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Paper presented at the
International Conference on
**Global Land
Grabbing**
6-8 April 2011

Organised by the **Land Deals Politics Initiative** (LDPI) in collaboration with the **Journal of Peasant Studies** and hosted by the **Future Agricultures Consortium** at the **Institute of Development Studies**, University of Sussex

Contemporary Land Grabs and their Alternatives in the Americas

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Prepared for the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing to be held at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex, April 6 – 8, 2011

***DRAFT** comments welcome but please do not cite or circulate*

Introduction

In 2007-2008, world food and fuel prices spiked sharply upward, doubling or tripling the cost of key food items and leading to a “wave” of protests and anti-government riots in more than 60 countries (IFPRI 2009). These protests, however sensational, were only the most recent and visible manifestation of growing levels of food insecurity, poverty, landlessness and environmental degradation around the world (Borras et al. 2011; de Schutter 2010; McMichael 2008). It is widely argued that the combined effects of global climate change, agro-industrial development, natural resource extraction, neo-liberal austerity policies and rapid urbanization have increased insecurity and vulnerability in rural areas across the globe and made it difficult for both the rural and urban poor as well as government agencies to foster and access the resources and capacities necessary for sustainable development (Deere and Royster 2008; McMichael 2008; WDR 2008).

Over the past decade, these pressures on the production of food and fuel, rural livelihoods, and environmental conditions have generated two very different responses. On the one hand, the food and fuel price spikes of 2008 intensified the rapid growth of large-scale land deals as private and public entities sought to secure access to future commodity supplies. From 2008 to 2009 national governments and private investors purchased over 40 million hectares of land— up from an average of 4 million hectares per year for the previous forty years – for the purposes of ensuring (or investing in) “food security” given the likelihood of repeated food and fuel price increases. Popularly titled a “global land grab” the rise in land acquisitions has generated a heated debate (World Bank 2010: vi; and see the March 2011 forum in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*): the evidence suggests that land deals take place predominantly in poor countries with low levels of transparent governance. This land serves as an offshore reserve for richer countries, although multi-lateral officials suggest that this investment could support local economic growth if harnessed properly.

The debate over these land deals has somewhat overshadowed a second, very different response to the contemporary conditions described above: over the past two decades, smallholders, the landless poor and rural workers from the United States and the Philippines to South Africa and Brazil have mobilized in increasingly vocal and well-organized social movements to demand access to land and social justice (Borras, Kay and Akhram-Lodhi 2008; Wolford and Gorman 2011). Ongoing mobilization has put land reform back on the political agenda at a time when most scholars argued that the age of state-led land distribution was over (de Janvry and Sadoulet 1989; Prosterman 1994). In demanding access to land and other resources, agrarian social movements based in both rural and urban areas are fighting for the

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right to life and livelihoods, local resources, and the creation of sustainable small farm sectors that could support improved welfare conditions and local markets (Lipton 2009).

In this paper, we analyze the context and form of what we will call (for simplicity's sake) "land grabs" and "land reforms" in the Americas. Although there is considerable debate over how to define contemporary land grabs, for the purposes of this paper we define a *land grab* as the large-scale acquisition of land or land-related rights and resources by a corporate, non-profit or public buyer for the purposes of resource extraction geared towards external consumers (where external means off-site rather than foreign). Thus, land grabs differ from other kinds of land purchases or more general economic development such as residential tourism or regional development because land grabs are expressly for the purpose of extracting natural resources such as food commodities, fuel supplies, minerals, water, and timber from one area and exporting it to another location, whether domestic or international. We argue, therefore, that extraction and alienation are more essential to the definition of land grabs than the type of capital invested, the intended market or the act of commodification/privatization per se. According to this definition, land purchases for local production and consumption are not considered land grabs whereas environmental conservation practices that remove an area from local control and hold it in the interests of the broader "global community" are.

Likewise, we define *land reforms* as those proposals and programs that consciously oppose the large-scale extraction of natural resources and alienation of land and resource rights. Thus, land reform in this paper is more than just land distribution; it is a conscious rethinking (reforming) of development on the land in order to privilege social justice, economic development, ecological sustainability, and the local community (what Borras and Franco 2011 refer to as "land sovereignty"). Land reforms are evident in a wide variety of social movement and state-civil society mobilizations and projects that provide alternative ways of combining production and consumption "socialize" land resources and rights (returning them to local communities at different scales).

In the paper that follows, we focus our discussion on the Americas as a whole; while there are significant differences between countries, we argue that similar structural forces (if not histories) condition economic and political practice across the broad region. And any regional characterization is forced and partial: there are perhaps as many similarities between Brazil, Argentina and the United States as between Brazil and Guatemala. A more relevant categorization than region may be resource type: the region boasts large-scale agricultural producers and exporters, mineral deposits, fuel sites, and ecological frontiers. Each of these different resources generates a different set of pressures for development and governance.

The first section of the paper is an outline of the contemporary context in the Americas, suggesting that while extraction, land purchases and mobilization are not new, they are occurring in new ways and in a different context. This section highlights the particular nature of what is at stake. There is a sense of millennial anxiety today that can be perhaps best described by James O'Conner's term "the second contradiction of capital" (1992): it is increasingly evident that the resources needed for continued capital accumulation are the same as those needed for sustainable livelihoods. Moreover, these resources are finite. This section is followed by a discussion of the seven key mechanisms and trends underlining the increase in large-scale land acquisitions. Third, we present examples of resistance to these land deals: we do not present an exhaustive list but an illustrative one that suggests that people across the Americas are responding to threats to their livelihoods in ways that illustrate the problems of vulnerability and resource extraction as well as the creative ways in which people resist. Finally, we outline a broad variety of land reforms that

we see as providing potentially productive alternatives to large-scale land deals. This does not mean that large-scale land deals are always or inherently negative, rather that the rush to accumulate off-site land rights and resources often comes at the expense of the rural and urban poor, many of whom rely on the land for their basic subsistence. Contrary to Margaret Thatcher's famous injunction that "There is No Alternative," these mobilizations and reforms suggest a variety of creative ways of "making a living and making living meaningful" (Bebbington 2000: 501).

The Contemporary Moment: The Second Contradiction of Capital

The context in the Americas today is both historically unprecedented and very familiar. Large-scale land and resource grabs have long been a prominent feature of American development. Today, however, they are taking place through new mechanisms of accumulation that threaten to re-work land and resource access throughout the region. There are at least three aspects that shape the contemporary moment; together they illustrate the novel configuration of actors and structural considerations in which both land grabs and land reforms are operating. These three aspects are political, economic and environmental.

Political dynamics have shifted enormously across the Americas over the last several decades. On the one hand, there has been an unprecedented expansion of electoral politics and democratization. While this is most clearly applicable to Latin American countries that have undergone democratic transitions since the 1980s, it can also be argued that the high level of mobilization and voter turnout in the 2008 US presidential election signalled a changing political climate there as well (could it be that, as Perry Anderson writes of Lula, Obama is simply waiting for his second term?). On the other hand, corporatist economic models and an escalating climate of national insecurity throughout the region (whether from drug wars, terrorism or fears of economic irrelevance) haunt the political agenda, subverting democracy and governmental transparency. This politics of fear and securitization shapes debates over new environmental governance regimes and creates the conditions of possibility for the widespread alienation of land and natural resources currently underway. However, there are always resistances: new political openings and instances of "deepening democracy" are emerging from the struggles of social movement actors, concerned citizens, and elected officials.

Political experiments in "deepening democracy" are underway across the Americas, and they suggest the potential for new and increasingly radicalized modes of regulation, governance and organization (Oxhorn 2003). The lines between state, market and civil society are being challenged by both social movements and state actors (Yashar 1999: 77), and there is a widespread feeling of political possibility and a search for alternatives both within and beyond existing state apparatuses and representative democracies. As the cases featured in this paper illustrate, these alternatives have real potential to 'crystallize' and endure. Social movements – from autonomous communities organized through the Zapatistas to the solidarity economies of the Recovered Factories in Argentina – are forging new, distinct democratic systems of governance that challenge the traditional roles of state, society, and market. National leaders from Lula to Chavez to Correa are gleaning ideas from the practices of these movements, and there is increasing potential for a new sort of state-society social contract.

One important manifestation of this political shift in the Americas is the emergence of attempts to institutionalize participatory or community-based decision-making forums within existing state structures – what is referred to as "participatory democracy." Ideals of decentralization and participation have increased the everyday interaction and overall articulation

between state and social movement actors and institutions. Social movement leaders throughout the Americas now have a greater presence within formal government spaces as they negotiate for their demands and provide their support (Abers and Keck 2006). These negotiations can present political openings for local organizers to distribute more of the state's resources within their own communities (Wolford 2010). Some examples include: indigenous communities in southern Mexico that have won the right to autonomous governance and receive resources from the Federal government, or municipal budgets across the region from Porto Alegre to Chicago, where communities now participate in determining how a portion of the budget will be spent. Such practices of participation can also of course be co-opted; for example, as a discourse to "certify" land and resource grabs by advocating consultation without providing sufficient incentive for actual dialogue or collaboration. "Win-win" scenarios of development with voluntary "codes of conduct" promote participation but subordinate it to the demands of capital: investment is necessary to help developing countries but respect for land users and the poor is voluntary (see Borras and Franco 2010).

The second defining feature of the current conjuncture is the rise and dominance of neo-liberal policies that as a general rule promote fiscal austerity, state withdrawal, 'right to work' programs, trade liberalization and resource privatization. Key agencies such as the World Bank and IMF have supported the creation and implementation of rights and rules that set the stage for the global land grab: the steady promotion of land rights and freely-functioning land markets has left many states and local communities without the tools to intervene in the radical reallocation of factors of production that land grabs represent. In addition to bearing the brunt of neo-liberal policies, governments and poor households are all squeezed by the economic crisis of the last ten years, and pressures on resource rights are particularly acute for those in poverty. Across the region, inequality has increased over the past two to three decades: the GINI index for Latin America as a whole increased from .50 in 1982 to .56 in 1995 and .595 in 2000 (Roberts 2002: 7; Klasen et al. 2009: 2); and GINI indices in the United States have steadily risen since 1968 (when it was the lowest ever reported at 38.6) to 46.8 in 2009. In 2007, 20% of the richest households in the United States controlled over 80% of the country's wealth; and between 2007 and 2009, profits on Wall Street went up 720%, unemployment went up 102% and people's home equity went down 35%. Poverty has also increased: one third of all Latin Americans lived below the poverty line in 1995 as compared with one fourth in 1982 (Roberts 2002: 7).² In 2009, fully 14% of the US population was defined as poor, a 50% increase from 2001 (US Census Bureau) and 49.1 million people lived in food insecure households as defined by the US Department of Agriculture. The number of people defined as suffering from "very low food security" more than doubled between 2000 and 2007.³

Wages have also fallen: the average real minimum wage in Latin America fell by 30% from 1980 to 1997 (Ibid) and the unemployment rate in the United States is double what it was in 2001 (9.0% in January 2011 as compared to 4.2% in January of 2001, US DOL statistics). Landownership through the region is also more concentrated, and the total number of rural poor in Latin America has increased in every country with the exception of Brazil, Chile and Mexico (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2002: 2). The growth in poverty in Latin America has increased the size of informal urban settlements and economies: for most countries in the region, the informal economy constitutes 30 to 40% of Gross Domestic Product (Vuletin 2008: 27) and urban

² These numbers are disputed by the World Bank; a paper by Michael Walton (2004) points out the variability that is hidden within the regional averages.

³ http://www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html

violence in Latin America is at an all time high as drug dealers and slum lords from Ciudad Juarez to Rio de Janeiro become the new revolutionary paramilitaries. These conditions – of more legible land markets in conjunction with greater insecurity or poverty – increase the likelihood that local actors will be forced to make decisions that privilege short-term gains rather than long-term sustainability.

The third aspect of the contemporary moment centers on the environment. Land grabs, resistances to them, and movements for alternatives are taking place in the context of unprecedented environmental change and degradation. Lester Brown's (2011) most recent sobering report "The Great Food Crisis of 2011" argues that food prices are being driven up on both sides of the food supply and demand equation. Increasing populations, rising affluence, and the government mandated use of bio-fuels leads to more demands upon environmental resources. Supplies are challenged by "soil erosion, aquifer depletion, loss of cropland to nonfarm uses, the diversion of irrigation water to cities, the plateauing of crop yields in agriculturally advanced countries, and – due to climate change – crop-withering heat waves and melting glaciers and ice sheets," and Brown offers some disturbing statistics. One-third of the world's cropland is losing topsoil faster than it can be reproduced, and California has lost approximately a million acres of irrigated land as farmers have sold off water rights to Los Angeles and San Diego. Brown makes clear in no uncertain terms – as the IAASTD report did in 2008 as well as countless others – that business as usual is no longer acceptable. Governments should redefine security away from a focus on military issues and toward investment in soil conservation, water efficiency, and climate change mitigation. Environmental degradation and unsustainable resource use need to be at the forefront of the political and economic agenda, both locally and internationally. New sources of energy need to be evaluated within a holistic ecosystem context or the drive for more energy will result in increased dispossession and poverty.

New Trends in Land Grabbing in the Americas

All of these characteristics – political, economic and environmental – shape the contemporary moment in which both large-scale land grabs and land reforms have emerged. Although this data is difficult to access for the United States and Canada, the World Bank report released in 2008 estimates that in Latin America over the past ten years, large-scale land purchases as well as claims on natural resources have increased dramatically. In just ten months, from October 2008 to August 2009, approximately 3.2 million hectares of land were acquired in Latin America for commodity production. The World Bank estimates that this is 21% of the land acquired worldwide and it is located primarily in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. At the same time, exports from mining and quarrying in the enlarged MERCOSUR region (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) more than doubled from 20 billion USD in 2004 to 46 billion in 2007.

The rapid increase in large-scale land and resource deals can be directly linked to the development of seven new mechanisms of accumulation, extraction and alienation (not all of these apply equally throughout the region).

First, extensive infrastructure corridors have been constructed across the continent through IIRSA, the South American Integrated Regional Infrastructure project, and the PPP, the Plan Puebla Panama, proposed by Mexican president Vicente Fox in 2000 (in 2007 it expanded to include Colombia and was renamed the Plan Puebla Bogota). Through these projects, new highways, energy lines and waterways are being constructed or adapted to link extractive frontiers to metropolitan areas and foreign markets. IIRSA is much farther along than the PPP

and has been both the cause and effect of increased mining, farming and drilling, and related projects have in several instances been preceded or followed by the weakening of environmental and labor legislation. IIRSA provides the means for increased investment in large-scale extractive projects that have become synonymous with national plans for Development even as they ship energy, food, and minerals out of local communities and out of the region. Likewise, the goal of the PPP is to create a development corridor from Mexico to Colombia. Two key projects within the PPP are the Electric Integration System for Central America (SIEPAC) and the Mesoamerican Transport Integration Initiative (RICAM). One project in particular is the 362-km multi-lane Franja Transversal del Norte (FTN) highway being built from Mexico through Guatemala and into Honduras. Funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, it is designed to serve as one of the many super highways that will help open Central America to private foreign investment, agribusiness expansion, and natural resource extraction (Valladares 2009a). Much like roads built into the Amazon rainforest, these new transportation corridors facilitate extensive resource extraction and large-scale claims to land.

Both of these infrastructure projects are tightly connected to the second contemporary mechanism promoting land grabs: increasing reliance on new forms of resource extraction for national development and fuel security, usually amid fears of fuel insecurity and peak oil or loss of national sovereignty through “foreignization” of energy resources. In the United States and Canada, extractivism is evident primarily in the natural gas sector, where, for example, significant investments to secure subsoil rights are being made across the country, in a U-shaped path from the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians. In the Marcellus Shale region of the Northeast, Chesapeake Energy, one of the dominant actors in energy investment, calls its 2011 “land grab” (as the company calls its bid to control land and sub-soil resources in the shale region) a success in its 2010 4th quarter report. The report argues that this grab increases the company’s ability to control large portions of the new liquid gas corridor. More generally, Eduardo Gudynas (2010) argues that extractivism of raw materials for export remains one of the pillar strategies for all Latin American governments that have seen a recent “shift left” and means that international/national companies are taking over new, remote, territories that are already inhabited. In Ecuador, for example, President Correa approved a new mining law that environmentalists and indigenous groups argue violates the 2009 constitution and gives international companies more access to conduct extractive activities (Chicaiza, 2009). In Peru, it is estimated that more than 60% of all social conflicts are related to environmental problems, primarily mining, and more recently, oil (Salazar, 2010).

The generalized model is to create “production enclaves” that are connected by transportation or energy corridors and often include police/military protection, which creates territorial fragmentation for existing populations, especially in the Andean zones. In some countries, this has resulted in, rather than a focus on strengthening private property rights, a return to state rights/nationalization of resources (for example the empowerment in Bolivia of the YPFB [Bolivian Fiscal Oil Fields], and the creation of a state entity for gas and energy, ENARSA, in Argentina). New legislation has also been passed that will ease environmental protections for the purposes of improved extraction. For example, a law was vetoed in Chile that would have protected the Andean glaciers from mining. In Brazil the direction is toward a “flexibilization” of regulation and environmental permits, and in Bolivia, environmental regulations were dismembered and although environmental management has been organized in a new ministry, its weakness persists. In Uruguay the Frente Amplio government continues with its practice of

awarding environmental permits to attract investments in cellulose and paper. And, in Chavez's Venezuela, Gudynas (2010) argues that the state of Zulia has been converted into a "zone of sacrifice for petroleum exploration."

A third mechanism promoting land grabs in the Americas is the fear of food insecurity which has prompted widespread corporate investment in food crops (some destined for fuel production). Although not new, investment levels have increased in the past ten years, with new land expansion concentrated in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. This is the region referred to as *Soylandia*. It is an area identified by the World Bank as having "suitable land available, with a low yield gap." It is considered ripe for investment in commodity production because industrial inputs are readily available, markets are relatively accessible, and land costs are low (approximately one tenth what they are in the United States, for example). In fact, large-scale commodity crop production has become so efficient and profitable that in an August 2010 article *The Economist* wondered aloud how a similar transformation could occur in Africa. One way it can happen, the magazine notes, is to sell land to foreigners. According to data in Brazil over 4 million hectares of land were sold to foreigners between 2002 and 2008; in Argentina, the latest data says that foreign capital controls 17 million hectares in the country. Large-scale land deals are often facilitated by high profile visits from agricultural ministries in sending countries and received generously by host governments. Recent efforts by Lula to prohibit foreign ownership of land will help but they require oversight. Outside of Soylandia, investment in biofuels is growing rapidly: throughout Central America, sugarcane planting for ethanol has increased with the signing of CAFTA-DR, in which "sugar was one of the sectors most fiercely defended by negotiators, who obtained an expansion of the export quota for sugar for the next 15 years" ("Fueling," 2008). Increased sugar cane and palm oil production in Guatemala has promoted deforestation and land consolidation (Velásquez, 2011).

The fourth mechanism encouraging large-scale land deals is involves the creation of new financial instruments intended to reduce market risk while allowing third party investors to profit from widespread concerns that food is running out. Private equity groups such as TIAA-CREF (a US pension fund), Berkshire-Hathaway (led by Warren Buffet), the Pharos Group (led by George Soros) and Black River Asset Management (led by Cargill) manage a variety of investments that increasingly include a piece of Latin American territory. Oftentimes, nationalized projects in small countries like Guatemala and Bolivia are also done through joint ventures or societies with foreign capital.

A fifth mechanism encouraging new land grabs is uneven agricultural development: perhaps an unexpected offshoot of the Green Revolution, wealthy, highly capitalized industrial farmers from some areas, particularly the United States, Brazil and Argentina, spend half of the year on what they see as the new commodity crop frontier (Wolford 2007). These farmers take advantage of hemispheric differences in planting seasons, environmental protections and labor legislation to purchase vast farms. While US farmers have been buying land in Brazil for almost fifteen years, there are increasing numbers of farmers from countries like Brazil who are putting down roots – albeit shallow roots – in other areas of Latin America and Africa. According to one report, the Sudanese government is reserving 500,000 hectares for Brazilian farmers.

The sixth mechanism promoting land acquisitions is new environmental imperatives and tools, both of which have helped generate what John Vidal calls the "Great Green Land Grab." New nongovernmental organizations have formed to negotiate the complicated but potentially lucrative rules of carbon cap and trade programs or REDD initiatives – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation. NGOs such as the World Land Trust, Cool Earth and the

WildLands have purchased tens of thousands of hectares of so-called empty land throughout LA. In some cases, the environmental trend has been tied closely to the growth of investment for energy, legitimating or “green-washing” investment that is often highly unsustainable (or, at the very least, not necessarily sustainable) in nature. In Guatemala, Green Earth Fuels, part of the consortium made up of The Carlyle Group, Riverstone Holdings and Goldman Sachs, purchased more than 25,000 hectares of land to produce African palm oil (Ortiz, 2008). In conjunction with this investment, Palmas del Ixcán, R. L., a subsidiary of Green Earth, announced the creation of an “environmentally sustainable and socially just” African palm oil plantation in which a private reserve will be created that they argue will create 4000 jobs. A further 4000 hectares will be set aside to help establish small-scale independent producers who will grow African palm with free seeds and fertilizers and a contract to buy their fruit at market value (Voegele, 2008).

The seventh mechanism promoting land deals is the international community. Multilateral organizations from the United Nations to Development Banks are generating both supply and demand in the global rush for resources. Panicked estimates of the increased demand for food – such as the estimate that world food production needs to increase by 60 percent over the next twenty years – are cited at high-level ag-investment conferences and they fuel speculation. At the same time, international aid agencies such as the World Bank and USAID have worked to create a hospitable environment for large-scale investment, funnelling money into Latin America for the purposes of “rural development” and “improving rural markets.” One example is the widespread multilateral support for the creation of tourist resorts the Honduran coast as part of the PPP. The project “Los Micos Beach Resort,” also known as the “Proyecto Turístico Bahía de Tela,” is financed mostly by the Inter-American Development Bank (18 million dollars). Inaugurated by then president Manuel Zelaya, the project broke ground in August of 2007. It is located within several protected areas, including the National Park Jeannette Kawas, on land traditionally used by the Garifuna people who have been fighting for collective land rights for over 30 years. However, the 2004 approval of new property laws and programs in Honduras (funded by the World Bank), have led to the individualization of the communal land of the Garifuna and have left the government and citizens few means of legally protesting the incursion of the large-scale tourism development (Viehweider, 2007).

It is incumbent upon the international community to acknowledge its own role in these processes and to admit that property markets on their own are unable to address the current situation.

Resistances to Land Grabbing

These seven mechanisms promote large-scale resource grabs and encourage an orientation towards export production and concomitant dependence on primary commodities. Although this model of development has been referred to optimistically as comparative advantage, it has as much in common with what has been called dependent development, enclave economies, resource curses, economic dualism, and, in Alain de Janvry’s (1992) memorable words, disarticulated capitalism. Large-scale land and resource grabs have the potential to aggravate environmental problems such as deforestation, soil degradation and water contamination. They also raise land prices; increases over the past few years are stalling hard-won promises of land reform and agrarian development. Ultimately, the uninhibited rush to claim land is of concern because without proper oversight, it can foment the twin processes of dispossession and displacement among the most vulnerable people in the region: the rural poor, indigenous peoples or people with customary or “alternative” rights to the land, and women and children who often

have no recognized rights. All of this, in turn, increases poverty, violence, inequality, hunger and urban informality.

Displacement and dispossession are two of the critical battlefronts in the modern war of accumulation. This is evident in Bagua, Peru, where in 2009 an estimated 60 people died during mobilizations to protest the president's attempts to facilitate third party access to communally-held indigenous and peasant lands ("Canadians," 2009). And in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where a state of emergency was declared when protests broke out over World Bank-led attempts to privatize water (Finnegan, 2002). And in El Salvador where three anti-mining activists have been brutally murdered and a report published by the IUCN in 2010 found "a strategic campaign of domestic terrorism targeting mining opponents" ("New Report," 2010). And in Ecuador where protests against oil extraction led the government to declare a state of emergency and militarize oil production in the Amazon (Hynds, 2004). And in Patagonia where Mapuche Indians protest the widespread sales of glaciers and land ("Mapuche," 2010). And in the highlands of Guatemala where indigenous Mayan communities fight a daily battle against international mining companies such as the Canadian Goldcorp – these companies are ceded new concessions at an astonishing rate because they promise to have abided by national rules obligating them to hold community discussions about new mines. The communities insist that no such consultations have taken place, but mining continues. Widespread protest occurs, such as the 2005 community referendum in which 11 out of 13 villages in the department of San Marcos voted against the proposal for a new Goldcorp mining project, but that vote was determined non-binding by the Constitutional Court of Guatemala in 2007 (Valladares, 2009b)

Drawing from examples and cultures of resistance that span the last 500 years, political activists in Americas have developed a contemporary repertoire of resistance that includes conventional elements such as blockades, hunger strikes, demonstrations and marches as well as new elements such as transnational mobilizations and meetings targeting global economic and political actors, internet campaigns, well-organized and coordinated land occupations, occupations of strategic sites such as government buildings or squares with attendant settlements established for two or three day 'conferences,' popular national referenda [plebiscites] and more. New technologies of communication and transportation facilitate the spread of these tactics. They are repeated, refined and disseminated through localized initiatives, transnational mobilization and media coverage. We discuss these further below because they shed light on the everyday ways in which once-utopian visions for social change are being realized and made concrete.

Mass mobilizations have become common across the Americas. There have been repeated mobilizations to discuss and protest the Plan Puebla Panama from 2001 to 2005 (Castro Soto, 2007). In Brasilia, in May 2010, representatives of 120 organizations met at a regional conference to create guidelines regarding land issues in Latin America that could be presented to the FAO as the multi-lateral institution debated its own "voluntary guidelines" for large-scale land acquisition. The civil society guidelines included the redistribution of land, the right to autonomy and consent, the rights of mother earth, the establishment of a true form of food sovereignty (where people have control over their land, seeds, and production), the sustainable use of land and resources ("Declaracion," 2010). Protests against mining have generated new organizational networks and strategies: in March of 2007, the Centre for Ecology and Andean Peoples (CEPA) in Bolivia hosted a meeting of civil society representatives from throughout Latin America to discuss how transnational mining companies are creating new tactics of oppression in light of community opposition and resistance to mining projects. Out of these

meetings emerged the formalization of the internet database that documents and disseminates information about mining conflicts throughout the region: <http://www.conflictosmineros.net/> (“Declarations,” 2007). And on March 30, 2006, the Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina (CONIC) organized thousands of peasants who marched in Guatemala City against neoliberal policies; together, they requested the resolution of over 1000 land conflicts, the end of mining concessions, and the creation a law that recognized indigenous peoples (“Campesinos,” 2006). Hunger strikes are enacted to protest everything from mining violations to political impasse: in 2009 Bolivian President Evo Morales went on a hunger strike to get a law passed, in Costa Rica activists went on a hunger strike against open-pit mining, in Chile arrested-Mapuche activists used a hunger strike as a way to protest their potential indictment on acts of terrorism (Estrada, 2010).

Protest is also increasingly taking place through legal channels. For example, in 2006, Nicaragua Sugar Estates Limited (NSEL) expanded its sugarcane production and ethanol processing facilities with the support of a \$55 million loan from the IFC. However, over 700 inhabitants of the towns of Chichigalpa, Goyena, and Abangasca, who are surrounded by the company's sugarcane fields, as well as former company employees, filed a suit on March 31, 2008 with the IFC's Office of the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (which is supposed to hold the IFC accountable to its environmental and social standards). They argue that the agro-chemicals placed on the fields, as well as the smoke from burnt sugarcane, have caused massive respiratory illness among the population. Additionally, they argue that the large amounts of water used by the company are threatening their water supply. They were helped in making their complaint by the Center for International Environmental Law (“Center for International Environmental Law” 2008).

Protest is also taking place through the creation of parallel or alternative systems of justice in which communities apply ethical, moral and legal criteria to particular cases of conflict. The Latin American Water Tribunal (TLA), founded in 1998, is an “autonomous and independent international environmental organization” (<http://www.tragua.com/>) that attempts to resolve disputes related to hydrological systems in Latin America through an alternative justice system. Plaintiffs present their case to tribunal judges who then make a decision based on the moral character of the resolutions presented as well as their relationships to international law (treaties, international agreements, etc.). Since its inception, the TLA has held five sessions, received 58 cases and assisted in 250 consultations. For example, in 2002, an environmental organization in El Salvador, Unión Ecológica Salvadoreña, presented three cases: one against the Salvadoran government for the construction of a highway that caused environmental damage, one against companies that had been contaminating the Rio Frio and one against a project planning a hydroelectric dam on the Río Torola (“Deununcias,” 2002).

Another example of alternative justice is the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT), founded in Italy in 1979 and composed of international judges and well-known activists. In Lima in May of 2008, the PPT held a session as part of the third Cumbre de los Pueblos, organized by the bi-regional network Enlazando Alternativas (Linking Alternatives), a network of social and political organizations across Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe. In a similar fashion, the Central American Tribunal of Climate Justice was created in 2010 as a parallel legal arena. In October of 2010, a jury composed of the jury, composed of the Belgian sociologist François Houtart, Cuban professor Armando Chaguaceda, the coordinator of Global Action Nicaragua, Clemente José Martínez, and the environmental expert William Montiel, found eight corporations, including the Canadian mining company Infinito Gold Ltd. And the US/Dutch oil company Shell, guilty of not

consulting local populations as obliged by international treaties. Likewise, on September 20, 2010, the first Ethical Tribunal on Mining was held in Santiago de Chile. Representatives from civil society in almost all of Latin America attended. The focus was on areas not traditionally part of mining concessions (“Pronunciamiento,” 2010). While these tribunals have no legal weight, they have an ethical and moral impact (Salazar, 2008).

All of these various forms of resistance, protest and violence show the modern face of what has been called accumulation by dispossession. Battles such as these will continue if large-scale investors – whether domestic or foreign – are allowed to purchase millions of hectares of land and water without oversight or accountability.

Alternatives to Land Grabbing

But activists, organizers and government agents have not stopped at simply resisting the structural conditions of their impoverishment. In addition to protests and mobilizations against large scale land grabbing, social movements and local community organizations have come together to agitate for and generate real alternatives. They demand ongoing attention to land reform initiatives, a focus on local, short, fair and community-oriented markets, sustainable farming and policies that prioritize people and respect for the environment. Hundreds – if not thousands – of demonstrations are being planned, meetings held, and ideas exchanged at any given moment of every day. There has never been a time in the history of the Americas when so many social movements and grassroots organizations have had the competency, commitment and capacity to assist in determining how people should be fed and housed. The vibrancy of the World Social Forum, and its regional counterpart in the US (held in Detroit in 2010) is testament to the ability of activists and organizers to go beyond the structural constraints that have generated the food and fuel crises of the past decade. Contrary to the suggestion that there is no alternative, there exists a multiplicity of different development options.

This section seeks to introduce some of the different proposals and experiments that challenge – implicitly and explicitly – the seven mechanisms of accumulation and extraction outlined above. Given the political climate and deepening crises of dispossession, we believe it is important to move beyond critique to highlight alternative models of natural resource allocation and management that reconsider notions of democracy and development from the global North and South. While the multitude of diverse organizing efforts makes an extensive review here impossible, we instead offer a schematized map of some of them in order to show that land grabs are not the only (or even a necessary) response to poverty, hunger and environmental crisis. We hope to highlight and open spaces to strategize about how to strengthen equity in land and resource access. We focus on what we see as eight alternatives to land and resource grabs. Each example represents a particular approach to problem solving. The categories we’ve chosen represent different theories, strategies, and tactics. While they cohere around similar goals – to create more just systems for living, producing, eating, sharing and caring for one another and the environment – the logics that underpin their problem-solving approaches are distinct, if overlapping. Below we first outline the rationale of each alternative and then provide some brief examples of how they have been deployed in particular places.

Visions for Food Sovereignty The first alternative around which activists and community groups from Toronto to Porto Alegre are organizing is food sovereignty. The concept of food sovereignty was first introduced in 1996 at the World Food Summit by the transnational farmer movement Via Campesina. Intended as a critique of the FAO’s depoliticized mandate for “food security,” food sovereignty referred to a policy agenda that would empower groups (small

farmers, peasants, fisherfolks, indigenous people) to define their own food, agriculture, livestock, and fisheries systems. Via Campesina's aim was to put questions of social control of food systems and power relations at the center of the policy table (Desmarais 2007). In this context, they chose to adopt a rights-based language. Food sovereignty, defined as "the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity," they argued, was a *prerequisite* of food security (Via Campesina 1996). Since the World Food Summit, food sovereignty has been articulated and rearticulated by diverse groups in different settings across the globe. It is a vision rather than a concrete plan and its changing and broad-based definitions reflect the diverse positions of people located in different social, economic, political and cultural places.⁴

A decade after the concept was first articulated by Via Campesina, the first worldwide food sovereignty gathering was held in Mali. On February 27, 2006, approximately 500 delegates from 80 countries congregated and adopted the Declaration of Nyeleni. Consultants with the scientific body IAASTD (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development) also adopted the concept of food sovereignty in its report "Agriculture at a Crossroads" (2009) as an indication of the ways in which agriculture-as-usual needed to and could change. In 2008, the Ecuadorian government put food sovereignty in the country's new constitution. More recently, participants at the 2010 US Social Forum in Detroit, Michigan, adopted a food sovereignty resolution that emphasized a commitment to:

"re-building local food economies in our own communities, to dismantling structural racism, to democratizing land access, to building opportunities for the leadership of our youth, and to working towards food sovereignty in partnership with social movements around the world; *We call on others* in the US to demand an end to the global land grab, to end both corporate and military land occupations, to demand fairer trade, aid and investment policies, land reform, and support for sustainable peasant and community agriculture and sustainable community fisheries; *We endorse actions* that include: the liberation of land and water resources for the production of food and sustainable livelihoods; the creation of new structures for cooperative ownership of land and food production, processing and distribution; the integration of labor rights, immigrant's rights and food justice; the valuing of women as primary food providers, and the denouncement of false solutions and false partnerships addressing climate change, hunger and economic development; *We demand a world* in which everyone has control over their food and no one has to put food in their mouth that hurts people or the environment (USSF 2010)."

We highlight food sovereignty here because we see it as a conceptual apparatus that does potentially transformative work by creating a shared moral and political discourse. In other words, food sovereignty is both a mobile and a mobilizing utopian vision. It expands people's sense of possibility and sketches the contours for a common project. Its global reach enables disparate national and transnational groups to unite under what Raj Patel has called one "big tent" (2009) and articulate shared visions for alternative agro-food production and consumption systems and development more generally. Like other universal aspirations that travel across difference and distance, food sovereignty is transformed in translation (Tsing 2005). As it becomes embedded in materially practices across localities and cultures it becomes identifiable as more discrete techniques and strategies aimed at addressing specific problems (e.g., agrarian

⁴ Thanks to Harriet Friedman for framing it this way (pers. comm. 2010).

reform measures, reorganizing food production and trade networks, regulating speculative capital, banning genetically modified organisms, promoting agro-ecology, protecting community natural resources from extractive industries). It signals a connection to a global agenda that challenges, historical power inequalities and in doing so critiques neoliberal economic development by nurturing an alternative imaginary. The next section focuses on *state-society partnerships* for food security. While these programs and others that we outline could camp out under the food sovereignty tent, we believe it's important to parse out their different agendas and the dominant rationalities that undergird each.

Food Security as a Right – State-Society Partnerships The second is new state-society partnerships and networks that have been emerging to address pressing problems of food access and distribution. Despite advances in agriculture, or rather because of them, absolute numbers of hungry and malnourished people around the world continue to increase both in the developed and developing world (the numbers are down this year from last but only because they spiked upward during the global food crisis). The rush to farm biofuels on arable lands has led food prices to sharply increase over the last few years. According to the FAO's most recent statistics, real world food prices are still double what they were in 2002 – 2004. The causes of food price hikes have been documented elsewhere and connect to the mechanisms of accumulation outlined above. Here we want to show how regions are responding and states are intervening in market relations. The alternatives we highlight below cohere around a similar goal: to intervene in regional food production, distribution, and consumption systems. The rationale behind these diverse partnerships is that food is a right. Under this Keynesian-inspired logic, the state *should* be responsible for ensuring that its citizens have access to healthy, nutritious, and fresh food – and sometimes this entails market interventions. Toward this end, new government agencies are emerging across the Americas that bring different stakeholders to the table to enhance food access and distribution. These projects are defined by their aim to re-embed the market within society by correcting inefficiencies and building new market relations. While they do not necessarily advocate for land reform and resource redistribution, or explicitly critique deep power relations embedded in the food system, these programs can help thwart land grabs by enabling small and medium-size producers to maintain or gain access to land, resources, and markets, and ensure citizens access to food.

Efforts in this vein include developing incentives, funding streams, programs, and budgetary allocations. In 1993, the newly elected administration in Belo Horizonte, Brazil's fourth largest city, declared food a right of citizenship. At the time 11% of its 2.5 million inhabitants were living in poverty and 20% of its children were hungry. The mayor founded a new city agency to help design a new food system. The agency (SAMB) included a 20-member citizen's council that brought together various stakeholders from farmer to consumers and involved citizens in participatory budgeting. Ongoing projects include: contracts for food deliveries that are negotiated between farmers and the city; low-cost food markets in well-trafficked locations where the city determines a set price for goods (mostly obtained from local farmers) and entrepreneurs make bids for the businesses (part of their job description is distributing produce to poor neighbourhoods that are far from the city center); People's Restaurants that serve local food for less than 50 cents per meal; school lunch programs that require sourcing to privilege community and school gardens. These results by all accounts have increased poor people's access to food. The initiatives are said to benefit 40% of the population: infant death rates in the city have fallen by half, infant malnutrition has been reduced, and consumption of fruits and vegetables have increased. The cost to the city has been 10 million US

dollars on average per year – or 2% of the city budget, approximately one penny per day per resident. Across the US, similar programs are being developed where cities have started to adopt Food Policy Councils. There are over 100 councils nationwide. They take multiple forms, sometimes commissioned by the state or local government, other times led by grassroots efforts, and often a combination of both.

Autonomy/Self-Determination The fourth alternative is autonomy or self-determination. Autonomy as a political strategy gained new meaning with the emergence of the Zapatistas in 1994. On January 1, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war on the Mexican state and army in a fight for a free and democratic government. They based their constitutional right to declare war on the Mexican state on Article 39 of the country's Constitution, which states: "National sovereignty essentially and originally resides in the people. All political power emanates from the people and its purpose is to help the people. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government." Importantly, the Zapatista's uprising coincided with the implementation of NAFTA, which Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos called a "death sentence" to the indigenous people of Mexico for the threat is posed to livelihoods and the ejido, Mexico's communal land system. While the Zapatistas did not overthrow the Mexican state, they gained international support in their struggle, have maintained a stronghold in Chiapas, succeeded in getting the Mexican state to recognize Juntas of Good Governments (extra-constitutional local/regional governing structures that govern by the mandate "mandar obedeciendo" to lead by obeying based on a community assembly systems), and catalyzed social movements around the world, sparking new calls for self-determination and autonomy. Zapatismo is a radical political critique of representative democracy. It provides both a conceptual apparatus and a grounded model for how we might think and do politics differently. In the simplest terms, autonomy is self-governance (in Greek auto = self; nomos = rule of law).

While autonomy most often refers to indigenous people's autonomy and is connected to territorial struggles and regional public governance (e.g., Nunavut territory in Canada, US Indian Reservations, Kuna in Panama), other groups not necessarily affiliated with territory have also demanded autonomy and called for the right to self-determination (Black Power movement/black nationalism in US, *piquetero* movement of unemployed workers in Argentina). While autonomy, like food sovereignty, is a conceptual apparatus that looks different when we examine particular cases, it is useful to highlight as an alternative to land grabs because it offers a distinct political imaginary that transcends the structure of the nation-state and formal democracy. Movements for autonomy, as Esteva writes, "seek to construct a form of society and government in which the people are not merely the formal source of political power but actually hold and exercise power" (Esteva 2001:125). In terms of considering alternatives to land grabs, autonomous groups in challenging private ownership of land and resources offer potentially useful models for developing new governance structures, sharing governance responsibilities, and controlling and managing access to land and natural resources in more equitable and sustainable ways.

Land Reforms The fifth alternative we want to consider is land reform. Our focus is on land reform projects that address inequities in access, ownership, and control of resources. There is an explicit acknowledgement that equality is impossible without redistribution. In many cases, land reform is spurred by groups of squatters on agricultural land that make demands on the state for redistribution and transfer of ownership (e.g. the MST in Brazil, etc.). In other cases, land reforms might include less dramatic and sweeping regulatory reforms, but nonetheless provide opportunities for the further democratization of land and resource (e.g., land banks). In both cases, states have the power to block land grabs and redistribute land that has already been

acquired. We therefore want to highlight several examples of different land reforms strategies that are already being used or might be used/strengthened to counter land grabs: the GCAR – Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (launched by Via Campesina in 1999) and FIAN – the Food First Information and Action Network, and the Land Research Action Network, progressive Land Banks bylaws in the United States, social movements such as the Brazilian and Bolivian Landless Movements, and new indigenous movements that struggle for territorial recognition and rights.

Ethical Markets & Infrastructure Development The sixth alternative is the development of ethical and sustainable market relations. While the phenomenon has spread to many commodity spheres (e.g., eco-conscious diamonds, sustainable clothing, and green cosmetics), we limit our discussion here to organizing efforts around agro-food relations. Over the last two decades, in reaction to the deep incursion of transnational corporations into agro-food systems, the expansion of monocultures and use of pesticides, genetically modified, patented seeds, and fossil-fuel intensive farming techniques, health concerns and obesity epidemics, free-trade agreements, and the dispossession of small and middle-sized farmers across the global North and South, a dizzying array of projects have emerged aiming to “lift the veil” on commodity production. While the goals of these projects vary, they generally include ethical mandates to: promote more environmentally and labor-friendly production relations; develop ethical standards and certification processes; promote transparency and give products a “face” and territorial identification; localize and establish more direct production-distribution-consumption networks; create cooperative market models in which consumers more equitably share production risks; and develop concrete and immaterial infrastructure to support these efforts.

Many of these efforts have been critiqued for the narrowness of the political openings they create. Sympathetic critics, like Julie Guthman, among others, have pointed to two contradictory currents that undergird these movements: one originates from a Polanyian desire to re-embed the market in society, while the other acts to re-enforce neoliberal subjectivities (e.g., cf. Guthman 2007). We agree that many of these projects, although there are exceptions, fail to critically engage in sustained conversations about race, class, and access, and therefore fall short on addressing urgent structural inequities (cf. also Slocum). Here, however, we want to highlight what we see as their potentiality (if not always achieved) in two key respects. First, we see many of these projects as moving beyond market exchanges to nurturing an ethos of food and agriculture production as a community resource. And second, we recognize their potential to forge new “power geometries” (Massey 2005) by altering spatial designs practices and the materiality of land itself – from the adoption of agro-ecological farming practices to the establishment of new collective spaces (community gardens, community kitchens, community slaughterhouses, seed banks) and knowledge networks to support these activities.⁵

Community Governance of Natural Resource The seventh alternative includes new community governance models for controlling access to and managing natural resources. Since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (more widely known as the Earth Summit) promoted local-level solutions and community-led initiatives as the best approach to fostering “sustainable development,” a multitude of community-based natural resource management or community-based conservation models have emerged throughout the

⁵ Doreen Massey (2005) uses the term “power geometries” to describe how particular power/knowledge relations become embedded in geographies and their effects (64). Massey also takes an agential view of space that is useful in terms of understand the political necessity of making changes in material space and infrastructure. There is also a literature on the politics of infrastructure that is useful here (Starr; Carse 2011).

Americas. While some community-based management programs are touted as successes, many have been critiqued for falling short of intended goals, being co-opted by the interest of multilateral institutions, and for not paying enough attention to intra-community dynamics and ecological heterogeneity (Leach et al. 1999). While there is a vast literature that discusses the history of these programs and offers grounded case studies, our goal here is to simply suggest the relevance of communal governance systems in considering alternatives to land grabs. Communal governance systems are most often designed to regulate what's known as common property resources or common pool resources, such as water, pastures, air, etc. These resources are defined by two qualities – the difficulty to exclude people from using them as well as their vulnerability to overuse, exhaustion, and pollution. And as Elinor Ostrom has famously pointed out, common property regimes often work quite well and the diverse institutional arrangements that societies have developed should be valued. Broadly, we argue that the mere existence of community governance systems (and the local community's attachments to them) offers a refutation to not only land grab discourse, but also serves as a first line of defense to slow the land grabbing process. There is powerful discourse around land grabbing that relies on the notion that privatization of common property resources is the best, and only, way to achieve the dual goal of mitigating/reducing global warming (by taking land and resources out of use through various ecosystems services schemes) and ensuring food and energy security (by maximizing efficiency with large-scale production models and reducing costs). However, struggles against enclosures and for community governance systems, including publically managed resources, negate this “tragedy of the commons” logic.

Water – the new “blue gold” – perhaps provides the most salient recent example of both the increasing pressure across the Americas toward common resource privatization, and the fury, fear, and communal principles evident in community protests (discussed above) and the organization of alternatives. Here we briefly outline a few examples in which North American communities have organized for community and state governance in the face of pressure to privatize the management of water systems. Over the last ten years, communities faced with aging infrastructure, steep repair bill, and depleted city budgets, have moved to privatize their public utilities. While most water systems across the U.S. and Canada are still publically owned, cities like Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Gary, Indiana, and Nottingham, New Hampshire have entered in contracts with private utility companies despite protests.

Other cities from Atlanta to the city of Halifax in Ontario, after experiencing the disastrous consequences of privatizations, have backed out of long-term contracts with water barons (e.g., United Water, a subsidiary of the French company Suez) and opted instead to reinstate publicly managed waterworks. In other instances, communities are fighting protracted battles. For example, Detroiters have been resisting the privatization of the city water department for the last five years. In 2006, tens of thousands of residents' access to water was cut off. The cut offs were ordered by the city in an effort to increase revenue streams and make the water department appear attractive to management companies. Detroiters have since formed a People's Water Board that acts as a watchdog group (similar to control groups that were put in place in Cochabamba after the Water Wars in 2000); it works to ensure municipal transparency, and advocates for clean, affordable, and common water resources. It has also been at the forefront of conversations around the Great Lakes about putting the region's groundwater into a public trust to prevent private interests from profiteering off of community resources. The People's Water Board is representative of a worldwide movement that insists that water (and other natural resources) is part of a global commons, a human right, and not a commodity.

Rights to Nature The last alternative we want to draw attention to is efforts to accord “rights to nature” and the values embedded in this movement for rights. Over the last few years, there has been a growing recognition across the Americas of the fundamental inadequacy of environmental law. Proponents of “rights to nature” disagree with the premise on which legal systems are based – that Nature is property (Margil and Biggs 2010). They argue, for example, that because the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act regulate pollution by setting permissible limits (such legislation has been adopted in other countries around the world), they enable corporations to grab and exploit resources. Protesting such exploitative extraction is not enough because the legal systems is actually working as it is designed to work – commerce is placed above nature and environmental degradation is essentially legalized. Therefore, they insist that we need a paradigm shift in property law. Towards this end, rights-to-nature advocates are designing new laws based on the inalienable and fundamental rights for natural communities and ecosystems to exist and flourish. Under these new laws, for example, as Margil and Biggs, who are affiliated with the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (2010) write, “a river has the right to flow, fish and other species in a river have the right to regenerate and evolve, and the flora and fauna that depend on a river have the right to thrive.” The Defense Fund has been a critical party is helping draft laws and get “right to nature” ordinances passed across the United States. Tamaqua Borough Council in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania was the first municipal government in the US to legally enforce rights to nature in 2006. Since then, over a dozen other communities across the country including Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Maine, California, New Mexico, and Virginia have also adopted such ordinances or are in the process. While it is too soon to evaluate the long-term effects of adopting such laws, their potential lies in providing legal frameworks that empower communities act as stewards for their local ecosystems.

In Latin America, there has been a related effort to re-conceptualization human-nature relations in the State/policy arena and in a way that challenges development paradigms. In 2008, Ecuador became the first county in the world to recognize the rights of nature in the drafting of the country’s new Constitution following Correa’s election. The Constitution reads, “Nature or *Pachamama*, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain itself and regenerate its own vital cycles, structure, functions and its evolutionary processes.” In Ecuador and Bolivia the inclusion of rights to nature is part of a larger philosophy of life and development for which indigenous groups, among others, have been fighting – the concept of *buen vivir* in Ecuador and *vivir bien* in Bolivia. The Ecuadorian constitution now states that the goal of development is *buen vivir* and that it provides a “conceptual rupture” with previous conceptions of development over the last six questions (Escobar quoting Acosta 2010).

Catherine Walsh explains the concept of *buen vivir*: “In its most general sense, *buen vivir* denotes, organizes, and constructs a system of knowledge and living based on the communion of humans and nature and on the spatial-temporal-harmonious totality of existence. That is, on the necessary interrelation of beings, knowledges, logics, and rationalities of thought, action, existence, and living” (2010: 18). While Escobar acknowledges the impressiveness of these constitutional changes, he also notes that many are weary of “the tremendous obstacles to actualize these principles in concrete policies and practices” (2010). Our aim in drawing attention to campaigns for the right of nature in the context of land grabs is to show the different communities around the world are acknowledging that governance and legal systems must be reworked to acknowledgment of the relationality of life and of humans and non-humans. These political/legal restructurings are part of the urgent process of re-articulating economic and ecological relationships.

Conclusion

By way of a brief conclusion, we restate our central arguments. The present moment is characterized by a set of structural crises that have generated or increased poverty, hunger, insecurity and environmental degradation around the world. Something has to change: the recent rise in both land grabs and land reforms is recognition that new configurations of people, economies, and ecologies are required. A system in which 3 billion people are defined as poor or absolutely poor is clearly not a system that is functioning well, to say nothing of the capacity for sustaining the current system into the future. Land grabs are a particular sort of solution to the contemporary crisis; they are generated by demands for food and fuel in the context where policy makers around the world privilege market solutions and mechanisms. They function through the extraction of resources and alienation of producers from the means of control. The discourse that legitimates these grabs suggests that they are necessary to resolve production shortages in some places (so called “land poor” countries) and production inefficiencies in others.

But there are alternatives. The same mechanisms of dispossession and displacement that have generated land grabs (and of which land grabs are a part) have also produced resistance and the search for new ways of organizing access to and control over resources. These alternatives do not suggest a new singularity, a new ‘best practice.’ Rather, they highlight the need for and availability of localized solutions to global problems. These solutions are often partial and small in scale, but they offer a new terrain on which to shift questions of supply into questions of control, distribution, access and opportunity.

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