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Governing precarious lives: land grabs, geopolitics, and 'food security'

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This paper has a two-part structure. The first part of the paper explores contemporary land grabs and shows how they both reflect and constitute a new neoliberal governance structure over land and land-based resources. In this sense, what is noteworthy about land grabs is their world-making capacity: the deals structure and make possible new relations of power in the global food economy. For this very reason, it is crucial to understand how land grabs affect both the *pace* and *direction* of agrarian change. The second part of the paper examines the discursive strategies that align 'food security' concerns with land-grabbing practices. Here I suggest that 'food security' supplies a moral sanction for land grabs. By mustering public empathy around a desire to 'feed the future', food security discourse – to borrow an idea from Fassin (2012) – converts a relationship of dominance (the governance of precarious lives) into a relationship of assistance (the provision of a remedy).

KEY WORDS: food security, land grabs, geopolitics, political economy, governmentality, agriculture

How to make a land grab

In a recent paper on land grabbing, Saskia Sassen suggests that the primary analytical challenge is to 'recover the *work* of acquiring large amounts of land in a foreign country' (2013, 27, my emphasis). By 'work' Sassen means the socio-political, economic and cultural practices that make land deals both possible and justifiable. To uncover this 'work', Sassen suggests (somewhat counter intuitively) that we need to look beyond the deals themselves. Instead of looking at 'x' (land grabs) we ought to examine 'non-x' (the concatenation of rituals and performances that prepare the ground – literally and metaphorically – for land deals). From here we might ask about land grabs: what political goals do they serve, what new social practices do they enable, and what sorts of narrative devices do they authorise? What, in other words, is their *strategic function*?

In this paper I build on this idea, but add to the list of background practices that make land deals possible a set of discursive tendencies that align 'food security' concerns with foreign land appropriations. Here I treat 'food security' as a knowledge–power constellation that authorises policy interventions pursued under the sign of progress and social improvement (Li 2007). Viewed as an *epistemological object*, 'food security' does tremendous work to make land deals possible; it is constitutive, rather than merely reflective, of the social practices that make land grabs happen.

The argument in this paper runs as follows. In the first section I briefly sketch what is known about land grabs – the underlying drivers of the process, the main target regions, the principal investors, and the scale of acquisitions. Next I try to pinpoint exactly what is *novel* about the present rush to acquire foreign land. In focusing on 'novelty' I want to be clear that I am not eschewing the very obvious historical parallels to be drawn. The point here is to recognise the *historic* specificity of the present by giving appropriate weight to the array of embryonic social practices that in time may calcify into new 'norms' and 'accepted' patterns of action. Building on this discussion the final part of the paper turns to four discursive tactics that underpin land grabs. My argument is that these discourses produce a social reality without which land deals simply would not be possible. The symbolic power of this 'food security' discourse is therefore as important as the socioeconomic and political dynamics elaborated in the first part of the paper.

The new 'farms race'

'Land grabs' are here defined as the transfer of the rights to own, use or control land through its sale, lease or concession. The International Land Coalition (ILC), an alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations, further observes that land grabs differ from 'ordinary' land acquisitions in the following respects: first, they do not entail the 'free,

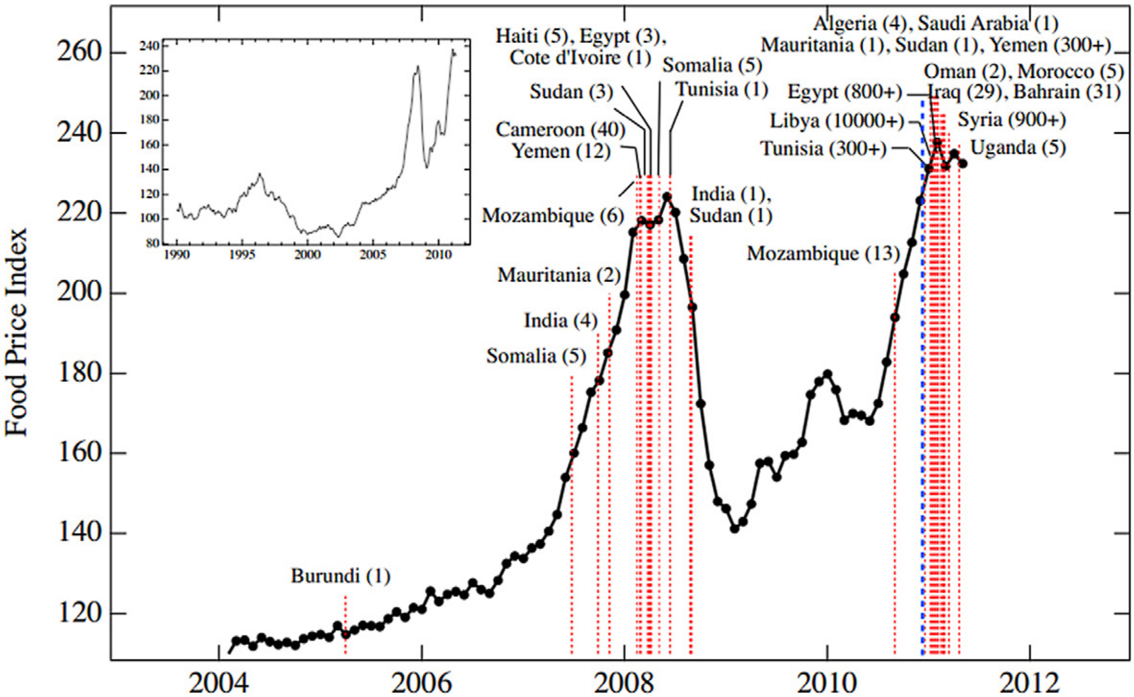

Figure 1 The food price squeeze and urban unrest
Source: Lagi *et al*. (2011). Reproduced with permission

prior and informed consent' of the dispossessed; second, investors seldom conduct impact assessments on the likely social, economic and environmental consequences; third, the contracts that seal these deals are either vague or non-binding; fourth, land deals often go hand-in-hand with violations of human rights, especially the rights of women and minority populations; and fifth, most deals are secured without democratic participation or independent oversight (Anseeuw *et al*. 2011, 11, 18).

The scale of the new land deals is equally noteworthy. Counting only acquisitions over 200 ha (note that this figure is 10 times the size of an archetypal small farm), and only deals transacted on and after the year 2000, the report concluded that 203 million ha of land – an area over eight times the size of the UK – has been sold or leased to states, commercial farmers and private investors. Significantly, 66% of all land grabs are in sub-Saharan Africa, although sizeable acquisitions have also been agreed in Latin America, the Ukraine, Southern Russia, Southeast Asia and Australia (HLPE 2011, 9; Oxfam 2012, 5).

There are many factors driving this significant wave of investment (cf. Cotula *et al*. 2009; FAO 2012; UNCTAD 2013). Certainly food price squeezes and urban unrest have played a role (see Figure 1). From 2007 the Gulf States in particular faced exorbitant food bills as the cost of importing provisions soared. Foreign land acquisitions thus became an exit strategy from import dependency by firstly enabling these states to bypass an increasingly volatile global food economy; and secondly, ensuring access to future food supplies via the vertical integration of primary production. This is the practice that Philip McMichael (2013) helpfully terms 'agro-security mercantilism'. It represents a (re)turn to supra-market mechanisms to ensure stable supplies of food, fodder, fibre and fuel.

A second factor is the real and perceived endowment constraints of nation-states. The government of China, for example, is presently getting to grips with the enormous challenge of having to feed 22% of the world's population with only 9% of the planet's arable land (GRAIN 2008, 3). This problem is magnified by the fact that China, and indeed other growth economies, are consuming increasing amounts of meat, fish, fruit and dairy products as they adopt the dietary patterns of the affluent West (OECD 2009, 32). Anxieties over population growth, the 'protein bomb', and dwindling resources are unleashing new geopolitical forces. In Saudi Arabia diminishing water reserves forced the government to abandon its programme for food self-sufficiency. Low stocks of arable land in countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have encouraged these states to 'offshore' their food production (Anseeuw *et al*. 2011, 37). In each case, foreign land acquisitions are seen as a solution to looming domestic pressures.

While states have a role in facilitating land grabs it is clear that the big player is private capital. Here it is important to distinguish between the activities of the agro-food firms and financial capital. Agro-food firms include, for example, Japanese, Indian and Arab companies – the 'second tier' of the food industry – which see land grabs as an opportunity to gain parity with more established market leaders. GRAIN (2008, 7), a leading Spanish NGO, reports that Japanese firms have bought 12 million ha of overseas farmland for the production of food and fodder crops. Likewise Karuturi Global Ltd, a controversial Indian company and erstwhile specialist in cut flowers, describes land acquisitions as an opportunity to scale up and transition their business into the booming agricultural sector: 'We have identified agribusiness as our next prime growth domain. We have taken up cultivation in Ethiopia on a mega scale to become a key player in the global agro-products market'[1]. For ambitious food firms like Karuturi Global, land grabs are about market expansion and horizontal integration.

Financial capital, by contrast, has been lured into land grabbing by a combination of the low cost of land, soaring food prices and massive speculation in biofuels. Reeling from the financial crash in 2007–8, financiers once again see land and land-based resources as a means of shifting their capital to more 'stable' commodity sectors (Daniel and Aittal 2009, 5; Smaller and Mann 2009, 1). Thorsson Capital, a business conglomerate based in the Republic of Panama, assures investors that land is the ultimate recessionary hedge:

> In the same line as gold, silver, platinum and palladium, land uniquely qualifies as a hard asset . . . Land purchased in today's market will appreciate in the future and will provide the investor with a stable asset to balance the more volatile components of the overall portfolio . . . Unlike stocks and shares, buying land means that you are buying something that is tangible, that can be physically seen, cared for and potentially developed into something of further value[2].

Thorsson Capital is not unique. Some of the world's biggest money managers are establishing agricultural hedge funds with large portions of capital set aside to acquire global farmland (Kugelman and Levenstein 2013).

Finally, the structural transformation of the energy economy to accommodate fuel derived from biomass has helped accelerate land grabs. As the world's largest consumer of oil, the USA has set a target of replacing 30% of its fuel needs with agro-fuels by 2030. A similar EU directive stipulates that 10% of transport fuels must be supplied from 'renewable' sources by 2020; the expectation is that 80–90% of this target will be met from biofuels (Anseeuw *et al*. 2011, 26). The targets set by the USA and the EU reflect a wider trend; 40 out of 50 countries consulted in a recent survey had already enacted legislation to promote biofuels (Smith 2010, 3). The International Energy Agency predicts that by 2030 global agro-fuel consumption is set to reach 250 billion litres of gasoline equivalent per year (IEA 2011, 23). For supply to match demand more land needs to be brought into production. ActionAid (2010, 19) calculates that EU countries have already 'secured or requested 5 million hectares of land for industrial biofuels in developing countries'. Data drawn from the Land Matrix paint a similar picture: the highest demand for land investments come from agro-fuels, comprising 40% of the area acquired where the commodity grown is known (Anseeuw *et al*. 2011, 24).

Focusing on 'non-x'

From this thumbnail review it should be evident that land grabs mark a *point of rupture* in the management of agricultural resources (for a fuller discussion, cf. Nally 2012). To specify this rupture more clearly I want to foreground four ways that land deals promote a new neoliberal governance structure over land and land-based resources.

First, new geopolitical relations and fault lines are being forged around foreign land grabs. Today, whether it is Brazil investing in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or China investing in the Philippines, or indeed North African states investing in sub-Saharan Africa, land deals are noticeably skewed along a new South–South geographical axis. In short, land grabs enable a new 'redistribution of power' (McMichael 2013, 48) in the food economy as established sites of influence yield ground to new zones of authority and control. Within this new nexus of governance – which is arguably more 'networked' and less 'hierarchical' (Duffield 2001, 2) than the traditional North–South divide – an 'extraordinary variety of actors' interact, including parastatal institutions, pension fund managers, commodity traders, strategic consultants, business entrepreneurs, as well as NGOs and state agencies (Fairhead *et al*. 2012, 239). It is from these polycentric constellations and 'particularized assemblages' (Sassen 2013, 29) that land grabs arise.

Second, as Philip McMichael (2013, 15) argues, land grabs represent 'a kind "re-territorialization" [that] is designed to avoid dependence on markets, or more particularly, market intermediaries'. In other words, the kind of horizontal and vertical integration that corporations such as Wal-Mart promote is now being pursued in agriculture by states (sometimes through public–private partnership) and private capital. For these actors market-bypassing strategies are a means to secure supply lines – and, just as importantly, circumvent real and perceived endowment constraints. By capturing and 'endogenizing' (Sassen 2013, 27) *global* nature states believe they can kickback against both national and natural limits to growth.

Third, the politicisation of land grabs – including the work of civil society organisations in shaming foreign investors – has spurred efforts to better regulate investments. The FAO, for example, has established Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGs), while the World Bank has produced an alternative set of standards known as Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) protocols. Significantly these developments suggest that we should accept the reality of land grabs and work collectively to mitigate their worst effects. For Olivier de Schutter loose governance frameworks of this kind simply finesse the details of land grabs – they suggest that it is okay to 'destroy the peasantry' so long as one accomplishes this 'responsibly' (de Schutter 2011, 275). The overall effect – handing foreign entities the right to use national resources (something that was, until recently, forbidden in many countries; cf. Spieldoch and Murphy 2013) – is hardly interrupted. The promotion of a 'light' regulatory environment ought to be seen as part of a wider politics of liberal governance that substitutes 'codes of conduct' for the rule of law. This *recalibration of governance* coincides with the deepening loss of economic sovereignty seen most obviously in the largesse dispensed by host governments (including tax holidays, exemptions from export duties, concessional lending practices, free or cheap use of the commons etc.) attempting to lure and retain foreign capital. What investors want – and are arguably winning – is 'a homogenous global playing field around which they can freely move raw materials, labor, capital, finished products, tax-paying obligations, and profits' (Barnes 2006, 21).

Fourth and finally, the deals signal the deepening penetration of financial markets into the food system. As several scholars have argued, agriculture has long represented a barrier or interruption to the circulation of capital (Bernstein 2010; Kloppenburg 2004; Lewontin 2000). However, geographer George Henderson (1998, 111) astutely notes:

> that while capitalist society, through its agriculture (*inter alia*), commodifies and exploits nature directly, it also exploits the very condition whereby nature poses interruptions or 'obstacles' to its exploitation. These so-called obstacles, which slow the valorization of productive capitals on the farm . . . open up temporal and spatial channels for the extraction of surpluses by means of fictitious values and fictitious capitals.

By exposing natural resources to new forms of exploitation (e.g. turning food into fuel, generating speculative bubbles through hedge funds etc.) land grabs make possible the 'assetisation' of nature – that is, the conversion of global agricultural land into a financial instrument – thus speeding up the valorisation process. In the words of Neil Smith, 'capital is no longer content simply to plunder an available nature, but rather increasingly moves to produce an inherently social nature as the basis of new sectors of production and accumulation' (cited in Fairhead *et al*. 2012, 243). In short, land grabs prise open new 'temporal and spatial channels' for the realisation of profit.

How to authorise a land grab

In the final part of this paper I want to delineate the legitimating strategies that make land grabs possible. To frame this discussion I begin with some remarks by George Orwell on the politics of language:

> In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible . . . [V]illages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, and the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*.
>
> George Orwell (2002 ([1946], 963)

To Orwell's list of 'exhausted idioms' (2002 [1946], 964) one would have to add the term 'food security', widely used from the mid-1970s to denote strategies to boost food supplies and nowadays invoked in debates on everything from famine relief to future climate change. In these discussions, 'food security' is commonly presented as an ideologically neutral concept, a pre-political idea that is moreover a global good. Similar to modern humanitarian reason (Fassin 2012, 3), the concept galvanises public empathy and in the process it re-narrates a relationship of dominance (the governance of precarious lives) as one of assistance (the provision of a remedy). Below I fasten on just four strands of contemporary 'food security' discourse in order to show how political speech is bent to 'defend the indefensible'.

Closing yield gaps

The authors of the World Bank's report on land deals, entitled *Rising global interest in farmland*, claim that much of the agricultural land in the global South, and especially in Africa, is 'unutilized' and could be targeted for a 'productivity increase' via foreign investment: 'None of the African countries of most interest to investors', the report asserts, 'is now achieving more than 30% of the potential yield on currently cultivated areas' (Deininger *et al*. 2011, xiv;

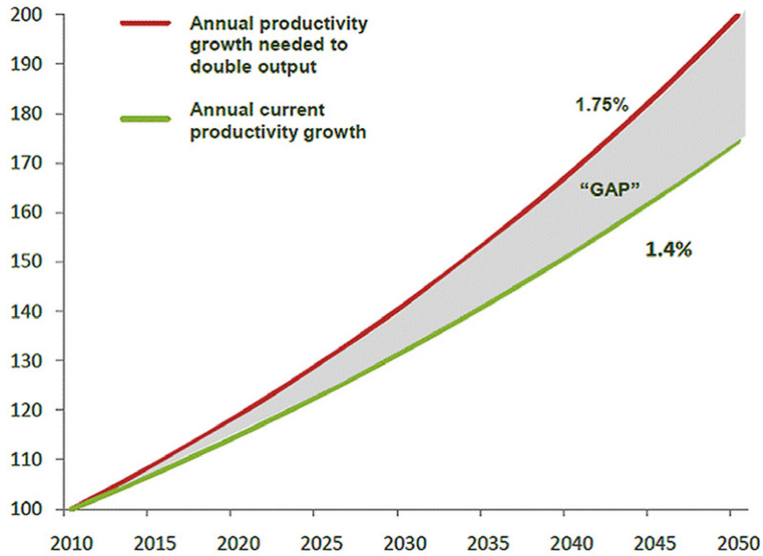

Figure 2 Visualising the 'yield gap'
Source: GHI (2010, 5). Reproduced with permission

Li 2011, 294). To illustrate this point the report is peppered with maps and tables that show 'the maximum potential value' (Deininger *et al*. 2011, 78; Li 2011, 282) that could be realised on each continent if the land was repurposed for intensive commercial farming.

The Global Harvest Initiative (GHI), an industry-led advocacy group that includes DuPont, Elanco, IBM, John Deere and Monsanto, embraces the same 'yield gap' arguments. GHI's annual GAP Report includes a GAP Index that aims to quantify the difference between the present rate of agricultural productivity and the pace required to meet future needs. The report is replete with shiny graphics (see Figure 2) and 'hard facts' that make a convincing case for more large-scale commercial farming. The story is also one of tipping points – 2050 and 9 billion people – after which it may be too late to mitigate the worst effects of population increases, climate change and dwindling resources. If the plough is to rein in the stork (Arnold 1988, 39), so the argument goes, we must embrace a new agricultural revolution.

Similarly DuPont's Advisory Committee on *Agricultural innovation and productivity for the 21st century* assures readers that the company is committed to addressing the 'food productivity gap' and furthermore counsels that 'stakeholders remain focused on the question of how to adequately raise productivity to meet the world's food needs, rather than get distracted by historic disputes, such as biotechnology versus traditional crop breeding, organic farming versus conventional farming, or food versus fuel production' (Dupont Advisory Committee 2011, 5–6). Note that organic agriculture is contrasted with 'conventional farming' by which the committee mean large-scale industrial agriculture. Observe too that concerns about biotechnology and using land to 'grow fuel' – while over 800 million people around the world are undernourished – are dismissed as 'historic disputes'. The *urgency* of producing more food to save lives means that almost every other concern can be suspended.

Strategic consultants and financial analysts have observed the power of the 'yield gap' argument. According to Susan Payne, founder of Emergent Asset Management Ltd (EAM) a UK investment fund, 'farmland in sub-Saharan Africa is giving 25% returns a year and new technology can treble crop yields in short time frames'. 'If we do not pay great care and attention now to increase food production by over 50% before 2050', warns Payne, 'we will face serious food shortages globally' (Payne citied in Vidal 2011, np). For Neil Crowder the Chief Executive Officer at Chayton Capital, an investment firm with significant monies in Zambia, deals are done with the aim of 'unlocking the potential of agricultural land and assets by optimizing production and operational efficiency'[3].

These and other 'yield gap' claims ignore Amartya Sen's (1981) classic point that food supply arguments do not sufficiently explain the persistence of hunger. Indeed it is perfectly possible to experience a subsistence crisis in the context of an overall increase in food availability. Such 'boom time' famines, Sen argued, are a reminder that 'food scarcity' is *relative* rather than an absolute category. Indeed, it is well established that enough food exists to feed in excess of the world's current population (OECD 2009, 21).

The logic of depeasantisation

In an exemplary article on land grabs, anthropologist Tania Li links the 'yield gap' argument to the desire to engineer a general 'exit from agriculture' in the global South. Li cites the World Development Report, entitled *Agriculture for development* (World Bank 2008) and its recommendation that smallholders unable to compete in the globalised food economy should abandon agriculture to more 'productive users' and take up wage labour. 'The assumption [is]', Li goes on to explain, 'that the nations of the global South will, sooner or later, experience an agrarian transition similar to the one that occurred in Europe in earlier centuries, characterised by the shift from farm to factory, country to town, and for those who stay in the countryside, a transition from subsistence production to high value commodity production or wage work on large farms' (Li 2011, 293; cf Li 2009a 2009b).

We have, of course, seen processes of alienation and dispossession accelerating over the last century (Nixon 2011). In *The age of extremes*, the final volume in his much-fêted quartet of books, historian Eric Hobsbawm declared that the 'death of the peasantry' constituted 'the most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this [twentieth] century', sealing 'us off forever from the world of the past' (cited in Weis 2007, 24). While many on the left felt that this was a premature obituary, several commentators on the right view the peasantry's demise as a blessing in disguise. According to economist Paul Collier, 'peasant farming is not well suited to innovation and investment'. For him the 'most realistic way' of drawing down global food prices 'is to replicate the Brazilian model of large, technologically sophisticated agro-companies' (cited in Pearce 2013, 397). Continuing in the pages of *Foreign policy*, Collier (2008, np) went on to mock 'the middle- and upper class love affair with peasant agriculture' and the view that 'peasants, like pandas, are to be preserved'. Given the present food crisis, Collier announced, support for small-scale farming reflects a 'retreat into romanticism'. In Collier's view 'the world needs more commercial farms, not less' (2008, np).

Collier's remarks are only the latest instalment in a long history of disparaging small farmers. Victorian elites castigated in equal measure Indian *ryot* farmers, Irish cottier tenants and African sharecroppers as primitive, idle, mendacious and improvident. To imperial eyes, peasants were symbols of obsolescence, no more capable of agricultural improvement than the dodo was capable of flight. As with the dodo, their future would be short-lived; extinction was the inevitable and natural dénouement. Indeed famines often did the trick (cf. Nally 2011a). Much the same narrative that characterised the colonial period carried over into the Green Revolution, as 'depeasantisation' (Araghi 1995) became the *sine qua non* for agricultural improvement.

Although today's promoters of agricultural development often employ 'smallholder friendly' rhetoric – witness a recent report from the World Economic Forum's (2013) *New vision for agriculture* which identified small farmers as 'change agents' and vital 'catalysts' – it is less clear how the planned-for 'partnerships' between giant global operators and low-income farmers will work to the mutual advantage of both. All too often the rhetoric of 'partnership' masks the obvious asymmetries of power between brokers and the fact that there are few legally binding guarantees for local businesses and small farmers (cf. Nally and Vira 2013).

The sacralisation of markets

A third plank in the land grabs discourse is the sacralisation of markets. Richard Ferguson, head of global agriculture at the investment bank Renaissance Capital, firmly believes that 'A free market with transparent pricing, enforceable property rights and liberalized trade would *solve just about every agricultural problem under the sun'* (cited in Pearce 2013, 398, my emphasis). The UK's *Foresight* report (2011, 168) also states that 'Food security is best served by fair and fully functioning markets and by liberalised global trade arrangements, not by policies to promote self-sufficiency'. According to GHI (2011, 16) 'trade is the mechanism that links supply to demand, and trade liberalization plays an essential role in promoting global food security by making the international food system more efficient'. The *New vision for agriculture* promoted by the World Economic Forum (2013) also prioritises market-based approaches to food security and poverty reduction. As the report rather awkwardly asks: 'With the models employed, are smallholders able fully to participate in the market, or are most still mainly at the subsistence level?'

The implicit contrast between market participation ('good') and subsistence agriculture ('bad') is not, however, a straightforward one. An important report authored by the World Food Programme (2009, 25) observed that while food markets help 'promote efficiency in resource allocation, especially through the signals they send to food producers, who favour high prices . . . [they] tend to fail most often and most severely for those who need them the most – the hungry poor'. Today's agricultural reformers rarely acknowledge the tendency for markets to tilt against the poor; nor should they when their primary aim is to introduce market values at every point in the food chain. Nigeria's Minister for Agriculture, Akinwumi Adesina, summarises the mood well: '[W]e are restructuring the space for the private sector to add value to every single thing.' '[In the past] we were not looking at agriculture through the right lens', continues Adesina. 'We were looking at agriculture as a developmental activity, like a social sector in which you manage poor people in rural areas. But agriculture is not a social sector. Agriculture is a business. Seed is a business, fertiliser is a business, storage, value added, logistics and transport – it is all about business' (Green 2013, np). If land deals can accelerate the transition to marketisation, then by this logic they should be vigorously pursued.

The power of solicitude

According to Neil Crowder at Chayton Capital, land deals are inspired by a desire to care for the stricken and neglected. 'The important thing to note', says Crowder, 'is that we are focusing on investments that will serve the continent's own growing consumer market. Our goal is to feed Africa'[4]. A leading industry magazine called *Real Deals* – displayed on the website of Emergent Asset Management – asks 'can private equity feed the world?' 'Food shortages represent the biggest threat to global prosperity', warns the headline, and 'private equity investors must stop ignoring the investment opportunity of a lifetime'[5]. Jarch Management Group, an investment house specialising in African land, declares: 'The Company believes in the empowerment of the populations who actually own the resources, sometimes being exploited by others. Jarch looks to work with the population to develop strategies to secure their political and economic rights of self determination' (see Figure 3)[6].

For Feronia Inc., a company financing 'plantations' in the Democratic Republic of Congo, land deals promote social improvements:

> We provide employment for approximately 4,000 people, and recognize that our people are our most valuable asset. We provide education, medical services, sanitation and housing for these workers and their families, supporting a community of over 45,000. We also provide the community infrastructure, including roads and electricity supplies. Feronia operates three comprehensive hospital facilities in the DRC – one at each of our plantations. We are the sole provider of healthcare services in our communities, providing medications, vaccinations, and general medical services. These services include various surgeries and child-delivery. We recognize the children in our communities as being an important hope for Africa's future . . .[7]

The Indian investment firm Karuturi Global echoes the sentiment that land deals can build 'resilience' and ensure the vulnerable against risk. The firm's strategy for 'Corporate Social Responsibility' in Ethiopia includes distributing 'woollen blankets to [the] poor and elderly . . . free food every Sunday to 100 destitutes [and] contributing $75,000 towards

Figure 3 Land grabs as a welfare and 'empowerment' strategy
Source: www.jarchcapital.com. Reproduced with permission

drinking water supply for Holetta town'[8]. This is what I have elsewhere described as 'corporate biopolitics' (Nally 2011b), whereby *public* welfare is recodified as *corporate* welfare – and in the process land grabs are restyled as a beneficent gift.

Conclusions

A House of Commons Committee (2009, 23) recently questioned Hilary Benn, the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK, about land grabs. While Benn recognised that the deals could generate problems, overall he 'seemed fairly complacent', describing the trend as an inexorable 'sign of the times'. In contradistinction to Benn's view, this paper has shown that land grabs are the outcome of complex, and in many cases novel, political processes involving policy assumptions and incentive structures that lock communities into violent trajectories of historical change and render silent or irrelevant alternative pathways to development. Land grabs are *made* – they are thus part of what Edward Said (1993, 7) termed the 'struggle over geography' – and so it stands that they can be *un*made.

In addition to foregrounding the 'work' done to construct global land deals, it is important to remind ourselves of the enormous costs of global enclosure. It has been estimated (Oxfam 2012, 2) that 66% of foreign land deals are in countries facing chronic hunger problems. An influential report by the International Institute for Environment and Development (Cotula *et al*. 2009, 4) documented 157 approved land deals in Ethiopia alone, including a single acquisition of 150 000 ha of land for livestock production. Yet in 2009, 7.8 million Ethiopians (10% of the population) were recorded as chronically hungry. Ethiopia remains the world's largest recipient of food aid – all the while the government and investors benefit from a thriving agrarian export sector reputed to be worth over $50 million (Oakland Institute 2011, 8–10; cf. Fisseha 2011). Such figures suggest that endeavours to realise 'food security' may actually *generate new forms of precarity* (cf. Gambetti and Godoy-Anativia 2013), rather than merely being responses to the latter. For this very reason abundance and scarcity, security and insecurity, need to be theorised and grasped as interdependent phenomena.

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Notes

1 See Karuturi Global Ltd (www.karuturi.com/). Accessed 12 September 2013.
2 See Thorsson Capital (www.thorssoncapital.com/investing-in-land.html). Accessed 27 February 2012.
3 Crowder cited in Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (2010).
4 Crowder cited in Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (2010).
5 Cited on the website of EAM (www.emergentasset.com/?func=PagePressItem&PressId=6). Accessed 12 September 2013.
6 See Jarch Capital (www.jarchcapital.com/company-overview.php). Accessed 12 September 2013.
7 See Feronia Inc (http://feronia.com/Responsibility/Community/default.aspx) Accessed 12 September 2013.
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