

# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

International Symposium: Conflicts over land and global change  
International Symposium, Freie Universität Berlin, 01-02 December 2016

## Keynote lecture:

### **Conflicted Frontiers and The Land Question at the Edges of the State**

Michael Watts (University of California, Berkeley)

I will explore two very different settings in which the land question has been shaped by a similar set of global forces, namely the oil and gas industry. My remarks will compare two oil-producing gulfs – the Gulf of Mexico (deepwater oil production off the coast of Louisiana) and the Gulf off Guinea (the on and offshore oil region of the Niger delta in Nigeria). Both are instances of what I call frontiers operating at the edge of the state. Each is markedly different and each stands at different places within the global oil and gas sector and fossil capitalism in general, but I shall endeavor to show how these frontier spaces produces particular forms of conflicts, landed property and systems of precarious livelihood which arise from what I call the global "oil complex".

### **Conflicts over land and global change: a Latinamerican perspective**

Astrid Ulloa (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá)

## **Panel: Spatial dynamics of conflicts over land**

### **Territoriality, Ground Rent and the Circulation of Capital Through the Land**

Bernd Belina (Goethe University Frankfurt)

To be traded and to become the object of investment and speculation, land needs to be organized in plots, i.e. demarcated and legally secured. I review 1) the geographical debate on the strategy of territoriality and 2) the Marxist theory of ground rent and its expansion by Harvey (1982: 347), who argued: "When trade in land is reduced to a special branch of the circulation of interest-bearing capital, then [...] landownership has achieved its true capitalistic form", in order to discuss the ways in which capital circulates through the land in a variety of settings today.

Harvey, D. (1982): The Limits to Capital. London.

### **State, space, society: Conflicts over mining in Colombia**

Kristina Dietz (Freie Universität Berlin)

This paper explores social conflicts over mining as situated at the intersection of relational local, national and global influences. Although struggles over mining are often place based, strategies applied by social actors in these struggles are not limited to bounded spaces or to the local scale. Besides, social mobilisation against large-scale mining projects does not always and exclusively occur in opposition to the state. In struggles over mining in Latin America, social activists often base their protest on political, cultural or territorial rights that were legally conferred to them by the state during processes of (neo)liberal democratisation and decentralisation in the 1990s. By

claiming these rights, e.g. of consultation, of democratic participation in decision making over mineral extractions, or of territorial control, actors demand and exert participatory citizenship. They do so in reference to and beyond the state – through the appropriation of legally sanctioned ‘spaces of participation’ and the creation of new ‘spaces of contestation’, and through the application of multi-scalar strategies that link the local, the national and global. The spatial relationality of conflicts over mining is analyzed drawing on an anti-mining protest in the department of Tolima, Colombia, where the mining company AngloGold Ashanti is currently preparing to open an industrial gold mine. Social movements together with local governments have initiated popular consultations at the municipal level in order to stop the project.

### **Small-scale gold mining in Mindanao**

Boris Verbrugge (Radboud University, Netherlands)

Since the 1980s, Mindanao (southern Philippines) has witnessed a dramatic expansion of artisanal and small-scale (gold) mining (ASM). I advance three propositions about this expansion. First, rather than a subsistence-oriented response to crisis, ASM-expansion should be seen as a product of the ‘informalization’ of mining, epitomized by a transition from capital-intensive large-scale mining to informal, labor-intensive ASM. Secondly, the expansion of informal ASM has (somewhat paradoxically) been facilitated by the decentralized Philippine state. Thirdly, the renewed expansion of large-scale mining under the tutelage of the national government is undermining ASM, and is producing (armed) conflicts.

### **New mining in the margin (Western and Central Africa): territorial (dis)-integration?**

Pr. Géraud Magrin (University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

I would like to investigate the territorial consequences of extractive activities affecting regions of margin during the last boom in Africa (2000-2014). The first African mining rushes (beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, 1950-1970’s) affected the largest deposits, whose geographical location made exports relatively easy. The last boom led to the exploitation of new mining areas, mainly located in remote places characterized by their status of margin within their national territories. It was often followed by conflicts over land and land use of spaces (mining vs conservation or agriculture). But it implied also improvement of territorial control by the State and integration at different scales. This statement will use case studies from Western and Central Africa in the mining and oil sector.

## **PANEL: State, authority and citizenship in conflicts over land**

### **Citizens as criminals. Violence and citizenship in socio-environmental conflicts in Guatemala**

Elisabet Rasch (Wageningen UR, Netherlands)

This paper studies the impacts on citizenship of the current increase of violations of human rights related to socio-environmental conflicts in Guatemala. There is a well-organized resistance against large-scale natural resource extraction that slowly moves from demanding inclusion in decision processes about resource use, towards a discourse of territorial autonomy. At the same time, there is an increase in the use of penal law and anti-terrorism legislation as a way of disqualifying social protest in resource conflicts. Violations of human, civil and political rights of protestors against

large scale natural resource extraction have also increased. This results in numerous communities demanding a clean environment, participation, and justice at the same time. These communities not only face foreign companies, but are also caught in the middle of armed and non-armed actors that contest the same territory and its natural resources. Their resistance is considered as a threat to internal security; citizens are viewed as criminals and protestors as terrorists.

## **Traditional authorities and conflicts over land in Ghana**

Sarah Kirst (FU Berlin)

In this paper, I analyze how traditional authorities' (*chiefs*) actions are linked to *land grabbing* and related conflicts by drawing on empirical data of two cases of conflicts over *land grabbing* in two regions of Ghana. Approximately 80% of Ghana's land is administrated under customary tenure with chiefs holding the land in trust for their communities and thus playing a crucial role in land transactions and frequently resulting conflicts. But chiefs are far from being a homogenous group. By comparing two cases of conflicts over large scale land commodification processes I highlight how chiefs are perceived in conflicts over land by local residents, how they perceive their own role and in what ways their actions impact the emergence and dynamics of conflicts over land. I argue that chief's actions and the related conflict dynamics are closely linked to questions of power and accountability.

## **Africa's land rush – future-making at the margins?**

Detlef Müller-Mahn (Universität Bonn)

The paper discusses land developments and national strategic plans in East Africa as spatial expressions of future-making. Development blueprints aim to 'turn history on its head', enabling previously-ignored dryland regions to become engines of economic growth. The process is simultaneously redrawing the map of marginal regions and redrawing the relations between people and environments in order to gain greater control over and make 'more productive' use of these environments. The empirical part of the paper explores the spatial politics of these processes along with case studies from Eastern Africa. The theoretical part then scrutinizes visions of the future (expressed for example in Kenya's Vision 2030) and concepts of future-making and risk against the backdrop of current debates about 'Africa rising', with a special focus on shifting biocultural frontiers. These processes entail unevenly distributed risks and opportunities, resulting in renewed land conflicts and processes of marginalization.

## **PANEL: Labor in conflicts over land**

### **Organising for Interest Representation: Smallholders and Outgrowers in Ghana's Plantation Agriculture**

Akua Britwum (University of Cape Coast, Ghana)

Production expansion in Ghana's plantation agriculture often rides on out-grower and smallholder schemes. Smallholder and outgrower schemes are an example of the redrafting of peasant households as production sites, beyond their traditional reproduction role. The qualifying criterion is the proximity of their land to the concession of the nucleus estate. Such farmers produce a large share of fresh fruit bunches for oil palm plantations in Ghana. Though farmers operate as owners of the land they farm, their contractual relations with the plantation estate gives them little control

over decisions such plant variety, agricultural practices and alternative markets. Their emerging needs and interests arising from their relations with the nucleus plantation dictate largely their willingness to organise. Sustaining the emerging organisational forms depends on their power resources and internal cohesion. Using information from key informant and group interviews of farmers, workers and management at the Ghana Oil Palm Development Corporation, the paper seeks to unpack the forms of employment relations within outgrowers and smallholder schemes and their labour force needs. The paper examines in addition, organisational modes they use to pursue their interests, their main sources of power and the place of traditional unions in their attempts to organise. It concludes that organisational successes derive from the varying degrees of associational power available to workers and the external players they can marshal to support their representation needs.

## **Labour and the Social Relations of Nature in the Palm Oil Industry**

Oliver Pye (Bonn University)

Labour has played a relatively marginal role in the debates over land grabs, which have focused more on capital, the state, land conflicts and campesin@ alternatives. But land conflicts are connected to other transformations in a globalising agribusiness sector. As flex crops become embedded within new global value webs, large plantation proletariats are produced in the South and connected to other groups of workers in spatially new ways. Flex crop value webs can be analysed as a web of connected groups of workers, including mill workers, seafarers and dock workers, energy workers, retail workers and bank employees to name a few. Whether their connections remain alienated and anonymous or become collective and political depends on the level and strategies of transnational organization. This paper first discusses why labour and alienation should be at the heart of analyses of social relations of nature by exploring their connections in the palm oil industry. It then analyses forms of everyday resistance that are being practised particularly by the migrants who make up much of the workforce in the plantations and mills in Malaysia. It argues that the migrant networks and the transnational social spaces produced by them could provide the basis for spatially innovative organising strategies. Based on results from in-depth empirical research and ongoing action research with new trade union initiatives, the paper ends by exploring potential organising strategies that could link workers across transnational spaces and up the global production networks.

## **Labor relations and worker struggles in the sugarcane sector of São Paulo, Brazil**

Jan Brunner (Freie Universität Berlin)

In my presentation I focus on workers, unions and worker struggles in processes of changing land control and land use. I analyze the production of sugarcane in São Paulo in Brazil, which increased strongly since 2003. The expansion of sugarcane cultivation is accompanied by processes of internationalization and concentration of capital in the sector and the progressing mechanization of the sugarcane harvest.

I will explore the effects of these processes on workers, unions and their struggles. Specifically I want to discuss how unions were affected by changes in the sugar-cane production, and how they reacted to the reorganization of the sector. Furthermore, I want to show, how the organization and struggles of workers changed over time. Empirically I base my analysis on a multiple set of data collected during three field trips to Brazil.

**PANEL: Social movements in conflicts over land**

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## **Social movements in conflicts over mining: Linking social movement studies, political ecology, and spatial theory**

Louisa Prause & Bettina Engels (Freie Universität Berlin)

Starting point of our paper is a gap in the contentious politics literature on framing. Very little is known so far about why social movement actors do or do not chose certain frames. We analyze the strategic framing of movement actors around mining projects to explain why actors chose certain frames over others. We put forward a framework to combine the concept of framing with other concepts from contentions politics, political ecology and spatial theory: political opportunity structures, materiality of nature, scale, and place. We argue that framing choices of social movement actors in mining conflicts are tied to the specific area that is contested as well as the political context in which they operate. Empirically, we draw on our research on mining conflicts in Burkina Faso and Senegal. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the conceptual debate on framing in the contentious politics literature as well as to advance a better understanding on movement actor's framing strategies on mining conflicts.

## **Seeing coal like an activist: dealing with the dynamics of coal contention in early 21st century South Africa**

Victor Munnik (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)

This paper reports on activist efforts to reframe the understanding of coal in South Africa. It engages with the challenges of working with an ever expanding body of social movement theory within the practical circumstances of movement building. These include the need for up to date, credible but adversarial empirical knowledge of the South African and international coal sectors, economic, legal and scientific issues, and the politics of allied organisations. It argues for using the principles of public sociology and existing activist understandings within a framework that is easy to share with fellow activists and by extension, the broader public.

## **Making the Extraordinary Everyday: Women anti-mining activists' narratives of staying put and carrying on in Peru and Ecuador**

Katy Jenkins (Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK)

This paper explores the way in which activism is incorporated into the everyday lives and practices of rural women in the Ecuadorian and Peruvian Andes. Drawing on research with women anti-mining activists in Peru and Ecuador, the paper emphasises that resistance is relatively rarely concerned with large scale protests, transnational activism, and the spectacular, but rather depends on daily resistance and resilience in, often fractured, local communities. I explore how rural women make extraordinary circumstances, including facing lawsuits and accusations of terrorism, part of their everyday lives, and how their resistance is enacted through strategies of staying put and carrying on, drawing on emblematic narratives of tradition, ancestry and customary practices to challenge notions of progress and development.