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Land Grabbing and Land Imperialism: Historic and contemporary perspectives

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Introduction

The subject of land grabbing and land imperialism has a duality that is both contemporary and historic. Societal mechanisms for delivering food security in an agrarian or nomadic community have always rested on effective resource control and management. Land and water have been, and still are, the critical resources that communities depend upon to survive, although in the twenty-first century there is a physical and mental dislocation between the urban majority and the land from which their food is derived.

With secondary economic growth, and a move from a society primarily working on or living off the land to urban dwelling, this leads to a realignment of how food is produced and distributed. Industrialisation and urbanisation are the major global drivers of agricultural land conversion and peri-urban sprawl (Dadi *et al.* 2016). In developed countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the reasons for the urbanisation of the population, whether in part voluntarily or policy driven, are lost in the mists of time. The connection of an evolved, largely urban and metropolitan population with how their food is produced is broken and fragmented. This allows a new discourse and other actors to enter the void

that is created, often deriving new economic and social models for how food is produced, processed, sold, purchased and consumed, even a new dialogue as to what food actually is.

The modern rural landscape of the UK is embedded within historic activities of land enclosure and changes in land tenure, loss of access and common rights for rural dwellers and a subsequent population migration to towns and cities. Between 1604 and 1914 over 5,200 Enclosure Bills were enacted by the UK Parliament relating to just over a fifth of the total area of England, some 6.8 million acres (Parliament, n.d.). Enclosure under these Parliamentary Acts brought an end to common rights and communal management of the open fields, instead providing portions of land to individual landowners as private, personal property (McDonagh and Daniels, 2012). McDonagh and Daniels outline that there was not just enclosure of land area, but also a realignment of wider infrastructure in terms of existing roads, churches, farmhouses, drainage systems and the removal of villages and resettlement of individuals either in new model villages (villagisation) or in towns and cities (urbanisation). Land enclosure in this context can be said to be an integral component of the historical development of capitalism (Makki and Geisler, 2013).

The narrative still continues in developed rural economies, with migration of the young from rural areas and agricultural corporatisation, whether it manifests in increased farm size (Foster *et al.* 2013), mindset (Wheeler *et al.* 2012; Magnan, 2012), or reliance on technology and the loss of jobs (Phillips and McLeroy, 2004). The collective discussion also reflects concerns over biodiversity conservation, natural heritage in the evolved landscape and societal interest in how food is produced. The brokering of much of this latter conversation is by civil society through non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It is nuanced and obviously political in its most rooted sense.

Civil society and social capital

Social capital is a resource, based on trust, that multiplies in developed social networks leading to co-operation among actors, and collaboration between institutions and community organisations to facilitate the achievement of common goals (Manning, 2013; Muthuri *et al.*, 2006; Leicht, 1998). Civil society is construed as being professional associations, clubs and societies (Norton, 2001). Foley and Edwards (1996) considered the paradox of civil society and whether firstly the generation of 'social capital' and secondly delivering what is seen to be a 'public good' are essentially the same thing. Foley and Edwards (1996, citing Putnam, 1993) suggest that the public good is only of value when it is available equitably to all society and provides the effects notionally ascribed to it. Their line of argument

proposes that social networks in themselves may not necessarily drive effective governance. It is only when such networks bridge and do not become politicised, that they rise above representing specific social interests and actually deliver a public good. Whilst this critique is nuanced, the contention that a politicised civil society co-exists with, but does not necessarily represent, citizens' interests is important. This is especially so when the decision makers in such private organisations become more remote from the individuals they state they are seeking to represent. In the void created by passive democratic political governance, an active politicised civil society could be considered as complementary or even a suitable substitute for governmental action. This form of civil society can then be charged with being the focal point and the advocate for society's interests and points of view (Foley and Edwards, 1998). Within the process of governance, mutually exclusive social constructs such as the political society, and differentiated public, private and non-profit economic sectors are then created (Foley and Edwards, 1996) often in themselves becoming more and more distant from the very society they were developed to represent. All these interfacing social constructs have a role to play in concert, or in conflict, with the development of food policy governance, especially around food security and more particularly nutrition security, and this context is crucial when considering the subject of land grabbing.

Social responsibility

Purchasing food and eating it as a consumer is an act that has political, economic, environmental, aesthetic, and ethical aspects (Lavin, 2013; Devinney *et al.*, 2006). In saying this, the term 'political' is being used in its core sense. In the ancient Greek, '*politikos*' means 'of, for, or relating to the citizens'. Citizenship, or the decision-making that is for, or on behalf of, all sections of society is today more usually termed as governance. Governance can be described as:

the structures and processes that enable governmental and non-governmental actors to co-ordinate their interdependent needs and interests through the making and implementing of policies in the absence of a unifying political authority, (Krahmann, 2003: 331).

Social responsibility can be prescribed or voluntary. Spence and Bourlakis (2009) define corporate responsibility (CR) as the voluntary actions that an organisation can take, over and above compliance with minimum legal requirements, to address both its own competitive interests and the interests of the wider society. Global governance and the interrelationship between foreign direct investment (FDI), trade, shareholder return, insurance, credit rating and sustainable development are key dynamics driving corporate social responsibility (CSR) and there are increasing demands from multiple stakeholders for more sustain-

able investments, and compliance with internationally accepted standards and agreed instruments (Manning and Baines, 2004). The formation of multinational corporations (MNC) means that their identity will naturally transcend national culture and national identity to form a differentiated, and sometimes dissociated, corporate identity. This corporate identity, in terms of social responsibility, and the organisation's interaction with a given or indeed plural 'society' can mean that there is a homogeneous interaction, and the notion of nation states and national identity is simply subsumed.

Szántó (2001) states that it is "a peculiarity of globalisation" that a hierarchically well-placed individual within a MNC can technologically govern at a global range. Indeed, MNCs apply their own strategic techniques and tactical measures in pursuing their business interests and affiliations (Teklemariam *et al.* 2015) that operate across nation states. Stiglitz (2006) argued that whilst exploitation of natural resources is a key part of the corporate globalisation model, this approach has led to failures in resource-rich developing nations. Therefore in order for their activities to be sustainable, Stiglitz suggests that MNCs need smart incentives and/or be forced to pay the true cost of their environmental and social impact. These assertions bring forth considerations of whether a corporation or a nation-state can act from an imperialistic stance in how it operates and its associated reach.

Imperialism as a mechanism to drive commerce and profit is as contemporary as it is historic. Imperialism at its simplest is the extension or imposition of power; more fully imperialism is the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation, (NGO or MNC) especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas. Thus imperialism is the exercise of power and control over political or economic activity in a given area, without any regard to the boundaries of nation states or nationhood. Nationhood in this sense is the grouping of individuals with a common language, culture economic life and an innate sense of identity. Hofstede (2011: 3) defines national culture as the "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from those of another." Mann (1997) argues that the rise of transnational power relations has weakened the role of the nation state. Thus it could be argued that globalisation is the set of changing conditions that transcends the nation state as a fundamental unit in terms of organisation, democratic processes or political units (Thompson, 2012), ultimately leading to high level policy processes that lack accountability (Lang and Heasman, 2015), the formation of a mobile global elites, less liberal models of identity and a deepening gap between rich and poor (Arditi, 2004).

Aspects of governance associated with food are rooted in the political. Social responsibility connected with food, at individual, corporate, institutional or