



## Global Land Grabbing

Research Grant winners, 2023-2024



**Julio Gutierrez (El Salvador)**

### **In Search of Bitcoin City: Charter Cities and the Rise of Far-Right Urbanism in El Salvador**

Charter cities are the latest invention of capitalist urbanism. Ideated by the Nobel-laureate economist Paul Romer, charter city projects envision the rapid construction of privately governed cities from scratch as a means to jumpstart development in stagnated economies. Contrary to other capitalist urban-driven solutions that tend to appear in high-income Global North metropolitan regions, such as green or smart cities, charter cities target large portions of rural land in the Global South. Since 2010, Central America has become the site of two charter city experiments: Próspera, located in the Atlantic island of Roatán, Honduras, and Bitcoin City, in El Salvador's easternmost coastal area, in the Pacific gulf of Fonseca. My proposed research focuses on the second one. Launched in 2021 by the authoritarian populist president, Nayib Bukele, this project envisions the construction of an "international financial center" for crypto-asset investors. Though almost nothing has been constructed, the project has gained wide attention for its libertarian/anarcho-capitalist appeal and its flamboyant marketing campaign financed by El Salvador's government. While most of the research on charter cities has focused on the socio-legal implications of private urban governance or their high probability of failure, I seek to explore charter cities in their role as *urban spectacles* intended to boost land speculation by domestic and foreign investors. I hypothesize that the expectations generated by government's spectacularization of the project lies behind two phenomena: 1 The little construction of fully operational spaces as a result of the purely speculative use of land, and 2. The proliferation of ever-more aggressive land grabbing practices near the project's site. With the support of the Land Deal Politics Initiative Small Research Grant, I hope to test these hypotheses and initiate a broader investigation on the relationship of urban spectacles and land grabbing in Central America.

#### **Bio**

Julio Gutiérrez is a Salvadoran PhD candidate in sociocultural anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is interested in the political ecology of financialization and urbanization, particularly the relationship between speculative urbanism and land water grabbing in Central America. In 2021, he was awarded the NSF Doctoral

Dissertation Research Improvement Grant to conduct a year of fieldwork in El Salvador for his dissertation project on the history of land speculation and real estate development in Nuevo Cuscatlán, a coffee town situated in the Bálsamo coastal mountain range. This work examines the role of business and political elites in the expansion of real estate markets and its implications on rural settings undergoing processes of deagrarianization. Gutiérrez has also co-authored journalistic reports in El Salvador which expose the links between business elites and land-water grabbing in El Bálsamo region. These reports have contributed to local communities' denouncing of resource grabbing and environmental devastation. Gutiérrez holds a M.A. in Latin American Studies and a B.A. in Economics from the University of Texas at Austin.



**Gabriela Torres-Mazuera (Mexico)**

**The Neoliberal Afterlife of *Ejido* Communal Lands: Revealing the Spectrum of Privatization**

This project concerns the massive private-led initiatives of communal lands parceling and privatization in Mexico and the spectrum of ejido communal lands privatization in the aftermath of a neoliberal legal reform in the 1990s. Specifically, I explore the legal loopholes and mechanisms at play to bypass legal restrictions on the alienation of ejidos' lands, the actors involved, and the new uses and values assigned to privatized lands. My hypothesis is that the most profitable land transactions in Mexico are carried out "in the shadow of the law" by individuals with sufficient legal knowledge, wealth, and connections to achieve land tenure conversion for speculative purposes. Contrary to the assumption that lands grabs are practically non-existent phenomena in Mexico, given the small percentage of ejido land conversion into private property (less than 6%), I argue that land grabbing is a concealed, underground, informal process that is redefining the uses, meanings, and values of agricultural land for capitalist accumulation. Indeed, land concentration emerges as a major trend of contemporary rural Mexico whether we consider the array of formal and informal leasing contracts over ejidos lands (parceled and communal) occurring all around the country, the control over lands, water, and ejidos assemblies held by non-ejidatarios agribusinessmen in the most productive regions or, the ejidos' internal changes in property relations and land-titling. My research intends to surpass a normative-substantive approach to property and privatization, to adopt, instead, an ethnographic description of what is actually happening in everyday practices of ownership and subjectivities in ejidos. This project builds on a previous investigation in the Yucatan Peninsula, intending to extend the scope of research to northern Mexico, a region where 3 584 380 hectares of common-use ejido lands were parceled between 1995 and 2020. By broadening the geographical coverage, I hope to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of land grabbing and privatization in Mexico and their impact on rural communities and economies across different regions.

**Bio**

Gabriela Torres-Mazuera is a research professor at the Center for Research and Advance Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS, Mexico) since 2011. She holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the Institute of Economic and Social Development (IEDES) at the University of Paris 1 Sorbonne-Pantheon (France). She has been a fellow scholar at the University of Chicago (2021), the University of New Mexico (2018), and the University of California (2009). Her field of research is the governance of agrarian and indigenous societies in contexts of legal and institutional change. In her most recent investigations, she has focused on the contemporary legal and political resistances and collaborations of Indigenous and peasant groups in Mexico facing processes of privatization and commodification of resources (land, seeds, water, forests). Her inquiry considers, the gaps and discrepancies between national and international legal frameworks, vernacular and Indigenous customary law, social practices, and individual action; she also analyzes the unattended consequences of legal mobilization and the sociopolitical uses of human rights. Among her most notable publications are the following articles and books: "Dispossession through Land-titling. Legal

Loopholes and Shadow Procedures to Urbanized Forestlands in the Yucatán Peninsula." *Journal of Agrarian Change* (2023); "How a Legal Fight Against Monsanto Became an Indigenous Self-Determination Claim in Mexico". *Journal of Human Rights Practice*. (2022); "Deregulating the social life of property: neoliberalism and the proliferation of normative dissonances in Mexico." *Journal of Legal Pluralism and unofficial law*, (2017). *La regulación imposible. (i)legalidad e (i)regularidad en los mercados de tierra en ejidos y comunidades en México del inicio del siglo XXI*. Co-edited book with Kirsten Appendini and published by El Colegio de México (2020). *La común anomalía del ejido posrevolucionario. Disonancias normativas y mercantilización de la tierra en el sur de Yucatán*, México, CIESAS (2016). In recent years her work has become engaged with Mayan grassroot organizations, activist, and rights advocacy lawyers in the Yucatan Peninsula in the pursuit of a range of rights and recognitions guided by the quest for indigenous development.



**Palden Tsering (China)**

**Pick up yak dung before the sunrise: rules of the range in Amdo Tibet, China**

Rules are socially embedded in society and are constantly negotiated in a variety of social, cultural and political contexts. Additionally, the rules governing rangeland use and access appear to be far more complicated and dynamic than the unitary recognition of the property right as defined by statutory law. Through the lens of legal pluralism, this paper will examine the multiplicity of rangeland use and access rules in Saga, a pastoral village in Tibet, China, as well as the ways in which Saga pastoralists develop rules in multiple contexts to manoeuvre in their struggle for inclusion in wealth building and the right to access rangeland under large-scale state policies. Through in-depth ethnographic study, this paper will look at cases such as the Rangeland Grazing Ban to see how pastoralists interpret and customise this conservation-oriented nation-wide programme to meet their expectations and de facto gain, and how a 'plural context-based hybrid rangeland governance' is always in the motion, where rules are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and even emotional dimensions of making; they are never fixed and are always evolving in a plural context.

**Bio**

Palden Tsering (Chinese Pinyin: Huadancairang) holds a PhD from Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex. He has worked on the role of traditional Tibetan community, resource governance, conservation and development, and politics of these dynamic interactions amid changes and uncertainties in the pastoralist context. His recent research is on the hybrid rangeland governance in two pastoral settings in Amdo Tibet, China. His research offers a new way of thinking about land governance and suggests a more nuanced approach to rangeland governance that goes beyond the conventional approach, with implication for management, policy, and politics of land in the Tibetan Chinese context.



**Sebastian Reyes-Bejerano (Colombia)**

**Contesting the river ecological fix from below: peasant struggles and water commons at the Sumapaz River Basin in Colombia**

Rivers have played a fundamental role in the formation and development of human societies. In rural areas, river functions sustain people's livelihoods by providing drinking water and irrigation sources. They also shape the territorial relations around which peasant and indigenous cultures and identities are created and recreated. Despite their relevance, modern capitalism has dammed, canalized, and controlled rivers through processes that seek to secure nature for the accumulation of capital and the generation of profit or turned them into a sink where the waste of industrial and urban development is dumped. However, the current crisis caused by climate change calls for new approaches to river and water management. Mainstream approaches seek to address the crisis without questioning the fundamental principles of capitalism, proposing technological and governance solutions to overcome the limits that the environment imposes on capital accumulation. This article introduces the category of "river ecological fix" to understand the processes that turn rivers into renewed spaces for accumulation through technological and governance arrangements aimed at securing resources for energy transition and for blue-green markets. It explains how these processes contribute to the dispossession of historically marginalized rural communities, increasing conflicts over water, natural resources, and land. The article takes as a case study the mountains of the central Colombian Andes, where conflicts related to water grabbing are on the rise. There, peasant communities are mobilizing against hydroelectric projects, mining, and nature conservation initiatives that exclude them from accessing and using the natural resources they have been using for decades to sustain their livelihoods. Peasants defend access to rivers by making demands for water and environmental justice, framing their struggles in new ways of understanding peasant-river territorialities, and producing commoning processes around water as an alternative to the river ecological fix.

**Bio**

I am a Colombian sociologist with a focus on environmental conflicts and political ecology. I hold two M.Sc. degrees: one in Environmental Sciences from Mexico and the other in Natural Resources Management and Development from Germany. I earned these degrees with the support of scholarships granted by CLACSO and CONACYT. Currently, I am a PhD researcher at the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA) at the University of Amsterdam. Over the past 15 years, I have actively engaged with social movements in Colombia, collaborating with peasant organizations in campaigns for political and negotiated resolutions to the internal armed conflict, as well as opposing extractivist mining projects. My research experience includes working with indigenous communities in Mexico and conducting master's research with artisanal miners in Colombia. I am currently based in Colombia, working with peasant organizations in the historically significant Sumapaz region, which holds a deep connection to the country's agrarian movement. My research primarily focuses on water-grabbing processes driven by technology and governance initiatives related to climate change adaptation policies. Additionally, I explore the resistance strategies of peasant communities against water grabbing, employing a critical approach to the concept of commons.



**Miryam Nascimento (Colombia)**

**The coca enclosure in the times of multiculturalism: narco land grabs, drug policies and campesino territoriality in Colombia**

In Colombia, farmers that cultivate illicit coca are at a crossroads. While farmers must cope with illegal armed groups' land-grabbing initiatives to expand coca production, they are also the object of violent state-led anti-drug policies that prioritize coca eradication over farmers' livelihoods. In this context, coca growers argue that narco land grabs and drug policies enclose the peasantry, rendering their cultures invisible. Inspired by a multiculturalist constitution that grants political representation and territorial autonomy to indigenous populations, coca growers demand special protections for *campesino* territories, which reflects their involvement in a broad movement for the state recognition of the peasantry in Colombia. Even though they are not part of an ethnic group, farmers claim to suffer similar forms of violence as indigenous populations because of drug trafficking and the war on drugs, a conflict that puts their cultures at risk of disappearing. In this paper, I ask: how do narco land grabs and the war on drugs impact farmers' demands for territory and cultural differentiation? Based on 24 months of ethnographic field work in Colombia's southwestern department of Cauca, this article shows that narco land grabs and state-led antidrug policies create a form of 'coca enclosure' (Dest 2020) that dispossess farmers from their lands and efface their existence from territory. In response, farmers' cultural identity emerges as an "ethnicized" cultural formation that undergirds their demands for territory and protection against drug conflicts. Drawing on scholarship on processes of land accumulation in Colombia's internal conflict (Vargas Reina 2021; Grajales 2022) and geographies of race and ethnicity (Gilmore 2002), this article contributes to understand how land grabs shape ethnicity and territory by looking at coca-growers who are not ethnically "different" but claim protections akin to ethnic populations.

**Bio**

Miryam Nascimento is a Peruvian Ph.D. candidate in cultural anthropology at CUNY, The Graduate Center. Drawing on 24 months of ethnographic field work, her doctoral dissertation explores how drug trafficking and the state-led war on drugs have transformed landscapes, human-plant relationships, and farmers' *mestizo* (mixed race) identities in Colombia. Her research has been supported by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos (IFEA), the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies at CUNY, among other institutions. Miryam's long-term ethnographic project is to explore illicit coca economies in Peru and Bolivia, foregrounding the contrasting ways in which coca intersects with race, conflict, and agrarian politics in the Andes. Miryam holds a B.A. in political science from Universidad Católica del Perú and a master's in public policy and development from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands and the Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals in Spain.



**Sohbe Djidim Nestor (Cameroon)**

**Impacts-socio-fonciers des acquisitions des terres à grande par les élites politiques au Nord-Cameroun**

Cette étude s'intéresse aux phénomènes d'acquisitions de terre à grande échelle par les élites politiques dans la région du nord Cameroun. L'objectif est d'analyser les impacts socio-fonciers de ces grands investissements fonciers sur les populations locales. La méthodologie s'appuie sur l'enquête de terrain auprès des populations rurales dans les terroirs environnants ces grandes exploitations agricoles. Hormis les enquêtes, des entretiens dirigés ont eu lieu avec ces entrepreneurs agricoles en question. Il en ressort que les acquisitions foncières à grande échelle sont l'œuvre des élites locales qui occupent des places privilégiées dans l'échiquier politique. Ces entrepreneurs agricoles accèdent à la terre par des voies coutumières non formalisées. Ces agro-industries constituent des véritables leviers de croissance économique, cependant celles-ci ont accentués l'insécurité foncière dans les terroirs se caractérisant par l'arrache des terres aux petits producteurs amplifiant ainsi les conflits fonciers. Cette insécurité foncière s'explique par l'ambiguïté de la gouvernance foncière manœuvrée par les chefs traditionnels qui sont les gestionnaires du foncier rural au niveau local. Dans ce contexte actuel marqué par la croissance démographique accélérée au nord Cameroun, l'octroi des terres agricoles à grande échelle par l'Etat ou par les chefs traditionnels devraient tenir compte des principes de développement durable ; c'est-à-dire répondre aux besoins du présent sans compromettre la vie des générations futures. D'où l'urgence de la mise en œuvre d'une politique foncière qui encadre les acquisitions foncières, favorise l'accès équitable à la terre à toutes les couches sociales et la sécurisation foncière à tous les producteurs.

**Bio**

Sohbe Djidim Nestor est doctorant en géographie à l'unité de formation doctorale «Science de l'Homme et de la Société » de l'Université de Maroua Cameroun. Il est spécialisé en géographie de développement rural. Ses travaux de recherche portent sur les problématiques foncières, les mobilités humaines ; les conflits et crises en milieu rural au nord Cameroun. Il est auteur de quatre articles scientifiques avec la participation à plusieurs colloques internationaux. Membre actif de l'AJEF-Cameroun (Association des jeunes experts foncier du Cameroun) ; il est par ailleurs chercheur du GICJFAC (groupe interdisciplinaire des chercheurs juniors sur le foncier en Afrique centrale) du réseau NELGA, Pole Afrique centrale. Sa thèse est finalisée et déposée en vue de la soutenance.



**Yaya Maïga, Yaméogo Joseph and Tiamiyu Kasimou (Burkina Faso)**

**L'accaparement foncier à grande et à petite échelle, une expropriation des terres dans les zones rurales du Burkina Faso: cas particulier des paysans de Sourgou dans le Boulkieumé**

La politique dirigiste de l'État sur le plan foncier à travers la loi n° 034-2012/AN portant Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière, qui accorde une part de la gestion foncière aux autorités coutumières contribue à exposer une frange partie de la population locale à l'insécurité foncière. Les nombreuses révisions de la RAF (1991, 1996 et 2012) a permis l'introduction de la propriété privée des terres et la réhabilitation du droit coutumier dans la gestion des terres (Zongo, 2010). Elle marque ainsi le début de l'accaparement foncier à grande et à petite échelle dans les zones rurales du Burkina Faso. Elle se matérialise par une expropriation et un retrait des parcelles agricoles des sans terres au profit des plus offrandes (nouveaux acteurs). Alors que l'un des objectifs de la politique agraire est de permettre un accès équitable et sécurisé de tous les acteurs à la terre rurale (RAF, 2012, article 34). L'attribution foncière traditionnelle contribue dans certains cas à saper la cohésion sociale au sein des groupes ruraux et claniques. Comme dans d'autres communes du Burkina, les modes d'attribution des parcelles dans le cadre du système foncier coutumier à Sourgou (don, prêt temporaire, etc.) sont empreints d'ambiguïté et de conditions d'utilisation très précaires. Ces dernières sont parfois soumises à la menace permanente de confiscation des terres, ce qui conduit souvent à des retraits effectifs (Maïga, 2020). L'objectif de cette étude est de catégoriser les types d'entrepreneurs agricoles, d'analyser l'évolution et la destination des terres qu'ils occupent et d'évaluer leur contribution à la dépossession des sans-terres dans la zone d'étude. La collecte des données se fera par des approches cartographiques, quantitatives et qualitatives.

**Bio**

**Yaya Maïga** est Doctorant inscrit en Environnement et Aménagement du Territoire au sein Laboratoire de Recherche en Sciences Humaines et Sociales (LABOSHS), Université Norbert Zongo, Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Ses travaux de recherche couvrent l'aménagement du territoire en générale. Il aborde les thématiques de la gestion durable du foncier, les problèmes environnementaux des zones humides que sont les bas-fonds. Il s'intéresse aussi aux systèmes d'informations géographiques (SIG). **Yaméogo Joseph** Il est environnementaliste et doctorant en Géographie, option Environnement et Aménagement du Territoire à l'Université Norbert Zongo, Koudougou, Burkina Faso. Il est également membre du Laboratoire de Recherche en Sciences Humaines et Sociales (LABOSHS). Ses axes de recherche s'orientent vers la géographie de l'environnement, la climatologie et la géographie socioéconomique. **Tiamiyu Kasimou** est doctorant au sein de l'École Doctorale Langue, Art, Communication Sciences Humaine de l'Université Norbert ZONGO, membre du Laboratoire des Sciences Humaines et Sociales (LABOSHS). Son champ d'étude embrasse le domaine de la biogéographie, la gestion forestière et la protection environnementale. Il s'intéresse également aux systèmes d'information géographique



**Esteban Escalante (Peru)**

**Money, power and negotiation over communal land between large-scale and small-scale mining in the Peruvian Andes**

In this research, I analyze the way money becomes power in the context of negotiations over land use in a Peruvian Andes multi-mining context. I focus on a specific episode that is part of a larger land grabbing process: the agreement reached between a multinational company and peasant miners for the use of communal property land. The copper-mining project “Constancia”, of the Canadian company Hudbay, started its activities in 2014 in the Peruvian province of Chumbivilcas. This company signed several agreements with the communities that were required to cede portions of their land, for the building of the project’s open pit and facilities. One of this communities was Uchucarco, which in 2012 signed an agreement with Hudbay that allowed the company’s use of communal property land in exchange of monetary contributions, and institutionalized a money giver-taker relation between company and peasants. In 2019 Hudbay tried to expand the project onto another communal area, but it encountered that this land was already in use by a significant group of peasants that were carrying informal and small-scale mining activities. For the peasant miners, these activities represented a significant increase in money earnings, which enabled them to challenge the negotiation standards that they had established with Hudbay. In this context, I explore the ways in which money flows are structured and disputed within the processes of negotiation and dispute over land. In the framing of this analysis, I take account of two theoretical considerations: that land can be taken as a token of power relations that unfold in complex and multidirectional ways (Borras & Franco 2012) and, that effective use of land is embedded in historical institutional ecosystems (Orihuela 2017, Côte2013). As a result, I analyze money flows as factors of those complex and institutionally embedded power relations.

**Bio**

I hold a BA in Anthropology from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) and a MA in Anthropology from the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO Ecuador). Currently, I am pursuing a PhD in Anthropology in the TRANDES Graduate Program in Sustainable Development and Social Inequalities in the Andean Region from the PUCP and the Free University of Berlin. I also work as a teacher in the Faculty of Social Sciences - PUCP. My research areas include extractive transformations, money institutional politics, cultural conflicts and rural youth in the Peruvian Andes. In recent years, I have worked in active-research processes, pedagogical formation and strategic support to peasant organizations in their struggle for territorial and collective rights, especially in mining contexts. My recent publications include the book *Minería artesanal y de pequeña escala en Chumbivilcas: un mapeo inicial*. Cusco: Derechos Humanos sin Fronteras, 2023 (with Caroline Weill), and the article “Parámetros inestables de valoración de la diversidad epistémica en una experiencia de formación técnico-productiva en los Andes peruanos” *Perfiles educativos*. México: UNAM, 2023





**Carlos Antonio Pop Ac and Victoria Sanford (Guatemala)**

**Not So Green: Resistance and Mobilization of the Maya Q'eqchi' Peoples of the Polochic Valley in Defense of their Ancestral Lands**

International metal and mining companies are scouring the globe for valuable ores essential to new technologies — nickel and the cobalt which accompanies it are essential in making electric cars — placing them in direct, often violent conflict with Indigenous communities. The co-called green energy of electric cars turns out to be dependent on destructive strip mining. With our planet's biodiversity under dire threat and once-remote and pristine regions ravaged by deforestation and other industrial incursions, the ability of Indigenous defenders to preserve and responsibly manage their ancestral lands is more important than ever. The Q'eqchi' of Guatemala have suffered land dispossession since the colonial era. Historic land grabs reduced the territory of ancestral communities leaving Q'eqchi' inhabitants as property/labor to be exchanged with the land rather than as subjects with rights. This paper will trace contemporary land struggles of Q'eqchi' in the village of Agua Caliente, El Estor that sits on Lake Izabal, the largest lake in Guatemala. El Fénix, an open-pit nickel mine on Q'eqchi' territory, has fouled the land and air and contaminated the lake with industrial wastes for decades under different company names. On February 9, 2022, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights heard the case brought by the Q'eqchi' community of Agua Caliente. The community is challenging the exploration and mining permits of the Swiss Solway Group that owns the Fénix mine. They want the Court to order the Guatemalan government to reform land surveying and titling laws to give Indigenous peoples collective control over their ancestral territory. If successful, this case would represent the first recognition by an international legal body that Indigenous peoples and local communities have the right to decide the fate of resources within their territory because the use of these resources has implications for the daily life and survival of indigenous communities.

**Bio**

**Carlos Antonio Pop Ac**, Q'eqchi' Maya Lawyer and Notary Public with a Law Degree from the Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala. He has litigated significant national cases in Constitutional and Criminal Law specializing in cadastre and land registry. He teaches Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure, Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Criminology, Forensics, and Human Rights Law. With support from the Government of Norway, he is the national coordinator of the Proyecto de Fortalecimiento al Estado de Derecho en Guatemala (Project to Strengthen the Rule of Law in Guatemala) and leads the Asociación de Abogados y Notarios Mayas in Guatemala (National Association of Maya Lawyers and Notary Publics in Guatemala). He has litigated for more than 20 years in the Inter-American Court system on indigenous land claims, political participation of indigenous women, femicide, and state persecution of Indigenous leaders. He serves as a consultant to private entities and nongovernmental organizations on Human Rights and land transportation. He is regularly invited to speak at United Nations guiding principles forums relating to international companies and human rights. He was lead co-counsel on the landmark Inter-American Court Case *Velasquez Paiz v. Guatemala* and is lead co-counsel on *Caso Comunidad Indígena Maya Q'eqchi' Agua Caliente vs. Guatemala* which has the potential to significantly increase Indigenous land rights throughout the Americas and set an example for the world. **Victoria Sanford** (PhD Anthropology, Stanford University) is Lehman Professor of Excellence at Lehman College and on the doctoral faculty at the Graduate Center City University of New York (CUNY). She is the founding director of the Center for Human Rights and Peace Studies. Her area of specialty is the study of genocide, violence and conflict in Guatemala and Colombia. She has conducted extensive field research with Maya communities in Guatemala, Afro-Colombian and

indigenous peace communities in Colombia, and Colombian refugee communities in Ecuador. <https://www.victoriasanford.info> She is the author of *Textures of Terror: The Murder of Claudina Isabel Velasquez & Her Father's Quest for Justice* (UC Press, 2023), *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), *Violencia y Genocidio en Guatemala* (FyG Editores, 2003), *Guatemala: Del Genocidio al Femicidio* (FyG Editores, 2008), *La Masacre de Panzós: Etnicidad, Tierra y Violencia en Guatemala* (FyG Editores 2009), and *Guatemala: Violencia Sexual y Genocidio* (F&G Editores, 2020). She is co-author of *Informe de la Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala: Cuatro Casos Paradigmáticos Solicitados por La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico de Guatemala Realizadas en las Comunidades de Panzós, Acul, Chel y Belén* (2000) and, a condensed version of the Panzós Massacre was published by the CEH as a paradigmatic case in the final report: *Guatemala ~ Memoria del Silencio*. She is co-editor [with Katerina Stefatos] of *Gender Violence in Peace and War: States of Complicity* (Rutgers University Press 2016). She is currently completing *The Vanished of Guatemala: Violence, Corruption and the Invention of Forced Disappearance*. She holds a certificate in Human Rights Law from the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights in Costa Rica. She testified as an invited expert of the Inter-American Court in *Caso Comunidad Indígena Maya Q'eqchi' Agua Caliente vs. Guatemala*.



**Gabriela Ruales and Angus Lyall (Ecuador)**  
**Mining and Land Grab Narratives in Ecuador**

Over the last decade, land grab literature has been attentive to emerging forms of land investment and their impacts on agrarian relations. In recent years, a new conjuncture of investment in mining – shaped by demand for renewable energy technologies – has propelled the concession of 9% of Ecuador's national territory. The Amazonian province of Napo – an historical center of small-scale mining, has witnessed a 300% expansion of capital-intensive gold mining over the last seven years. This expansion has been contingent on the dispossession of peasant and Indigenous communities that lack property titles, as their farmlands and forests have been enveloped by concessions. Activists have denounced such land grabs in courts and media; however, mining firms have also recruited these same peasant and Indigenous families into mining, providing them with capital or hiring them as labor. In our experiences as researchers across rural Ecuador, this contradictory situation is not uncommon: At first glance, communities affected by land grabs appear as victims; upon closer analysis, they also appear to be entangled as participants. Thus, we seem stuck between narratives in which communities appear as “hopeless” in the face of external forces or “duped” into complicity. Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) suggests that researchers move beyond narratives of hopelessness by documenting the enduring hopes and desires of dispossessed communities, but how should we study the desires of communities seemingly engaged in their own dispossession? To overcome the impasse between narratives of desperation and complicity, we have studied the tensions between desire and practice – namely, between the desires and the pragmatic actions of peasants who reluctantly engage in mining, as a tactic to navigate social expectations, gender relations, and ethnic discrimination. By acknowledging these tensions, we are able nonetheless to recover the “wisdom and hope” (Tuck 2009, 416) that persist in such contradictory territories.

#### **Bio**

**Gabriela Ruales and Angus Lyall** are members of the *Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador* (Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador), which conducts participatory-action research on socioenvironmental conflicts, agrarian change,

gender violence, and human rights, along with rural communities and organizations across Ecuador ([www.geograficriticaecuador.org](http://www.geograficriticaecuador.org)). The Collective also runs a popular education school with communities entangled in socioenvironmental conflicts. **Gabriela** is a feminist geographer who is completing her doctorate in Regional Rural Development at the *Universidad Autónoma Chapingo* in Chiapas, Mexico. Gabriela has published on oil politics in the Amazon, women's rights, feminist geographies of the Global South, and feminist methodologies in the *Journal of Latin American Geography*, *Dossier Geopauta*, and the *Revista de Bioética y Derecho*, among other journals. Her dissertation is centered on analyzing the Anzu river as a subject in the alluvial gold mining conflict in the province of Napo, Ecuadorian Amazon, with a feminist approach in dialogue with the women of the communities mainly. **Angus Lyall**, PhD, is a political geographer and is currently a professor of International Relations at the *Universidad San Francisco de Quito* in Ecuador. Over the last fifteen years, Angus has published studies on labor in agro-industrial enclaves in the Andes and on oil politics in the Amazon for the *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*; *Culture, Agriculture, Food, and Environment*, *Environment and Planning A*; and *Development and Change*, among other journals.



**Ronald Ndesanjo and Linda Engström (Tanzania)**

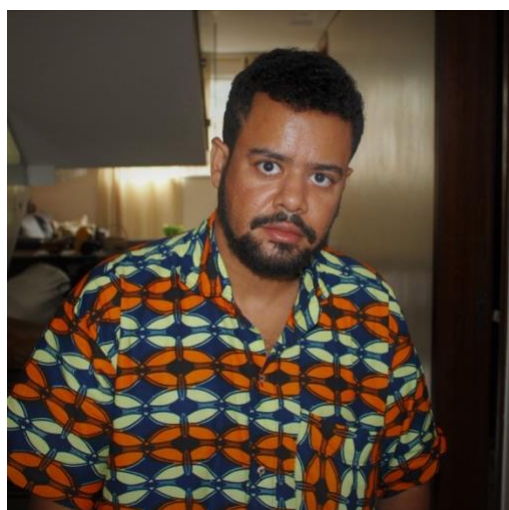
**Cancelled Land Deals in Tanzania: An opportunity for land equality or perpetuation of livelihood losses among smallholders?**

Since the early 2000s, large-scale agro-investment has been promoted as a key development strategy for Africa, promising economic growth, efficient agriculture and poverty reduction. Consequently, about 45 million hectares of land has been leased or sold to private investors for large-scale biofuel or food production (Land Matrix, 2021). However, despite strong support from governments, donors and private actors, many investments are cancelled or go bankrupt before they become operational. Notwithstanding this trend, large-scale agro-investments are still being pursued in rural Africa and reports on cancelled investments occur regularly. Research in Tanzania shows that there is an unexplored phenomenon that could contribute to a more equal land distribution in rural Africa. While large-scale agro-investments are a key driver of smallholder displacement and increasing land inequality, a large number of these agro-investments have not materialised as planned. When deals are cancelled, the land is left uncultivated, open for competing claims and may be appropriated by the state or other interests. Besides, the land can also potentially be redistributed to smallholder farmers. While literature on the effects of operational agro-investments in Africa has exploded, a systematic analysis of the effects of cancelled land deals is still lacking. The proposed paper assesses how land rights and access following cancelled land deals affect smallholder livelihoods. It draws on a larger research project that aimed to explore how cancelled land deals affect smallholders' land access and livelihoods in Tanzania. We applied a mixed quantitative-qualitative methods focusing on a multi-case study design. The qualitative approaches include in depth interviews, focus groups, resource mapping and transect walks. Quantitative data collection was done through surveys and livelihood studies. and development policy and their impacts on rural smallholders and herders in East Africa, with a particular focus on land tenure and governance. Her research focus is development discourse including privatisation trends in development policy and land governance and the actual effects of development policy on local communities.

**Bio**

**Ronald Boniphace Ndesanjo** holds a PhD in Natural Resource Assessment and Management from the University of Dar es Salaam. Currently, he is a lecturer at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam-Tanzania. He has over 15 years of research and consulting experience in Climate Change, Environment, and Natural

Resources Management. Ndesanjo's research focuses on understanding the complex interactions between the environment and people's livelihoods. His doctoral project sought to underscore the determinants of climate change resilience among smallholder livestock keepers in Tanzania. He has also worked extensively on issues related to the gendered impacts of climate change in Tanzania, the Water-Energy-Food Nexus in the context of climate change, and land governance and smallholder livelihoods. **Linda Engström** is a Researcher in Rural Development at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Dr. Engström's overarching research interests are within natural resource management. Dr. Engström is currently heading research on Land Justice, which is a follow up of her PhD research on large-scale agro-investments in Tanzania. The project's focus is the politics of access and use of land following scaled back, stalled or closed agro-investments.



**Luis Antônio da Silva Soares (Brazil)**

**Examining Impacts of Transmission Lines on Black Peasantry: A Case Study in Northeast Brazil**

In this paper I will seek to analyze the appropriation of land, water and green areas caused by the implementation of the Campina Grande III – Pau Ferro Transmission Line<sup>1</sup> in the Settlement Chico Mendes II, in the Rural Area of Tracunhaém, in the state of Pernambuco, Northeast Brazil. The main area of work was delimited in three parcels of the settlement. The main objective is to present a peasant and Afro-referenced perspectives on the implementation of a high voltage transmission line in the settlement. These perspectives will be associated with the concepts of environmental necropolitics, black peasantry and family farming. The main collection techniques for this qualitative research will be the narrative interview and participant observation. This work is an unfolding of my professional experience in the territory, where I realized that the Chico Mendes II settlement is a favorable territory for observing the socio-environmental impacts generated by the transmission lines, due to the African ancestry and the protagonism of black women in the foundation and coordination of these agrarian reform area. The construction of wind farms in the Northeast Region impacts the agrarian reform settlements and the way of life of the black peasantry. Studies point out that the installation of these lines in the settlements fragments the native vegetation and increases erosion processes. In addition, there are indications that the coexistence of the peasantry with high voltage energy increases the incidence of tumors, depression, spontaneous abortions, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Alzheimer's and heart problems. This paper will relate cultural patterns of black peasants with the transmission lines in their territories and will propose an afro-referenced theoretical deepening on the expansion of transmission lines of wind farms in Northeast Brazil. In such a way that researchers and social movements will find a socio-environmental reflection of political and daily practices in a rural settlement.

**Bio**

I am a 35-year-old black researcher from Pernambuco, Brazil. In the last years, I have dedicated my work to research and technical assistance in rural settlements of agrarian reform and “quilombos”, in partnership with popular movements concerned with the impacts of the expansion of wind and solar energy mega-projects in the Brazilian Northeast. I am currently studying in a PhD program in Sociology at the PPGS (post-graduation program of Sociology) at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), with a grant from CAPES (Higher Education Personnel Improvement Coordination). I have a specialization in Environmental and Cultural Education by the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Pernambuco (IFPE), a master's degree in Rural Extension and Local Development by the Post Graduation Program in Rural Extension and Local Development (POSMEX) at the Federal Rural University Pernambuco (UFRPE), and a degree in Social Sciences from the same institution. During my undergraduate and master's degrees, I had the privilege of receiving a scholarship from the National Council for Scientific and

Technological Development (CNPq). I worked as a researcher in the projects “Cooperativism and territorial dynamics” and “Globalization and Agriculture”, and was part in the research groups “Agricultural cooperatives, organizational innovation and local development” (UFRPE) and “Globalization and Agriculture (UFPE). In addition, I held the position of research manager at the Monitor Project at the University of Brasília (UnB), where I carried out the monitoring of the Dom Hélder Câmara Project (PDHC), developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (Mapa) and co-financed by the Agricultural Development International Foundation (FIDA), with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality levels in the Brazilian semi-arid region. Currently, I am associated with the Macondo research groups at the University of Agreste de Pernambuco (UAST/UFRPE) and Geru Maa - Laboratory of Africology and Amerindian Philosophy at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF). These associations provide a stimulating and collaborative academic environment, allowing the expansion of knowledge and contribution to interdisciplinary studies.



**Mohammed Meer Hamja and Pranav Menon (India)**  
**Metaphors of environmental claim-making - Pastoral lifeworlds of Van Gujjars amidst regimes of dispossession in Western Himalayas**

The Van Gujjars are a semi nomadic, backward caste (Pasmanda) Muslims, who rear an indigenous Gojri buffaloes that are attune to seasonal migration and rotational grazing. They traverse between the dry and moist dense deciduous forests of the Siwalik and Terai Bhabar region in winters to the alpine meadows (Bugyals) in the middle and upper Himalayas in Uttarakhand. Their land use practices and mobility with livestock within forests, though regenerative and sustained utility of forage, helps maintain water sources, reduce invasive species growth and allows maintenance of fire lines. However, the prevalence of forest technologies through legislations, rules and discretion has pushed most of these pastoralists into sedentary lifestyles, especially since the notification of the Rajaji Tiger reserve and setting up of resettlement colonies. Drawing on Levein's (2015) idea of regimes of dispossession, this paper intends to trace out the myriad forms of fortress conservation that mediate, inhibit and exclude the pastoral livelihood of the Van Gujjars. Through episodic events fostered by myriad stakeholders, such as the Forest department, dominant caste elite and courts, such regimes of dispossession create both ex-situ and in-situ forms of dispossession coupled with engendering a will to resettle. To understand the true nature of such land-grabs, it becomes imperative to foreground the shifts in performance of pastoral, nomadic and domestic labor of the Van Gujjars today. Through this paper we explore four forms of dispossession viz. dispossession through developmentalism, dispossession for conservation, dispossession through afforestation and dispossession within the politics of resettlement. Although the mobilization of the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sanghatan has managed to envision and find pluralistic ways to assert pastoral tenure, whether the reform oriented frame of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 can allow modes to challenge this ongoing slow, at times non-violent, processes of dispossession would be instructive to contextualize. Such a non-scalar analysis of land grab allows to thresh out the contextual and relational nature of pastoral work, the need to cultivate a praxis to contest false encroachment cases, locate the grammars of tenurial rights and assess claims of indigeneity articulated by the Van Gujjars and other local populations with the state.

## Bio

**Mohamad Meer Hamja**, Founder, Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sanghatan. A masters student in social work, Hamja has been instrumental in organizing and mobilizing the Van Gujjars towards cultivating awareness regarding the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Through such efforts, the Sanghatan has managed to form over 200 forest rights committees, file claims for individual and community tenure, engage in conservation drives, resist forms of displacement through petitioning and GIS mapping. A former fellow from Center for Pastoralism and Kalpavriksh, he has facilitated research studies on conservation, traditional knowledge, pastoral know-how, human wildlife relations, pasture land management and breed recognition. Through the Sanghatan, Hamja has fostered a group of Van Gujjar youth to engage in providing information about government schemes to elders, running self help groups on handicrafts and traditional jewelry, educational support for children and adult literacy programmes, without admonishing their pastoral identity. Applicant 2 - **Pranav Menon**, Graduate Student, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus. Formerly trained as a lawyer, Pranav has been associated with the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sanghatan since 2019 by providing legal aid, representation and advice on issues of encroachment, forest rights, wildlife protection, due process of law, grazing rights. Currently undertaking archival research to record their historical presence in the region, Pranav also is interested in questions of political economy, land grabs, labour, human-nonhuman interactions and conservation technologies.



**Perdana Roswaly (Indonesia)**

### **Mending the Broken Clock: Gender and Socioecological Changes After the Land Grab in North Sumatra, Indonesia**

This research examines how restructured gender norms correlate with environmental changes in the aftermath of a land grab in an indigenous community of Batak Toba, Indonesia. After seven years of conflict against a pulp company over customary forest rights, the grievances of Batak women persist despite having won legal protection for their sacred forest and receiving compensation and recognition for their roles in the struggle. Combining ethnography, women's time diaries, interviews, and soil sampling, I find that grievances remain because ecological changes after the failed land grab, mainly soil depletion and river erosion, severely affect women's labour time. The increasing labour time reflects the deepening of the patriarchal division of labour despite the community's increasing gender awareness and equity. After the conflict, community expectations for women's labour and environmental caretaking have increased, creating a paradox in which gender equity sits uncomfortably alongside post-conflict ecological damages. Such damages are mostly irreversible and figure centrally both in women's grievances and their increasing labour burden. The paper highlights the question of socioecological remedy, which becomes a latent, yet often unaddressed, problem in the aftermath of land grabs. By recentring women's care work in rebuilding our damaged environment, this paper calls for a rehabilitative framework that focuses on the nexus of gender-environment in land politics. Keywords: labour, gender, environmental changes, social ecology

## Bio

Perdana "Pepe" Roswaly (they/them) is a PhD candidate in sociology at Northwestern University, Illinois. Born and raised in a palm oil plantation in Indonesia, their research has been focusing on the world-making in and the economic and socioecological transformation of plantations. Pepe's dissertation aims to explain why and how Indonesia's palm oil plantations continue to expand amidst fiscal loss, the vulnerable relationship between the state and palm oil businesses, and persistent social and environmental crises caused by the industry. They combine qualitative data (ethnography, interviews), archives (1910–2018), and spatial data to historicize and dissect the state's interest in keeping and expanding palm oil plantations. Pepe also writes extensively in gender, specifically transitional justice, as shown by their research report and policy recommendations concerning women's reparation in post-conflict Aceh. Their thesis details the intensification of indigenous women's labour burdens that are mediated by socioecological changes after the failed land grab in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Pepe is one of the translators for the Handbook of Critical

Agrarian Studies (Akhrum-Lodi et al, 2021) in Indonesian, a project led by Indonesia's National Land Academy. Pepe also serves on the academic board and the managing committee for the Transnational Palm Oil Labour Solidarity.



**Bruna Figueiredo Goncalves (Brazil)**

**The financing of agriculture and new forms of land financialisation in Brazil**

Debates about the agrarian question have gained new vigor with a series of land grabs that have been occurring globally since the mid-2000s. Largely, these “investments” in land are made by finance capital, seeking to extract its financial value. While most of the literature focuses on understanding particular cases and mechanisms of appropriation, this research contributes to this debate by analyzing a set of legal, financial, and institutional innovations that have occurred in the agricultural financing system in Brazil, especially since 2019. Particularly interesting are the creation of Investment Funds in the Agribusiness Productive Chain and the new "Agro Laws". This research aims to understand the nexus between these changes and the process of financialization of agriculture and land in Brazil, observing the actors and institutions involved and analyzing to what extent they enable new forms of access, valuation, and extraction of the financial value of land. As ongoing research, this abstract is based on partial data qualitatively analyzed. These are primary data collected in semi-structured interviews with Brazilian government officials and influential actors; and secondary data, collected by literature review and research in national databases. The analysis carried out identifies these changes have led to modifications in the collaterals for agricultural financing, to the creation of new agricultural complex bonds, and the constitution of investment funds directed to agriculture and land. I argue these changes constitute an advance to the financialization of land. In particular, they enable unprecedented liquidity to land, by creating conditions to reverse its inherent immobility; created legal channels for the acquisition of land by foreigners, despite its restrictive legislation; and established greater safeguards for investors. In this process, the value of land to the financial market is related both to its performance as a financial asset and as an unprecedented collateral for new financing instruments.

**Bio**

Bruna Figueiredo Goncalves is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences at the Graduate Program in Social Sciences in Development, Agriculture and Society, with a study period at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS/EUR) in the Netherlands, funded by the PDSE/CAPES program. She has a master degree in International Relations from the Institute of International Relations at PUC-RIO (2018) and a B.A. in International Relations from the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (2015). Currently, she is a member of the Study Group on Social Change, Agribusiness and Public Policy (GEMAP/UFRRJ), coordinated by Sergio Pereira Leite. In 2020, she was awarded the scholarship “FAPERJ Nota 10”, granted to students with outstanding academic performance. She participated in the editorial board of IDeAS Journal as vice-director for three years (2019-2022). She is the author of articles and book on Land Grabbing, Financialization of agriculture and land, International Economics and Politics, and Agribusiness Finance. Her last publication was a co-authored book named “Financialization of agriculture and land in Brazil: dynamics in course and disputes at stake”, published by Heinrich Böll Foundation. Her ongoing doctoral thesis analyzes the expansion of finance and the participation of financial actors throughout the agribusiness chain (or agro-industrial complex), particularly the land market. She conducts qualitative and quantitative analysis, mainly from public databases, on agriculture. She is interested in issues related to the expansion of agribusiness in various regions of Brazil and Latin America and participates in the research project, under the GEMAP, “Economic Corridors, Agricultural Markets and Land Governance: reflections from the Arco Norte and Carajás corridors.”



**Delima Silalahi, Rini Astuti, Darmanto and Lubabun Ni'am (Indonesia)**  
**Global Food Crises, Ethnic Politics, and Kinship-Based Agriculture: The Indonesian Food Estate and Local Responses in North Sumatra**

Large-scale food provisioning programmes continue to be proposed in response to a powerful global narrative of food and climate crises. These speculative and top-down development agendas have transformed rural populations, reconfigured labour relations, and altered natural landscapes. However, what happens when a large-scale food provisioning project is applied in a particular setting where agricultural practices are still predominantly ruled by kinship-based social organizations? Why do state agencies choose to locate the project in the stronghold of indigenous and peasant movements? What policy narratives and the technology of governance do the state and private actors employ to legitimize and operationalize the project? How do various actors on the ground, which involves the local communities, regional governments, land brokers, NGOs, and indigenous alliances, position and respond to the project? Our research seeks to answer these questions by studying the Indonesian government's food estate (FE) project in North Sumatra. We seek to investigate the FE as a global-scale project within the context of Indonesian semi-authoritarian bureaucracy that allows ethnic politics to shape national agricultural modernization at a particular place. Additionally, we will examine the entanglement of the global narrative of food crises, ethnic politics, and kinship-based agricultural systems and how they influence the responses of all political actors involved. To accomplish this, we will combine participant observation and participatory action research, involving home-grown scholar-activists and grassroots social movement protagonists in co-designing, co-analysing, and co-writing the research. Our methodology not only provides a critical perspective on the FE but also fosters robust scholar-activism practices in Indonesia and beyond. Furthermore, our collective research aims to situate the North Sumatra FE within the contemporary debate on large-scale agrarian programmes as a new, particular mode of reorganization of power, people, and landscape on the rural side.

### **Bio**

**Delima Silalahi** is the Director of Kelompok Studi dan Pengembangan Prakarsa Masyarakat [Study Group for the People Initiative Development] (KSPPM) in North Sumatra, Indonesia. She has worked in grassroots activism with the Bataknese communities for over 25 years and involved in agrarian and indigenous people movements at local, national, and international levels. She is one of the 2023 Goldman Environmental Prize winners. She has published a book derived from her scholar-activism research thesis in *Tombak Haminjon Do Ngolu Nami: Masyarakat Adat Batak Pandumaan dan Sipituhuta Merebut Kembali Ruang Hidupnya* [Tombak Haminjon Do Ngolu Nami: Indigenous People of Pandumaan and Sipituhuta Batak Reclaim Their Living Spaces] (2020). She also led the publication of the first compelling and ethnographic studies on food estate in North Sumatra entitled *Mangan Sian Tano Ni Ompung: Food Estate Versus Kedaulatan Petani* [Mangan Sian Tano Ni Ompung: Food Estate Versus Peasant Sovereignty] (2021).

**Rini Astuti** is a research fellow at the Australian National University. Her work operationalises social science theory in studies of climate and agrarian-environmental change. Her research has been published in top geography and development studies journals, including *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. She has received prestigious fellowships for her scholarship and leadership, including the Australia-APEC Women in Research Fellowship which recognises contributions from high-achieving female researchers in Asia Pacific Economic Countries and the Kavli Frontiers of Science Fellowship from the United States National Academy of Sciences. **Darmanto** is a research fellow of Southeast Asian Studies at the Czech Academy of Science. His main research interest is the intersectionality of food study, indigeneity, political ecology and agrarian change. His primary research has been with the indigenous Mentawai living on Siberut Island published in major academic Southeast Asia and food study journals (*Indonesia and Malay World*; *the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*; and *Food, Culture and Society* among others). He also co-authored the first major book on the political ecology of the Siberut rainforests entitled *Berebut Hutan Siberut: Orang Mentawai, Kekuasaan, dan Politik Ekologi* [Contested Siberut Forests: Mentawai People, Power, and Political Ecology] (2012).

**Lubabun Ni'am** is a PhD student at the Institute of Anthropology, Heidelberg University, Germany, and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Doctoral Research Programme grantee. He has been working in North Sumatra since 2018 and published books, papers, and columns in *Geoforum* and international and Indonesian publication platforms. His research interests stretch from international development studies to human-nature relations and indigenous ontologies. He was involved as a managing editor and one of the translators of the Indonesian version of the *Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS)* small book series on *Agrarian Change and Peasant Studies*.





**Haithem Gasmi (Tunisia)**

**Farmers and Land in Tunisia: A history of land grab and a future of organization**

The capitalist mode of production was introduced in Tunisia, firstly in the agricultural sector, by the weapon of French settler-colonialism during the first half of the 20th century (1881 - 1956). After a “socialist” experience based on the collectivization of land in cooperatives during the 1960’s, the Tunisian leadership turned back to liberal policies in the agriculture sector since the 1970’s. The first step in resolving the collectivist experience was the lease and sale of land to private investors. Since then, private large-scale exploitations have increased in an “accumulation by dispossession” fashion obeying to the neo-colonial international system of value drain from South to North. During and after the uprisings of 2010-2011 in Tunisia, small-scale peasants and agricultural workers executed several attempts to “grab-back” land from private investors. Militant action culminated in 2021 when several protests emerged in different rural areas of Tunisia demanding agrarian socio-economic rights, land tenure included. This new phase of the rural movement in Tunisia has introduced a new form of organization of farmers: The local “small-scale farmers’ coordination” (Tansiq’iyet Sighar Al-Fallahin). This new type of “informal” organization is allegedly a response to the absent role of the “classical” agricultural syndicates in Tunisia in defense of small-scale farmers. Up to 2023, the members of the local coordinations started to discuss the upgrade of the struggle towards the establishment of a national small-scale farmers’ coordination. In this research, I will trace back the history of the policies of land tenure in post-colonial Tunisia. Then, I will investigate the different militant attempts of the farmers to grab land back from the state or private investors. Finally, I will study the rationale of the creation of a national small-scale farmers’ coordination with a focus on land rights.

**Bio**

Haithem Gasmi is a Tunisian agricultural engineer and a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium. He worked in different local and regional civil society organizations on environmental rights, climate justice, and food sovereignty. Currently a researcher in rural politics and peasant struggles. He is also a research fellow with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Council for American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).



**Burcu Ozdemir (Turkey)**

**Ecological degradation of Upper Tigris Valley: Technocratic relations, war and violence**

In February 2020, the Ilisu Dam, constructed on the Tigris River as a part of the Turkish state's massive Southeastern Anatolia Project in Turkish Kurdistan, started filling its reservoir. As the water levels rose, the river started flooding the hundred miles of the upper Tigris River and its tributaries, including the ancient town Hasankeyf. Together with the houses, lands, and livelihoods of the local Kurdish population, material remnants of their lived past in the area were submerged. Such acts and scenes of destruction and dispossession – harnessed through the transformations of the Tigris River and its ecologies -- have become emblematic of state policies in Turkish Kurdistan. This project studies ecological degradation of Upper Tigris Valley, with a specific attention to transformation of Tigris River. It examines complex networks of material, social and technocratic relations with Tigris River and its ecologies, to map out and analyze how war produces ecologies and how ecologies enable and extend war in the form of affective and corporeal violence. With the escalation of the war between the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) and the Turkish armed forces, the ecological destruction of Turkish Kurdistan through infrastructure projects became systematic. Reshaping the flow of rivers became an explicit tool for securing control and exerting power in Turkish Kurdistan. At the same time, water remained central to Kurdish political movement's attempts at unsettling state power and territorial politics, as has been reclaimed both as a *Kurdish* natural resource and as a sign of belonging and loss. With a specific attention to Tigris River, this project seeks to examine how war shapes and is shaped by the material sediments, embodied practices, and memories of the ecologies in Upper Tigris Valley. Attending to inescapable proliferations of violence and sedimented archives of ecologies of war, it aims to contribute to anthropological discussions that challenge the universalist lens of climate change by naming colonial hierarchies of life and capitalist networks of power as laying the grounds for ecological destruction.

**Bio**

Burcu Ozdemir is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the Graduate Center, CUNY. Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey. She holds a BA in Political Science from Bogazici University and MA in Political Science from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her research is based in Northern Kurdistan (Turkish Kurdistan) and examines ecologies of violence, extractivism, large scale developmentalist interventions and feminist life-making projects.



**Catalina Quiroga (Colombia)**  
**Landscapes of Climate Change: Mangrove Defense amidst Conservation Processes and Market-Based Solutions in the Colombian Caribbean**

The Black and *campesino* communities of the Colombian Caribbean lead various mangrove conservation projects involving planting mangroves, seedbeds, caiman, and bird protection, and promoting tourism. These projects are endorsed by diverse private and public actors who, from differing viewpoints, mobilize climate change discourse - both mitigation and adaptation. These yields varied local project involvement levels and transformations of livelihoods and local economies. At the local level, defending territorial permanence is a major focus for organized communities in mangrove conservation projects. An instance is the Cispatá Bay and La Caimanera swamp. This community, impacted by paramilitary violence in the early 2000s, joined conservation programs tied to the REDD+ strategy in 2006. Now, the wetland hosts Colombia's first Blue Carbon Bonds project, profiting from preserving blue ecosystems. Named "Vida Manglar," this project integrates tourism and climate mitigation. The pilot and selling of credits followed government, institutions, cooperation agencies, and community planning. As part of the implementation, restrictions were placed on agriculture and fishing near the mangrove to ensure its preservation. As a result, today, the black and *campesino* community, formerly farmers, fisherfolks, and labourers, oversee a tourism company. The second instance is Ciénaga de la Virgen in Cartagena. Grassroots, including violence-displaced and black communities involve in land and water disputes, engage in mangrove conservation via environmental compensation tied to infrastructure. These black communities assert their city presence via ecosystem conservation, central in mangrove conservation for climate adaptation. These cases show that in Colombia, the implementation of conservation and tourism projects has been intertwined with previous process of land dispossession and land and water grabbing. Despite having a participatory component, these mangrove conservation processes are implemented in areas historically characterised by socioenvironmental inequality. I argue that the transformation of life in these communities associated with climate change projects is a process that needs to be analysed through the lenses of critical agrarian studies and feminist political ecology. Hence, this application aims to explore the impacts of climate change policies on the mangrove ecosystem and how communities, social movements, grassroots organisations, and other actors overcome/navigate socioenvironmental injustices.

**Bio**

I am a Colombian anthropologist interested in feminist political ecology and critical geography. So far, my research has been characterised by collaborative work with the local populations involved. I finished my B.A. in Anthropology in 2012 at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. My thesis analysed how peasant-miners in Antioquia produced alternatives to protect the territory with community plans such as Peasant Reserve Zones. In 2016, I obtained an M.A. in Geography from the Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia. My thesis explored hidrosocial landscapes in the Colombian Caribbean. After 8 years of research and work experience related to extractive activities, particularly agribusiness and mining, I am now interested in problematising and analysing the implementation of mangrove conservation and restoration projects within the climate change framework. Currently, I am a PhD student at the department of Human Geography, Lund University in Sweden. My research aims to analyse how the interaction between climate change policies and local strategies to overcome socioenvironmental injustices produces landscapes of climate change. This aim will be fulfilled through a case study of the mangrove ecosystems of the Colombian Caribbean. To date, I have written and contributed to (6) peer-reviewed articles related to political ecology, landscapes studies, critics geographies, and collaborative ethnographies, most of them in Spanish, my native language. I have consistently worked in interdisciplinary teams that do collaborative and critical research while also being engaged in activism with social movements and official institutions such as Jardín Botánico de Bogotá and Ambiente y Sociedad NGO.



**Rashmi Singh (India)**

**Roots and Routes of Green Grabbing of Pastoral land: local to regional politics of grazing ban in Indian Himalaya**

In the proposed paper I unpack the social, political, and institutional context that led to a grazing ban and pastoral evictions in the Eastern Indian Himalaya. I explore the 'roots'- the multiscale factors that contributed to the genesis of the ban, and the 'routes' - modes of exclusion that were adopted by the state for pastoral displacements. Building on the case of Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP), Sikkim, India, I argue that the genesis of a conservation initiative that results in displacements may not always be linked with the state's conservation intentions only; instead, these initiatives can be a result of contestations between the local resource users of protected areas and the state's own political agenda and intra-state battles. In addition, the role of local institutions and associated actors becomes critical in deciding the fate of implementations of such initiatives at the local scale. The case of Sikkim's Grazing Ban depicts the larger phenomenon of 'green grabbing of pastoral land' where the state continues to use the claims of 'desertification' to appropriate pastoral landscape for the 'green' plans. Conservation policies are instrumentalized by struggles at the local scale, and therefore policy formation in the pastoral landscapes should consider an in-depth understanding of the complex social, cultural, and ecological nature of resource use.

**Bio**

I am a research affiliate at PASTRES-Pastoralism, Uncertainty, Resilience, IDS-UK. My doctoral research at the School of Human Ecology, Ambedkar University Delhi examines the politics of rangeland conservation in the Indian Eastern Himalaya, Sikkim. I explore how pastoral cultures, and their contemporary ecological realities respond to the 'science' of biodiversity conservation, and the green grabbing of pastoral landscape. I use an interdisciplinary approach and employ political ecology and ecological analysis to understand the social as well as ecological responses to a 'grazing ban policy' implemented by the state government of Sikkim. My parallel work is understanding the relations between wildlife conservation and pastoralism across Eastern and Western Himalayan region. I have a master's degree in Environment and Development at Ambedkar University Delhi. Based on my empirical research across the Western and Eastern Himalayan region, for over a decade, I primarily advocate for pastoralist's knowledge and participation in rangeland management and policies in South Asia. My primary interest lies in conducting long term research in the Himalayan landscape engaging with the themes of environmental politics, pastoral studies, rangeland conservation, animal geography, and social transformation. I have received several prestigious awards including Asia Student Scholarship from the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies (2022), T.R Ellett Young Academic Award by Lincoln University, the New Zealand (2021), and the Rufford Foundation Small Research Grant Award (2017).



**Tathagato Ganguly (India)**

**From Territories to Plantations: Afro-Ecuadorian Territorial Struggles in Northern Esmeraldas, Ecuador**

In 1994, by virtue of the Law of Agrarian Development (*Ley de Desarrollo Agrario*), 37 Afro Ecuadorian farm communities were granted collective land titles. Consequently, the Ecuadorian state recognised 127,279 hectares of land as *comunas* (communes) in the north western part of Esmeraldas province. *Comunas* are spatio-legal entities that guarantees certain collective rights to its inhabitants that are protected by the Ecuadorian constitution. More importantly, referring to the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century maroon settlements, the region is also considered as 'ancestral territory' by the Afro-Ecuadorians. But, in the two and half decades since, these communes have lost around 30,000 hectares of land to the mining industry, palm oil cultivators, and shrimp farming industry. Meandering mangroves are divided into monotonous plots for shrimp farming and large swathes of tropical forests are being cleared for logging activities and palm oil plantations, ushering an endless cycle of violence with no easy escape in sight. However, as practices of exploitation and dispossession intensifies so does resistance, however varied, unorganised or miniscule. Thus, the past three decades have also witnessed an active mobilisation of the local Afro-Ecuadorians to protect their territorial, socio-political and cultural rights. Critical agrarian scholarship of the past decade has argued for the need to unpack 'land grab', both conceptually and methodologically, and to build a more historically attuned understanding of "political reactions from below"<sup>1</sup>. Furthering these insights, this paper would demonstrate how histories of marronage is not only central to, but work as an overarching frame for the territorial struggles of the Afro-Ecuadorians. Further, it probes the processes of territorialisation of property. Doing so, it is argued, allows us to go beyond the sterile binary of territory-tenure and helps us comprehend how the hegemonic sovereign territoriality is challenged as transformation of agrarian spaces into extractive zones is resisted.

**Bio**

Tathagato Ganguly is currently a final year Doctoral student at the Dept. of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, India. Presently, he is writing a thesis titled 'Territories of Extraction: *Comunas Negras* and Extractive Industries in Esmeraldas, Ecuador' which is based on 22 months of ethnographic and archival research carried out in Ecuador. Straddling between Sociology and History, his thesis deals with the long history of Black territorial autonomy in the province of Esmeraldas, how it has allowed the said communities to develop a distinct idea of territory, one that is imbricated with the experience of marronage; and lastly, how this idea of territory is reformulated and rearticulated as they defend their lands that are ravaged by extractive activities such as oil palm plantations. During his stay in Ecuador, he was also associated with FLACSO Ecuador as an Associate Researcher at the Dept. of Anthropology, History and Humanities. He has presented his doctoral work in several conferences and workshops in Ecuador, Mexico and Germany. His areas of interest can be broadly described as Neoliberalism and Extractive Industries, Latin American Social Movements, Agrarian and Rural Sociology, Critical Race Theory, and Maroon Ecologies and Black Geographies. Currently, he is also working as an Intern at SEPHIS (South South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development) where he is involved in the day to day working of the institution and further exploring the possibilities and the promises of South-South exchange, notwithstanding the structural constraints.



**Sienne Molepo (South Africa)**

**Running out of land for settlement and graves: Extractive industries and land dispossession in rural South Africa**

This paper focuses on how the mining extractive industry has, and continues to, restructure rural life in South Africa. The paper emanates from field work conducted in 2022 for an ongoing Master's thesis. I follow the tale of the Mmakau community, a small impoverished community located along the western part of the billion dollar Platinum Belt of South Africa. Striking findings reveal that, the community's access to land for common usage is rapidly shrinking. The traditional authority is running out of land for settlement for its constituency. As an alternative to feed this growing demand for settlement land by locals, current local home owners are informally subdividing their stands and selling to land hungry locals and migrant labourers. One of the major crises, has been the full to capacity communal burial site where community members struggled for three years to get alternative land for a new burial site. Their options were limited as open land is shrinking. In the worst case scenarios, people had to bury the dead on top of the older graves of relatives. How do we make sense of the shrinkage of communal land? The argument I put forward is that (1) mining expansion over the years have went on to accumulate, concentrate and centralise more land from communities, particularly common usage land set aside to accommodate a growing population and its needs. (2) As renewable energy sources advance amidst South Africa's energy crises, new solar energy plants feeding into the national electricity grid have been erected side by side with mining production sites, consuming more common land. (3) The arrival of mining is transforming the area into a peri urban area, there is expansion of nearby townships for the working black middle class that have gradually encroached on rural communal land.

**Bio**

Sienna Molepo, is a black young woman scholar from the rural province of Limpopo in South Africa. I am currently enrolled for an MPhil in Land and Agrarian studies at PLAAS, the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. I am currently managing the JPS website "Agrarian Conversation", a new exciting venture. I am part of a cohort of students under the NRF/DSI funded South African Research Chair in Land and Agrarian Studies chaired by Professor Ruth Hall. My current MPhil research project is looking into new nuances around the formation of the rural state in South Africa, questions around the reproduction of chiefly authority, re-subjectification of political subjects by both rural and central states and negotiation of new contracts of recognition. My future plans are to get into professional academia with aspirations to end up in a leadership role within academia. I joined academia- particularly the agrarian field after working as researcher on the South African government's Land Restitution programme. Whilst still relatively new to agrarian field, I have found a home with a set of scholarship that enables me to think about the world as a historical formation, continued with capitalist and social relations and forms of exploitation. My biggest achievement is getting selected for the SARChI programme. It has definitely changed the course of my life and professional career. The opportunities for self-development, growth and pushing me out of my comfort zone have been rewarding and I have been blessed to be mentored by some of the best women and men in academia. I am a strong systems person, very passionate about my work, empathetic and love to think of myself as a visionary leader.



**Faustina Obeng Adomaa, Gertrude Dzifa Torvikey & Adwoa Yeboah Gyapong (Ghana)**  
**Whose salt? Unravelling the role of state policies and customary regimes in resource grabbing in Ghana**

Salt mining is an economic mainstay of communities along Ghana's eastern coast. Traditionally, salt is mined as a common resource and women dominate as artisanal salt miners. In the last few decades, the statutory and customary states' endorsement of large-scale industrial salt mining has culminated into private companies taking over such commons as concessions. In October 2020, the Government of Ghana leased approximately forty thousand acres of land to a private company for an industrial-scale salt mining in the Ada Songor Lagoon catchment area. This lease is the largest of its kind in the West African subregion and manifests as the pinnacle of a gradual but intense process of granting common resources as concessions to private companies. In this paper, we chronicle the intricacies of state policies around salt resources and associated action and inactions that has resulted in the privatisation of community and small-scale mining areas. We show how state policies and customary political regimes intersect around the logic of modernising salt mining through large-scale private investments and its effect on the displacement of artisanal miners, particularly women who initially have been at the centre of the local industry. We highlight how the nationalisation of salt and associated policy shifts and logical inconsistencies have affected the sector and enabled the grabbing of what was hitherto a common resource. Salt mining areas along Ghana's Eastern Coast have become sites for conflicts and violence amidst struggles to maintain both the legitimacy of private concessionaires and the livelihoods of affected people with associated consequences on what legitimate mobilising and claims look like. In this paper, we show how structural violence manifests in state policies that aid largescale grabbing of a composite resource. This paper speaks to the peculiarities of the national political context as an enabler of resource grabbing directly and indirectly.

#### **Bio**

**Faustina Obeng Adomaa** is a critical geographer working at the intersection of the politics of global commodity chains and their ramifications on local land, labour and gender relations. She works with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ghana as gender and social inclusion lead. She is currently finalising her PhD Candidate at Wageningen University, Netherlands. **Gertrude Dzifa Torvikey** is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), University of Ghana. She also works with Feminist Africa Journal at the same University. She has a PhD in Development Studies from the University of Ghana. Her research interests are in agrarian livelihoods, migration, labour and gender issues. **Adwoa Yeboah Gyapong** is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Social Policy Studies, University of Ghana. She has a PhD in Development Studies from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her area of interest is in the political economy /ecology of development, particularly contestations around land, labour and food. She is also a social policy analyst and a consultant with experience in monitoring and evaluation of development interventions. She has conducted research and consultancy in several African countries including, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.



**Poonam Jusrut (Mauritius)**

**Land Grabbing in Mauritius through a Post-Colonial Lens: An Analysis of the Integrated Resorts Scheme and its Implications**

This paper examines the phenomenon of land grabbing in Mauritius within the framework of post-colonial theory, focusing on the Integrated Resorts Scheme (IRS) and its impact on local communities. The IRS, along with the Real Estate Scheme (RES), has opened up the real estate market to foreigners, leading to the emergence of gated communities that pose challenges to the social cohesion of local communities. This study explores how these schemes, initially intended to stimulate the Mauritian real estate market, have the potential to facilitate a form of "re-colonization" in the country, perpetuating socio-spatial segregation within the country. Through a post-colonial lens, the analysis explores the tensions that emerged from the "foreignisation" of limited land resources in a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) through legal means of resource extraction. IRS and RES schemes dispossess citizens of the ability to access land resource in their own country. This research aims to deepen our understanding of land grabbing dynamics in Mauritius within a post-colonial theoretical framework. By adopting a post-colonial lens, this research offers new insights into the implications of land grabbing in Mauritius, considering the historical legacies of colonization and the socio-political dynamics of contemporary Mauritian society. Such insights are valuable to policymakers, scholars, and activists interested in addressing the challenges posed by land grabbing and promoting more inclusive and sustainable land governance practices. The findings contribute to theoretical debates on land grabbing and provide a foundation for understanding the contemporary dynamics of land resource "grabbing" in the Mauritian context. Furthermore, this investigation on how the commodification of land resource through market-based instruments such as the IRS and RES contributes to the existing scholarly research carried out by the Land Deals Politics Initiative (LDPI).

**Bio**

Poonam Jusrut earned a PhD in Geography from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in August 2016. She has a BA (Hons) in Geography from the University of Delhi, India and an MSc in Development and Environment from Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. Originally from Mauritius, Poonam's research interests revolve around development studies. She is also interested in using geospatial analysis in her research.





**Loveness Msofi and Masautso Chimombo (Malawi)**  
**Land Pawning as Land Grabbing: A focus on rural Malawi**

Land *pawning* is an emerging practice in land rental markets which is understudied in Malawi and in agrarian studies. The practice involves renting out land for a considerable amount of money to be paid back within an agreed period of time. The one who rents in is free to use the land until the money is paid back in full. We study this practice within the context of local and domestic land grabbing. Land grabbing refers to the large-scale land acquisitions by domestic and transnational companies, governments, and individuals. In Malawi, land grabbing has its roots in the historical land transfers that took place during the colonial era. The concept has received much attention because it results in dispossession of peasants and land concentration among a few, destruction of the environment and the commons. Land grabbing is usually considered at larger scale involving large-scale transaction for production of export crops and for corporate agendas. Less often does it involve small-scale land deals that are done locally involving traditional leaders. We investigate the impacts of land *pawning* among small-scale farming communities on labour and capital relations as well as livelihoods. We also ask a question whether land *pawning* can be considered as land grabbing. We find that the practice perpetuate poverty as land owners are dispossessed of their most important asset and they struggle to pay back the loan for prolonged periods. This result in land owners relying on selling their labour power to sustain livelihoods. We therefore conclude that *land pawning* is a form of land grabbing as it results in land dispossession by small-scale capitalist, leaving owners to rely on their labour power for survival.

#### **Bio**

**Loveness Msofi** is a Malawian agrarian studies scholar born on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1986. Her research interests span across agrarian and rural transformation, political economy of agrarian change, gender and class differentiation, social reproduction, agricultural extension and education, livelihoods analysis, climate change and land issues. She has just submitted her PhD thesis for examination which is titled: *Agricultural extension and commercialisation in rural Malawi: Implications for livelihoods, class and gender differentiation* at the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS). Loveness holds an MSc degree in agribusiness management obtained in 2012 from National Pingtung University of Science and Technology (NPUST) in Taiwan. She also holds a BSc. Degree in Agricultural Extension obtained in 2008 from Bunda College of Agriculture. Loveness is an academic at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) in the Extension Department. She has worked with the Ministry of agriculture from 2009-2014 as a women's programmes officer responsible for gender mainstreaming in Agriculture. Loveness has been involved in a number of research studies in Malawi. She was part of a team of researchers on the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA) which is under the Future Agricultures Consortium. Her role was to analyse gender and social differences in agricultural commercialisation. She was an African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) fellow from 2013-2015. Other fellowships and awards include: The Early Career Fellowship Programme in 2012 and The Thematic Support Fund in 2013, both by Future Agricultures consortium and The Climate Impacts Research Capacity Leadership Enhancement Fellowship in 2016 by the African Academy of Science (AAS).

**Masautso Chimombo** is a lecturer in Rural Sociology in the Extension Department at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). He holds an MA in Social Work (Nord University, Norway) and BA in Social Sciences with Sociology as a major (University of Malawi, Malawi). Masautso is a graduate student at Sophia University in Japan pursuing PhD in Global Environmental Studies. Masautso has worked on agrarian research projects focusing on the land question in Malawi. Other research interests are on farmer producer organizations and rural development in general.



**Nicholas Nyachega (Zimbabwe)**

**“We thought he was one of us”: On the Afterlives of Settler-colonial Dispossession, and Contemporary Land-grabbing ‘Wars’ in Zimbabwe’s Eastern Borderlands.**

*Everyday conflicts* over land, at a variety of spatial scales, have tremendously shaped human affairs in both colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. While co-creating oral histories for my doctoral dissertation in Zimbabwe’s Inyanga borderlands in 2021, I learned that there was a “hot land war” in the Nyafaru area. This “war” involved villagers from the Tangwena community on one hand, and former Zimbabwe Minister of State for National Security, Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement, Mr. Didymus Mutasa, on the other hand. Since 2005, the former had, more than sixty times, taken the latter to the High Court of Zimbabwe, where the latter was accused of “abuse of political power” and a “fervent desire to privatize community land.” Months later after hearing this story, I then examined “Nyafaru Papers” at the National Archives of Zimbabwe. My trajectory of inquiry changed when I stumbled upon a 1961 Constitution of Nyafaru Farm and a description of “Daily Life at Nyafaru” in which Mr. Mutasa was listed as a legal advisor and executive member at Nyafaru. Since then, I have grappled with questions about land conflict, boundary contestations, and the organized dispossessions of peasant community lands in this borderland region. Using this case study, my project takes a long historical view to examine “hidden” land grabs and local strategies of resistance and resilience in the face of dispossession by the political elite. I explore how and why politicians like Mr. Mutasa (whom the locals describe as *black settlers*) abuse their political and legal power to organize land grabs. I ask why and how the *afterlives* of settler-colonial logic(s) of land dispossessions, violence, and abuse of political and financial power have shaped contemporary land struggles. I will argue that postcolonial Zimbabwe’s dispossessions and land grabs, like the colonial ones, are an ongoing *structure, not an event*.

**Bio**

My name is Nicholas Nyachega. I am a native of Zimbabwe, born and raised in the Honde Valley borderlands. I am a Ph.D. Candidate in African History (and Development Studies & Social Change Minor) at the University of Minnesota, USA. My dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of Northeastern Zimbabwe’s *borderlanders* (people who live near the border) from the 1880s to the present. I explore the complexities of what happens in places where state forms of power and sovereignty compete with or oppose other local systems of indigenous sovereignty and power. By conceiving borderlands as *contested spaces* and *places of contradictions*, my thesis foregrounds how, when and why states’ efforts to control people have been seriously undermined by *borderlanders* whose everyday mobilities (movements), changing goals, and daily needs (such as access to cross-border markets and farmlands), depend largely on indigenous socio-economic systems rather than the states’ apparatuses of control. I argue that borderlanders’ practical realities of daily life, and their abilities to utilize indigenous socio-political and economic knowledge systems, challenge technologies of state power, such as border patrols, as well as the states’ categories of criminality and refuge-seeking. To reconstruct these histories from below, my dissertation relies mainly on oral histories, little-used archival documents, personal experiences, family histories, and contemporary ethnographic materials. In the past three years, I have co-created sixty-five oral histories in the Honde Valley and Inyanga borderlands. In addition, I analyzed more than one hundred archival files in both Zimbabwe and neighboring Mozambique. As a doctoral student, I have published works that cover borderlands, livelihoods, and inequality through topics such as the Zimbabwe Liberation War, Ethnic Minorities, and Healthcare. These articles are accessible at [Nicholas Nyachega - Google Scholar](#). In addition, I have a forthcoming book chapter on Zimbabwe’s transborder liberation movements, border farms, and contested borderscapes.



**Gustavo Setrini & Ramón Bruno Fogel Pedroso (Paraguay)**

**Land grabbing and violence in Paraguay: an emblematic case of contemporary accumulation by dispossession**

Paraguay, with a land gini coefficient of .94 and only 4% of arable land managed by smallholders, has among the most unequal land distributions in the world, and foreign landowners control more than half of the holdings larger than 1,000 hectares. A short list of land-intensive agricultural products, including soybeans, corn, rice, beef, and their derivatives make up 62% of the country's exports, providing the motor of an annual economic growth rate of 3% percent over the last three decades. No export taxes are levied on this sector, and total tax revenues of just over 10% of GDP are insufficient to fund a modern state. Two clientelist machines with 19th-century agrarian origins dominate party politics. All of this makes Paraguay seem like an anachronism. Yet, Paraguay provides an emblematic case of contemporary agriculture-based development, of which state-backed violent dispossession of indigenous and peasant communities and private appropriation of public lands is a central feature. Using case studies of emblematic large-scale land acquisitions in the *Ka'a Poty* and *Hugua Po'i* indigenous communities and analysis of secondary data of land transactions over 200 hectares over the last three decades, this study examines the different means of physical and institutional violence employed in the dispossession of land and the construction of Paraguay's agroexport model: violent evictions with burning of houses, destruction of crops, and detention of children and women; forging of land titles, illegal rental contracts, and institutionalized corruption in the National Institute of Indigenous Development, the National Institute of Rural Development and Land, the public prosecutor's office, and the judicial system. The study traces the links between the structure of the contemporary global economy, Paraguay's growth model, these forms of state-backed violence, and the country's political regime.

**Bio**

**Gustavo Setrini**, is currently research director and professor of political economy at FLACSO Paraguay in Asunción. He holds a B.A. in Government from Lawrence University (WI, USA) and a Ph.D. in Political Economy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. From 2019-2023, he served as Head of Solutions Mapping in the Acceleration Lab of the United Nations Development Program in Paraguay and, from 2013-2018, as Assistant Professor of Food Studies at New York University. His books and articles investigate the political economy of the agrarian transition in Paraguay, agrifood globalization, and sustainable agriculture. **Ramón Bruno Fogel Pedroso**, holds degrees in Law and Social Sciences from the National University of Asunción, a Masters in Political Science from FLACSO Chile, as well as a Master degree and Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Kansas. He is a researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Rural Studies (CERI), professor and member of the academic governing committee at FLACSO Paraguay, and a Level III researcher in the National Council of Science and Technology's (CONACYT) research system. He served as Ad Hoc Judge of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case of *Yakye Axa*. In 2023, the Paraguayan congress officially recognized his scientific production and innovation, consisting of more than 35 books and more than a hundred publications in scientific journals, many of them focused agrarian structure, conflict, and peasant resistance.

## **Frew Yirgalem Mane (Ethiopia)** **Land, Party/State-led Development and Protests in Ethiopia**

In 2012, Ethiopia unveiled a plan to expand its capital, Addis Ababa, by appropriating over one million hectares of rural land (almost five times Luxembourg's size) from the surrounding Oromiya administrative region. The plan, officially known as the Addis Ababa Master Plan, was the government's signature state-led development policy initiative. The aim was to double-down on Ethiopia's structural transformation aspiration by establishing new urban residential, services, commercial and special industrial centres. Nevertheless, the local Oromo farmers resisted the plan, for they believed it was a policy of land annexation. With the government resorting to authoritarian measures to suppress the dissent, the situation escalated into waves of anti-government protests- subsequently bringing the regime to collapse in 2018. This study has two objectives: to analyse the land-protest nexus in Ethiopia between 2012 and 2018; and to assess the changes and continuities in the new government's policy response regarding the land question in Addis Ababa and its surroundings. The study is based on field interviews, database extractions, and document review. While acknowledging the land question in the long-durée of Ethiopia's agrarian agenda, the study combines party/state-led development model and the politics of sub-national identity analytic frameworks. In this context, four issues stand out in the unpacking and comprehensive understanding of contemporary land-protest nexus: the manner and extent land is offered as concessions to attract and retain foreign capital; politico economic & demographic pressures on extra-territorial growth; the place of land in the ruling elite rent-seeking and rent-distribution strategies; and the practices of extra-legal expropriation and the means of legitimizing the state's displacement power. By so doing, the study seeks to contribute to the debate on impact and implications of 'land grabs' in the context of statist, large-scale development approach. It will also highlight the stakes in advancing context-sensitive and socially just land resource development and utilization policy in Ethiopia and sub-Sahara Africa at large.

### **Bio**

Frew Yirgalem Mane holds a PhD in Human Rights and Global Politics (specializing in Political Economy) from Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies (Pisa, Italy) in February 2021. He has MSc degree in Urban Management and Development (specializing in land and housing) from IHS, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Frew was a research scholar at SOAS, University of London under Erasmus plus Placement Scholarship from March to June 2019. Currently, Frew is teaching Politics and Political Economy of Development in the Department of Political Science and International Studies, Bahir Dar University- Ethiopia. He was graduate program coordinator of the Department between October 2014-2016. Frew's major areas of research interests include state-business relations, land politics and policies, political regime and political violence and socioeconomic justices. He has published research papers in areas of state-led development, politics of urban-renewal and land value, women political empowerment and decentralization in Ethiopia. He is an alumnus of the Young African Leaders Initiative East Africa Centre, a leadership program launched by the former President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, in July 2015. Frew has served as research assistant in the Federal House of Peoples' Representatives (HPR), Ethiopia. He was the secretary of Bahir Dar University Teachers Association, a regional chapter of Ethiopian Teachers Association, which is one of the oldest and largest professional associations in Ethiopia having 400,000 memberships.

### **Acknowledgements**

Funds for these 27 grants come from contributions from the following:

ERC Advanced Grant project [PASTRES](#), IDS Sussex, UK, coordinated by Ian Scoones

ERC Advanced Grant project (No. 834006) [RRUSHES-5](#), Erasmus University Rotterdam, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Netherlands, coordinated by Jun Borrás

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, [Wendy Wolford](#)

SARChI Chair, PLAAS University of the Western Cape, South Africa, [Ruth Hall](#)

[Political Ecology Forum](#), Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Tor Benjaminsen