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Land grabbing and its environmental justice implications

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Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Land grabbing is a serious issue. Land grabbing has major negative social impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people living in areas where land grabbing is taking place. It also leads to serious environmental degradation. The pre-existing injustices experienced by local communities are exacerbated by, and exacerbate, the impacts of land grabbing. Land grabbing brings economic hardship that may eventually lead to people selling off or leasing their land. Even where people are not displaced, land grabbing still has severe impacts on their livelihoods. This thesis has shown that land grabbing can be considered to be a form of 'slow violence', and that there is a lack of consideration by governments of the long term issues and cumulative impacts of land grabbing.

In my PhD research, I sought to understand the social, political and environmental dynamics underlying the contemporary governance of land grabbing and the environmental justice implications of land grabbing. This is done by an extensive literature review on land grabbing and by studying different case studies in Argentina. The empirical data was derived from studying land grabbing in several locations and from complementary perspectives:

- the conservation program of Douglas Tompkins in the protected area, Los Esteros del Iberá;
- the investments of the Harvard Management Company in industrial tree plantations in the protected area, Los Esteros del Iberá;
- expansion of industrial tree plantations in Corrientes;
- agricultural expansion in Santiago del Estero; and
- state-civil society collaborations in the context of land grabbing in Santiago del Estero.

These case studies revealed the impacts of land grabbing on the lives of local people, as well as the roles, interests and responsibilities of different actors, the difficulties in addressing the negative impacts from land grabbing, and how resistance strategies were mobilized at different geographical scales in an attempt to influence land grabbing.

Two research questions were addressed in this PhD research. The first question sought to explore the social, political and environmental dynamics underlying the contemporary governance of land grabbing. The second question sought to understand the implications of land grabbing in terms of environmental justice. Both questions were addressed in each chapter of this thesis. Below, these findings are summarized.

6.2 The social, political and environmental dynamics underlying the contemporary governance of land grabbing

To understand the contemporary governance of land, there are many dynamics that influence how and why actors from different geographical scales interact. The interplay between actors over land is one of constant renegotiation, restructuring and readjustment. Social, political and environmental dynamics (or a combination of these) influence the modes of land regulation and governance in the context of land grabbing. These were especially discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, in many rural areas in Argentina, the state has failed to meet its key responsibilities. Therefore, most rural communities are in a state of social deprivation and people live in impoverished conditions. This was visible in the lack of basic needs such as access to adequate food, water, income, mobility, work, education, healthcare and housing. Most people also lacked formal land title. The obstacle of formalization of land rights and the pre-existing injustices experienced by local communities aggravated the negative impacts of land grabbing and the extent to which local communities could cope with land grabbing. The roots of the marginalization of local communities lie in past policies and practices that enabled unequal ownership and access to land. Even though communities might have known the risks of not formalizing land tenure, they would invest time addressing other pre-existing injustice rather than the fundamental issues of securing land access.

Responsibility for allowing land grabbing to occur is shared among many actors across geographical scales. As shown in Chapter 3 on the Harvard Management Company and Douglas Tompkins, land grabbers are attracted to relatively low land prices, but are also attracted by a business-friendly investment climate and weak environmental regulations in Argentina. In general, the national and provincial governments of Argentina have a weak regulatory role and therefore, social and environmental impacts of land grabbing are exacerbated.

Social movements played an important role in informing civil-society about their land rights, empowering people, and improving land tenure security. The role of social movements was exercised in different ways, from mobilizing people, scale jumping, to state-civil society collaborations (see Chapters 3 and 5). The possibilities to achieve social transformative action for social movements and local people depends on many things like the political setting, remoteness, available resources, access to information, and external contacts. Especially under the reign of Presidents Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, who promoted social justice policies and left-wing populism, social movements were given more opportunities to address social issues.

In Santiago del Estero, after years of political pressure, the provincial government gave different

social movements and NGOs a way to address issues provoked by land grabbing. The two agencies, the *Registro de Poseedores* and *Comité de Emergencia*, were established and constitute a joint effort between the provincial government and civil society to address land conflicts. With their activities, the barriers to formalize land tenure were somewhat lowered and communities were better assisted to deal with the violent confrontations they sometimes experienced with investors. However, the actions of these two agencies do not provide sufficient countervailing power against the actors, many of whom utilise violent strategies to dispossess people of their land.

As discussed in Chapter 3, protected areas can also be vulnerable to land grabbing. Even green initiatives can lead to land grabbing, as many uses of the environment promoted under the neo-liberal conservation discourse are destructive, with severe socio-environmental impacts. Even though the investments in protected areas may be ostensibly green, local people may suffer the same impacts as they do from conventional land grabs. The paradox of green grabs was shown in the case of the Harvard Management Company, where the socio-environmental issues local people experienced, like diminished water access, were a trigger for civil society groups to organize. Thus, these ostensibly-green investments foster new modes of governance.

6.3 The implications of land grabbing in terms of environmental justice

Land grabbing can be considered to be a major environmental justice issue, in that disadvantaged communities become displaced, fenced-in, or forcibly evicted. Vulnerable people in rural areas in Argentina face disproportionate environmental injustice and experience various forms of violence – actual, structural and slow violence (Chapter 4). The unequal distribution of harms, the limited extent of local participation in decision-making, procedural justice issues, and the lack of recognition of and respect for local people and local cultures, are key issues in the land grabbing discourse. Land grabbing has many socio-environmental impacts that are felt by already-vulnerable people, especially Indigenous peoples. As mentioned before, the impact of land grabbing is exacerbated by the pre-existing inequalities in rural areas, such as the lack of education, basic services and infrastructure.

Land grabbing and land use change are a serious threat to the effective functioning and wellbeing of local communities and to the way of life of many communities. Land grabbing endangers the continuation of diverse cultures and ways of living. These negative socio-environmental impacts were observed in the agricultural expansion, industrial tree plantations, and in nature conservation. The lives of rural people are disrupted by land access restrictions, being displaced, or fenced-in. Land grabbing structures of people's lives as it introduces a variety of changes, as discussed below.

To enable land grabbing to take place, local brokers may visit local people's land or announce the sale of the land, leading to profound concern and distress; or local people might be violently expelled without warning. However, the implementation of projects can also take years, meaning that there is insecurity and anxiety about how, when and with what impacts these developments will happen. When the projects are actually implemented, there is a wide array of possible consequences that befall local people. Often, local people are merely seen as a source of cheap labour by land grabbers and by governments. In the provision of labour, they are frequently exposed to a wide range of workplace and occupational risks. In Corrientes, for example, I observed many people who had amputated limbs due to accidents while working in the timber industry. In agribusiness, people face disproportionate exposure to agrochemicals. They experience having their homes being over-sprayed, diminished access to water, and the aesthetic aspects of their environment changed considerably. Their prospects for having a peaceful, enjoyable life become limited.

Even though land grabbing is often portrayed in the literature as being an abrupt happening, my research revealed that it is process that occurs over time (sometimes many years), with different impacts at different points in the process. Therefore, it is essential to study the temporal dimensions to grasp the real impact of land grabbing. Another key point in understanding the governance of land grabbing, is the crucial role of socio-political and socio-environmental particularities of different places. Land grabbing fosters complex processes that vary by locality.

Under certain circumstances, land grabbing can open-up spaces for reflecting on the environmental values and social responsibilities of individuals, communities, NGOs, governments and companies. This was shown in the case of Douglas Tompkins (Chapter 3) and also in Chapter 5 with the discussion of the collaboration between social movements and the provincial government. Nevertheless, these types of changes in governance are often only created under political pressure and may not achieve effective wellbeing outcomes for local communities.

6.4 Reflection on the theoretical approaches used in this thesis

Four bodies of literature were used in this PhD: land grabbing, political ecology, environmental justice, and governance. In the course of this PhD research, limitations were identified in each of these bodies of literature, and a corresponding contribution to them was made, as discussed below. The insights presented in this thesis suggest that the 'work-in-progress definition' of Borras et al. (2012) needs more nuance to fully explain the phenomenon of land grabbing, its governance and impact. Borras et al. (2012, p.405) stated that land grabbing is "the capturing of control of

relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms involving large-scale capital that often shifts resource use to that of extraction, whether for international or domestic purposes.” Several points identified in my research are important to consider for an improved understanding of land grabbing:

- (1) rather than being only vast tracts of land, land grabbing can occur through the aggregation of a series of individually small-scale acquisitions that collectively (cumulatively) add up to sizeable areas of land being acquired. These small-scale land acquisitions can have similar impacts as large-scale land grabs for local people;
- (2) land grabbing is a phenomenon that is influenced by global policies and practices;
- (3) the impact of land grabbing is exacerbated by unclear tenure and pre-existing inequalities;
- (4) green grabbing is land grabbing; and
- (5) given its spatial-temporal character and the fact that land grabbing can be considered slow violence, the processes and repercussions of land grabbing are complicated.

With these points in mind, the following description of land grabbing is proposed:

Land grabbing comprises the processes of gaining control of land and other natural resources through large land acquisitions or the accumulation of small-scale investments. It occurs through the use of a variety of mechanisms, including force and violence, that are often stimulated or regulated by governments. Land grabbing is influenced by global political dynamics that trickle down to the local level, and plays out differently in different locations. Land grabbing is facilitated by the lack of or unclear land tenure. Land grabbing results in a change in resource use to that of extraction or conservation. The impacts of land grabbing are exacerbated by pre-existing injustice, and can severely impact the environment and the lives of local people in varying ways over time.

This revised description brings greater clarity about contemporary land grabs. It emphasises that there is a need for policies and practices that are more responsive to local people and the environment. These types of policies perhaps should promote reduced consumption and the formation of alternative economies. Instead of focussing on growth, policies should pay more attention to pathways to a ‘moral economy’ (Vira, 2015), in other words, what improves people’s happiness, prosperity and wellbeing other than consumption and accumulation. A moral economy reinforces the need for companies to prove that they are not harming ecosystems and human beings. At present, the burden of proof in case of human rights violations and misconduct is the other way around, meaning that people have to organize against powerful companies, a battle that is implicitly unfair.

From a political ecology perspective, land grabbing in Argentina is a continuation of the extractivism/exploitation Eduardo Galeano (1971) was talking about in his book, *The Open Veins of Latin America*. In this book, Galeano explained how exploitation by Europe and the USA has shaped Latin America and its social fabrics. With the recent increase in land grabbing, the long-standing inequity between North and South, as well as within countries, is exacerbated (Agyeman et al., 2016; Galeano, 1971; Martínez-Alier, 2012). In many Southern countries, commodities are exported unprocessed, meaning that there is almost no added value and few job opportunities (Gudynas, 2009). Therefore, income disparities will not be dissolved by land grabbing, especially in countries with a weak socio-political or economic status.

The roles of powerful actors and their use of the environment can be criticised. However, my PhD research has shown that there is a need for more nuance. In the field of political ecology the nuance is sometimes lost in the criticism of powerful actors taking control over land. First, under certain circumstances key actors are willing to listen to the concerns of people, or can be forced to do so. This can lead to positive socio-political developments resulting from land grabbing over time. Second, addressing negative impacts of land grabbing is complex because of local contextual factors. Sometimes, key actors are willing to address negative issues but face operational challenges including: aligning visions; getting people to think about the future; establishing participatory and deliberative processes; resolving pre-existing conflicts; or implementing an ongoing and sustainable process of development without entrenching dependency (Esteves & Vanclay, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider the place-based particularities and histories of each location when analysing them from a political ecology perspective.

From an environmental justice perspective, my research has given a better understanding of the disadvantages local people experience, especially in their abilities to address environmental injustices. These place-based specificities are not sufficiently addressed in the field of environmental justice studies (Schlosberg, 2013). From my fieldwork, the difficulties and injustices people faced included the lack of basic needs, especially food, water, income, mobility, work, education, healthcare and adequate housing. These difficulties limited people's ability to resist or to initiate social transformative action. Some people affected by land grabbing can still take strong action to defend their interests, while others feel that they have little choice but to acquiesce. Local inequalities and specificities influence the differential distribution of benefits and harms, with some local people benefitting and others not.

As explained throughout this thesis, land governance is dynamic, multifaceted, complex, and does not serve the interests of all actors. Governance is the idea that different actors at different levels should influence decision-making, albeit in various forms. Even though governance is presented as representing democratic decision-making and empowerment (Eden, 2009), these

promises are rarely fulfilled (Swyngedouw, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 3, land grabbing and its governance brings about socio-environmental awareness and can open-up arenas for dialogue and multi-level collaboration, but the interests, needs and demands of local people are seldom met.

As underlined in Chapter 4, the ability of citizens to be pro-active is greatly hindered by several disadvantages, including geographical isolation, financial constraints, and limited knowledge about their legal rights and the judicial system. This hampers people in influencing the debate on land grabbing. However, Chapter 5 discussed a case in Santiago del Estero where resistance to land grabbing and political pressure led to types of collaborative governance that benefitted local people. Here, social movements started collaborating with the provincial government. Traditionally, these actors would not work together. Coming from a background of weak technical and institutional capacity, by joining with social movements the provincial government was able to make a significant contribution to addressing land conflicts. Even though many scholars have been critical of these types of collaboration in Latin America (Lapegna, 2017; McKay, 2018; Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017), this thesis has underlined the value of these collaborations in triggering procedural, policy and participatory changes. However, as also expressed by other scholars, even though more democratic spaces are created, the negative dimensions of land grabbing continue at the expense of local people (Lapegna, 2017; McKay, 2018; Vergara-Camus & Kay, 2017).

6.5 Comments regarding industrial tree plantations, nature conservation and agricultural expansion

This section briefly reflects on the different industries studied in this thesis, including industrial tree plantations, nature conservation and agriculture. What becomes clear from the data is that all land grabs are shaped at the global level by various discourses, policies and programs, and they impact local communities, which are limited in their ability to stop these investments or to negotiate a fair deal. More serious consideration of the socio-environmental impacts of these land grabs is needed, especially because this thesis has clarified how the negative effects of these industries unfold. This includes the negative consequences that are not known, are invisible, or overlooked (Nixon, 2011). Because of the slow violence local communities experience, their living conditions and general wellbeing is deteriorating to such an extent as to be almost unliveable. This situation is co-produced by the state, particularly with its endorsement of land grabbing as a development strategy.

Industrial tree plantations

The arrival of industrial tree plantations in the vicinities of local communities means tremendous

changes in their day to day life. Not only an aesthetic change in being enclosed by trees, but the changes experienced also encompass issues like diminished water access, cultural changes in that traditional cultural practices can no longer be performed, and that the only available work has extremely poor conditions. Other scholars have confirmed that the impacts of industrial tree plantations, whether eucalyptus, palm or any other monoculture, are severe (Li, 2017; Overbeek et al., 2012). The diverse farming systems that were once in place are destroyed, and monocultures severely impact biodiversity (Li, 2017). In areas where large-scale industrial production is being promoted, Li (2017) describes the existence of a 'mafia system' that is slowly unfolding, meaning that, in every step of the production cycle, illegitimacy and practices that are dishonest, exploitative or deceitful are exercised. The current methods of production of tree monocultures are based on an ever-intensifying unsustainability ranging from how the land is obtained, the type of social injustice that is created, the work that is offered, and the way natural resources are exploited.

Nature conservation

Nature conservation has become more complex. As market mechanisms are introduced to the field of nature conservation, increasingly-varied strategies for protecting nature can be observed. One reason for this and an outcome is that the state is withdrawing from nature conservation and other actors are taking over this task (Büscher et al., 2012; Corson, 2011). The limited capacity of states is frequently given as a justification for neoliberal conservation (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). This thesis has shown that, generally speaking, current conservation strategies have severe social impacts. Even though some initiatives aim to do good, local communities are rarely seen to benefit from eco-tourism, the increasing number of conservancies dedicated to biodiversity protection, or the presence of environmental NGOs. As many rural communities, especially Indigenous communities, are living in areas of high biodiversity that are under threat of being commoditized, there is a need to pay more attention to these social impacts (Parra, 2018; Vanclay, 2017). Also, there is a need for better environmental regulation of the areas of high biodiversity.

Agriculture

Large companies such as Monsanto, Cargill, Bunge and ADM promote agricultural change that introduces a shift from family farming to large-scale industrial production, often by using genetically modified seeds and agrochemicals (Yousefi et al., 2018). Many explanations are given for the shift from small-scale to large-scale production, such as the contested explanation of the inability to feed the world with small-scale diverse farming systems (Gillam, 2018; Kapstein, 2018). As this thesis has shown, there are many negative impacts experienced by local people from large-scale industrial agriculture, including dispossession and health issues related to agrochemical use (Leguizamón, 2018). Agricultural expansion also triggers deforestation. For agri-

culturalists, cleared land is generally worth much more than land with trees (especially if there are legal controls to clearing), and therefore illegal clearing frequently occurs in conjunction with land grabs.

6.6 The outlook for land grabbing and environmental justice in Argentina and beyond

In 2015, the Argentine government changed presidency from Cristina Kirchner (from 2007-2015) to Mauricio Macri (from 2015-present) (Leguizamón, 2018). In recent years, all over Latin America, liberal centre-right presidents have taken over from former left-wing presidents (Belem Lopes, 2017; Niedzwiecki & Pribble, 2017). Neoliberal policies are again at the forefront of Argentine and Latin American politics (Belem Lopes, 2017; Niedzwiecki & Pribble, 2017).

The former left-wing Argentine Presidents, Néstor Kirchner (from 2003-2007) and Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015), introduced various policies that promoted social justice, sovereignty, participation and improved environmental management (Costantino, 2017). However, critical scholars have considered these policies to be primarily a way to maintain electoral power and legitimacy, rather than a genuine commitment to these causes. The Kirchners are generally considered to be Janus-faced in terms of their contradictory policies and practices (Costantino, 2017; Lapegna, 2017). In theory, policies were implemented to restrict foreign investments and to protect those most in need, however, in practice the agro-industry expanded, foreign investments increased, and local communities suffered expulsions (Lapegna, 2017; Murmis & Murmis, 2012). Another example of these contradictions is the use of export taxes to pay for social programs intended to benefit vulnerable groups. These social programs arguably assisted local people, although they depended on the income from soy and other extractive industries which threatened the very ability of local people to maintain their livelihoods (Gudynas, 2009; Leguizamón, 2018).

According to Costantino (2017), Macri eliminated the contradictory nature of the laws that were introduced by the Kirchners and openly supported foreign companies to invest in Argentina. For example, to incentivize agricultural production, Macri lowered the agro-export tax introduced under the Kirchners (Leguizamón, 2018). Under Macri's reign, the Land Law (26.737) introduced by Cristina Kirchner was modified so that it no longer limits the amount of land foreigners can own (Costantino, 2017). The Macri government also cut the social welfare programs that were at the forefront of left-wing politics (Associated Press, 2016). A recent loan from the IMF raises the fear that the IMF will promote more neoliberal measures, which have already proven to be detrimental to equality in the country (Belem Lopes, 2017).

A change that has occurred since the Macri government is increasing violence towards protesters (Costantino, 2017; Grinsberg, 2017; Mason-Deese, 2018; Telesur, 2017). In 2016, Macri authorized new rules giving the police more latitude in controlling demonstrations (Aaronson, 2016). The consequence of these measures was seen in the demonstrations against the pension reforms in 2017, where water cannons, teargas and rubber bullets were used to repress protest (Grinsberg, 2017; Mason-Deese, 2018; Telesur, 2017).

The case of Santiago Maldonado also exemplifies the use of excessive violence, the complicity of the government in the use of violence, and a failure of the state to protect people's right to protest against injustice (Costantino, 2017; Global Witness, 2017; Kapstein, 2018). Santiago Maldonado was a 28-year old man from Buenos Aires who assisted a Mapuche Indigenous community in their conflict with the Italian textile company, United Colors of Benetton. With 930,000 hectares, Benetton is among the largest landholders in Argentina (Murmis & Murmis, 2012). In the town of Cushamen in Chubut, this Mapuche community has been in protracted conflict with the Benetton Investment Group over access to land. In August 2017, this conflict reached an all-time high (Kapstein, 2018). The national government instructed the Argentine National Gendarmerie to intervene in the protest. The protesters were met with disproportionate violence by the Gendarmerie, and Santiago was taken by them. He disappeared for 78 days before his body was found. His disappearance gained national and international attention. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights requested that the Argentine state investigates his disappearance (IACHR, 2017). All over the world, on social media people called for his return using the phrase, "Where is Santiago Maldonado?" (Goñi, 2017). Responsibility for his disappearance was never accepted by the government, nor was it fully clarified what happened. The disappearance of Santiago Maldonado provoked memories of the around 30,000 forced disappearances during the military dictatorship period (during the late 1970s and early 1980s) (Mason-Deese, 2018). In the year Santiago was killed, an Indigenous Mapuche, Rafael Nahuel, was shot by a soldier during a planned eviction (Global Witness, 2017; Mason-Deese, 2018). These incidents damaged the reputation of the Macri government and it gives an impression of how land grabbing conflicts will most likely unfold in the future.

In 2017, 60% of the murders of environmental defenders were in Latin America, with Argentina ranked in eleventh place (Global Witness, 2017). Currently, Latin American politics are characterized by a fierce repression and criminalization of voices critical of governments and companies, especially around land issues. With the introduction of neoliberal policies, the cutting of education budgets and social programs, the outlook for vulnerable people of this continent is bleak, at least in the short term (Associated Press, 2016; Belem Lopes, 2017; Mason-Deese, 2018; Portillo, 2018).

6.7 Recommendations

The severity of the issues discussed in this research suggest it is highly desirable to develop recommendations for the various groups of actors involved in land grabbing. These recommendations suggest varying courses of action for local communities, social movements/NGOs, governments, international organisations and companies.

Recommendations for local communities

- It is in the local community's interest to gain formal land title, and it is highly desirable for this path to be pursued where it is available.
- Local communities should give greater consideration as to how to strengthen their ability to claim land rights, by improving their documentation and action that demonstrate occupation of the land (*actos posesorios*).
- Local communities should invest in sharing information on land rights and land tenure issues with other communities and with local, national and international NGOs.
- Local communities in regions undergoing spatial transformation are encouraged to develop a range of community initiatives to assist in community development and natural resource management in order to better respond to land grabbing.
- Local communities should be more proactive in engaging with land investors to make the investors aware that there are communities resident in the area and that they intend to defend their rights.

Recommendations for social movements/NGOs

- NGOs should actively disseminate information to local communities on land rights, data on land use changes, tools for mapping, and the actions necessary to establish land entitlements, in order to improve the ability of local people to maintain their land access and to defend their land.
- NGOs should build solidarity and share ideas with kindred organizations at all levels.
- NGOs should continue to dialogue with government actors and companies.

Recommendations for governments

- Governments should enable the efficient and affordable formalisation of land title for people with customary land tenure.
- Governments should provide clear information about how land title can be formalised.
- Governments should assist communities involved in land tenure conflict.
- Governments should ensure adequate protection of people who defend their land rights.
- Governments should provide appropriate access to justice for local communities.
- Governments should ensure that essential public services are adequately provided in

deprived areas.

- Governments should provide effective monitoring of working conditions, especially in the dangerous industries.
- Governments should introduce effective environmental policies to avoid environmental harm.
- Governments must hold companies accountable for malpractice.
- Governments should establish a transparent registry of land ownership.

Recommendations for international organisations

- International organisations should promote the strengthening of corporate social responsibility policies and practices at all levels.
- International organisations should strengthen global standards for activities involving land investments.
- International organisations should pay greater attention to monitoring the impacts of land investments, especially over time.
- International organisations should stimulate the development of international law so that companies will be held to account for misconduct, including human rights violations and the destruction of the environment.

Recommendations for companies engaged in activities that might be perceived as land grabbing

- Companies should be mindful of the social and environmental consequences of their investments.
- For all land acquisitions, companies should conduct a due diligence assessment to establish whether there are people living on the land being acquired or that previously lived on the land in question.
- Companies should acknowledge the potential for local people to have rights over and interests in the land being acquired.
- Where people are (or were) living on land being acquired, companies must ensure that there is a fair process, adequate compensation, and adequate restoration of livelihoods.
- Companies should comply with international standards and community expectations regarding project-induced displacement and resettlement.
- Companies must ensure that there is a meaningful process of community engagement and procedural justice.
- Companies should demonstrate respect for local people and local cultures.
- Companies should provide the ability for local people to say 'no' to projects, and they should respect the outcome of such determinations by local communities.
- Companies should provide the resources to affected communities so that the communities can engage an independent consultant.

- Corporate headquarters must ensure that local operations comply with corporate policies and procedures and international standards, especially in relation to working conditions, etc.

6.8 Final remarks and future research directions

The literature on land grabbing suggests that land politics is entrenched with inequality and has never been more diverse (Borras, 2016). Even though there are various attempts to democratize land (at many levels), these initiatives are criticized for not being effective or sufficient (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012; Fortin & Richardson, 2013). The Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure (FAO, 2012); the Forest Stewardship Council (2015); the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS, 2014) exist at the international level to promote sustainability. As all these initiatives fall short (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012; Fortin & Richardson, 2013), there remains a need for more redistributive land politics, and institutional and political change to safeguard local communities (Borras, 2016). Therefore, the future research directions highlighted below focus on ways to redress the inequalities land grabbing brings about. These research directions also draw attention to the several issues that remained unanswered in understanding land grabbing and its governance dynamics. Based on the main research findings of this research and data on contemporary land politics in Argentina, the following five key issues are distilled.

Firstly, there is an immediate need for action research on improving communal and collective tenure security for local people. There is a need for researchers to participate in mapping activities, to consider how to strengthen the ability of communities to document land possession, and to contribute to the legal procedures to gain formal title, as well as to advocate for an improved process by which local communities can gain land tenure. Formalization of tenure could lead to better access to credit, and may assist farmers to create other sources of income by accessing machinery for the cultivation of crops. Another important action would be to conduct research on how local people and communities can be protected from the adverse or perverse outcomes that can arise from the formalisation of land tenure. Although the formalization of land title is a recommendation given above, there needs to be a better understanding of how customary tenure can be respected and protected.

Secondly, there is a need to understand under what conditions companies, philanthropists and company and conservation staff are willing to listen and positively respond to the issues faced by local communities. Especially when projects are already being executed, local people have many concerns. As observed in my research, there is little comprehension by company and conservation staff of the issues local people experience with their projects and programs. This

leads to a situation in which local people feel discontent and company staff consider them to be adversaries of their projects and programs, which is not a fruitful ground for change.

Thirdly, an interesting focus for future research in the context of the violence and repression in Latin America is to understand when and how social movements are likely to achieve their goals. Current political developments in Latin America are worrisome. Therefore, research should also be done on how community-focussed government agencies can establish their value in current political systems.

Fourthly, in research on land grabbing there is a need to stimulate different disciplines to work together. Many mainstream economists proclaim the expansion of industrial tree plantations, soy production, and other extractive industries like mining, as progress, whereas from an ecological or social perspective, they are destroying communities and ecosystems. If more attention would be paid by universities to combining economics with environmental and social sciences, heterodox economic approaches could regain popularity and influence in promoting natural resource use and distribution that are socially inclusive and environmentally friendly.

Fifthly, another direction for future research is to work on exposing the injustices created throughout commodity chains. These injustices could be presented more clearly to the end consumer. If consumers were more aware of the social and environmental harms that are involved with the production of commodities, consumer choices are likely to change.

As a final remark, I consider that it is important to take an explicitly normative stance in research and that this should be respected in academia. At present, academic research, guidelines, certification schemes and roundtables are not sufficiently assisting local communities. The objectivity-obsessed culture of academia has served the interests of global capitalism, enhancing inequality. The importance of remedying inequality is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (UN, 2015). Social and economic inequalities are detrimental for the environment, because the sustainable use of the environment improves when there is greater equality (Boyce, 1994; Dorling, 2017). These notions support scholarly activism to actively address inequality and the issues communities face. Borras (2016, p.2) defines scholar activism as “rigorous academic work that aims to change the world, or committed activist work that is informed by rigorous academic research, which is explicitly and unapologetically connected to political projects or movements.” Scholar activism should be stimulated by universities by giving immediate attention to wider dissemination of research findings and in a variety of formats.

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