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### **Class Conflict and Competing Visions of the Future in a Polanyian Countermovement: the Case of Mbombela Stadium, South Africa**

**ABSTRACT:** In recent years, land insecurity and “land grabs” have garnered significant attention among scholars and activists, who have focused primarily on how transnational investors have caused the dispossession and displacement of rural communities. Scholars have considered these sites of contestation potential spaces for a Polanyian countermovement that rejects capitalist “accumulation by dispossession.” To link dispossession in the name of neoliberal development schemes with the protective countermovements described in *The Great Transformation*, I analyze an ongoing dispute over the construction of a World Cup Stadium on a farm on the outskirts of Nelspruit, South Africa. Fascinatingly, residents who stand to be forcibly removed have maintained faith in market-based relationships, constituting a class of countermovement that embraces both capitalist solutions as well as social protection.

A growing body of evidence suggests land conflicts and land transfers throughout Africa are on the rise, much of which is occurring on so-called “customary land” (Borras et al. 2011; Deininger et al. 2011; Peters 2013). In what is often called the “land grab” phenomenon, transnational actors such as multinational corporations are buying millions of hectares of mostly rural lands in developing countries around the world for agricultural development, resource extraction, financial speculation, and various development agendas. In September 2010, the World Bank estimated that nearly 45 million hectares of land throughout the world had been transferred—a figure some twenty times higher than annual land exchange estimates during the preceding 40 years (Arezki 2011: 1). This estimate continues to rise with the help of the Land Matrix, an online, user-submitted database of large-scale land deals. The dominant narrative on land grabs hones in on the specious ways in which multinational corporations acquire land and the subsequent forced removals of the people who live or otherwise use the lands (Oya 2013). Recent activist campaigns such as “World vs. Bank” pioneered by NGOs Oakland Institute and The Rules have depicted the World Bank as a nefarious actor in this phenomenon, arguing that its prescriptions for the developing world include land policies that undermine local tenure and promote grabs. Yet, there are many “winners” and “losers” in the recent rush for land that undermine the common binary of land “stealers” and land grab “victims.” The dominant narrative disseminated by activists in this field belies the ways in which local “micro-capitalism” and within-state authorities collude with international buyers and sometimes expropriate lands themselves (Li 2007). In fact, popular attention on land grabbing

by multinational corporations overlooks the larger theme of land insecurity, its origins in colonial policies, and the confluence of legal pluralism and capitalist motivations that contributes to large-scale land dispossession today. In many instances, transnational land deals can be viewed as a new setting in which preexisting struggles for land and power play out. Recent research in Africa and beyond details the ways in which actors within states including “traditional leaders” and modern bureaucrats exploit ambiguities in legal codes, claims to indigeneity, and authority under “customary law” to profit from land deals (Berry 2004; Boone 2009; Boamah 2014; Dwyer 2013; Fairbairn 2013; James 2007; Levien 2013).

A Polanyian perspective on the land grab phenomena and land insecurity on the whole can elucidate the international historical context behind land deals and dispossession as well as the new subjectivities that the process engenders. By viewing the recent land insecurity trend as a sort of second enclosure movement brought on by neoliberal policies, we can forego a myopic view of the phenomenon in favor of one that understands the politics behind land deals. In what follows, I analyze an on-going land dispute in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa at the site of the 2010 World Cup Stadium, Mbombela Stadium, in the city Nelspruit. While this particular example of land conflict is not a *transnational* land deal itself, the deal was motivated by the FIFA World Cup, a transnational profit-making athletic association. Moreover, the dispute typifies land grabs in that it dispossessed marginalized populations, intensified class conflict, and gave rise to an organized resistance. The Mbombela Stadium land dispute also demonstrates how complex land grabs can be by showing how unanticipated actors—leaders of a communal property association—can use relative advantages in the South African land regime to alienate land for personal gain. Moreover, this particular land dispute seems more singular in its potential to complicate a traditional understanding of a Polanyian countermovement in that those participating in the resistance against the state-sponsored development scheme have maintained their faith in market-based development and are seeking efforts to privatize both their land and its future development. Recent anthropological scholarship on neoliberalism as a cultural project, not simply a political one, attests to its ideological pervasiveness and potential to be taken up by countermovements, populist agendas, and “pro-poor” policies (Ferguson 2009; Harvey 2005; Gardner 2012). While the Mbombela resistance offers a critique of state capitalism, it does not offer an economic or political alternative; instead, it appropriates neoliberal ideology to advance community-initiated development.

### **Polanyi and Countermovements**

Responding to Adam Smith’s contention that one of man’s most natural inclinations is to “truck, barter, and trade,” Karl Polanyi argues that rich anthropological analysis of various tribal societies around the world proves that man places higher value on “his social standing, his social claims, and his social assets” than on material goods (1944: 46). These goods are only useful insofar as they advance his social capital. Polanyi’s insistence that there is nothing “natural” about a completely “self-regulating” free-market economic systems is particularly salient today as the ideology of neoliberalism has become so pervasive as to be considered “common-sense” and to “have no alternative” (Harvey 2005). Despite today’s dominant

economic order's failure to completely adhere to its own free-market principles, it is useful to apply Polanyi's work to understanding the effects of neoliberalism today.

Speaking on the world's feudal past, Polanyi said that the shift toward mercantilism dislocated land from its rich social meaning—land was for much of human history “the basis of the military, judicial, administrative, and political system[s]” (1944: 69). In the advent of mercantilism, land was transformed into a fictitious commodity, its transfer and use no longer determined by customary law, but instead by the regulations of buying and selling. Prior to this revolution, Polanyi contended, the organization of society dictated the structure of the economic system. Mercantilism, however, was the first economic system to impose itself on society. The economic system—what Marx called the infrastructure or the base—became independent of the needs of society; in fact, it controlled it. Polanyi argued that this arrangement is inherently unsustainable because it divorces man from his humanity, destroying social relations, culture, and communities. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Polanyi saw a so-called self-regulating market economy become the basis for social organization in the Western world. On the national level, “movements for social protection” sprung up sporadically from various sources, demanding greater social protections from the detrimental effects of the constant, unregulated pursuit of profit. Polanyi argued that these countermovements were vital to the survival of humanity: “Indeed, human society would have been annihilated but for protective counter-moves which blunted the action of this self-destructive mechanism” (Ibid. 76). These countermovements lacked any global cohesion, working independently within their countries of origin. In some cases, these countermovements took on the ugly face of fascism, which came at a great cost to democratic institutions and to the people, who were “re-educated...through an act of mass conversion enforced against recalcitrants by scientific methods of torture” (Ibid. 241). On the other hand, were progressive countermovements, the other half of what Polanyi called a “double movement.” According to his definition, a double movement consists of two, organizing principles of society operating simultaneously in the world. The principle of a self-regulating free market coexists with its diametrically opposed opposite—the principle of a world organized around “social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature” (Ibid. 136).

Yet, by Polanyi's account, the highly fragmented countermovements failed to adequately challenge the prevailing economic order, and the world fell into chaos in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later, widespread adoption of Keynesian economic policies throughout the century amounted to the most global, cohesive countermovement since before WWII. But the dominant global order again turned toward the ideology of the self-regulating market and market-based solutions to the world's ills, including structural adjustment programs and other liberalization measures some claim are responsible for land grabs in developing countries. Especially since the 2008 financial crisis, many critics have come to view the growing popular skepticism of neoliberal policies to be yet another opportunity to trigger a double movement, or perhaps even a “counter-hegemonic movement,” a new political and economic global order not based on capitalism (Evans 2008). The international “land grab” phenomenon has great potential to precipitate a new counter-hegemonic movement out of the global South in response to accumulation by dispossession.

Harvey (2003) defines modern accumulation by dispossession as the often violent removal of people from their land and their means of production as a result of the need to turn to international locations to address capital over-accumulation, or creating a “spatial fix.” Accumulation by dispossession is an ongoing, highly uneven process that has historically and continues to transform “communal,” “collective,” or otherwise customary property rights regimes into exclusive property rights, resulting in a second enclosure movement (Arrighi 2003). Although the individualization of rural lands around the world has been escalating for quite some time without the help of international land deals (Peters 2004), it seems land transfers in the name of development have the potential for unprecedented impact on agrarian societies from Africa, to Asia, to South America. The recent explosion in demand since 2006 for “underused” lands around the world by multinational corporations and private investors has been credited to a sharp increase in urgency of the international food, energy, and financial crises (Borras and Franco 2012). Despite insistence from proponents, many recent agribusiness investments do *not* produce more food for consumption in the local markets, but produce mainly biofuels and mono-crop outputs bound for international markets (GRAIN 2008). And while fine-grained qualitative and quantitative studies of particular instances of land dispossession for large-scale development have yet to yield their definitive social and economic effects, the most recent studies reveal a wide variety of outcomes with both unanticipated “winners” and “losers” (see Wolford et al. 2013).

The rise of transnational land deals in the last decade and increasing number of land displacements and dispossession in the name of “development” have already sparked a number of highly vocal international campaigns, including *La Via Campesina*, the Shackdwellers International—a global network with affiliates in thirty-four countries—and *Abahlali baseMjondolo* in South Africa. These organizations and others have taken up oppositional discourses in light of land dispossessions, denial of public services, and threats to food sovereignty. *Abahlali* in particular is an ardent advocate of inclusive politics and self-determination in light of development schemes formulated “from the top” by elite politicians and technocrats. Channeling Franz Fanon, the *Abahlali* leadership invites intellectuals to experience slum living for themselves and live “inside history” to see how they are able to formulate their own politics (Gibson 2011: 19). Yet, these particular resistance campaigns should not suggest that the “land grab” phenomenon is defined by a rigid political dichotomy, with the “victims” of land deals—peasants, farmers, peri-urban slum dwellers—up against the hegemonic power of malicious politicians and the temptations of international investment. In Moore’s (1998) application of a Gramscian understanding of resistance to Zimbabwean rural politics, he rejects the early tendencies of Subaltern Studies theorists to isolate subaltern people and their efforts at resistance from larger webs of power. Instead, Moore argues, subalternity is fluid and relational. Similarly, hegemonic power is fluid and is constantly redefined by discourses about who can claim power and why. It is essentialist and mistaken to speak about the intentions of the “state” in the context of land deals; ethnographies of development have shown there are many groups involved in negotiating land deal boundaries and determining the intended beneficiaries—including elected politicians, “traditional” authorities, land owners themselves, and investor representatives. (Berry 2004; Doshi 2012; Fairbairn 2013; Levien 2013). The categories of subalternity and hegemonic power are both

“produced through cultural contestation” (Moore 1998: 351). The multiple layers of authority and notions of place are appropriated by different groups to advance their goals in the struggle over land. Within these contested spaces, identity, belonging, authority, and customary law are continuously debated; the struggle for land is not compartmentalized in separate spaces of resistance. Thus, when considering a Polanyian perspective on “land grabs,” countermovements should be viewed within a field of power, both exerting power of its own while also being restricted and shaped by exterior forces. In essence, countermovements ought to be studied with a Foucauldian notion of power because “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978: 95).

These theories of resistance can enrich studies of land dispossession and how they articulate with local politics and social conflicts. By recognizing resistance as relational, we are forced to view countermovements as being in communication with the hegemonic power they purport to resist and defined by fluctuating concepts of identity and space. In post-apartheid South Africa, access to land is central to efforts to reduce poverty and increase economic opportunities for the poor. Although the African National Congress (ANC), the country’s ruling political party, has made public promises to secure land tenure and increase access to land ownership for the country’s poor, current policies embrace an ideology that favors moving land from “low utility” to “high utility” and have led to the dispossession and forced removals of both rural, urban, and peri-urban populations living under insecure tenure. The land reform policy of restitution in particular has created an unanticipated opportunity for land grabs and social conflict.

### **Land Restitution in South Africa**

Racialized dispossession in South African history taints the ongoing “land question” of how to bring about more equitable land ownership in the country. The land restitution program was instituted in the 1990s to allow communities displaced after 1913 to reclaim ancestral lands. This and other features of South African land reform make the study of land dispossession especially interesting. Although South Africa has largely been considered a major player in the “grabbing” of lands in other countries, dispossession in the name of development by national and international actors has also occurred *within* the country, albeit with considerably less attention.

With the Department of Land Affairs’ (DLA) 1997 *White Paper on South African Land Policy*, the country’s trifecta of land reform was solidified: “restitution” would restore land to claimants whose land was expropriated during the apartheid era; “redistribution” would transfer land to new ownership based on a willing-seller/willing-buyer basis with some government assistance; and “tenure reform” would improve tenure security for those informally working on white-owned farms as well as provide reforms to “customary” tenure and private ownership. Restitution was intended for those members of a “nascent African middle class,” whose properties throughout the country were forcibly taken from them during their relocation to bantustans. Redistribution sought to bring the more “historically oppressed” who had never had rights to land before (James 2007: 8).

Land reform was ultimately packaged within the 1996 Growth, Employment, and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), a five-year development strategy focused on liberalization and privatization that marked a shift away from the populist ideology previously espoused by the ANC (Thwala and Khosa 2008: 46). The intended goal was to transfer about thirty percent of white-owned land to black ownership by 2014 and to promote individual farming in rural areas. In total, around eight percent of land was redistributed to black ownership, which is considered a major failure by both government officials and scholars. The “willing-seller/willing-buyer” system of restitution—greatly influenced by the free-market principles advocated by the World Bank—slowed the rate of transfer considerably. Another possible reason for the slow pace of transfer was the requirement that only groups submit land claims; individuals could not claim individual plots. The process of restitution required groups to put forward land claims with substantial evidence of historical dispossession and to create juridical identities, “communal property associations” (CPAs) to manage any restituted land. The foundation of the restitution policy, the 1994 Restitution of Land and Rights Act allowed land claims from “communities,” defined as “any group of persons whose rights in land are derived from shared rules determining access to land held in common by such group, and includes part of any such group” (Department of Land Affairs 1994: I.iv). Thus, the statute recognizes customary tenure arrangements that existed prior to land dispossession, as stated in the definition of the “right to land”: “any right in land whether registered or unregistered, and may include the interest of a labour tenant and sharecropper, a customary law interest, the interest of a beneficiary under a trust arrangement and beneficial occupation for a continuous period of not less than 10 years prior to the dispossession in question” (Department of Land Affairs 1994: I.xi). Restitution of land does not result in legal private ownership, but it *de facto* holds that status in practice. The Communal Property Associations Act of 1996 requires CPAs to elect a leadership that must be accountable to the association membership and draft constitution. The membership must constitute a community, or group of people whose claim to land is predicated on common heritage or history. The politics of inclusion is complex, often requiring membership fees and purported belonging to a common ancestry.

CPAs mirror land management in the former bantustans, where chiefs hold land “in trust” on behalf of citizens. Here, land disputes have long been sites of class conflict and authoritative exploitation. During colonial rule in Africa, colonial powers constructed the concept of “customary law,” often confusing different community authorities for political rulers, granting them powers of land alienation, the end result serving European interests in expropriating land (Chanock 1991; Moore 1986). Colonial policy had an enduring effect on notions of “traditional,” making “rights of access contingent upon people’s social identity” (Berry 1993: 39). As a result, Africans “sought to negotiate new social identities in order to take advantage of commercial or political opportunities” and continue to do so today (Ibid). In South Africa, chiefs were figured into the governance project of indirect rule, and they became salaried officials tasked with allocating land. These measures by the state weakened individual claims to land and ensured that European settlers would have an advantage in acquiring land (Cousins 2008: 114). In more recent years, chiefs in South Africa and throughout Africa have been implicated in the illegal sale of lands under customary tenure to national and international developers. In fact, the resurging power of “traditional authority” across the African continent

has been linked to increased land alienation for development (Burnod 2013; Fairbairn 2013). Decentralization reforms in land management in Ghana, Benin, and elsewhere have opened up the field for elites to lay claim to historical knowledge, autochthony, and “customary practice” to legitimize authority—a legacy of the colonial fixation on the “traditional” (Berry 2004). The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform of South Africa is considering a similar decentralized model that gives traditional councils greater control over communal land—a move that could exacerbate rural tenure insecurity and result in more land deals.

In the South African land reform program of restitution, the primacy of claims to “tradition” and autochthony endure. The politics of exclusion that these claims play into can deepen social inequality by rewriting concepts of citizenship and, therefore, entitlement (Geschiere 2009). Within CPAs, leaders can exploit power much in the way chiefs did in the past and continue to do. “Land grabs” do not only occur under the dictates of a multinational corporation or a corrupt chief; elected public officials or private officials, such as those overseeing the operation of CPAs, can be responsible for alienating land without proper authorization.

### **Mbombela Stadium**

The 2010 FIFA World Cup Tournament was hailed as a shining moment for South Africa. The country proudly exhibited its unity, reliance, and triumph sixteen years after the end of apartheid. In fact, the country was lauded for putting on a spectacular show, ensuring low crime rates, and providing excellent hospitality toward the thousands of international football fans. For all of the euphoria surrounding the event, the World Cup has failed to make good on its purported investments. The government justified the spending of some R55.3 billion in preparation for the sporting event by arguing it was a long-term investment in the country’s economic future. This a common argument, especially made by country hosts of the Olympic Games, to justify the millions spent on infrastructure and national showmanship (Rose and Spiegel 2010). President Jacob Zuma proclaimed the World Cup as an opportunity for “long term economic growth and the creation of decent jobs” (SAPA 2009). In the months leading up to the event, the World Cup was touted as an antidote to the country’s employment and economic growth woes, backed up by promises of huge returns on investment.

Yet, since the games have ended, new data has come to light that contradicts these premises. For the year 2010, annual employment fell by 4.7 percent, and the construction industry in particular contracted by 7.1 percent. The construction jobs created by the World Cup disappeared immediately following the games’ conclusion (Bond and Cottle 2011: 49). The government ended up spending eleven times as much as originally projected, a total of R27 billion (2010 FIFA World Cup Country Report). Both FIFA and FIFA sponsors were not required to pay tax to the South African government, and the organizations received free unlimited internet and telephone access and greatly discounted hotel rates for FIFA staff and affiliates (Ibid: 47). The total revenue to FIFA was R25 billion, completely tax free, the most profitable World Cup for FIFA yet (Ibid: 48). Even if South Africa benefitted tremendously from investment in the World Cup, the great human costs of putting on the event were not insignificant.

Land dispossessions were a major feature of the 2010 World Cup preparations. In fact, forced removals are a hallmark of mega sporting events the world over. In Johannesburg, one thousand people were forcibly removed from construction sites in “Soccer City,” the location of the city’s soccer stadium. In Cape Town, a governmental clean up to remove informal businesses and the homeless from the city streets resulted in the construction of the resident-named *Blikkiesdorp* (literally “tin can town”), a temporary refugee camp of one-room tin structures for 1,400 families. Those in the rural areas faced betrayal by traditional leaders and politicians alike, who exercised their power to ensure the construction of costly new stadiums. The construction of Mbombela Stadium, located immediately outside of the historically Afrikaner town of Nelspruit, was fraught with corruption and rights violations.

The Mdluli clan has a long history in the area that is now Nelspruit, occupying the land long before the Great Trek of the mid-1800s. According to the Mdluli, sometime after 1913, the land was taken from them by white settlers. In 1890, HL Hall & Sons, a fruit farm, was founded on the land by Boer pioneers. Many of the families living on the land, which became Mataffin Farm, were hired as farm workers for the growing company. In the late 1990s, the owners of HL Hall & Sons decided to sell the Farm to focus on property development. The Restitution Act allowed those families that had lived on the land prior to Boer encroachment to set up a land claim after the property went for sale. The Mdluli clan brought a land claim to 6,000 hectares of Mataffin Farm to the Land Claims Commission, later forming the communal property association, the Matsafeni Trust (McKinley 2011: 283). As part of the sale agreement, the Mdluli were obligated to allow the former employees of the farm living on the land or the “lawful occupiers,” to continue to live on the land. In 2003, the Matsafeni Trust, made up of both Mdluli clan members and “lawful occupiers,” became the lawful owners of the land.

In 2006, the Trust leadership surreptitiously sold 70 hectares of land to the municipality for a highly suspicious R1 sale price. The National Land Minister and the National Land Claims Commission argued that the sale was illegal without the express approval of the members of the Trust. Yet, Mpumalanga’s World Cup director defended the deal, dismissing the contentions over the sale as the result of “internal bickering,” which could not stall the immediate construction of the stadium and the need to “do our continent proud” (Ntsaluba 2008; McKinley 2011: 287). According to the New York Times, two schools—John Mdluli Primary School and Cyril Clark High School—were bulldozed to make way for the stadium (Bearak 2010). Prominent human rights lawyer Richard Spoor came to represent the lawful occupiers and their descendants, who called themselves the Matsafeni Trust Beneficiaries. According to him, the leadership of the Matsafeni Trust did not have proper representation of the lawful occupiers and did not seek their approval for the sale. Moreover, the exclusively Mdluli Trust leadership had long-term ties with Robert Gumede, billionaire and public backer of the ANC, who was interested in making the Trust land the site of a stadium for the World Cup in 2010. Reportedly, the Trust leadership’s original intent was to sell more land than required for the stadium to the municipality, which would use the surplus to build luxury apartments (Spoor 2013).

Richard Spoor and the Trust Beneficiaries, reportedly 883 out of 1,250 families, challenged the R1 deal (Hartdegen 2008). One affected individual remarked that the leadership



was merely interested in “gathering wealth for themselves,” calling those behind the sale “ruthless capitalists” (McKinley 2011: 287). The Trust Beneficiaries demanded that the leadership of the Trust resign and for democratic and transparent elections to take place (McKinley 2011: 292). The Beneficiaries applied for an interdict at the Pretoria high court where the municipality argued that the Matsafeni Beneficiaries were merely “undermining” the World Cup preparations and “subverting the national interest” (McKinley 2011: 293). Judge Mavundla handed down an incisive critique of the municipality, calling them modern day colonial land-grabbers: “I will not let this kind of thing happen again, not in this day and age,” he swore, granting the Beneficiaries the interdict (McKinley 2011: 293). Another court ordered the immediate replacement of the trustees. Yet, in an example of political and economic elite speaking for the disenfranchised masses, the chief Land Claims Commissioner came forward claiming to have made a deal with the Beneficiaries to allow the land to be ceded. The community of Beneficiaries responded with riots. Displaced students, then attending class in inadequate prefabricated classrooms, set them alight and were promptly arrested (Bearak 2010). In 2010, an independent forensic report placed much of the debacle’s blame on Jacob Dlala, the municipal manager who personally approved the construction of the Mbombela Stadium. Dlala ensured that the deal ultimately benefited a private development company, Blue Nightingale, which was directed by *the chairperson* of the Matsafeni Trust.

In the years following the stadium construction, the Matsafeni Trust leadership has taken over much of the assets it acquired from Hall & Sons, profiting exclusively from its management. The Matsafeni Trust and Mdluli Farms website claims that 118 hectares of land was “donated” to the municipality to build the World Cup Stadium. The interim trust that has been set up continues to be plagued by in-fighting; the Beneficiaries are without adequate representation within the leadership and the Mdluli leadership is actively attempting to forcibly evict the beneficiaries from the land, arguing they are in fact illegal invaders (Benny Mabunda, pers. comm. 2014). As a result, the municipal government split the Matsafeni Trust into two parts—one for the claimants and one for the beneficiaries. As of August 2014, this move was still being finalized. Although the Mdluli clan is not significantly wealthier or more powerful than the members of the Beneficiaries, the process of restitution in effect created an elite class of entitled Trust leaders, not entirely unlike traditional chiefs with greater powers to manage land. The ability to commandeer the valuable assets of Hall & Sons coupled with connections to wealthy benefactors, the Trust leadership was able to virtually deprive the Beneficiaries of any of the rights and privileges of being a part of the land restitution. Benny Mabunda, Beneficiary member and descendent of original Hall & Sons farm laborers, believes this is simply how politics works. “Whenever you are in a position of power and you have money, it’s always difficult for the less fortunate to fight with you,” Benny said, suggesting it’s easy to exploit privileges at the expense of the poor and powerless.

Without the benefit of control over the business and without land security, the Beneficiary community demanded that the government provide basic services. Throughout the land dispute, community members organized massive marches and protests—sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent—in response to the injustice. The government argued that they could not get involved due to the on-going land dispute, but community activism eventually

forced the local government to begin installing municipal water taps. Replacement schools have still not been built, despite promises. Living conditions on the farm are still very poor. Besides calling on the government to provide basic services, the community members have turned toward the private sector for development funds. They bid to have the newly-established University of Mpumalanga campus built on their land in hopes of bringing development in infrastructure and many jobs. The bid was later rejected due to the ongoing land disputes. Now, the community is pursuing a contract with the International Convention Center, hoping it will build in their community. Benny sees these efforts as a way to promote “self-initiated development.” He says that the government designs development interventions and comes in without any community consultation. Benny and others imagine a future for their community in which they use the rights to land that they have to bid for commercial property developers, and they believe, schools, roads, water access, and other infrastructure will follow suit.

Gardner (2013) shows how the Maasai in Loliondo, Tanzania view neoliberalism as a fruitful way to negotiate directly with foreign investors. While they recognize that neoliberal development schemes hold great risks to their property rights, they willingly participated in market-based relationships to stake claims to resources that were actively being commodified. They “see market driven relationships with foreign investors as sites of both appropriation and *recognition*” (Ibid. 378; emphasis added). Recognition of both legal claim to land and to identity is of great importance to communities living on the peripheries of cities, in “informal” settlements, or otherwise legally dubious areas seeking improved livelihoods and development. Grassroots GPS mapping campaigns in global urban slums are increasingly common because they provide communities with an objective means to corroborate local claims to lands and to show the extent of the need for social services (Warner 2013 NPR). For the Matsafeni Trust Beneficiaries, engaging with private investors is a means to have a third party recognize their land claim, and thus recognize their identity. These are inexorably tied because in South Africa, land restitution is contingent upon identity. In the land restitution program, claims to culture or ethnicity can translate to claims to property. The communal property associations in effect commoditize culture and disenfranchise those who do not have the same cultural claims as the claimants to land, like the Trust Beneficiaries. As Comaroff and Comaroff argue in *Ethnicity Inc.*, “...the commodification of culture may also entrench old lines of inequality, conduce to new forms of exclusion, increase incentives for the concentration of power, and create as much poverty as wealth” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 52). The Matsafeni Trust’s corporation Mdluli Farms, which produces avocados and nuts for the UK market, capitalizes on the clan’s cultural heritage. Their website reads, “The Mdluli Clan are descendants of Matsafeni Mdluli who was a leader of a secessionist group that broke away from the Swazi kingdom during the previous century.” The company statements argue that the strength of South Africa’s agricultural sector “lies in families,” using the Mdluli clan’s history as a marketing device. Inclusion in such a valuable “family,” is costly, and presents a lucrative opportunity for exploitation. A majority of the membership fees to communal property associations, says human rights lawyer Richard Spoor, are pocketed by the trust leadership, which often controls the revenue that comes from the restituted land through farming development or other business activity. In the process of the land dispute, the Trust Beneficiaries lost their identity as a community, first by being subsumed by the Matsafeni Trust and again when they were labeled squatters by the Trust

leadership. Private sector investment operates as third party recognition of their claim to land and their unity as a community.

Yet, seeking private investment sets the Trust Beneficiaries apart from the global countermovement in response to large-scale land dispossession embodied by *Abahlali Basemjondolo* and *Via Campesina*. While the latter are decidedly anti-corporate, the community beside the Mbombela Stadium represents less revolutionary politics. Suggestive of a deep awareness of the tendencies of authorities to exploit power and betray constituencies—either modern, elected officials or “traditional” ones—*Abahlali*’s democratic election policies require regular new elections (Patel 2006). Sibusiso Zikode, a former chairperson of the movement, so jaded with intellectualizing of the poor and resistance movements, has called for an anti-politics or a “metapolitics.” Its philosophy rejects top-down forms of governance and proposes a radical break from party politics. The movement seems to approximate what Evans (2008) called a truly counter-hegemonic countermovement. In addition to its ongoing political project, *Abahlali* makes consistent demands for “The Right to the City,” including rights to basic services, public housing, and equal access to education for the poor. The Trust Beneficiaries have made very similar demands for their community with some success, albeit on a much smaller scale. They saw the tremendous amount of spending that went into the Mbombela Stadium, justified for its supposed economic and social benefits. But they wound up losing more than they started with due to the World Cup investments. Calling on the government to provide basic services and opportunities while maintaining some faith in the model of development that undergirded the World Cup event, the Trust Beneficiaries take greater issue with people in power than their ideology. In contrast, *Abahlali* calls for utter dismantling of South Africa’s economic policies. The difference in approaches to justice raise the question of whether organized movements like the Trust Beneficiary’s ought to be included in global dispossession countermovements. Can a countermovement still be productive if it doesn’t represent a radical break from the politics of the hegemonic power?

## **Conclusion**

The Mbombela Stadium land dispute is a striking example of how “land grabs” can be perpetrated by actors within states—and not exclusively by politicians or chiefs. The land reform policy of restitution created a space where previously landless people could exploit relative advantages at the expense of certain groups whose claims to land are overridden. The process of resistance is an ongoing effort to be recognized by outside groups, including potential investors, as a legitimate, landholding community. For the community, market-based relationships hold the promise of being recognized when political leaders refused to acknowledge their existence and their legitimate claims to land.

The sites of land grabs are contested spaces of meaning about belonging, entitlement, land use, and “visions of the future” (Peters 2013). They are also sites where preexisting struggles for political, social, and economic capital are played out. The scale at which land grabs are occurring around the world presents a fertile opportunity for a global, cohesive countermovement to emerge. Some organizations have literally set up across continents, and

grassroots movements around the world are appropriating a unifying progressive discourse. For example, legal empowerment NGOs present one of the most universally appealing pro-rights argument to be taken up by land and dispossession movements. But must these organizations and their counter-hegemonic discourses be unified to truly challenge the threat of land dispossession? Should their discourses disagree with every part of the politics that enable land grabbing? Or can they incorporate particular elements into their vision of development? According to Foucault, even resistance movements are formed within the confines and the influences of society at large, not in isolated spaces. This however, does not mean that resistance movements cannot have a truly transformative impact on politics. In fact, the Mbombela Beneficiaries may have envisioned a future that is more possible within our world than the politics advocated by *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. International attention should shift toward the movements that have been shown to truly challenge land dispossession—regardless of their politics—to allow global sharing of ideas and support in these struggles over land and visions of the future.

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