

Cornell University Press Book Series

On Land: New Perspectives in Territory, Development and Environment

Series Editors

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Capinar é muito bom! (Hoeing [working the land] is very good!)
É pena que é difícil! (It's a shame it's so difficult!)
(Song sung by rural community in northern Mozambique)

Struggles over access to—and the use of—land have shaped the nature of modern states, societies, and communities. Such struggles derive more from the abundance of values, meanings, and claims on the land than from its purported scarcity. Throughout time and across place, land has constituted sustenance, territory, culture, ecosystem, possession, power, and profit. It inspires poetry as well as violence, and gives rise to metaphors of beauty, vulnerability, and power. From the creation of empires to European colonization to the contemporary scramble for natural resources, land has been a critical component of settlement, livelihoods, and identities. The search for “new” land—land that is characterized as virgin, empty, or idle—has motivated political and economic expansion and generated recurrent concerns about the availability and distribution of resources. Smallholders, city dwellers, pastoralists, state bureaucrats, investors, social movement actors, and scientists all value land in different ways, many of which are incommensurable. Valuation—through affect and desire as well as economy—produces inequalities and shapes our histories of and on the land.

This book series will explore the variety of ways in which the multifaceted nature and dynamics of life on the land have shaped development, territoriality, and the environment in particular places and historical moments. We seek to publish work that crosses regional, disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical boundaries. We are looking for authors addressing questions inflected by class, gender, race, and generation, as well as spatial and environmental transformations encompassing and extending beyond those inspired by work on agrarian questions that has motivated much scholarly work over the past century.

This is an appropriate moment to be building this series. Questions related to the meaning and control of land have taken on new urgency in the current historical moment, shaped by mounting pressures to convert land into commercialized and financialized commodities for local and globalized circulation, adding to already existing political, economic, and ecological stress. Land has become a central component in most new policies to transform urban and rural landscapes for economic and political gain, in terms of more intensive production of energy, food, natural resources, and as an object of globalized speculation, expropriation, and migration. In some parts of the global South, the stampede for land reflects a “global land grab” that challenges us to rethink our understanding of land politics.

In order to elaborate on how we understand the multiple dimensions and meanings of land, we draw on the concept of articulation. Articulation is a concept with a long history and multiple definitions, but three modalities are particularly relevant to our concerns in this series.

The first has to do with articulation of relations of production, property, and power that were once discussed in the “mode of production” debates. This framing of articulation had strong structuralist underpinnings, with scholars contending that the origins of a social formation shaped the paths and possibilities of the future. Analyses of colonial and postcolonial societies examined the relationships among different agrarian ideal types such as feudalism, the Chayanovian peasant economy, and capitalist agriculture. A long literature engages with the articulations or uneven combinations between different modes of production in and across specific sites. From this debate, we take the notion that social forms in particular places and times are constituted by multiple relations of production, property, and power.

The second use of articulation is associated with debates in cultural studies and the Gramscian notion of conjuncture. This idea of articulation maps closely to theories of intersectionality and Stuart Hall’s argument that if multiple relations of exploitation and discrimination exist, then they are all relevant. From this, we derive the importance of the diversity of conjunctural analyses that elicit close examination of historical trajectories, relational analysis, and understandings of context. Some might argue that land is timeless or relatively “fixed” and unchanging, but the uses, meanings, accessibility, and quality of land vary dramatically in different time periods and in different places.

The third use of articulation lies in its double meaning as both a coming together and an expression, such as in the articulation of beliefs or of political positions. Land has inspired passionate defenses, in a variety of forms from “weapons of the weak” to regional or national revolutions. It is no accident that the most well-organized transnational movement today is Via Campesina, fighting for the rights of the rural and urban poor to access land in ways compatible with their practices and desires. These articulations often come from places of profound vulnerability and deep inequality.

This series thus seeks to ground the intellectual, political, theoretical, and practical concerns of these articulations. We will publish work that uses land as an empirical, theoretical, and analytical window into broader processes of social and material reproduction, environmental change, livelihoods, nationality, coloniality, governance, and modernity. Subfields from agrarian studies to comparative historical sociology, political ecology and economic geography have emerged to explore the relationship between people and their environments, the rise of the modern state, inequality and economic justice, land ownership, property, urban forms from slums to suburbs, and market behavior. Besides these subfields, we expect work in this series to cross disciplinary lines as the land question has inspired a commingling of scholarship in multiple academic fields, working on themes of frontiers, colonization, displacement, settlement, land and resource management, conservation, conflict, landscape and ecosystem dynamics, and more.

We are seeking rigorously researched contributions that speak across disciplines and subject areas to ask new questions as well as those that take a new approach to old questions. We will

publish a range of manuscripts that, taken together in the series, will offer a richly nuanced set of arguments about ongoing relations between humans and the land.

Our principal aim is to create a distinguished and distinctive forum offering new perspectives on how people live and work on the land, and how the land—with all of its resources and qualities—has historically shaped, and continues to shape, human societies. The core questions that animate this series derive from our subheadings of territory, development, and environment.

TERRITORY *How have forms of governance and governmentality been linked—historically and today—to the appropriation, delineation, production, and management of land?* This question focuses on the relationships between land and territoriality. It locates the rise of the modern state and other governing institutions and processes within and through material claims to land as territory. Historical and contemporary forms of rule are intimately tied to the land. Territory has been constituted in a variety of ways, including through colonial and contemporary wars of conquest and occupation involving states, nations, and other claimants; through on-the-ground battles between “natives,” “settlers,” and “migrants”; and through formal, globally recognized and contested definitions of citizenship versus “alien” others inside and outside territorial bounds. Territorial relations have been constituted and strengthened through the development of increasingly sophisticated mapping tools and both remote and proximate land management systems, including property registries and mechanisms for extraterritorial governance. Understanding territory and territorialities requires focus on formal legal mechanisms (constitutions, jurisdictions, and mandates) as well as on the formal and informal processes and mechanisms deployed by different actors. The processes by which rule is enacted, negotiated, coerced, enabled, experienced, and contested are part of the making of territory. The persistent history and recent spike in countermovements by displaced and dispossessed communities raises questions around old and new forms of state authority, as demands for agrarian reform and food and land sovereignty raise questions of accountability, security and local control. Land users, occupants, holders, and controllers, in organized fashion or not, do not necessarily accept the territorializing intentions of would-be governing forces; understanding how their territorialities and intentions are expressed on the land before and after governing agents encroach on them to maintain power or extract surplus is also of importance in shaping access to, control of, and use of the land. To explore these complex dynamics, we welcome contributions that ground territory and territorialities in diverse and changing social and political constructions of the land.

DEVELOPMENT *How has control and management of land and labor been fundamental—and how is it fundamental today—to economic and social development?* This question explores the ways in which economic and political change has shaped and been shaped by relations between land, labor, and the environment. The desire for growth has turned land into a fungible factor of production and uncoupled land from labor with complex implications for environments, governments, and people alike. Among these developments have been the rise, spread, and hegemony of private property, the creation of major settler colonies that often constitute nation-states, and land reforms. Massive land acquisitions and transfers have reshaped the legal, economic, political, social, and cultural ways in which land is claimed and utilized even while small-scale subsistence and peasant farming continue. Besides the physical grabbing and legal dominations taking place, global financial networks are acquiring land and driving agrarian

change. Development policies and programs have been targeted toward the transformation of life on the land, whether in rural or urban areas. The rapid growth of new and old urban spaces has meant a reconfiguration of land uses and values in urban, peri-urban, and rural communities. Obscure financial tools are deployed to reward investors and hedge the risks associated with securitized real estate and infrastructure projects. Extensive migrations—rural-urban, transnational, circular—have become commonplace aspects of development, though poorly understood in either specific or general relation to the land. At the same time, multiple knowledges inform the process of development – examining the production, dissemination, and negotiation of different forms of knowledge and expertise are crucial to understanding the relationship between development and life on the land. We are interested in supporting authors writing on relations among various development processes taking place on the land: transformations, spatial reorganizations, capital investments, and social mobilizations.

ENVIRONMENT: *How has “nature” or the so-called natural environment been enrolled into the production of society and economy in different times and places?* Work across multiple fields of interdisciplinary inquiry has explained the mutual constitution of nature and society. Research in agrarian studies, environmental history, political ecology, science and technology studies, human geography, environmental sociology, and other fields has shown decisively that we cannot understand social life without understanding the importance of place, ecosystem, landscape, material resources, and socio-natural labor. Droughts generally have an ecological or climatic element to their constitution but water scarcity is a fundamentally social state and relationship. Differences in the value of land and land’s attributes underpin many of the greatest conflicts in human history as well as driving fundamental transformations such as the so-called Age of Exploration, the industrial revolution, colonization, and the rise of postwar multinational commodity chains. Likewise, land use change is one person’s degradation and another’s land development. Forests are planted, protected, produced through intentional human action; various components of the land—its vegetation, rocks, and minerals—are viewed by many peoples as having their own agency and spiritual being. Ecological thinking—in its broadest socio-natural form—is one way of understanding the relations among societies and natures, but there are other ways of seeing, as well, from the different vantage points of those who live and work on the land. From climate change to water pollution and chemical overload, the contemporary moment is one of socio-ecological crisis, and poorly conceived solutions that seem to blame the poor and misunderstand the origins of the problems. We are interested in work that explores the production of the environment as discourse, resource, context, and agent.

We have outlined an ambitious agenda. By describing these three themes in general terms and by drawing on the multiple analytical lenses made possible through concepts of articulation, we have demonstrated the series’ general orientation and its flexibility: we remain open to new topics, approaches, and areas. We are convinced that there is much work to be done, and that such work is needed to understand the past and the dynamics of the current moment. We are excited to build on a long tradition of work on land while forging new directions.

For more information about the series, please contact one of the series editors or the Senior Editor responsible for the series at Cornell University Press, Jim Lance (jml554@cornell.edu). All solicitations welcome; full manuscripts are required for review.