Agriculture and Human Values (2021) 38:271–282
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10152-3

SYMPOSIUM/SPECIAL ISSUE

Introduction to symposium 'Reimagining land: materiality, affect and the uneven trajectories of land transformation'

Sarah Ruth Sippel[1] · **Oane Visser**[2]

Accepted: 12 September 2020 / Published online: 19 October 2020

Abstract
Over the past decade land has again moved to the centre of resource conflicts, agrarian struggles, and competing visions over the future of food and farming. This renewed interest in land necessitates asking the seemingly simple, but pertinent, question 'what *is* land?' To reach a more profound understanding of the uniqueness of land, and what distinguishes land from other resources, this symposium suggests the notion of 'land imaginaries' as a crucial lens in the study of current land transformations. Political-economy, and the particular economic, financial, or political interests of various actors involved in land projects do not directly result in, or translate into, outcomes, such as dispossession and enclosure, increased commodification, financialization, and assetization, or mobilization and resistance. All these processes are informed by different imaginaries of land—the underlying understandings, views, and visions of what land is, can, and should be—and associated visions, hopes, and dreams regarding land. Drawing on a variety of case studies from across the world, crossing Global North/South and East/West, and including contemporary and historical instances of land transformation, this symposium addresses the multifaceted ways in which implicit, explicit, and emergent understandings of land shape current land transformations.

Keywords Imaginaries · Land rush · Land transformations · Political ecology

Introduction

Over the past decade land has again moved to the centre of resource conflicts, agrarian struggles, and competing visions over the future of food and farming. The renewed attention to land is reflected specifically in 'land rush' literature, which has brought new attention to long-standing debates regarding land, access to resources, development, and rural livelihoods. This renewed attention is a stark breach with decades-long neglect of land in rural and agri-food studies, particularly in the Global North,[1] that started around the 1970s. Remarkably, this happened despite a proliferation of studies on landscape and 'more-than-human'–nature interactions. From 2007 to 2008 onwards, triggered by sharp food price hikes and the global financial crisis, rural land has turned from being an un-investable, forgotten object into a much sought-after target for investment. Multinational companies, banks, and states suddenly saw (farm)land and agriculture as stable ground for profit making. The renewed interest in land necessitated asking the seemingly simple, but pertinent, question 'what *is* land?' (Li 2014). How is it possible that something as banal as land has attracted so much renewed attention, and has been able to conjure up new investment vehicles (Clapp et al. 2017); geopolitical conflicts (McMichael 2013); and worldwide political mobilizations (Borras and Franco 2013) after decades of urbanization, rural outmigration, de-agrarianization, and economic growth that has increasingly relied on seemingly footloose capital and digital economies? Within the land rush, investors and financial institutions sought to return to the 'real',

The original online version of this article was revised due to severe mis-referencing.

✉ Sarah Ruth Sippel
sippel@uni-leipzig.de

Oane Visser
visser@iss.nl

[1] Institute of Cultural Anthropology/SFB 1199, Leipzig University, Leipzig, Germany

[2] International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Hague, The Netherlands

[1] We use the terms Global North/South as a shorthand to distinguish contexts marked by highly industrialized agricultural systems (US, Canada, some parts of Europe, Australia, New Zealand) from those where smallholder farming structures prevail. Obviously, there are important differences between and within the respective contexts.

and ploughed capital back into land as a 'tangible' asset, following the financial crisis of 2008, and the poor performance of 'traditional' asset classes. Land, however, turned out to be a resource unlike any other. Due to its multiple ontologies, its life-giving affordances, and its strong association with national territory, land is not only challenging to 'assemble' as a resource for global investment (Li 2014, p. 590), it is also an especially contested investment object. To reach a more profound understanding of this uniqueness of land, and what distinguishes land from other resources, this symposium suggests the notion of 'land imaginaries'—the underlying understandings, views, and visions of what land is, can, and should be—as a crucial lens in the study of current land transformations.

In what follows, we first outline the neglect of land in rural and agri-food studies over the past decades and the (partial) resurgence of attention for land since 2007/08. We then develop the notion of 'land imaginaries', drawing on the literature on 'environmental imaginaries' (Peet and Watts 1996; Mitchell 2011); 'sociotechnical imaginaries' (Jasanoff 2015; Jasanoff and Kim 2015); and 'spatial imaginaries' (Wolford 2004; Watkins 2015). Subsequently, the following three sections will zoom in on three lines of inquiry surrounding land imaginaries that we see as particularly fruitful for research. These are: (1) the trajectories of land imaginaries and land transformations; (2) land imaginaries and materiality; and (3) the affective dimension of land imaginaries. This symposium consists of four papers, which examine land imaginaries within farmland investment contexts in the Global North (Fairbairn, LaChance, De Master, and Ashwood on US farmland investment in California); the Global South (Beban and Schoenberger on land title reform in Cambodia); Global North investors in the 'Global East' (Visser on Western farmland investors in Russia and Ukraine); and a case of 'reverse investment' by emerging economy investors in the Global North (Böhme on Chinese farmland investment in rural Australia). The individual papers will be presented in the section(s) to which they contribute most.

From the neglect of land to the 'land rush'

The late-2000 rush for land came as a surprise to many researchers in an era that had been described as 'post-rural' and 'post-productivist', with rural lifestyles and livelihoods (including those of farmers) supposedly becoming more multifunctional, transient, less grounded, or even hyperreal (Cloke 1997). The question 'what is land?' was rarely asked anymore in rural, agri-food, and agrarian studies since the 1970s, and land as an object of study had increasingly moved to the margins of rural and agri-food studies (see e.g. Mormont 1990, p. 563). On the eve of the contemporary land rush, rural geographer Woods (2006, p. 580) argued that 'rural politics'—focussed on 'political debates concerning agriculture, or forestry, or the management of rural land more broadly'—had increasingly given way to rural social issues, such as rural identity or rural community as part of a 'politics of the rural'. In politics of the rural, the 'meaning and regulation of rurality itself is the primary focus of conflict and debate' (Woods 2006, p. 580), rather than its natural resources. The rising prominence of global commodity or value chains, circuits, and network approaches in agri-food studies since the 1990s (see e.g. Hughes and Reimer 2004; Fold and Pritchard 2005; Pegler 2015; Neilson and Pritchard 2011) equally represented a move away from farming and its embeddedness with land and the local environment, and redirected the focus on the sphere of global interconnections, entanglements, and flows.[2]

This shift away from rural politics, widespread in the Global North, was less notable in research on the Global South, where livelihoods of rural populations remained more strongly linked to farming and land.[3] The decline in attention for land was thus less pronounced in agrarian studies of peasants and small-scale farmers, agrarian movements, and land reforms in contexts of the South. However, agrarian studies focused primarily on actual land transformations and issues of accumulation and dispossession, and less on the specific relationships with, and understandings of, land, which were sometimes more assumed than comprehensively studied. For example, within the study of (continued) land reforms in many rural spaces outside the West—such as the market reforms in post-socialist Eurasia in the 1990s; the pink tide selective land reforms in Latin-America in the early 2000s; and ongoing market-based land reforms in Africa—land was mostly conceived of in terms of property and access, with relatively little attention for other ways of imagining and relating to land. 'Other'—that is to say non-property based—relationships with land, and land issues more generally, certainly remained a key focus in (anthropological) studies of indigenous populations (e.g. Tomlinson 2002; Barrera-Bassols and Zinck 2003), given the intimate relationship between land and colonial occupation, dispossession, and indigenous struggles for (land) rights and self-determination. In contrast with agrarian studies, anthropological research also engaged widely with relationships with land beyond property and access. However, the overall result was that understandings of land were largely neglected in

[2] See also the increase of research on rural (seasonal) migration (Gertel and Sippel 2014; Corrado et al. 2016).

[3] Obviously, various non-farm income sources, including wage labour and remittances, became more important in the Global South as well, but compared to the Global North, income from farming remained much more essential.

agrarian studies, unless land was 'othered' (i.e. owned by indigenous populations, or occasionally peasants).

While the decline of scholarly interest in land fits within the general fading of interest in rural politics since the 1970s, it is remarkable that this decline has persisted within the surge of studies on landscape[4] (e.g. Daniels and Cosgrove 1993; Gosden and Head 1994; Schama 1995, for early examples; cf. Cloke 1997; Head 2000) and the emerging research strands that have developed new perspectives on the interrelationship between human and non-human 'actors', whether framed in terms of 'hybridity' (Haraway 1991; Whatmore 2002) or actor-network theory (Callon et al. 1986; Latour 1993). These new fields of environmental research have led to rich work on flora (e.g. trees, border plants, and food crops; cf. Heuts and Mol 2013; Martin 2020), animals (e.g. Saltzman et al. 2011; Holloway et al. 2014), and even mushrooms (Tsing 2018) and bacteria (Lorimer 2020). However, land (and soil) have remained remarkably understudied. Similarly, the literature on landscape has focused more on 'scape' than on 'land',[5] as illuminated by the proliferating use of 'scapes' in this literature, such as 'countryscapes' (Cloke 1997), 'streetscapes' (ibid.), 'lifescapes' (Convery et al. 2005), and 'dreamscapes' (Jaenke 2001). In short, these studies have re-focused on the diversity of more-than-human actors that shape place, and have decentred political economy forces shaping land and landscape in favour of a multitude of actors across scales (McCall Howard 2018).

The land rush brought back rural politics with a vengeance, not only in the Global South but notably also in the Global North. Long standing concepts such as commodification, (new) enclosures, and primitive accumulation (and later, accumulation by dispossession) rapidly took centre stage in the academic debate on the new rush for land, and were key in connecting academic and activist discourse. In the rush to make sense of the novel and escalating phenomenon of transnational land deals, or what Oya (2013) called the 'land grab literature rush', longstanding political economy concepts were applied, without much consideration of new strands of literature on landscape, more-than-human natures, or other relationships with land.[6] While concepts such as enclosure and accumulation by dispossession have been effective in exploring general drivers and outcomes of the land rush, they have been less useful in doing justice to the geographical unevenness and highly divergent, place-specific outcomes of these land transformations. Scholars thus pointed to the need for longer term, in-depth, empirically and historically grounded studies (e.g. Ouma 2014; Pedersen and Buur 2016; Goldstein and Yates 2017; Schoenberger et al. 2017). Rather than employing a global imaginary of land transformations within, as Le Billon and Sommerville (2017, p. 214) put it, 'dualistic framings of victimization or beneficiation', it is important to understand the situatedness and multiplicity of actors who engage with land, along with their various positions of power, interests, and constraints.

More recently, building upon, and going beyond, the initial 'land rush' period, a burgeoning body of research has added more nuance to the dynamics of current land transformations. For example, scholars have started to unpack the intersections between farming and finance—initially often portrayed as the 'big bad wolf' hungry for farmland (Ouma 2014, p. 163)—and have argued that turning land into a financial asset class is not a smooth pathway but requires active work on land's 'investability' and is pursued by a host of actors with different interests, motivations and underlying moralities (e.g. Li 2014; Williams 2014; Ouma 2016; Kish and Fairbairn 2018; Sippel 2018). Similarly, scholars have critically investigated the role of China as another supposed 'key driver' of the land rush and have argued that Chinese investments are not as dominant and different from 'Northern' investments as is often suggested, as well as neither necessarily state-led or food security driven (Bräutigam and Zhang 2013; Oliveira 2018; Böhme 2020b). While these recent studies have added a more nuanced understanding of the unevenness, complications, and contradictions involved in current land transformations, this symposium seeks to go one step further by placing the emphasis on the 'imaginaries' of land, that is to say the various understandings of land that are implicitly or explicitly informing these projects in regard to land.

Land imaginaries as a lens to study current land transformations

This symposium employs the notion of 'land imaginaries' to capture the underlying understandings, views, and visions of land, which we consider crucial within current land transformations. Political-economy, and the particular economic, financial, or political interests of various actors involved in land projects do not directly result in, or translate into, outcomes, such as dispossession and enclosure, increased commodification, financialization, and assetization, or mobilization and resistance. All these processes are

[4] The rise of landscape studies was predominantly confined to the Global North, with a strong focus on the UK and the US.

[5] For exceptions see the anthropological study by Peace (2005), which specifically focuses on land and landscape, and the studies by Puig de la Bellacasa (2015) and Krzywoszynska (2019).

[6] Most of the early studies on the land rush (including, admittedly, by one of the authors, Visser and Spoor 2011) focussed primarily on mapping the unprecedented number, scale, and speed of global land acquisitions (e.g. Borras et al. 2011; Cotula 2012), subsequently raising debate about methodologies, measurements and 'messy hectares' (Edelman 2013).

informed by different understandings of land, and associated visions, hopes, and dreams regarding land. Land imaginaries encompass the various societal understandings of what land is (land's ontology), its different uses and values (land's social 'affordances'), and ideas of what it can, or should, do in society (Li 2014, pp. 589–590). Land imaginaries are highly divergent across time and space; they can become hegemonic, silenced, or marginalized; appear naturalized or be the grain for contestation; they work as a means of oppression as well as liberation. While recent scholarly interest in land has indicated the importance of these various views and understandings of land, they have so far mostly been addressed implicitly (for an exception see Panikkar and Tollefson 2018). This symposium moves the imaginary constructions of land to the centre of analysis and asks: *What are the distinct views of land within current land transformations, how do they take shape, and what are their implications?* We ground our notion of 'land imaginaries' in three, partly overlapping, bodies of literature on 'environmental', 'sociotechnical', and 'spatial' imaginaries. We also conceptually distinguish between two dimensions of imaginaries, which, in reality, are not clearly separable from one another but interact in complex ways.

Firstly, land imaginaries can work as implicit components that inform practical engagements with land in rather subtle, unconscious, or unreflective ways. These underlying mental and cultural frameworks are notably reflected in the notion of 'environmental imaginaries' in environmental history and political ecology (Peet and Watts 1996; Nesbitt and Weiner 2001; McGregor 2004; Davis 2011; Mitchell 2011). Here, environmental imaginaries refer to the ways in which societies collectively construct, interpret, and communicate nature (McGregor 2004, pp. 594–595). By providing the language, norms, metaphors, and meanings for constructing and expressing nature, land imaginaries, like environmental imaginaries at large, can become naturalized, determine how environmental issues are interpreted, and define what is considered ethically or morally right or wrong in regard to nature. This first dimension of land imaginaries thus refers to the often taken-for-granted, unreflexive, or subconscious ideas that groups of people have developed about their (or others') environment. Underlying social constructions and land uses in a rather implicit manner, these imaginaries can nevertheless have wide-reaching implications. Environmental imaginaries and their constructions of unused and 'empty' lands, environmental crises, or 'boom frontiers' sustained the establishment of European colonial order, and were powerful narratives used to justify the imperial goals of intervention, settlement, and control (Davis 2007; Shetler 2007; Mitchell 2011). Studying these notions about land through, for example, narratives, paintings, archival documents, or maps helps to understand how the relationship between society and land has been constructed by different people across time and space, and how land is valued within these contexts. It furthermore points to the political struggles and conflicts involved when imaginaries of land not only travel but also compete with, or triumph over, others (Delaney 2001; Sodikoff 2007). Such clashing land imaginaries reflect struggles over control of natural resources, and can be driving forces behind nature politics (Nesbitt and Weiner 2001).

Secondly, land imaginaries can also become an explicit and conscious driving force of land transformations if they express actively envisioned land futures (yet) to be realized. In this second dimension of land imaginaries, we are thus interested in imagining as a social practice of actively envisioning and working towards new worlds and realities (Daniels 2011; Watkins 2015). The significance of imagination, as Ingold (2012, p. 3) holds, is more than the capacity to construct images or the power of mental representation, it means 'to participate from within, through perception and *action*, in the very becoming of things' (our emphasis). This dimension of imaginaries is especially prominent in Sheila Jasanoff's concept of 'sociotechnical imaginaries', which she defines as the 'collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures' (Jasanoff 2015, p. 322). The aspirational and normative components in regard to social futures captured by Jasanoff's notion of imaginaries are particularly important for this dimension of land imaginaries, as they invoke what the world is and *should* be, by performing and producing diverse visions of the collective good. Linking past, present, and future, here the focus is particularly on the dynamics of social change implicated in the notion of imaginaries, by placing the emphasis on the capacity of individuals and groups to see and think things differently from how they were previously thought. We suggest that this second dimension of land imaginaries—understood as active visions and novel understandings of what land can or should do—is equally an essential driver of (competing) projects of transforming land, materially or in regard to its social or moral understandings. These visions of land are reflected in the ways in which people actively work to influence and reshape human relations to land, together with the aim of realizing a particular view of what land can do or afford in society.

Two main variants of 'new' explicit imaginaries can be distinguished. First, the *extension* or 'translation' of existing land imaginaries into new geographies, spheres, or periods. Imaginaries that are new to certain geographies or 'resource frontiers' can be slight modifications of existing imaginaries. The newness is that certain areas are re-imagined as suitable for these imaginaries. For example, new infrastructures (roads, storage), agricultural technologies (liming), and expanding global value chains for soy have enabled the extension of imaginaries of efficient, square, large-scale mono-cropped farmland from the United States

into the Brazilian Cerrado (Ofstehage 2016), previously seen as of no use to agriculture. Another example is the imaginary of land envisaged and promoted in 'The Mystery of Capital' by De Soto (2000), which was key in extending the registration of private land property from Western 'mature' markets in urban real estate and commercial farmland to the marginal landholdings of slum dwellers and smallholders in the Global South. Second, new, explicit imaginaries can emerge as *alternative* or counter imaginaries, developed to contest and replace mainstream existing land imaginaries. Such alternative imaginaries have been identified by Panikkar and Tollefson (2018), who describe how a broad anti Pebble Mine coalition in Alaska foregrounded 'subsistence imaginaries'—grounded in indigenous subsistence cultures and modes of relating to land—to counter the dominant 'extractive imaginaries'. These alternative imaginaries became key components of environmental justice and land sovereignty initiatives. Also Schoenberger and Beban (2020) discuss how a land titling campaign in Cambodia opened up spaces for alternative, more equitable land imaginaries in a setting where visions and practices of large-scale top-down land exploitation constituted the hegemonic land imaginary.

For various reasons, land imaginaries constitute a useful addition besides related but broader concepts, such as socio-technical, environmental, and spatial imaginaries. Land has manifold features that (in most socio-cultural contexts) set it apart from other aspects of the natural environment, and which have important implications for how it is being imagined. Different elements of the environment enable divergent practices and imaginaries, depending on their spatial and material features (Bakker and Bridge 2006; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). A first important characteristic of land is its relatively fixed state.[7] Animals move, plants often expand (or are moved), and even large trees are logged and transported across the oceans as timber or biomass. Also, sub-soil resources like oil and minerals are widely moved across the world in global commodity chains. The bulkiness of land (and its generally lower value) impedes such transportation, which is rather limited, at least within the lifetime of a human. Moreover, land still remains, even if a layer of land (or soil) is removed (except for those cases where land is excavated in such large quantities that lakes or the sea make the land disappear, for example when sub-soil resources such as coal are extracted). Furthermore, land, more than any other object of our natural environment, often functions as a 'birthplace' or 'reservoir' of manifold resources. Land can be farmland or forest land, it can contain an endless number of mineral resources, and has recently gained value as a resource due to its CO_2 capturing capacity, via its soil or the trees growing on it. Further, and in contrast to many sub-soil natural resources, land itself—when used sustainably—is a renewable resource in its function as farmland, forest land, biofuel land, or land for solar panels or wind mills. Finally, land has life-giving capacities (Li 2014; Münster and Poerting 2016), it enables growing, gathering, and hunting for food, pumping up water, and building a house to live in.[8] In short, human survival is unimaginable without land (Münster and Poerting 2016), just as land would remain un-imagined without humans. Due to the above-mentioned features of (high degrees of) fixity, a reservoir of manifold resources, its capacity to constitute a renewable resource, and above all its life-giving capacities, land tends to have a high symbolic value in societies across space and time. Territory, belonging, identity—to mention just a few key aspects of the human condition—are strongly linked to land, more so than to other objects of the natural environment. Even water, which has at least the same life-giving feature as land, is less a symbol of territory or identity. Thus, the trajectories of land imaginaries, arguably more persistently than other imaginaries, have far-reaching real life consequences, and are often wrapped up with emotions and struggles. Overall, with this notion of land imaginaries we seek to inspire, focus, and bundle research on the above-mentioned aspects of land and their important implications for how we think of, and act in relation to, land.

To investigate the crucial role of land imaginaries in land transformations, the following questions guide the contributions to this symposium:

(1) What historical and place-based trajectories of land imaginaries can we identify? Which imaginaries have been dominant, suppressed, or contested within these trajectories? What are the implications of these trajectories for current transformations across regional con-

[7] It needs to be stressed that we do not see fixity as an absolute feature of land. However, when placed on a continuum, and compared to other resources, land tends to have more fixity. An elaborate discussion of land's (un)fixity is beyond the scope of the paper, but a few points are worth mentioning. Li's (2014, p. 589) statement that the core characteristic of farmland as a natural resource is its fixity, commenting that it cannot be rolled up 'like a mat', seems a universal truth—but in fact, rare opposing land imaginaries can be found that highlight fluidity. For example, Mexican peasants in the erosion-prone mountainous area of the Patzcuaro Basin imagine land as moveable (Barrera-Bassols and Zinck 2003). Sud (2019) describes the unfixity of land in Indian government policies. Furthermore, the boundaries of land, for instance vis-à-vis water, are often not clear cut or fixed, as ethnographic studies in muddy terrains have shown (Richardson 2016, 2018; Cortesi 2018).

[8] An additional feature of land is that whereas some natural resources depend on a lot of capital and technology to be assembled, land in many cases can generate food or value with relatively limited means. Related to that, land's history as a natural resource is about as long as human history, whereas some objects have only become a natural resource relatively recently.

texts and settings, especially concerning the opening and closing of agricultural frontiers?

(2) How are the imaginary and the material interlinked and co-produced in land imaginaries? Does the materiality of land pose limits on land imaginaries, and how do new representations of biophysical materiality allow for new imaginaries to emerge?

(3) How are land imaginaries connected with emotional, affective, performative, and embodied aspects of land use? How do these interlink with anticipations of imagined futures, and what role do these affective and anticipatory aspects play in developing alternatives to dominant or hegemonic understandings and uses of land?

Each of these sets of questions addresses a different gap in the land rush literature, and research on current land transformations more generally.

Trajectories of land imaginaries

The first set of questions reflects our aim to go beyond the unilinear, somewhat homogeneous, view of land investment and commodification. To this aim, we place the emphasis on the spatio-temporal variation in land investment trajectories and consider land imaginaries as a field of contestation over different ideas and visions regarding land's past, present, and future (Panikkar and Tollefson 2018). Rather than seeing land investments as a kind of juggernaut that relentlessly rolls over the global countryside in an undifferentiated way, it is crucial to uncover the—sometimes drastic—divergence in land investment trajectories across space (Visser 2017), thereby taking the historical dimension more seriously (Edelman and León 2013; Ouma 2016).

We do not contest the *longue durée* development of commodification—and more recently assetization—of farmland and other natural resources within the larger development of the 'capitalization of almost everything' (Leyshon and Thrift 2007). Land has invariably been an object of struggle through human history, both in the form of conquest and dispossession (whether induced by clan orientations, nationalism, (neo)colonialism, and/or capitalist expansion at large, Scott 1998; Layoun 2001; Moore 2005), and resistance and counter-mobilisation (Wolford 2010; Morris 2014; LaDuke 2016). Yet, such trends are still uneven in their strength, pace, and sometimes direction. Looking closer at concrete regions and localities we find 'sluggish commodification', disappointed farmland investors and failed investments (Magnan 2015; Kuns et al. 2016; Visser 2017); contestations and renegotiations of land's 'investability' and assetization (Ouma 2020; Sippel and Weldon 2020); and agricultural frontiers that have turned into 'frontiers in ruins' (Münster 2017). As Crowley and Carter (2000) argued for western Kenya, agrarian change comprises complicated and contrasting trends, some of which are more obvious than others, and thus always needs to be understood as a 'heterogeneity' and a 'patterning or patchiness' (Crowley and Carter 2000, p. 385).

Environmental history provides manifold examples of situations where environmental imaginaries have crucially influenced the 'success' or 'failure' of land projects, often with long-lasting detrimental implications for the affected communities. Davis (2007) reveals how, during the French-colonial occupation of North Africa, the 'declensionist environmental narrative', which primarily blamed Arab nomadic pastoralists for deforesting and desertifying the once highly fertile 'granary of Rome', became the dominant view of North Africa's environmental history. The same legend of the 'granary of Rome' that, as Swearingen (1987, p. 35) shows, inspired the early French colonial wheat producing ventures in Morocco, but 'proved to be a mirage that [v]anished in the reality of the Moroccan natural environment'. These narratives, and associated classifications of Moroccan land as 'productive' or 'unproductive' (*Maroc utile* and *Maroc inutile*), were not only used to justify and enable the appropriation of land and resources and to control local populations, but their legacy survives in contemporary policies and, as ecological science, still informs environmental research. Similarly, environmental histories of the prairies (Worster 1979; Cronon 1991; Moon 2020), the Eurasian Steppe (Moon 2013), and the Amazon (Peluso 2012), and their insights on, amongst others, the construction, opening, and decay of agrarian resource frontiers, enrich the study of contemporary land transformations as they alert us to the myths these might be grounded on, and their potential delusionary character.

While research on environmental and sociotechnical imaginaries has traced their emergence, phases of struggle, and fortification, little attention has been paid to how land imaginaries leave the stage. Jasanoff (2015) in her insightful typology of phases of a sociotechnical imaginary distinguishes between origin, resistance, embeddedness, and extension of imaginaries. A phase of demise is remarkably absent. We believe that the demise of land imaginaries is just as important to understand land transformations as their emergence or proliferation. Mitchell (2011) pays more attention to the demise of (environmental) imaginaries and observes that they can disappear rather suddenly. Which factors contribute to the demise of an imaginary or the pace and trajectory of its demise are still open questions, opening up important avenues for further research on land imaginaries. What is, for instance, the 'after life' of large-scale transnational land investments? In the case, of oil palm plantations, Li (2018) argues that the materialization of the imaginary of rationalized, highly efficient plantations has brought about an infrastructural violence in the form of

monotonous grids of roads, and oil palm fields that leaves little room for alternative land imaginaries, let alone a return to the previous land uses. In the case of the French colonial visions of North African land, the imaginary of North Africa as the 'granary of Rome' disappeared rather quickly in the face of two combined factors, which came to the fore in the early 1930s: the high production costs and periodic crop failures given Morocco's rather marginal environment for wheat cultivation, on the one hand; and the insight that Moroccan colonial wheat production competed directly with French production, on the other, as Moroccan wheat production was too expensive to be sold on the world market, and thus had to be absorbed by the 'metropole' (Swearingen 1987, p. 27). Recalcitrant nature, however, did not enhance the emergence of local counter-imaginaries, but rather led the same French colonisers to resort to a new, California-inspired imaginary, namely 'to convert the Morocco first conceived as a granary of wheat into a vast [citrus] orchard' (R. Hoffherr in L'Economie marocaine 1932, quoted in Swearingen 1987, p. 61).

Visser's study of the 'black earth' (2020) is an example of how the longitudinal research of contemporary farmland investments can be fruitfully combined with perspectives from environmental history to gain deeper insight into farmland investment trajectories and the powerful, and potentially delusionary, role of imaginaries within these. Visser demonstrates how optimistic farmland imaginaries celebrating the 'black soil' have dominated the land imaginaries of external actors, and have recurrently led them to underestimate other 'hard' agricultural facts, such as the harsh climatic conditions in the agrarian heartland of Russia and Ukraine. Contrary to the imaginary of abundance and fertility associated with the black earth soil, the material climatic conditions of unseasonal frosts, erratic rainfall, and severe droughts have repeatedly derailed large farmland investment projects of outsiders coming into the region.

Materiality and land imaginaries

The predominant focus of the land rush literature on commodification, often framed in terms of accumulation by dispossession, primitive accumulation, or enclosure (e.g. White et al. 2012; see Hall 2013 for a critical review), while being insightful in itself, means that land is predominantly conceived of in terms of private property (and to some extent territory). This focus on the legal status—or de facto control—of land has led to ignorance of other important aspects, such as the material dimension of land. The second set of questions seeks to open this 'black box' of materiality to further the debate on current land transformations. On a rather general or global level, debates regarding land—within academia and beyond—are increasingly informed by the notion that material, and particularly biophysical, limits to human land arrangements have become more tangible and urgent. This widely shared notion is framed in different, partly overlapping, ways, such as in terms of ecological concerns (e.g. regarding fertile land as a non-renewable resource, Montgomery 2007); observations about closing frontiers of cheap nature (Patel and Moore 2017); the realization that specific types of land use can contribute to, or mitigate, climate change and global food insecurity (Weis 2010); and pleas for a shift to (climate) smart or digital farming (Clapp et al. 2018).

However, when it comes to concrete cases of farmland investment and transformations, the role of material aspects has mostly featured only in a loose, more presupposed manner. The papers by Böhme (2020a) and Visser (2020) show that when farmland investments take shape in specific farm sites, optimistic land imaginaries can meet different realities where the materiality of environmental conditions constitute obstacles to the envisaged projects. Böhme depicts how Chinese investors mobilize 'quality imaginaries' of Australian farmland to market fresh milk to affluent, food safety concerned Chinese consumers. Within this imaginary, the company has developed a narrative of a 'natural', 'pure', 'pristine', 'pollution-free' paradise where 'happy cows' breathe clean and fresh ocean air at the 'edge of the world'. This land imaginary, she argues, not only stands in stark contrast to the industrial and technological character of the farm and the heavy transportation infrastructure the export of fresh milk requires, the very notion of the remoteness it celebrates also represents a substantial material obstacle. The biophysical characteristics of fresh milk, Böhme concludes, make it a 'stubbornly local food', which does not align well with the geographical remoteness of Australian land—potentially putting the investment project at risk. In a similar vein, Visser's paper reveals how a land imaginary largely ignorant of climatic materialities has resulted in numerous farm failures and environmental damage. Nevertheless, the imaginary has been repeatedly invoked during various investment waves over the course of centuries, showing that land imaginaries can be surprisingly resilient despite opposing material realities. Drawing on this insight, and further examples from other regional contexts, Visser finds a striking, long-standing ignorance of the less 'visible' and tangible climatic factors in (Western) scientific accounts of the environment. In essence, Visser's paper raises crucial questions on the relationship between land imaginaries and knowledge production, which deserve further attention in the context of the increasing signs of climate emergency that humanity is facing.

Fairbairn et al.'s paper (2020) picks up on this and further demonstrates the critical relationship between the representation of materiality within land imaginaries and the power-laden terrain of knowledge production in regard to environmental futures. As Andersson and Westholm (2019)

argue, future imaginaries are inherently selective constructions, in which uncomfortable knowledge might be retained or marginalized by powerful stakeholders at the expense of other forms of knowledge. The dominance of (Western) scientific methods and institutions within these constructions, as Panikkar and Tollefson (2018) observe, often leaves activists and environmental organizations no choice but to learn the language of scientific knowledge-making or find skilled translators. While in Visser's case, the less tangible, not immediately observably climatic factors mislead the investors themselves, Fairbairn et al. demonstrate how a finance-backed farmland investor in the Californian Cuyama Valley uses land's invisible—and therefore 'uncertain'—subterranean attributes to create a land imaginary of ample water resources conducive to the company's financial and extraction interests. Given the strong financial capacities of the company, it could resort to the authoritative techniques of scientific modelling of water resources, underlying that modelling is an inherently political activity that rather than 'representing' land is used to shape realities and futures of land imaginaries (Loconto and Rajão 2020).

Affective dimensions of land imaginaries

Our third set of questions deals with the affective and anticipatory dimensions within land imaginaries and their implications for possible alternative land futures. The affective—and sometimes spiritual, symbolical, or moral—dimension of land has been comprehensively addressed within anthropological studies (e.g. Peters 2001; Tomlinson 2002). However, the affective aspects of land—e.g. soil—are not exclusive to the imaginaries of indigenous communities and long-standing farming traditions, as recent anthropological and geographical studies on contemporary land imaginaries have demonstrated (e.g. Peace 2005; Beban and Work 2014). As several contributions to the land rush literature have shown, land investment discourses have drawn heavily on emotive 'empty yet full' narratives (Bridge 2001), well known from colonial history (Hongslo and Benjaminsen 2002). Employing notions such as 'empty', 'marginal', 'idle', 'waste land', or 'abandoned', land was depicted as 'underutilised' and 'unused', yet full of investment potential and 'rapid, rising and hitherto underrecognised value' (Li 2014, p. 596; see also White et al. 2012; Nalepa et al. 2017). What is more, emotional and affective components do not only work in favour of investor interests, as the flipside of the 'celebration' of the black earth soil by Western farmland investors in Russia and the 'clean and green' image of remote Australian farmland suggest (Böhme 2020a; Visser 2020). Investors are not the 'cold blooded', rationality-driven 'homi economici' they often like to think of, and present, themselves—and are not immune to falling prey to the limitations of their own land imaginaries.

The affective component within land imaginaries and their potential for contestation as well as aspiration for alternative—hopeful—futures is particularly prominent in Schoenberger and Beban's contribution (2020). Ideas of what land is and should be, the authors argue, are filled with powerful emotions—and it is these emotions that enable land imaginaries to be reproduced, challenged, or transformed. However, how can people overcome fear associated with existing or dominant land imaginaries, so that alternative, more hopeful imaginaries can emerge within a context of aggressive land grabs and dispossession such as Cambodia? Schoenberger and Beban suggest that it is moments of rupture that can open up such spaces, disrupting dominant imaginaries and allowing for alternative imaginaries to arise. Contrary to the complicit role the state often played in other 'land rush' contexts (Wolford et al. 2013), in Cambodia it was a land titling campaign of the state that represented such a moment of 'rupture', and the villagers' affective ties with students, acting as volunteer land survey officers, were key in bringing about new and hopeful land imaginaries. However, as the authors note, even hopeful ruptures of dominant land imaginaries are not without ambiguity: some people's land did not get registered, powerful actors stirred the campaign towards their interests, and those whose power was threatened sought to re-establish their dominance. What exactly the land title will hold in the future, and for which purposes it might be (mis)used, remains an open question for many rural people.

While future land imaginaries can be full of opportunity and hopeful, in other settings people may feel that there is little room for imagining or dreaming, with futures dominated by (social) obligations attached to land (Visser 2006) or heavy debts linked to land (Hofman 2018). Fairbairn et al. (2020) also describe counter-imaginaries of the rural population, which critically interrogate the investor's farmland imaginaries and their far too rosy water availability situation. Yet, as their article notes, these alternative imaginaries have not (yet) translated into more hopeful or just land trajectories. Farmland imaginaries of Harvard's investment fund, assessing underground water reserves rather optimistically, have enabled it to convert relatively dry farmland into high value vineyard land. It remains uncertain how long this investor's imaginary will hold sway in the face of further ground water depletion and its negative consequences for neighbouring farmers and villagers—potentially opening space for more hopeful ruptures of dominant imaginaries.

To sum up, drawing on a variety of case studies from across the world, crossing Global North/South and East/West, and including contemporary and historical instances of land transformation, this symposium addresses the multifaceted ways in which implicit, explicit, and emergent

understandings of land shape current land transformations. Placing these imaginaries of land at the centre of analysis, this symposium adds an important analytical lens to the debate as it helps to comprehend the societal struggles that are fought over land as being rooted not only in the often competing interests and projects of what people seek to do with land, but also in the diverging, sometimes novel, and often long-standing or recurring understandings of what land can or ought to be in society.

Acknowledgements Many thanks to Nicolette Larder, Juan Ignacio Staricco, and Tanya Richardson for their valuable feedback on an earlier version of this introduction, as well as to Daniel Münster who contributed to the first conceptualization of this Symposium. We would also like to thank the participants of the workshop 'Constructions, Representations, Productions: Exploring Historical and Contemporary Imaginations of Land' at the SFB 1199 in Leipzig 2018 for collectively exploring the theme of 'land imaginaries' with us. Lastly, thanks to Esther Riley for her editorial work.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL. Sippel acknowledges support from the German Research Foundation (C04, SFB 1199) and Visser acknowledges support from European Research Council (ERC) grant LANDGRABRU (StG 313871).

References

Andersson, J., and E. Westholm. 2019. Closing the future: Environmental research and the management of conflicting future value orders. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 44 (2): 237–262.

Bakker, K., and G. Bridge. 2006. Material worlds? Resource geographies and the matter of nature. *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (1): 5–27.

Barrera-Bassols, N., and A. Zinck. 2003. 'Land moves and behaves': Indigenous discourse on sustainable land management in Pichataro, Patzcuaro Basin, Mexico. *Geografiska Annaler, Series A, Physical Geography* 85 (3–4): 229–245.

Beban, A., and C. Work. 2014. The spirits are crying: Dispossessing land and possessing bodies in rural Cambodia. *Antipode* 46 (3): 593–610.

Böhme, M. 2020a. 'Milk from the purest place on earth': examining Chinese investments in the Australian dairy sector *Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10153-2.

Böhme, M. 2020b. Shared interest or strategic threat? A critical investigation of political debates and regulatory responses to Chinese agricultural investment in Australia. *Globalizations* 1–20.

Borras, S.M.J., and J. Franco. 2013. Global land grabbing and political reactions 'from below'. *Third World Quarterly* 34 (9): 1723–1747.

Borras, S.M.J., R. Hall, I. Scoones, B. White, and W. Wolford. 2011. Towards a better understanding of global land grabbing: An editorial introduction. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38 (2): 209–216.

Bräutigam, D., and H. Zhang. 2013. Green dreams: Myth and reality in China's agricultural investment in Africa. *Third World Quarterly* 34 (9): 1676–1696.

Bridge, G. 2001. Resource triumphalism: Postindustrial narratives of primary commodity production. *Environment and Planning A* 33 (12): 2149–2173.

Callon, M., J. Law, and A. Rip. 1986. *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Clapp, J., S.R. Isakson, and O. Visser. 2017. The complex dynamics of agriculture as a financial asset: Introduction to symposium. *Agriculture and Human Values* 34 (1): 179–183.

Clapp, J., P. Newell, and Z.W. Brent. 2018. The global political economy of climate change, agriculture and food systems. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 45 (1): 80–88.

Cloke, P. 1997. Country backwater to virtual village? Rural studies and the 'cultural turn'. *Journal of Rural Studies* 13 (4): 367–376.

Convery, I., C. Bailey, M. Mort, and J. Baxter. 2005. Death in the wrong place? Emotional geographies of the UK 2001 foot and mouth disease epidemic. *Journal of Rural Studies* 21 (1): 99–109.

Corrado, A., C. de Castro, and D. Perrotta (eds.). 2016. *Migration and Agriculture: Mobility and Change in the Mediterranean Area*. London: Routledge.

Cortesi, L. 2018. The muddy semiotics of mud. *Journal of Political Ecology* 25: 617–637.

Cotula, L. 2012. The international political economy of the global land rush: A critical appraisal of trends, scale, geography and drivers. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (3–4): 649–680.

Cronon, W. 1991. *Nature's Metropolis. Chicago and the Great West*. New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company.

Crowley, E.L., and E. Carter. 2000. Agrarian change and the changing relationships between toil and soil in Maragoli, Western Kenya (1900–1994). *Human Ecology* 28 (3): 383–412.

Daniels, S. 2011. Geographical imagination. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36 (2): 182–187.

Daniels, S., and D. Cosgrove. 1993. Spectacle and text: Landscape metaphors in cultural geography. In *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. J. Duncan and D. Ley, 57–77. London, New York: Routledge.

Davis, D.K. 2007. *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Davis, Diana K. 2011. Imperialism, orientalism, and the environment in the Middle East. In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. D.K. Davis and E. Burke, 1–22. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

De Soto, H. 2000. *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Delaney, D. 2001. Running with the land: Legal-historical imagination and the spaces of modernity. *Journal of Historical Geography* 27 (4): 493–506.

Edelman, M. 2013. Messy hectares: Questions about the epistemology of land grabbing data. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 40 (3): 485–501.

Edelman, M., and A. León. 2013. Cycles of Land Grabbing in Central America: An argument for history and a case study in the Bajo Aguán, Honduras. *Third World Quarterly* 34 (9): 1697–1722.

Fairbairn, M., J. LaChance, K. De Master, and L. Ashwood. 2020. *In vino veritas, in aqua lucrum*: Farmland investment, environmental uncertainty, and groundwater access in California's Cuyama Valley.*Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10157-y. **(in press)**.

Fold, N., and B. Pritchard (eds.). 2005. *Cross-Continental Agro-food Chains: Structures, Actors and Dynamics in the Global Food System*. London: Routledge.

Gertel, J., and S.R. Sippel (eds.). 2014. *Seasonal Workers in Mediterranean Agriculture: The Social Costs of Eating Fresh*. London: Routledge.

Goldstein, J.E., and J.S. Yates. 2017. Introduction: Rendering land investable. *Geoforum* 82: 209–211.

Gosden, C., and L. Head. 1994. Landscape—A usefully ambiguous concept. *Archaeology in Oceania* 29 (3): 113–116.

Hall, D. 2013. Primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession and the global land grab. *Third World Quarterly* 23 (9): 1582–1604.

Haraway, D. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Head, L. 2000. *Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Change*. London, New York: Routledge.

Heuts, F., and A. Mol. 2013. What is a good tomato? A case of valuing in practice. *Valuation Studies* 1 (2): 125–146.

Hofman, I. 2018. Soft budgets and elastic debt: Farm liabilities in the agrarian political economy of post-Soviet Tajikistan. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 45 (7): 1360–1381.

Holloway, L., C. Bear, C. Morris, and K. Wilkinson. 2014. Animals, technologies and people in rural spaces: Introduction to a special issue on emerging geographies of animal-technology co-productions. *Journal of Rural Studies* 33: 95–98.

Hongslo, E., and T.A. Benjaminsen. 2002. Turning landscapes into 'nothing': A narrative on land reforms in Namibia. *Forum for Development Studies* 29 (2): 321–347.

Hughes, A., and S. Reimer (eds.). 2004. *Geographies of Commodity Chains*. London: Routledge.

Ingold, T. 2012. Introduction. In *Imagining Landscapes: Past, Present and Future*, ed. M. Janowski, and T. Ingold, 1–18. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate.

Jaenke, K.A. 2001. *Personal dreamscapes as ancestral landscape.* PhD dissertation California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco.

Jasanoff, S. 2015. Imagined and invented worlds. In *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*, ed. S. Jasanoff and S.-H. Kim, 321–341. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jasanoff, S., and S.-H. Kim (eds.). 2015. *Dreamscapes of Modernity: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and the Fabrication of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kish, Z., and M. Fairbairn. 2018. Investing for profit, investing for impact: Moral performances in agricultural investment projects. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 50 (3): 569–588.

Krzywoszynska, A. 2019. Caring for soil life in the Anthropocene: The role of attentiveness in more-than-human ethics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 44 (4): 661–675.

Kuns, B., O. Visser, and A. Wästfelt. 2016. The stock market and the steppe: The challenges faced by stock-market financed, Nordic farming ventures in Russia and Ukraine. *Journal of Rural Studies* 45: 199–217.

LaDuke, W. 2016. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Latour, B. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. London: Harvester/Wheatsheaf.

Layoun, M.N. 2001. *Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and Nationalism in Crisis*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Le Billon, P., and M. Sommerville. 2017. Landing capital and assembling 'investable land'in the extractive and agricultural sectors. *Geoforum* 82: 212–224.

Leyshon, A., and N. Thrift. 2007. The capitalization of almost everything: The future of finance and capitalism. *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (7–8): 97–115.

Li, T.M. 2014. What is land? Assembling a resource for global investment. *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers* 39(4): 589–602.

Li, T.M. 2018. After the land grab: Infrastructural violence and the "Mafia System" in Indonesia's oil palm plantation zones. *Geoforum* 96: 328–337.

Loconto, A., and R. Rajão. 2020. Governing by models: Exploring the technopolitics of the (in)visibilities of land. *Land Use Policy* 96 (104241): 1–5.

Lorimer, J. 2020 (forthcoming). *The Probiotic Planet. Using Life to Manage Life*. Chicago, IL: University of Minnesota Press.

Magnan, A. 2015. The financialization of agri-food in Canada and Australia: Corporate farmland and farm ownership in the grains and oilseed sector. *Journal of Rural Studies* 41: 1–12.

Martin, S.J. 2020. The political economy of distillers' grains and the frictions of consumption. *Environmental Politics* 29 (2): 297–316.

McCall Howard, P. 2018. The anthropology of human-environment relations. Materialism with and without Marxism. *Focaal* 82: 64–79.

McGregor, A. 2004. Sustainable development and 'warm fuzzy feelings': Discourse and nature within Australian environmental imaginaries. *Geoforum* 35 (5): 593–606.

McMichael, P. 2013. Land grabbing as security mercantilism in international relations. *Globalizations* 10 (1): 47–64.

Mitchell, T. 2011. Are environmental imaginaries culturally constructed? In *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. D.K. Davis and E. Burke III, 265–273. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Montgomery, D.R. 2007. *Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Moon, D. 2013. *The Plough that Broke the Steppes. Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700–1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moon, D. 2020. *The American Steppes. The Unexpected Russian Roots of Great Plains Agriculture, 1870s–1930s*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, D.S. 2005. *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Mormont, M. 1990. Who is rural? Or, how to be rural: towards a sociology of the rural. In *Rural Restructuring. Global processes and their responses*, ed. T. Marsden, P. Lowe, and S. Whatmore, 21–44. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Morris, B. 2014. *Protests, Land Rights, and Riots: Postcolonial Struggles in Australia in the 1980s*. New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Münster, D. 2017. Frontier in ruins: Internal colonization and the making of an agricultural landscape in South India. In *Soziale Ästhetik, Atmosphäre, Medialität: Beiträge aus der Ethnologie*, ed. P. Zemisch, U. Münster, J. Zickgraf, and C. Lang, 97–107. Berlin, Münster, Wien, Zürich, London: Lit.

Münster, D., and J. Poerting. 2016. Land als Ressource, Boden und Landschaft: Materialität, Relationalität und neue Agrarfragen in der Politischen Ökologie. *Geographica Helvetica* 71 (4): 245–257.

Nalepa, R.A., A.G.S. Gianotti, and D.M. Bauer. 2017. Marginal land and the global land rush: A spatial exploration of contested lands and state-directed development in contemporary Ethiopia. *Geoforum* 82: 237–251.

Neilson, J., and B. Pritchard. 2011. *Value Chain Struggles: Institutions and Governance in the Plantation Districts of South India*. Malden, MA: Wiley.

Nesbitt, J.T., and D. Weiner. 2001. Conflicting environmental imaginaries and the politics of nature in Central Appalachia. *Geoforum* 32 (3): 333–349.

Ofstehage, A. 2016. 'Farming is easy, becoming Brazilian is hard': North American soy farmers' social values of production, work and land in Soylandia. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 43 (2): 442–460.

Oliveira, G.L.T. 2018. Chinese land grabs in Brazil? Sinophobia and foreign investments in Brazilian soybean agribusiness. *Globalizations* 15 (1): 114–133.

Ouma, S. 2014. Situating global finance in the land rush debate: A critical review. *Geoforum* 57: 162–166.

Ouma, S. 2016. From financialization to operations of capital: Historicizing and disentangling the finance-farmland-nexus. *Geoforum* 72: 82–93.

Ouma, S. 2020. This can('t) be an asset class: The world of money management, "society", and the contested morality of farmland investments. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 52 (1): 66–87.

Oya, C. 2013. The Land Rush and Classic Agrarian Questions of Capital and Labour: a systematic scoping review of the socioeconomic impact of land grabs in Africa. *Third World Quarterly* 34 (9): 1532–1557.

Panikkar, B., and J. Tollefson. 2018. Land as material, knowledge and relationships: Resource extraction and subsistence imaginaries in Bristol Bay, Alaska. *Social Studies of Science* 48 (5): 715–739.

Patel, R., and J.W. Moore. 2017. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Peace, A. 2005. A sense of place, a place of senses: Land and landscape in the West of Ireland. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 61 (4): 495–512.

Pedersen, R., and L. Buur. 2016. Beyond land grabbing: Old morals and new perspectives on contemporary investments. *Geoforum* 72: 77–81.

Peet, R., and M. Watts. 1996. *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. London: Routledge.

Pegler, L.J. 2015. Peasant inclusion in global value chains: Economic upgrading but social downgrading in labour processes? *Journal of Peasant Studies* 42 (5): 929–956.

Peluso, N.L. 2012. What's nature got to do with it? A situated historical perspective on socio-natural commodities. *Development and Change* 43 (1): 79–104.

Peters, P. 2001. Maps, metaphors and meanings: Boundary struggles and village forest use on private and state land in Malawi. *Society and Natural Resources* 14 (5): 411–424.

Puig de la Bellacasa, M. 2015. Making time for soil: Technoscientific futurity and the pace of care. *Social Studies of Science* 45 (5): 691–716.

Richardson, T. 2016. Where the water sheds: Disputed deposits at the ends of the Danube. In *Watersheds: The Poetics and the Politics of the Danube River*, ed. M. Bozovic and M.D. Miller, 307–336. Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press.

Richardson, T. 2018. The terrestrialization of amphibious life in a Danube Delta 'Town on Water'. *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finish Anthropological Society* 43 (2): 3–29.

Richardson, T., and G. Weszkalnys. 2014. Introduction: Resource materialities. *Anthropological Quarterly* 87 (1): 5–30.

Saltzman, K., L. Head, and M. Stenseke. 2011. Do cows belong in nature? The cultural basis of agriculture in Sweden and Australia. *Journal of Rural Studies* 27 (1): 54–62.

Schama, S. 1995. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: A. Knopf.

Schoenberger, L., and A. Beban. 2020. Rupturing violent land imaginaries: finding hope through a land titling campaign in Cambodia. *Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10156-z.

Schoenberger, L., D. Hall, and P. Vandergeest. 2017. What happened when the land grab came to Southeast Asia? *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (4): 697–725.

Scott, J.C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale: Yale University Press.

Shetler, J.B. 2007. *Imagining Serengeti: A History of Landscape Memory in Tanzania from Earliest Times to the Present*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Sippel, S.R. 2018. Financialising farming as a moral imperative? Renegotiating the legitimacy of land investments in Australia. *Environment and Planning A* 50 (3): 549–568.

Sippel, S.R., and T. Weldon. (2020). Redefining land's investability: Towards a neo-nationalization of resources in Australia? *Territory, Politics, Governance.* 1–18.

Sodikoff, G. 2007. Land and languor: Ethical imaginations of work and forests in northeast Madagascar. *History and Anthropology* 15 (4): 367–398.

Sud, Nikita. 2019. The unfixed state of unfixed land. *Development and Change* 0 (0): 1–24.

Swearingen, W.D. 1987. *Moroccan Mirages. Agrarian Dreams and Deceptions, 1912–1986*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tomlinson, M. 2002. Sacred soil in Kadavu, Fiji. *Oceania* 72 (4): 237–257.

Tsing, A. 2018. *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Visser, O. 2020. Persistent land imaginaries. Celebration of fertile soil and the recurrent ignorance of climate. *Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10154-1.

Visser, O. 2006. Property, labour relations and social obligations in Russia's privatised farm enterprises. In *Changing Properties of Property*, ed. F. von Benda-Beckmann, K. von Benda-Beckmann, and M.G. Wiber, 126–146. London, New York: Berghahn Books.

Visser, O. 2017. Running out of farmland? Investment discourses, unstable land values and the sluggishness of asset making. *Agriculture and Human Values* 34 (1): 185–198.

Visser, O., and M. Spoor. 2011. Land grabbing in post-Soviet Eurasia: The world's largest agricultural land reserves at stake. *Journal of Peasant studies* 38 (2): 299–323.

Watkins, J. 2015. Spatial imaginaries research in geography: Synergies, tensions, and new directions. *Geography Compass* 9 (9): 508–522.

Weis, T. 2010. The accelerating biophysical contradictions of industrial capitalist agriculture. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 10 (3): 315–341.

Whatmore, S. 2002. *Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

White, B., S.M. Borras Jr., R. Hall, I. Scoones, and W. Wolford. 2012. The new enclosures: Critical perspectives on corporate land deals. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39 (3–4): 619–647.

Williams, J.W. 2014. Feeding finance: A critical account of the shifting relationships between finance, food and farming. *Economy and Society* 43 (3): 401–431.

Wolford, W. 2004. This land is ours now: Spatial imaginaries and the struggle for land in Brazil. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (2): 409–424.

Wolford, W. 2010. *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

Wolford, W., S.M. Borras, R. Hall, I. Scoones, and B. White. 2013. Governing global land deals: The role of the state in the rush for land. *Development and Change* 44 (2): 189–210.

Woods, M. 2006. Redefining the 'rural question': The new 'politics of the rural' and social policy. *Social Policy and Administration* 40 (6): 579–595.

Worster, D. 1979 [2004]. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sarah Ruth Sippel is a Senior Researcher and Lecturer at the University of Leipzig, Germany, and an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the School of Social Science, University of Queensland. Her research explores the nexus between global food security, financialization of natural resources, and emerging forms of solidarities within global agri-food systems. She is the Principal Investigator of an 8-year research project on imaginations of land (C04, SFB 1199) funded by the German Research Foundation. She is the author and co-editor of three books and her work has been published in journals such as *Agriculture and Human Values*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Journal of Rural Studies* and *Environment and Planning A*.

Oane Visser is an Associate Professor at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, the Netherlands. He has been visiting scholar at University of Oxford, City University New York, Cornell University and University of Toronto. His research focuses on farmland investment, large-scale farms, digital farming, interactions between small and large farms, and rural cooperation, particularly in Russia, Ukraine and Romania. European Research Council (ERC) laureate Visser is the coordinator of the Eurasian Agrofood and Land initiative (EURAL). Visser (co-)edited five special issues including two on financialisation of agriculture (in *Agriculture and Human Values* and *Journal of Agrarian Change*) and published articles in, amongst others, *Journal of Rural Studies*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Globalizations*, *Focaal* and *European Journal of Sociology*.