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Contesting Global Landscapes Theme Project

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Military Agency and Land Grabs: Rethinking “Military Occupation”

Most research on land grabbing emphasizes negotiated land deals sponsored by private sector investors and/or governments. Military agency and that of para-militaries, PMCs, and NGAOs (non-governmental armed organizations) in land encroachment and occupation are ignored or viewed as exceptional/temporary. Yet military coercion and its threat are paramount sources of resource enclosure, human displacement, and disempowerment worldwide. Public and private military force have been and are being widely used to establish dominion over land, 200-mile exclusive economic zones, sea lanes, resource zones, water sources, mineral deposits, conservation zones, intellectual properties, space, and the global commons.

I seek to incorporate military agency, broadly defined, into the land grab discourse, to explore the use of “legitimate violence” in both on-shore and off-shore land assembly, and to expand the trop of military occupation.¹ Examples of military enclosure and occupation extend to military facility siting (the US Armed Forces are the largest landlord in the world); prolonged periods of martial law; *lebensraum* wars via colonies, protectorates, and annexations; indirect power extensions through contracting and cartography; reliance on PMC operations and paramilitary proxy wars to protect resources and investments; and military land grants that displace civilian populations. Research questions include:

- How is mushrooming interest in multi-sector security opening doors to “military occupation,” broadly defined?
- How does the expanding use of force and violence by non-state actors express itself in spatial and territorial terms and what are the implications for state sovereignty, non-state enclaves, and “counter-space” property formation?
- In what sense are domestic *coup d’etats* land grabs of a different (whole society) order and how do these dramatic events temper more familiar land grabs?

¹ Military occupation refers to provisional control of a certain power over a territory not subject to the formal sovereignty of that entity and without the volition of the actual sovereign. It is presumed to be temporary and generally entails no compensation, lease fees, promises of employment or land value enhancement.