

A scenic landscape with a river, fields, and mountains in the background. The text is overlaid on this image.

Action theatre to study resistance to land grabbing

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1. Research project:
Land Rush in the
Great Lakes
2. Methodology to
study resistance:
applied theatre
3. Ethical challenges
and reflections



Global drivers

Regional drivers



Rush



'Mode



Climate
change



Legacy of
conflict

Global drivers

Regional drivers

Agrarian and
land policies



Global drivers

Regional drivers



Rwanda

Burundi

DRC(east)

- Neo-liberal agrarian and land policies
- Focus on productive value of agriculture
- Partnerships: public – private – civil society



Global drivers

Regional drivers

Agrarian and
land policies



Resilience /
resistance at
the local level



Different shades of resistance

Coping Strategies

individual acts of violation aimed at survival

Deliberate violation

individual acts of deliberately violation (element of pride)

Collective compromise

individual acts of violation with individual aims

Collective hidden

collective acts of violation, but part of the hidden transcript

Infrapolitics

Disguised collective acts of violation

Narrow Politics

organised acts performed in public that pursue immediate change

Broad Political Action

organised acts performed in public that pursue abstract political aims

Entanglement of
resistance – role of
variety of actors beyond
‘dominant’ – ‘dominated’

Evolution of resistance in
space and time
renegotiation –
reappropriation - dialogue



How to study resistance?

Image courtesy: Chaire Singleton, UCL, 2015

Innovative research method:

- **Qualitative in-depth research** – long-term engagement
- Elaboration of innovative methods: Simulation game transformed into **community theatre** action research



- In close collaboration with **civil society organisations and local theatre groups** created through the research project
- Discussion through **participation of public**

LAND RUSH: an applied theatre method



LAND RUSH: an applied theatre method

“**Aesthetic distance** allows applied drama participants [as well as audiences] to address and work with their own lived experiences and concerns in a safe way, through the **distancing provided by translating reality into fiction**”.
(Prendergast and Saxton, 2013: 16)

- To share **hidden discourses** that normally remain confined to a very particular inner circle through explicit narratives and plot twists OR through subtle metaphors and body language
- To reveal **tacit knowledge**, taking participants beyond their conscious self into parts of their sub conscience and into the world of others

LAND RUSH: ethical questions

- How guarantee **security** of participants and public?
 - What about consent when process has taken off
 - Emotional triggers
 - Coordination and presence of bystanders
 - Uncontrollable context
- **Participatory** / loss of control
 - Power relations – also among subaltern
 - Keep specific elements **distanced** from real-life situation
 - Objective is not to get to **consensus**



LAND RUSH: ethical questions

- Theatre as **transformatory encounter**
 - Paternalistic treatment? – Cultural invasion (Freire)
 - Transmission of culturally-bound values
- Theatre in **action-research**
 - Placing research in longer-term perspective
 - Collaboration with civil society partners
 - Appropriation of resistance strategies by those fighting 'on their behalf'?



LAND RUSH: ethical questions

- Right of researcher to **disclose hidden discourse /** to study resistance?
 - Tricking people into revealing
 - Giving honest interpretation
 - Instrumentalised by whom?
- **Auto-reflexivity** in resistance studies
 - Ethic protocols? No black or white answers
 - Researcher / activist
 - Collective discussion





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