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

- Overpopulation
- Climate change
- Extreme land scarcity

Regional drivers

- Rush on land
- Legacy of conflict
- 'Modernisation'
- Regional drivers

Climate change

Legacy of conflict
Global drivers

Regional drivers

Agrarian and land policies
### Global drivers

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

### Regional drivers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rwanda</th>
<th>Burundi</th>
<th>DRC(east)</th>
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**Note:**
- State strong in crisis
- Weak governance
- Top-down dispersed
- Alliances budget aid fragmented
- Civil society

**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

[Map of Uganda, North Kivu, South Kivu, Rwanda, Burundi]
Different shades of resistance

**Coping Strategies**
- Individual acts of violation aimed at survival

**Deliberate violation**
- Individual acts of deliberately violating (element of pride)

**Collective conscience**
- Individual acts of violation with implicit support from others

**Collective hidden acts**
- Collective acts of violation, but part of the hidden transcript

**Infrapolitics**
- Disguised collective acts of violation intruding on the public sphere

**Narrow Political Action**
- 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
  - Uncontrolable 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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