

 Socialization in Theory and Practice

# Conference

# THE LAND QUESTION



Centre for  
Social Critique  
at Humboldt-  
Universität zu  
Berlin

THE NEW  
INSTITUTE

GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG

**KEYNOTES:**  
**OMAR  
DAHBOUR  
ISABEL  
FEICHTNER**

**30.-31.10.2025**  
**AUDITORIUM  
GRIMM-ZENTRUM  
HU BERLIN**  
**GESCHWISTER-SCHOLL-STR.  
1/3**



Organized by Jacob Blumenfeld and Rabea Berfelde from the Socialization Research Project at the Centre for Social Critique. Funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung.  
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## The Land Question

October 30–31, 2025

HU Grimm Zentrum Auditorium, Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 1-3, Berlin

Thursday, October 30, 2025

8:45 **Doors Open**

9:00 – 9:15 **Welcome and Introduction by the Organizers**

Rabea Berfelde & Jacob Blumenfeld (Centre for Social Critique, HU Berlin)

9:15 – 09:45 **The Land Question: An Overview**

A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi (Trent University, Canada)

10:00 – 11:30 **Labour, Class and Global Agriculture**

Matan Kaminer (London) *The Thai-Israeli “Frontier Settlement Project” and the Global Land Question*

Aimé Paris (Nanterre), Tanguy Martin (Reprise de terre) *Lost in Agrarian Transition*

Elisa Greco (Frankfurt), *Financialisation, land grabs and forms of resistance: a case from Tanzania and reflections on class across North and South*

11:30 – 11:45 **Break**

11:45 – 13:15 **Land Conflicts in Green Capitalism**

Kristina Dietz (Kassel), Bettina Engels (Berlin), Facundo Martín (Conicet, Argentina), *Agrarian and land transformation how and where to? Strategies and visions of agrarian movements*

Maria Pfeiffer (Jena), Robert Wade (Eindhoven) *The Land Question in the Energy Transition: On the Role of Landownership in Germany’s Wind Energy Expansion*

Carla Nover Castelos (Kassel) *Land Concentration and Subjectivities of Resistance in Europe’s Internal Peripheries: The Case of Anti-Lithium Struggles in Extremadura*

13:15 – 14:15 **Lunch**

14:15 – 15:45 **Decommodification, Expropriation, Socialisation**

Miranda Strominger (CUNY) *Shelter from the Market: Limits to Decommodification*

Philipp Stehr (München) *Expropriating Agricultural Land*

Noaman G Ali (Bath) *Contingent solidarities and failing successfully at land reforms: Lessons from South Asia*

15:45 – 16:00 **Break**

16:00 – 17:45 **Land Politics in Germany: Problems and Alternatives**

Anne Neuber (Netzwerk Flächensicherung), Manuel Wagner (AbL) *Shaping the ongoing transformation of ownership in agricultural land markets: Practical insights into obstacles and ideas on the path towards use-oriented agriculture*

Lester Malte Pott (Weimar) *Limits and potentials of public land leasing for the decommodification of agricultural land: A comparative policy analysis in the context of eastern Germany*

Jan Lucas Geilen (Frankfurt) *Beyond the Market: Ulm's Municipal Land Policy as Decommodification Practice*

17:45 – 18:00 **Break**

18:00 – 19:15 **Keynote** *Land, Sea, Moon: From territoriality to becoming terrestrial*  
Isabel Feichtner (Universität Würzburg)

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Friday, October 31, 2025

09:00- **Doors Open**

9:15-9:30 **Welcome and Introduction by the Organizers**

Rabea Berfelde & Jacob Blumenfeld (Centre for Social Critique, HU Berlin)

9:30 – 11:00 **Decolonizing Land**

Kanishka Goonewardena (Toronto) *On the Global Actuality of the Oeuvre of Ginige Vernon Stanley de Silva*

Rodrigo Maruy (Berlin) *Should the Land Belong to Those Who Work it? On the Decolonisation of Land Ownership in Latin America*

Isadora Dutra Badra Bellati (London), *The Field of Senses and the Senses over the Field: Rethinking Landscapes for Constitutional Land Disputes in Brazil*

11:00 – 11:30 **Break**

11:30 – 13:00 **Epistemologies of Land**

Michael Schwind (Erkner/Berlin) and Varun Patil (Erfurt) *Possibilities and tensions of a hegemony approach to land: The cases of land struggles in India and Germany*

Anna Henkel (Passau) *Terra. Epistemological, historical and material transformations*

Alexander Dobeson (Copenhagen) *Land, values, and valuation work: moral imaginaries of land market in England and Germany*

13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch**

14:00 – 15:30 **The Value of Land**

Stefan Ouma (Bayreuth) *Questioning the Asset Form – A Synthesis*

Edward Shepherd (Cardiff) Tim White (London School of Economics) *Towards a Political Economy of Complexity: How Occulted Expertise Sustains Landed Power Relations*

Felix Anderl (Marburg), Christin Stühlen (Frankfurt) *Seeing Land like International Organizations: Strategies of Making Land Legible for the International*

15:30 – 16:00 **Break**

16:00 – 17:30 **Land and Political Theory**

Kendall Gardner (Oxford), *Liberalism and the Production of Settler Stability*

Nicole Whalen (Newfoundland), *Land Financialization and Property-Owning Democracy: Rematerializing Property in Contemporary Approaches to Justice*

Juliette Monvoisin (Siegen) *Vanishing Lands, Persistent Worlds: Rethinking Territorial Sovereignty beyond Property*

17:30 – 18:00 **Break**

18:00 – 19:15 **Keynote** *An Ecosocialist Concept of Land Ownership and Territorial Rights*  
Omar Dahbour (City University of New York)

## Abstracts

Thursday, October 30, 2025

### 9:15 – 09:45 **The Land Question: An Overview**

A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi (Trent University, Canada): *Land and agrarian questions: an overview*

Land is at the heart of contemporary recombinant agrarian questions. This is because the terms and conditions governing access to land shapes and are shaped by rural production, rural accumulation and rural politics even as the “work” of land affects and is affected by rural social relations. The importance of land as an asset for dominant classes has been the foundation of relations of exploitation across history and, since the Industrial Revolution, the basis of the emergence of the capital – labour relation. Moreover, as capitalism has become financialized over the last thirty years land has become an ever more important asset for capital. For the subordinate classes, land has been the source of a livelihood that has become increasingly squeezed as the circuits of capital internationalize and absolute human inequality deepens, fostering the growth of relative surplus populations because access to waged labour is stagnant. Yet for the subordinate classes that continue to rely upon land it has been and continues to be thoroughly embedded within the cognitive and volitional activities that are materially practiced by rural peoples. In so doing, land has historically and contemporarily mediated the physical, conceptual and imaginative relationships between people and the material powers that preside over them. Thus, while land is something that is constructed by humans over their daily lives, both physically and symbolically, land is also something that through the web of life constructs humans as social beings.

### 10:00 – 11:30 **Labour, Class and Global Agriculture**

Matan Kaminer (Queen Mary University of London) *The Thai-Israeli “Frontier Settlement Project” and the Global Land Question*

Beginning in the early 1990s, Israel replaced its Palestinian agrarian workforce with workers from Northeast Thailand (Isaan). My research has located the roots of this labour regime in a mid-1980s initiative of Thai military leaders, who hoped to enlist Israeli aid in setting up agricultural settlements on the Lao and Cambodian borders but ended up providing a pretext for the informal importation of Isaanite labor into Israel. The “Frontier Settlement Project” was predicated on a conception, shared between the ruling classes of both countries, that the combination of paramilitary settlement and commodity agriculture could serve the pacification of colonized peripheries. The project was a phenomenon of transition, taking place in a period when the emergent political economy of neoliberal globalisation still required ideological justification in the ideological terms of the era of nationalist developmentalism. It morphed into a circuit of labour migration because the agrarian problem of each ruling class – a surplus population in Thailand, a rebellious workforce in Israel – could be profitably resolved by establishing a flow of working people between their countries. This transformation illustrates the enduringly colonial nature, not

only of both Thai and Israeli societies, but of the world-system which has integrated their peripheries with one another. It raises the question of a how a globally emancipatory project of land reform might grapple with the legacy of the “mobilization and immobilization” (Stoler) of agrarian populations under capitalism – including both the expulsion and genocide of indigenous peoples and the importation and deportation of disenfranchised migrant workers.

Aimé Paris (Sophiapol de Université Nanterre Paris 10), Tanguy Martin (activist investigative collective “Reprise de terre” (Land Reclamation); advocacy officer for Terre de Liens) *Lost in Agrarian Transition*

Our contribution stems from the questions that arose during the agricultural mobilizations of winter 2024. From the perspective of the ecological left, we wish to examine this phenomenon as an opportunity to revisit a Marxist analysis of the contemporary composition of the agricultural world in France. Indeed, it seems to us that our political camp is in urgent need of such an analysis: the transformations affecting agriculture are complex, and studying them should enable us to envision a strategy that takes into account both class composition and the historical trends shaping this segment of society. What should be done about conventional farmers in struggle? Answering this question through a Marxist lens requires analyzing the exploitative structures that organize a highly fragmented agricultural sector. A class-based analysis should allow us to redefine the political composition of our struggles, while also offering farmers themselves a framework to challenge the reactionary discourse of agribusiness, dominant unions, and the government – all of whom attempt, in their own ways, to reframe the conflict as one opposing a supposedly unified class of farmers to a regulatory political class (ecologists, European institutions, etc.). In doing so, this concrete analysis also allows us to critically reassess agrarian Marxism – its relevance today as well as its limitations. It is thus from a resolutely Marxist and ecological perspective that we propose to work through three key concepts – exploitation, alienation, and ideology – which, in our view, provide the analytical tools necessary to understand the ongoing process of agrarian transition.

Elisa Greco (Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt am Main), *Financialisation, land grabs and forms of resistance: a case from Tanzania and reflections on class across North and South*

The contribution explores the entanglements among finance, class and agribusiness at the times of financialisation, documenting resistance against the material entanglements that these deals caused, with regards to land, labour and agrarian capital. In this highly financialised investment in a rice farm in Tanzania a contract farming component was added to make the investment more attractive to investors and donors alike. Faced with highly exploitative conditions, middle-scale rice farmers organised of a collective boycott of the scheme. We will analyse conditions faced by farmers, the connections between financial capital and the financial component of the contract farming scheme, and look at the reasons behind the resistance and the class dynamics that nurtured resistance at the local level. The case allows to draw broader political reflections on the class aspect of financialisation and agribusiness in Tanzania that are relevant to other experiences in the Global South and in the agrarian underdeveloped areas of the Global North.

#### 11:45 – 13:15 Land Conflicts in Green Capitalism

Kristina Dietz (University of Kassel), Bettina Engels (Freie Universität Berlin), Facundo Martín (Conicet, Argentina), *Agrarian and land transformation how and where to? Strategies and visions of agrarian movements*

Our contribution focuses on the strategies of agrarian movements that mobilise for a progressive transformation of agrarian structures, like land ownership and property relations, class and gender relations and socio-ecologically destructive modes of production and consumption. It relates to research on emancipatory rural politics, which deals with the resistance and alternatives to current authoritarian, anti-democratic and pro-capitalist mobilisation in rural settings. We outline three typical strategies of progressive agrarian movements: non-reformist reforms, place- and event-based alliances and prefigurative politics. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, but overlap and are linked to each other in socio-political practice. We illustrate the strategies using examples of current progressive agricultural movements in Germany (particularly Brandenburg) and Europe: initiatives for institutional change in land regulation, protests against *mega-bassins* in France and community supported agriculture.

Maria Pfeiffer (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena), Robert Wade (Eindhoven University of Technology) *The Land Question in the Energy Transition: On the Role of Landownership in Germany's Wind Energy Expansion*

The German energy transition signifies more than a shift from conventional fossil fuels to renewable energy, it also reflects a gradual diversification of ownership and control in the energy sector, as evidenced by the rise of citizen energy projects and a broader range of actors participating in the expansion, challenging the traditional dominance of large private corporations in energy systems. Yet, the reality of wind energy expansion in Germany reveals persistent and intensifying structural dependencies, particularly concerning (mostly private) landownership. Our presentation examines the central role of landownership in shaping the spatial and social dynamics of wind energy development in Germany. Drawing on novel landownership and wind energy datasets constructed for Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt between 1991-2021, this research presents historical trends of wind energy development's relationship with land tenure arrangements. We combine this with data from semi-structured interviews conducted in these federal states where post-reunification land privatization transferred vast tracts to non-local investors. We show how the influence of private landowners has grown significantly as competition over wind-suitable land escalates, creating a powerful veto position that can hinder project implementation and exacerbate local conflicts over land use, justice, and the equitable distribution of risks and benefits. We highlight how the scarcity and high demand for viable land have inflated land rents (with some of the highest wind rents in Europe and potentially globally), intensified socio-spatial inequalities, and provoked calls to reconsider the entanglement of property rights and renewable energy governance. We explore emerging and potential solutions (such as land pooling schemes and the theoretical uncoupling of land and wind rights) as pathways to mitigate local conflicts.

Carla Noever Castelos (University of Kassel) *Land Concentration and Subjectivities of Resistance in Europe's Internal Peripheries: The Case of Anti-Lithium Struggles in Extremadura*

Entrenched land concentration in Europe's internal peripheries hinders and shapes contemporary struggles over land use and ownership. Focusing on anti-lithium mining protests in Extremadura, Spain – a region historically characterized by *latifundismo*, agrarian inequality, and rural subalternity – this contribution examines how unequal land distribution functions both as a material condition and a cultural logic conditioning hegemonic struggles around land. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and grounded in Gramscian political ecology, land is conceptualized not merely as property or productive asset but as a site of subject formation. Land concentration shapes protest in marginalized rural areas in two intertwined ways: materially, through economic dependencies – especially where peasant livelihoods rely on communal access to land – and culturally, by reinforcing historically ingrained identities and narratives of rural backwardness and passivity. Echoing Gramsci's analysis of the "Southern question," these narratives produce a mentality of servitude that shapes political subjectivities and agency. Resistance, however, arises where land remains socially embedded in everyday life—such as for subsistence, care, or local use. In these contexts, land use for extractivism like lithium mining is not experienced as so-called green progress but as renewed enclosure under the guise of ecological modernization. Protesters mobilize suppressed traditions of rural resistance, notably the massive land occupations of March 25, 1936, when around 70.000 landless agricultural labourers seized estates demanding agrarian reform. They articulate land not as a commodity but as commons – ecological, social, and political – and envision alternative transformations rooted in collective and caring land use. This contribution adds to debates on land socialization by highlighting how land concentration both constrains and animates emancipatory political projects in Europe's internal peripheries. It argues that reclaiming land as a collective good amid ecological crisis and capitalist marginality requires confronting structures of dispossession and reactivating counter-hegemonic rural subjectivities. The Extremaduran anti-lithium movement exemplifies democratic struggles over land as involving the re-signification of land itself – as a condition of life, a site of memory and political agency, and a horizon for self-determined, post-extractivist futures.

#### 14:15 – 15:45 Decommodification, Expropriation, Socialisation

Miranda Strominger (CUNY) *Shelter from the Market: Limits to Decommodification*

In recent decades, *decommodification* has (re)emerged as a dominant political vision and persistent theoretical frame for the socialization of land and housing. Urban and rural social movements against precarious inhabitation commonly struggle for particular forms of ownership under the banner of *decommodified land and housing*, including community land trusts, limited equity cooperatives, and public housing. However, the frame of decommodification obscures the persistence of exploitation, accumulation, and precarity in and through these legal technologies of tenure. Adherence to decommodification as an analytic and horizon, I argue, presents a theoretical and ideological obstacle to more profound socialization of land and housing. This paper offers a

conceptual history and critique of decommodification, tracing its translation from Polanyian welfare state theory into grassroots housing justice practice. Situating the historical-geographic specificity of decommodification's rise to public salience as a partial response to the changing contours of the land question, I show that the concept gained not only common-sense significance but material support in many U.S. cities in the years following the international foreclosure-driven financial crisis. This recent history reveals that experiments in site-by-site, common, democratic ownership have, in fact, been meaningfully metabolized by financial capitals and local states. Finally, this paper demonstrates that the persistence, rather than diminishment, of property in land's commodity form under so-called decommodified tenure has serious consequences within the everyday lives of its inhabitants. Against the spectral decommodification approach, this paper instead attends to these forms of tenure as embedded sites of the social reproduction of capitalist social relations, including capitalist housing. This approach better illuminates the real challenges faced by those who inhabit, produce, and reproduce efforts to socialize land and housing.

Philipp Stehr (Technische Universität München) *Expropriating Agricultural Land*

This paper discusses when land currently used for agricultural purposes can be permissibly expropriated and what alternative governance schemes should be employed after expropriation. I define expropriation as the compulsory purchase of property by the state and the subsequent transition into an alternative form of ownership. Understood this way, expropriation is a basic tool for the state to intervene where current forms of ownership do not work for the public good. I identify two main prima facie wrongs connected to agricultural land ownership. The first are environmental harms. The second is unaccountable power. I argue that both can be grounds for expropriation and the transition into alternative forms of ownership. I make this case using two examples. For environmental harms, I look at the agricultural sector in the Netherlands and the nitrogen pollution that has stoked calls for expropriation there. For power over workers I look at the German meat-processing industry and recent scandals around working conditions within that industry. Using these two cases I then show how we should think about what governance schemes are warranted post-expropriation, based on the problem that warranted expropriation in the first place. When tackling environmental problems like in the Dutch case, the main goal is to effectively ban certain uses of the land. This can be achieved under many different forms of ownership—private, state-owned, democratic—as long as the new owners use the land for other purposes. When tackling problems of power however, the only effective governance scheme post-expropriation is democratic since only that kind of scheme can effectively make the power that comes with ownership accountable.

Noaman G Ali (University of Bath) *Contingent solidarities and failing successfully at land reforms: Lessons from South Asia*

Projects to socialize land inevitably spark political struggles among groups with competing interests. Divergences exist not only between those who disproportionately control land and those who do not, but also amongst the latter, potentially reinforcing long-term inequalities. This paper examines radical peasant movements in South Asia—specifically, communist-led land reforms in Telangana in India (1940s–50s) and North-West Frontier Province

in Pakistan (1970s)—to explore how internal contradictions within such movements can perpetuate certain inequalities even while challenging others. In both cases, radicals leveraged political crises to build solidaristic cross-class and cross-caste coalitions of tenants, smallholders, and labourers against landed elites. However, due to limited resources and cadre strength in rapidly evolving situations, coordination and leadership roles were taken up disproportionately by better-off smallholders and tenant farmers. Their control over informal land redistribution often reinforced caste, class, and gender hierarchies—sidelining landless, lower-caste, and women participants. Once new governments regularized land rights to undermine further radical reforms, upwardly mobile beneficiaries abandoned further struggle, revealing the contingent nature of their solidarity. While these movements achieved significant successes in land redistribution and constraining the political power of landed elites, democratization remained partial. As land struggles re-emerge globally—around housing, agriculture, and natural resources—movements will again involve participants from diverse class, ethnic, and gender positions. I argue that socializing land will require careful analysis of power imbalances internal to coalitions for land reform, to develop strategies for the democratization of leadership, politicization of long-term land justice, and resistance to state co-optation. Without deliberate efforts to counter internal hierarchies, progressive struggles risk failing successfully—that is, reproducing inequality even as they dismantle it.

#### 16:00 – 17:45 Land Politics in Germany: Problems and Alternatives

Anne Neuber (Netzwerk Flächensicherung), Manuel Wagner (Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft, AbL Mitteldeutschland) *Shaping the ongoing transformation of ownership in agricultural land markets: Practical insights into obstacles and ideas on the path towards use-oriented agriculture*

The Land Transfer Act (*Grundstückverkehrsgesetz*) of 1962 is the heart of German farmland market regulation. It states that land ownership should be widely distributed. Besides, farmers are granted pre-emptive rights in order to improve the agrarian structure suggesting that the idea behind the law was and still is, that the land should belong to those who cultivate it. Today, German farmers must deal with an increase in lease and purchase prices, which can, in most cases, no longer be generated from primary agricultural production. 60 % of agricultural land belongs to non-farmers. Most importantly, there is currently no effective legal framework protecting against land being sold to investors, as the law does not apply to share deals. The result: the concentration and financialization of farmland are increasing. Especially after the global financial crisis of 2007/8 a lot of capital got spatially fixed in agricultural land (Harvey 1982, 2001). Access to land for farmers, especially for new entrants, gets more and more difficult to the extent that we can state: The land market is in crisis. In order to fulfil the aims of the 1962 land laws, we must consider concepts of alternative ownership and disposition over land. Having set the framework of German land regulation, we aim to conceptually clarify what socialization in agriculture can look like in concrete terms and what obstacles arise in its implementation. To this end, we draw on Jenny Stupka's definition (2023, 13) of socialization, placing it in a triad of democratic change consisting of (1) power of disposition, (2) manner of disposition, and (3) purpose of disposition. In our

opinion, even one step of this triad would have a major impact on land management. We'll therefore present already existing alternatives in leasing, owning and managing land and categorize them in the theoretical framework. Drawing on our experience of working in agriculture, we furthermore identify four challenges, that any reflection on socialisation must take into account: 1.) Socialization always involves negotiation processes. However, only 2 % of the working population in Germany is still employed in agriculture. This leads to a gap in terms of knowledge, involvement, and power in dialogue processes. 2.) The current distribution of EU agricultural subsidies makes people in agriculture feel as if "society" already has a say in their daily work decisions – in the form of a powerful bureaucratic apparatus which made them drive their trucks to Berlin to protest. 3.) Between 1945 and 2000, rural areas in eastern Germany experienced several structural changes. Expropriation, redistribution, (forced) collectivization, nationalization, and privatization of agricultural land formed a collective experience resulting in new forms of ownership and usage rights being viewed with scepticism. 4.) For family farms, which still make up the majority of all farms in Germany, land ownership is not just a means of production; it is also something they are deeply attached to and take care of, that links to ancestors etc. - a kind of "extended self" (Belk 1988). Against this background, alternative ownership concepts may seem threatening.

Lester Malte Pott (Bauhaus University Weimar) *Limits and potentials of public land leasing for the decommodification of agricultural land: A comparative policy analysis in the context of eastern Germany*

Against the backdrop of increased financialization and concentration of ownership of agricultural land in eastern Germany (Brunner 2019; Bunkus/Theesfeld 2018; Jänicke/Müller 2024) – keyword: land grabbing – strategies are needed for a socio-ecological transformation of land policy. A central element of this is the decommodification of land. Approaches to this can be found on the one hand in public land and planning policy, and on the other hand in civil society alternatives for land governance and protection, such as commons organizations (Heinz/Belina 2019). The former (land policy) enables the latter (alternatives to the system). Studies into the structure of the agricultural sector conducted in recent years have found that a high proportion of farmland is leased, with a significant proportion of land owned by local authorities (Tietz/Hubertus 2024). However, the conditions under which this land is made available and the land policy framework that (could) promote alternative allocation have not yet been examined. Against this backdrop, the instrument of public land leasing according to specific socio-ecological criteria (in German: Gemeinwohlverpachtung = GV) has been under discussion for several years and has already been tested in some municipalities. As part of the research for my master's thesis, I am therefore first examining the (policy) processes behind the introduction of the GV of municipally owned agricultural land in order to gain insights into the effects that this instrument has on the democratization and decommodification of public land ownership. Three municipalities in eastern Germany (Leipzig, Erfurt, and Kyritz) serve as case studies for the qualitative, empirical study. The aim of this work is to address the land issue in the agricultural sector from a property-critical, political-economic perspective using the 'analytical lens of decommodification'. The research topic of "municipal land policy" also allows important links to be made

to decommodification strategies in housing policy, as there are many parallels between the financialization of land and the instruments used to counteract it in the agricultural and housing sectors (Feichtner et al. 2025). For this reason, the work culminates in considerations for an integrated urban-rural land policy, in which the importance of civil society-supported models of decommodification as a complement to reforms of public real estate policy is discussed.

Jan Lucas Geilen (Institut für Sozialforschung, Goethe University Frankfurt) *Beyond the Market: Ulm's Municipal Land Policy as Decommodification Practice*

The city of Ulm offers a promising and practical example in addressing the conference's central question of how land can be socialized and negotiations on land use reoriented. Located in Baden-Württemberg, the city has pursued a municipal land policy since 1889, which has enabled it to continuously expand its scope for action in urban development and housing policy while establishing an alternative approach to land management. In contrast to conventional land tenure systems, the Ulm model opens new avenues for questioning the exclusionary nature of property rights, curbing speculation, and capturing unearned profits through urban policy principles as well as administrative guidelines and practices (Geilen 2022). The city's approach involves equipping the "Abteilung für Liegenschaften und Wirtschaftsförderung" (Department of land and economic development) with sovereign instruments, thereby positioning the municipality as a nearly unavoidable intermediary in land transactions. In negotiations with sellers and in the allocation of land, criteria are applied that differ fundamentally from market principles. This opens up the possibility of decommodification and distribution of land beyond traditional market logic. The Ulm model not only provides a concrete foundation for other cities, civil society alliances, and urban political movements to pursue land policies grounded in practices of communizing (that is, relational and intersubjective engagements with land based on shared needs and responsibilities), but also opens up pathways for transforming existing property relations and imagining societal forms in which land is no longer treated as an ordinary commodity. The presentation is based on interviews with municipal representatives and field research at the property office. The goal is to analyze how this little-researched yet widely acclaimed municipal practice functions (Böcker et al. 2021). Furthermore, it examines the extent to which such a land policy can be understood as a decommodifying policy, the degree to which it can be transferred to other contexts, and the political and structural challenges that may arise from such approaches. This analysis is conducted particularly against the backdrop of critiques concerning its democratic potential, its dependence on growth, and the internal logics of entrepreneurial urban policy (Silomon-Pflug 2018).

18:00 – 19:15 **Keynote**

*Land, Sea, Moon: From territoriality to becoming terrestrial*  
Isabel Feichtner (Universität Würzburg)

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Friday, October 31, 2025

9:30 – 11:00 Decolonizing Land

Kanishka Goonewardena (University of Toronto) *On the Global Actuality of the Oeuvre of Ginige Vernon Stanley de Silva*

In this paper, I will approach the land question through the writings of Ceylonese/Sri Lankan political-economist G. V. S. de Silva (1928-1980), whose outstanding but mostly unknown work engaged peasant struggles in South Asia from an anti-imperialist standpoint, with an innovative commitment to post-colonial national development. De Silva is an unusually rewarding scholar and activist—with a unique range of experiences in public service, international non-governmental organisations and peasant struggles—to study regarding the land question because of his multiple accomplishments that will inform my contribution: his seminal role in drafting the Paddy Lands Act of 1957 in Ceylon, intended to give land to the tiller; his influential work as a leading civil servant for the Ceylonese/Sri Lankan government and in UN agencies concerned with Third World development; his participatory involvement with peasant movements in South Asia, especially the struggle over the lands and livelihoods of Adivasi (tribal/indigenous) people in the outskirts of Mumbai in India from the mid 1940s to the late 1970, led by the instructive Boomi Sena (Land Army) mobilization; and his pioneering theoretical contributions to tiers-mondiste aspirations for socialist development (especially the manifesto ‘Heretical Thoughts on Economic Development’, 1973) and Marxist thought (most notably the posthumously published essay ‘Social Change’, which draws on his experiences with Boomi Sena and other peasant movements to propose a radical alternative to the orthodox Marxist conception of historical progress along with a new historical-materialist theory of radical-democratic political organization and political consciousness based on and aimed at people’s power). In this presentation, I will show how de Silva’s pioneering work remains relevant to present day politics, both metropolitan and peripheral, while underlining his resonances with exemplary European thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre and Raymond Williams, by drawing on my own writings on their work in the fields of critical geography and urban studies.

Rodrigo Maruy (Centre for Social Critique, Humboldt University of Berlin) *Should the Land Belong to Those Who Work it? On the Decolonisation of Land Ownership in Latin America*

Attributed to Emiliano Zapata, the motto “the land belongs to those who work it” captures a central issue of agrarian reforms in Latin America during the 20th century, namely the expropriation of latifundia and the redistribution of land to the peasantry. Although agrarian reforms varied widely between countries—family and collective property were predominant in México and Bolivia, the nationalization of land was paradigmatic in Cuba, and cooperatives played a major role in Peru and Chile—, one could say that redistribution remained a key stake. Nonetheless, in most cases agrarian reforms did not manage to overcome the marginalization and exclusion of indigenous rural communities. This is often attributed to technical failures in implementation combined with deficient and corrupt state bureaucracies. However, the question arises as to

whether redistribution, understood as a change within the legal form of property, was itself part of the problem. For redistributing the land to those who work it did not amount to decolonizing land ownership in Latin America. Yet what would it mean here to decolonize land? To address this question, my argument proceeds in three steps. *First*, in dialogue with Brenna Bhandar and Robert Nichols, I will shortly reconstruct the objection that redistribution does not alter the legal form of private property. Accordingly, the decolonization of land requires overcoming such form. To be sure, this suggests a broad notion of decolonization which—especially in the Latin American context—has led decolonial theorists to stretch the concept too far, reducing it primarily to an epistemic and cultural metaphor. As a *second* argumentative step, I will criticize such overextending of decolonization by discussing Aníbal Quijano’s concept of “coloniality”. *Third*, I will sketch an alternative understanding of the decolonization of land by drawing on the idea of “internal colonialism” developed by Pablo González Casanova and Rodolfo Stavenhagen. In a nutshell, my claim is that the decolonization of land ownership must be understood in materialist terms, and this implies, but cannot be reduced to merely redistributive strategies. As a closing remark, I will argue that Quijano’s concept of “socialization”, which he developed during the 1960s and 1970s in CEPAL and in dialogue with dependency theories, delineates a fruitful approach along these lines.

Isadora Dutra Badra Bellati (Queen Mary University of London), *The Field of Senses and the Senses over the Field: Rethinking Landscapes for Constitutional Land Disputes in Brazil*

Since colonial times, a small ruling class and its successors have held ownership over the largest tracts of rural land in Brazil. Today, while 84% of the Brazilian population lives in urban areas, one third of households (urban and rural) suffer some level of food insecurity (Brasil. IBGE, 2023). In this work, I test the hypothesis that the unfair distribution and the destructive use of lands in Brazil might be a problem of lack of imagination or restricted imagination. I concentrate my efforts on identifying different social imaginaries of space – more specifically, imaginaries of land use – that define social practices of different groups. I claim that, in Brazil, a specific social imaginary of land use emerged with colonialism but got a new configuration in the 1960s – with the expansion of industrialisation and the modernist move in architecture – and that this social imaginary came to define the way constitutional laws were designed in 1988 and the way they are still interpreted today. More precisely, I argue that by looking at the treatment given by constitutional judges and legal representatives to the principle of the ‘social functioning of property’ (guaranteed by articles 184 to 186 of the Federal Constitution), I can prove the instituting force of that specific social imaginary of land use. Knowing that other imaginaries (e.g., Indigenous, Quilombola and peasant imaginaries) exist in parallel to the governmental (institutionalised) one, in a second moment of the research I investigate an alternative way of treating the same constitutional principle but having another imaginary of land use as the framework of my analysis. In this creative act, I claim that alternative social imaginaries of land use are marginalised because they have no proper translation into the constitutional law vocabulary and that visual material could be the best way to translate this imaginary to judges and to legal representatives, reinterpreting the above-mentioned articles of the Federal Constitution under other assumptions.

### 11:30 – 13:00 Epistemologies of Land

Michael Schwind (Leibniz-Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung Erkner/Berlin) and Varun Patil (University of Erfurt) *Possibilities and tensions of a hegemony approach to land: The cases of land struggles in India and Germany*

Our presentation discusses how Gramsci's theory of hegemony sheds light on the dimensions of power and domination in relation to land. First, we analyse a wide range of existing scholarship on land, examining the implicit or explicit use of hegemony theory in areas such as the negotiation of land laws and reforms, land dispossession, everyday land sales, and land-based identity constructions or rural aspirations. Secondly, we present two case studies of land contestations in India and Germany. The Indian case talks about conflict over slum renewal by a private developer in Dharavi, Mumbai, which is largely occupied by lower castes. While the immediate conflict is about policy exclusions, whereby many residents struggle to meet the eligibility criteria for the rehabilitation scheme, and the neglect of livelihood rehabilitation, many Dalits view the renewal as an attempt to prevent lower castes from entering the city. The German case examines the mobilisation of the constitution through the 'Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen' initiative in Berlin, which aims to socialise privately held land and housing stocks in order to reorganise the current land regime around the concept of the 'commons'. From the literature review and our own case studies, we present three aspects of how land plays a role in the formation of hegemony: 1. How land becomes part of the maintenance of the hegemony of a dominant group, for example through land-based concessions. 2. How people negotiate norms, ideas or property relations surrounding land and how they anchor in their common sense. 3. How land becomes a site and medium for contesting existing hegemonies. Finally, we propose conceptualising land as a hegemony relationship, while highlighting some of the challenges associated with this approach.

Anna Henkel (University of Passau) *Terra. Epistemological, historical and material transformations*

The structure of today's agriculture developed after the second world war. Politically-intended agricultural economics and the natural sciences transformed agricultural practices towards specialisation, intensification, rising sizes of farms by diminishing numbers and, all in all, an "efficient" agriculture. Although this transformation is important to understand when asking for current land questions, it is this only a second transformation which builds upon the even more fundamental transformation which took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fundamentally changed the practices, knowledge-base and materiality of agriculture. I use "terra" as an analytical term to refer to a materiality which is expected to be on the ground and on which something can grow. But both its word used to refer to terra and its materiality changed with the rise of modern society: Since antiquity and until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, terra was considered as the "stomach of plants". Agriculture and terra were thus inextricably entwined while agricultural practices did not change. It is only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that a modern understanding of terra as soil evolved and which is characterised by three specificities: First, soil is a materiality abstractly defined by the science *pedology*. It is no longer connected with plant growth but researched about as an individual materiality. Second, soil is now considered as a *productive factor* which can be

measured according to objective criteria. Instead of giving a living, agriculture now aims to produce profit. And third, soil now is an object of political regulation. It is no longer connected to farming by the medieval mean of a double-property, but it is considered to be best used when institutionalized as *private property* (in Germany starting with the so-called October edict 1807). At the same time, "space", as measured by cartography, and "mineral plant nutrition", researched on by agricultural chemistry, differentiate as self-standing materialities. The development of these three materialities – autonomous from individual or local knowledge – take part in the first revolution which already triples agricultural output in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and without which the industrial revolution had not been possible, industrialisation requiring fed people working in factories. The second revolution since the 1950s accelerates the ideas of the first, combined with new and powerful technologies. In order to not only critically discuss the several concerns connected with the Land question on stake today, this specifically modern type of materiality and its connectedness with modern, functionally differentiated society must be taken into account. Obvious are severe ecological damages, a continuous loss of individual agricultural knowledge and the necessity to transform the incentives of agricultural decisions as well as better distributing the risks of an over-intensified and -specialised agriculture. Less obvious is how deeply modern industrialised society is connected with an industrialised agriculture. The land question thus involves no less than the double transformation of agriculture and society.

Alexander Dobeson (Copenhagen Business School) *Land, values, and valuation work: moral imaginaries of land market in England and Germany*

Land markets are commonly thought to deviate from the neoclassical model of perfect competition due to natural scarcity, their asset-like character, and the fictitious features of what is traded. But how can such a recalcitrant market object be valued and exchanged? Based on archival and ethnographic research in the field of valuation work in England and Germany, this article reveals how land is rendered as a legitimate market good by enacting moral imaginaries of what 'the land market' is and what it ought to be as an object of knowledge. While in England the imaginary of restless land markets emerged 'bottom-up' around valuers' pragmatic engagement with the real estate sector, in Germany the careful post-war re-liberalization of the land market was intimately tied to the imaginary of orderly land markets enforced through the tight legal framework of the building code to counter speculation. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these imaginaries for shaping contemporary land markets and the financialization of valuation.

### 14:00 – 15:30 The Value of Land

Stefan Ouma (University of Bayreuth) *Questioning the Asset Form – A Synthesis*

This talk extends my research on the assetization of farmland to consider the broader phenomenon of the assetization of diverse domains of life and materiality. While contemporary literature on assetization has illuminated many aspects of this process, significant dimensions remain underexplored. I address these gaps by synthesizing five interrelated lines of inquiry. First, I examine the historicity of the asset form, situating it within longer trajectories of economic and legal transformation. Second, I explore moral struggles surrounding the asset form, highlighting contestations over its legitimacy,

desirability, and consequences. Third, I interrogate how the asset form reproduces and reconfigures imperial gestures, articulating colonial power geometries across geographies and populations. Fourth, I pursue a project of defetishizing the asset form, rendering visible the social, political, and ecological relations obscured by its apparent neutrality. The latter step also flags the data problem: the fact that many “assets” cannot be accounted for because they remain invisibilized. By weaving these strands together, the talk offers a critical synthesis that both deepens theoretical understandings of assetization and opens space for reimagining the forms and relations through which value is organized, claimed, and contested.

Edward Shepherd (Cardiff University) and Tim White (London School of Economics) *Towards a Political Economy of Complexity: How Occulted Expertise Sustains Landed Power Relations*

Complexity is a universal feature of land systems across the globe. Deciphering the rules and practices governing land in any given place requires considerable specialised knowledge. In this paper, we contend that engaging with the politics of complexity can provide key insights into the politics of land. The paper is based on a large qualitative study of land value capture in England - the policy mechanism that determines how land values are distributed between state, community and private actors when a piece of land is developed. Through this case, we chart how since the 1940s complexity has played a key role in shaping and delimiting the scope for land reform in England. We demonstrate how a vast 'complexity industry' of consultants, surveyors, economic modellers and land agents has emerged, which largely serves to uphold the interests of those benefitting from landed wealth. This complexity industry has directed focus towards toying around at the edges of the existing settlement and its technicalities rather than confronting the thornier political and ideological matters at its core - i.e. who should own land, and the value thereof, in the first place. In all, we suggest that confronting the political economy of complexity in land markets can help tease out the challenges to meaningful social-redistributive land reform.

Felix Anderl (Philipps University Marburg), Christin Stühlen (Leibniz-Institut für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, Frankfurt am Main) *Seeing Land like International Organizations: Strategies of Making Land Legible for the International*

How do international organizations (IOs) “see” land? Building on evidence in Critical Agrarian Studies and the Anthropology of Development, this article investigates this question with a focus on how global governance contributes to the global land rush. Drawing on Li’s heuristic of “making land investible,” we identify four strategies in IO reports that render land legible as a policy object and facilitate its commodification. Our analysis shows that IOs commonly see land as an economic resource, aligning their governance practices with investment-oriented logics. However, an inductive coding of their reports reveals that this is not their only lens. Some IOs adopt more pluralistic views, recognizing land’s ecological, cultural, and heritage dimensions, reflecting differences in mandates and policy fields. For instance, UNEP exhibits more openness to non-economic values of land, while the WTO predominantly reinforces commodification. Despite this variation, the overarching logic of

land-as-resource persists across the dataset. With the example of Poulantzas, we show how a focus on material interests underlying governance institutions can offer explanations of their “strategic selectivity” in seeing land. This helps understand why some IOs are strongly selective about what they see in land, while others have more discretion at how they make land legible. The resulting contradictions in their ways of seeing land can serve a strategic function in establishing the permissive structure that sustains the land rush.

#### 16:00 – 17:30 Land and Political Theory

Kendall Gardner (University of Oxford), *Liberalism and the Production of Settler Stability*

In the political theory of territory, theorists like Anna Stilz, Margaret Moore, and Cara Nine have tackled the land question by addressing two interrelated injustices: climate displacement and colonisation. However, by largely maintaining a commitment to territorial sovereignty, these accounts fail to properly engage with Indigenous and decolonial critique, much of which questions land’s role as territory and/or property. Following these critiques, this paper argues that contemporary political theory fails to properly address climate-related land loss for the same reason. By upholding territorial sovereignty and its settler-colonial foundations, these theorists fail to take *instability* seriously as one of land’s characteristics. I argue that these theorists remain committed to stability due to their liberal inheritance. Through an analysis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century adoption of John Locke into the liberal canon, I show how Anglo-American intellectuals cemented settler-colonialism as a form of liberal statehood. I suggest that current attempts to theorise climate-related land loss within a liberal framework ultimately fail because of their ideological commitment to settler stability. In the quest to find justice, those pulling from a tradition of liberalism end up falling into the very traps they set out to avoid.

Nicole Whalen (Memorial University of Newfoundland), *Land Financialization and Property-Owning Democracy: Rematerializing Property in Contemporary Approaches to Justice*

There is a growing urgency to address economic and ecological injustices related to land use and distribution. One of the most pressing concerns includes the increasing acquisition of land for investment purposes. The financialization of land contributes to the expansion of industrial agriculture as well as growing inequality and rising costs in the value of land. Despite this urgency, contemporary theories of justice remain focused on immaterial (i.e., financialized) forms of wealth redistribution. Taking the example of property-owning democracy, I argue that such approaches are not equipped to deal with land injustice because their models of property ownership do not entail sufficient control over an asset by its owners. I conclude with a proposal for rematerializing property as a solution to the financialization of land and the rise of what Brett Christophers refers to as “asset-manager society.”

Juliette Monvoisin (University Siegen) *Vanishing Lands, Persistent Worlds: Rethinking Territorial Sovereignty beyond Property*

As the territories of small island states such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands face irreversible loss due to rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion, the land question takes on new urgency. In these cases, land is not

merely a means of production or subsistence—it is the condition of possibility for sovereignty, cultural continuity, and collective identity (Kolers, 2009). Yet dominant approaches to climate displacement, whether through refugee frameworks or redistributive land-sharing schemes, often reduce territory to an interchangeable resource—a neutral surface upon which political rights are exercised (Risse, 2009; Nine, 2010; Dietrich & Wündisch, 2015). This paper challenges such instrumental views of land by foregrounding its epistemological and political significance: as territory imbued with meaning, as a non-substitutable infrastructure of belonging, and as a constitutive element of political community. It critiques the property-based conception of land that underpins international legal norms (Grotius, 1609; Charbonnier, 2020) and proposes instead to approach sovereignty not as control over bounded space, but as the capacity to sustain relational geographies and mobile forms of life (Campbell, 2010; Burkett, 2013; Marino, 2015). By drawing on Indigenous spatial practices and alternative land ontologies, the paper argues that the disappearance of habitable territory invites a rethinking of political authority beyond exclusive possession. This shift opens up new ways of addressing the classed, cultural, and ecological dimensions of land-use conflicts in the age of climate crisis—especially when communities are displaced not by conquest or enclosure, but by the slow violence of environmental collapse. In this light, the land question is no longer just about distribution or ownership, but about the recognition of different ways of inhabiting and valuing land—ways that resist being collapsed into market logics, legal abstractions, or technocratic solutions (Kolers, 2019; Dahbour, 2024).

**18:00 – 19:15 Keynote**

*An Ecosocialist Concept of Land Ownership and Territorial Rights*  
Omar Dahbour (City University of New York)

In this talk, I will make an argument for an ecosocialist concept of land, territory, and the rights to each that certain peoples, classes, or groups can legitimately claim. The argument consists of three major contentions. First, land has taken on a renewed importance in 21<sup>st</sup>-century political struggles. This is the result of changes in the political economy of energy production, as well as transformations in agricultural and food systems. As a consequence, land has become an important, even essential, aspect of any program for the socialization of productive assets. Second, the socialization of land involves a revitalization of notions of the commons and commonwealth. These terms are meant to denote forms of land ownership that are neither private nor public in any strict sense. They suggest the need to rethink what social property means, when it is applied not (only) to industrial enterprises, but also to the material foundations of agriculture and industry. Third, attempts to socialize land through forms of communal ownership will fail unless contained within a more general strategy of territorial rights. Rights here is used in the general sense of legitimate, high-priority claims to governance over distinct features of social property, group relations, and/or personal entitlements. In this case, a territorial right is necessary in order to legitimate more local, circumscribed claims to land ownership. These three contentions will be prefaced by a brief consideration of the role of the agrarian or land question in Marxist and critical theory. A brief conclusion will consider why socializing land must ultimately be politicized through ecosovereignty claims that confront state power, as well as market imperatives.