

‘Zones of Intermediality’ as Analytical and Theoretical Tool to Examine Large Scale Land Acquisitions.

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International actors increasingly work through global structures and deploy discourses to access, acquire and exploit vast tracts of arable land in Africa for various purposes (e.g. agricultural production, bio-fuel, multinational mining and conservation). At the site of such projects, tensions emerge between divergent international and local conceptualizations of development, history, heritage, livelihood security, and sustainability.

In this paper, the author proposes an innovative theoretical model ‘zones of intermediality’ to address the above problematic, focusing specifically on how diverse, culturally-informed stakeholder approaches to the environment and land use come together on the same playing field. ‘Zones of intermediality’ are physical and ontological grids where land claims are mediated, legitimized and/or defended by various stakeholders - company, government official, local elder, NGO, etc. ‘Zones of intermediality’ may be triggered by any number of discursive and non-discursive factors. We approach ‘zones of intermediality’ in two principal ways:

1. *land access and legitimization*: by investigating media used by stakeholders to legitimize their land claims;
1. *embodied valuations*: by analysing how different land and livelihood valuations are mediated by cultural paradigms;

The first approach focuses on historical and contemporary processes of inclusion/exclusion (dispossession or access restrictions) from land as legitimized through media/processes of mediation. Media plays an important role in legitimizing high impact land projects, and the depiction of local stakeholders as the main degraders of the environment in mainstream media is a powerful discourse of legitimacy. The author aims to situate ‘land degradation’ within specific historical, cultural, ecological, political-economic and discursive contexts.

The second approach concentrates on the breakdown - where each actor in the ‘zone of intermediality’ might use a similar language, but mean something different. This is predicated on the hypothesis that different stakeholders approach notions of development, wealth, land use, labour, ‘sustainability’, and heritage differently. Where, why and how does a break point (conflict) emerge within the context of (inter-)national – local interaction? We aim to adapt this model to applied development aims by showing how and why different stakeholder approaches to land are mediated by (non-)discursive cultural paradigms.

In sum, intermediality has a dual interest - as a tool wherein media is deployed to achieve certain ends, be they economic, political, cultural and/or charitable, and as a mirror of the wider cultural environment.