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**Institute for the Social Sciences, Cornell University**

**Contesting Global Landscapes Theme Project**

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### **Critical Analysis of ‘Green Grabbing’**

Ecological degradation and risks are invoked by a range of powerful actors as justification for a variety of actions that reshape access to land and the resources derived from land. Cast as ‘green grabs’, these actions are contested by people and organizations concerned about social justice, the implications of displacement of local people and further concentration of political and economic power by states, financiers and corporations. An analysis of ‘green grabbing’ demands that we develop these arguments and apply them to empirical cases in order to understand mechanisms, dynamics and outcomes. Additionally, a critical analysis demands that we seriously consider claims about ecological degradation and its implications for current and future generations as well as non-humans. It is quite possible that changes in patterns of access to land are required if we are to conserve biodiversity, mitigate climate change and protect water resources, as well as advance capacities of local and non-local people to produce security and welfare. I do not take it as a given that local people’s claims to land trump others’ claims. I do not take it as a given that local people interact sustainably with land. And, I do not take it as a given that alternative institutional arrangements cannot or should not be pursued.

I expect to advance this symmetrically critical analysis of interactions between ecological claims and control of land resources through development of two ongoing empirical cases. The first is forest conservation by ENGOs and state partners in the USA. Specifically, we are studying the political and economic construction of the “Finch Pruyn working forest”, the single largest addition in more than a century to the Adirondack Park, the largest protected area in the continental USA. In addition to presenting us with a chance to explore how new conservation objectives are being integrated into a landscape with its particular history and its dense network of existing claims to land, this case provides an opportunity to address financialization. Twice as much land being incorporated into the park has been sold to a Danish pension fund as part of the Finch Pruyn purchase, a transaction that the New York Times has called the “Deal of the century.” Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs) are part of a major shift in tenure in the USA and represent a window into the nexus between institutional investors and land resources.

The second case focuses on state-centered grassland conservation in China. Specifically, we are studying current efforts to reduce livestock densities in the Three River Source Area, a region in the Tibetan Plateau that is headwaters to the Yellow, Yangtze and the Mekong Rivers. The China case directly speaks to displacement, as this summer we interviewed Tibetan people who were recently relocated to newly constructed settlements as part of the conservation scheme. Also, the China case allows to link to the Payment for Ecosystem Services debate, as herders are nominally being compensated as part of this initiative.