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Defending the 'public interest': An assessment of competing actor representations of 'solutions' to growing natural resource deficiencies

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies a SRT framework to the study of two case studies, namely the recent campaign of opposition to the legalization of hydraulic fracking in the State of New York and the more ongoing debate on land leasing in Africa. In relation to both campaigns, the analysis accounts for the arguments of a major financial institution and industry representatives who stress the safe and value-adding dimensions of these practices, as well as the views of opponents who refute the validity of industry's position and point to the unacceptable risks posed to the community, health and the environment. In spite of a number of obvious differences between these two case studies, not least differences arising from contrasting socio-economic and geo-political settings, there were also some notable similarities. First, was a tendency amongst protesters in both cases to formulate their role as contemporaries in a historically extended struggle for democratic justice. All perceived of themselves as guardians of their community's right to resist a corporate 'invasion' of their territories, like their forefathers and mothers before them. A theme of colonialism was explored in both settings through various identity and thematic anchoring devices that deliberately evoked shared understandings and historical memories of exploitation and human suffering. The evocation of powerful symbols of identity through visual narratives of

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protest further reinforced the cultural comprehensibility of opponents' message of protest in both contexts.

Keywords: Social representations; justice; identity; liberty

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for justice in this age of global climate change increasingly is a struggle to preserve entitlement to essential natural resources but equally, a struggle for equity and fairness in the distribution of the burdens created by ongoing environmental destruction. High polluting corporate and state actors deplete their own resource reserves and those of others (e.g., the atmospheric commons) in full knowledge of the dire consequences of doing so. However, as scientific tools of data gathering grow evermore precise, the possibility of tracing specific environmental effects to the activities of particular actors increases. The Climate Accountability Institute (2013), for instance, published data recently identifying five major gas and oil producers as the main offenders amongst 90 corporations responsible for almost two thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions. As they do so, the resource inequalities that emerge are seen not as 'fair inequalities' but as profoundly unjust. This paper looks at two issue campaigns where shifts in the wider cognitive representation of sources of environmental harm have exacerbated tensions between opposing actors, each representing their own position as in the interests of 'the common good' and in line with ideas of justice in a resource challenged world.

The analysis will focus on two issue campaigns set in very different geographical and political settings - the recent campaign to legally ban hydraulic fracking in the State of New York (2012-2015), as well as the ongoing debate on large-scale land leasing in Africa. Both land leasing and fracking have been heavily promoted in recent years by major investment agencies such as the World Bank as viable 'solutions' to diminishing energy reserves and reduced yields of essential food crops. Since 2008, the World Bank Group has offered generous financial support to natural gas explorations, as part of its $3 billion investment in fossil fuels (Institute for Policy Studies, 2013:1). In the same time period, it has become a more prominent advocate of

land-leasing initiatives in Africa and other regions of the developing world (see, World Bank, 2013) to address what it perceives as the under-utilization of 'available' resources in times of increasing scarcity. Apart from accounting for how fracking and land leasing are presented as practice-based 'solutions' to global problems of resource shortage, this paper will also account for the views of those who are fundamentally opposed to such formulations and attempt to undermine the perceived safety of these practices.

METHODOLOGY

Using a Social Representations Theory approach (Moscovici (2007/1961; 1984), it will assess how competing actors in disputes on these practices represent their main ecological, social, and economic effects on the community. As Purkhardt (1993:32) observes, social representations 'embody and define the experience of reality, determining its boundaries, its significance and its relationships'. Exploring how actors 'define the experience' of fracking or land leasing within their communities allows the researcher some opportunity to assess how actors conceive of these new practices in terms of the familiar.

Taking insight from the work of Howarth (2002: 145; Howarth, 2006: 67; 2014: 2) on the connection between representations and identities, it notes how actors in both campaigns formulate a distinct identity position by weaving concerns over the risks of fracking or large-scale land leasing into a shared social history of democratic struggle. Through processes of interpretive integration, the relationship between democratic identity and ideologies of freedom or liberty is creatively explored by actors and expressed through their social representations of these practices. Of particular concern are those differences of interpretation that emerge between competing parties. Whilst many of these differences are shaped by communicative exchanges with opponents, more fundamentally, actors develop a distinct perspective in communication with a stock of ideas and values that make possible the classification of the various dimensions of land leasing and fracking practices in the first instance and their objectification as a natural 'part of our social setting' (Moscovici, 1988:214).

A Social Representations Theory (SRT) approach offers a particularly fruitful research framework for assessing the multiple layers of meaning construction created by competing actors in disputes. It offers a useful means of exploring how actors draw upon societally familiar frames of reference (Hoijer, 2011:7), including socially embedded ideas of liberty, autonomy and democratic justice to 'conventionalize' opposition or, indeed, actively support the legalization of fracking or large-scale land leasing within a community. Collectively shared interpretations of the risks and merits of these practices do not emerge ready made but rather develop gradually within a community over time. It is not only the process of acquiring an understanding of the meaning of these practices that is inherently social. The interpretive components of their representation are also deeply social, reflective as they are of the historical, cultural, political and economic context of their production.

Against the criticism that social representations theory pays insufficient attention to scenarios of conflict and ideological mobilization amongst competing interests, this paper defends SRT as an ideal approach for studying such issues, especially when the function of social representations in shaping policy (on land reform or environmental protection, for instance) or political relations (for example, outcomes of commissioned inquiries) (see Voelklein & Howarth, 2005: 440) is taken into consideration.

Two contexts of study

The analysis centres on two case studies set in highly contrasting geographical settings. The first is the campaign of opposition that developed in the State of New York against the legalization of hydraulic fracking from 2008, whilst the second captures a segment of the more ongoing debate on the merits of large-scale land leasing in Africa. Two notably different case studies were chosen to assess how the risks or benefits arising from each were framed with the aid of socially and culturally specific codes of meaning, reflective of the context in which they emerge. Apart from clear differences of interpretation, there were also notable similarities. For instance, a tendency amongst opponents in each case to construe their struggle for justice as part of a wider crusade that stretches across time (Sani, Bowe & Herrera, 2008:160). Efforts to bridge old and new campaigns for justice were always in the interests of making sense of new challenges in

terms of older ones (see also Liu et al., 2005: 538; Lowe, 2012: 14.4). Visual protest iconography was a particularly useful tool for bridging the past with the present and portraying both as part of the same ongoing struggle for democratic justice. Another common element was the tendency to emphasize the mythical basis of opponents' truth claims and accuse the same of misleading publics.

Data

Research data for both case studies was gathered from several textual sources, including official reports produced by international agencies, most notably the World Bank (1995, 2009, 2010, 2013), the Independent Oil and Gas Association (2015a, 2015b), NGOs such as Christian Aid (2009, 2013), Oxfam (2011), Action Aid (2012) and Ecowatch (2015), as well as more general campaign literature and poster images produced by coalitions, including New Yorkers Against Fracking (2012), New York Society for Ethical Culture (2012, 2015), the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) (2014), the African Biodiversity Network (2010) and the Oakland Institute (2015). All textual sources reviewed were analyzed for evidence of how actors represented the benefits or indeed risks posed by the practice in question to health, the environment, the economy, as well as the democratic wellbeing of the community.

Analysis

To capture the inherently social nature of communication on the risks or benefits of land leasing and fracking practices, the analysis will focus on two dominant strategies of social representation. The first is that of objectification. As Moscovici (2000:42) explains it, objectification reflects a process whereby a new or complex phenomenon is objectified as a concrete element of collective social consciousness with the aid of familiar frames of reference. This paper examines how the objectification of land leasing and fracking occurs with the aid of visual, as much as rhetorical framing devices that situate 'heterogeneous' representations of both within rich and varied fields of interpretation (Batel & Castro, 2009: 419). Of particular interest to this research is the extent to which protesters supplement rational arguments explaining why practices of hydraulic fracking, for instance, ought to be banned, with more creative, visual

narratives of protest. The latter are usually employed to portray contentious issues in a direct and emotionally charged manner. Visual texts paint a graphic picture of the social present, one that simultaneously disseminates information, frames major concerns (Snow et al. 1986: 464), identifies symbols that resonate deeply with communities and emotionally objectifies the need for resistance to new capitalist ventures.

Whilst the struggle for visibility in political campaigns may seem like an obvious feature of all protest activity, it is one that has been largely absent from social movement research to date. Doerr, Mattoni & Teune (2013: 55), through their fieldwork, seek to correct this deficiency, analyzing how protest imagery acts as a type of 'Trojan horse' (see also Doerr & Teune (2008: 161), entering somewhat unobtrusively into fields of social representation to generate deep emotional connections with various campaigns of opposition. Research for this paper sought evidence to support the arguments of Doerr, Mattoni & Teune (2013), as well as the more general claim that fantasy and imagination continue to be prominent features of the theatrics of contemporary political life. The creative use of familial scenes or city landmarks in poster illustrations, as well as celebrity endorsements of messages of protest (personification), add a certain 'iconic quality' (Moscovici, 1984: 38) to protesters' campaigns and greatly increase their public appeal.

The analysis also sought evidence of two types of anchoring employed by actors in their social representations of various concerns. According to Lowe (2012:14.6), anchoring is the process of classifying foreign phenomena in terms that resonate with more familiar ways of viewing and understanding the world. Two types of anchoring can be observed. First, thematic anchoring where actors make sense of and order their comprehension of land leasing or fracking practices, for instance, by evoking a series of familiar or 'pre-existing' (Moscovici, 2000: 31) themes, including themes of nationalism, community, or that of safety. A second type is identity anchoring where actors apply 'we', 'they', 'us', or 'them' identity distinctions to reinforce community allegiances or, indeed, heighten social distance from opponents. Another strategy of interest to this research is the use of negative typifications where opponents accuse each other of making false claims and deliberately misleading publics, of seemingly intending to provide explanation and justification for progressive practices that, in truth, are highly destructive.

Overall, the research aims to promote the merits of a social representations theory approach to the study of how societal actors make sense of new, potentially destructive environmental practices by anchoring, objectifying, and framing their component elements in terms of the societally familiar.

NEW YORK'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST HYRAULIC FRACKING

As hydraulic fracking becomes a more regular practice across the United States of America (now occurring in twenty-two states), an intense debate ensues as to the risks and benefits attached to its operation. Since 2008, gas companies in the US have lobbied government for access to the Marcellus Shale, an area that stretches from upstate New York through Pennsylvania to West Virginia and west to parts of Ohio. The shale is comprised of sedimentary rock buried deep beneath the earth's surface and contains reserves of natural gas that are a byproduct of natural decomposition. In October 2009, the Canadian company Gastem began drilling the first of its three state-permitted Utica Shale wells in New York, an area that lies beneath the Marcellus Shale.

The American Petroleum Institute enthusiastically supported such moves and estimated that if New York embraces natural gas fracking, its operations could add over 15,700 jobs and generate $369 million in state and local tax revenue by 2020 (Independent Oil and Gas Association, 2011). When these proposals were first made, energy companies had already established a number of fracking on the other side of the southern border of New York in Pennsylvania with much controversy over its overall costs and benefits. Opponents pointed to the way these operations had already begun to generate significant health and environmental risks in the form of air and water pollution. Of particular concern was the way US law allowed energy companies not to release information about the chemicals pumped into the ground during the fracking process. Independent scientific testing in the region confirmed concerns that groundwater supplies were being contaminated with chemicals known to be dangerous to health. Over the next seven years, anti-fracking campaigners would fight an intense public battle to have fracking operations banned in the state of New York. In particular, campaigners targeted the

office of the new state Governor, Andrew Cuomo, as did those energy industry representatives in favor of its legalization.

In March of 2012, anti-fracking groups formed an alliance, known as New Yorkers Against Fracking (NYAF). By 2014, over 150 groups had joined this new alliance. One of the first decisions it made was to create a new social media site to reach a wider audience, publicize campaign events, post news reports and attempt to recruit new members. Public rallies were held on a regular basis at legislators' offices around the state, including that of State Senator Jack Martins who in April 2012 co-sponsored a bill for a moratorium on fracking in New York. In August 2012, Sean Lennon, together with his mother Yoko Ono, formed the group Artists Against Fracking and gathered nearly 150 fellow artists including Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr for an event to raise awareness of 'the campaign of misinformation' regarding hydraulic fracturing as 'a clean alternative to coal or other fossil fuels'. On April 19th, 2013, the group opened an art show entitled 'Imagine No Fracking' invoking the memory and values of Lennon's much loved peace anthem 'Imagine' and inviting publics to call or tweet the governor, urging him to impose an immediate ban on fracking.

By February 2013, the office of the State Governor Cuomo had decided to conduct its own comprehensive study of the health effects of fracking, Encouraged by these developments, the NYAF launched a 'Don't frack NY' Twitter Storm to increase public awareness and political pressure on the governor's office to put health and environmental safety concerns at the top of its issue agenda. In the fall of 2013, the anti-fracking activists increased their use of celebrity endorsements to further enhance public interest in their campaign. For instance, in November, Marisa Tomei, Daryl Hannah, and Amy Smart, as well as a host of other celebrities appeared in a series of New York Against Fracking video campaigns challenging President Obama and Governor Cuomo to ban fracking for reasons of health and pollution.

In the meantime, supporters of fracking, such as The Independent Oil and Gas Association (IOGA) were organizing their own media campaign. Postcards were sent to households throughout the state of New York condemning the antics of celebrity supporters of a ban on fracking as well as the lack of credible evidence supporting the rationality of such moves.

Media channels were used to promote the message that fracking has the potential to reduce U.S. carbon dioxide emissions to their lowest levels since the early 1990s. Meetings with legislators and officials from the Governor's office were organized to clarify the pro-fracking position and voice concern over the 'inaccuracy' of the claims of anti-fracking activists (e.g., John Holko, President of Lenape Resources).

IOGA President Brad Gill, for instance, accused activists of 'twisting the facts and taking part in street theater, stunts and gimmicks', as well as 'ignoring the prosperity and environmental protection that modern natural gas development is bringing to many other states' (quoted by Lerner, CNN, August, 2012). The choice of wording here is revealing. Active verbs such as 'twisting', 'ignoring' or nouns like 'gimmicks' indicate how this actor attempted to emotionally anchor the representation of protesters in wider social typifications as brazen and unprofessional. The underlining message is that campaigners are irresponsible not only for objecting to developments that are seen as beneficial to the community, but also jeopardizing the long-term economic wellbeing of 'an engaged local workforce'. Against this positioning of opponents as 'they' who obstruct progress, industry representatives aligned themselves with practices that are 'responsible' and sensitive to the energy challenges 'we' Americans face today. The 'we' identity position being constructed here is asserted in a definitive style to eliminate any doubt as to its validity:

> Hydraulic fracturing is a responsible way to make the most of our American energy resources while limiting environmental harm (Independent Oil and Gas Association, 2015a:1).

A major thematic anchoring employed by industry representatives was safety. Keen to reassure publics as to its safety, the Marcellus Shale Coalition (2015a:1) describes the fracking procedure as follows:

> It can take several days to complete the stimulation process and requires continuous monitoring to ensure the safety of workers and the protection of the environment. Natural gas companies invest between $5 and $6 million to develop a single well.

> Protecting that investment through a safe operation and successful completion is a key priority for every well drilled.

Similarly, the IOGA (2015b:1) adopts a reassuring tone when describing how the fracking process involves mainly simple and trusted natural components, such as pure water and sand, as well as substance known as guar found 'in many of your favorite processed foods'. Having accounted for fracking's safety, Industry then explores its economic potential. Emphasis now shifts to the employment opportunities generated by fracking for a 'local workforce' if current 'barriers' are removed.

> The energy industry has a proud history of providing safe, efficient and environmentally sound exploration for oil and natural gas in New York, while employing thousands of workers and contributing to the New York's quality of live (IOGA New York, 2015).

Industry describes itself as firmly committed to 'strengthening America's communities'. A theme of nationalism is explored continuously. Seizing the opportunities created by harnessing 'clean-burning American natural gas' is first and foremost in the interests of making America 'a better place to live, work and raise our families' (Marcellus Shale Coalition, 2015b: 1). Not only does Industry situate itself firmly within a 'we' national community (identity anchoring) but also describes the welfare of 'future generations' as its primary concern.

Counter representations of fracking

For critics, industry representatives, such as those referred to above, consistently fail to acknowledge certain basic facts with regard to fracking, including that a total of 70 to 140 billion gallons of water are needed to fracture wells in the United States each year, an amount equivalent to the annual water consumption of nearly forty towns with a population of 100,000. The Marcellus Shale Pennsylvania well alone uses an average of 4.5 million gallons (USGS, 2016). As companies drill deeper in search of new shale wells, the quantity of water required to

fracture deeper rock will rise, according to actors such as Ecowatch (2015), as will the amount of chemicals used, many of which are toxic to humans and wildlife (see Earthworks, 2015:3).

Opponents accuse Industry of propagating the myth of abundant gas and employment opportunities when in fact, neither can be guaranteed under circumstances of resource scarcity and the very real risk of environmental disaster (e.g., Ecowatch, 2015). The autonomy of communities, they argue, must be protected if they are to avoid becoming 'corporate resource colonies'. Throughout the anti-fracking campaign in New York, protesters defended their right to object to the allocation of extraction rights to corporations wishing to drill for natural gas in their state on the grounds that such activities interfere with their abilities to safeguard reserves of precious resources for future generations, as well as jeopardize their capacities to protect basic freedoms, including freedom from fear of ecological disaster.

Indeed, protecting basic freedoms proved an important identity anchoring device for protesters. Extending this identity even further, campaigners opposing the legalization of fracking in the state of New York drew heavily upon on the allegoric power of one of New York's most potent symbols - The Statue of Liberty. The latter is an important emblem of the city's multiple histories of democratic struggle and continues to be subject to a type of interpretive heterogeneity that increases its symbolic porosity and cultural relevance over time. As one New Yorker Against Fracking campaigner described it:

> 'As the image of the Statue of Liberty suggests, New York was once the door that welcomed people to a new land and a new life—people who were traumatized by the greedy regimes that plagued their countries of origin. New York now needs to stand up once again against the greedy regimes — this time in our own country — and keep alive the idea of America as a place of freedom' (Jennifer Montalbano, Phoenicia, NY June 27, 2012).

The meaning of this symbol is in constant motion in response to new developments in the City's biography, its peoples, events and surroundings. It is this element of movement that is brought to life by anti-fracking campaigners in their creative depiction of the Statue of Liberty in

poster campaigns as a hero figure defending her people against a likely 'frack attack' (Ecowatch, 2015). Emotionally charged references and visual portrayals of an animated Statute of Liberty banishing frackers from the state of New York are explicitly in the interests of generating solidarity with a project of justice that spreads across time. The poster image in Figure 1 depicts the Statue of Liberty in a new meaning setting, clearly engaged in an angry exchange with fracking operators. Notably afraid, the latter appear to be fleeing hastily from her wrath. The message at the top of the image is personalized, directed specifically at Governor Cuomo in a way that partially situates him outside a justice in-group but in a way that also suggests he can become part of this in-group if the right actions are taken.

In terms of emotional anchoring, the poster image is reminiscent of a comic hero figure, brave and defiant against those who threaten the safety of her people. The campaign's imagery and written message are designed to arouse sentiments of outrage and a felt need for immediate action to safeguard 'our city/town/community' from outside interference. For Americans Against Fracking and the New York Society for Ethical Culture, this campaign is an important moment of civic identity assertion (identity anchoring). Ecowatch continues the theme of defiance and heroism in its descriptions of the dangers a 'frack attack' poses to the environment, health, and democratic values of America's communities (see Ecowatch, Stop the Frack Attack National Convention, October 3-5, 2015).

Figure 1: New York Society for Ethical Culture November 2012 (see: http://www.meetup.com/Ethical-Culture-NYC/events/91097922/).

The second poster produced by New Yorkers Against Fracking (January 2015) reprinted below in Figure 2 contrasts sharply with the earlier campaign poster (2012) in Figure 1. The important element to note here is the timing of this second illustration, produced after the announcement by government to ban fracking in the State of New York. The emotions represented through this campaign are therefore celebratory and reflect strong elements of civic pride (the 'I love New York' t-shirt worn by figures in the picture). Once again, the Statue of Liberty is portrayed as a protective mother figure but on this occasion is represented as happy and smiling as she tilts a somewhat enlarged torch of liberty towards the New York skyline, another emblematic symbol of freedom and opportunity in the American collective imagination.

Figure 2: New Yorkers Against Fracking (January 2015).

The type of dreaming these poster campaigns inspire is strategically focused on the act of political awakening from a state of unknowing as to the dangers posed by fracking. Both posters speak to a 'dialectical fairytale' (Susan Buck-Morss, 1991: 225) of New York as a land of liberty. As a critical historical enterprise, the ongoing development of this fairytale embodies a constructive moment when the city's historical struggles against oppression and intolerance are acknowledged (portrayal of a multi-ethnic New York public in Figure 2) and linked to newer struggles for justice (opposition to fracking). In particular, the utopian dream of a 'frack free future' is seen as bound up with the ongoing development of this fairytale. The type of interpretive work explored here reflects a process of objectification where fracking operators are objectified in collective social consciousness as instigating a 'frack attack' on their city. Their identity construction is, therefore, that of an enemy wishing to undermine the freedoms and resource wealth of New York's communities. More generally, this interpretive work points to the continuing importance of the Statute of Liberty to the city's representations of itself, its peoples, shared values, and age old principles of liberty and democracy.

Yet this imaginative dream work is not convincing to all. Deroy Murdock, for example, writing in the *New York Post* in January 2013 before the ban was imposed commented:

> 'In a New Yorkers Against Fracking agitprop poster, the Statue of Liberty furiously topples natural-gas-drilling towers with her torch as energy company 18-wheelers flee in horror. These warnings might be believable if fracking regulators seemed even slightly worried. Instead, federal and state environmental officials appear positively serene about hydraulic fracturing.

Murdock was not alone in his questioning of campaigners' representations of the dangers posed by hydraulic fracking. Indeed, throughout this campaign, political debate was colored by deeply antagonistic relations among opposing actor coalitions, each equally committed to discrediting the motives and reputation, as much as the perspective of the other. In spite of Murdock's assumption that regulators did not share opponents' concerns over the safety and invasive quality of fracking operations, in December 2014, New York's State Health Department released a report in which it concluded that fracking did, indeed, pose a risk to communities. The expressed concern was that many of the potentially carcinogenic chemicals used in fracking operations could leak into and contaminate groundwater around fracking sites. This report led administration to finally ban fracking in New York and issue a formal statement to that effect in June 2015.

LAND LEASING IN AFRICA

Over the last two decades, global temperatures have risen steadily leading to a consistent fall in cereal production in many regions (e.g., the Gulf) and a sharp increase in food prices (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2010). Add to this the need for crop yields to be approximately 85% higher than levels in the year 2000 to accommodate the projected growth in global population to nine billion by 2050. One initiative supported by the World Bank to address these problems is the possibility of large-scale leasing of Africa's rich 'uncultivated' lands. Casting the food security concerns created by global climate change in trans-boundary terms, the understanding is that Africa's extensive land reserves are potentially of benefit to many and, therefore, must be made available immediately for intense agricultural investment. Across a

number of key position papers published between 1995 and 2010, the World Bank lays out various reasons why new leasing initiatives must be supported, not lest because of Africa's failed attempts to date at sustainable resource management, poverty reduction, employment generation, and land reform (World Bank, 2013:1).

In *Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant* (2009) it explains how such 'failure' has arisen mainly because of the primitiveness of its farming methods and general cultural backwardness. Arguments concerning poor land management and agricultural output become the central justificatory grounds for a proposed mass transfer of ownership rights to mainly foreign commercial interests. Certain socially embedded ideas, such as the doctrine of 'terra nullius', that is, 'lands that belong to no one', are evoked to naturalize the classification of these lands as 'available' and make such formulations seem like unproblematic elements of shared thinking (Moscovici, 1988:214). Similar to the past during periods of colonial conquest when terra nullius was employed as a quasi-legal justification for the enclosure of Africa's 'idle lands' and other precious resources by European colonialists (Araghi, 2000: 146), today lands 'owned by no one' are earmarked for immediate commercial development. The fact that less than 10 percent of the lush lands of The Guinea Savannah, an area of some 600 million hectares of land, is used for growing crops is noted disapprovingly (World Bank (2009:2). It is essential, therefore, that such land be 'transferred' to 'those who can use it more productively' (World Bank, 2009: 3)

Traditionally, land ownership in the developing world has been governed by customary land tenure, a distributive system deemed increasingly out of sync with more modern, legally grounded ownership arrangements. According to the World Bank (1995:7), the main 'weakness' with such traditional arrangements is their tendency to allow 'open access' for all to valuable resources, especially land. Large scale, predominantly foreign market investment is promoted as a corrective to such inefficient arrangements, where ownership is transferred to private agricultural producers on the basis of a more 'regularised' system of ownership rights. In *Innovations in Land Rights Recognition, Administration and Governance* (2010), the World Bank explains how a truly effective response to Africa's current problems cannot rely on a resource management regime that offers equal recognition to both customary arrangements and private contractual rights (p. 28). Instead, what is required, it argues, is a system of 'uniform

commercial and intellectual property laws' (2010: 155) that smooth the way for the advancement of international commercial investment (p. 156) and with it, significant poverty reduction (World Bank, 2013: 1).

Counter representations of land leasing

For opponents such as The Oakland Institute (2015), Christian Aid (2009) or Action Aid (2012), land leasing arrangements do not offer local African communities the type of 'opportunities' the World Bank speaks of. Instead, these actors attempt to reframe large-scale land leasing as a type of agro-imperialist 'land grabbing' reminiscent of Africa's colonial past by anchoring these new practices in historically familiar ways of viewing and understanding the world. Two types of anchoring are operationlized in this instance. First, thematic anchoring, where opponents attempt to shape public understandings of land leasing by evoking pre-existing social representations of exploitation and injustice that are then 'dialogically reconstructed' and extended to new contexts of meaning (Marková, 2000: 447). A second type of anchoring applied is identity anchoring where opponents introduce clear identity distinctions between what 'they' 'capital hungry' 'foreigners' want and what Africa's vulnerable communities require (e.g., strong democratic representation). Large-scale deals are seen as part of more ongoing historical trends towards exploitation and indifference to the plight of Africa's peoples.

ChristianAid (2013:16), for instance, draws attention to at least three varieties of 'myth' present in the policy discourse of the World Bank on land reform in Africa – the myth of idle lands, the myth of global solidarity and thirdly, the myth of development. As Barthes (1987: 115) observed, myths serve a double function: their purpose is to notify the reader as to the existence of a certain thing but in a way that encourages the reader see it from a particular ideological perspective. For opponents such as ChristianAid, what is essential is that the ideological claims of powerful players actors be exposed as false. A central aim is to trigger a moment of political awakening to the need to stop an unbridled capitalist destruction of Africa's precious and finite resource reserves.

The myth of 'idle lands'

Lands targeted for further commercial development are anything but marginal or 'unused' (Oxfam, 2011). Rather, they are utilized for shifting cultivation, grazing, hunting and gathering and in that, contribute to the rich communal life of the developing world (Cotula et al., 2009). 'The land must come from somewhere—whether from small farmers' land, communal land, or conservation areas. There is no free land in any of our countries, so communities will inevitably be displaced and denied their territories and natural resources' (African Union, Economic Commission for Africa, 2009). Furthermore, displacements have been shown to occur more frequently in prime areas with sufficient access to water and infrastructure (see The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Earthscan, 2011). A study conducted by the African Biodiversity Network in 2010 confirms this finding. In densely populated areas such as Wolaita, already experiencing land pressures, swathes of land used by locals is being allocated to private corporations, for example, Sun Biofuels (African Biodiversity Network, 2010: 6).

Opponents point to the fact that land represents more than just 'opportunities'. More importantly, is a heritage with deep historical significance for Africa's peoples (see Declaration of the Global Convergence of Land and Water Struggles, 2015). It is essential, therefore, that a broader understanding of the value of land be granted due recognition through a democratic deliberative procedure that is inclusive of a range of farming interests (especially smallholder farmers and women), civil society groups, state representatives, all acting in accordance with international obligations.

The protest images below offer some insight into how opponents of land grabs emotionally and thematically anchor these developments. In Figure 3, the scramble for Africa's fertile lands is graphically illustrated, with crowds of US and European investors rushing to buy cheap lands as World Bank officials look on. All are strategically represented as white businessmen, drawing attention to the racial and gender aspects of this dispute.

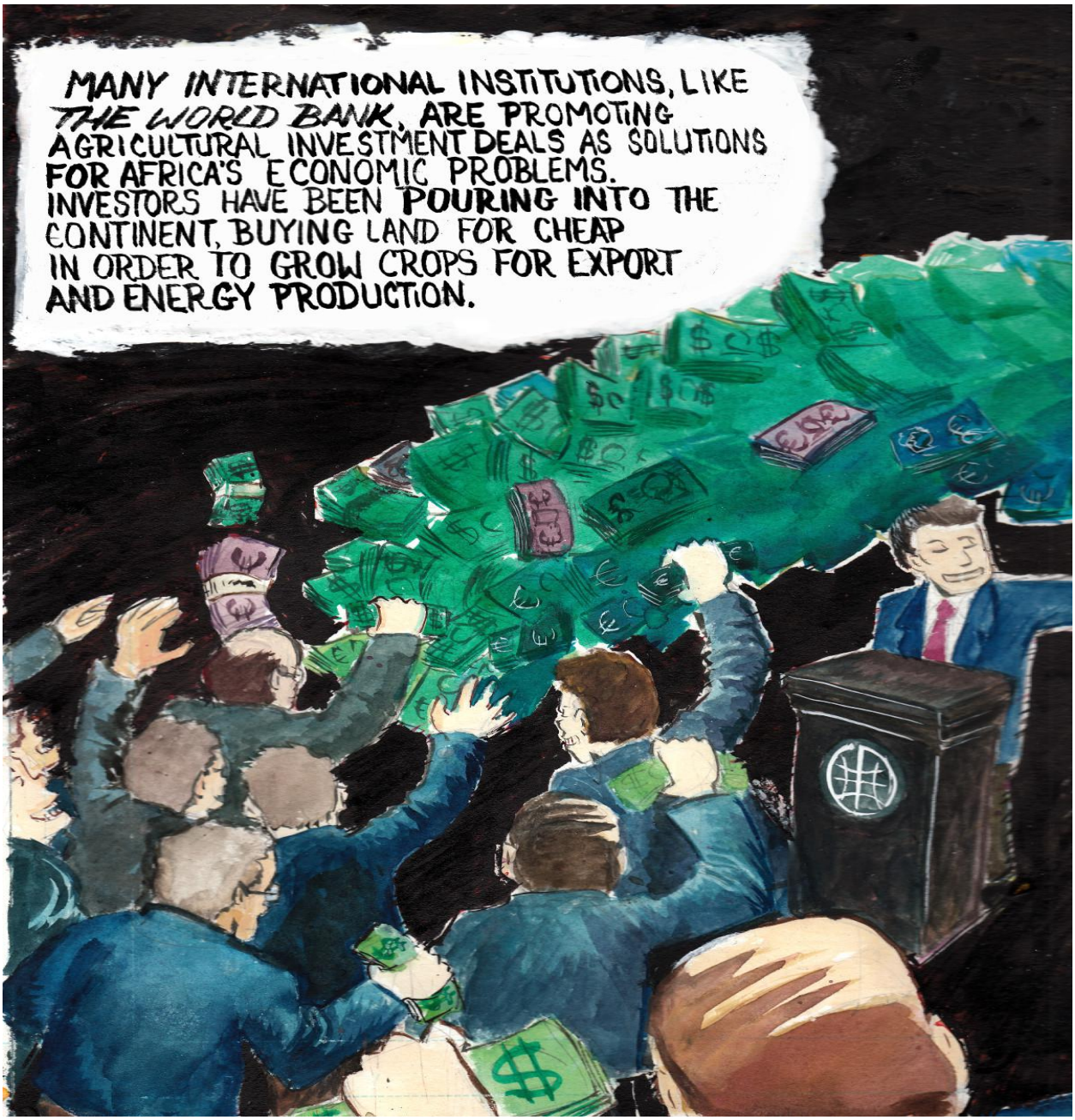

Figure 3: The Oakland Institute (2015)

The myth of global solidarity

Responding to the pledges of the G8 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition Initiative to lift fifty million people out of poverty by 2022, the Head of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) denounced the activities of this alliance, claiming it supports initiatives that are

discriminating against those who are supposed to be its main beneficiaries - Africa's small farmers and women farmers. Women comprise approximately half of the agricultural labor force in many regions of Africa, yet are the most frequently marginalized when it comes to land ownership, access to credit, and control of the proceeds of agricultural deals (UN Women, 2015). Opponents accuse the Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition of helping to usher in a new wave of colonialism in Africa. In terms of emotional anchoring, the image in Figure 4 produced by the Oakland Institute (2015) deliberately conveys mistrust and encourages sentiments of moral indignation by portraying the main recipients of foreign investors' 'false promises' and harmful practices as Africa's vulnerable children.

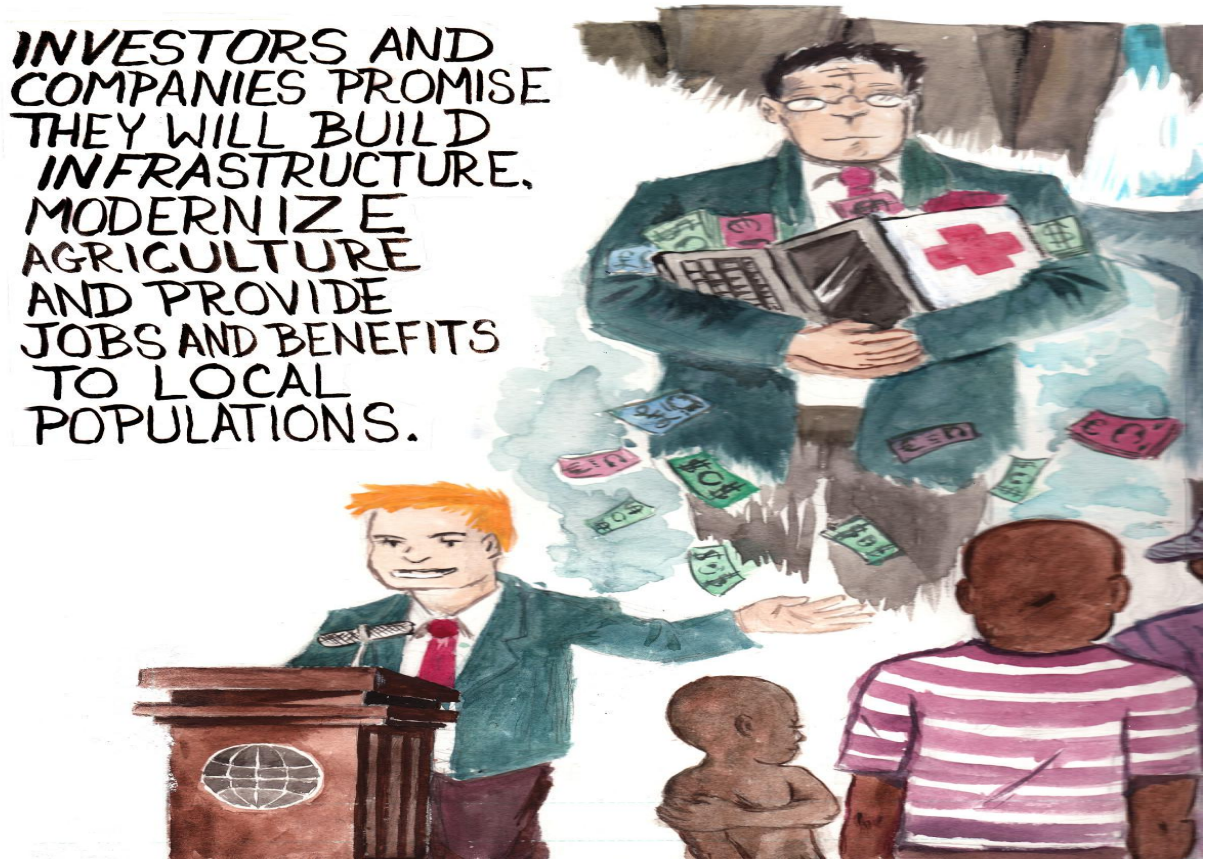

Figure 4: The Oakland Institute (2015)

The myth of development

For ChristianAid (2013:16) also, a deeper understanding of the significance of land to the communities of Africa is essential. This actor notes a major tactic of the World Bank is to systematically ignore evidence supporting the virtues of small-scale farming. Instead, large-scale farming tends to be presented as the only option for the future. Figure 5 below presents an illustration by the Oakland Institute where the dangers of this push for larger scale intense framing initiatives are graphically portrayed, including an alarming deterioration in the quality of Africa's agricultural lands and a grave depletion of essential water supplies. The image suggests that foreign investors' promise of 'opportunity' hides a deeper, more disturbing truth.

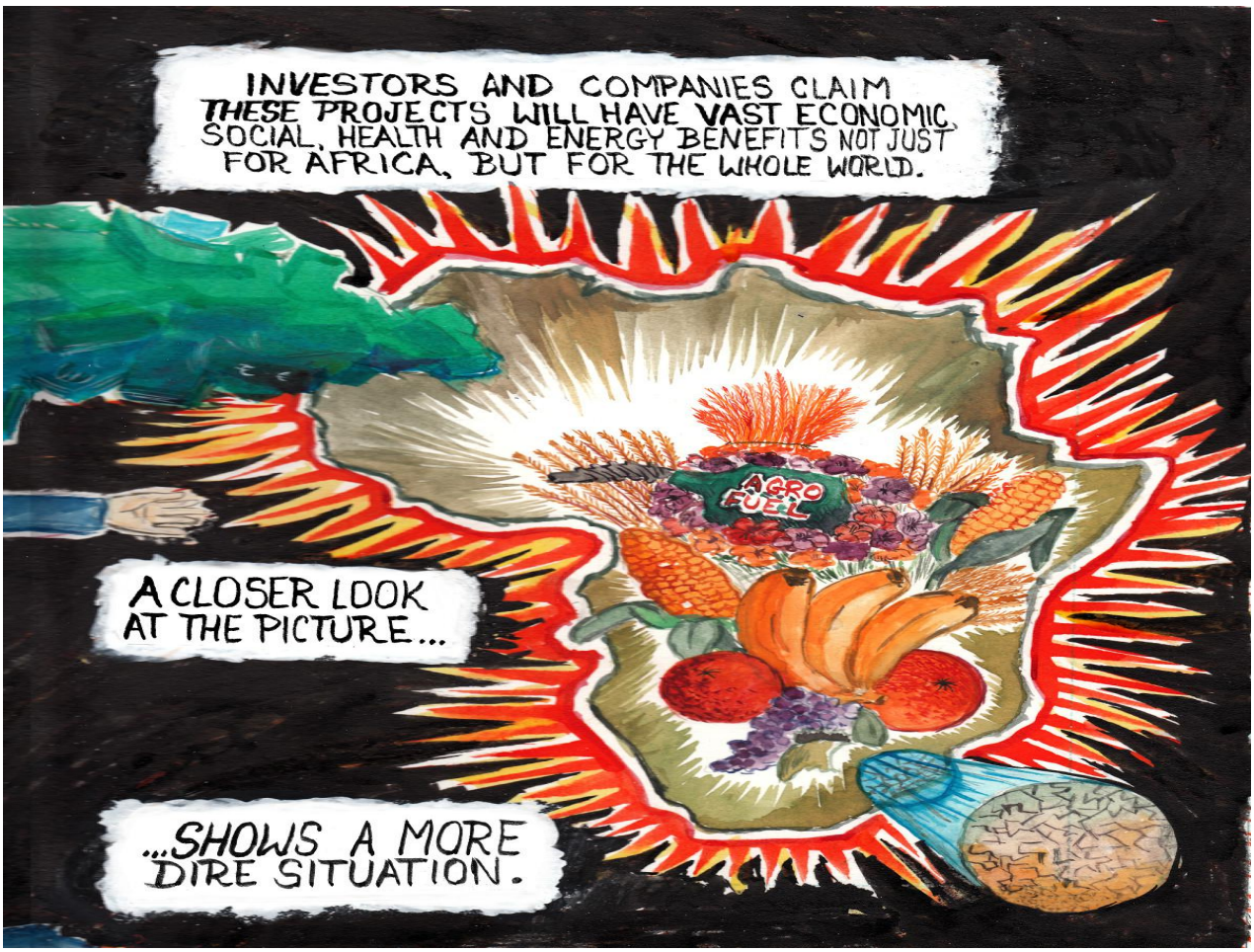

Figure 5: The Oakland Institute (2015)

ActionAid (2012) also explores a theme of 'hidden truths' by pointing to field research that suggests employment opportunities arising from new land deals are mostly short lived, poorly paid, and lead to greater economic hardships, especially for pastoralists and women with less secure land rights. The arguments of opponents of land leasing, such as those outlined above, enjoy a notable degree of cultural resonance with those African communities directly experiencing the effects of these new land deals, but also internationally amongst those who stand in solidarity with the people of Africa (e.g., Climate Justice Assembly Declaration, The World Social Forum, 2009). Of particular concern are those procedures that systematically block the democratic freedoms of communities to change the course of resource destruction and resist an unwanted degree of capitalist domination of their ecological and economic fate (see the Oakland Institute, 2015). Securing freedom from such domination requires action. Figure 6 below presents an illustration by the Oakland Institute designed to inspire publics to act by evoking familial memories of colonial ships transporting precious cargo out of Africa. The aim here is to trigger historical recognition and mobilize communities to support collective campaigns of solidarity to stop contemporary 'land grabs' across the developing world.

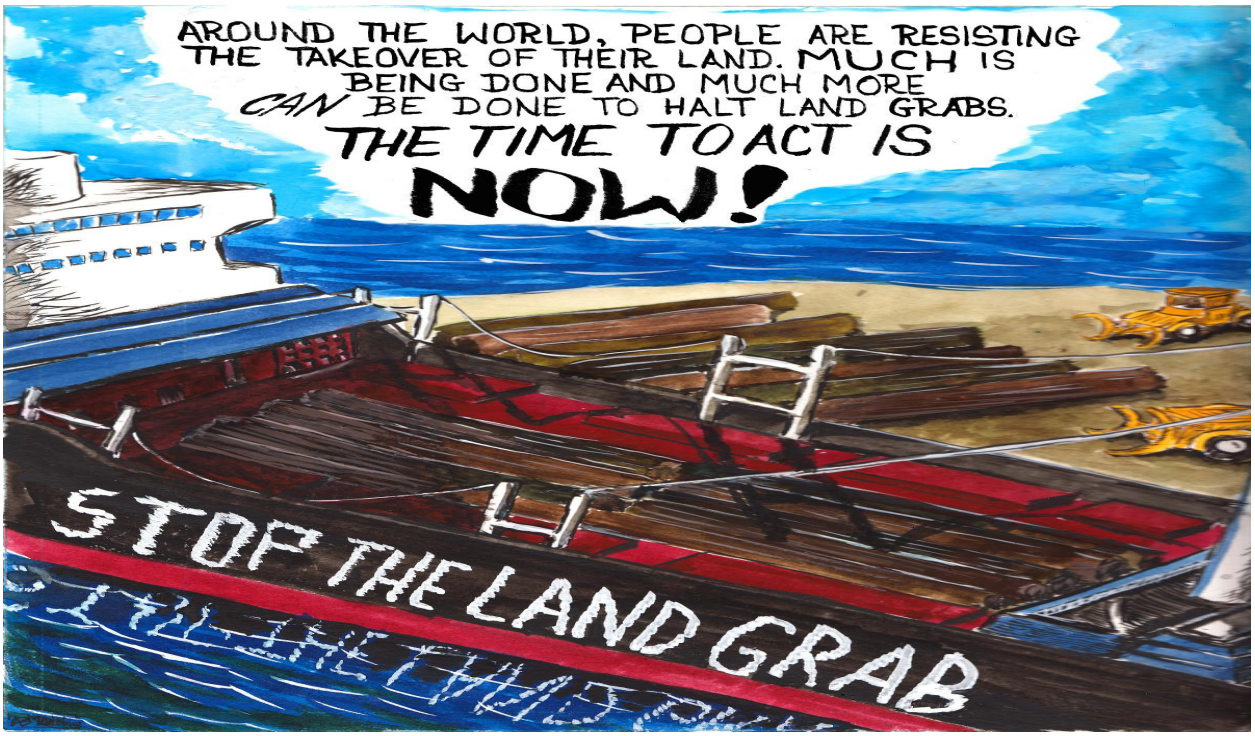

Figure 6: The Oakland Institute (2015)

CONCLUSION

This paper applied a SRT framework to the study of two case studies, namely the recent campaign of opposition to the legalization of hydraulic fracking in the state of New York and large-scale land leasing in Africa. In relation to the campaign to ban fracking, the analysis accounted for the arguments of representatives of industry who stressed the 'safe' and 'clean' dimensions of this energy source and noted its potential contribution to 'the American economy'. It also accounted for the arguments of opponents who focused on the risks of fracking to health and the environment. Actors on both sides of this campaign tried to position themselves as acting in the best interests of the public and construed the identity of their opponents as 'outsiders'. In relation to the second case study, the analysis accounted for the arguments presented by the World Bank in four major policy position papers published between 1995 and 2010 exploring paths to further agricultural development in Africa. It also assessed how opponents responded to internationally backed land leasing initiatives, framing them as 'contrary to the interests of local African communities'.

In spite of a number of obvious differences between these two case studies, not least differences arising from contrasting socio-economic and geo-political settings, there were a number of similarities. First was the shared tendency amongst protesters in both cases to formulate their role as contemporaries in a historically extended struggle for democratic justice. All perceived themselves as guardians of their community's right to resist a capitalist invasion of their territories and natural resources, like their forefathers and mothers before them. Protest actors in both case studies consistently attempted to undermine the legitimacy of industry's representations of fracking or land-leasing practices as in the interests of local communities, by re-interpreting the same as 'agro-imperialist' acts of 'land grabbing' reminiscent of a colonial past in the case of land leasing, or as part of a plan to turn communities into 'corporate resource colonies' in the case of fracking. A meta-theme of colonialism was thereby explored in two very different geographical and political settings through strategies of thematic and identity anchoring that deliberately evoked powerful pre-existing understandings and historical memories of exploitation and human suffering. The very real danger of a capitalist invasion of precious

resource reserves provoked new varieties of civic nationalist sentiment, as well as a need to protect communities' remaining resource wealth from future capitalist plundering.

Overall, this paper has explored the merits of a SRT approach to the study of competing actors representations of practices promoted by dominant financial agencies and corporate alliances as 'solutions' to the problem of growing natural resource scarcity (e.g., the commercial acquisition of 'available' arable lands and energy supplies). In particular, it has focused on those practices of objectification, anchoring, and ideological mobilization used by actors to align their position with what is perceived as in the 'public interest' in this age of ecological adversity.

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