RESISTANCE AGAINST LAND GRABS IN SENEGAL: FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND PARTIAL FAILURE OF AN EMERGENT SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In Senegal, the government has encouraged private investment in agriculture and biofuel production since the 2000s, generating several attempted or effective large-scale land acquisitions by domestic and international investors. In reaction to these projects, local groups of opponents have joined forces with national peasant organizations, civil society associations, and think tanks to resist perceived land grabs. This article examines the emergence of this social movement and explains why anti-land grabs campaigns were successful in halting some projects, but not successful in others. I argue that four main factors are at play: a strong mobilization of local populations measured by group cohesion and level of determination; the assistance of national and international NGOs in scaling up protests beyond the local level; the capacity of opponents to harness the support of influential elites and decision-makers; and the legal status of the land under contention. This paper draws on an analysis of secondary data, qualitative interviews, and field observations carried out in Senegal for several months from 2013 to 2018.

Keywords: land grabs; large-scale land acquisitions; Senegal; resistance; social movements; non-governmental organizations
In recent years, fundamental changes in the ownership and occupation of land have occurred in many countries of the Global South, with domestic and foreign investors tentatively or effectively acquiring vast swathes of land (Cotula, 2013; GRAIN, 2016). In Senegal, a small country of 196,712 km², land transactions have multiplied exponentially over the last decade due to the implementation of government programs aimed at modernizing agriculture and producing biofuels. These domestic policy incentives have combined with a growing interest from land-seeking international investors, who see Senegal as a safe business destination. However, despite avowed state support for agribusiness and private investment, several announced projects have never materialized, were terminated, or are continuing on significantly smaller areas than planned. Although there has undeniably been a clear increase in large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) in Senegal, numbers on the scope of the land rush are inflated. What explains that several ventures have encountered major operational obstacles, resulting in some cases in their definitive interruption?

I argue that organized opposition has influenced the course of several proposed LSLAs in Senegal, leading some investors to lose control of their concession. Protests against current land deals have emerged in Senegal due to the perceived threat that LSLAs represents for customary land ownership, food security, traditional livelihoods, and social stability, in a context where 49.5% of Senegalese households practice agriculture and pastoralism (ANSD, 2014, p. 151). Illustrative of their commitment to keep or regain their land, several local community members have been willing to engage in direct actions and face jail time. At the national level, a dynamic network comprising peasant associations, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks, known as the Framework for Reflection and Action on Land in Senegal (Cadre de réflexion et d'action sur le foncier au Sénégal – CRAFS) was created in 2011. CRAFS, as a whole or its individual organizations, has engaged in campaigns to denounce and limit the implementation of several land deals, acting as a social amplifier of local events of contention. More broadly, CRAFS has also urged the government to increase its support for family farms and participated in the land reform initiated in 2012. External observers have portrayed Senegalese civil society’s vitality, resourcefulness, and capacity of influence, past and present, as largely unmatched in West Africa (Apanews, 2013; McKeon, Watts, & Wolford, 2004).

In this article, I trace the conditions that led to the emergence of the anti-land grab social movement in Senegal, which has posed a significant challenge to state-sponsored land investments. Collective action against perceived land grabs differs from traditional associational life in Senegal’s rural areas, which was formerly canalized and contained by religious leaders, aimed to provide agricultural services and influence policy-making in the context of state retreat, or took the form of violent rebellion. I then explore some of the factors that explain how this coalition of local and national groups successfully campaigned against several land deals. I also examine why some dedicated efforts to stop LSLAs have only achieved partial results. I advance that four main factors are
at play: the capacity to act collectively at the local level, the assistance of national and international NGOs in creating awareness around controversial projects, the ability of opponents to harness the support of elites and decision-makers in their struggles, and the legal status of the land under contention. These protests have taken place in a democratic setting simultaneously characterized by the existence of electoral incentives facilitating the mobilization of political elites and the apparition of new constraints for freedoms of expression and association, especially under Abdoulaye Wade’s presidency.

My arguments are based on a study of five major campaigns against deals that many community members and Dakar-based activists regard as “land grabs”: Ranch de Dolly, Lanka Investissement, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, Ranch de Ouassadou, and Senhuile. When I initially wrote the paper, these five campaigns were the most sustained and notorious ones that had occurred in Senegal. This paper draws on an analysis of written documents, qualitative interviews, and field observations carried out in Senegal from 2013 to 2018. I examined more than fifty newspaper articles, as well as NGOs’ public reports and unpublished documents, information displayed on corporate websites, official correspondence, legal proceedings, and meeting minutes. In addition, I conducted in-depth interviews with 35 local, regional, and national representatives of local groups and national civil society organizations to understand the strategies they have used to fight against LSLAs. I also met with more than 20 administrative agents and elected officials to gauge their reaction to mobilization around land deals, as well as five corporate executives. Finally, I participated in more than 20 meetings and workshops on topics related to land governance and agribusiness in Senegal.

This chapter first reviews the writings on community responses to LSLAs in light of the social movement literature, followed by a discussion of the emergence of the anti-land grab movement in Senegal. The third section considers the transformation of the Senegalese associative movement and describes the land tenure system in Senegal. I then introduce the analytical framework developed to explain the varied outcomes in opposition campaigns against land investments and chronicles the evolution of the five land projects. The fifth section illustrates in detail how the four factors identified have played out in the case studies.

EMERGENCE, FORMS, AND RESULTS OF CAMPAIGNS AGAINST LAND GRABS

The magnitude of the global wave of LSLAs and its implications for international capital, state power, and local populations have attracted much media and scholarly attention. At its inception, the body of work on LSLAs has mostly attempted to identify the international and domestic drivers of the land rush, as well as to assess their consequences on rural livelihoods. It has yet to explain in a more comprehensive fashion the trajectories of specific land deals, an important task given the major discrepancy between goals stated by governments or private companies and results actually obtained on the ground. Authors have offered valuable pieces of explanation as to why many projects were aborted,
focusing for instance on sudden changes in the global economic environment (Cotula, 2013); the obstructive role of domestic elites and administrative authorities (Burnod, Gingembre, & Ratsialonana, 2013), or the speculative nature of some land deals (McCarthy, Vel, & Affif, 2012). However, even though domestic and international NGOs were at the forefront of detecting and contesting LSLAs in several countries, writings on resistance to the current wave of land deals remains relatively scant. Building on the social movement literature and on existing accounts of anti-land grab campaigns in other countries, this chapter precisely fills this gap in the context of Senegal.7

Three questions are at stake when analyzing opposition to large-scale land acquisitions. First, why does social mobilization against perceived land grabs occur in some instances but not in others? Saturnino M. Borras Jr. and Jennifer C. Franco (2013) aptly remark that peasants do not automatically oppose land deals. Different individuals and groups can variously view the same land investment as an unfair land grab and an occasion for community development or personal enrichment. Insofar as land grabs are partly a matter of perception, the public consultation process and the terms of inclusion of affected customary owners influence community responses to land deals (Mamonova, 2015; Smalley & Corbera, 2012). Smalley and Corbera (2012) also argue that variations in tenure arrangements and the value of the land account for the support or resistance of affected populations.

Second, what are the forms that protests take and which actors do they target? Shapan Adnan (2013) distinguishes between four types of land-based resistance, depending on whether strategies to contest land seizures are overt or covert, and violent or non-violent. For some, the type of land dispossession (incremental, small, and community-induced versus large and sudden land grabs by external actors) engenders distinct forms of resistance (Kandel, 2015; Levien, 2013). While this proposition is generally valid, the quasi-automatic link between land dispossession and overt opposition to maintain or regain physical control of land needs to be unpacked more carefully. It appears that the regime type also matters, making forms of everyday resistance more frequent in authoritarian environments, while overt opposition is more likely to occur in democracies (Scott, 1986; Trang, 2009). Violent resistance is similarly not viable in strong states that can easily suppress rebellion (Tilly, 2006), neither is it justifiable nor appealing in democratic contexts (Schock, 2015).

Not only do land struggles take several forms, but they also occur at various scales. Catherine Boone (2015) claims that different land tenure regimes shape local responses to foreign agricultural projects. According to the author, when the central state is responsible for managing land access, such as in Tanzania, land conflicts play out in the national arena. When a neocustomary land regime prevails, as in Ghana, for instance, landowners will direct their grievances toward chiefs and disputes will remain confined at the local level. While this framework is undoubtedly compelling, it does not have strong predictive capacity in the case of Senegal, a country that does not fall neatly in one of the two land tenure regime categories (statist/neocustomary). In Senegal, land grabs enabled by rural councils have been contested in the national arena. However,
Boone’s central intuition that the legal status of the land impacts social protests remains valid, albeit in a different guise, as will become evident below.

Third, what results do campaigns of resistance achieve? In general, the body of work on LSLAs has not attempted to explain in a systematic manner why mobilization against land deals succeeds in some cases but not in others. It is nonetheless possible to decipher a number of factors from the existing literature. Rosanne Rutten et al. suggest that “‘horizontal’ relations of shared interests and identity” influence small-holders’ bargaining power (2017, p. 894). Kurt Schock similarly mentions “mass mobilization” as critical for generating “leverage within institutional political and legal spheres” (2015, p. 502). The role of elites is more ambiguous. On the one hand, a recurrent argument states that domestic elites commonly enable land deals as intermediaries or investors (Fairbairn, 2013; German, Schoneveld, & Mwangi, 2013). On the other hand, consistent with Sidney Tarrow’s argument that the presence of “influential allies” widens the political opportunity structure (1998, p. 79), the ability of concerned communities to garner the support of elites and state authorities in fighting land grabs also features in many writings (Borras Jr. & Franco, 2013; O’Brien & Li, 2006; Rutten et al., 2017; Schock, 2015). I take these arguments to a more fundamental level by showing that, in cases where communities are highly divided about the arrival of investors — which seems to happen frequently — or cannot rely on the support of influential elites, land defenders can compensate their small number and isolation by committing radical acts of opposition.

Finally, a narrow focus on the local dynamics of contention also obliterates the influence of national and international NGOs with significant power, money, and knowledge. Resistance movements increasingly occur across multiple geographical scales, rendering obsolete the traditional binary categories of “local” and “global” (Ferguson, 2006; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). In Africa as elsewhere, civil society is connected to transnational groups that provide crucial material and framing resources to grassroots land struggles (McKeon, 2013; Prause, 2014; Rutten et al., 2017).

**THE EMERGENCE OF RESISTANCE AGAINST PERCEIVED LAND GRABS IN SENEGAL**

Not all large-scale land deals are necessarily land grabs. The many accounts that depict the current wave of LSLAs as an unbridled land rush by the impersonal forces of capitalism efface the political agency of people who experience, accept, and contest these projects. I therefore use the term “land grab” cautiously, as it has an inherently negative connotation implying that land is stolen away from a homogeneous and vulnerable local population. In most cases studied in this paper, some community members were in favor of the proposed land transfer, despite the fact that it had some or all of the “objective” features associated with land grabs. However, these land transfers were viewed as land grabs by a considerable number of people who felt compelled enough to organize against their installation. As a matter of fact, LSLAs often polarize local communities between opponents and supporters of these projects, as the success of
the former in stopping a land investment risks depriving the second of anticipated benefits, and vice versa. As such, new strategic alliances and community divisions often form when land investors arrive.

As been observed in Kenya (Smalley & Corbera, 2012), my fieldwork reveals that land deals involving sustained negotiations with villagers appear to receive greater legitimacy at the outset, partly because the latter regard themselves as genuine owners of the land. In Senegal, projects that dealt individually with peasants through contract farming schemes or the (illegal) purchase of land have typically not induced a significant level of community strife ex-ante. This observation indicates that the mode of land entry plays a role in the intensity of resentment and feeling of dispossession. Sometimes, agribusiness projects thus receive local support, at least initially, because they are viewed as an opportunity to earn much-needed revenues in the form of salaries, land rents or produce sales. Whether those deals retain their legitimacy largely hinges on the success or failure of the investor in living up to those promises.

In contrast, a land grab involves the notion of involuntary dispossession or restriction of access to land that risks profoundly altering the prevailing means of subsistence. Land grabs are conceptualized here as instances where powerful actors use procedures viewed as illegitimate to seize land that local populations traditionally use for small-scale agriculture or livestock grazing. Legitimacy differs from legality. Land deals that follow official procedures may be regarded as fraudulent by current users but legitimate by acquirers. Conversely, land transfers that are not authorized by the law may appear acceptable to local owners. Determining when a procedure is illegitimate is thus invariably contested and depends on the respective position of stakeholders. From the perspective of dispossessed owners, land grabbing can occur prior to an actual land transfer, through inappropriate consultation of concerned communities who are expelled from the land. It can also happen after a transaction was concluded, when populations part with their land for unrealized promises such as agricultural modernization, job creation, erection of infrastructure, social investment, and so on. Perceived land grabs are obviously more susceptible to generate resistance, defined as “what people do that shows disgust, anger, indignation or opposition to what they regard as unjust, unfair, illegal claims on them by people in higher, more powerful class and status positions or institutions” (Kerkvliet, 2009, p. 233). Resistance against large land grabs, in particular, is motivated by the loss of productive assets at the basis of agricultural and pastoral systems that typically occurs through the “coercive force of the state” (Borras & Franco, 2013; Levien, 2013, p. 361).

THE FORMS AND EVOLUTION OF LAND-BASED RESISTANCE IN SENEGAL

While rural producers’ political voice has increased in influence over time in Senegal, contemporary campaigns against land grabs represent a new form of collective action, both at the local and national levels. A few years after Senegal’s independence, peasants expressed their dissatisfaction with the decline
in producer prices through the intermediary of their religious marabouts, who threatened to withdraw from peanut cultivation as a means to gain political leverage (Cruise O’Brien, 1979). In parallel, rural populations affected by drought-induced famines and the government mismanagement of agriculture started to form endogenous organizations outside official state cooperatives in the 1970s. However, these associations did not overtly attempt to challenge rural hierarchies of power or state authority (Hrabanski, 2010). A more ambitious venture was the creation of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in Senegal (Fédération des organisations non gouvernementales du Sénégal – FONGS) in 1976. The inception of FONGS “marked the official birth of a peasant movement which had moved from the local to the national scale” (Hrabanski, 2010, p. 288), even though the organization principally provided its members with training activities and exchange programs during the first ten years of its existence (McKeon et al., 2004). In the 1980s, the retreat of the state in the wake of neoliberal measures gave an additional impetus to the peasant movement, which was able to occupy the institutional vacuum created (Hrabanski, 2010). Following more than a decade of peasant activism at the grassroots level, the National Council for Rural Dialogue and Cooperation (Conseil national de concertation et de coopération des ruraux – CNCR) was created in 1993 and has ever since advocated for the enactment of governmental policies and laws promoting family agriculture. The CNCR gained ascendancy and progressively became a recognized interlocutor by the Senegalese state in the design of agricultural programs (McKeon et al., 2004).

While a number of large transfers of land have accompanied state efforts to develop the agricultural sector and consolidate its power in rural areas since the colonial period, they have been met with two extremes: either relative passivity or outright resistance. Examples of inertia include the allocation of 45,000 hectares of forest to Serigne Saliou Mbacké, the general Khalifa of an influential religious brotherhood, for the cultivation of peanuts in 1991 or the creation by a foreign investor of an 80,000-hectare plantation of gum arabic trees in 1999. While these land transfers encroached on occupied farmland and pastures, no coordinated campaigns to oppose them at the local or national level were organized. The one exception is the Casamance rebel movement that took place beginning in the 1980s in the South of the country. This secessionist movement emerged following the influx of migrants from the North seeking land on which they could settle, as well as the establishment of international hotel resorts limiting autochthonous populations’ access to land and water (Hesseling & Eichelsheim, 2009).

When President Abdoulaye Wade came to power in 2000, the Senegalese peasant movement, which he regarded as a hindrance to the exercise of his presidential authority, encountered several setbacks. Wade was not inclined to collaborate with existing peasant organizations and employed various strategies to circumvent their influence, including the creation of a parallel syndicate. In addition, Wade encouraged rural authorities to allocate land to any applicant with the means of cultivating the land. During his reign, attempted or effective LSLAs occurred at an unprecedented scale. Macky Sall, the current president
elected in 2012, also displays a strong commitment to fostering private investment in agriculture, although he claims that family farms must be preserved in parallel.

Despite having no “repertoires of contention” on which to build from previous episodes of disruptive action (Tilly, 2006) and limited resources at their disposal, several peasants and pastoralists in Senegal are no longer quiescent to state authority. To employ Anthony Oberschall’s terms, the current anti-land grab movement in Senegal not only emerged in response to “changes in the basic conditions of life,” but also to a “change in beliefs and values, aspirations and expectations used to filter, frame, and respond to one’s life circumstances” (1993, p. 17). In this sense, Senegalese peasants’ and herders’ attempts to retain control over land represent a passage from an essentially non-confrontational associational life to overt advocacy and contestation movements. Most of the time, land defenders engaged in overt and non-violent strategies (such as public rallies and declarations in the media), as well as “non-contentious private actions such as informal meetings with politicians [and] audiences with the president” (Rossi, 2017, p. 38). Campaigners also occasionally resorted to moderate violence, both overt and covert, for instance when they broke into private property, damaged agricultural equipment, or attacked companies’ workers. If the means employed by land defenders are not in themselves terribly innovative, their usage in rural Senegal is rather unusual.

The Land Tenure System in Senegal

As will be developed in the next two sections, the capacity of anti-land grab campaigns to attain their stated goal remains uneven, partly because different types of land tenure have consequences for political struggles over land. This point deserves further elaboration, as most authors view tenure arrangements as important factors explaining community responses (Smalley & Corbera, 2012) or forms of land struggles (Boone, 2015), but not necessarily the final results of resistance movements.

Laws distinguish between three broad categories of land in Senegal: the state domain, the private domain, and the national domain. The state domain comprises of movable and immovable goods and property rights of the state. The private domain refers to land officially registered with the state and owned by natural or legal persons, principally in urban areas. One project studied here has taken place on land located under the private domain (Ranch de Ouassadou).

The national domain comprises of all non-registered land in the private or state domain, which covered approximately 95% of the territory when the National Domain Law was enacted in 1964. Land comprised in the national domain cannot be privately owned or sold, under the premise it belongs to the Senegalese nation as a whole. The national domain is itself subdivided into four categories: urban, pioneer, classified, and rural zones. Municipal councils manage urban zones, while pioneer zones represent a residual category of land reserves. Classified zones belong to the forest domain of the state with,
which includes classified forests, natural reserves, and national parks. The Water and Forestry Department, a paramilitary body, is responsible for implementing the Forestry Code in these areas. Two case studies analyzed here have occurred on the forest domain of the State (Ranch de Dolly, and Senhuile phase II).

Rural zones, which are destined for habitat, farming, and pastoral activities, are administered by local governments, the rural councils. In Senegal, there were 320 rural communities that have administratively been transformed into communes in 2014. Each rural community contains several villages and is governed by an elected rural council. After the rural council has convened to deliberate on a land request, it issues an excerpt of minutes to the land claimant. The sub-prefect, a state appointee at the district level, must approve these decisions through a decree. These land allocations do not confer permanent ownership rights to claimants, but only revocable use rights. While customary rights continue to prevail for local users as the National Domain Law has never been fully enforced, most investors in Senegal seek a formal land allocation by the municipal governments. Lanka Investissement, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, and Senhuile phase I took place in rural zones.

**FIVE EMBLEMATIC CASES OF CAMPAIGNS AGAINST LSLAs IN SENEGAL**

This section contrasts five opposition campaigns against perceived land grabs that took place in the 2000s in Senegal. As visible in Table 1, three projects involve domestic investors (Ranch de Dolly, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, and Ranch de Ouassadou), while two ventures concern foreign companies (Lanka Investissement and Senhuile). The investors under study have attempted to acquire parcels ranging from 2,970 hectares to 80,000 hectares for agriculture, tourism, animal husbandry, and biofuel projects. The proposed land deals are located in ten rural communities across the country.

Despite the variety in investors’ country of origin, projects’ purposes, and land areas, these cases exhibit three commonalities that enable their comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.</th>
<th>Characteristics of the Land Deals.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investors’ country of origin</td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface area (ha)</td>
<td>51,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural communities</td>
<td>Thièl and Gassane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project’s purposes</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the land deals had effectively been concluded, the projects involved the transfer of vast swathes of land owned or used by peasants and pastoralists, and they have generated widespread controversy, leading concerned populations to ask for their cancellation.

While in some instances, anti-dispossession campaigns have been able to hamper contested projects, in other cases their battles were only moderately successful. What factors explain the successful mobilization campaigns in the cases of Ranch de Dolly, Lanka Investissement, and Mame Tolla Wade, but only partial results in the cases of Ranch de Ouassadou and Senhuile? Four major factors are decisive in accounting for outcomes (see Table 2). A prerequisite for the emergence of campaigns is a strong mobilization of villagers, measured by the number of people banding together against a project, or community cohesion, and land defenders’ level of determination and capacity for strategic action. The second explicative factor is the assistance received from national and international NGOs in advertising opposition, providing organizational resources, negotiating with investors, and formulating counter-narratives. The third factor is the presence of allied elites such as administrative agents, elected politicians, and religious leaders who can pressure the government from within or share critical pieces of insider information with land defenders. The analysis distinguishes between elites’ degree of involvement in anti-land grab movements and capacity to influence land decisions, as the impact of committed allies can be constrained by other more powerful elites or the legal category of the land. The final factor is the land tenure category, which in turns greatly influences the perseverance of investors to pursue their projects in the face of opposition. Using the classification of Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (1996), the first two factors mostly relate to the “organizational structure of the movement” and the “framing processes” employed, while the last two concern the “political opportunities” and constraints that land defenders face.

It is analytically difficult to single out or hierarchize which variable is the most determinant in explaining success or failure — the only necessary condition for a campaign’s success is a robust local mobilization. The outcomes of campaigns depend instead on the dynamic interaction of these factors in each particular case. This is not a predictive model, as different configurations of variables can lead to comparable impacts. Inversely, a similarly vigorous level of mobilization can yield different results, as an investor’s strong claims to the land make an opposition campaign significantly more difficult.

Ranch de Dolly

As Table 2 shows, success in stopping the dismantlement of Ranch de Dolly and convincing the Senegalese government to renovate it was due to the unified opposition on the part of the Fulani community that was assisted by a national NGO, political elites’ strong and influential support for this opposition to the disappearance of the Ranch, and, to a lesser extent, the legal status of the land in question. In 1969, President Léopold Sédar Senghor had established the Ranch de Dolly over 87,500 hectares in a pastoral reserve (réserve sylvo-pastorale), a protected
Table 2. Factors Explaining the Outcome of Anti-land Grab Campaigns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Ranch de Dolly</th>
<th>Lanka Investissement</th>
<th>Mame Toll Wade</th>
<th>Ranch de Ouassadou</th>
<th>Senhuile Phase I</th>
<th>Senhuile Phase II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local mobilization</td>
<td>United community</td>
<td>Moderately united community</td>
<td>Divided community</td>
<td>Divided community</td>
<td>Divided community</td>
<td>Divided community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community cohesion</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of determination</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance from NGOs</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from elites</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of involvement</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity to influence</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal status of land</td>
<td>National domain (Forest domain of the state)</td>
<td>National domain (Rural zone)</td>
<td>National domain (Rural zone)</td>
<td>Private property title</td>
<td>National domain (Rural zone)</td>
<td>National domain (Forest domain of the state)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign's outcome</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Campaign's Success</td>
<td>Relative Success</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Relative success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
area belonging to the forest domain of the state. The Ranch, which straddles the rural communities of Gassane and Thiel, was equipped and made available to pastoralists to graze their livestock and supply Dakar’s meat market. However, public authorities stopped expending money on the Ranch and the infrastructure became obsolete. Nonetheless, the Ranch still represented a zone of importance for nomad herders, especially during the rainy season when cultivated farmland becomes unavailable for grazing. Before restoration works had begun, the Ranch served approximately 3,400 villagers and hosted more than 23,000 bovines, sheep, and goats (République du Sénégal, 2014).

In January 2003, President Abdoulaye Wade revealed its plans to dismantle the ranch and give 51,000 hectares of land to the general Khalifa of the Mouride brotherhood, Serigne Saliou Mbacké, to practice agriculture and intensive husbandry. Pastoralists who would lose access to the Ranch as a result of this land transfer rapidly reacted by setting up press conferences, organizing a strike to destabilize the meat market, marching between a regional town and Dakar, as well as by interceding with several ministers. The mobilization resulted in the creation of the National Union of Herder Organizations of Senegal (Union nationale des organisations d’éleveurs du Sénégal – UNOES). In June 2003, Wade received pastoralist organizations during a presidential audience, after which he sternly declared, “the Ranch de Dolly is not the property of the herders, but that of the state which determines its usage” (Gouvernement du Sénégal, 2003). However, in December 2003, the general Khalifa publicly announced that he had suspended land clearing activities on the Ranch in reaction to the organized dissent of the herders (Seck, 2003). Despite the Khalifa’s renunciation to the land, some ambiguity remained as to whether the area would in the future be permanently devoted to communal grazing activities, as President Wade never publicly repudiated his intentions to convert the Ranch into an agricultural zone (Fall, 2003).

Pastoralists, who were determined to maintain the Ranch on a perennial basis and avoid a future land grab, have been supported by the Center for Study, Research, and Training in African Languages (Centre d’étude, de recherche, de formation en langues africaines – CERFLA) since 2011. This organization, with the help of an experienced rural sociologist and assistance from a Swiss donor, has designed a series of actions lobbying the government to obtain a legal guarantee protecting and restoring the Ranch, including the writing of a pastoral code. At the local level, it was able to unite competing Fulani clans and pastoral associations into a cohesive group that gathered during a large forum in November 2011. Instead of antagonizing authorities by engaging in direct confrontation, CERFLA decided to include in its advocacy efforts administrative agents and elected officials who felt concerned about the fate of the Ranch. The organization reached out to key elites who were able to influence the central government through a message centered on the national vocation of the Ranch. For example, one deputy from the region has embraced the cause with dedication and has frequently advocated for the Ranch at the National Assembly.

These mobilization efforts paid off, as President Macky Sall pledged to preserve and restore the Ranch for pastoral usage in 2013 (Sall, 2013).
Renovations in the Ranch are currently underway (Diallo, 2018). This success has not led CERFLA to complacency given that the pastoral code remains to be formally adopted. Local pastoral associations and CERFLA continue their advocacy work so that pastoralism is better incorporated into state policies and programs. Nonetheless, considering the investments already realized, the future of Ranch de Dolly is likely secure for the time being.

**Lanka Investissement**

Lanka Investissement stalled as a result of the opposition by a fairly united community backed by several NGOs and political elites who helped overturn a rural council land allocation (see Table 2). These elites were both deeply concerned and influential. The International Food Security Network (IFSN) discovered the existence of this project while conducting a study on food security that ActionAid and the CNCR had commissioned. During field research, one community leader complained that three rural council presidents in the region of Kédougou (Bandafassi, Tomboroncoto, and Saraya) had given their consent to the creation of a tourist park supposed to cover 80,000 hectares. One rural council president publicly confirmed that the investor had directly negotiated the allocation of 17,400 hectares with the council (Tamba, 2008). While rural council presidents have been accused of insufficient consultations with other councilors, village chiefs, and local populations (Sambakhé, 2010; Tamba, 2008), the deal was apparently endorsed by “big names.” Abdoulaye Wade, for example, allegedly supported the project through a presidential decree. And the investor behind Lanka reportedly came from a wealthy Spanish family and had close ties with the president’s son (Fall, 2008).

Early on, the local organization that revealed the deal to IFSN started to collaborate with national NGOs to request the project’s cancellation. Several groups, such as the Senegalese chapter of Amnesty International, the African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights (Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l’homme — Raddho), and ActionAid Senegal jointly criticized the deal during press conferences at two social forums held in June and July 2008 in Kédougou. They denounced the investment as an infringement on the right to food and a foreseeable cause of food insecurity, in a context where food riots had occurred in Dakar just a few months before. To convey their message, these NGOs employed various strategies, including community consultations, the production of a public declaration, and radio shows to inform populations. The diaspora of Kédougou living in Dakar and abroad was involved in mounting opposition against the project and provided money for the organization of protest activities. More importantly, a minister from the region worked to dissuade President Abdoulaye Wade from moving forward with the project, while a former socialist deputy native of Kédougou interceded with presidents of rural councils and firmly denounced the deal in the media (Fall, 2008; Tamba, 2008). Also, a regional state official concerned about the partial enclosure of the neighboring Niokolo Koba National Park transmitted confidential pieces of information to activists even though he did not publicly disapprove of the project.
Building an alliance between individuals living in Kédougou, Dakar and foreign countries helped “reach a critical mass of stakeholders able to influence decisions” (Squelbut, De Grave, Bertrand, & Lehnardt, 2011, p. 32). The opposition of these elites counterbalanced the support that the project initially garnered at the highest strata of the political hierarchy.

While a number of community members welcomed the project (Sambakhé, 2010), most people rejected it. Disapproval of the deal took place in a context of widespread discontent over natural resource management in the area. On December 23, 2008, youth from Kédougou violently protested to denounce the adverse impacts of local mining concessions, the lack of state resources dedicated to the region, high unemployment rates, and the potential negative consequences of the tourism project. After the protestors had set fire to government buildings, the army shot at them and killed two young men (Sagna & Dabo, 2008). After approximately two years of opposition, the investment was ultimately abandoned in opaque circumstances. This successful case of mobilization was for national NGOs a critical test that set the stage for future episodes of contention and reinforced the notion that activists could effectively hamper land investments.

**Ferme Mame Tolla Wade**

Ferme Mame Tolla Wade is another project that local populations successfully challenged through a bold opposition campaign and support from a national NGO, which led its chief promoter to abandon his project. In July 2005, upon the request of the national gendarmerie, the Rural Council of Diokoul Diawrigne allocated 2,070 hectares of land to an investor thought to be President Abdoulaye Wade nearby his native village in the region of Louga. Wade’s name did not appear in the council’s excerpt of minutes; instead, the document indicated that the parcel was attributed to a private entity, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade. Unable to find water sources within the limits of the original plot, the investor requested and obtained 900 additional hectares from the rural council in November 2006 (Diop, 2012). Villagers discovered the allocation when South African workers came to erect a fence around 400 hectares of farmland, thereby encompassing the fields of four villages (Cicodev Afrique, 2011, p. 24). The gendarmerie had to intervene to calm aggrieved peasants. Following the incident, the manager of the Ranch made various promises, such as job creation and the erection of social infrastructure, to entice villagers to accept the project. President Wade also received a delegation of notables from the rural community to tout the merits of the farm (Diop, 2012). The group of attendees, mainly composed of rural councilors unaffected by the land allocation, did not dare to contest the president.

In 2008, 99 farmers who had lost their land as a result of the enclosure created the Collective of the 99 Landless Peasants (Collectif des 99 paysans Sans Terres). The group of local militants lobbied politicians for a reversal of the land allocation decision, to no avail. Some villagers remained bystanders in the early phases of the opposition campaign, seemingly out of deference to
authority, but they grew increasingly averse as the investor failed to respect his promises (Cicodev Afrique, 2011). In 2010, the collective consequently asked CICODEV, a Senegalese organization defending consumer rights, to assist them. CICODEV first conducted a field mission to document the case in January—February 2011. It also hired a bailiff to obtain the land allocation papers from the rural council, which had hitherto refused to release the documents, in contravention of the law. Observing that the farm was not installed within the perimeter indicated in the first excerpt of minutes and that the second document did not indicate the specific location of the parcel, CICODEV contested the validity of the rural council’s decision on legal grounds. To help the Collective spread their message, CICODEV then employed a variety of stratagems, such as the transmission of official letters to authorities and the organization of a local rally in July 2011. CICODEV also invited 18 farmers of the Collective to express their grievances against the land project during a public presentation at the World Social Forum organized in Dakar in February 2011. The event provided an occasion for the farmers to network with other rural residents confronted with similar difficulties and to find allies for their cause (M. Diouf, 2011). In December 2011, CICODEV, with support from the Green Group in the European Parliament, published a report discussing the negative repercussions of the land deal on local populations.

On February 9, 2012, 12 peasants, exasperated by their inconclusive attempts at regaining possession of their land after six years of opposition, decided to seize the opportunity offered by Abdoulaye Wade’s electoral tour in their community and cut the farm fence to occupy the fields. As a result, the manager of the farm filed a complaint, and the trespassers were arrested and imprisoned for three months. This coup d’État, which came as a surprise to CICODEV’s director since villagers had not previously informed him of their plans, illustrates their resolve at recovering their land. CICODEV and the Collective received support from the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation and the International Land Coalition to pay the legal procedures and offer financial assistance to the family of the detainees (Kanoute & Lapeyre, 2017). In parallel, CICODEV’s director sent several press releases to the media to publicize the incarceration of the peasants and continued to negotiate directly with the farm manager to obtain the return of the land. After Abdoulaye Wade had lost the presidential elections of March 2012, evicted peasants were allowed at last to cultivate 350 of the 400 hectares on the confiscated land. Other producers whose parcel was occupied by the farm received compensation for the land they had lost. The owner of the farm has not entirely relinquished his land as no excerpt of minutes has been issued to make the decision official. However, the farm is now in a state of abandonment and disrepair. Two members of the Collective were also elected as rural councilors and nominated on the land commission in the 2014 local elections, indicating the emergence of a novel form of “rural citizenship.”
Despite sustained support from NGOs and administrative authorities, local populations achieved only partial success in their campaign against Ranch de Ouassadou (RdO) due to community divisions but more crucially to the legal status of the land, which offered the investor greater tenure security. In the 2000s, a businessman asserted that he possessed 3,065 hectares of land in the rural community of Dialacoto, inherited from his father who had in 1958 purchased seven land titles through auction. His father cultivated peanuts for a period, but eventually abandoned the land he had acquired. Meanwhile, the state used the location to resettle people displaced by the creation of the nearby Niokolo Koba National Park in 1969. The resettled people also migrated to existing villages, creating a mix of autochthonous populations and newcomers, later joined by individuals attracted by intensive banana production (Ece, 2012).

Some 77 years later, the owner’s son claimed the land to erect a commercial farm that would encompass 14 villages inhabited by more than 4,200 people. According to media and NGO reports, he refused to allow a public road to be constructed on his property, igniting the anger of banana farmers who wanted the road to transport their crops to Dakar. Additionally, banana producers who were already cultivating 15 hectares on the investor’s property refused to leave their parcel. In response, the businessman prosecuted the recalcitrant farmers before the regional court, in a lawsuit that he ultimately lost. Finally, just before the cultivation season, RdO destroyed an orchard owned by a group of women and plowed the fields of peasants normally sowed with food crops.

In July 2012, the Collective of the Populations of Wassadou’s Villages (Collectif des Populations des villages de Wassadou), created by the peasants to lobby for their land, requested the help of CRAFS to fight against RdO. They became aware of CRAFS through the secretary of a banana producer organization sponsored by ActionAid. Claiming that the investor prevented them from exploiting their parcels, the Collective wanted him to completely vacate the land they used to cultivate. The tactics the Collective and CRAFS employed to this end included the organization of two rallies in July 2012, the writing of a memorandum by village chiefs addressed to the Minister of Agriculture, and recourse to a bailiff to record damages that the Ranch had imposed on peasant farmland. Villagers also intentionally planted 1.5 hectares of land with food crops on the property of the investor (A. Diouf, 2012).

The Collective could count on the earnest support of regional leaders, in particular administrative officials who, after a period of hesitation, questioned the validity of the investor’s private land title and sided with impacted populations. Land defenders also had the support of a religious marabout who had political leverage at the regional level and of a member of a famous activist group in Senegal, the M23. The combination of widespread mobilization and backing from key elites resulted in the Collective and the investor obtaining an audience with the prime minister to discuss the issue in 2012. The meeting was
inconclusive, however. On March 27, 2013, the sub-prefect, who opposed the project, ordered that agricultural work on the contested property be suspended in an arrêté. In reaction, the investor appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the sub-prefect’s decision infringed the right of private property as guaranteed by the Senegalese Constitution and annulled the arrêté. The Supreme Court ruling confirmed the inalienable character of the land title.

Agricultural activities resumed in July 2014, prompting a group of banana producers to attack and severely wound two employees and damage equipment of the Ranch (Alkuma, 2014). In reaction, villagers in favor of RdO publicly called on the governor to support the project (Dangnokho, 2014). In May 2015, recalcitrant populations once more attempted to hamper activities of the Ranch (Faye, 2015). In search of a solution, the investor proposed to regroup and relocate dispersed human habitations and land plots in a block of 140 hectares within the boundaries of his concession.

From May 20 to May 22, 2015, ActionAid set up a press visit for journalists, which led to the publication of several newspaper stories and the convocation of an urgent meeting by the Governor (APS, 2015a). This event was followed the next year by the stopover of an “international land caravan” departing from Burkina Faso to denounce the project. The last demonstration staged by local and national organizations occurred in 2016. The civil society also met with the minister of justice, a politician from the region, who in turn interceded with the prime minister to find a solution to the protracted dispute. His involvement seems to have been pivotal in inciting the central government to end the stalemate.

The campaign against RdO has delayed the pace of implementation of the agricultural project, but opponents have not been able to completely oust the investor from his property. Why was the opposition only partially successful? Unlike the two previous cases, the villagers were seemingly not as united in their rejection of the project. There was a relative lack of participation of villagers not directly affected by the creation of the Ranch, and perhaps even a lack of leadership on the part of victims, as an NGO representative notes in an internal document. A local newspaper resolutely in favor of the project seems to confirm the existence of a split between “autochthonous” villagers, who welcomed the investment, and dwellers who arrived more recently for the cultivation of bananas, who strongly and consistently opposed it (Alkuma, 2015). The investor himself has dismissed the concerns of his adversaries, whom he has assimilated to a “groupuscule” agitated by civil society leaders. Local elites opposed to the project had a moderate level of influence on the land struggle given the existence of the property title. As both the businessman and land defenders have refused to give up on their respective position, the Senegalese government struck a compromise. While the government declined to expropriate the individual as advocated by opponents and administrative authorities, the promoter has in exchange abandoned the idea of consolidating land plots disseminated on his property. If local producers are for the moment able to cultivate their parcels, their future land tenure security remains uncertain.
As seen in Table 2, Senhuile\(^{50}\) is a case where opponents both succeeded and failed in stopping the project. In the first phase of the project in the rural community of Fanaye, strongly determined local opponents with some backing by NGOs convinced President Abdoulaye Wade to reconsider his support to the investors. In the absence of noticeable elite support for their struggle, land defenders’ pugnacity was the most decisive factor in ending Senhuile in their community, which also comprised a sizeable number of adherents to the investor. Senhuile approached the president of the rural council in July 2010 to obtain a land concession of 20,000 hectares in an area occupied by herders. According to his political rivals, the president negotiated with the company without properly informing other rural councilors and surveying the population affected by the project. The president mainly sought approval from the central government and state structures. The opposition movement against this project slightly differs from the other campaigns, as the chief architects behind it were local political entrepreneurs. The land investment became an object of contention between two political factions of the rural council, as Faction A was afraid that Faction B would build consistent political capital and privileged access to windfalls for patronage networks as a result of Senhuile’s project.\(^{51}\) Unable to defeat the deal during regular rural council meetings due to their minority position and marginalization within their own political party, the faction that resisted Senhuile embarked on a campaign of top–down popular mobilization. Opposition resulted from a combination of local elites’ struggle for power and the concerns of farmers and pastoralists who feared to lose their land to a private company under uncertain terms.

After a first slice of 300 hectares was granted to the company for the creation of a tree nursery, the newly baptized Collective for the Defense of Fanaye’s Land (Collectif de défense des terres de Fanaye), the group representing rural councilors and villagers hostile to the project, wrote letters to authorities and held a demonstration in July 2011 in Fanaye (IPAR, 2012). Frustrated by the lack of results of their actions, individuals from the region living in Dakar asked Enda-Pronat, an organization that carries out ecological agriculture programs, for help. These demands led to the involvement of CRAFS in the opposition campaign (Hopsort, 2013). In August 2011, CRAFS conducted field research and helped with the organization of another protest on October 1. Shortly after, a high-ranking state official informed the group of dissidents that the rural council had secretly released the remaining 19,700 hectares to the company.\(^{52}\) This event was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Clashes between opponents and supporters of the project lead to the death of two people on October 26, 2011 (RFI, 2011). Following the tragic incident, Abdoulaye Wade received a delegation of the Collective in November 2011 to hear their complaints and decided to terminate the project due to the high level of animosity it created. Despite community divisions, Senhuile was stopped by highly committed opponents who forced the president of the Republic to revoke the project in order to avoid further controversy before the presidential elections.
However, the project entered a second phase when Abdoulaye Wade arranged for the company to operate in the rural communities of Ronkh and Ngnith between the two presidential election rounds of 2012. There too, villagers have objected to the arrival of the investor. However, opponents have so far been unable to secure a definitive termination of the project, partly because of the strong backing of the state, the lack of elite support to opponents, and the legal status of the land. To install Senhuile, Abdoulaye Wade reclassified the Special Avifauna Reserve of Ndiaël, a protected area located in the forest domain of the state, and allocated 20,000 hectares to the project for a period of 50 years, renewable by tacit agreement.\(^{53}\) The land concession encompasses 37 villages and hamlets inhabited by almost 10,000 people. Since pastoral populations had customarily occupied the zone before its gazetting, the government recognized to the surrounding communities the right to collect natural resources and to graze their animals in the protected area. In allocating land to Senhuile, the state has effectively extinguished their rights of common pasture in the Reserve. Despite his commitment to terminate the project during his electoral campaign, newly elected President Macky Sall pursued the Senhuile investment in the Reserve as originally planned by Wade.

At the very inception of the project, the group of opponents to Senhuile comprised most community members impacted by the enclosure of the Reserve. Relatively early, however, positions on the desirability of the project have diverged, and the opposition front has fragmented. The company signed an “agreement of cohabitation” with local communities in 2014 under the aegis of the regional governor. Those who have continued to refuse Senhuile have gathered in the Collective for the Defense of the Ndiaël Avifauna Reserve (Collectif pour la défense de la réserve d'avifaune de Ndiaël – CODEN) and carried out a relentless campaign of opposition to protect their pastureland. Senhuile’s early efforts to establish its visible presence by clearing the forest at a rapid pace were accompanied by several community protests. At first, villagers adopted what Michael Levien terms “spatialized, defensive tactics” (2013, p. 363) to repel the investor from their land, such as directly confronting Senhuile’s workers and sabotaging its equipment. In reaction, the authorities called upon the gendarmerie, who stayed on site for many months to protect the company’s installations and deter social protests.

Over time, local opponents have softened their bellicose strategies under the influence of NGOs that have counseled them to avoid resorting to violence and employ institutional means instead.\(^{54}\) As domestic tactics proved ineffective in forcing the investor to leave, campaign organizers have also escalated their means of action to the international level (Prause, 2014). While they still criticized the Senegalese state as being primarily responsible for the project, activists also targeted Tampieri Financial Group in Italy to mount pressure from outside. NGOs such as GRAIN, ActionAid, Re:Common, and the Oakland Institute have for instance released four accusatory reports, set up an online petition, and met with the Italian owners.

The local opposition campaign to Senhuile in the Reserve is the one in Senegal that has received the most support by the civil society and coverage
from the media. Senhuile has failed to fulfill most of the promises it made to persuade the government and populations to accept its project in the first place. Despite this poor track record, the Senegalese government has maintained an almost unfaltering support to the company. More crucially, the project continues to this day due to the legal status of the land, which affords the investor a strong claim to the land. As long as the Senegalese government continues to endorse the project, Senhuile’s land tenure security is preserved. Cognizant of the value and rarity of such a vast land concession in a small country like Senegal, the company is intent on keeping the land despite its current inability to fully cultivate it.

FACTORS EXPLAINING THE OUTCOMES OF CAMPAIGNS AGAINST LAND DEALS

The cases discussed above indicate that a crucial component of campaigns for stopping land deals, both in terms of their emergence and chances of success, is the intense mobilization of peasant or pastoral populations whose livelihoods are in peril. Countless land projects in Senegal have encountered brief, local social resistance but protests have not “taken off” to the same degree. Sometimes, NGOs have helped the subterranean opposition to surface such as for Lanka Investissement. In most cases, villagers have rapidly created Collectives to organize themselves at the local level before resorting to the help of national NGOs.

Groups campaigning for the rehabilitation of Ranch de Dolly and the cancellation of the Lanka Investissement park have been able to overcome internal divisions. Most notably, CERFLA made a myriad of pastoral organizations and familial clans cohere into a group that fought for the Ranch de Dolly. In Senegal, as elsewhere in Africa, Fulani herders have historically experienced greater land dispossession and political marginalization, partly because extensive pastoralism is not considered a “productive” activity and because their geographic mobility diminishes their organizational capacities (Schoonmaker Freudenberger, 1991). That they were able to have the government maintain the vocation of the Ranch was an astounding accomplishment. For their part, militants for the dismantlement of Ferme Mame Tolla Wade and Senhuile phase I have compensated their small number or lack of community cohesion by their willingness to make sacrifices and take risks (Ganz, 2000; Oberschall, 1993). In successful cases of project interruption, opponents to perceived land grabs have demonstrated a superior capacity for organization than neutral or favorable community members. Also, the government usually backed out of projects when social tension deteriorated beyond acceptable levels. In the first phase of Senhuile, for example, the escalation of violence rendered the project socially inadmissible and reflected poorly on the government. It seems that the death of youths and agitation in Kédougou also provided an inappropriate context for the pursuit of the Lanka Investissement project.

Champions of land investments can more easily discredit an opposition movement as unrepresentative when local community members disagree among
themselves. Ranch de Ouassadou and Senhuile phase II are currently able to pursue their operations partly because part of the population believed that their project was beneficial for their community and has cooperated with the investor. These two companies have organized public relations events to advertise this popular endorsement. For instance, Senhuile signed an agreement with neighboring communities to give a voice to supporters of the project and discredit protestors who were hitherto receiving more public attention.

However, even though they are well organized at the grassroots level, protests in remote rural areas are often insufficient to generate enough attention to halt LSLAs. As a consequence, all local groups examined here have asked for the support of national NGOs from CRAFS, the coalition of anti-land grab organizations, to scale up their fight beyond the village level. Supra-local organizations have helped publicize opposition through marches, press points, writing of memoranda, and letters addressed to state agents and elected officials. Paid-staff of CRAFS members have provided local groups with organizational resources such as funds, labor, and means of communication (Oberschall, 1993). CRAFS members also managed to be included in the National Commission on Land Reform, which they saw as an occasion to modify laws to prevent future land grabs.

CRAFS has also helped articulate counterarguments to land investments. Unlike other populations in some African countries, who often expect the government to act in a predatory manner, there is in Senegal a widespread perception of the state as an institution that must behave in a benevolent fashion toward its citizens. Against this backdrop, NGOs have publicly criticized government programs or directives that have enabled LSLAs, calling into question the legitimacy of state institutions — both national and local — in the way they allocate land. Their discourse has grown increasingly sophisticated over time. In the beginning, many NGOs circulated the highest figures available on the land rush in Senegal, as they had an incentive to dramatize the phenomenon against which they were fighting. They have also evoked the specter of violent land conflicts, food insecurity, and poverty resulting from land grabs as an instrument of dissuasion. Noting more recently that many investors have failed to cultivate their land, opponents have shifted their discourse to highlight the inefficacy of agribusiness in comparison to smallholders.

Domestic civil society organizations are also linked to foreign NGOs that provide funding, training, and opportunities to advocate their cause abroad. These local activists regularly participate in global forums and have borrowed terms circulated in international circles to make sense of the Senegalese populations’ predicaments. Isolated cases of land grabs in Senegal were woven into an encompassing narrative of land dispossession linked to the changing global environment. Unlike other countries, such as China, where resistance to land deals remains “fragmented and highly localized” (Ong, 2014, p. 10), mobilization in Senegal under the leadership of CRAFS has allowed the exchange of successful tactics. These organizations have also endeavored to inform villagers of their rights and the land legislation. As such, this coalition was “able to ‘frame’ discontent and resistance in ways that enable peasants and agrarian workers to
overcome or set aside reluctance and fear so as to begin to band together and confront collectively authorities and other powerful entities” (Kerkvliet, 2009, p. 235).

Third, the success of campaigns against LSLAs is partly attributable to the high level of mobilization of influential leaders who have sided with concerned communities in their fight to retain access to land. The “elites” do not constitute a uniform group — depending on their interests and values they may facilitate or obstruct land grabs. In Senegal, some elites have intervened in these campaigns as a way to enhance their political capital or make electoral gains. In other cases, administrative agents who contravened government directives do not have obvious interests in opposing land deals. Through their skillful use of their political contacts, groups against Ranch de Dolly and Lanka Investissement were able to convince the government or the investor to stop their projects. In the case of Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, opponents did not involve other elites, but directly discussed with the farm manager, who was the presumed intermediary of President Abdoulaye Wade. In comparison, the second phase of Senhuile seemingly benefited from a strong backing of the state, which went as far as deploying the national gendarmerie to keep opponents at bay.

A final factor shaping the outcome of mobilization is the legal status of the land under contention, which invites or constraints specific courses of action. Land rights granted by rural councils are more easily revocable. In three instances of successful campaigning (Lanka Investment, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, and the first phase of Senhuile), a rural council had attributed the land, making it easier to stop the project. In cases of partial failure, the land was governed by the state or owned by a private investor. The legal status of the land thus “locks” it in the hands of the company which can go to court to defend their title, making it more difficult for aggrieved populations to recover alienated parcels, even when they have administrative authorities on their side, as in the case of Ranch de Ouassadou. Having a strong claim to the land emboldens investors to persist with their project in the face of opposition. Despite the incapacity of land defenders to completely stop Ranch de Ouassadou and Senhuile to this date, their actions have nonetheless hampered the operations of both projects and forced the investors to make concessions. For instance, after ActionAid had published a scathing report on Senhuile (Benegiamo & Cirillo, 2014), the company displayed a willingness to dialogue with communities. Militants for the preservation of the Ranch de Dolly have for their part sought to entrench the legal status of the Ranch as a means to preempt any future attempts at dismantling it.

**CONCLUSION**

Rural populations in Senegal have over time employed various means to express their grievances about their condition or redress their situation, including the violent rebellion in Casamance, discontent canalized by marabouts in the groundnut basin, producer associations at the grassroots level, or participation in governmental policy-making in Dakar. I have shown in this article how social
movements have obstructed the realization of several land investments in Senegal, a country that has experienced a formidable wave of announced LSLAs supposed to cover gigantic areas relative to the geographical size of the territory and local usages. Perceived land grabs, defined here as the involuntary loss of assets through extra-economic force and illegitimate means, have prompted in Senegal the emergence of a new form of collective action, in which several villagers rose to advocate their land rights and overtly contest large-scale schemes. In the cases of Ranch de Dolly, Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, and Senhuile in the Reserve, they have even challenged the authority of the President of the Republic himself.

The success of campaigns against perceived land grabs in Senegal depends on four interrelated factors. First, local mobilization is a primordial condition for fighting effectively against LSLAs – in all the cases examined here, protests have originated in rural communities. Sometimes, the unity of a movement has been achieved with the support of an external NGO that has helped surmount traditional rivalries. Other times, a group of villagers was able to commit provocative acts of contestation that have put the government on the defensive and eroded its legitimacy.

Second, in opposition to land investments, the national peasant movement has joined forces with civil society associations and think tanks to provide logistical support to local struggles and construct an anti-grab narrative promoting family agriculture as a viable alternative to agribusiness. CRAFS has contributed to organizing resistance, informing farmers and pastoralists of their rights, and alerting the wider public opinion. CRAFS, with the help of international NGOs, has intensified the scope of campaigns against land grabs.

Third, I argue that the enlistment of elites, such as religious leaders, elected officials, and administrative agents, is a significant factor in effective opposition to LSLAs. NGOs that have attracted influential actors to their cause have been able to obstruct land deals more easily. While elites may push for the realization of large-scale land investments in some instances, they may at other times intervene to prevent populations from dispossession. Their involvement thus acts as a double-edged sword that depends on the particular configuration of each land struggle.

Fourth, local collectives and civil society organizations are sometimes confronted with the problem of property rights. As land rights granted by rural councils are more amenable to political influence and pushbacks, NGOs fighting against these land deals may more easily cancel them, as evidenced in the case of Lanka Investissement and the first phase of Senhuile. When the central state or a private individual legally controls the land, it is harder to reclaim it, especially when traditional occupants do not have their customary land rights recognized by the law (as in the case of Ranch de Ouassadou) or that they have been extinguished (as in the second phase of Senhuile).

What is the significance of the anti-land grab movement for democracy and social equality in Senegal? On the one hand, this movement embodies the profound changes in mentality and the expansion of citizenship in rural Senegal. As Gellar observes, “Senegalese citizens are increasingly regarding the Senegalese
state as theirs and accountable to them rather than being an autocratic state which laws they don’t understand or a predator state run by people who are free to pillage public resources [...]” (2013, p. 147). In many ways, these campaigns have contributed to a deepening of democracy, as land defenders have acquired a better understanding of their land rights and confidence in their capacity to influence political leaders.

Building on the experience they have gained in the five campaigns analyzed here, activists recently managed to cancel two other major land investments authorized by municipal councils. In Diokoul Diawarigne, Senegindia wanted to acquire 1,000 hectares of land in late 2016, but as a result of community protestations, the Indian investor abandoned the idea. To devise their resistance strategies, the villagers concerned by this new enclosure relied on the advice of the collective created to fight against Ferme Mame Tolla Wade. Similarly, local and national activists against Senhuile have shared their practical knowledge with opponents of AfriPartners Sénégal, a Moroccan firm, in the Senegal River Valley. Their opposition was so effective that President Macky Sall opted to pause the project in 2018.

On the other hand, it is important not to romanticize these struggles, as the interruption of a project by a small group of politically motivated individuals may cause disappointment to other villagers, as happened in the first phase of Senhuile in Fanaye. In addition, opposition sometimes masks social inequalities within concerned communities. In several resistance campaigns, political considerations factor in, as land undergirds authority in stratified agrarian societies. In Senegal, some projects have stalled because landed elites have refused to give up their local power. So far, NGOs that have been otherwise critical of religious and political elites who appropriate land have remained silent on this issue.

Despite its official rhetoric promoting agribusiness, the government has been responsive to civil society’s demands and has interrupted many contentious projects or made accommodations. These concessions do not mean that the government has abandoned its ambition to modernize agriculture altogether. In 2017, President Macky Sall explicitly invited rural owners whose land is unused not to “hinder development” and let other investors farm it (Touré, 2017). Macky Sall has also refused to implement the policy recommendations of the Land Reform Commission. NGOs have not been influential enough to force the government to implement changes that would effectively formalize customary rights or enlarge the power of municipal governments in land management. These shortcomings should not obscure the formidable capacity for action that local and national NGOs have displayed against perceived land grabs carried out by private investors.

NOTES

1. According to a report released in 2013, 844,976 hectares of land in Senegal have been the object of speculation by national and international investors for biofuel production, agribusiness, mining, and tourism (Sy, Cisse, & Ba, 2013, p. 17). As of 2013, Ba, Ngaido, Diouf, and Ka had for their part identified 20 intended land deals covering a total surface area of 499,435 hectares. However, the projects effectively initiated only
concern 150,000 hectares (2013, p. 14). Using geo-spatialized data, a more recent inventory finds that 11 of the largest agribusiness companies in Senegal collectively possess 51,790 hectares of land, but only cultivated 21,716 hectares as of 2016 (Guillouet, 2016).

2. I principally measure success against the goals that these groups have set for themselves.

3. Apart from Senhuile, the other case studies were selected inductively. Numerous state agents and NGO activists spontaneously referred to these cases during interviews, leading me to probe into these projects and gradually decipher common patterns.

4. I met with more than 250 stakeholders in Senegal, including individuals involved in one LSLA that did not elicit contestation and is not explicitly analyzed here. I have selected and discussed the most relevant interviews for the purpose of this article. As I conducted extensive fieldwork on Senhuile in the context of my doctoral dissertation, the sample is not equally representative of all the cases examined here.

5. Full disclosure: during my fieldwork in Senegal, I was an affiliated researcher with Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR). IPAR is a member of CRAFS, although it has not actively engaged in protests to maintain its independence as a research institution (Hopson, 2013).

6. These drivers include increasing global food prices, biofuel production, the financialization of land and food crops, and tourism. These new trends have combined with the older phenomena of urbanization, industrial enclaves, slum evictions, extractive industries, and conservation projects.

7. Sarah Hopson (2013), Jeanne Koopman (2012), and Louisa Praise (2014) offer a rich overview delineating the major steps and “framing strategies” taken by activists in one or several anti-land grab campaigns in Senegal, but their accounts remain mostly descriptive.

8. For instance, these features concern the absence of consultations, the opacity of the land transaction, inappropriate compensations, and insufficient institutional oversight (cf. Tirana Declaration, 2011). Note that these dimensions can themselves be the object of interpretation.

9. The definition of land grabs I offer here is more circumscribed than that of other scholars who, for instance, include in this category any transaction in which “control over land changes hands,” regardless of the mode of acquisition (Hunsberger, Franco, & Chunyu, 2014, p. 206; van der Ploeg, Franco, & Borras, 2015, p. 152).

10. I thank Adrian Di Giovanni for this remark. See also Jesse C. Ribot & Nancy Lee Peluso, 2003, p. 156.

11. The conversion of the forest into farmland caused the eviction of approximately 6,000 pastoralists and 100,000 animals who lost access to their communal pastures and water points. Concerned herders wrote to President Abdou Diouf asking him to “restore their rights” and “protect their forests,” to no avail. Independent local media also debated the land transfer, but most NGOs and international organizations active in the country remained silent on this issue (Schoonmaker Freudenberger, 1991, p. 18; 22). This lack of agitation contrasts markedly with the important social mobilization and media coverage of current land deals, including the same marabout who was offered several thousand hectares of land in Ranch de Dolly.

12. While restricted land access is one of the immediate causes triggering the conflict in Casamance, the rebellion is rooted in historical insubordination to the central state and a profound sense of disenfranchisement from Dakar.

13. The government has carried out the decentralization reform in 2014, but the land reform has yet to be enacted — creating a sort of “institutional anachronism” between two related bodies of regulations. For this reason, I use the former designation and refer to rural communities in the paper.

14. Senegal has a “deconcentrated” or “territorial” system of administration, with state appointees at the regional level (governors), the departmental level (prefects), and district level (sub-prefects). These state agents are responsible for implementing government decisions in their respective jurisdiction.
15. To provide an order of magnitude, 69.8% of agricultural households in Senegal cultivated between 1 and 5 hectares of land in 2012-2013. Only 2.6% farmed more than 20 hectares (ANSD, 2014, p. 352). In average, a rural household in Senegal has ten family members (ANSD, 2014, p. 301). The 2013 census data can be extrapolated to the 2000s in general.

16. Many projects are aborted at the negotiation stage, before they even start on the ground.

17. To borrow a metaphor from Leander Schneider, we can see each of these factors as a ball in play on the billiard table that “affect the game through their interactions with the complex eco-system they form with other balls” (2017, p. 577). Such a perspective implies that there is no single factor discretely acting as an independent variable.

18. Interview with national NGO representative, Dakar, May 2014.

19. Interview with expert, Dakar, May 2014.

20. Macky Sall promised to invest US$ 4.5 million.

21. Personal communication with national NGO representative, email correspondence, April 2018.

22. These realizations comprise the construction of a borehole, a water tower, several troughs, a road, and a fence (Diallo, 2018).

23. To his defense, the president of the rural council claims he requested that the company fulfill eight conditions, regarding for instance the respect of environmental standards or priority hiring of local villagers.

24. Interview with national NGO representative, Dakar, April 2014.

25. Interview national NGO representative, Dakar, April 2014.

26. Interview with regional NGO representative, Tambacounda, June 2014.


28. For many years, villagers, civil society members, and journalists wondered if the owner was the farm manager or President Abdoulaye Wade. In a declaration of assets made on July 12, 2012, a spokesperson indicated that Wade possessed a farm at “the entrance of Kebemer for the breeding of cows and ostriches” (Dakar Actu 2012). We can confidently surmise that Wade was effectively the owner of Ferme Mame Tolla Wade, as his description closely resembles that of the Farm, but this information cannot be confirmed beyond any doubts.

29. Mame Tolla Wade is the name of Wade’s mother.

30. Follow-up interview with national NGO representative, phone conversation, July 2018.

31. Interview with national NGO representative, Dakar, November 11, 2014.

32. The letter asked for the relocation of the farm on the parcel originally attributed by the rural council (Kanoute & Lapeyre, 2017).

33. The World Social Forum is an annual meeting that gathers civil society organizations fighting against globalization. In Dakar, the event attracted 75,000 people from 132 countries.

34. Interview with national NGO representative, Dakar, November 2014.

35. Follow-up interview with national NGO representative, phone conversation, July 2018.

36. Interview with national NGO representative, Dakar, November 2014.

37. Fieldwork notes, November 2013 (See also Ece, 2012, p. 70).

38. Interview with local NGO representative, Tambacounda, June 2014.

39. The name is indifferently written “Ouassadou” or “Wassadou”.

40. The investor has always publicly maintained that he did not evict existing users from the land (APS, 2012).

41. These rallies were planned before CRAFS became involved in the campaign, but the organization helped advertise them more broadly.

42. Interview with administrative agent, Koungeule, August 2014; Interview with administrative agent, Dakar, September 2014.
43. The M23 is a movement created on June 23, 2011, to contest Abdoulaye Wade seeking a third presidential mandate. At the time, the M23 gathered all the major opposition parties and civil society organizations.
44. Interview with local NGO representative, Tambacounda, June 2014.
45. Court Suprême, Arrêt N° 21 du 10 avril 2014, in the author’s possession.
46. Four people were eventually charged and detained.
47. Follow-up interview with national NGO representative, phone conversation, July 2018.
49. Follow-up interview with national NGO representative, phone conversation, July 2018.
50. The company started as Senethanol, then became Senhuile-Senethanol when Tampieri Financial Group, an Italian holding, partnered with the initial group of Israeli and Senegalese businessmen in 2011. In the course of the second phase of the project, the investor stopped referring to the name “Senethanol.” Now, the company operates as Les Fermes de la Teranga. For the sake of simplicity, I use Senhuile throughout the paper.
51. Interview with local notable, Fanaye, February 2016; Interview with administrative agent, Fanaye, February 2016; Interview with rural councilor, Fanaye, February 2016.
52. Interview with rural councilors, Fanaye, February 2016.
54. Interviews with local opponents to Senhuile, Saint-Louis, February 2016.
55. Opponents recently met with a minister sympathetic to their pleas and asked her to diminish the size of Senhuile’s concession to 10,000 hectares (Interview with national NGO representative, June 2018). There have been talks since 2012 to do so, but the government has not formalized the changes ever since.

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