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**Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019**

**8:30am (public session)**

**Building 50, 51A**



## **"WHEN MUD COMES BETWEEN US": CONTEMPORARY LAND ENCLOSURES AND THE POLITICS OF CLAIM-MAKING IN CENTRAL SUDAN**

In the mid 2000's, Sudanese government elites began attracting foreign investments in agriculture to offset losses in oil revenue that would accompany South Sudan's likely secession. Prompted in turn by the 2008 food and financial crisis, and framing their investments as gestures of Muslim solidarity, a dozen Gulf Arab investors have since established large agribusiness farms on several million acres of Sudanese land that local farmers, agricultural workers and pastoralists have used for generations.

This dissertation, examines the ways Saudi and Emirati corporate investments in land are reconfiguring everyday social relations between landless and landholding stakeholders with competing claims to land, in the agricultural Gezira region of central Sudan. It combines a multi-sited ethnographic study of contemporary land grabs in rural and peri-urban communities with a historical analysis of the ways the Gezira has been imagined as the answer to various colonial and post-colonial development visions. It draws on fifteen months of fieldwork conducted in three Gezira communities along the Blue Nile, in local courts, at investor conferences, ministries, archives and in the mosques of Sufi religious leaders who are mediating land disputes that have emerged out of this context.

My work suggests an approach to the study of contemporary land grabs across various scales and time frames; one that conceptualizes them as a set of historically situated negotiations and contestations, shaped by heterogeneous notions of space, land ownership and belonging. In particular, it situates contemporary land grabs in Sudan within a layered history of enclosures and unequal landed relations shaped by legacies of enslavement and colonial rule.

This dissertation also responds to a growing literature on political reactions 'from below' to large-scale land deals, which centers labor and class relations within the land grab debate, but is less attentive to their intersection with gendered and ethnic social relations. Instead, I build on analyses of racial capitalism to trace the ways contemporary processes of land dispossession are gendered and racialized, while examining how race, gender, class, and enslaved descent shape the different forms resistance to these processes can take.