

## Frontiers, resources and conflict

### Thesis Scope

The thesis takes frontier spaces as sites of contestations and negotiations between multiple actors, forces and discourses. Frontiers are geographical imaginations and processes that shape property regimes, reconfigure human-nature relations and connect peripheral spaces to global market economies and state authority. Expansion of capitalist resource extraction to peripheral areas often takes place in collaboration between states and private business actors. However, encounters between states, development actors, market forces and people inhabiting frontier zones can be understood as continuously negotiated and contested relations that Anna Tsing (2005) calls spaces of friction.

Frontier frictions are, thus, processes of conversation and contestation between discourses, practices and actors that are locally embedded and globally connected. Whether locally initiated or part of global land rush, frontier-making entails resource appropriation, changes in land right/property regimes and conflicts. Violent resource appropriation often practiced through displacement of local inhabitants invokes conflict—in the form of resistance against displacement and dispossession or by creating competition between local societies for access to resources. Students writing a thesis on this topic may consider one or both of the following questions, and apply them to one or more case studies, such as (mining frontiers, large-scale agricultural schemes, flower farms, sand extraction sites in Ethiopia). The questions that can be tackled through the thesis may include:

- How does the encounter between different discourses and practices of resource utilization shape land right/property regimes?
- What does the friction between actors at frontier sites produce in terms of resource governance, social relations and citizenship?

Methodologically, the topic can be approached either through discourse analysis or ethnographic fieldwork. For the former, students may analyze discourses of state and development actors about frontier zones, resources, spaces, people inhabiting these areas. They can use these to understand how development interventions are legitimated, as well as state-society relations and/or the political economy of development. Likewise, ethnographic research on encounters between different actors in frontier zones can illuminate our understandings of violence, conflict, resistance, local agency and changes in property regimes. Prospective students may discuss the feasibility of doing ethnographic fieldwork with their potential supervisor.

**Language:** English

Please get in touch with **Asebe Regassa Debelo** ([asebe.debelo@geo.uzh.ch](mailto:asebe.debelo@geo.uzh.ch)) if you are interested to write a Masters thesis on this topic.