

## ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

# AGENCY AND DISPOSSESSION: TEMPORARY POSSESSION AND THE LEGACY OF LAND LAWS IN MONGOLIA

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A large proportion of people in Mongolia are classed as nomadic herders. They do not own the land on which they herd their animals in the sense of outright ownership, but hold rights to pasture under different kinds of temporary possession or custodianship. Land here is a national asset held in common. In contrast, people in villages, towns, and cities own plots of land. These are often used as collateral for forms of financialization, such as bank loans. This difference is the result of historical conditions. But recently, and with the rise of the neo-liberal mining economy, it is also a way in which political elites make money off national assets, undermining the ability of people in the countryside to resist. This paper, written by an anthropologist and an environmental lawyer, explores this phenomenon in relation to multiple forms of dispossession, the extraction of natural resources and people's labour, and to different kinds of agency. It asks, how can new relationships of property be formed that do not exploit nature, but avoid leaving a *terra nullius* type legal void that can be exploited by those who do believe in absolute property dominion?

Rebecca Empson is a Professor of Anthropology at UCL. She has published two monographs *Harnessing Fortune* (OUP 011), and *Life in the Gap* (UCL 2020). She is interested in the intersection between the environment and economic and social practices and the political subjects that this gives rise to in Mongolia and more recently in the Baltic Sea.

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