The Question of 'Idle Land' and the Dynamics of Displacement for Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in the Global South: Preliminary Observations from Uganda

Adventino Banjwa
PhD Fellow, MISR, Makerere University

Abstract: This paper thinks through the idea of "idle land" – an idea so pervasive in large-scale agricultural investment circles and state discourses on land acquisition for development in the global South. The idea that Africa and much of the global South is home to unrivalled 'idle' but otherwise highly 'productive' land continues to inspire numerous investors who are intent at putting so-defined idle land to some 'productive purposes'. Such land is often defined as 'wasteland', 'idle land', 'unused land', and other similar descriptive markers. Well-documented cases of forced physical displacement of communities by state security agencies make it obvious that such lands have never been 'idle' – at least not in the literal sense of the term. What is not so obvious, and a core interest of this paper, is why states, agricultural corporations and their international financiers continue to front the discourse of idle land in reference to most arable lands in the global South. I make three core arguments in this paper. *First*, I argue that idlization of land is a historical phenomenon, and has been articulated to different politico-economic objectives under conditions of modern political power at different historical moments. We should thus think of it as *political idlization* of land, and from a postcolonial vantage point, I argue, colonialism provided the defining moment for its articulation. *Second*, I argue that in our contemporary neoliberal moment, political idlization of land functions to justify and legitimize neoliberal operations on land. With the alliance between the postcolonial state and neoliberal forces in fronting it, idle land talk thus reveals and functions to cement the neoliberal character of our postcolonial state. This state allies itself with global neoliberal forces not just in drawing even the remotest piece of land into the market: it embodies the neoliberal logic itself. *Finally*, to understand its condition of possibility under neoliberalism, I argue that contemporary political idlization of land embody, and is a culmination of, an epistemic operation: a neoliberal critique of the historically diverse, dynamic, context-specific and generally none-marketizable modes of knowing, conceptions and practices concerning land use in the targeted areas of the global South. With this, drawing from decolonial scholarship, I propose a rethinking of the dominant conceptualization of *displacement* as only physical, to now consider it as a double-edged operation: both *physical* and *epistemic*.

Keywords: Large-scale land acquisitions; Neoliberal Political Idlization; epistemic displacement; postcolonial state

Introduction

Contemporary mega land-based projects in Africa and much of the global South, involving big agricultural corporations, states, finance capital, and other actors, are justified through a now familiar shibboleth, one which discursively presents the land in question as "idle", "empty", "unused", and similar descriptive markers[1]. As many well-documented cases indicate, such as

[1] I am grateful to Muhamed Lunyago, a colleague at MISR, for his persistent encouragement to turn my thoughts on this subject into a text, and for his feedback and suggestions along the way. An earlier version of this paper was written as a Book chapter for a forthcoming book project on Chinese Agricultural Investments in Africa, co-edited by Freedom

those from Uganda upon which this paper draws, irrefutable evidence of physical displacement of communities by state security agencies to pave way for large-scale land-based projects makes it obvious that at issue is not whether such lands were occupied or not prior to such projects. What is not so obvious, and a core interest of this paper, is why states, agricultural corporations and their funders continue to front the discourse of idle land in reference to most arable lands in the global South.

The engagement that follows embody three core arguments. *First*, I argue that idlization of land is a historical phenomenon, and has been articulated to different politico-economic objectives under conditions of modern political power at different historical moments. We should thus think of it as *political idlization* of land, and from a postcolonial vantage point, I argue, colonialism provided the definitive moment for its articulation. *Second*, I argue that in our contemporary moment, the form political idlization of land takes is undoubtedly peculiar to the contemporary political and economic conjuncture, one marked by multiple crises of food, energy, finance, environment, and, above all, the postcolonial political under neoliberalism (see Borras et al. 2011: 9; Moyo and Yeros 2005; Manzo and Padfield 2016). Here, political idlization, I argue, functions to justify and legitimize neoliberal operations on land. With the alliance between the postcolonial state and neoliberal forces in fronting it, idle land talk thus reveals, and functions to cement, the neoliberal character of our postcolonial state. This state allies itself with global neoliberal forces not just in drawing even the remotest piece of land into the market: it embodies the neoliberal logic itself. *Finally*, to understand its condition of possibility under neoliberalism, I argue that contemporary political idlization of land embody, and is a culmination of, an epistemic operation: a sustained neoliberal critique[2] of historically diverse, dynamic, context-specific and generally none-marketizable modes of knowing, conceptions and practices concerning land use in the targeted areas of the global South.

These insights encourage us to rethink the dominant conceptualization of displacement. Reports documenting forced *physical displacement* of people from their historical places of existence and dwelling[3], and the human cost involved as a result of the destruction of people's means of survival, are quite numerous[4]. Yet these reports cannot explain why, despite obvious cases of forced evictions, idle land talk thrives in official and (agricultural) investment discourses. In other words, from such accounts, we do not get a sense of that which seems to render forced evictions possible in the first place – which, as I have hinted above, is best described as the sustained neoliberal critique of socially-acceptable conceptions and forms of land use. This speaks to the *epistemic* dimension of displacement. Through a state-enforced displacement solely based on a one-

Mazwi, George T. Mudimu and Kirk Helliker. I am grateful for the comments received during that process. I am equally grateful to Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) and the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE-Uganda) for an important opportunity I was earlier granted to present my draft ideas in a session of the NAPE-RLS Intellectual Study Group on Land and Natural Resources, held in Kampala on June 24, 2023, in which I received valuable feedback and comments, especially from the discussant, Professor Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo.

[2]On this, see also Borras's (2006) critical reflection on what he calls the pro-market critique of conventional land policies (Borras 2006; also Borras et al. 2011).

[3]I am using 'dwelling' in its original Illichian sense: as a dynamic, culturally-specific art of human existence on land (Illich 1991).

[4]In the case of Uganda, see Zeemeijer, I., 2011. "Who Gets What, When and How? New Corporate Land Acquisitions and the Impact on Local Livelihoods in Uganda." Masters diss., *Utrecht University*, p.99. See also Banjwa (2022: 69-71).

dimensional capitalist conception of what constitutes land use, one that conceives "productivity" only in terms of high mass agricultural production for the (global) market, I argue that physical displacement operates alongside another, even more insidious because more hidden, form of displacement: the discursive displacement of the different socially-legitimate modes of knowing, conceptions and practices concerning land use. The concept of *epistemic violence* emerging out of critical decolonial scholarship becomes useful in this regard (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021, 2018, 2013; Santos 2017; Gill 2016).

What is clear is that the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin the contemporary notion of "idle land" are exclusively rooted in neoliberal economics. The whole idea is to further entrench capitalist social relations in postcolonial societies, now regarding land (Amin 2012; Akram-Lodhi 2007; Haller 2019). This explains the general obsession in these circles with increasing "agricultural productivity", and the unmistakable economic reductionism embedded in their conceptions of productivity and productive land use. This is the reality with which targeted communities in the global South are confronted. To think beyond it is to take seriously perspectives from those whose views and conceptions of land use it silences and displaces.

With that brief introduction, the rest of the paper is divided into three core sections. The next section offers a brief historical and conceptual overview on the contemporary problem of political idlization of land from a Ugandan/Africa vantage point. After that, I briefly present the three cases from Uganda, through which I discuss the politics of the contemporary political idlization of land. The last section frames displacement in the context of large-scale land-based projects as also encompassing an epistemic dimension, after which I end the paper with concluding remarks. This paper is based on a critical engagement with existing literature, and it draws together primary and secondary source material in its critical endeavor.

Political Idlization of Land in Africa: A Historical and Conceptual Overview

It is possible to consider global histories of modern dispossession of landed communities as also histories of modern *political idlization* of land. One may reflect on the 18th and 19th century enclosure movement in England, which involved the transmogrification of formerly common lands into private farms, as enabled by a particular form of idlization, one which disregarded the commonality with which such lands were being used historically. Commenting on this historical development, Vandana Shiva (2010) writes that:

> The commons, which the Crown in England had called wastelands, were not really waste. They were productive lands, providing extensive common pastures for animals of established peasant communities, timber and stone for building, reeds for thatch and baskets, wood and fuel, wild animals and birds, fish and fowl, berries and nuts for food. (Shiva 2010: 254)

By defining land as "wastelands", such lands were thus rendered "idle", which in effect displaced communities' context-specific conceptions on the constitution of productive use of land, and the resultant invisibilization of their diverse forms of relating to and living upon land. The effects were devastating. Writing in *The Rise of Cheap Nature,* Jason W. Moore (2016) writes thus:

> Sometimes peasants who were forced off their land found their way to the towns. Sometimes they were dispossessed and kept on the land reduced to cottagers and forced into agricultural wagework – or neo-serfdom [as] in Poland – to acquire what their small plots could provide" (Moore 2016: 85; see also van Meijl et al. 2006).

The above were developments in what would later emerge as metropoles for territories of late colonialism. The colonial context came with its own peculiarities on the question of land. The massive land dispossession of colonized natives that took place in late colonial Africa, more glaring in settler colonial contexts, and the whole setup of colonial governmentality, so well theorized by Mahmood Mamdani (2017) as *decentralized despotism*, were all preceded by colonial *political idlization* of land – that is, politically rendering huge chanks of land as "wastelands", "unused lands", and so on. This was the seminal moment for political idlization of land in territories of late colonialism. Interestingly, these so-defined "wastelands" were the very lands that the colonial state took over. In Uganda for example, as I will indicate later, these so-called "wastelands" officially became colonial (Crown) lands as per the Buganda Agreement of 1900. What interest did colonialists have in lands they themselves had designated as wastelands, if the lands in question were indeed wastelands? Such a question takes us beyond colonialist discourse itself, to ask more fundamental questions concerning the function of such discourse in the colonial project.

Modern colonial dispossession of colonized natives, especially of the natives' land, was always backed up by systemic physical violence directed on the bodies of the natives. However, perhaps even more devastatingly, this dispossession was preceded and propelled by colonialist knowledge production, rooted as it was in colonial racism. Aimé Césaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism,* quotes certain colonialist writers arguing for the need and responsibility of "civilised peoples" to put to proper use the resources God gifted "humanity" that were lying "idle" in the hands of "uncivilised" natives. He quotes, for instance, Albert M. Sarraut, an ex-Governor-General of French Indochina, as insisting to his students at Ecole Coloniale "that it would be puerile to object to the colonial enterprises in the name of 'an alleged right to possess the land one occupies, and some sort of right to remain in fierce isolation, *which would leave unutilised resources to lie forever idle in hands of incompetents'*." (Césaire 1972: 17, emphasis added; see also Rönnbäck 2014).

In *The Coloniser's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History,* Blaut (1993) calls this belief "the diffusionist myth of emptiness", which he insists was crafted by colonialist thinkers and administrators to serve purely "colonialist functions" (Blaut 1993: 25). As Aimé Césaire observed, such blatant dispossession was justified, apparently, in the "common interest of all humanity", because the "lazy natives" were not putting resources like land to proper use (Césaire 1972: 17). C*olonial* interest was projected as *common* interest! This explains the history of colonial forced removals, massive land dispossessions, and genocide of native populations, a process that led to the total reordering of social relations on land under colonialism, a reordering that became the basis for the construction of the colonial modern state (Mamdani 2001, 2017, 2020).

Diverse and dynamic precolonial modalities of relating to and being on land, and the epistemological and ontological views that made them possible, embodied in the notion of

"custom", were not exempted from the colonial discursive and political reconfiguration of reality in colonized territories. Mamdani (2017:21) emphasizes how, for instance, British colonialism in Africa was "the first to marshal authoritarian possibilities in native culture. In the process, it defined a world of the customary from which there was no escape." Mamdani (2017:21*f*) adds that:

> Key to this was the definition of land as a customary possession, for in nonsettler Africa, the Africa administered through Native Authorities, the general rule was that land could not be a private possession, of either landlords or peasants. It was defined as a customary communal holding, to which every peasant household had a customary access, defined by state-appointed customary authorities.

Where colonial authorities were confronted with realities that did not fit into its communal straightjacket, such as the system of *githaka*[5] among the Gikuyu, or that of *Obwesengeze*[6] among the Baganda, the colonial response was either to dismiss them, or corrupt them through mis/re-interpretation (Sorrenson 1963).

To some African observers during colonialism, the colonial great transformation (to use Karl Polanyi's iconic phrase) in relation to the subject of land was unmistakable. In *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, Jomo Kenyatta, later to be independent Kenya's first president, wrote that among the Gikuyu agriculturalists, land was the basis around which the entire society, its systems of knowledge and politics, were organized. He writes that land "supplied [the Gikuyu with] the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental commitment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried" (Kenyatta 1959: 21). In such a context, land draws together two worlds in perpetuity: the world of the living and the world of the dead. Both the dead and the living (including those yet to live) equally had valid claims on the same land, with the implication that the interests of both had to be taken into account if anything was to be done on the land. Kenyatta notes that because of this pre-colonial reality "among the Gikuyu, the soil is especially honored, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth (koiruga)." (Kenyatta 1959: 21).

Another interesting case is that of the pre-colonial Buganda Kingdom. The colonial regime, in 1900, imposed a new land order in total disregard of what one historian of pre-colonial Buganda has termed *landed obligation*, that is, a political and social system through which "people in Buganda used reciprocal obligation, pledged in land but understood as an expression of affection, to create connections, to incorporate strangers, and to vanquish competitors in an ongoing struggle for followers and prestige" (Hanson 2003: 3). Hanson (2003:12) insists that the colonial turn in Buganda, cemented through the 1900 Buganda Agreement, was "an affront to [Buganda's pre-colonial] meaning of things, like ripping a wall off of the comfortable house of ideas people inhabit, and the result was an outpouring of statements to remember the house as it had been". Thus, according to Hanson (2003), the two decades following the 1900 colonial land order in

[5]Individual land holding "acquired…either by purchase or through inheritance or by acquiring first hunting rights" (Kenyatta 1959). See also Barlow (1932).
[6]Though rare and on small holdings, these were inheritable individual land holdings granted to some individuals by the Kabaka of Buganda before colonial rule (Lwanga-Lunyiigo 2022).

Buganda was a period involving "the erosion of reciprocal obligation" (see also Lwanga-Lunyiigo 2013: 18*ff*).

It is widely accepted that the 1900 Buganda Agreement was the foundation upon which colonial capitalist relations on land were built. What is rarely recognized is the fact that, through this "Agreement", the colonial power successfully defined over half of the then estimated total land in Buganda[7] as lying *idle*, by virtue of which it was confiscated and vested in "Her Majesty's Government … to be controlled by the Uganda [colonial] Administration"[8]. This became the (British) Crown Land in Buganda, outlined in Article 15 of the Agreement as consisting of 'forests' (1,500 square miles) and "9,000 square miles of waste or cultivated, or uncultivated land [sic], or land occupied without prior gift of the Kabaka or chiefs by the Bakopi ['peasants'] or strangers…"[9]. As Mamdani (2015:188) succinctly observes, with the 1900 Agreement, "all uncultivated community land" was brought under the direct control of the colonial state.

Formal colonial rule may have ended in Uganda as elsewhere, but the colonial conceptual terrain still functions in many postcolonial discourses on land. However, what the contemporary debate on customary and public lands (as the primary target of mega land-grabs in recent times) tells us, in part, is that not everything is absorbed into the mainstream neoliberal economic understanding of land, and relations to and on land, in a postcolonial setting. The realities that underpin the postcolonial "customary" mode of land ownership, in its varying and contested forms, forcefully portray the fact that here, the complex and contested modes of relating to and on land render alien the central verities that underpin contemporary neoliberal conceptions of "idle land", to which the World Bank has provided the discursive resources (Manji 2006; Amanor 2012).

The temptation is to view contemporary idlization of land as an 'objective' process by which states in the global South, together with their 'development partners' in the global North and other actors (including new powers in the global South such as China, India, Brazil, among others), search and designate truly unoccupied yet cultivable land with the sole purpose of putting this land to 'productive purposes'. This is the mainstream neoliberal economic perspective with respect to the so-called "idle land" in the global South. It is often packaged in neo-Malthusian terms, as a necessary step if global food production is to match an ever-growing world population. According to this view, the world cannot put up with the contradictory simultaneity with which the existence of plenty of "idle" and/or "under-utilized" land in some countries co-exist with global shortages especially in food and energy supply. Studies that embrace this perspective have for long been arguing for the expansion of land under cultivation, as well as increasing the productivity per given piece of land under cultivation (Cai et al. 2011; Eicher 1994). The economic reductionism in this view is quite telling. All the complexity that is known when it comes to context-specific conceptions and practices *apropos* of land use, and the corresponding conceptions of what constitutes "productive use of land", are flattened and reduced to one and one thing only: economic productivity.

Nowhere, unsurprisingly, is the mainstream neoliberal economic understanding of idle land as well-articulated as it has been by the World Bank. Published in the wake of the 2008 food crisis,

[7] 10,500 out of the then estimated 19,600 square miles.
[8] A full text of the 1900 Buganda Agreement is reproduced in Lwanga-Lunyiigo (2013: 262-281).
[9] See Lwanga-Lunyiigo (2013: 276)

the Bank's 2011 study titled *Rising global interest in farmland: can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?* (Deininger and Byerlee 2011. *See also* Byerlee and Deininger 2013) is widely cited especially among those who espouse the Bank's views on land and agricultural production. The problem, according to the Bank, is twofold: first, the existence of large chunks of arable land especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America that is not put to "productive use"; and second, the low yield productivity on land under smallholder cultivation. Where land exists in plenty (in so-called "land abundant countries" – see Byerlee and Deininger 2013), the Bank recommended "largescale acquisition", while at the same time recommending modalities to close "yield gaps" by increasing yield productivity (Deininger and Byerlee 2011: 76).

The World Bank put sub-Saharan Africa in the spotlight as the geographical entity with "the largest amount of land potentially suitable for rainfed agriculture" (Deininger and Byerlee 2011:76). Unsurprisingly, cases of what is today described as land-grabs skyrocketed in the aftermaths of these interventions by the World Bank. In this study, the Bank's notion of "idle land" is threefold: (i) "land not cultivated, not forested, and not protected with low levels of population density that could potentially be suitable for rainfed agricultural production"; (ii) "land currently cultivated where comparing potential actual yield provides a basis for estimating the 'yield gap'…"; and (iii) "land currently forested in unprotected areas with low density that are potentially suitable for rainfed crop production" (Deininger and Byerlee 2011). Using this broader net to capture what it considers "idle" elements on land, the World Bank estimated "the availability of some 445 million hectares (ha) of currently uncultivated, non-forested land that would be ecologically suitable for rainfed cultivation in areas with less than 25 persons per square kilometer (km^2)." (Deininger and Byerlee 2011: 77, 79). Most of this land was said to be in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa in particular (Martin and Palat 2014: 136*ff*).

It has been argued that the designation of land as "idle", if anything, is "a convenient, though inappropriate, way of disposing of a troublesome problem associated with the identification and classification of land uses" (Anderson 1962: 16), and that it can only be possible with total negation and rejection of what Amin (2012:8) calls the "other forms of land-use", that is, the multiple ways through which people think of and relate to and on land (see also Margulis et al. 2013: 2). The assumption underlying the designation of such lands as "idle" has been widely queried by critical scholarship on the subject (Hall 2011: 196; see also Martin and Palat 2014: 135*f*; Baglioni and Gibbon 2013: 95; Nyong'o 2013: 23*ff*; White et al. 2013; Broughton 2013: 1*f*). As Martin and Palat (2014:136) indicate, the mainstream portrayal of land in the global South as "idle" "reflected … a capitalist and administrative definition of these terms, rather than an assessment of actual use or cultivation practices". Yet, more than anything else, at the heart of this conception of land is a stubborn Eurocentrism which, as Martiniello (2013:15) notes, "does not take into account the multiple patterns of land use articulated in African land … systems". Martiniello (2013:15) argues that, in these multiple patterns, "land is not considered as a property nor is it entirely utilised for agricultural purposes", and that these systems "provide land for present and future generations". Thus, "whereas land might appear empty, it is, in fact, preserved for allocation for future generations" (*Ibid*). Here Martiniello (2013) recognizes two constituencies with more or less equal claims to the land, encompassing two temporal considerations of presence on the land: the present and future. But he forgot an equally important constituency, encompassing a different temporality, that of the 'past': the dead/ancestors (Chambati and Mazwi 2022: 20; Mkodzongi 2016). Their claims on the soil are reinforced by their visible, unmistakable presence on and in it. And it is their

presence on and in the soil that has always rendered possible different meaning-making processes by the living, different modes of history-telling. From this, it is possible to map out the contours of the irreducible context-specific complexities on matters of land, the complexities flattened in the contemporary state-backed neo-liberal discourse of "idle land".

The politics of contemporary idlization of land: The Case of Uganda

One can find numerous examples through which to demonstrate how exactly the discourse of idle land plays out in actually existing large-scale agricultural projects in the global South. To make my point, I engage with three examples derived from Uganda. Two of these are Chinese private agricultural companies: Hanhe Farm and Kehong China Uganda Agricultural Industrial Park (KCUAIP). Both are located in central Uganda. The third is a Scandinavian plantation forests company, Green Resources' Kachung forest project in Northern Uganda.

Located on 162 hectares of land in Nakaseke district, Hanhe Farm, a subsidiary of Hanhe International Company, was launched and began operations in 2011. However, it had been in existence since 2009 (Ggoobi and Barungi 2016: 15; Maiyo 2014: 3: Luwaga 2021; Ford 2019). The land on which Hanhe Farm is located was public land, with communities on it before the company took it over. The second Chinese agricultural investment company, the Kehong China Uganda Agricultural Industrial Park (KCUAIP), was commissioned by president Museveni in 2016. It occupies 375 hectares of Lubenge wetland between Luweero and Nakasongola districts, for which company has a 99-year lease (Wandera 2021; Luwaga 2021; Ford 2019; Xiangyi and Blair 2018; *Daily Monitor* 2016). The company planned to employ over 25,000 people as a result of a US$220 million investment in an integrated agricultural industrial park model – including rice, poultry and livestock farms on top of establishing processing plants and an agricultural training facility for the local communities (Luwaga 2021; Wandera 2021; Oluka 2016; *Daily Monitor* 2016). The third case is a Scandinavian planation forests company, Green Resources' Kachung Forest project in Northern Uganda. The project is funded by the Swedish public energy agency (SEA) through a carbon credits programme (Mousseau and Teare 2019: 7; Ziedorn and Machula 2015).

In a curious convergence of interests, both government officials and investors in these cases make the same claim – that the lands in question were "idle" prior to their agricultural projects. For instance, in the case of the KCUAIP, Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, confidently argued that before leasing the land to a Chinese agricultural company, it "was a forest": "What was a forest is going to turn into a city for agricultural produce and factories" (see Oluka 2016). Here, the existence of "a forest" is an indisputable marker of "emptiness". This so-defined "emptiness" is then used to justify giving away such lands to an agricultural investor, in whom the mission of undoing "emptiness", of aligning land to a particular conception of "productive use", is entrusted. When people in the local community protested against their forced removal and the encirclement of their land for Chinese agricultural purposes, the Secretary General of the China-Africa Friendship Association-Uganda (CAFAU), a Ugandan entity that coordinates Chinese investments in Uganda, angrily responded: "*Much of the land we have has been idle. Now we have got people to make use of it* and we are still complaining." (see Oluka 2016, emphasis added). In the case of Green Resources' Kachung forest project in Northern Uganda, a 2019 report by the Oakland Institute documents how the company, and its funder (the publicly owned Swedish Energy Agency

– SEA), claimed that the land they obtained in Kachung (in Northern Uganda) for a carbon forests business was an "unused bushland" (see Mousseau and Teare 2019: 7). In actual sense, the land in question only became "free" (unused) after state security agencies evicted villagers off this land (*Ibid*).

These claims have been refuted by people whose places of dwelling were dismantled to pave way for the agricultural projects in question. In the case of Hanhe Farm in Nakaseke district, one researcher learnt that actually, what Hanhe Farm owners and government officials call "idle land" constituted the *commons* for people living in this area. Before Hanhe Farm took it over, he insisted, all this land was

> accessible to the community for grazing, fishing, harvesting of reeds for making mats and roofing houses and harvesting clay soil for brick making (Maiyo 2014: 4).

One can look at such land as an epicenter on which people's lives in this community rotated: they could not only count on the proteins obtained from the different life forms in the swamp; their animals also depended on this land for grass and water. In short, their entire art of dwelling, as Ivan Illich would call it (Illich 1991), was weaved on the basis of this land: from obtaining materials and tools to construct their homes, to burying dead members of their communities, and to obtaining food for themselves and their animals. For these communities, *idle land talk* is indeed *idle talk*: they have no idle land in their midst. If one is looking for these communities' understanding of what constitutes "land use" and "productive use of land", it surely cannot be defined outside the broader web of their engagements with and on this land.

What is interesting in the case of Hanhe Farm, as indeed is the case with the KCUAIP, is that to people in the communities in concerned, *idlization* of land only happened when the agricultural companies in question took over the land. With people forced off the land, most of it remained a fenced-off bush, a no-go zone for those who, not so long ago, had daily mapped the same land with their bare foot stamps. Only after the company took over the land did it become an "unused bushland". In fact, Hanhe Farm in particular abandoned the land after a few years. Yet even after that, the land remained a no-go zone for people in the area. When asked why they abandoned the land after only a few years, the owners argued that they "failed to make [their] money back" (Ford 2019). Never mind that conventional economic wisdom suggests that, for any serious long-term investment (such as these claimed to be), less than ten years is a very short time to start clamoring for profit. Hanhe Farm owners dreamt of a miracle in Uganda!

While the community had devised sound ecological ways of subsisting on this wetland without dismembering the eco-system, our new agricultural investors, after five years of operation, claimed that their failure arose because the land was "a wetland and suffers from floods. We were not aware of that because we came to the place in the dry season when there was no water. But floods destroyed our crops and our gardens.", adding that "[s]ometimes we could not even get to the farm" (Ford 2019). Yet Hanhe Farm, just like its counterpart, the KCUAIP, had huge ambitions of educating poor locals on effective, modern, and productive forms of land use. Given the reasons Hanhe Farm owners gave for abandoning the land, one can tell clearly who of the two, between the community and Hanhe Farm owners, needed lessons from the other regarding effective, productive and ecologically-viable forms of land use in this particular case!

The discourse of "idle land" was more prominent in the case of the KCUAIP, again fomenting the talk of high-ranking government officials and Chinese investors. Besides the President's claim that KCUAIP was transforming a forest into a productive farm, there were others who traded similar claims. For example, Mr. Alex Kakooza, "whose organisation scouts for Chinese investors", argued that community members complaining about displacement and eviction from their land "should look at the value the investors add *to previously idle land*" (see Oluka 2016, emphasis added). Here, one notices what may appear a contradiction in terms: how can one, in the same statement, confirm both the forced eviction of communities and the idea of the same land being idle? However, such seemingly contradictory statements actually speak to the broader issue at hand, which is the neoliberal disqualification of every conception of land use that does not conform to the market logic. It seems to me that in these cases, at issue is not whether land is literally idle or not; rather, at issue is how communities use such land. Thus, even in Chinese media, KCUAIP was represented as "turning *a section of Ugandan wasteland* into an agricultural powerhouse that is changing people's lives" (Xiangyi and Blair 2018, emphasis added). These views in Chinese media were reinforced by the General Manager of the company, Yang Hong Ping, who proudly reminded his listeners thus: "The land you are standing on used to consist of bushes, weeds, or forest" (see Xiangyi and Blair 2018).

What Yang Hong Ping called "bushes, weeds, or forest" was to the communities "a refuge for … farmers in the dry season" (Ford 2019), broadly constituting "communal land and water dams that were in place before the land was taken over by the investors" as one resident, Enock Ssentongo, told a reporter in 2021 (Wandera 2021). A local leader narrated to one journalist how, because of the new agricultural venture, their water sources were fenced off with promises of piped water as a compensatory measure. He says the company simply inserted a single water tap inside a fenced-off space, and expected the whole community to collect water for themselves and their animals with jerrycans passing under a barbwire fence! As if this was not bad enough, the company had disconnected the water from the tap ever since (Luwaga 2021; Ford 2019). To residents like Ssentongo, therefore, there was no such a thing as "idle land" before the coming of the KCUAIP. Like in the case of Hanhe Farm, people claim that it is the company that took their land and turned a huge chunk of it into an empty bush, that is, rendering it literally idle (Wandera 2021).

Perhaps the case of Scandinavian plantation forests company, Green Resources, and its Kachung forest project in Northern Uganda, offers the most interesting example of how contemporary political idlization of land plays out in actually existing large-scale agricultural projects. A 2019 report by the Oakland Institute documents how Green Resources, and its funder, the (publicly owned) Swedish Energy Agency (SEA), claimed that the land they obtained in Kachung (in Northern Uganda) for a carbon forests business was an "unused bushland" (Mousseau and Teare 2019: 7). In actual fact, the land in question only became "free" (unused) after forced mass eviction by state security agencies. In 2015, TV4 Sweden Reporter, Camilla Ziedorn, interviewed SEA's Ulrika Raab, the Project Manager of Kachung Forest (Ziedorn and Machula 2015). Here is a part of that interview:

> **Camilla Ziedorn (CZ):** You write that [the land] was unused bushland before the project came in. But in your due diligence report, the risk assessment, you write that the community has used the land for many years. How does that work?

Ulrika Raab (UR): The one document is a brochure…
CZ: But that's the information the public gets…
UR: No matter what land project you look at with people in the vicinity, you have to deal responsibly with the issue of land use. That's not just the right…
CZ: You are not answering the question. You write that the [carbon credits] forest is being planted in what was an unused bushland. But you know that there had been farmers using that land all along. So why do you write that it was unused?
UR: [Does not respond to the question, stares at the interviewer confusedly]
CZ: Outwardly you describe the project as planting a forest where there was once only unused bushland. But you know that farmers have used that land all along.
UR: And they still use it.
CZ: Why then do you write unused bushland?
UR: [Does not respond to the question, just stares at the interviewer confusedly]
CZ: Why do you write that in public information?
UR: If you let me speak, I can tell you about Kachung…
CZ: I want you to answer the question.
UR: How we describe the project in the brochure…that you're reading now…, I do not even know what you're reading.
CZ: It is what you sent me. It is on your website, which you continuously refer to. […]
CZ: Is it unused?
UR: There is a meticulous plan for how to work with the local community. They are still allowed to be there and herd their cattle through the forest. I am not familiar with the land-use conflict you are trying to portray here.

The exchange continued, as Camilla Ziedorn presented one piece of evidence after another all to prove to her interviewee that the land on which Green Resources established its lucrative carbon farming business was not an "unused bushland" as the company publicly claims, but that it was emptied of people at the barrel of a gun, aided by the Ugandan state (see Ziedorn and Machula 2015). Yet, and the interviewer seems to have known given the framing of her questions, it was not the case that the interviewee and her company did not know that people lived on this land before the company took it over. They were aware of that, and the interview proves just that. The fact that the company continued to present the land as an "unused bushland" should have signaled to the interviewer that perhaps what the company was and is contesting relates to the very question of what constitutes land use. Perhaps by calling it an "unused bushland" the company is not making reference to the prior physical presence of communities on the land, which it doesn't contest; perhaps in so thinking, it is projecting its carbon forests business as the example of an acceptable mode and conception of land use. I develop this line further in the section below.

Displacement *as* Epistemic Violence

Popular critiques of large-scale land-based projects in the global South, the most prominent coming from NGOs, generally give primacy to physical displacement of communities from their places of dwelling and sustenance of life. This is an important critique, and it targets all major land-based investments whose establishment was a result of the forced removal of people and communities from their land. By drawing on recent critical decolonial scholarship (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2018; Santos 2017; Dotson 2011), it is possible to expand the notion of

displacement (i.e., what is displaced) from its general limitation to physicality (that is, the physical displacement of people from land on which they live) to include also the epistemic dimension, namely, the contestation of people's ways of knowing, conceptions and imaginations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 72, 2013: 264) in relation to land. In this sense, we can think of displacement *as* epistemic violence.

It seems to me that at the heart of the contemporary political idlization of land is a contestation on the constitution of "land use" in general, and of "productive use of land" in particular. In the context of this study, the contest is between two broadly conceivable groups. On the one hand, there is the postcolonial neoliberal state allied with 'private' agricultural capital. On the other hand, are the communities in society subjected to the demands of agricultural capital. In short, this is, in an important sense, a contest between the state and private agricultural capital on the one hand, and, on the other hand, communities in our society.

The state and private agricultural capital are intent on defining "productive use of land", or "land use" more generally, in purely economic terms, based on the number of (preferably global) market-destined products that can be obtained from the land. Here, the insistence on labelling land, on which people live and subsist, as "idle" is based on pure economism: it is idle because production based on it is not externalizable. In other words, it does not directly translate into products on their way to national and global markets, and thus does not contribute directly to national income and related forms of national economic statistics, as well as to socio-political visions such as, in the case of Uganda, "Vision 2040" (Banjwa 2016). To put the matter more crudely, land must make money, and any land use to be validated must contribute to this objective. In this understanding, it matters less whether people in these communities know no hunger because they can produce enough food to feed themselves year after year, or that there is no such a thing as "homelessness" among these communities because every adult person can construct their dwelling place with tools commonly derived from what economic experts call "wastelands", "bushes", and "forests". What matters is that all land must be exploited to make different forms of products on their way to the market – whether agricultural products such as rice and maize, or apartment complexes to house labourers. This is the idea of "productive use of land" based purely on the market logic.

On the other hand, in the communities in areas targeted by massive private agricultural investments, such as those considered here, a different understanding of productive use of land can be discerned. Here, the common frontier, what economic experts call "a wasteland", is *inter alia* a buffer zone to ensure that certain basic necessities of life are accessible for all people living in these areas, especially during times of unfriendly weather conditions, such as draughts. Beyond the living (present and future, born and yet-to-be-born), land is also a final resting place for dead members of the community, who equally have valid claims on this land (Lwanga-Lunyiigo 2022). To be buried on the *kiggya* (a Luganda term for a family burial site), for instance, constitutes an important aspect of productive use of land. Such a proposition, that burying the dead constitutes "productive use of land", would no doubt send our typical economic expert into a mental paralysis. For our expert, the dead are not a market-destined product. Yet these communities attach such great value to the dead, to the extent that even when people face tough economic circumstances, the one thing that generally remains outside exposure to the market are family burial sites – I am here thinking of cases where there is a semblance of choice, under the so-called "willing seller

willing buyer" basis. We may refer to this societal view of land use and productive use of land as one predominantly based on sustainable community subsistence.

The claim is not that there exists today any community in Uganda (or elsewhere) that is totally insulated from the onslaught of market forces aided by state violence. Rather, the point is that the latest investments target landed communities whose sustenance is primarily based on their land and, further, that this sustenance, in its broadest and dynamic sense, defines the parameters of their conceptions on what constitutes "productive use of land". The mainstream attack on "subsistence life" (myopically understood via the market logic to mean "producing for the stomach" and almost nothing for the market), and the open declaration, through state policy, of converting communities from "subsistence agriculture" to "commercial agriculture", tells it all (*Daily Monitor* 2019). Why should it be a concern if communities can fill their stomachs with good things, especially those they themselves can produce? Why should their primary direct sustenance through production on land be replaced with mediated sustenance through the market?

The contest between these two conceptions of what constitutes "productive use of land", and of land use more generally, have also involved the question of environmental protection. What is at stake is the question of how "conservation" is understood in a postcolonial neoliberal political setting, *vis-à-vis* how local communities understand and practice conservation. For instance, the KCUAIP and Hanhe Farm, like many other large-scale land-based investments in Uganda, are located in water catchment areas, or wetlands, protected in national laws from any major human developments. These state laws, of course, deploy the statist discourse of conservation contrary to people's understanding of a peaceful co-existence between humans and other lifeforms in nature (Lwanga-Lunyiigo 2013: 240; Sachs 2015: 34). However, limited as these laws are, they are consistently violated by the very state that enacts them. Save for the public rhetoric and the laws no one cares about, we find, in these cases, not a single pretension of addressing climate change, as observed elsewhere (see Alkhalili et al. 2023a, 2023b; Lunyago, forthcoming). What we are confronted with are endless ironies. For instance, the president of Uganda routinely utters anti-wetland destruction rhetoric at events where he is a guest of honor in launching Chinese and other investments in wetlands! The minister of environment and the NEMA[10] authorities evict citizens subsisting through small-scale activities (such as growing yams for consumption) carefully crafted in wetlands, apparently not because of some grand humanistic idea of conserving for all present and future members of society. Rather, akin to settler colonial attitudes, the intention is to clear the wetlands of local human presence for massive destruction by large-scale land-based investments. As Lunyago (2023) has shown, even formerly protected forests are being degazetted to give land to these investors! One commentator noted thus:

> Almost in panic mode, the Minister of State for Environment, Beatrice Anywar, is daily seen threatening to evict ordinary Ugandans who occupy wetlands. She recently embarked on a tour of Kalungu district, under heavy police escort, ordering peasants on tiny half acre patches to vacate wetlands or else they will be forcefully evicted (Habati 2020).

[10]National Environmental Management Authority

While (the then) minister Anywar may have wanted to be seen as fighting wars on behalf of the environment[11], her real war as a minister in this postcolonial neoliberal setting was against local subsistence in wetlands and other nature spaces such as national parks – for a simple reason that subsistence life is seen as the antithesis to the state-backed project of commodifying all aspects of nature. This is why an environmental minister, such as Anywar at the time, could never be seen launching a similar campaign in wetland areas housing large-scale projects of private agricultural capital.

This is also why all those concerned with pro-people environmental conservation approaches, including civil society organizations, must rethink the whole state discourse on conservation and environmental protection. The question worth asking is the following: conserving for whom and protection from what? As Alkhalili et al. (2023a, 2023b) have shown in cases from the Middle East and North Africa, the common tendency is to sacrifice "territories and populations" in the name of addressing climate change (2023a: 2). In their cases, (the Occupied Syrian Goran Heights and Occupied Western Sahara) wind energy (as a climate change mitigation intervention) functions to reinforce and give credence to preexisting colonial occupation. In our cases, the projects in wetlands, such as Hanhe Farm and KCUAIP, do not (and cannot!) even claim to be concerned with environmental conservation. For how can they when their projects are operating in such areas?

It seems to me that in Uganda's postcolonial neoliberal context, by "environmental protection" it is meant, by state officials, the protection of the environment (wetlands and all aspects of nature) *for* private capital investment and consumption (on this, see Nakangu 2019; Lunyago 2023). In such an endeavor, in a typical colonial fashion, communities living in such areas are designated as so-many threats, as so many stumbling blocks. They must be removed from these areas; the environment has to be protected *from* them. Only in approaching contemporary state environmental conservation discourse in this way does the seemingly ironical co-existence of official environmental conservation laws and rhetoric and private capital investments in wetlands begin to make sense.

The notion of "idle land", which is discursively used to justify large-scale agricultural investments in Uganda and elsewhere in the global South, presents a paradox. Yet, approached from the vantage point of the current global neoliberal conjuncture, this paradox is thinkable. In a postcolonial setting like Uganda, if those claiming that particular lands were "unused bushlands" before the arrival of agricultural companies also, ironically, demonstrate awareness of the prior presence of communities on the lands in question (as in the cases I have explored); then it seems to be the case that the terrain of contestation is the very conception of the constitution of (productive) land use. In defining land as "idle", it seems to me, the state and agricultural investment companies (together with their financiers in the IMF and World Bank) are questioning local conceptions and practices concerning land use. They are questioning all none-marketizable conceptions of (productive) land use. I have argued throughout this paper, learning from critical decolonial scholarship, that *physical displacement* be viewed as an embodiment, and a culmination, of an epistemic operation:

[11]Before she was appointed a minister, she became famous for her part in the Save Mabira Forest campaign against the government's plans to give away this natural rainforest to a local sugarcane growing conglomerate, Mehta Group.

the neoliberal critique of the diverse, dynamic, context-specific and generally none-marketizable conceptions and practices concerning land use.

Conclusion

I this paper, I have engaged the idea of "idle land" – an idea so pervasive in large-scale agricultural investment circles and state discourses on land acquisition for development in the global South. The idea that Africa and much of the global South is home to unrivalled 'idle' but otherwise highly 'productive' land continues to inspire numerous investors who are intent at putting so-defined 'idle land' to some 'productive purposes'. Such land is often defined as 'wasteland', 'idle land', 'unused land', and other similar descriptive markers. Well-documented cases of forced physical displacement of communities by state security agencies to pave way for large-scale land-based projects make it obvious that such lands have never been, literary, 'idle'. What is not so obvious, and what has been the core interest of this paper, is why states, agricultural corporations and their international financiers continue to front the discourse of idle land in reference to most arable lands in the global South. I have made three core arguments in this paper.

First, I have argued that idlization of land is a historical phenomenon, and has been articulated to different politico-economic objectives under conditions of modern political power at different historical moments. I have argued that to better understand it, we should think of it as *political idlization* of land, and from a postcolonial vantage point, colonialism provided the defining moment for its articulation. Reflecting on its seminal articulation during colonialism, Blaut (1993) called it the colonial "diffusionist myth of emptiness", a key element in colonialist discourse that served purely "colonialist functions" (Blaut 1993: 25).

Second, I have argued that in our contemporary neoliberal moment, political idlization of land functions to justify and legitimize neoliberal operations on land. With the alliance between the postcolonial state and neoliberal forces in fronting it, idle land talk thus reveals and functions to cement the neoliberal character of our postcolonial state. This state allies itself with global neoliberal forces, even if not willingly as it has been claimed in some circles (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001), not just in drawing even the remotest piece of land into the sphere of the market: it has come to embody the neoliberal logic itself. For this reason, I have argued that we better think of this state as a postcolonial neoliberal state – and engage it as such.

Finally, to understand its condition of possibility under neoliberalism, I have argued that contemporary political idlization of land embody, and is a culmination of, an epistemic operation: a neoliberal critique of the historically diverse, dynamic, context-specific and generally none-marketizable conceptions and practices concerning land use in the targeted areas of the global South. With this, drawing from decolonial scholarship, I propose a rethinking of the dominant conceptualization of *displacement* as only physical, to now consider it as a double-edged operation: both *physical* and *epistemic*. These insights encourage us not only to reframe our critical discourse against the contemporary phenomenon of land grabbing, but also to reimagine how we organize and engage in society-based resistance against this phenomenon.

References

Akram-Lodhi, A.H., 2007. Land, markets and neoliberal enclosure: an agrarian political economy perspective. *Third world quarterly*, *28*(8), pp.1437-1456.

Alkhalili, N., Dajani, M., & Mahmoud, Y., 2023a. "The enduring coloniality of ecological modernization: Wind energy development in the occupied Western Sahara and the occupied Syrian Goran Heights". *Political Geography* 103 (2023), p.102871.

Alkhalili, N., Dajani, M., & Mahmoud, Y., 2023b. "Claiming space for decolonial scholarship: Confronting epistemic exclusion in green energy colonialism". *Political Geography*.

Amanor, K., 2012. *Land Governance in Africa: How historical context has shaped key contemporary issues relating to policy on land*. International Land Coalition.

Amin, S., 2012. Contemporary imperialism and the agrarian question. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, *1*(1), pp.11-26.

Anderson, J.R., 1962. The dilemma of idle land in mapping land use. *The Professional Geographer*, *14*(3), pp.16-18.

Baglioni, E. and Gibbon, P., 2013. Land grabbing, large-and small-scale farming: what can evidence and policy from 20th century Africa contribute to the debate?. *Third World Quarterly*, *34*(9), pp.1558-1581.

Banjwa A., 2016. "Of visionless visions and the need to transcend tantalizing myths of our time". *The Observer*, August 29, 2016. Available: https://observer.ug/viewpoint/46158-of-visionless-visions-and-the-need-to-transcend-tantalizing-myths

————2022. "Land for Development? Neoliberal Restructuring and the Dynamics of Land Reforms in Uganda". In: Mazwi F., Mudimu G.T., Helliker K. (eds.) *Capital Penetration and the Peasantry in Southern and Eastern Africa. Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development*. Springer, Cham.

Barlow, A.R., 1932. Kikuyu land tenure and inheritance. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society*, *11*(2)

Blaut, J.M., 1993. *The colonizer's model of the world: Geographical diffusionism and Eurocentric history* (Vol. 1). Guilford Press.

Borras Jr, S. M. 2006. "The Underlying Assumptions, Theory, and Practice of Neoliberal Land Policies." In: Rosset, P., Patel, R. and Courville, M. eds., 2006. *Promised land: competing visions of agrarian reform*. Food First Books.

Borras Jr, S.M., Hall, R., Scoones, I., White, B. and Wolford, W., 2011. Towards a better understanding of global land grabbing: an editorial introduction. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *38*(2), pp.209-216.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L., 2001. Neoliberal newspeak: notes on the new planetary vulgate. *Radical Philosophy*, *105*(2-5).

Bräutigam, D. A., & Xiaoyang, T. (2009). China's Engagement in African Agriculture: "Down to the Countryside." *The China Quarterly*, *199*, 686–706. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27756497

Bräutigam, D., & Zjang, H. (2013). Green Dreams: Myth and Reality in China's Agricultural Investment in Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, *34*(9), 1676–1696. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24522203

Broughton, A., 2013. Land grabbing: A new colonialism. *Green Social Thought*, *61*, pp.25-29.

Buwembo J., 2021. Uganda's land belongs to us all, but we are now worried about it. *The East African*, October 19, 2021. Available: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/oped/comment/uganda-s-land-belongs-to-us-all-3588112

Byerlee, D. and Deininger, K., 2013. Growing resource scarcity and global farmland investment. *Annu. Rev. Resour. Econ.*, *5*(1), pp.13-34.

Cai, X., Zhang, X. and Wang, D., 2011. Land availability for biofuel production. *Environmental science & technology*, *45*(1), pp.334-339.

Cesaire A., 1972. *Discourse on Colonialism.* Monthly Review Press.

Chambati, W. and Mazwi, F., 2022. "The Land Belongs to Us": Ethnic Claims Over Land During Zimbabwe's Land Reforms. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, *11*(1), pp.85-111.

Daily Monitor 2019. "Museveni rallies Tooro on commercial farming". *Daily Monitor*, May 12, 2019.

Daily Monitor, 2016. "New Agricultural Industrial Park to create 25,000 jobs". *Daily Monitor*, April 27, 2016.

Deininger, K. and Byerlee, D., 2011. *Rising global interest in farmland: can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?* World Bank Publications.

Dotson, K., 2011. Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia*, *26*(2), pp.236-257.

Duyvendak, J.J.L., 1939. 'The true dates of the Chinese maritime expeditions in the early fifteenth century'. *T'oung Pao*, *34* (Livr. 5), pp.341-413.

Eicher, C.K., 1994. *Zimbabwe's green revolution: preconditions for replication in Africa* (No. 1099-2016-89036).

FAO 2017. "Uganda and China's project results prove South-South Cooperation facilitated by FAO to be an effective tool for agricultural development". Available: https://www.fao.org/partnerships/news-archive/news-article/en/c/897400/ [Accessed February 11, 2022].

Finlay, R., 2008. 'The voyages of Zheng He: ideology, state power, and maritime trade in Ming China'. *Journal of the Historical Society*, *8*(3), pp.327-347.

Ford, P., 2019. "Big Promises, Few Results: Chinese farms falter in Uganda". The Christian Science Monitor, September 10, 2019. Available: https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2019/0910/Big-promises-few-results-Chinese-farms-falter-in-Uganda [Accessed January 01, 2022].

Ggoobi, R. and Barungi, J., 2016. Socio-Economic Effects of Chinese Agricultural Investments on the Environment and Local Livelihoods in Uganda.

Gill, B., 2016. Can the river speak? Epistemological confrontation in the rise and fall of the land grab in Gambella, Ethiopia. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *48*(4), pp.699-717.

Gro Intelligence 2015. "A Look at Chinese Investment in African Agriculture". Available: https://gro-intelligence.com/insights/a-look-at-chinese-investment-in-african-agriculture [Accessed January 02, 2022].

Habati, M. A., 2020. "Godfathers, Politics eating up wetland". The Independent. Available: https://www.independent.co.ug/godfathers-politics-eating-up-wetland/

Hall, R., 2011. Land grabbing in Southern Africa: the many faces of the investor rush. *Review of African political economy*, *38*(128), pp.193-214.

Haller, T., 2019. The different meanings of land in the age of neoliberalism: Theoretical reflections on commons and resilience grabbing from a social anthropological perspective. *Land*, *8*(7).

Hanson, H. E., 2003. *Landed Obligation: The Practice of Power in Buganda*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Huaxia 2020. "Industrial Park with Chinese Investments in Uganda Contributes to Industrialization." Xinhua, October 20, 2020. Available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2020-10/20/c_139452361.htm [Accessed February 16, 2022].

Illich, I., 1991. "Dwelling". In: Illich, I., 1991. *In the mirror of the past: Lectures and addresses, 1978-1990*. London: Marian Boyars, pp. 55-64.

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), & ACODE, (2015). *Status and trends in Chinese investments that impact forestland use in Uganda: Uganda*. International Institute for Environment and Development. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18022

Kenyatta, J., 1959. *Facing Mount Kenya: the traditional life of the Gikuyu*. East African Educational Publishers.

Lawther, I., 2017. Why African countries are interested in building agricultural partnerships with China: lessons from Rwanda and Uganda. *Third World Quarterly*, *38*(10), pp.2312-2329.

Lunyago, M., (forthcoming). 'Large-scale Land Acquisition' and the Politics of Climate Change: A Case of West Africa. In: Kalangi, A. (ed., forthcoming). *Dynamics of Land Acquisition for Development*.

Lunyago, M., 2023. "Resisting degazetting forests and the discourse of development in Uganda". Climate Change and Environmental Politics in Africa, *PASR*, Vol. 3, July 2023.

Luwaga, B., 2021. "Chinese Agricultural Park in Luweero struggles to take off five years after launch". URN. Available: https://ugandaradionetwork.net/a/story/chinese-agricultural-park-in-luwero-struggles-to-take-off-five-years-after-launch-

Lwanga-Lunyiigo, S. 2022. Mailo Land: Thinking Historically about a Contested Tenure. Unpublished paper presented to the 3rd Session of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Intellectual Study Group on Land and Natural Resources. Kampala, February 12, 2022.

————2013. *The Struggle for Land in Buganda: 1888-2005.* Kampala: Wavah Books.

Maiyo, J. 2014. The Political Ecology of Chinese Agriculture Investments in Uganda: The case of Hanhe farm. SAIS-CARI Policy Brief 01/2014, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C. http://www.sais-cari.org/research/chinese-agricultural-investments-in-africa

Mamdani, M. 2015. "The Contemporary Ugandan Discourse on Customary Tenure: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations". In: Mamdani, M. 2013 (ed.). *The Land Question: Socialism, Capitalism, and the Market*. Kampala: Makerere Institute of Social Research.

————1976. Politics and Class Formation in Uganda. New York: Monthly Review Press.

————2001. A brief history of genocide. *Transition*, (87), pp.26-47.

————2017. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of Late Colonialism*. Kampala & Johannesburg: Makerere Institute of Social Research and Wits University Press.

Manji, A.S., 2006. *The politics of land reform in Africa: From communal tenure to free markets*. Zed Books

Manzo, K. and Padfield, R., 2016. Neoliberal Colonialism? A postcolonial reading of "land grabbing" in Africa. In *The Postcolonial World* (pp. 529-545). Routledge.

Margulis, M.E., McKeon, N. and Borras Jr, S.M., 2013. Land grabbing and global governance: critical perspectives. *Globalizations*, *10*(1), pp.1-23.

Martin, W.G. and Palat, R.A., 2014. Asian Land Acquisitions in Africa: Beyond the 'New Bandung'or a 'New Colonialism'?. *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, *3*(1), pp.125-150.

Martiniello, G., 2013. Accumulation by dispossession, Agrarian change and Resistance in Northern Uganda. MISR Working Paper No.12, January 2013. Available at: https://misr.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/publications/12Accumulation%20by%20Dispossession,%20Agrarian.pdf [Accessed January 10, 2022].

Mkodzongi, G., 2016. 'I am a paramount chief, this land belongs to my ancestors': the reconfiguration of rural authority after Zimbabwe's land reforms. *Review of African Political Economy*, *43*(sup1), pp.99-114.

Moore, J.W., 2016. "The Rise of Cheap Nature". In: Moore, J.W. ed., 2016. *Anthropocene or capitalocene?: Nature, history, and the crisis of capitalism*. Pm Press.

Mousseau, F., Teare, E., 2019. *Evicted for Carbon Credits: Norway, Sweden, and Finland Displace Ugandan Farmers for Carbon Trading*. Oakland: The Oakland Institute.

Moyo, S. and Yeros, P. eds., 2005. *Reclaiming the land: The resurgence of rural movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. Zed Books.

Nakangu, B.B., 2019. *State craft in the natural resources management structure of Uganda* (Doctoral dissertation, Makerere University).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2013. *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa*. African Books Collective.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2018. *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. Routledge.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2021. The cognitive empire, politics of knowledge and African intellectual productions: reflections on struggles for epistemic freedom and resurgence of decolonisation in the twenty-first century. *Third World Quarterly*, *42*(5), pp.882-901.

Nyong'o, P.A., 2013. The land question, land grabbing and agriculture in Africa. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies-Multi-, Inter-and Transdisciplinarity*, *8*(2), pp.23-31.

Octave, N., 2021. "China-Uganda Relations: An All-round Mutual Benefits Engagement". Available: https://www.dwcug.org/china-uganda-relations-an-all-round-mutual-benefits-engagement/ [Accessed February 14, 2022].

Oluka, B.H., 2016. "Gov't gives Chinese firm 2,500 acres in Luweero for farming". *The Observer.* Available: https://observer.ug/news-headlines/44019-govt-gives-chinese-firm-2-500-acres-in-luweero-for-farming [Accessed February 09, 2022].

Rönnbäck, K., 2014. The Idle and the Industrious–European Ideas about the African Work Ethic in Precolonial West Africa. *History in Africa*, *41*, pp.117-145.

Sachs, W., 2015. *Planet dialectics: Explorations in environment and development*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Santos, B.D.S., 2017. Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide. *ALBERTA LAW REVIEW*, *54*, p.4.

Schmidt, W.G., 2001. 'A Chinese in the Nubian and Abyssinian kingdoms (8th century). The visit of Du Huan to Molin-guo and Laobosa'. *Arabian Humanities. Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique/International Journal of Archaeology and Social Sciences in the Arabian Peninsula*, (9).

Shiva V., 2010. "Resources". In: Sachs, W., 2010 (ed.). The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power. Zed Books.

Sorrenson M., 1963. "The official Mind and Kikuyu Land Tenure, 1895-1939." In: *Proceedings of the EAISR Conference Held at Kivukoni College, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika*. Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research (EAISR), Makerere College.

State House Uganda, 2016. "President Museveni Calls for More Investments in Uganda". Available: https://www.statehouse.go.ug/media/news/2016/04/15/president-museveni-calls-more-chinese-investments-uganda [Accessed February 17, 2022].

van Meijl, H., Van Rheenen, T., Tabeau, A. and Eickhout, B., 2006. The impact of different policy environments on agricultural land use in Europe. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*, *114*(1), pp.21-38.

Wandera D., 2021. "Why Shs.700b Agriculture Park Project in Luweero Has Stalled". *The Daily Monitor,* September 23, 2021.

Warmerdam, W. and van Dijk, M.P., 2013. Chinese state-owned enterprise investments in Uganda: Findings from a recent survey of Chinese firms in Kampala. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *18*(3), pp.281-301.

White, B., Borras Jr, S.M., Hall, R., Scoones, I. and Wolford, W., 2013. *The new enclosures: critical perspectives on corporate land deals* (pp. 13-42). Routledge.

Xiangyi, X. & Blair, D. 2018. "First came the chicken, then the egg farm". China Daily. Available: http://africa.chinadaily.com.cn/weekly/2018-10/05/content_37022431.htm

Yu, H., 2019. The China–Uganda South–South Cooperation Project Under FAO's Food Security Framework. In *South-south Cooperation and Chinese Foreign Aid* (pp. 161-179). Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.

Ziedorn C. & Machula J., 2015. "Talla Fakta: The Forbidden Forest". *TV4 Sweden*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COoPVXlNbqQ [Accessed January 10, 2023].