

Globalization, Land Grabbing, and the Present-Day Colonial State in Uganda: Ecolonization and Its Impacts

Journal of Environment &
Development
0(0) 1–27

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DOI: 10.1177/1070496515622017

jed.sagepub.com



Pádraig Carmody^{1,2} and David Taylor³

Abstract

Much has been written recently about the nature, drivers, and impacts of large-scale land acquisitions or “grabbing” in Africa. We argue that current land grabs are a product of ecological scarcity and the opportunities this presents for accumulation and logics of state building. In effect, land grabs represent a reinscription and deepening of sociospatial power inequalities associated with previous eras. Together we term these combined processes ecolonization, as discourses of climate change mitigation and food and energy security facilitate continued and deepening domination of ecological space by domestic political elites and transnational investors, through the United Nations’ Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation and enhance forest carbon stocks projects, for example. The new internal frontiers opened up by processes of capital accumulation are, in turn, fundamental to the reproduction and strengthening of colonial African state formations. Land dispossession thus serves hybrid economic accumulation and political logics across different scales and temporalities. The ways in which these processes are empirically expressed is explored through two case studies from Uganda.

¹Department of Geography, School of Natural Sciences, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland

²Department of Geography, Environmental Management and Energy Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

³Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Corresponding Author:

Pádraig Carmody, Museum Building, Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland.

Email: carmodyp@tcd.ie

Keywords

Africa, climate change, deforestation, dispossession, food security, oil palm, REDD+

KICUCULA, Uganda—According to the company’s proposal to join a United Nations clean-air program, the settlers living in this area left in a “peaceful” and “voluntary” manner.

People here remember it quite differently.

“I heard people being beaten, so I ran outside,” said Emmanuel Cyicyima, 33. “The houses were being burnt down.”

Other villagers described gun-toting soldiers and an 8-year-old child burning to death when his home was set ablaze by security [*sic*] officers.

—Kron (2011)

The aforementioned quote from the *New York Times* refers to an incident in Uganda when 15,000 people (Nel, 2014) were displaced to make way for an investment by a British company, New Forests. This was done to create a timber plantation that, it was hoped, would contribute to climate change mitigation under the auspices of the United Nations Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) program. William Easterly (2014) asks whether similar dispossession could occur today in the United States and concludes that it could not, although the United States itself was founded on land dispossession. In this article, we argue that just as forced displacements were central to colonial conquest and the formation of many nation states, a similar process is now unfolding to conquer new frontiers in the quest for expanded accumulation, to create territory, and to offset the ecological consequences of the ongoing expansion and deepening of the capitalist mode of production, to which it contributes.

In geography and cognate fields, there have been a number of important theories developed around how to conceptualize the current round of globalized land grabbing,¹ such as “green grabbing” (Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012), “territorialization and enclosure” (Corson, 2011), or as an element of what David Harvey (2003) has called “accumulation by dispossession.” Notwithstanding the major contributions made by these and many other publications (e.g., R. Hall, Scoones, & Tsikata, 2015; White, Borrás, Hall, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012), we argue that the overarching process and relationships between this and associated subprocesses and events on the ground have been neglected. We call this overarching process *ecolonization*, preferring this terminology to that of the “ecological fix” (Bakker, 2003) or “ecoaccumulation” (Sullivan, 2013) because it conveys that these processes are multidimensional, long lived, and intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production. The current round

of land grabbing can be thought of as reflective of the maturation of the ecological contradiction between a growing global economy and finite natural resources.

Specifically, ecologization consists of the following:

- The ongoing ecological colonization of different types of natural resources by those states, companies, and consumers that are able to exercise power in the global political economy. For example, greenhouse gas emissions per capita vary between countries up to 800-fold (World Bank, 2014).
- The depletion of natural resources resulting in a long-term increase in their economic, social, and political importance, across scales.
- The opening up of new frontiers of ecoaccumulation, both sectorally and spatially, in part to try to offset the impacts of resource scarcity and problems of overaccumulation of capital.
- The appropriation or “grabbing” of land and other natural resources that have appreciated in value by powerful international and “domestic” actors (Fairbairn, 2013) to serve economic accumulation and state-building purposes.

Ecologization then is a combination of these elements, which often find most acute expression at the periphery of the global system through the phenomenon of land grabbing. Locating land grabbing through the concept of ecologization situates these processes structurally. Land grabbing represents an attempt to spatially fix both the ecological contradiction and the overaccumulation problem generated by globalized capital accumulation and to open up new frontiers for its expansion. The fix is spatially expressed and refracted through concrete actions taken by African states to open up new land frontiers for both foreign investors and domestic political elites in tandem. African states, in turn, are often keen to facilitate land grabbing for their own state building, territorialization, and economic motives. While land grabbing is often presented as a recent phenomenon, there are clear links to, and similarities with, past periods of extensive changes in land tenure and use associated with the colonial period and (largely) European expansionism as documented by Wily (2012), Baglioni and Gibbon (2013), and Edelman and León (2013), among others.

Colonialism was characterized by unequal social relations and exploitation, land dispossession, the extraction of resources for the benefit of metropolitan powers, and the denial of the rights of property and full citizenship to colonial subjects. It was a system in which certain states claimed sovereignty over people and territory beyond their own boundaries, without granting citizenship rights (Kearns, 2007), privileging the rights of one set of people over those of others (Brett, 1973, cited in Kanji, 2008). Current land grabs replicate some of these features, in addition to sometimes establishing quasisovereignties² over land that has been purchased or leased. Land grabbing is also often associated with a

deepening of the “ecologically unequal exchange” established under colonialism that “can be interpreted as an overall asymmetrical transfer of natural resources and sink capacity (the capacity of the Earth’s ecosystems to absorb waste and pollution) from peripheral to core countries underlying nominally equitable monetary exchanges (Hornborg, 2011)” (Frame, 2014, p. 15). The denial of rights by land grabbers and governments means that people who are dispossessed are subjects rather than citizens (Mamdani, 1996).

The “landing” (Li, 2014) of flows of transnational capital in Africa triggers new displacements of people, with sometimes severe social impacts, but as yet unknown long-term political consequences (see Borrás & Franco, 2013). Focusing on the eastern African country of Uganda, this article explores the way in which land grabbing is being used to promote both capital accumulation and state strengthening through dispossession. We find that the beneficiaries of colonization are, perhaps unsurprisingly, transnational corporations (TNCs) and state and local elites able to leverage their connections to these companies and control over land, often resorting to force in the process.

The article proceeds by developing this concept focussing specifically on the ways in which “internal” and “external” actors drive the process of land grabbing. We then discuss our methodology and present two case studies to show how these dynamics have played out on the ground in Uganda. We conclude by discussing the implications of our cases for the theory of colonization.

Ecolonization and African Land

Two of the most significant trends in African development are climate restructuring³ and land grabbing. The two trends appear to be in mutual opposition, however. This is because agricultural productivity in Africa is likely to fall, overall, with projected future climate change. The reasons are twofold: increased uncertainty in the weather and the effects of changes in seasonality and levels of precipitation on largely rain-fed, subsistence forms of food production (Cline, 2007). Uncertainties over future supplies of food create incentives for foreign companies and powers to grab large areas of land to attain future food security (Liberti, 2013; Nally, 2010). However, food security⁴ at local and national levels may be jeopardized by heightened international interest in acquiring or leasing land for agricultural production (Cotula, 2013), with two thirds of major land deals taking place in countries that have their own serious food problems (Oxfam, 2012). The apparent contradiction between climate restructuring and land grabbing is being partially offset by the possibilities that both processes open up for capital accumulation by dispossession (D. Hall, 2013; Harvey, 2005) and political control: together aspects of ecolonization.

Climate restructuring is an example of ecological stress that world powers or oil-rich states and their companies are attempting to redress or fix through further ecolonization, which involves the sale or grabbing of large parcels of land in

the developing world for climate change mitigation, food, and biofuel production. McMichael (2012) characterizes these processes as reflective of changing conditions of capital accumulation as the costs of energy and wage foods rose; and second, as finance capital sought out substitute land in the global South for 'ecologically exhausted Northern crop land and as energy crop sites' (pp. 681–682). However, we argue that current land grabbing reflects not just these conjunctural aspects, such as what were until recently high energy prices, but the deeper contradiction between ecosystem functioning and service provision and the almost consistently expanding global economy. For example, easily accessible petroleum has now been tapped, and there is a shift toward extracting energy from more difficult sources, such as deep offshore or shale deposits through hydraulic fracturing or fracking (Klare, 2013), although this may change given the recent dramatic drop in the oil price. In Africa, there has recently been growing demand for both highly fertile and also ecologically more marginal land to produce biofuel, largely to meet demands of consumption from overseas (Molony & Smith, 2010). Around 40% of the land acquired in recent years in large area land deals in Africa was for biofuels (Sassen, 2013) and also carbon offsetting. The valorization of often degraded land provides an expression of the ecological contradiction that is being fixed through a "colonial land grab [that is] enabling industrialized countries to maintain high levels of carbon emissions on the basis of their offsetting activities, while restricting development options for those where offset activities are located" (Lyons & Westboy, 2014, p. 17). Consequently, climate restructuring is selectively valorizing land in Africa both directly and indirectly. Directly by, for example, driving the adoption of new, more productive forms of farming, as in Madagascar (Unruh, McConnell, & Rodman, 2010), and indirectly through the degradation of land in other world regions, such as India (Parenti, 2012). The latter in some cases then led governments and corporations to seek out new sources of land supply, often in Africa.

Furthermore, given growing resource scarcity, it is 'no surprise, then, that so many corporations are rushing to sign land deals that give them wide-ranging control over Africa water' (chief economist of Citigroup, quoted in GRAIN, 2012, p. 14, in Grant, 2015, p. 248). In addition to resource depletion and scarcity resulting from economic growth, there are a variety of other drivers of interest in large-scale land acquisitions in Africa, including global population growth, dietary changes, particularly increased consumption of meat in Asia (Parr, 2013), and the increasing power of and corporate concentration in global agribusiness (Amanour, 2012).

The first-order global drivers of the land rush result from the interaction between ecological scarcity and the opportunities this provides for capital accumulation. However, such interactions can be manifest as dispossession of assets, disruption to livelihoods, and further economic and political marginalization, as explored later. While the global drivers of increased interest in African land have been well described (Cotula, 2013; Pearce, 2012), there are also interrelated second- and third-order drivers operative through national and local scales

that serve state, in addition to more obviously economic logics. It is the coming together of these logics that binds current colonizing assemblages.

(Trans)National Biopower and Land

Ecolonization is taking place in the context of nominally sovereign territories in the global South, largely because state elites benefit from it. Following agreement on the Bali Action Plan and the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 13) to the United Nations' Framework Convention on Climate Change, several countries developed strategies for reducing emissions of carbon through increased protection of existing and planting of new forests (including plantations), with the intention of mitigating climate change (Murdiyarso, Brockhaus, Sunderlin, & Verchot, 2012). These strategies were rolled together in what became known as the United Nations' REDD and enhance forest carbon stocks program, subsequently REDD+. The plus is meant to denote benefits to local communities, in addition to reducing the risk of dangerous climate change. Since REDD+ came into being, financial assistance has been made available by, for example, the World Bank and various bilateral donors. This financial assistance has provided an incentive to some governments to protect forests by excluding locals and to convert existing vegetation to plantations. In both cases, people have been disposed of their land or denied access to resources they formerly could exploit (Larson et al., 2013).

Although degrading environments have at times been seen to pose a challenge to the authority of African states, these same nations are now able to leverage global environment as an element of their extraversion portfolios, or external resources such as aid or resource exports (Peiffer & Engelbert, 2012), which can be used to bolster regime maintenance. Bumpus and Liverman (2008) refer to the process of accumulation by decarbonization; others to accumulation by conservation (e.g., Büscher & Fletcher, 2015). At the same time, dispossession and poverty creation may be functional to political regime reproduction by disempowering citizens.

As a basic input into the sustenance of human life, land is an implicit source of biopolitical power (Carmody, 2013). In Africa, political regime maintenance is often tied to biopower (Foucault, 1978) through overseeing access to land. Regulating or denying access to land can have profoundly disciplining effects on the peasantry. Furthermore, the granting of parcels of land to regime loyalists, as in Zimbabwe, for example (Scoones et al., 2010), serves to promote political accumulation and regime legitimacy in those networks (Rubongoya, 2007), although large area land grants to foreign investors have sometimes resulted in massive popular protest and, in the case of Madagascar, a change of government (Carmody, 2011). How global drivers are refracted, expressed, or resisted through states depends on the balance of social forces and the possibilities that land acquisitions open up for regime maintenance and politicized accumulation by state elites.

It is sometimes said that in Africa political power is won in the rural areas and lost in cities (Boone, 2014). Ensuring urban client regime loyalty is then often a priority, and land provides a resource and mechanism through which this can be achieved. In many African nations, the attractions of increased tax revenue and exports, enhanced political control, perceived developmental impacts, ideologies of development, in addition to population growth, combine to make large area land acquisitions attractive to both foreign and domestic investors; creating spatialized investment demand on the part of the state. National elites and foreign investors may also engage in land banking on a speculative basis in anticipation of increases in land prices or the potential discovery of minerals or oil and to secure access to them. For example, villagers in Kasenyi, Buliisa District, Uganda 'were beaten by hired thugs and detained by police . . . after contesting the fraudulent sale of community land, including a plot where Tullow Oil's Kasmene-3 well is located' (Musiime & Womakuyu, 2012, p. 3). Thus, struggles over land in Africa are strongly associated with the processes of creating and allocating use, production, and exchange values. How these struggles play out is locally and contextually contingent, but the balance of power favors actors who derive structural power from mobility and capital (e.g., TNCs) and states that ultimately control access to territory and are able to (often) monopolize the use of force. The power of this assemblage results from the integration of different forms of power and their legitimating discourses of climate change mitigation, development, and conservation. Although the focus in much of the literature to-date has been on the power of transnational investors, in biofuel investments, for example, the biopower derived by the state by land dispossession is also an important driver (Lavers, 2012).

Methodology

During visits to Uganda in November 2012 and in September and November 2013, we carried out anonymous key informant interviews with representatives of nongovernmental organizations, civil servants, academics, and others. Visits to areas where land grabs had recently occurred (Bugala Island one of the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria, and Karamoja and Teso in the north of the country; Figure 1) were also conducted, and a survey of those who had recently been displaced in Karamoja and the nearby Teso region was undertaken. Twenty-one families who had been displaced from land in several districts of north-eastern Uganda (Napak, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, and Katakwi) were surveyed. These survey respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method, as all had recently lost access to land as a result of displacement.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject, we have not, for the most part, identified individuals or their organizations in our Results section. The Bugala island case study details a case of land grabbing that involved foreign investors whereas the Karamoja one is defined by the actions of national actors.

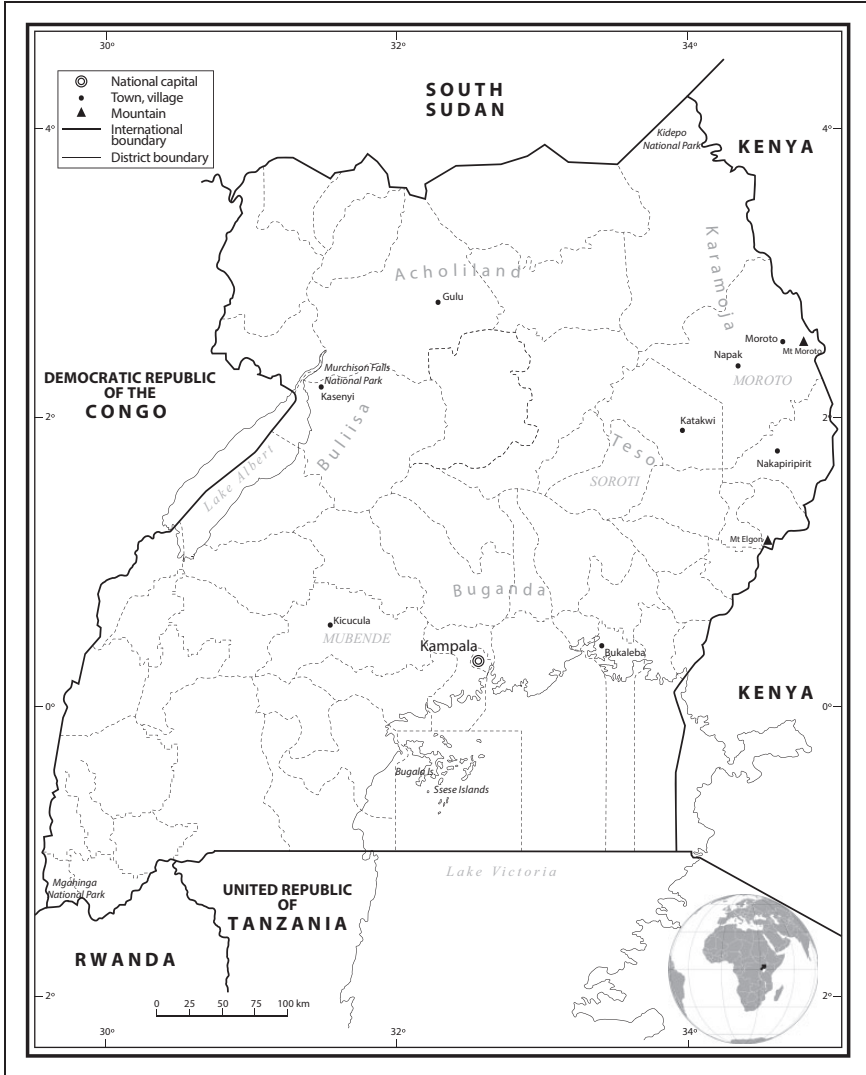


Figure 1. Location map of Uganda and study areas.

Nonetheless, similar processes are at play in both cases, and we argue both elucidate the ongoing ecolonization of natural resources in Uganda.

Land Grabbing in Uganda

The predominant land tenure arrangements in Uganda range from mainly customary in the north to freehold in the south. Indeed, a coexistence of a number

of tenure systems, including the award of large tracts of land to absentee landlords during the early part of the colonial period under the freehold (*mailo*) system (Brett, 1973), has created scope for overlapping rights to the same plot of land and raised the potential for disagreement and conflict (Deininger & Castagnini, 2006). This complexity was added to following nationalization of land during the 1970s, a decision that was subsequently revoked in the 1990s as part of a program of regulating, clarifying, and simplifying land tenure governance. In the new constitution, which was adopted in 1995, 'ultimate title by the state was removed altogether, and landholding under customary tenure was given equal force with freehold, leasehold and *mailo* tenures' (Wily, 2013, p. 22). Furthermore, a new Land Act was adopted in 1998. Under these legal provisions, only Ugandan citizens can own land, and foreign investors are consequently restricted to leasehold tenure. The constitution, in theory, also offers protection against arbitrary expropriation, except in the public interest (Constitution of Uganda, Art. 26). Unfortunately, shortages in funding and expertise have meant that many changes in land tenure and in institutions associated with granting and overseeing the ownership of land have not been implemented (Government of Uganda, 2003), thus providing an additional potential source of conflict (Deininger & Castagnini, 2006).

The Uganda Land Commission, district land boards, and land tribunals are charged with the registration and management of land tenure. Uganda is also a member of the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. Thus, the regulatory and institutional structure in Uganda is comprehensive and places substantial responsibility in the hands of state actors to manage land on behalf of the populace. However, the reworking of land tenure offers significant opportunities for more powerful actors to appropriate land (Martiniello, 2015). In particular, powerful actors have over the last few years seized land in the north, taking advantage of the ending of armed conflict that displaced large numbers of people and effectively created large no-go areas, and legal ambiguity and overlapping claims involving different forms of tenure. The social disruption and legal ambiguity associated with postconflict settings provides opportunities for land grabbing by alliances of private and "public" actors, what Woods (2011) calls "ceasefire capitalism."

One person who had been recently dispossessed of their land in Bukaleba village in Uganda (Figure 1), to the east of Kampala, the capital city, said, 'It is like I am a Kenyan in Uganda' (quoted in Lyons & Westoby, 2014, p. 19), reflecting their sense of loss of citizenship rights, where claims can be made on the state. The denial, or selective undermining of property and citizenship rights, could be seen as a form of internal colonialism (Hechter, 1975) resulting from the operation of the land-grab assemblage composed of national and transnational actors. There is also historical precedent for this in Uganda where the British policy of indirect rule meant substantial amounts of land were given to

the various indigenous kings, chiefs, and royals, such as the land grant to the king of Buganda. This

turned the *Bakopi* (free peasants) and *Bataka* (clan leaders) into landless classes. . . . Although land given to the chiefs was supposed to be unoccupied rangelands, the chiefs abused the provisions of the agreement and laid claim to fertile lands in the densely populated areas. (Muhumuza, 2007, p. 79)

In a historical parallel more recently, ‘some high ranking military officers have been cited in land grab deals in northern Uganda’ (Mabikke, 2011, p. 11).

There have been a variety of national- and local-level drivers of land grabbing in Uganda, including, but not limited to, rapid population growth of 3.5% per annum that increases competition for land (Nel & Hill, 2013) and the state’s drive for territorialization. In Uganda, in the 1970s, Idi Amin announced that citizens could live wherever they liked in the country (Nel & Hill, 2013). This prompted encroachment into protected forests (Hamilton, 1985). However, on coming to power in the mid-1980s, the current National Resistance Movement (NRM) government reversed this decree, and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the National Forest Authority (NFA) have been involved in ongoing expulsions. According to Nel (in press), functional territorialization is taking place within Uganda, involving the setting aside of land for conservation, productive forest reserves, and so forth and providing the basis for laws prohibiting and prescribing specific activities that in effect deny locals access to natural resources, including water, firewood, and wild plants to meet their subsistence food needs. The latter is particularly the case in Karamoja, northern Uganda, where political instability and a lack of investment in agriculture has left a relatively high proportion of the rural population heavily dependent on plants collected from the wild for their nutritional security.⁵

Notable examples of displacement in Uganda during the 1990s were the expulsion of over a thousand farmers and their families from farmland, some of which had been settled for over 60 years, during establishment of Mgahinga National Park (Adams & Infield, 2003) and the dispossession of 130,000 forest dwellers without compensation as part of European Commission-funded Natural Forest Management and Conservation Project in Uganda (Parr, 2013). Mgahinga National Park has something of a unique history for a protected area in Uganda. What is now Mgahinga National Park, famous for its population of mountain gorilla, was originally gazetted as a Game Sanctuary (1930) and then as a Forest Reserve (1939; Adams & Infield, 2003). The original area of the Forest Reserve was reduced by about 30% to provide additional agricultural land (Werikhe, 1991). Subsequently, some of the degazetted land was regazetted in the 1960s, although the new boundary was not demarcated and residents were not evicted (Infield & Adams, 1999). These examples of expulsions of people from their land in Uganda could be viewed as a countermovement to

survivalist enclosure from below (R. Hall, 2011), driven by ideologies and materialities of fortress conservation (Brockington, 2002). The vast gap in power between (many) citizens and the state in Uganda facilitates land grabbing. This is, in part, a historical consequence of the fact that African colonial states were founded on land dispossession, while new internal frontiers are still important to state reproduction and restructuring.

In 2007, commercial land deals involving foreign corporations or states were thought to account for about 15% of agricultural land in Uganda (Friis & Reenberg, 2010), although many of these deals may not have come to fruition. However, in 2009 alone, the Ugandan government leased an estimated 2.2% of the country's total land area (Martiniello, 2012). The most affected areas were in the less developed northern, western, and central regions. The scale of evictions associated with new project development is substantial, involving many tens of thousands of people (see Martiniello, 2012, for details). This, in turn, feeds combined migration, urbanization, and immiseration. In Gulu, one of the main towns in northern Uganda, the population increased almost fourfold since the early 1990s, and the poverty rate rose from 43% in 2007 to 69% in 2009/2010 (Martiniello, 2012, 2015), despite a fall in the national rate from 31% to 25% between 2005 and 2009 (World Bank, 2014). We now turn to an examination of our two cases to demonstrate the ways in which ecolonization has played out concretely.

Bugala Island Case

Bugala Island, with an area of approximately 270 km², is the largest of the archipelago of islands forming the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria. The island was originally inhabited by the Bassese, although their number is now greatly exceeded by migrants, the most recent of whom have come to work on a new palm oil plantation. Owned by Bidco Uganda, the plantation was first commissioned in 2004, when 16,000 ha of land were given to the company (Archer, 2012; Bichachi, 2011). Bidco is a Kenyan multinational, which produces its palm oil for human consumption (Bidco manager, personal communication, January 2015), but the plantation is a joint venture with the Singapore-listed Wilmar Corporation and is also supported by the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Prior to the development of the plantation, much of the Ssesse Islands was gazetted as protected forest reserve; in theory much of the islands still is, but in Uganda, plantation forestry is allowed on land that is designated as Central Forest Reserve, and oil palm is considered a form of forest plantation. According to the chief executive officer of Bidco, 'to achieve commercial returns in palm oil you can't do ten acres or even one thousand acres. . . . We've looked at it globally and found you needed ten thousand hectares. So we began to look around' (quoted in Berman, 2013, p. 105). External investment is seen as critical, given the scale of land conversion involved. According to an NFA employee, 'if

we don't have international investment, we will lose our forests' (cited in Lyons & Westoby, 2014, p. 17). However, one of the prime motives for this investment may have been to allow for logging and the lumber to be sold, to the benefit of the Ugandan president's relatives, although it was said at the time that the timber was buried (Archer, 2012: confidential interview, Kampala, September 2013).⁶ The Norwegian head of Uganda's NFA quit over the decision to clear the forest, which he said was against his conscience and the laws of Uganda (quoted in Agence France-Presse, 2006).⁷ Initially, 6,500 ha of forest and arable land were taken for the plantation, but now there are more than 10,000 ha under oil palm on the island (for further discussion of land tenure on Bugala, see Piacenza, 2012).

In addition to deforestation, construction and extension of the oil palm plantation involved the destruction of crops and livelihoods. For example, one farmer in her 60s, Magdalena Kakamya, woke one morning in July 2011 to find her land being ploughed up by equipment from the plantation. According to her, "No one came to talk to me before they destroyed my crops. . . . I heard that some people were given money, but I didn't receive anything" (quoted in Mwesigwa, 2015).

During our visit to the island, we passed through areas where highly biodiverse, mid-altitude rainforest had been and was being cut down. At one point, across from a sign declaring the area part of a Central Forest Reserve (see Plate 1), a chainsaw was in action. At another point, we saw chainsaws being used alongside a huge regular saw to chop up the trees that had been felled. The forest area we passed through was much more biodiverse than the palm plantation. By comparison, individual palms in the relatively species-poor plantations were spaced about 5 m apart with little substorey vegetation cover. A narrow fringe of forest had been left beside the lake, but the scale of the plantation and associated



Plate 1. Forest reserve boundary marker, Bugala Island, Kalangala district.

deforestation was enormous. Soil had been banked against many of the palm trees, presumably to stop erosion and to act as a store and source of nutrients and water. The palm trees appeared to provide very little by way of nutrition to, and protection for, the soil; at one point where we stopped, the lateritic soil had been completely washed away, exposing the barren rock underneath.

We drove on a newly constructed, wide road that had been cut through the plantation and forest, presumably primarily to facilitate palm oil export. There was much heavy road and digging equipment in evidence. After driving for some time on the road, we came to the palm oil processing factory. There was a strong smell from the pits where waste from the factory appeared to be being pumped. Large signs on the factory gate and inside the factory declared 'Safety first,' although rubbish had also been tipped near to the pits outside the factory. As we photographed the factory and pits, security guards approached and told us that we could not take photos without authorization from the office, which was about 1 km farther down the road. If we had permission, we were told, we would also be able to enter the factory and look around.

On arriving at the office, we were greeted by security guards,⁸ who told us that they had been informed by radio that we were coming. We asked if it was possible to get into the compound, which contained heavy digging equipment and security vehicles and was surrounded by wire fencing. We were told that the manager had left and that, as permission to visit had to be requested a day in advance, a visit on this occasion would not be possible. Likewise, later attempts to secure an interview with staff in Wilmar Corporation in Singapore were unsuccessful.

Signs on the road said welcome to the land of 'peace, palm and prosperity [*sic*']'. Judging by the extent of planted oil palm, the scale of displacement on the island must have been substantial. We observed a small herd of cattle grazing within the plantation and passed through a number of small settlements that contained health posts. Notwithstanding this, one local informant described how others in her village had had their cattle poisoned because they had been caught grazing on oil plantation land.

Ninety-five percent of the workers on the plantation are migrants and are paid very low wages of approximately US\$57 to US\$76 or approximately UGX (Ugandan shillings) 148,200 to 197,600 per month (Archer, 2012; confidential interview, Kampala, September 2013; Milieudéfense, 2013), far below the average on the island. Meanwhile, locals are encouraged to be out-growers for the scheme but often find themselves in debt to the company for pesticides and fertilizers, with no alternative buyers for their produce. At the same time, Bidco negotiated a 10- to 25-year tax exemption deal, from when the company became profitable. Meanwhile, there is no hospital on the island despite the fact that the HIV prevalence rate is estimated to be 27%, largely because of the *jaboya* system, which involves the

trading of fish caught by local fishermen for sex with women traders (Archer, 2012). Fishing has been one of the livelihoods adopted on Bugala Island by those who have lost access to farmland as the oil palm plantation has been extended.

The current situation on Bugala Island highlights the ways in which a transnational contract of extraversion (Carmody, 2010) between state elites and multinational corporations has opened up new frontiers of capital accumulation, under the guise of poverty reduction and sustainability. In this discourse, frontiers are constructed as sites of 'bountiful emptiness' (Bridge, 2001), awaiting exploitation by TNCs. According to Wilmar Corporation's (2014) website, 'amidst the impoverished regions of the developing economies in which we operate, our presence has brought relief and stability to many who live on the poverty line.' Thus, the frontiers of poverty and (what are seen by some to be) underutilized resources are constructed as coterminous. However, the company has been rated 'least green' or worst in the world in terms of its environmental footprint by *Newsweek* (Ynetnews.com, 2012) and has also been cited in human rights abuses (Alimenterre, n.d.). Consequently, the current round of ecologization shares a similar legitimating discourse to colonialism, in which benefits accrued to the colonial powers at the same time as indigenous populations were 'civilized' or as Cecil Rhodes defined the colonial enterprise—'philanthropy plus a 5 percent dividend on investment' (quoted in Khoo, 2013, p. 93).

Northeastern Case

The situation on Bugala Island differs from that in northern Uganda. Northern Uganda, unlike southern parts of the country, has been conflict-affected for decades following the establishment of the NRM government in 1986 under Yoweri Museveni's leadership. According to Mwenda (2010), President Museveni's 'strategy of political consolidation was built on two pillars . . . political stability and economic reconstruction in the south; on the other, the military capacity to defeat or cripple armed insurgents in the north' (p. 53). However, with the end of the conflict in the north of the country in the mid-to-late 2000s, a legacy of insecurity, and also land, now provide the new second pillars for regime perpetuation in the north.

After the decree in 1975 by Idi Amin allowing Ugandans to settle anywhere they wished in the country, people who settled in forest reserves were granted licenses to live there. But the NRM government subsequently declared these illegal, retroactively. There is again a historical precedent for this, as during the colonial period 'the gazettement of a big part of Karamojong land (northeastern Uganda) into Kidepo National Park⁹ also increased resource related poverty' (Muhumuza, 2007, p. 81).

According to the Wildlife Conservation Society website, 'Kidepo Valley National Park was gazetted in 1962.' Its remoteness from the headquarters in

Kampala of what is now the UWA, political instability in the region, and inter-tribal conflict have complicated efforts to control poaching. However, in recent years, park management has reestablished full control over much of Kidepo, one of Uganda's most beautiful protected areas, but also its least visited. So-called full control is partly inspired by the necessity to benefit from climate change funds, including those associated with the United Nations' REDD+ program. According to the World Bank (2011), in its REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal For Uganda:

Several of these areas are connected and form larger landscapes highlighting again the need to preserve landscape connectivity (Kidepo-Agoro Agu Landscape, Murchison-E.Madi-Nimule landscape). These landscapes could be connected again to conserve the old corridor that allowed elephants to migrate between Murchison Falls and East Madi.

It is also important to design REDD-Plus strategies which would conserve (and restore) these prime conservation forests through better management interventions such as law enforcement, zoning and land use planning to assure landscape connectivity, new management approaches (e.g., community involvement, public-private partnerships through concessions), enrichment planting, removal of invasive species *and others* [emphasis added].

In southern Uganda, Nel and Hill (2013) found the projects they studied sought "to bolster the respective jurisdictions of the NFA and UWA in the Bukaleba Reserve and Mt Elgon National Park, which is an attempt to secure the internal territorialisation of the State" (p. 432). In relation to land, the state is a site of commodification and, particularly at election time, decommodification, when a need to attract votes from locals¹⁰ means that politicians often promise to halt or reverse evictions. However, in the struggle between state building and accumulation and popular legitimation, the latter seems to be losing out, as elaborated later.

The UWA has played a prominent role in displacing people in northern Uganda. During the period of insecurity in northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by the infamous Joseph Kony, and other forces, such as cattle rustlers, intimidated or scared people off their ancestral lands, often to camps for internally displaced people. The state also displaced people, ordering the entire population of almost 2 million people in western Acholiland in 1996 to abandon their homes 'after which the army began bombing villages, burning huts and granaries and killing civilians who refused to comply' (Martiniello, 2015, p. 658).

According to some respondents to our survey, the UWA took advantage of population displacement to take over vacated areas for wildlife conservation. As the security situation improved and the LRA was displaced into surrounding

countries, with assurances from the President and local politicians, people returned to resettle in their villages, often only to discover their land was now a protected area. This is echoed elsewhere by Nel and Hill (2013), who argue that

as the communities [in Mount Elgon] see it, since 2002/2003 the Uganda Wildlife Authority attempted to “encroach onto public land” (Namisindwa Land Owners Association members, interview with the first author, July 2012) to which they had customary claims. . . . [They] explained that their being prevented from performing circumcision rites on the graves of their ancestors (which is seen as necessary in order to fulfil cultural obligations) has resulted in their sons’ inability to marry or produce children. (p. 430)

According to a respondent at the Uganda Land Alliance, locals now see wildlife ‘as more of a curse than a blessing’ (interview, Kampala, September 2013). Although one respondent to the Karamoja and Teso survey noted in relation to the UWA,

Let them bring a truck and put all “landless” people and take to the place they want. If possible let them settle us in space we don’t need land, or let them kill all of us who are interfering with their projects. We want our land. We have now boundaries with UWA that they come and plant land markers . . . land belongs to people *with* animals. (Respondent 5)

Most of the respondents reported having lost access to parcels of land from 5 to over 100 ha (see Table 1), and those who subsequently got access to other land reported getting smaller parcels than they had held previously.

Table 1. Distribution of Hectares of Land Lost by Survey Respondents, Karamoja and Teso.

	Number of respondents
1–10 hectares	2
11–20 hectares	5
21–30 hectares	5
31–40 hectares	1
41–50 hectares	1
51–60 hectares	1
61–70 hectares	3
71–80 hectares	1
100 hectares and above	2

According to an officer of the Uganda Land Alliance, ‘you can never recover that land as the [Uganda Wildlife] Authority was operating within the law.’ This may be true in relation to the ownership of land; however, illegal acts may be committed in relation to the methods used to retake control (Kaag & Zoomers, 2014). It was very clear from the survey returns that displacement was involuntary. Consequently, according to Betty Bigombe, the Ugandan minister of water, unless land disputes in northern Uganda are addressed, there could be ‘another conflict like [the one with] the LRA. People will be pitted against each other’ (quoted in Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2012). Thus, ecologization may sow the seeds of conflict, as colonialism before it did.

As noted earlier, it is not just the UWA that has been involved in land grabbing and population displacement in the north of the country. According to a nongovernmental organization respondent, ‘there are questions about who is allocating land to investors. Not clear who is doing it. . . . Top people are involved’ (confidential interview, September 2013). Janet Museveni, the president’s spouse, is minister for Karamoja in the government, and land grabbing is facilitated by the fact that in northern Uganda 90% of the land is held under customary tenure (Mabikke, 2011).

One interviewee stated that when local ‘notables claim land, and evict previous tenants, for example, the government encourages the tenants to go back. Then when the tenants have re-taken the land they send in the police to clear it again for investors’ (confidential interview, September 2013). However, tenure is not necessarily secure even for foreign investors but is dependent on local and national power dynamics. In one case, we were told of a foreign investor who had their equipment burned. The land was then taken over by the members of prominent families. This kind of policy is facilitated by ambiguity over land tenure and titles in the context of formalization. According to Martiniello (2015), in northern Uganda, the state is attempting to enhance its fiscal base and territorial control, while helping create a new class or group of politically connected businessmen. Thus, the redefinition of property undertaken in the 1995 constitution is being used to eradicate ‘agrarian use rights not juridicially defined,’ in favor of more powerful actors (Martiniello, 2015, p. 658).

Contestation over land is not just about land banking or getting access to arable land. Areas around Mount Moroto will potentially face more evictions due to the presence of limestone in that area. Some have already been displaced and their land fenced off for mining purposes. In Soroti District, some people suspect that the government has sold their land to foreign investors. According to one respondent, Karamoja is endowed with more than 20 different types of minerals (interview, Kampala, September 2013). These include ‘limestone, uranium, marble, graphite, gypsum, iron, wolfram, nickel, copper, cobalt, lithium, tin, base metals, lead and talc’ (Observer, 2012). Marble and limestone that are

mined in the Moroto District of Karamoja are sold on to Tororo cement factory (Gelsdorf, Maxwell, & Mazurana, 2012):

In Moroto, community members were not displaced from their lands; instead, mining companies set up perimeter fences, and deployed the army, who barred access to the mining operations areas. This is contrary to the provisions of Section 80(1) of the Mining Act, which allows the lawful owner or lawful occupant to retain surface interests in the land. (Avocats Sans Frontières, 2014, p. 34)

According to one of our respondents, population displacement to allow for mining of marble was 'a little bit violent,' whereas another told us that a relative of the Minister of Finance had obtained access to a large area of land to mine marble. Furthermore, a survey respondent noted that 'the UWA claimed our land and part of the land has been fenced off for mining.' There have been similar incidents elsewhere in Uganda (see Kandel, 2015).

Discussion

The ecologization of Uganda, and arguably other parts of Africa, has both internal and external dimensions. The theory of internal colonialism was developed in relation to South Africa and the Celtic fringe of the United Kingdom (Hechter, 1975; Wolpe, 1975) in an effort to explain the ways in which certain regions and people within a nation state were exploited and denied the full rights of citizenship to facilitate capital accumulation and uneven development. Land grabbing in Uganda is a polymorphous crystallization (Mann, 1986), involving aspects of state building, elite accumulation, and transnational ecologization.

Rather than necessarily being a barrier to capital accumulation, ecological scarcity opens up new horizons for investment, demonstrating the adaptability and mutability of capitalist production and its ability to generate fictitious use and exchange values through, for example, the development of carbon markets (Knox-Hayes, 2013).¹¹ The ecological contradiction is then both a problem and an opportunity for capital accumulation, depending on the specific sector and geographic locale. The further breaching of local and national ecological limits in the rich countries of the world is leading to deepening ecologization, which in parts of Africa is expressed through land dispossession, energy and raw material exports, deforestation and reforestation, erosion of biodiversity, food imports and exports, and other mechanisms. Population displacement, which is a concomitant of ecologization, is often state supported and led, resulting in an economy of disaffection and the imperative, if not necessity, of political repression. This political repression may be financed by the resource rents generated by ecologization.

The geography of this political economy, and the fact that it largely affects politically marginalized communities in often relatively remote rural regions,

may mean this structure is currently sustainable. However, the inequalities, exclusions, displacements, pauperization, and memories generated, and how these interact with localized identities, may store up sources of political instability for the future, although one respondent during our visits in Uganda hinted that any instability may be some way off, arguing that 'it is easy to rule a poor man.' Land grabbing thus fits into a broader pattern of selective poverty perpetuation in Uganda to ensure regime maintenance, as poor people are often preoccupied with survival rather than 'high' politics (Carmody, 2007).

Current ecologization shares similarities with the earlier period of colonialism in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. The ecolonial transnational assemblage extends even into Zimbabwe, where small holders who were granted land in the 2000s are now sometimes being dispossessed to make way for extensive agricultural developments, such as sugar cane plantations (R. Hall, 2011). In the case of Uganda, at least, there is a more prominent role for local political elites. This is also the case in many other African countries. As R. Hall (2011) notes,

media driven depictions of the rush for farmland for food and biofuels by the Chinese and Koreans with the backing of their governments and by Western corporations may be missing the mark, as equally profound but less visible transformations gather pace. (p. 205)

And, as land is often leased, 'the "grabber" is usually the state rather than foreign investors.'

Conclusion

Although some have lamented the lack of political leadership in Africa (Rotberg, 2013), this article has shown how there is determined leadership in the case of Uganda to assure regime maintenance through a variety of channels, including land dispossession. This dispossession serves multiple functions—leveraging donor support for climate change mitigation and so-called green growth, disciplining subject populations, and opening up opportunities for politicized capital accumulation and neopatrimonial legitimacy, including within the military. It works in tandem with other processes such as the looting of the treasury, with some estimates suggesting as much as half of government monies go missing in Uganda (Munk, 2013), to ensure regime maintenance.

The rising pressure on, and scarcity of, resources generates discourses of conservation that can then be used to legitimize displacement and dispossession. However, while generating sporadic resistances, the creation of powerlessness may nonetheless be functional to both state building and the ecolonial assemblage more broadly. The merging of different forms of power and discourse under the signs of progress, conservation, climate change mitigation, food security, and poverty reduction are for the moment likely to endure.

The ecolonial assemblage is then not likely to be receptive to ‘voluntary codes of conduct,’ but only to more popular pressure and political struggle. However, the scale of the challenge globally, as a result of climate restructuring, may undermine the ecolonial assemblage over the medium term (Klein, 2014), with as yet unknown and unknowable consequences. Some of the displaced farmers on Bugala Island have recently filed a lawsuit against Bidco and Amos Ssempha (a Ugandan businessman involved in organizing the transfer of land to Bidco). However, ‘it is not unusual for cases to pend [in Uganda] for 15 or 20 years in the regional magistrates court’ (Kandel, 2015, p. 640). As has sometimes been noted, the “march through the institutions of power” will be a long one (Herf, 1986), although worthy of support nonetheless.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Julius Okwakol for his field research assistance and David Nally, Rosaleen Duffy, Bram Büscher, Adrian Nel, Susan Murphy, Jonathon Rigg, Ben Niemark, Solomon Olum, the journal editor and referees, and the participants at the *Political Ecology and Development: Resources, Power and Justice* workshop at the University of Lancaster, 2014, for their comments, which have substantially improved the article. Thanks to Poonam Saksena-Taylor, National University of Singapore, for producing Figure 1 using Adobe Illustrator. The writing of this article was facilitated by an Isaac Mensah Meyer fellowship at the National University of Singapore for Pádraig Carmody.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Fieldwork in Uganda was funded by Trinity College Dublin, the support of which is gratefully acknowledged.

Notes

1. There are a variety of definitions of what constitutes land grabbing. For our purposes, this refers to the taking of land away from its long-term users without their consent. For a discussion, see Boamah (2014).
2. Sassen (2013) states that land grabs are ‘feeding the disassembling of national territory.’ However, as land in Africa is still typically and ultimately often owned by the state and state laws still apply, this is not strictly speaking true. Rather, there are ‘graduated sovereignties’ (Ong, 2006) that may actually help with state building through the projection of territorial control and greater tax revenues, for example. However, this state building is not necessarily associated with the development of rights, but divided citizenship.
3. The term *climate restructuring* is preferred to climate change or even climate disruption (Maass, 2009) for a number of reasons. Climate as a term implies

regularity, in contrast to change. Climate restructuring also captures the increased variability predicted in future climate projections, notably involving precipitation, for much of Africa (Niang et al., 2014). Anthropogenically induced climate restructuring is driven by economic change, which, in turn, drives variations in land use that then recursively feedback into climate conditions.

4. This concept can be applied problematically. Following Li (2007), Nally (2015, p. 340) treats “‘food security” as a knowledge-power constellation that authorises policy interventions pursued under the sign of progress and social improvement.’
5. We are grateful to Solomon Olum for this point.
6. Governance in Uganda is centered around the president’s family, with Thakur (2005, cited in Fisher, 2013) noting that even within the “State House complex” is it not clear how much influence those outside the familial network have.
7. The 2003 Forestry Law, along with other policy documents related to forestry, is currently unavailable on the NFA website (<http://www.nfa.org.ug/index.php/downloads1>).
8. The Bidco plantation on Bugala Island is policed by armed guards by a company called Saracen, which is owned by President Museveni’s brother.
9. This was recently ranked by Cable News Network (2013) as Africa’s third best national park.
10. In the 2006 election, a minister stated that ‘trees don’t vote, people do.’ Slogans similar to this had been used in previous election cycles (Karani, 1994).
11. Some critics argue that carbon trading systems ‘encourage companies who already use more than their share of the world’s carbon sinks and stocks to buy still more of them—using cash which has itself been accumulated partly through a history of overexploiting those sinks and stocks’ (Lohmann, 2001, p. 7, quoted in Hayward, 2007, p. 434).

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Author Biographies

Pádraig Carmody is associate professor of geography at Trinity College Dublin and visiting associate professor in the Department of Geography, Environmental Management and Energy at the University of Johannesburg. His research interests center on the political economy of globalization in Africa.

David Taylor is Provost's Chair and professor of tropical environmental change at the National University of Singapore. His research centers on the human dimensions of environmental change and ranges from basic and exploratory to highly applied work.