

“It is easy to rule a poor man” : Ecolonisation and the politics of land grabbing in Uganda

Pádraig Carmody, TCD and David
Taylor, NUS.



Climate change and land grabbing

- Apparent contradiction
- “Fixing” through opportunities both open up for accumulation through dispossession and political control
- Recursive nature of processes
- “Green grabbing” may change land use cover and feed into climate restructuring (unpredictability). Katrina -> biofuels
- Ecolonisation



African land

- Productivity of about 65% of Africa's agricultural lands has declined significantly over the last 50 years
- Valorisation of often degrading land - severity of the ecological contradiction
- Social expression through displacement



Land and biopower

- In agrarian societies land is a source of biopower
- How “global” drivers are refracted depends on the balance of social forces and possibilities for politicised accumulation.
- Spatialised investment demand, given taxes, exports and possibilities for political control.
- Struggles over use, production and exchange values.



Ecolonisation

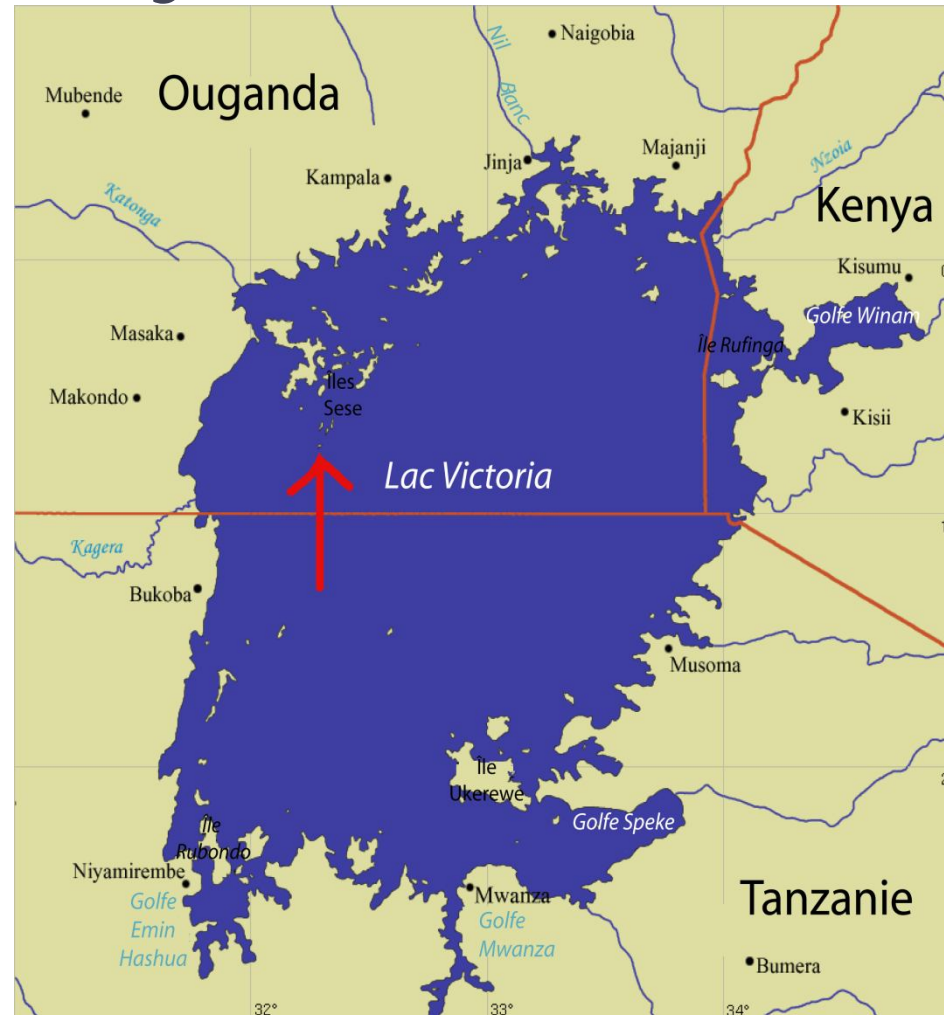
- State elites use their position as gatekeepers and often regalian theories of land to their benefit.
- Colonialism was imposition of some peoples' will over others – denial of citizenship and property rights.
- Elements of these power configurations being reinscribed.
- Poverty and “powerlessness” may be functional for regime maintenance



Historical parallels

- Under colonialism land grant to king of Buganda “turned the *Bakopi* (free peasants) and *Bataka* (clan leaders) into landless classes” (Muhumuza, 2007)
- “Some high ranking military officers have been cited in land grab deals in Northern Uganda” (Mabikke, 2011).
- 2009 – Ugandan government estimated to have leased 2.2% of the country’s land area.
- “There are questions about who is allocating land to investors. Not clear who is doing it.. Top people are involved” (Confidential interview)
- Evictions – poverty rate in Gulu rises from 43% (2007) to 69% in 2009/10

Bugala case study



Dispossession/Degradation

- Ssese islands are forest reserve
- BIDCO oil palm plantation -2004
- Timber claimed to be have been buried but was sold for President's family benefit (confidential interview)
- 27% HIV prevalance rate





Conclusion

- Ecological scarcity opens up opportunities for capital accumulation.
- Population displacement, which is a concomitant of colonisation, is state supported and led.
- Economy of disaffection -> political repression but poverty as a source of power.
- “It is easy to rule a poor man”.