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## The Peasant Land Question: Beyond the Pitfalls of Peasant Protection

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### Abstract

This paper interrogates the peasant land question in Buganda. It engages debates on the peasant question as a central focus of the contemporary land question in Buganda. It highlights how the state and Buganda kingdom have weaponized, decentered, alienated and subjectified the peasants in their framing of and responses to the land question. The Paper contends that the deployment of peasants as an organizing category has served to not only depoliticize peasants but also weaponized them to ensure political legitimacy and sustain the market logic of capitalist accumulation. To illustrate this argument, the Paper engages the discourse of ‘peasant protection’ and the recent acts of land dispossession as a way to highlight the pitfalls of peasant protection. The Paper further argues that in order for us to come to grips with the land question, we need to understand the perspectives that emerge from society regarding land and its relations in order to imagine conditions of possibility for peasant emancipation, liberation and ‘democratic reform’. The Paper engages perspectives from society to offer an alternative thinking about land and land reform beyond the capitalist modes of economic organization and thought. It reimagines the land question from the vantage point of the peasant society by engaging a society’s discourse of motherhood as a critique to the colonial and neoliberal conception of the land question as anchored in a capitalist market logic.

**Keywords:** Peasant land question, Land reform, Peasant protection, Land dispossession, Neoliberalism, Buganda, Agrarian political economy

### Introduction

This Paper interrogates the peasant question as a foci of the contemporary land question in [B]Uganda. The Paper makes two interrelated arguments: First, it contends that the deployment of peasants as an organizing category by both the state and the kingdom has

served to not only depoliticize peasants but also weaponized them to ensure political legitimacy and sustain the market logic of capitalist accumulation. The postcolonial rhetoric of peasant protection reproduces the colonial logic of protection i.e., in ways in which the colonial state constructed Uganda as a protectorate purportedly protecting interests of Ugandans, yet it was protecting colonial and imperial interests. The contemporary peasants have been deployed as a justification for reform but without their meaningful inclusion (participation) in any conversation about the land question and subsequently land reform—without taking their agency seriously. To illustrate this argument, the Paper engages the state’s (national and subnational) discourse of ‘peasant protection’ and the recent acts of land dispossession as a way to highlight the pitfalls of peasant protection. I show that the peasant has been excluded through the rhetoric of inclusion in acts that center the state and the market and decenters, marginalizes, weaponizes and alienates the peasants. This exclusion of the peasant society is not by accident or out of a vacuum, it is a historically well planned move by both the state and capital (the market) to ensure what Marx has called primitive accumulation, and in a Ugandan neoliberal context, what David Harvey has called accumulation by dispossession (dispossession of land and displacement of opinion/discourse). Second, the Paper argues that in order for us to come to grips with the land question, we need to understand the perspectives that emerge from society regarding land and its relations in order to imagine conditions of possibility for peasant emancipation and liberation. To illustrate this argument, I engage the society’s discourse of motherhood as a conceptual and analytical tool to show the different ways in which land is conceptualized from the vantage point of peasant society beyond the inflexible *statist* and *marketist* framings. The society’s notion of motherhood is not only epistemologically and conceptually important in rethinking the colonial and neoliberal epistemic discourses on land but also analytically compelling because it complicates the divide between the physical, metaphysical and the socio-political aspects of the land question. Doing so does not only challenge the foundation of the neoliberal conception of the land question as fundamentally subject to capitalist logics but also constitute a rereading of the social protection approach (in the Polanyian sense) to land from the vantage point of the peasant society through engaging the possible alternative modes of socio-economic organization that focuses on the multiple forms of land uses, values and meanings that the society has embraced historically in ensuring non-predatory forms of land relations. As recent literature in agrarian studies has shown, it is not a problem to look at land resources as being critical for the economic wellbeing and livelihood of the rural poor but we should also understand that its importance “is far beyond economic issues”.

Historically, both the postcolonial state (central government) and Buganda kingdom in their different narratives and development undertakings have constructed an alleged peasant path to ‘development’ by deploying ‘the peasant protection discourse’ as a justification. In the conversation and the debate around land and land reform, the question of peasants has always been fronted as a subject of discussion, which I have framed as the peasant land question. Understanding how political and policy debates have framed the question would help us unravel the different dynamics and politics surrounding the peasant land question. The framing of the land question as a peasant question in the postcolonial period emerges with the NRM regime. The earlier regimes’ focus was on the whole notion of common man

[which I engage in Paper 4], but the post-1986 focus on peasants becomes more interesting because its framing particularizes a historically marginalized category right from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial construction of the peasant subjects. In pursuit of the two arguments, the Paper is guided by the following questions: how has the peasant land question been framed in the NRM regime as part of the larger historical land question? What does this mean for understanding the land question in Uganda, especially in the debate on land reform? Who is a peasant that the state reforms target? How and why did peasants become an organizing category? Are there conditions of possibility for emancipation from the vantage point of the peasantry? The NRM government and the Buganda kingdom have presented the peasant in their discussion as a homogenous category that has to be liberated by a universal land reform. In contending with the homogenization narrative, this thesis shows that there is no single category of peasants but the state picks one that it seeks to depoliticize and ride on in order to serve its own interests. It takes for granted the differences, contradictions and inequalities internal to the peasantry itself. This is because, the category peasant in itself is heterogeneous and internally differentiated as it is also defined by other categories like gender, ethnicity, class among others.

Following this introduction, the Paper is divided into four sections: the next section offers a historical, conceptual and theoretical understanding of the peasantry. Section three delves into the discourse of peasant protection by engaging the debate between the central government and Buganda kingdom over the right modes and entity to protect peasants' land right. The section shows that in doing so, the peasants get dispossessed, weaponized, alienated and subjectified to serve interests of power and capital. The fourth section navigates cases of accumulation by dispossession of the peasants in the name of protection and the neoliberal logic of capitalist development. The last section will recenter the peasant society into the discussion around the land question as a way of seeking conditions of possibility for peasant emancipation through a more democratic mode of understanding land and land relations.

### **The Peasant (UN) defined: Conceptual and Historical-Political Understanding of the Peasantry**

This section begins from a basic question: who is a peasant? This question emerges from the premise that the state and Buganda kingdom have presented the peasant as a universal and homogenous category that they seek to salvage. However, existing scholarship has shown how the peasants and the peasantry have historically been differentiated. This social differentiation has roots in medieval and early modern times. Western medieval Europe witnessed social differentiation which “separated free peasants and those of servile status, rich and poor peasants, peasants with secure land tenure and landless laborers working for a wage on the lord’s demesne and women and men”.<sup>1265</sup> Marc Edelman has argued that the concept peasants in medieval and early modern times denoted

“Rural poor, , rural residents, serfs, agricultural laborers, and the ‘common’ or ‘simple’ people”.<sup>1266</sup> Earlier categorization connoted a subjugated being. Edelman notes that “earlier Latin and Latinate forms (French, Castilian, Catalan, Occitan, etc.) date as far back as the

sixth century and denoted a rural inhabitant, whether or not involved in agriculture. Very early on, both the English 'peasant', the French 'paysan' and similar terms sometimes connoted 'rustic', 'ignorant', 'stupid', 'crass' and 'rude', among many other pejorative terms. The word could also imply criminality, as in thirteenth-century Germany where 'peasant' meant 'villain, rustic, devil, robber, brigand and looter'. Such meanings attributed to peasants reflected their extreme "subordination and ubiquitous elite practice of blaming peasants for a variety of economic and social ills". With time, the category came to be used as a marker of political identity distinguished from the rest of society especially with the 20<sup>th</sup> century social revolutions.

Beyond its historicity, Edelman offers us three more ways in which the peasant is conceptually categorized and understood: the social scientific, the activist and the normative. The social scientific understandings of the peasant question in the 1960s and 1970s especially by anthropologists categorized peasants in relation to "a larger society that included non-peasants". This categorization treated peasants to include "rural artisans, fisherfolks, pastoralists and small-scale miners in addition to agriculturalists". This categorizations show that peasants is a heterogeneous category whose individuals are typified by their engagement in numerous livelihood activities including agriculture, wage labor, pastoralism, livestock petty commerce, etc.<sup>1271</sup> The activist theorization on the other hand categorized peasants based on their experience and so alliance to a social and political movement. They base on the peasant condition of economic vulnerability combined with the quest for autonomy blurring the difference between peasants and farmers (important for the social scientists). Normativists categorize the peasants on the basis of 'rights'. As such, Edelman shows that peasants and so the peasantry have long and complicated histories that "reflect their vast presence (even today) and their continued political and social subordination in those societies". This explains why the categorization of peasants has always been used in very pejorative terms to infer their continued oppression, discrimination and subjectification. They have remained second class citizens in many parts of the world with numerous restrictions both de facto and legal.

In emphasizing a conceptual discussion of the peasantry, Henry Bernstein has argued that the concept peasant is usually deployed to refer to "household farming organized for simple reproduction for subsistence. The development of capitalism changed the social character of small-scale farmers as peasants became petty commodity producers who produced for subsistence after their incorporation into the "wider social division of labor and markets" in what came to be known as commodification of subsistence central to capitalist development. These petty producers (peasants) became subject to social differentiation and this class formation serves to show the diffuse nature of the peasant category. In the Ugandan context, Mamdani as early as the 1980s had illustrated the class differentiation of the peasantry and categorized it into three, the poor, middle class and rich peasants. But the middle class peasantry was also subdivided into two, i.e., lower middle and upper middle peasants. For Mamdani, "households which could marshal an occasional surplus to enter into exploitative relations—by renting out land or implements of labor, or by employing wage labor—were characterized as upper middle peasants [...] and those households faced with an occasional deficit compelling them to enter, however irregularly, unequal relations

from an unfavorable vantage point, were classified as lower middle peasants”. Despite these conceptualizations which infer heterogeneity, the postcolonial Ugandan state has homogenized the peasants to create room for its weaponization, subjugation, alienation and exploitation.

This theoretical and historical foundation paves way for an engagement with the ways in which the debate has been framed especially between the state and Buganda kingdom regarding the question of peasant protection and their access to and ‘ownership’ of land. This thesis notes that much as it is a political category, the peasant is also an economic and social category which relates to modes of access to the means of production—which access can be varied—and other social relations in society.

Thus, the relationship the peasants have on land is varied and multiple.

### **The Canard of ‘Peasant Protection’: Peasant Subjectification and Depoliticization**

At the center of the debates around the peasant land question has been the discourse of peasant protection. There are two competing narratives. The state narrative argues that land law reform has been aimed at protecting the peasants from the landlords and other land-hungry people who have continued to be a threat to the peasants. On the other hand, those who oppose the reforms (especially their intentions and interests) argue that the state is not protecting the peasants, rather it is serving its own selfish interests in the name of protecting the peasants. Here, Buganda kingdom particularly argues that state deploys the language of peasants in order to weaken the kingdom and its power and to fuel land grabbing and dispossession of peasants. In his book, *King on the Throne*, Mayiga noted it was “inconceivable for *Museveni* to think that he could champion the cause of the peasant in Buganda better than the Kabaka”.<sup>1277</sup>

One important characteristic of the modern postcolonial neoliberal states’ movement to reform land has been its weaponization of the peasants. Whenever the state wants to either ‘maintain order’, constrain the power of other institutions, or pass a law reform, the peasants have always been looked upon as a resource. During discussions for the drafting of the Uganda constitutions between 1992 and 1995, the NRM Constitutional Assembly Delegates (CAD) invoked peasants by arguing that the only asset the peasant have is land and therefore they needed to have full rights over their own land with little government interference. In here, the delegates called for a freehold land tenure system which they argued would provide security of tenure to the peasants. The New Vision newspaper report showed that when thinking about the category peasants, the delegates were also thinking about the tenants on “official freehold or those other landlord’s land” arguing that they needed protection. In their discussion, one NRM delegate pointed to the fact that some forms of land tenure were very unfair to the peasants. Mr. Kutesa (CAD) stated that customary tenure was very unfair to peasants because it locked them out of the banking industry since “they could not mortgage land as collateral in acquiring loans”. These positions of NRM delegates are state narratives since the delegates were representing the official position of the state regarding questions of land and politics generally. In here, you

realize that the constitutional assembly delegates were fronting the peasant as a category they needed to protect, in form of a subject without any form of agency.

In his letter to Buganda leaders reproduced in the Monitor of July 12-15, 1994, President Museveni attributed the problems of peasant to Buganda kingdom and the Baganda middle class elites who wanted to continue enjoying the privileges they wrongly got from the colonialists in 1900. For Museveni, the Buganda elites have fronted the language of peasant and rallied behind the Basenze/tenants to serve their own interests and not to resolve their problems. Being the problem, the Baganda elites were considered not to be capable of resolving the peasant land question. In the same letter, the president noted that some elites have continuously reproduced the claim that the tenants/ Basenze peasants enjoy that status something which he claims is far from being true. Citing examples from other parts of the country, he notes that no single peasant can wish for the same:

I know some Baganda elite parading around the line that Baganda and non-Baganda peasants known as Basenze affected by mailo land system enjoyed that status. I know of many other peasants in other parts of the Uganda that do not miss that enjoyable status of not owning land you occupy. Indeed I will not rest until this injustice is resolved.

The president claims to be having a strong commitment to fighting for the peasants and specifically to fight the landlord system under mailo land tenure where they face an injustice. Museveni extended the critique to a larger question of “*ebyaffe*” as a way of questioning the intentions of the elites and the Kingdom. Museveni considered the demand for a *ebyaffe* as an elitist demand and not a peasants’ demand. He suggested that if Buganda kingdom is true to the claim of protecting peasants, then it should reconsider *ebyaffe* demands to reflect individual peasants’ collective demands—which he coined as *eyaabwe*.

I have told you in our many conversations that as we return *ebyaffe* to Baganda notables (*Abakungu*), we must also return *eyaabwe* to the peasants without injuring the *Bakungu*. The discussion we had when you came to see me last touched on this question..

Here, we can see that the demand for *ebyaffe*, according to Museveni, was a demand for the “notables” (*the Bakungu*), a middle class category especially those that benefited from the spoils of the 1900. Thus it was high time the peasant took their own share of the claimed *ebyaffe*. This very claim was reiterated when talking about the politics around the restoration of traditional leaders. Here, it was argued that it was this very group of elites and landlords who pressurized and threatened the “NRM leaders to concede to the restoration of the cultural Kabaka”. With the fear that these landlords and elites would de-campaign the “constitutional assembly and the 1995 general election”, the NRM

“Succumbed”.

Pressure from Buganda landlords and elites seem to have threatened the NRM leaders to concede the restoration of a cultural Kabaka (king). The NRM fearing that these elites and landlords could decampaign the CA and the 1995 general elections,

succumbed...The closed NRC session hurriedly convened and pressurized by the president to pass the constitutional (amendment) statute 1993 and the traditional rulers (restoration of assets) statute 1993 and the traditional rulers (restoration of assets) statute 1993 were quickly passed. The Kabaka was crowned and more than 400 square miles of land and other properties returned to the cultural institution.

The war now was considered as one against the middle class. What does Museveni think is the solution to the peasant question? His solution was to avail land to the peasants, not as tenants or *Basenze* especially those that had stayed on the land for more than 20 years but as private freehold owners (by way of buying-off their tenancy and become land owners. Museveni has coined this as *Okwegula* [redeeming themselves]. He noted that since “most present mailo land owners bought from the original allottees”, then it can only be fair if the peasants, who have “suffered much injustice at the hands of their Baganda elites” redeem themselves by buying off the landlords. In the foregoing narrative, the state seems to show that its interest is in protecting the peasants against those elites and landlords who aim at dispossessing, exploiting and marginalizing the very class of people who have been facing the wrath of history (both colonial and postcolonial). To ensure that its envisioned solution is achieved, the state had to establish a land fund which would buy off the landlords and avail such land to the peasant *bibanja* holders. This was provided for in the Land Act 1998 to ensure that “government acquires land by law and now leases it to the tenants”. The landlords are “supposed to be given 30% value of the land through the *land* fund” established in the Act. This means that in its initial plan, the state was interested now in ensuring that the *bibanja* holders enter into a different arrangement of tenancy based on leasehold but when the state is the one to give leases to the people. This would eliminate the middle class landlords of the 1900. I want to suggest that this would not eliminate the landlord system but rather establish a new landlord who is the state, that would lease land to the people. This would be identical to the 1928 busulu and envujjo land reform which the then established “free peasantry”, according to Mamdani, would pay tribute to the protectorate government and the intention being aimed at “neither freehold nor landlordism, but a land-secure free peasantry paying tribute to the state”.

By the year 2021, there was a shift in the mode of protection envisioned in the 1998 land Act. The state now had embarked on using the land fund not to buy land to lease to *bibanja* holders but to give freehold titles to *bibanja* holders. What the state does by getting this land and giving it to *bibanja* holders to fully own it as private individually owned property is actually a redistribution without necessarily de-commodification of land. Here, it has transferred commodified land to full private ownership but has not dealt with the crisis of commodification. This has been attributed to politics by the state as the ministry official notes:

Because of politics today, the government is giving titles to the tenants which is not by law. This is very political. The president wants to look to be pro-poor but this is also becoming unsustainable because the fund wasn't literally planned like that. It is expensive. Politics has taken over and it is trumping the law.

The land fund which was set up in the name of helping *bibanja* holders has turned into a money making scheme for officials in government. This is because the “money allocated in the land fund is embezzled by some government officials, misappropriated, misallocated to non-landlords, exorbitant compensations to a few landlords and has ended up in pockets of a few individuals leaving the majority *bibanja* occupants subject to forced evictions by landlords”.

Critical voices have shown how hypocritical the state is when it fronts the peasants in all its claims. But for starters, Buganda had trust and confidence in the NRM state and it thought that since the kingdom supported its rise to power during the bush war, it would be easy to achieve some of its demands. After the restoration of the Kabaka of Buganda to the throne on July 31, 1993, he made an anniversary on July 22, 1994 and a celebration was held together with his birthday. The theme for the celebrations was ‘*Buganda Ey’omulembe mu Uganda Empya*’ translated as “a better Buganda in a new Uganda”. Here, it was hoped that things had changed since a new regime had come and a new and better Buganda was to come out after its ravages. Museveni’s letter to Buganda leaders which prompted a debate on the land and peasant question came out a few days to the celebrations but this did not influence the theme of the celebration. Instead, the Kingdom and some of its “leaders and supporter who were angered”, took to themselves to respond to the claims of the state about the grabbing and exploitation of the peasants. Some of the critiques came from elites in Buganda who also formed part of the central government (including the then Vice President, Dr. Samson Kisekka) but did not agree with the state’s stand on the question. Dr. Kisekka was therefore charged by Buganda kingdom with the responsibility of leading a delegation to meet the president and explain to President Museveni not only the question of land but also other issues[which constitute *ebyaffe* like the *federo* question].<sup>1296</sup> It should be noted that the demand for *federo* has always gone hand in hand with the demand for *ebyaffe* which Museveni was castigating. They were angered by the fact that out of the many issues raised to Museveni, he noted only three. To them, there were two points which speak to the whole question Museveni was talking about and basing his argument. First, they claimed that the Odoki commission did not make realistic recommendations including recommendation on the federal issue. Second, it was in the DNA of the state to always fragment and humiliate Buganda by subdividing it which they called carrying on the legacy of Obote. To the second, this subdivision had gone as far as dividing the elite or middle class and landlord Baganda and people in Buganda from the peasant Baganda and this could only work to serve the interest of the state.

Out of this indignation, Charles Peter Mayiga, who is the current Katikkiro of Buganda, responded to the presidents’ letter (considered to have been written even before the coronation of the Kabaka in 1993 and was later republished in the monitor in July 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup>). Mayiga raised quite a number of issues in response but only two are important for this work. First, Mayiga argued that the demands of a section of Baganda [which he calls Baganda interest groups] cannot be generalized as a tribal demand as this would only lead to parochialism. For him, it would have been very prudent if the president took time to confirm if the aspirations of the interest groups were aspirations of all and not narrowing group interests as Buganda’s demands since the general people’s demands were in the

constitutional commission report [the Odoki report]. Following the constitutional Commission report, Mayiga noted that the people of Buganda [including the peasants] wanted only three things: 1) the Kabaka, 2) A federal arrangement, and 3) private land ownership freehold mailo. These were the larger aspirations of the people.

Now when it came to the question of the middle class (the elite and landlords) in Buganda rallying behind the peasants to pursue their own interests, Mayiga argued that it is right for the peasant to rely on the middle class to advance their interests. To him, “even the NRM leadership itself whose cause was the liberation of the masses (peasants) is composed of the elite. The NRM struggle relied on the support and contribution of the peasants but its leadership even up to present time is made up of the middle class”. After highlighting how the NRM itself and its middle class rally behind the peasant, Mayiga wondered whether “the NRM leadership has vested interests when it speaks about what the people of Uganda want since it has no peasants in its leadership”. This questions the state’s interest when it speaks of protecting the peasants just the same way the state questioned the interests of the kingdom and its elites. In fact, some sections have claimed that it is the state instead which is seeking to consolidate itself and grab people’s land. Thus the land question and so the defining of the problem as one of mailo land tenure misses a point since the problem is the problem of the state:

The problem with land is not with owners of mailo land nor is it a problem of *bibanja* holders or tenants, the problem is with the state...Much as the colonialists brought problems on land with their transformations, the current state has increased such problems. There are people who have land on mailo tenure but when initially they never were allocated. These are buying out those who want to sell...The people who want to reform land tenure are aiming at stealing land, it is not aimed at securing tenure. Ownership rights is not the problem but those who get ownership and don’t fulfil their responsibilities. These owners are rich who are listened to while those occupying are poor who cannot access lawyers while some actually are not educated enough to know some of these things.

Thus the state has interests behind the move in the name of securing tenure for the peasants, which is typical of the very nature of the postcolonial neoliberal modern power. Another respondent argued that the state and individuals within it have invented the problems on land. If the colonial state produced the problem through bringing new tenure systems, the contemporary state has gone ahead to extend the same problem by making people believe that the “problem on land is only on mailo land and not on any other like leasehold”. This very state gives people leases on public land after whose expiry is not renewed because they want to give such land to other rich people even when the land has peasants occupying it. This according to this respondent, is a planned scheme by the state to ensure that it makes all land to be under “control of the state”. It is the state which issues titles on land, sometimes double titles on the same piece of land. As an official from the Land Protection Unit of the Uganda Police indicated, officials in government connive with those who want to grab land whether on mailo or not. “These can remove a genuine land title from the system and tell the buyer that the land exists. After scamming the unsuspecting land buyers,

those very officials put back the land title into the system. This in the end causes land conflicts as two or more people are fighting over the same land. So you cannot blame the tenure system because this is happening on almost all land tenure types”. As such, you realize that “someone wakes up one morning and comes and says this land belongs to me, you have to vacate. They come with legitimate titles some of them and court orders to evict you”. The state that is meant to protect the people—ideally though it wasn’t originally designed for that especially in its modern form—“is behind the land grabbing”. Those “with money and power use the very state machinery in the land grabs including security personnel. Thus this securitization of land theft by the state is one of the problems, and other than addressing this, people argue, the state looks somewhere else to blame and for a solution. It should be noted that my respondents at certain moments conflate the state with government and I inquired what they intended to mean, it came out that they were referring to the state than government. And so one respondent concluded that under Obote and Amin the state openly declaring their interests regarding land but the state under Museveni has “gone undercover. It has not officially declared its real interests and intention but this does not mean that it doesn’t have, they have intentions which are far worse than those of Amin and Obote”. And as such, the land “in Buganda and Uganda will one day belong to the state and the state under this very NRM government”.

Others have argued that this attempt is not new for the NRM regime, it was conceived as early as 1972. The then Rubaga North Member of Parliament, Waswa Lule, in 1998 during the conversations around the land reform debate argued that “President Yoweri Museveni conceived the idea of grabbing Buganda’s land way back in 1972”. Lule quoted Museveni when he argued that Obote made a mistake of not distributing the Buganda Kingdom land to “the peasant when he abolished the Kabakaship”. Semujju’s article quoted Museveni’s speech which was quoted in a different seminar paper titled *the land question in Uganda* presented to the “conference to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Faculty of Law, at the International Conference Centre” to show that Museveni claimed that despite abolishing the institution of Kabakaship, Obote “never tackled the question of mailo land”. For Museveni, if “Obote had distributed land to peasants...and abolished various tenants’ rents to landlords, he would have justified the blood that he shed”. So for Museveni to justify the blood that he shed during the NRA bush war, he had to give land to the peasants.

However, this was conceived as a plot to further dispossess Buganda in the name of the peasants. As Lule would note, in the same conference, “controversial land law, was a historical ploy that was hatched by Museveni to grab Buganda’s land”. This story shows how the peasant has been mobilized as a tool to grab land and fight political battles of the elite, the state and kingdom. This was exemplified in the counteractions during this very conference. For instance, in response to Lule’s claims, MP Rubabo Mondo Kagonyera argued that “his two friends from Luwero told him that Baganda peasants are happy with the provisions of the land law”. In response to this claim, Lule angrily noted that if indeed the peasants wanted the 1998 law which was being debated, then government would not be spending “millions of money to try and convince them to accept it”. One other (Makerere University Professor, Tumwine Mukubwa) attributed this to politics. If we draw insights from the theoretical and conceptual formulations of Edelman, Bernstein and Mamdani, we

can see that both the state and Buganda kingdom present the peasants as a homogenous category whose protection has to not only come from either of the institutions but also has to be uniform. The debate highlighted above ignores the fact that the peasant even today is differentiated and this differentiation is historical. The foregoing contestation did not feature the peasants and their actual experiences which would give the nuances of their marginalization, alienation, dispossession and subjectification. This raises a very important question; why didn't the peasants speak for themselves if at all they were not being weaponized. In the next section I highlight the experiences of the peasants and their articulation of the land and peasant problems.

### Demystifying the Fallacy of Peasant Protection: Peasants' Experiences

The debate around the land and peasant question requires a reconstruction from the stand point of the peasants. Doing so requires stepping outside and political and discursive contexts of the formal hegemonic institutions of power. For articulations of the land question to make sense to the ordinary peasants, I argue that it has to not only emerge out of but also be meaningful to their objective material/living conditions. In other words, it requires an engagement with the system of exploitation and production relations in which they survive. This section draws on the silenced voices of the different categories of people from society to show that actually the peasant question has been depoliticized and weaponized. This de-politicization and weaponization ends up serving interests of power and capital thereby creating new breeds of middle class peasants instead of resolving the peasant problems. Other than understanding the interests and aspirations of the peasants, the narratives condition their full incorporation into the circuits of capitalist exploitation and accumulation by pushing for relations of private ownership as the ultimate demand of the peasants. The discourse of private ownership creates an impression that the peasant problems will be solved once they own land, which is not the case especially because even those owning freehold titles in Kampala for example are "getting evicted even on the barrel of the gun". It should be noted that with neoliberalism, there has been a deepening of the differentiation internal to the peasantry.

Some sections of the society are weary of the motives of Buganda kingdom just as they are with the central government. A section of artists in Uganda cautioned the "Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II against opportunists who misled his father Kabaka Mutesa II during the 1966 crisis". During the celebration of the first coronation of the Kabaka in 1994, 80 Baganda artists from 25 theater groups used theater and music to express their worry about the elites and middle class which they called opportunists in the Mengo establishment. In a play titled "*Saagala Agalamidde* which was staged at pride theater on Friday as one of celebrations, these artists noted that "we are in total fear that the opportunists in the Mengo clique which misled your father the late Kabaka Mutesa in 1960s to the extent of isolating him from Baganda catholic elites in favor of protestants are still surrounding you". According to the new vision, the "play also depicted some Baganda weaknesses like *ebyaffe* fundamentalism, double standards and greed to amass material wealth from the Kabakaship without production which will cripple the consolidation of the newly restored kingdom. It urged the Baganda of all walks of life to work harder for the revitalization of the shattered

Buganda economy”. This play is important because it comes out of the voices which are not within the domain of power but articulated the problems of the peasants.

Critics of the Mengo establishment have occasionally questioned the elite/middle class that form the administrative wing of the kingdom for harboring selfish interests which have potential to cripple the kingdom. To them, these leaders are not interested in protecting *Abantu ba Ssabasajja* (Kabaka’s subjects-the peasants) but serving the ‘state and themselves’ thereby becoming *ekikonge kya Museveni* [Museveni’s Henchmen]. It is argued that rural commoners, who perhaps suffered during the regimes of Obote and Amin, have come to see Mengo and the Lukiiko as “self-serving structures” with the motive of “reproducing the domination of Buganda's traditional oligarchy” than representing the interests of *Abantu ba Ssabasajja* (Kabaka’s subjects). For instance, it has been argued that the fight that was put up during the land reform of 1998 was more intended to restore assets of elites than benefiting small peasant farmers. The *Obutikkiro* led by the Katikkiro has always been a target of such criticism especially because it seems it has gone full scale in serving personal interests and interests of the state and capital thereby “ignoring the plight of the Kabaka’s subjects” [*Abantu ba Ssabasajja*]. In contending with the politics on Kabaka’s land, one respondent argued that those charged with the mandate to protect the “interests of Kabaka’s subjects do not take such peasants at heart. They are instead helping certain people to streamline the flow of money (cash)”. In the same spirit when pressed hard to explain what he means by streamlining money and serving their own interest, he highlighted that “cultural institutions have benefits they get from government, so government has them (leaders in cultural institutions) as tools for mobilizing populations for political support”. He continued to argue that the “kingdom is on the side of government” than the peasants because “it leverages on the side of the politicians than the peasants”.<sup>1320</sup> This was more a critique of the ways in which the kingdom administration has handled the question of land tenure.

In what follows, I will highlight instances of accumulation by dispossession reinforced by both the state and Buganda kingdom either directly or indirectly in order to show the continued weaponization of the peasants in the name of liberation and protection. I highlight peasants’ experiences and voices to tease out modes of exploitation, marginalization and subjectification anchored in projects and programmes initiated by both the state and Buganda kingdom in the name of peasants’ interests. I will begin with cases in which central government has been involved and later Juxtapose them with those of Buganda kingdom.

To begin with the first instance, people in Kayunga district argued that land conflicts are more on leasehold land than on Kabaka’s Mailo land. If the conflicts are largely on leasehold land, then why is it not a target of the reforms? They wondered! In Kayunga, there are middle class people (some politicians while others business elites) who are grabbing land possessed by peasant. The peasant gets leasehold titles on public land, and others have mailo land which they inherited from their parents and grandparents but these have lost such land and annoyingly through the aid of the state security operatives and other state organs. Two of these are Kalangwa Moses and Segawa Dalton.

In an extended interview running across two days with Mugerwa (the deputy Mugerere), it came out that these two men are carrying out acts of accumulation by dispossession against the society. These are buying-off villages and demanding huge rents from the people who are using the land. For example, Segawa Dalton is believed to own “900 acres of leasehold land on public land. He pays 200,000 shillings annually for the 900 acres of land to government. This means that Segawa is paying 222.3 shillings to government every month for the 900 acres”. What is more interesting is that Segawa does not get lease for this land to use (it should be noted that he gets this land when people are already occupying it and others having running leases which they cannot fight for given his status and connections in government), he rents the land to the actual farmers who are using the land. “After paying only 200,000 shillings, he rents out the land and charges 200,000 shillings from those subtenants who utilize/use the land for 6 months. If you calculate this amount, you find pure exploitation and appropriation. Segawa is not using the land but the people on the land put it to use. In renting the land to peasants, Segawa makes 180,000,000 shillings making a profit of 179,800,000 shillings a year”. Those who cannot afford the amount he asks for are forced off the land. It was also noted that Segawa is not only using the land to get such money from the poor peasants, he also uses it as a mortgage to access loans from the banks, even with the peasants on it and after paying him. When people try to run to police, the police refers them to court and the process in court takes a long time and a lot of money. Many of them “end up giving up and leaving the land or paying the money”. This story raises three questions: Why would the land be leased to Segawa when it still has people using it? Do people who lease this land (literally the state) really care for the peasant farmers who are using this land? When the state thinks of peasants, which peasants? Is Segawa a peasant, who should be given lease and later evict others (perhaps fellow peasants)? Other respondents expressed the same worry as some of the land is actually fenced off and “this kind of eviction is done in the presence of state officials” and even if you go to court, you can hardly win the case”.<sup>1323</sup> If Segawa is therefore to be categorized as a peasant, then he either falls in the upper middle class peasant or the rich peasant who has the capacity to get huge leases and win cases in court. This is a kind of peasant landlord gets a lease from government through dispossessing the poor, monopolizes the land and derives his income from renting the same land to the poor peasants.

One peasant farmer happens to be a victim of similar land grabs. He narrated that he and his family used to stay on their family mailo land. The land was for their grandfather Kilimulaala Yokaana who was granted/given by the king. A rich middle class government official by the “names of Kalangwa Moses Kaliisa with the aid of the state stole the land using guns”. This case is important because this middle class elite did not grab the land to use it, rather he grabbed it to get more money out it. After getting the land, he sold it to capitalist Madhivan of the Madhivan companies in 2015. Kalangwa is said to have claimed that he had bought the land from the family but “the name of the person he claims sold it to him was not even known in this community let alone to the family”. When the family started to fight for their land through the local council leadership, Kalangwa “started now going to some members of the family who were money minded and started giving them some money to give up on the case”. One of his “brothers was given 2 million Shillings and that’s how the land was taken. We had family homes on the land, we could use the land for

farming, we also had over 200 cows on the land which we were raring on the same land. This land was home to our “kijja” (ancestral home) and all our grandfathers and fathers were buried on it”. When the case was reported to police, the police referred them to Jinja high court. This family could hardly afford transporting themselves to Jinja for court sessions which dragged for over 5 years.

We reported the case to police and later to court in the Jinja high court. Because we don’t have money, we can hardly convince the courts. We even can’t afford to go to court every now and then because of transport and other related costs. But we are dealing with very rich people, very powerful people. The case is still in court.

I had a look at his documents, the police reference and the court papers but could not take any details for security and safety reasons. As Mamdani would suggest, all that is happening of dispossessing the poor peasants by the middle and rich peasants follows a path charted by the “external fraction of capital, that is, the path of large-scale land enclosures, of legal titles to these and securing hefty bank loans on this basis”. Interesting is his claim that all this cannot happen without the state knowing, that is, it is not possible without political connection just like Segawa and Kalangwa are.

This case is important because it highlights how the shift in modes of land use are rendering the peasants subjects of capital and the state. The respondent points to the multiple uses on the land they had like raring cattle, being their ancestral land (ebijja/ebiggwa), and as a home. The relationship the peasant has over land also includes cultivation/production for subsistence. Equally it points to how monetarization (read financialization) played a role in their dispossession as family members were bought off. These cases are not isolated occurrences. There are many happening around the country.

In Kampala, the best exemplification of accumulation by dispossession have been the eviction of people from Nakawa-Naguru, and Nsambya lands using narratives of development, increased incomes and low-cost housing. In October 2007, government allocated the Nakawa-Naguru land to “Opecprime Properties Limited, a UK based property developer, to develop it into a modern satellite town” in an agreement which was signed between the government and the company. It is estimated that over 1700 people were evicted to allow this development. The state and ‘investors’ made promises of project benefits—in an alleged Memorandum of Understanding with the over 1700 occupants of the land—to not only the occupants of the land but also the general public. Accordingly, the project was estimated to constitute over 1700 flats with amenities that could be affordable by low income earners since they were the majority occupants of the land and as evictees, they had to be given first priority. It also promised over 30,000 jobs to be availed to the general public in a period of 10 years after commencement of the development. Other sources reveal that the project was to build 5000 housing units “at a cost of USD 300 Million (shs. 837b)”. The development had to start in January 2008 with an estimated finish date of 2018.

This Nakawa-Naguru case offers us an opportunity to interrogate aspects of accumulation by engaging the dynamics that followed the eviction of the ordinary peasants who occupied

the land. First the land was not only allocated to a private multinational corporation Opecprime but also other private investors especially after the eviction of the peasants. These private investors included Janet Kobusingye (5.8 acres); Charles Kimera (1.13 acres), National Library (2.0 acres); (Islamic University of Uganda (10.0 acres); Nakawa disabled Vocational Training Institute (0.6 acres) Quakers (0.43 acres); Church of Uganda (0.39 acres); House of Dawda (10.0 acres); CTM (U) Limited (6 acres); Alumus Properties Ltd (2.5 acres); William Nkempi (6 acres); Yas Company (5 acres) and Access (U) Limited (12.35 acres). This double sell of land resulted into multiple claims over the same land by the different private developers and this led to the flopping of the construction project as Opecprime sought remedies in court. The multiple sales of the Nakawa-Naguru land to different investors reveals the logic of capitalist alienation and displacement for private gains. The president in a letter dated April 30, 2010m following a meeting which was held at state house Entebbe on February 15 2010, argued that since some of the Nakawa-Naguru land had already been given to Opecprime, “the sanctity of the latter’s agreement with government to establish a modern satellite town at Naguru and Nakawa must be upheld”. The president further argued that the private developers who did not go through competitive bidding processes and were therefore allocated some of the “land in error should either be allocated land elsewhere or integrated into the project as property buyer”. The president’s claims reveal that there was corruption, greed, selfishness and misallocations of the land from which the peasants were evicted but these are informed by the market logic. Besides, the idea of “property buyers” shows how the project targeted buyers than the plight of evicted peasant occupants.

Following the revelation that some people erroneously acquired the land, the president gave a directive in the letter that the Uganda Land Commission and the MoLHUD issues the two land titles for Nakawa and Naguru to Opecprime (U) Ltd with immediate effect in accordance with the agreement signed with government in October 15, 2007. This was not to be delayed and the other private developers had to be relocated and the land titles issued to them were to be cancelled as advised by the attorney general in his written opinion of sept 7 2009. The president further directed that the Nakawa-Naguru land be “fenced off by government”. Fencing off the land was aimed at ensuring that there are no further encroachments on the investors newly acquired land *especially from the former occupants of the land* [emphasis mine]. This was more of an enclosure of the land. The “new enclosure” was to be ensured with complete vacating of the land by the peasants and this was to be done by the ministry and the Uganda Police Force (UPF), something typical of securitization of the enclosure movement and deployment of violence. Indeed, if people freely agreed to leave and signed a memorandum with government then why the need for police for them to vacate. This reveals that they were being forced off the land through the force of the memorandum. This raises a couple of questions: Whose interest were the investments going to serve? What is the fate of the formerly hopeful but “now hopeless” peasants who were evicted from the land?

In an interview with an official from the MoLHUD in Kampala in February 2023, it was noted that those who were evicted from the Nakawa-Naguru estates ended up in Kasokoso, Acholi quarters and Kinawataka which were already crowded spaces with high rates of

unemployment, lack of housing, growing unfavorable informal economy, etc. Others failed to get semi-permanent settlements. According to the respondent, these face housing challenges after displacement and noncompensation for others despite the promise of building for them a satellite city with them as priority. In the end, “the project did not happen”. His worry though seemed not the plight of the suffering people but the impossibility of convincing such people to allow any other development project. And the evicted people were not given any alternative means of survival.

Now faced with a dilemma of having multiple “illegitimate” claims over the land by numerous investors, the burden of accumulation had to be shifted to a different place and people. It is Rosa Luxembourgh who tells us that when capital can no longer find avenues for accumulation, it moves somewhere else. In a capitalist primitive fashion, the contradiction around Nakawa-Naguru led to the transfer of the burden of capitalist accumulation to Nsambya Railway land which was also being occupied by peasants. A cabinet meeting was held on June 17, 2009 to reconsider a decision which had been made earlier of not selling Nsambya land. In the earlier cabinet decision, the cabinet decided that the Nsambya land should not be “disposed while authorizing the disposal of all the other non-core assets of URC”. The Nsambya land was identified as noncore asset of the corporation. The June 2009 meeting opened the land for disposal.

The Nsambya and Kibuli land is now home to a fancy hotel called “mestil hotel”, a business center called the Arena Mall and a tiles warehouse store all of which are privately owned business. Were these established in the interests of the peasants who were evicted? The acquired land interestingly becomes a source of conflict among the members of the capitalist class [investors] over who takes which share. Chris Nsamba documented this dilemma in part:

Over 10 companies and individuals who had acquired part of Nakawa estate land have been allocated the 57-acre Uganda Railways Corporation (URC) land in Nsambya. The Nsambya land allocation means that the private developers will share the 57 acres among themselves depending on how much each firm or individual paid the Government for the Nakawa land. Each acre of the Nsambya land is valued at sh1.2b; meaning that the 57 acres are worth sh68.4b.

The acquisition of land by these disgruntled investors was to be based on conditions set by government. These included: the Ministry of Local Government (hereafter MoLG) to obtain the actual value of the land, MoLG to prepare a cabinet paper on how the land in Nsambya and Kibuli would be divided among the beneficiaries prior to the actual allocation of that land, MoLG to attach development conditions to the land being compensated and set time frame within which the land should be developed, the local private developers to pay premium over and above the revalued land if the costs are more than the value they had paid initially. In all these conditions, there is no talk about the peasant who occupied the land prior to the allocations or even those neighboring these lands.

The report of the PAC-COSASE investigation into the Uganda Railway Corporation land reveal the problematic nature of these acts of accumulation. The findings revealed that

despite the presidential directive and the cabinet memo recommending only 32.35 acres of land to be allocated to the beneficiaries, a whopping 72.78 acres of land was allocated resulting into over 40.49 acres (more than double) being distributed in excess without authorization and assessment. This means that extra poor peasant occupants were evicted. Further, the committee findings revealed that some individuals and entities that were not meant to benefit from the allocations ended up allocating themselves land. For example, as the committee findings show, “Kampala International University, which did not appear in the Cabinet Memo and Presidential directive was allocated 14 acres for the development of the University. However, a shopping mall (Arena Mall) was eventually built on the said land”. Further still, the report indicated that some of the leases were acquired without payment of premium and/or ground rent. For instance, the report shows that “the lease for Ms. Janet Kobusingye the proprietor of Mestil Hotel and Residences was extended from 10 years to 49 years then to 99 years with no premium or ground rent paid for the 89 years”. And lastly but also importantly, some of the entities which were to get the allocations did not and it is important to take note of these: National Library, Nakawa Disabled Vocational Training Institute and Church of Uganda. Much as these have their own interests, they are closest to serving the interests of the poor peasants. So given that they were not typical capitalist institutions that would guarantee the sustenance of accumulation for the market and consolidation of power, they were put off the list of beneficiaries.

How should we understand acquisitions and displacements of land in Nakawa-Naguru and Nsambya? We can read such acquisitions from the contexts of David Harvey’s “accumulation by dispossession”. These cases of accumulation exemplify a successful project of neoliberalization of the economy in which redistribution of land occurs upwards. These cases highlight how land was redistributed amongst the capitalist classes and comprador elites through “commodification and privatization of land and the forceful (*though often with persuasive gimmicks and grammar—often [mis]represented as consent*) dispossession of peasant populations” [emphasis mine]. After all, as Chomsky notes, the people “must submit to their rulers” and giving their ‘consent even without consenting’ is just enough. Chomsky tells us that there are instances when violence is limited or cannot produce the intended results and the governed have to consent but this is ensured through the “device called manufacturing of consent by the progressive and liberal opinion”. And this process of generating consent is considered to be “the very essence of the democratic process” since the “conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element of democracy”, thus pointing to the limits of liberal democracy and neoliberal development. Equally, these cases resulted into the suppressions of modes of production which the peasants were undertaking on the land from which they were evicted and ultimately the appropriation of this land by investors who shared it amongst themselves. These processes of accumulation by dispossession have seen the state at the center of it, this time without obvious deployment of violence despite its “monopoly of violence and definition of legality” but through tricking people with the language of development and the law. By hoodwinking the peasants using the language of development (manipulation of their minds and material conditions), the state assumed that people consented to their land being taken. The state orchestrating evictions in the name of public interest and development constitutes what Mamdani has called a state’s move to

colonize society which is very historical, with its roots in the colonial period where “the relation between state and society changed radically”.

From these cases, we note that at least three of the four features which constitute accumulation by dispossession are manifested. There is privatization, corporatization and commodification of land in which the eviction of peasants opened up new fields for capital accumulation in these former residential and subsistence agricultural and business zones which were not in the circuits of capitalist profitability especially in Nakawa-Naguru and Nsambya cases. The second is financialization especially in Kayunga cases where money became a key factor in the processes of dispossessing the peasants through buying off family members and facilitating court processes. The third is that in all cases both Kayunga and Kampala, the state has been at the center of this redistribution of land. For instance, in Nakawa Naguru, the state pushed the peasants off the land in the name of developing it and later gave it to investors and business people. In the cases in Kayunga, the state gives leases to the elites who later sell the leases or get money out of them through rents.

Interestingly, this accumulation by dispossession is very gendered, typical of capitalist primitive accumulation Marx theorized earlier in the English context. Much as the dispossessed and evicted were both men and women, majority of the companies that shared the land from which people were evicted in Nakawa and Naguru, and those grabbing people’s land in Kayunga in the highlighted cases are men dominated. This means that if at all these were the peasants the state was targeting, then it was targeting patriarchized peasants. This speaks to the utter disregard of the ways in which other identities and categories become side-stepped when dealing with the land and peasant question as if questions of gender just like class are not fundamental in conditioning the peasants into their vulnerable status. The established businesses and grabbed land can hardly be afforded by the ordinary poor peasant let alone a gendered (woman) poor peasant. In the words of Raju Das, the historical role of the state is to protect private property and not ordinary peasants and so claiming to protect the peasant is sheer pretense since the state can “never be a friend of peasants and peasant cultivation”. As such, the state in considering this as a solution did not look into the contradiction internal to the agrarian classes it sought to liberate, that’s if it intended to liberate them anyways. The result of this has been the recreation of a classed and gendered subject worth of not only dispossession but also exploitation by capital. This is attributed to the ignorance of internal differentiation within the peasantry as theorized earlier.

After establishing that the government initiatives promote capital accumulation than protecting the peasant, one question pops-up: *do the responses of Buganda kingdom through some of its initiatives reflect an aspiration to protect the peasants and their land, or at least their interests? Do such responses think of which kind of peasants it intends to protect?* A mere look at the kingdom’s response to the peasant question shows quite otherwise. First in its *kyapa mu ngalo* program, it seems not so much invested in protecting the peasant [see Paper 6] than push a market and state agenda. Second and most important, its neoliberal and developmentalist character in the recent past has enabled Buganda kingdom to embark on building what it called low cost housing for low-income earners.<sup>1356</sup> The initiative started in 2021 in what was called the Sentema housing project of the

Buganda Kingdom. This project was established “following the Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi’s instruction that the kingdom provides better homes for the people of Buganda at an affordable cost”. Much as the project was rolled out in 2021, the contract had been signed between Buganda Kingdom and Guoji Group (a Chinese construction firm—who are the very people that developed the posh estates of Mirembe Villas still owned by the kingdom). It should be noted that most Kabaka’s Mailo land is occupied by mostly poor peasants. So the establishment of such a project meant that many of these had to be evicted in order to allow space for construction. According to an online news platform, around 600 residents occupied the land in Bukungulu village, Sentema where the project was to be established.

People who expected the kingdom to protect them “lodged a protest on April 18 over fears that they would be evicted from the land” and without compensation. To quench the worries of people, the then spokesperson of Buganda Land Board (BLB) argued that those who were making noise were being “unnecessary”. This is because, BLB was not “evicting tenants, rather, it was carrying out a registration exercise to enable them pay due compensation”. Just like how the state promised considering the peasant who were occupying Nakawa Naguru land as first priority when the houses are complete, so is Buganda Land Board with its claim that they “allow all tenants around to register with Buganda Land Board. After registration, those who wish to work with Buganda Land Board will be incorporated in the project and those who don’t want will be fully compensated”. As a result, people were evicted (though not using physical force) and the project took shape. The estate now has “444 housing estates that occupies 55 acres, and includes a vocational school, industrial, health facilities, restaurants, shopping mall, and recreational centers, as well as security provided for residents”. The homes are argued to range from one-bedroom to three-bedroom with a price range of 65 to 135 million shillings. The cheapest house costs around 65 million Uganda shillings (this price is argued to have been 56 million at the opening but it has just increased over a period of two years) and this has to be paid in a period of three years. On average, a person who is buying a one bed room house has to pay 2.8 million shillings per month (I wonder which poor peasant can afford this).

For those that can hardly afford to pay for the house, the kingdom has partnered with financial institutions like centenary Bank and Housing Finance Bank to offer “mortgages to those who wish to purchase homes”. So really we see that the target of this very project has not been the very poor peasants, who can hardly afford 1.85 million shillings a month to pay for the house. The logic the state uses is being deployed here by the kingdom (though not surprising because both are under neoliberal forces) and worse of all, these people are economically coerced into very dangerous relations with banks to get loans, and failure to pay would mean loss of whatever they have worked for. The question still remains; which peasant was being targeted by the kingdom? As one person commented on X

(formerly Twitter), “Expecting a low-income person to pay 1.85 million per month for the lowest 1 Bedroom House is unrealistic”. We can see following from the above stories that the state and Buganda Kingdom are not doing a very different thing at least when it comes to the classed [poor] and gendered peasants. If people were evicted by the state from

Nakawa, people were equally evicted from Sentema to establish a housing estate. The difference is that the Buganda Kingdom estate was built (even though not for poor peasants) while that of the state was not and the land was shared. From these foregoing illustrations, we can see that both the state and Buganda kingdom have accepted a neoliberal logic. However, much as the state deploys violence often while Buganda deploys persuasion, the result is more or less the same towards the peasants (*omuntu wa wansi*). What this means is that Buganda, especially the Mengo establishment, is an elite structure today that is a bit divorced from the ordinary peasants (*bantu ba Ssabasajja*). Equally important to note is that Buganda kingdom through this project is altering socio-economic relations to be typically defined by the market logic. A look at the photos on the single one-bedroom house shows that one only has a small compound in the size of almost a veranda as their space. This means that they do not have space for even putting a single banana plant or a small garden of greens. In essence, these people who were using this land for different purposes to survive have now to move to the city centre and hustle (labour) to get money to pay for the house. This creates relations of wage labour with all its exploitative and precarious tendencies thereby drawing the poor peasants into the capitalist labour market. This only happens for those that are able to buy the houses as those who cannot are typically left out of the equation as some fail to even get alternative means to survive.

Now given the fact that those with money and power are the ones who are protected, whose interest then is private land ownership protecting? It seems that these new land grabbers are the 21<sup>st</sup> century breed of middle class who are the target beneficiaries of land reforms in the name of peasants. If the state cannot help people whose land is taken with historical ancestral graves, how can it purport to protect the peasants across the country? Is it still about protecting the peasants? Could it not be that the new breed of middle class [different from that of the 1900s which got lots of land and is being fought by the state] is being created and the state wants to eliminate the old middle class? Could this new middle class be the one behind the state's move? Here it was Marx who educated us that the state has always been deployed by capital in order to ensure primitive accumulation. Harvey would add that this accumulation happens after dispossessing the peasants through his notion of accumulation by dispossession. One of the basic features of neoliberalism is "the systematic use of state power to impose (financial) market imperatives in a domestic process that is replicated internationally by globalization". In doing this, we realize that interests of both the state and capital are served in the name of protecting the peasants. The peasants other than being on watch to protect themselves against land grabbing are hoodwinked to think that the state is protecting them yet given its very nature and character in this neoliberal dispensation with the forces of capitalism behind, it cannot allow such "self-protection". As some respondents questioned, is the state only interested in protecting peasants on mailo land and not any other peasants (like those on public land) given its obsession with mailo land reform? The state does a lot to dispossess people and give land to those it wishes and this is typical of all states in the postcolonial Uganda. Its return to land law reform through the name of the peasants speaks to the 'NRM's appeal to populist legitimacy'. This is because,

'economic growth had become a source of legitimacy for the NRM's monopoly of power.

## Beyond the State and the Market: Reentering Society

This section recenters the society and the society's perspective in the debates on the land and peasant questions. As the different Papers have shown, the land question has consistently been framed as a question of the state and the market where the two preserve the space for debate and action for themselves by way of shaping both discourse/epistemology and praxis. This section moves beyond this reductionist and devalorizing conceptualization and rendering of the land question to a more holistic reading to argue that in order for us to come to grips with the land question, we need to understand the perspectives that emerge from society regarding land and its relations in order to imagine conditions of possibility for peasant emancipation, liberation and democratic reform. To illustrate this argument, I engage the society's discourse of motherhood as a conceptual and analytical tool to show the different ways in which land is conceptualized from the vantage point of peasant society beyond the inflexible *statist* and *marketist* framings. Doing so does not only challenge the foundation of the neoliberal conception of the land question as fundamentally subject to capitalist logics but also constitutes a rereading of the social protective approach to land from the vantage point of the peasants through engaging the possible alternative modes of socio-economic organization that focus on the multiple forms of land use, values and meanings that the society has embraced historically in ensuring non-predatory forms of land relations. Drawing on political economy approaches, the section asks questions like: what does land mean to different people? What are the multiple yet divergent values attached to land? How does society think of land reform? How do such perspectives speak to larger debates around land use, land reform, development, power? How does such an understanding help us transcend the neoliberal normative assumptions and narratives around land and land reform?

### 'Ettaka Nyaffe': A Reconceptualization of Land through a Society's Discourse of Motherhood

Having seen how the existing articulations of the land question does not only decenter but also subjectifies and marginalizes the peasant society, I attempt to bring society to the center of the discussion of the land question in Buganda. Like any other colonial and neoliberal governance practices, epistemology and tradition, the current debate and policy responses by the state on land tends to present land as a resource—a commodity—worth of exploitation. Such a neoliberal and colonial epistemic discourse privileges land as a commodity and ends up taking for granted the ways in which people perceive of and relate to land. Uganda/Buganda like many other communities is grappling with the fact that society has been coerced into the neoliberal framework that attaches value of land in its commodification, financialization, assetization and marketization. Agrarian literature in the recent past has come to suggest that it is not a problem to look at land resources as being critical for the economic wellbeing and livelihood of the rural poor but we should also understand that its importance “is far beyond *just* economic issues”. For this case, for the people of Buganda, land and the relationships on it form a very diverse and complex network that brings together social relations, culture, memories, histories among others. It is not only a source of livelihood and sustenance but also a source of identity, belonging and

power. The choice of placing society/people at the center of this land debate [through decolonization as a methodological tool and political economy as an analytical lens] is that societies have “stories, cultures, social practices, languages” to share and these can become “spaces of resistance, liberation and hope”.

Decolonial writers have argued that European/western hegemonic models of knowledge have often been provided as an authentic form of knowledge which commands universality and superiority over other epistemologies. The western epistemology pushed other forms of knowledge to the margins and has been presented as the only form of true knowledge which is objective and based on reason. It has become “hegemonic” and has generated expansive scientific practices through an establishment of a frame of knowledge that universally conscripts other societies. Relatedly, it’s considered repressive due to the fact that it cannot leave any knowledge created outside the set frame to survive thus failing to appreciate the epistemic diversities. Santos has aptly argued that Westerncentric ways of knowing need to be interrogated with ‘other knowledges’ and other ways of knowing. For him, global capitalism and colonialism have historically been purposed to destroying all other possible ways of knowing and he coined epistemologies of the south as an epistemological dimension to resist such destructive tendencies i.e. as a liberation against capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and neoliberalism. Mbembe thus contends that any attempt aimed at decolonisation has two tasks i.e. ‘deconstruction’ of the dominant western knowledge and ‘development’ of alternative models. However, Santos unlike Mbembe suggests that decolonisation of knowledge shouldn’t necessarily seek to deconstruct and seek alternatives but a search for an “alternative thinking of the alternatives”. Interestingly Sabelo suggests that we should not think of human beings as only born in knowledge systems but also as “legitimate” thinkers, knowers and producers of knowledge. Following Mamdani’s idea that society has to be put at the center of the discussions around land and Sabelo’s suggestion that ordinary people should be considered legitimate thinkers, this section centers the peasant society as a unit of analysis to engage discourses from the society regarding their conception of land and its relations as a decolonial critique of hegemonic neoliberal and colonial episteme. My field findings on the land question in Uganda with a particular focus on Buganda has revealed that there are multiple yet fluid and divergent meanings attached to land beyond the western neoliberal conception which provides land as merely a commodity to be transacted and exchanged in the patriarchal and classist capitalist market with its value being limited to the market economic sense. The marketized meanings attached to what land is, ought to be used for and can offer, which is being pushed by the state, to some extent by Buganda kingdom—*though its agency is questioned when it comes to such*—and the neoliberal financial institutions internally and globally including the IMF and World Bank is different from what the people of Buganda seem to have. I engage the society’s discourse of motherhood to rethink the articulation of land and land relations beyond the capitalist market logic.

## Conceptualizing the Discourse of Motherhood

In order to make sense of the Buganda peasant society's discourse of motherhood, this thesis engages and thinks with existing theorizations and conceptualizations of motherhood in Uganda and beyond. The most important work here is Rhiannon Stephen's, *a History of African Motherhood*, which traces the historical development of motherhood in Uganda with particular focus on present day Buganda, Busoga, and Bugwere. Rhiannon Stephens is very important for this work because her theorization moves beyond the conceptualizations of motherhood which are anchored in biology and patriarchy to broader conceptualizations that involve institutional, structural and ideological considerations. This is not only important because it helps us move beyond the orthodox parochialism but also because it enables us to think about and conceptualize land beyond the exclusive materiality that neoliberal and colonial epistemology attaches to it.

Stephens argues that existing 'historical studies' treat motherhood as a universal category that is often imbued with relational and emotional significance which limits it to only "nurturing, caring, facilitating, and restraining". This according to her is sheer essentialism and biological determinism which is problematic. Accordingly, there is need to think about motherhood historically and this calls for broadening "our understanding of it beyond biological reproduction and practices of nurture and caregiving and think instead about motherhood as a social institution and as ideology". It is in this sense that this thesis intends to engage with Rhiannon Stephens. This historical approach is important because it allows us to think of the discourse of motherhood as one that historically shapes and has been shaped by the communities of which "it formed such an important part". Doing so allows us to think about land not entirely based on its materiality but also the ways in which land shapes and is shaped by the social, economic and political relations in community. Importantly, this conceptualization does not freeze the conceptualization of motherhood but treats it as one which has historically been changing, diversifying and contracting with the changes in communities. Even in instances where motherhood is used to explore "complex social and political organization" of society in ways that may be misconstrued as gendered/sexist, it is used in such a way that brings 'women into the analysis without excluding men' and at the same time without subordinating women to men and vice versa. This is because, motherhood in society could not exist "in the absence of fatherhood thus being a relational institution which shaped the individual experiences of motherhood and public form". Stephens argues that engaging motherhood as an ideological concept "allows us to reconstruct the historical architecture of its multiple functions, both durable and contingent, as a productive necessity, a cultural form, and a political institution". Resultantly, it helps us transcend the limited conceptualizations which are considered "universal and timeless".

In order to explicate the relationship between motherhood and political and economic institutions, Stephens endeavors to delve into the historical shifts of motherhood in the great lakes region starting from how the 'ideal motherhood' was conceptualized and its place in society at the end of the first millennium CE in North Nyanza, which constituted the ancestral community of Bugwere, Busoga and Buganda. During this period, motherhood

was conceived as an institution of “creating networks of relationships and mutual obligation that cut across the dominant patrilineal divides”. Later with time, the ideology of motherhood was mobilized “in the organization of social, political, and economic lives”. It equally facilitated contacts “between people with different languages and cultures and to integrate newcomers into South Kyoga communities”. Motherhood also became an important avenue through which social reproduction was carried out. It is important to note that in Buganda, there were struggles over the function of motherhood as a social institution and the need to “emphasize biological reproduction” at its core. However, despite such struggles, Stephens argues the motherhood continued to “be a central feature of social organization, food procurement, and political life”.

Such a conceptualization is not unique to Uganda and not entirely new. The discourse of motherhood had been conceptualized in Africa by scholars like Ifi Amaduime as early as the 1980s and Oyeronke Oyewumi in the 1990s in very similar and interesting ways. In *Male Daughters Female Husbands*, Ifi Amaaduime has highlighted how motherhood as an ideology was important in expressing kinship morality among the Nnobi especially ‘through notions of Ofumunne, imenne and ibenne’. She argues that as a kindred group, the people were supposed to be “guided by umunne principles, the spirit of common motherhood, which compelled love and trust”. This enabled a reduction in cases of rumor-mongering, theft, lies, among others and so prevented wrong doings. Motherhood became an organizing ideology and discourse especially for women’s organizations moreso in the ‘indigenous culture’. It was to “motivate aggression and competition in economic pursuits, and militancy in self-defense or in the pursuit of public peace”. Among the Nri society, Amaduime argues that the “bond of common motherhood” known as “Ibenne was ritualized and symbolized in a cult object”. Ibenne symbolized a spirit of unity and was consulted on questions of trust, unity and solidarity and it helped in bringing people together in society.<sup>1400</sup> This earlier conceptualization and historicization shows how the discourse of motherhood was more diverse and complex and could explain complex social, economic and political relations in society.

In the same way, Oyeronke Oyewumi in *the Invention of Women* has challenged scholarship that locates the theory of motherhood entirely in ‘domesticity’/domestication. For her, the “the socioeconomic realities of Yorubaland” conceived of mothers as those that “must provide for their children materially”. Quoting Sudarkasa, she argues that “motherhood was an impetus rather than an obstacle to economic activities”. In here, Oyeronke points to motherhood as an ideology that appreciates the material contribution of mothers to their families and children outside the house/home or what colonial epistemology and politics coined as the private/domestic domain. However, this acknowledgement does not limit their contribution to only the material neither does it think of such contribution as gendered. Similarly, she like Amaduime and Stephens, considers motherhood equally as an institution which was the most valued among the Yoruba people. As an institution, motherhood represented and symbolized a myriad of things and it suggested a “multiplicity of possibilities for social organization”. So, having seen how the discourse of motherhood can be used and has been used to understand very complex, multiple and interrelated relations both of power, society, economy and largely the polity, it becomes an interesting discourse

to engage especially when thinking with and from the vantage point of the peasant society whose knowledges have historically been silenced and devalorised by the state/power and the market in understanding the land question and by the larger western-centric colonial and neoliberal hegemonic knowledge and epistemology. This can help us in reshaping knowledge and epistemology through this decolonial lens. It should be noted that a fair understanding of the land question has to be not only limited to the material way of life of the peasants but also their modes of thought.

### Rethinking Land through Motherhood in Buganda

The society's discourse of motherhood among the people of Buganda reveal multiple, complex and complementary meanings, value, roles and conceptions of land which are historical. These different meanings and interpretations serve to offer alternative thinking to the neoliberal-colonial canon of understanding land and consequently development. These alternatives not only question the neoliberal and state-centric definition of land but also points to the necessity of appreciating the agency of the society in land relations.

Interested in understanding the different dynamics surrounding the land question in Buganda, one of the questions I would pose to the respondents in the field was on their understanding of land and the different meanings and value they attached to it— 'what does land mean to you?' Very numerous, complex, flexible and interesting responses were registered. Key among them was the idea that *Ettaka nyaffe* and *ettaka bulamu* (land is our mother and land is life). Thus, land was seen as being much bigger than just an economic good—a commodity. The conception of land as *nyaffe* was registered across almost all the interviews conducted with society and its usages reflects not only the ways in which society understands and values land but also speaks to the agency of society in knowledge production and shaping socio-economic and political relations in society. Resultantly, society has different locales (epistemic and eco-political) and importance of land. One respondent argued that

land is a mother because when you stop suckling your mothers breast, you resort to eating food, and food is grown on land. Even when you go wherever you go, you still can't find another mother. So when you leave your land or sale it, you still refer to either your Butaka or to the land where your ancestral parents were buried. You cannot today find another Butaka just like you can hardly find a new mother.

This respondent points to land as motherhood and offers us an important narrative that locates land in social and familial relation. This narrative metaphorically speaks to the fact that when land is lost, the possibility of getting it back is limited, even when you get it back, you cannot get the same or at least not value it the same way. The discourse of motherhood as Ifi Amaduime would suggest speaks to the fact that when you lose a mother you may not get another mother and if you get one, there is an addition i.e., step mother, surrogate mother, adoptive mother etc. If you get another mother, you may actually not value them the same way you valued your first—and often real— mother. Same is alluded to when it comes to the question of land. It is not impossible to get another piece of land especially for those that have the means as dictated by the land market. But the new land that you can get

may have a new addition beyond what you sold and it is disconnected from the realities, histories, values, attachments and memories of life. Ifi Amaduime has interestingly argued that the glorification that emerges out of the discourse of motherhood could be reflected in the “suffering and loneliness of children who had no mother. Usually their mothers reappeared to kill off their foes...stepmothers were always villains; favoritism by fathers was common”. This discourse also speaks to land as a source of livelihood to the community which offers sustenance. The care which is offered to this community and its people by land can “only be offered by a mother who cannot forsake his/her children even when they annoy them to the worst point”. This however, does not limit the discourse of motherhood, or even mothers, to care work but thinks of care work broadly as an integral part of building a society, economy and polity. Another respondent stated that

When I speak about land, I speak of it as my mother (*Mmange*). This is because everything I have in my life is found, based and has been made on land. Everything my mother used when I was being born was on land i.e. From the (herbal) medicine to water, to the food eaten when pregnant etc. When I was born and when I became of age, I started being fed and carried by land. That is why I can say that land is our mother (*ettaka ye nyaffe*). Even when I die, I will have to go back into the land.

Thus, there is a strong emotional and spiritual connection to land, which they view as a kind of mother or source of life and sustenance. The quote emphasizes the many ways in which land has supported and sustained them throughout their life, from their birth to their daily existence and through death. They also suggest that land is central to many different aspects of human experience, including the natural world, health, and cultural practices. Key among these is also the relationship between land and health. From the quote, land plays a significant role in human health, both in terms of the resources it provides (such as food, herbs and water) and the cultural practices and traditions that are connected to it. This may have implications for public health policies and practices which are disregarded by the neoliberal epistemological envisioning. The respondent equally pointed to the ways in which land is important in the afterlife of human beings. By pointing to going back to land, it becomes clear that land will be their home at death—their last resting place. This last aspect is important also because it points to the fact that it reflects some aspect of precolonial relations on land which persist or an inspiration from it. The creation of *butaka* and *ebiggwa* was based on this importance of land and so land has never ceased to be a home for the dead which relation played a part in the lives of the living especially with the establishment of *ebiggwa* (ancestral homes and family burial grounds). Today, people who stay and work away from their ancestral homes often go back to reconnect with their ancestors through prayers and other ceremonies (*okujjukira abagenzi*). These ceremonies also work as avenues for family reunions (*okumanyagana*).

Land accommodates people since they build their houses on the land. Even the business which land is being turned into is done on land.

When you stop being carried by your ‘mother’ on her laps and back, it is the land which takes on the burden of carrying you again. With a few exceptions of taking a flight which

lasts for a few hours or days, most of the time in our life we are carried by land. We build our houses for homes on the land, we grow food on the land, we do business on the land, we drive cars on land etc.

This statement suggests that land is a central and essential aspect of human life, human existence and experience. It suggests that land serves as a kind of foundation or support for many different aspects of human activity, including building homes, growing food, doing business, and even traveling. It highlights the importance of land in terms of its role in sustaining and supporting human life, suggesting that it is a fundamental resource that is necessary for human survival and flourishing.

We should note that by invoking motherhood in explaining the meanings, values and relations attached to land, society imagines and conceptualizes land as a fundamental part of an individual's or community's cultural and spiritual identity and belonging, and it is closely tied to customs, "traditions" and practices that are passed down from generation to generation. When an individual or community leaves their land or sells it, they may still have a strong emotional and spiritual connection to it, even if they are physically distant. Land then in this context becomes an irreplaceable and fundamental aspect of human life and experience which is closely tied to many different aspects of human identity and belonging. For instance, every Muganda belongs to a clan and this socio-political unit is very fundamental in shaping the question of belonging in Buganda since *Obuzaale* ("lineage") and *ensibuko* ("origin")—if at all we can call it origin—is related to land.<sup>1413</sup> When you ask a Muganda to *okulanya* (identify themselves and their lineage), they will mention their full names (with the surname/clan name), then to their parents and their great grandparents. *Okulanya* ends with a mention of the clan as the top-most unit of identity. Clan land is equally mentioned and in that *okulanya*, it metaphorically symbolizes that one has claims to that clan land/*butaka*. And indeed, a full description of one's identity requires a full account of one's lineage including parents, grandparents, great grandparents etc. which in Buganda is called *okutambula ng'Omuganda* and it invokes the land where the deceased in the lineage lie i.e., *muzukulu wa Kisoro eyebase ebusujju ebweeza* (grandson/daughter of Kisoro lying in BusujjuBweeza). Identifying with clan land does not necessarily mean that one physically occupies the clan land, it is a claim to a metaphysical and metaphorical space. One respondent noted that the grand children of *Ngonge* (otter) clan identify with their land at Lweza, Busujju in Mityana. *Abekika ky'engonge bonna balina obutaka* literally translated as all members of the Ngonge clan have claims over their clan land. The land is not that big and no one can even go and make claims of physical access. After all, even with colonial land dispossession, many clans do not have physical land—the soil. Even those that have left the land, those that had physical claims and those that have left the country continue making claims over that land and referring to their *butaka*, even without knowing the actual physical/geographical location of the *butaka* in question. Before colonialism had disrupted land relations and established western hegemonic land relations, every member of a clan who died would be taken back to their *butaka* for burial on their ancestral land. Another clan head argued that

Much as some clans might have lost their clan land (material), they still maintain the title *Bataka* not because they are in possession or control of the material aspect of land but because of the other social, spiritual and cultural value attached to land and which they identify with. Even in the absence of land (material), we believe we have land and we have obutaka, we never say we lost our land/butaka.

He added that without land (whether in the material, metaphysical or metaphorical sense) he is not a clan head. This is because, it is this land which makes him a *mutaka*. This speaks to how land is a source of power even today despite the denigration of such power with colonialism. According to

Omutaka Kayiira,

my clan headquarters (butaka) and my shrine (*embuga*) as a mutaka is on land just the way you see where we are now. Land is believed to be for everyone, here on this land is where I base my power to lead my grandchildren, the grand children of my clan and to execute my other duties as clan head. Much as some clans might have lost their clan land (the material), they still maintain the title *Bataka* not because they are in possession or control of the material aspect of land but because of the other social, spiritual and cultural value attached to land and which they identify with. Even in the absence of land (material), we believe we have land and we have obutaka, we never say we lost our land/butaka.

Omukungu Kizito Bashir elaborated more that the political connotations of land are that it symbolizes leadership in Buganda even today. According to him, “besides the Kabaka who is regarded as *Ssabataka*, leaders in Buganda have always been those who have been with land. Look at the lowest level of leadership in Buganda, *Omutongole* (a village chief), one does not qualify to be a leader if they don’t have land i.e. land meaning a home—a permanent home. People worry that they may ask you to be a leader then tomorrow you decide to migrate. To be of the lowest of any leader you must have a home. Even omuluka, saza etc. leaders must have homes—land—to qualify to be leaders”. The compounding of these different values, meanings, relations, memories and histories on land constitute what the society conceptualizes to be a discourse on land framed through a notion of motherhood.

Considering land as *nyaffe* is not new in Buganda, it can also be traced from the reign of Kabaka Mutesa I. Kimala notes that Kabaka “*Muteesa I ettaka yaliyita nnyaffe!*” meaning Kabaka Mutesa I called land our mother. He also cites a one Major Katende who was one of the guards and friends of Kabaka Muteesa I both in Uganda and when he was in exile, speaking to land in the same language of motherhood. He quotes major Katende in one of their conversations thus:

...obuzaale tebugulwa, n’olwekyo, tobutunda. Buli lwotunda ettaka, ebiggwa, ebiggya, obutaka, obwakabaka obeera otunze nnyoko akuzaala, naye obeera omutunze. Okwo kwe kutunda obuzaale bwo. Ensi yo obeera ogiriddemu olukwe, nga naawe weeriddemu olukwe.<sup>1419</sup>

*You cannot buy your origin and belonging, and so you cannot sell it. Whenever you sell land, ancestral grounds, kingdom land, you have sold your 'biological mother. That's what it means to sell your origin and belonging. It amounts to treason [Translation mine from Luganda].*

The narrative that Kimala gives underlines two issues: One ethical and another epistemological. Ethically, no one in Buganda culture is allowed to sell their parent. This would not only mean disrespect but also disregard of cultural and ethical values. Thus, questions of land can as well be couched in a language that pushes cultural ethics. By equating the sale of land to treason, one would be scared to do so because it would call for tough punishments. On the epistemological side, understanding social relations on land would mean understanding the land question through the lens of society and society's discourses which speak to the questions in the language that emerges out of and best describes the context. This then can help us unravel the intricate and complex problem surrounding land. It would mean having a holistic historicization of the problem in ways that reveal the hidden intentions and debunk hegemonic tendencies.

Besides, these numerous meanings attached to land do not in any way suggest that the people of Buganda do not appreciate the "economic value" attached to land. Land, it is argued, has an economic value but the respondents have offered a more redefined context-specific yet flexible understanding of what economic value and wealth should mean. Land having an economic value doesn't necessarily mean that it should be subjected to market forces and principles of exchange and so availed to the market for sale—*though this is not to rule out the fact that monetization is part of the economic values that some people have on land today*. The economic value attached to land lies in the idea of land use. In a conversation with one clan head in Buganda, it was argued that:

land is wealth. It is the most precious item one can have. Children don't know the value of land. They don't know that raring and farming is a job. They just look at land as merely something to sell and get money. If they inherit land from their grandfathers, they just think of selling it to go to the city center. Land is and should be a generational item which we have to use sparingly for even our future generations to benefit. But the current move of selling it is making it lose meaning and future focus.

Here wealth doesn't necessarily lie in the sale of land. Wealth lies in how the society and its people make *use of land*. The value derived from land is sometimes not for individual or personal benefit per se. Value has to benefit both the individual and the collective/community when they use land. This is elaborate in a system known as *OKwazika* (mutual borrowing). Here, a person in possession of land can allow another person to make use of it but without attaching any (mandatory financial) obligations. One respondent in a FGD noted that "we have historically been having a system of *Kwazika*". A family member, a neighbor or community member (male or female) can be given land to use for a season or more when they request for it. Those who request to use land may be those without, those with land but not enough, or even those that have but what they have

can barely suit the type of crop they want to cultivate”. The system of *Kwazika*, it is argued, wasn’t just to help the person or family being given the land but also the giver and the entire community. This is because sharing is part of the social values in Buganda and such sharing goes with no obligation to share the proceeds of the harvest or to pay for it. “We inherited such from our parents and grandparents and we have happily been living in the community satisfied with no one lacking food because they had nowhere to cultivate”. But in most cases, as a mode of appreciation, those who borrow the land out of their will happily share the proceeds of the harvest without the other party necessarily asking for it. This system of *Kwazika* can be theorized as reciprocity, a mode of socio-economic organization

(including social sharing, gift giving, barter etc.) as an alternative to the market economy that focuses on monetary exchange (to be highlighted later). This reciprocal mode of organization can be understood in the context of Karl Polanyi’s formulation that

Man’s economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end. Neither the process of production nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods; but every single step in that process is geared to a number of social interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken. These interests will be very different in a small hunting or fishing community from those in a vast despotic society, but in either case the economic system will be run on noneconomic motives.

Here, we can derive how reciprocity emphasizes the social protective aspect of land. Polanyi further teaches us that

Individual’s economic interest is rarely paramount, for the community keeps all its members from starving unless it is itself borne down by catastrophe, in which case interests are again threatened collectively, not individually. The maintenance of social ties, on the other hand, is crucial. First, because by disregarding the accepted code of honor, or generosity, the individual cuts himself off from the community and becomes an outcast; second, because, in the long run, all social obligations are reciprocal, and their fulfillment serves also the individual’s give-and-take interests best. Such a situation must exert a continuous pressure on the individual to eliminate economic self-interest from his consciousness to the point of making him unable, in many cases (but by no means in all), even to comprehend the implications of his own actions in terms of such an interest.

As such, the economy, and most importantly relations on land should be entrenched in the social, economic, political and cultural network of interaction that can result into peoples’ mutual well-being through reciprocity and distribution. This can help us in rethinking the ways in which the market economy does not only dictate our behaviors but also *will* result into the “demolition of society”. Other theorizations anchored in what has been termed

‘economics of reciprocity’ have highlighted the ways in which people move beyond the self-interest—typical of the market economic relations—in ways that are reciprocal. For instance, Fehr and Gächter have argued that reciprocity encapsulates niceness and cooperation in friendly actions.<sup>1428</sup> To them, reciprocity ensures that there is a repeated interaction that is not motivated by “future material gains”. It is on this basis that Eric Sabourin argues that reciprocity is anchored in mutual trust and not give and take.<sup>1430</sup> Sabourin states that reciprocity has an economic logic that is opposed or even antagonistic to market exchange. In managing common resources, there is a specific collective binary reciprocal structure called sharing in which the emotional and ethical values create a sense of belonging and trust. Farmers and peasants who identify with notions of unity, solidarity, strength and life of the collective community or being, feel a strong sense of belonging to a collective.<sup>1432</sup> As such, the basic needs of each family and thus community are met and somewhat satisfied with this kind of arrangement. However, Sabourin is describing a situation where the system and structure of management of land on behalf of the collective determines this relationship. But for the case of Buganda, which I describe with a system of *Kwazika*, this used to happen and still happens in some places with individual and family lands without necessarily the authorities having to take part or be involved in determining the relations on land.<sup>1433</sup> Besides limiting reciprocal relations to established structures, Sabourin argues that reciprocity only works in small groups. To the contrary, Hanson has shown how historically reciprocity worked for the entire polity until land started being centralized in the seventeenth century Buganda coupled with the colonial attempts at displacing such relations. As this section shows, reciprocity has the potential to work in larger groups. The beauty with these non-market relations on land is that even the “selfish characters” have the potential to change their behaviors towards a collective good. This however does not take away the fact that the selfish can otherwise also influence the reciprocal individuals to become selfish but to emphasize the good in ensuring collective gain. This thesis moves beyond the economics of reciprocity whose analysis is anchored in the economic sphere to larger social, economic, political and cultural relations in Buganda.

The *Kwazika* system through reciprocal relations can be read to counter the overhype of the neoliberal focus on cementing exclusively individual ownership rights and the marketized and financialized relations. In this system, one would hardly think of grabbing another’s land because they can have access in times of need. Here both social and economic value are realized. Thus, mutuality and reciprocity forms the basis of relations of access and use. *Kwazika* however is getting eroded and replaced by a neoliberal market/exchange relation called *Kupangisa* (hire) where one has to pay to use the land for a specified period of time. This system of *Kupangisa* is an exchange and transactional relationship anchored in the capitalist market of exchange. This then doesn’t only propagate a sense of landlessness but also denial, starvation, theft, grabbing, alienation and resultantly conflicts. The marketization of such relations makes people detached from their community and erodes social values which would be derived from the land.

The society’s discourse also points to a rich archive of knowledge on ecology and sustainable land use including environmental sustainability. For the community, land which constitutes forests is not just a forest or merely land.

It (land) offers us fresh air and is believed to be a source of generating rains. These lands are used as grazing grounds for those who have animals. Land is a source of firewood for the community.

In the process of collecting firewood in the forests and shrubs, a lot of conversation on social and economic life used to happen. Today, the individualization of land has also resulted into the individualization of social life.

Forest land has always been very essential as it provided people with space to get air and breathing space. But today forest lands are getting extinguished. People are clearing them in the name of setting up industries and factories. This is destroying the very reason for which such land was reserved. Now every piece of land is looked at as one for commercial purposes. We no longer have land which contains trees to give us fresh air. People are no longer getting communal grazing areas; people are no longer having space for communally collecting firewood.

The above quotes demonstrate, first, that land has multiple uses and meanings, for example to some it is used as a source of firewood, to others it can be used as grazing grounds, and for yet others it is a space for society building through social (including economic and political) conversations. Secondly, the quotes make it clear that these modes of land use are more consistent with aspects of environmental conservation and coping mechanisms for dealing with the impacts of climate change. People articulated how land can be used sustainably, for example, when it is used as a source of firewood, people only collect the dead branches and stems which have fallen off the trees. A third lesson to be learned from the interviews is that they point to the gendered implications of the decontextualization of the conceptualization. These comments by community members offer a critique to the exclusive materiality attached to land and to the discourses of development promoted by the state and the neoliberal market.

Therefore, the statist and marketers conception of land is unsympathetic to these multiple and diverse meanings of land that different people attach to it in Buganda. This conception which attaches value to commodification and productivity in terms of market relations disavows and marginalizes the diversity of its meanings. Other studies beyond Uganda have also pointed to the multiplicity and fluidity of land values, uses and meanings. As highlighted above and across the thesis, it means a home, a source of identity and belonging, a family, heritage, source of livelihood, source of power among other meanings. To appreciate these diverse meanings and values is to appreciate the “role land plays in people’s understanding of themselves in the world”.

## Conclusion

Let me **conclude** this Paper by asking a question and attempting to respond: What would be the epistemological and political implication of summoning a society-based understanding of land and its relation in understanding the question which is historical and entangled in larger colonial political and agrarian structures? I argue that to think so is to imagine ways in

which society thinks, imagines, values, relates, conceptualizes and debates land and its relations. We should think of society's conceptions as not merely social framings but also as a mode of resistance to the state and market framing of the question and the attendant policy responses. It is to move beyond the statist and marketist framing of the land question to a more context-based understanding of land that takes the agency of the marginalized peasantry seriously. It is to take the choices and articulations of the society as political decisions and to appreciate society's agency. It's a call for reimagination of the economy from the vantage point of the peasant society and and to narrow the society down to the lowest level, the household. As Ossome and Dickens and Russel tell us, capitalism today survive on the intersection between the state, the market and the household as institutions. Ignoring such conceptions in understanding and resultantly responding to the land question explains its continued existence in not only Buganda but also Uganda today.

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