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Transnational land deals, agrarian change and land governance in central Uganda

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The global outbreak of the food and financial crises starting from 2008 is widely understood to have generated an exponential rise in foreign commercial interest in, and acquisitions of arable land in developing countries, particularly in Africa. The rationale for this research was in part, premised on the high level of public attention — on what came to be known as the global land-grab. The associated rise in global debates and increased public attention initially drew on anecdotal media reports concerning potentially adverse socio-political and environmental consequences. However empirical evidence and detailed knowledge about the actual characteristics, processes, and effects of transnational land deals at the local level remained scant. Some of the glaring gaps that persisted during the start of this research included questions as to whether the phenomenon was more hype than reality: Under what circumstances and in what ways did these land deals occur? What were their characteristics and how did they unfold at the local level? Who were the principle actors involved and what were their roles? Ultimately, what were the effects of these land deals? Many studies have since explored these questions from various perspectives and this book seeks to add to the growing body of knowledge on the multi-dimensional complexity of process and location-specific dynamics of transnational land deals.

Based on multisited empirical ethnographic research spanning a period of five years, this book examines historical and contemporary trajectories of socio-political relations about land in Central Uganda. It argues that transnational land deals are embedded within long-term historical processes of ethno-political social formations and post-colonial state building, contemporary patterns of decentralised (land) governance, and developmentalist processes of agrarian modernization. Using a comparative interdisciplinary study of Chinese, Norwegian, and Indian owned farms in Nakaseke District in Central Uganda, this research explores the role of contextual socio-economic factors such as conflict, poverty and vulnerability, the political economy of state-society relations and elite use of discourses of legitimation for land control, and the role of patronage in stakeholder relations that shape process of inclusion and exclusion that (re)produce unequal distribution of the outcomes of land deals at the local level.

Juxtaposed between dominant discourses depicting transnational land deals as defining a new era of increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa's hitherto neglected agriculture sector, and those that see in it the dominant power of transnational capital in the globalization of local commons through adverse incorporation and dispossession, this book presents a detailed empirical basis upon which to explore critical discourses, understand everyday practices, and question broader policy choices about the possibilities and differentiated effects of contemporary land reforms, agrarian change and rural development in Central Uganda.



Josh Maiyo studied education (BEd Arts) at Kenyatta University in Nairobi and practiced journalism in his native Kenya and later in the Netherlands before embarking on his academic career. He holds a MSc in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Amsterdam and a MPhil in African Studies from the African Studies Centre, Leiden University. While completing his PhD at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, he was a research affiliate at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), and an adjunct faculty in International relations at Webster University Leiden. His research interests lie in the intersection between the political ecology of land and agrarian change and the anthropology of development from a global perspective. He currently teaches International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam and is a research fellow at the China-Africa Research Initiative of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS-CARI), Washington, D.C.

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