

**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BUYENGO'S MAIZE:
MARKETS, EXPLOITATION, DISPOSSESSION AND COLLECTIVE
ACTION**

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**The Political Economy of Buyengo's Maize:
Markets, Exploitation, Dispossession and Collective Action**

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Abstract: The neoliberalism project is now quite widely spread and consequently small scale farmers all over the world are invariably integrated in commodity exchange. How has this deep market integration reshaped agrarian relations and formations? How have these markets altered land ownership and land use, social relations of production, and with what implications for the agrarian condition? These questions concern household level decisions around property (primarily land) ownership and use, household expenditure patterns and earnings, and therefore these issues sit at the heart of this dissertation. At the same time however, these issues are often quite personal and private and it is for this reason that I employed an ethnographic approach, in order to engage with them in more intimate ways.

I argue that the exploitation of small scale farmers via the market hinders rural accumulation and the emergence of a bourgeois class in this Ugandan rural area, and that it is this exploitation that explains the myriad of agrarian crises we see unfolding here. I argue that markets, especially “free” markets, do not always operate as mechanisms for generating equilibrium and efficiency and, quite to the contrary, are in fact sites for those that have power to leverage the market for their benefit at the

expense of those that wield comparatively less power in the market place. Hence, in this dissertation I argue that studying the market is indispensable to understanding the dynamics of the agrarian crisis unfolding in many parts of the global south today.

The community in this area were generally aware of the intense relations of exploitation in which they were presently embedded. And yet this shared consciousness of exploitation did not translate into overt community based actions meant to challenge these relationships of exploitation. This dissertation finds that possibilities for collective action are foreclosed by the extent to which these small scale farmers are integrated into contradictory class-based struggles over wages and working conditions. Second, that small scale farmers generally live a half-way house between the market and subsistence, and faced with a choice between confronting the merchants and resorting to the land, they generally choose the latter. They are guided by a choice for subsistence over risk, what (Scott 1976) has called a subsistence ethic. However, over and beyond social relations of production, small scale farmers are integrated in all kinds of patronage and kinship relations, which shape their material wellbeing in ways that mitigate the consciousness of exploitation from translating into collective action. Hence, to come to grips with the agrarian crisis and formations unfolding today one must look beyond production relations to broader questions that lie at the intersection of culture and politics.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A citizen of Uganda, Daniel Lumonya completed a bachelor's degree in social work and social administration at Makerere University in Uganda in 1992, a master's degree in social sector planning and management at the same university in 2000, and a masters in development sociology at Cornell University in 2011. He taught at Makerere University in Kampala for fourteen years and was academic director with SIT Study Abroad on its Uganda and Rwanda semester and summer programs between 2001 and 2015. Daniel also served as Academic Dean at SIT Study Abroad from August 2015. Daniel's research interests revolve around small scale farming systems and agrarian transitions, rural livelihoods analysis, and state-civil society relations. Daniel has extensive experience with NGO and government program monitoring and evaluation in Uganda and has traveled extensively in the region.

Dedicated to my parents
Aida Miriam Lumonya and Bulasio Oguli Lumonya

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A special note of thanks goes to Anirudh Krishna Professor of Public Policy at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy, and to Milissa Markiewicz at North Carolina Institute of Public Health, for the mentorship they provided me in the early years of my graduate study. I owe the initial seeds to several moments, one of which stands out for its profoundness. In the fall of 2000 I took a trip up the East Coast of the United States with my friend Dan Murphy, who then was Academic Director with

SIT Study Abroad. Dan drove me from Connecticut through New Hampshire and Massachusetts, eventually dropping me off at Marlboro College in Vermont where I was commencing my first teaching stint in the USA. The astounding wealth disparity that I observed existed between rural Uganda and the United States triggered in me a wide range of questions about the global distribution of wealth, the role of modern nation-states, global development governance, the World Bank and the IMF, etc. Unknown to Dan, this trip piqued my initial interest in international political economy, and my stint at Marlboro provided me with a strong foundation for teaching in multicultural settings.

I arrived at Cornell University in the fall of 2007 with several unresolved questions lingering in my mind. While I took immense pride in being enrolled at one of USA's top institutions of higher learning, it is the theoretical foundation provided to me by Cornell's Development Sociology department that equipped me with the tools with which to engage these questions in systematic ways. Classes with Professors, Max Pffefer, Fouad Makki, Shelly Feldman and Philip McMichael provided the tools with which I could make sense of the critical social issues presently facing our world, and for asking pertinent social research questions. Just as I couldn't have asked for a better lineup of classes and teachers, I couldn't have asked for a more pleasant and intellectually stimulating student cohort. Jum Warritay, Ian Bailey and I took this intellectual journey together, supporting each other and sharing love and

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During the later phase of dissertation writing I joined the Senior Management Team at SIT Study Abroad in Brattleboro, Vermont and I couldn't have asked for a team of more supportive colleagues. Priscilla Stone, the Vice Provost, was steadfast in urging me on and in expressing a willingness to allow me free time to make progress on my dissertation. Later, Sophie Howlett, President and Chief Academic Officer at SIT, continued to provide encouragement and advice. The inspiration and support from my colleagues in the Academic Dean team at SIT Study Abroad, Aynn Setright, Brian Hammer, Said Graiouid, David Shallenberger and later Katy De La Garza have been just as indispensable to this journey.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Small farmers all over the world now encounter pressures in ways quite unprecedented. In both the global north and south the power of small scale farmers in global markets has been undermined as multinational agribusiness companies have set new production standards (Appleby et al. 2003). And yet neo-liberal policies of deregulation render small farmers in the global south progressively dependent upon markets for commodities, credit, technology, land, and services of all kinds. Banks and agricultural extension agencies that are increasingly integrated with multinational companies control global trade and farm input supply chains (Edelman 2005). As peasants in the global south increasingly employ modern technology manufactured by western multinational companies, their dependence on cash income deepens and their vulnerability to shocks beyond their immediate environment intensifies.

The integration of small African peasants into global production relations is hardly a new phenomenon, but the intensity of this integration has shifted over the last 400 years. Africa's peasants contributed slave labor to Western economies as early as the 16th century and by the mid-1900s European slave traders had expropriated over thirteen million Africans to work on plantations and mines in the Americas and the Caribbean (Thomas 1997). The wave of colonization in the second half of the 19th century triggered a shift from use of slave labor in the Americas to expropriation of peasant lands for plantation agriculture, contract farming and forced labor to grow

crops such as tea, sugar, tobacco, sisal, coffee, etc. for export to the metropole. This form of colonial extraction would last one hundred years during which colonial law imposed a sharp dichotomy between export crops and food crops (Geske & Van Donge 2001). A disintegration of this dichotomy in the last thirty five years signifies the extent to which Africa's small farmers have become, in quite mundane ways, deeply embedded in global commodity markets. Now Africa's small scale farmers "willingly" sell a full range of their crops to global commodity circuits, encountering markets that are highly integrated with multinational companies, under terms and conditions that are often not of their own choosing.

I conducted field work for this dissertation in Uganda, a suitable setting in which to study micro-level dynamics that have followed the contemporary integration of small farmers into global commodity markets. While the integration of Uganda's small farmers into global commodity markets is nothing new, its contemporary uniqueness is in large part a legacy of economic liberalization policies of the late 1980s¹. This radical shift was shaped by a neoliberal ideology of free markets in which the Government of Uganda, with World Bank/IMF support, set up policies that eliminated the state from, and encouraged private businesses to enter the agricultural input supply, purchase and export of farmer's produce (Geske & Van Donge 2001). Grants and loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank, and other bilateral agencies

¹ Together with Ghana, Uganda implemented some of the most far reaching economic liberalization and political reforms in sub-Saharan Africa (Delpeuch & Leblois 2013).

such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) financed a national private sector foundation and its network of regional offices, through which many upstart private enterprises were funded.

Uganda's small agricultural producers have become deeply integrated into market exchange as a result of these economic liberalization policies. Manufactured goods dominate new rural consumption cultures, and commodity markets of various kinds have set a firm foothold in many parts of rural Uganda. Shops in various local centers supply imported household goods such as salt, sugar, utensils, cooking oils, soaps, lotions, ropes, and twine and such. Wealthier households may own electrical gadgets such as radios, cellphones, and small to midsize solar systems with which to power these items. Their health centers charge official and/or unofficial fees, regardless of whether they are government, NGO or private run. Communities are often driven to private clinics and drug shops, given short supply in government healthcare centers. Insufficient funding to public education has instigated a shift to private schools across rural and urban landscapes and parents must dig deep if their children should receive a comparatively better education, even as public school pupils are charged fees of various kinds for school uniforms, books, school meals and construction.

Cooperative unions that supplied agricultural inputs and extension services to Ugandan farmers, purchased and exported their cash crops were disbanded and the Government of Uganda set in motion policies to support private companies to take on

their input supply and export market functions (Bakunda 2008). The same thing has happened to agricultural extension, which is now largely commercialized. Agricultural input supply is now provided by private agro-enterprises in the market place. Often, government extension workers attend only to those farmers that reimburse their transport costs and veterinary assistants only attend to farmers that are able to pay for those services. In a fundamental departure from the era in which Cooperative Unions supplied free farm inputs, farmers now obtain these inputs exclusively from private for-profit retailers. By and large rural farmers now obtain most of their subsistence needs via the market and much of their circuits of subsistence reproduction are highly monetized. In looking at much of rural Uganda, one gets the impression that in many ways these structural adjustment programs have achieved their aim: commodity markets are widespread and market transactions have deepened in quite unprecedented ways. Cash is now more than ever indispensable to farmer's production and reproduction endeavors.

Drawing on ethnographic data in Buyengo, a parish comprising of six rural villages in eastern Uganda, this dissertation investigates the social dynamics unleashed by this contemporary integration of small scale rural farmers in market exchange, and the impacts of this integration on agrarian formations. The dissertation explores the new processes of exploitation and dispossession that have arisen in Buyengo as these new markets have become more widespread. What role have markets come to play in engendering new process of exploitation and dispossession? How is this new local

political economy transforming agrarian relations and with what implications for local labor relations and farming generally?

Organization of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows. The next section of this chapter reviews the contemporary literatures regarding agrarian political economy. I draw on key salient work in agrarian political economy to explore the gaps in the literature, to which I seek to contribute. The contemporary neo-liberal market is my object of study. Accordingly a section follows in this first chapter of the dissertation in which I make an epistemological and a methodological justification for making the market my object of study. I make the case for studying power relations in the market place, over and above forces of demand and supply which is where conventional studies of the market place their attention.

Chapter two explores the social character and economic dynamics of Buyengo village, the area of my study, and outlines the methods through which I gathered my data. Ethnography is the general approach to my data collection. Chapter two accordingly discusses the specific choices and process through which I conducted participant observation, group and key information interviews and surveys. The chapter also reviews the approach that I employed for note taking, data management and enhancing reliability. The chapter ends with a section on research ethics and reciprocity.

Chapter three then follows, in which I examine the political, social, and economic conditions that have instigated the specific form of the market that we see operating in much of rural Uganda. The chapter draws on secondary sources and empirical data in both Uganda and in the study site, Buyengo, to illustrate that the peculiar formations of this market are to be found in the ways in which the dynamics unleashed by World Bank/IMF economic liberalization programs found expression in the particular social, political and economic conditions present in Uganda at that time. It is in this way that the chapter aims to explore the broader context that instigated the specific forms of the contemporary market operating in rural Uganda.

Chapter four draws on empirical data in my study site, a rural village in Eastern Uganda. Based on participant and non-participant observation, key informant and structured and unstructured interviews, this chapter explores the political economy of the maize market in the study area: the redistribution of value across the maize commodity chain, how and why it occurs, how exploitation occurs and who is dispossessed, and how these new forms of exploitation and dispossession are transforming agrarian formations and relations and the character of farming in this study area.

Chapter five explores the social and political dynamics that preempt and prevent small farmers from engaging in overt actions that should transform the relations of exploitation in which they are presently embedded. While chapter three analyzes how Uganda's larger social and political dynamics have enabled market actors to engage

unhindered in dubious practices, chapter five analyzes the conditions internal to Buyengo which preclude the rise of collective action that should transform relations of exploitation in which rural producers are deeply embedded.

Studies on the political economy of agrarian inequality

Contemporary studies analyzing agrarian transitions are well represented in political economy of agrarian change literature for example, Cousins, (2013), Scoones et al., (2012), Oya (2007). These studies have generally, in different ways, demonstrated that a class of rural capitalists and a corresponding class of rural proletarians was present or was emerging as capitalist relations of production have penetrated social relations of production in rural agrarian society. The central argument of these studies has been that peasant societies are neither undifferentiated nor static, and that rural peasant societies are constantly in flux and in motion as capitalist social relations of production emerge in various aspects of rural life. Implicitly, these studies are the antithesis of mainstream modernist literatures that paint a picture of homogenous peasant society and, essentially, illustrate the march towards a fully capitalist society.

The central questions in agrarian studies have largely been concerned with who among rural farmers was accumulating capital and becoming petit bourgeois and who was dispossessed and becoming proletarian, and how these processes were transforming ownership and control of the means of production. For example Cousins (2013) explored distinctive differences in the ownership and control of the means of production—land, tools, technology, occupation—among proletarians and agricultural

capitalists in rural South Africa to pay claim to the evolution of capitalist relations of production. Similarly, Oya (2007) draws on unequal patterns of land distribution and income, and uneven concentration of commercial assets to make the point that a distinguishable class of rural capitalists is emerging in rural Senegal. Scoones et al. (2012) have also shown that an emerging class of rural capitalist were accumulating a surplus as they invested in new and better forms of production following the land redistribution programs in Zimbabwe.

However, these studies have generally taken for granted the notion that rural capitalist social relations of production gradually appear as households accumulating wealth become capitalist and, that those that are dispossessed inevitably sell their labor to those that accumulate capital. In other words, rural labor markets are considered to be an inevitable outcome of the twin processes of accumulation and dispossession. However, how and why some peasants become capitalist and others become proletarians and the historically specific circumstances and spatially distinctive trends that drive these processes of social differentiation remain largely un-researched and unknown. The specific pathways through which processes of accumulation and dispossession travel have hardly been well studied.

As Wright (2005) points out, this approach to explaining agrarian transformation explains rural inequality by demonstrating unequal ownership of the means of production and yet unequal ownership of the means of production does not in itself say much about how these productive assets are acquired and used. It does not help

our understanding of the *concrete* processes that produce rural capitalists and proletariats. As Wright notes, it could be that the distribution of productive assets has relatively little to do with economic exchange: a welfare state could provide an income that sustains a standard of living, in which case what people own would have relatively little to do with the relations of production in which they are embedded (Wright, 2005). In sum, the specific process and means through which this appropriation occurs, and the conditions that enable them, requires systematic explanation.

This dissertation investigates the concrete processes that are instigating class formation in this historically specific moment in which rural peasants are generally integrated in market exchange. To explore these concrete processes, I shift the lens of observation from the characteristics of emerging classes—the property that they own and how they use it—towards the material relations between the different rural actors and how those relations are mediated through the commodities that they produce and exchange. I do this so that I analyze the actual processes via which, simultaneously, proto-capitalists accumulate capital and the actual processes via which rural proletarians are dispossessed of their means of production, the drivers of these actual processes and why these particular dynamics are peculiar to this contemporary moment of deep market integration.

What would it mean to focus a research endeavor upon drivers of class differentiation as opposed to its consequence (e.g. a distinctive class structure)? It would mean that we ask: Why and how do some households accumulate capital as,

simultaneously, other households are dispossessed of capital? What are the specific mechanisms that drive unequal access and control of the means of production within the same class of peasants, pursuing their social reproduction within the same ecological conditions? This requires that we shift that which we observe (i.e. the character of emerging classes—the capital that they own—tools, land, income and whether they sell their labor or hire labor, as has been the case with most studies of agrarian change), to the concrete mechanisms via which capital is transferred from some producers to other producers, thereby concentrating wealth in some producers and dispossessing others. It means that we elaborate these processes of accumulation and dispossession as ongoing and dynamic and that we shift our lens from a functional class structure to the relations of exchange, exploitation, accumulation, dispossession, etc., between different classes of rural agricultural producers.

In exploring these processes, I aim to illuminate the particular dynamics of accumulation and dispossession operating in agrarian contexts where liberalized markets have become pervasive, such as in Buyengo, and the concrete mechanisms through which social differentiation is produced in this particular moment. Rather than becoming an end, I make differentiation (accumulation and dispossession) the actual processes that I investigate—differentiation becomes my object of observation. This entails that I critically examine the qualitative and quantitative processes of market exchange operating in this location and how the wider social relations in which households are embedded mediate this exchange and its uneven social implications.

Observing the relationships between small scale farmers and market actors (merchants and retailers) is particularly central to my attempts to assess the consequences on agrarian formations of the ubiquitous presence of various market actors in circuits of rural social reproduction. It is crucial to my attempts to explore how the actions of various market actors affect small scale rural farmers and how the responses of these small scale farmers in turn affect productivity and agrarian formations generally. Observing the relationships between small scale farmers and these market actors is crucial for understanding how small rural farmers perceive the relationships of market exchange in which they are presently embedded, how this shapes their farming choices and how, ultimately, their farming choices transform agrarian relations and formations.

In addition, exploring the narratives of small rural producers about the market driven conditions in which they presently produce enables me to re-interpret how this integration in “free” markets shapes the choices of these rural producers and how their choices, which modernist perspectives often regard as laziness, may be seen as reasonable given present circumstances. For example, it enables me to reinterpret the desire by some rural small farmers to exit farming all together and engage in speculative (and many other such unproductive) ventures. It enables me to illuminate the particular process and conditions triggered by “free” market integration and how accumulation and dispossession that it has produced is vastly different from the accumulation and dispossession typical of the preceding state dominated model.

Just as key studies in agrarian change have done, I take accumulation and dispossession as concrete ongoing dynamic processes that transfer capital of various kinds (financial and material) between and within various classes in the agricultural commodity chain. However, to investigate the specific mechanisms through which some producers accumulate and others are dispossessed of the means of production, I will make exploitation—the transfer of capital—the central focus of my analysis, rather than the character of emerging agrarian classes. I take from Marx and presume that a merchant is bound to a producer not simply by their antithetical class positions but also by commodity exchange in which is embodied producer's labor power. This demands that I make exploitation the central aspect of analysis, situating it within the specific context of commodity exchange.

Modernists tend to employ access to essential infrastructure, such as health care, education and roads, to explain inequities in household income. And yet household income itself determines whether or not households will access these goods and services. These explanations are insufficient because income inequities are known to exist among households that live within the same geographical area, with similar proximity to this social infrastructure. Political economy literature has tended to draw attention to this inequality but it attributes this inequality to unequal access and control of the means of production, and yet unequal access and control of the means of production itself requires explanation—it is not an original condition. Understanding the processes and the relationships that explain social differentiation has profound

implications for the policies and programs meant to reduce poverty. Policy makers could design effective poverty reduction policies and programs that target the processes and relationships that drive inequality if they worked with data that concretely explains social differentiation and the processes that drive it.

Within the literature on agrarian change, Mamdani (2008) is exemplary in how he illuminates the concrete processes through which the dispossession of small rural agrarians occurs. Mamdani's contribution is framed around two key points of departure. First, that analyses of agrarian relations have largely ignored production relations *within* peasant agriculture and second, that the bulk of African peasants are generally not embedded in feudal type tenant-landlord relations, as is the case in Latin America for example. Drawing on empirical data from two Ugandan villages, Mamdani analyzes the myriad of processes through which rich peasants accumulate capital and poor peasants are dispossessed. These include labor sharing practices, access to state power by rich peasants through which they mobilize productive capital; renting out farm implements, forced labor and forced material contributions to the church, the local chief and so on, (compounded by historical inequities in control and access to landed capital and the state), and accumulation and dispossession instigated by economic distress.

Mamdani's analysis makes two contributions, one theoretical and the other methodological, both which inform the approach I take in this dissertation. Mamdani draws our attention to the non-economic, non-market based means via which rural producers are dispossessed; specifically, politics, local cultural practices and unequal

access to state power. Mamdani describes how, through these processes, accumulation and dispossession occurs with varying levels of intensity among different social classes in two Ugandan villages. The largely ethnographic, mixed method approach of Mamdani's inquiry constitutes his main methodological contribution, and similarly, this dissertation draws on surveys, interviews and observations that are based on an ethnographic approach to explore how actions and relationships between merchants and small scale rural producers ultimately affect agrarian relations and formations. Like Mamdani, the largely ethnographic approach that I adopt in this dissertation allows me to explore how intimate social relations of production (hardly discernable to the casual observer through rapid appraisal methods) affect agrarian relations and formations.

However, in a slight departure from Mamdani's conceptual procedure, I do not separate non-market and market based processes and transactions or economic and non-economic sphere. Instead, I make the market itself the focus of my analysis and follow the redistribution of capital in the chain of commodity exchange to explore the concrete mechanisms through which redistribution of capital occurs via the twin process of accumulation and dispossession. I place attention upon the transactions that occur within the market (i.e. coercive processes that are internal to the market, which instigate accumulation and dispossession in rural Uganda) and their material, re-distributional effects. I explore the dubious practices and unscrupulous behavior that occur, not in spite of the market, but because of how contemporary markets have been constituted—how the notion of the “free” market—an unregulated space operating in a social

context comprised of highly unequal power relations—has become the main driver of peasant dispossession in contemporary Uganda. Accordingly, this dissertation unveils these concrete, market based processes through which exploitation occurs, ultimately leading to social differentiation.

What would this mean, practically, for my attempts to study the market? It would mean that I explore accumulation and dispossession processes that operate *within* the market place. By exploring accumulation and dispossession processes within the market place, I transcend the framing in classical economy theory that reproduces an epistemological separation between markets and society or one that holds markets in opposition to society, and constructs a binary between markets and society. In effect I study the society (power relations, actions of market actors and responses by small scale farmers) within the market place and their ultimate effects on agrarian relations and formations.

In taking the market as a concrete object of study I aim to make the following key theoretical claims. First, dispossession of rural small scale farmers in contemporary Uganda has intensified via transactions in the market place because merchants wield comparatively greater power, and engage in dubious practices that dispossess these small scale rural producers. Second, markets are essentially political constructs and, by and large, regarding them as “free” is what has enabled the very social conditions through which market actors engage in dubious practices that dispossess peasants of their productive capital. In sum, I aim to blur the separation that scholars often draw

between market-based and non-market based spheres. I take the view that markets are deeply embedded in power relations; that power relations shape the character of market transactions and; that power relations redistribute value as a consequence of which distinctive classes of agrarian capitalists and agrarian labor are formed.

Making the market my object of study

The market is studied every day, by economists and various other market analysts. But they tend to separate the state and the market. Hence we hear about state-led development versus market-led development; non-market based versus market based development. Scholars and policy makers alike conceive state-led interventions as the antithesis of the “free” market. Markets, they will argue, work best when they are left free to allocate and reallocate resources via the invisible forces of demand and supply. This epistemological binary, between the state and the market, creates a scholarship that employs demand and supply variables to study the “free” market, because it is assumed that the “free” market is protected from state intervention and it is free of power relations. Thus the focus of those who study the “free” market in this way has been on the forces of demand and supply, which I will call proximate elements of the market, rather than upon the behavior of, and power that people wield in the market place. Scholars that study the market in this way place attention upon supply and demand, or the quantity of goods in the market relative to needs, and how these variables affect commodity prices. They have not drawn attention upon the power relations that shape the dynamics in the market place.

This epistemological separation of the state and the market reinforces the notion that markets are unfree when the state fixes prices and are free when markets are left to their own devices—supply and demand. The “free” market becomes an abstract space, driven only by demand and supply, rather than by social and political processes. Hence commodity prices in a “free” market can only be fixed if they are fixed by the state and commodity prices are genuine when they are fixed by forces of demand and supply. The market arena becomes an arena comprised of atomized actors, unknown to one another, competing simply on the basis of the prices of commodities that they find in the “free” market place. The fundamental premise of this approach is that commodity prices in a “free” market cannot be fixed by market actors themselves, in any ways other than by the forces of demand and supply. Thus, this logic reproduces the notion that the market is a “free” space, in which the state can be inserted or removed—one in which power relations, history and agency are absent. It reproduces an epistemology that sets the state in opposition to the market. Ultimately, this premise separates the market from society and draws a line between the economic and the political spheres. It strips the market of all social and political content.

The language that both classical economists and Marxists employ to describe the market also demonstrates how markets are reified in academic discourse. Classical economists commonly employ the phrase ‘*market forces*’ and Marxists generally employ the phrase ‘*the dull compulsion of the market*’. Central to classical economics is the idea that a market has some sort of *force* and to Marxists that the market has a sort of *dull*

compulsion. Both imbue the market with some form of invisible, abstract forces, and that it is these forces that compel market actors to make their choices in the market place². What do classical economists mean by “*market forces*” and what do Marxists mean by “*the dull compulsion of the market*”? For the classical economists, these market forces operate through a price mechanism. Those who produce efficiently inevitably sell at a price that is lower than the price that inefficient producers are willing to accept. The result, according to the classical economists, is that more efficient producers, taking this lower price, drive less efficient producers out of business and ultimately resources are used more efficiently by these more efficient producers. Similarly, commodity prices, determined only by forces of demand and supply, is what drives people’s choices. Given two choices of the same commodity, consumers will naturally buy the cheaper of the two, and with time producers with more expensive goods will be forced to abandon this line of business given that their commodities sell less relative to the goods that are priced lower.

While they are less clear about what they mean by *the dull compulsion of the market*, Marxists do not seem to be too far from the premises of classical economists. As with classical economists, Marxists seem to regard the market as existing in its own right, working within its own logic, as it compels actors to make rational choices. Along the same lines, Marxists also conceive of the market as if it is a phenomenon that operates

² See for example Wood, E. M. (2002a). *The origin of capitalism: A longer view*. London: Verso.

in some terrestrial space. Thus while for them the market is comprehensible, it becomes abstract. Questions of agency are silenced by the terms within which both classical economists and Marxists conceive of the market. The main premise of this project is different. Taking from the literature on the sociology of markets (Granovetter 1985; Fligstein 1996), this project assumes that people do not simply ‘access markets’. Rather, when people go to markets, they encounter real people who, and real institutions which, function within particular social, political and economic contexts. In sum, my premise is that the market is a space in which people insert their agency, and power.

I make the market my object of study in this dissertation. My aim, primarily, is to restore the history and agency that is embedded within the market place and how this history and agency shapes opportunities for some at the expense of others. I proceed on the premise that how the market functions, its resource allocation function and its material impacts, are a consequence of the power relations that people bring to the market place. People find other people in the market place, who all have preconceived notions, hopes and expectations that have been shaped by their history and by their lived experiences and, of critical importance, power. Rural producers may come to the market powerless due to their distress, indebtedness, having no savings, etc., while merchants may come to the market place with powerful political, social and economic capital—savings, storage facilities, connections to enforcement agencies—that they may leverage to their benefit. Therefore, to apprehend the market one must grasp the real actions of people (producers, vendors, retailers, merchants, etc.) and the

political, social and economic environment in which their actions are enabled. Only by attending to the real actions of people and the context that shapes those actions, can one analyze the actions of market actors and their effect on social differentiation and class formation.

As my starting point in studying the market, I make the actions of real people—the power that they possess, their social capital, land and other forms of capital that they bring to the market place—my independent variable, and agricultural commodity prices, income redistribution, agrarian labor relations, changing land use and changing meanings of land ownership my dependent variables. I explore the impact of the market—actions of market actors and the power that they wield—on capital accumulation, labor market dynamics, land use and meanings of land ownership. That commodity markets are now highly pervasive in my study area makes the choice to study markets fairly simple. The question that I seek to ask then is: How has the behavior of market actors transformed income distribution, labor dynamics (employment, entry and exit in the farming system), meanings of land ownership and land use?

But even as my attention is placed on how the market transforms labor dynamics, meanings of land ownership and how land is used, I constantly situate the changing relations towards and meanings of land ownership and the choices that land buyers and sellers make, within the historical, social and political context in which they occur. Accordingly, I will constantly seek to explore how free market policies, which originated

outside the geographical boundaries of Buyengo, have shaped social conditions in Buyengo, and how in turn Buyengo's residents have responded to these policies, and the sort of agrarian relations and formations that have emerged as a result. Primarily, I seek to examine how liberal economic policies influenced the choices that Buyengo's farmers make. Doing this allows me to assess, critically, the relationships that liberal economists anticipate should occur between and labor, land use and productivity when commodity markets are liberalized. In sum, I aim to ask: Do free markets naturally and inevitably reallocate resources (e.g. land) from less to more productive users? Do free markets lead to improvements in the productivity of small farmers? If they do not, as has been shown to be the case elsewhere, what are the unique circumstances that upset the relationship between markets and productivity?

Chapter Two: Collecting and Making Sense of Field Notes

Introduction:

The primary focus of this dissertation is the dynamics of accumulation and dispossession that operate within Buyengo's maize economy, particularly how the new and emerging market in maize redistributes capital among the different groups of economic actors, how the small farmers have responded to these agrarian conditions and how those responses are in turn influencing farming in Buyengo. This chapter, presented in four distinct sections, elaborates my research approach and methods of data collection. The first section of the chapter describes the study area and study population of the dissertation. The second section deals with my research approach, largely ethnographic, within which I have employed a variety of research methods—in-depth key informant interviews, individual and group interviews, participant observation and a survey. This section also elaborates the ways in which my ethnographic approach shaped my engagement with the field site and respondents. The third section discusses note taking and qualitative data management and analysis strategies, including how I addressed issues concerning reliability of my data. The final section deals with ethical questions, including reciprocity.

Study Area and Study Population

The residents of this parish and the wider community of the district generally refer to this area as Buyengo. Within the formal administrative structure of Busia

district, Buyengo is a parish. Uganda's system of local government designates the village as the smallest administrative unit. Typically four to eight villages make up a parish, eight to ten parishes make up a sub-county and eight to twelve sub-counties make a district³. Buyengo has eight villages, each with a local council executive committee of elected leaders providing oversight. According to the data I obtained from these local council representatives each village has a population ranging from 400 to 600 persons and roughly 60 to 90 households per village. With 450 to 680 households we can infer, and I verified this through several key informant interviews, that Buyengo has an average household size of six or seven.

This community is largely agrarian in character, as is the case in much of rural Uganda. Land sizes generally vary, with some farmers owning up to five acres of land and small poor farmers owning land as small as quarter an acre. As such all farming in Buyengo is small scale in character. All farmers in this area employ handheld tools such as hoes, machetes and slashers. While not uncommon, the use of ox-plows is generally an exception and no mechanized farming, tractors or such, are used. I learnt from the local councilors and other key informants that the typical middle level household owns and farms two acres of land. I also conducted several transect walks through which I visually estimated that two acres to be the size of land owned by the typical household in Buyengo. Village leaders also report, and I confirmed through village transects, that

³ As of 2013 Uganda had 114 districts.

this largely agrarian village survives on a wide range of crops: maize, beans, sweet potatoes, groundnuts, various leafy vegetables and fruit trees. I learnt that maize has replaced cotton and coffee as the main source of household subsistence cash.

With various key informants, I inquired repeatedly about the demographics and economic characteristics of a typical household in Buyengo. Most frequently, I was told that such a household is mostly monogamous with a household size of six—two adults and four children. Such a typical household might be classified as middle level in this context—they own land sufficient to produce a surplus for the market and they rely on both labor and land for subsistence. Such a household is not likely to own any cows and may own a few goats and a few chicken because two acres of land is not sufficiently large to support both crop farming and more than a few animals. They are also middle aged, thirty to forty five years of age, and their children, teens or younger, are likely in primary and/or secondary school. Given the size and consumption needs of such a household, cash income is essential to support subsistence needs and production of a surplus for the market is therefore critical to this household. They primarily rely on maize farming for this cash.

As is the case with most agrarian societies, ownership and control of the means of production in Buyengo is uneven. Larger farmers own larger pieces of land and other productive capital and are most likely to produce a surplus for the market. Middle size famers occupy the next strata, and they may own less productive capital, often relying on both crops from the land and sale of their labor for subsistence. This dissertation is

based on the political economy of a typical middle size household in Buyengo. However, while this middle size household is hypothetical, it represents the typical farmer in Buyengo and the type of exchange relations in which all farming households are engaged. This is because upper and lower income farmers, given that they are just as small scale in character, generally encounter the same conditions in the market place that middle income farmers encounter. They also generally sell their farm produce to the same merchants, find the same prices in the market place and purchase farm inputs from the same farm input retailers. Larger farmers however, having more savings or capital with which to finance their household consumption as we shall see, may have more control over the period in the farming cycle in which they sell their maize.

Buyengo society is largely patriarchal, and as is the case in many patriarchal cultures household economic decisions are typically made by men. Hence these men, rather than women, were my primary informants. Relative to women these men will generally have a more in-depth understanding of how much labor time and money they spent on the various aspects of the maize production cycle from land preparation to harvesting, the prices that they obtained on the market for their maize grain and household level expenditure patterns.

My unit of observation is, primarily, the household. I gathered data on the household level political economy: household level ownership and control of the means of production, particularly land, farming choices, land use, productivity and income, household level consumption and spending patterns. I also obtained household level

data on the cost of household subsistence-typically the food items and other basic essential items that a typical average household would require on a daily and a monthly basis. As such my focus was not on the intra-household division and distribution of the products of labor, which as many studies show, is skewed against women. As I have noted, men are the main source of this data, given that they generally control household spending. I triangulated from multiple sources: key informants, focus group discussions, group and individual interviews and a household survey.

Ethnography

Household level ownership and control of the means of production, consumption and spending patterns can be highly personal, private and sensitive, and great variations in social circumstances render essential that I employ an ethnographic approach to my data collection. As Emerson et al. (1995) note, ethnographers are committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people. Accordingly, I sought to see things from the inside and how Buyengo's residents lived, how they carried out their daily farming routine, and what they found meaningful about farming.

In keeping with the ethnographic approach, my data collection was largely based on participant observation, informal conversations, attending meetings with membership organizations, several unplanned and planned group discussions and several key informant interviews with village leaders, local council leaders, and district officials. The spontaneity, informal and casual nature of the conversations often allowed

my interviews to develop naturally within my subject's usual social environment, enabling me to probe these personal stories in depth. I chose a purposive research design as it was not my goal that my data was representative of all farmers in Buyengo. My goal was to construct a scenario that was applicable to a typical household in Buyengo—one with typical household characteristics: two acres of farmland, four to six children and two adults; a husband and a wife.

I lived in Buyengo between August 2011 and July 2013 largely as a participant observer. Accordingly, my identity as a researcher often became blurred. Village residents often simply regarded me as a member of their community, engaging in the same livelihood struggles as their own. I reared goats, hired labor for my goat farm, negotiated wages, and sought after agricultural extension expert help in the same ways that Buyengo's residents did. Much of my data collection relied on informal, casual conversations. I would for example sit down over an evening beer and speak to local people about a broad range of issues, from farming to education, politics, rainfall patterns, marriage, etc. This informality allowed me to get under the radar in ways that enabled me to enter the lived experiences of local rural farmers.

My parents are from Buyengo and they own a home there, which I visited frequently both as a child and as a young adult. While I was not raised Buyengo, I was, in effect from there. This was my ancestral home and everyone, every single member of the community felt a sense of some ownership to my achieved privilege. After all, they and their forefathers before them had been a part of my father's and my

grandfather's lives. They had perhaps also wished my success and said a prayer every Sunday to my success as a member of their community. This often drew me into a complex web of social relations in which I was very much an integral part. Every once in a while there was the expectation to fulfill my obligations arising from my privileged position in this community. It is within this context, for example that I was expected and in fact required to help with various community projects (e.g. when a local community member's daughter was taken ill). It is also within this context that I was frequently requested to make material contributions to church projects, funeral expenses, school fees and so on and so forth.

One could argue that this complex web of relationships biased my data. In fact, when I revealed this to one of my colleagues, he expressed concern about the potential for this bias to undermine the validity of my data. Couldn't my identity and my position as a member of this community contaminate my data? This attitude it seems to me stems from the positivist notion that researchers should be detached from their research subjects; that the further one is removed from their data the higher the likelihood that the data will be free of bias. Hence, it is argued, a researcher whose identity is unknown to the research subjects, and who is known simply as one who comes in to collect data is more likely to gather authentic data (Aunger 1995).

But this assumption ignores the fact that whatever research design—ethnographic or positivist—elicits responses from research subjects that are inevitably affected by situational factors such as the assumptions that research subjects hold about

researchers, their identity and intentions (Aunger 1995). As Rhoads (1991: 118) notes, no phenomenon emerges in the context of a social interaction that cannot be reduced to the characteristics of the individuals who partook in that interaction. Aunger (1995: 100) has also argued that responses to questions can be modeled as the result of a wide variety of factors, ranging from informants' private beliefs to their strategic decision making about whether to reveal their "true" opinions, miscommunicated meanings, and more spurious influences such as distracting events in the vicinity of the interview.

I arrived into the village from Kampala (or from the USA to those that knew me more closely), and my subjects did make assumptions about my intentions and this inevitably influenced what they would or would not, say to me. My manner of dress, often in nicer clothes, the ethnicity that the various people ascribed to my physical appearance, manner of speech and accents were all interpreted differently by my research subjects and inevitably led to different interpretations of my intentions. Moreover people are not unsuspecting and unassuming individuals who simply act only upon the cues and pieces of information that the researcher reveals. Buyengo's residents were privy to previous information regarding my wider extended and nuclear family. Networks of communication within the village also quickly spread the word, and this word was quickly interpreted and reinterpreted based on people's own historical experience and the expectations they had of me. I sensed, for example, that some people's responses to my presence may have been influenced by the prior behavior of my extended or nuclear family.

A positivist perspective will question the objectivity, reliability and validity of my data (Bergman and Coxon 2005). The assumption is that positivist research produces relatively more reliable and valid data. And yet research subjects will inevitably make assumptions about any researcher, based on their experience with prior researchers or the expectations that they have of researchers more broadly. For example, it is quite conceivable that subjects may relate to the positivist researcher with expectations of tangible development projects, if previous research projects in which they participated yielded a development project. If on the other hand, research subjects participated in research projects with neither tangible benefits nor feedback nor improvement in their living conditions, they might express disinterest in the researcher's project. In keeping with the ethnographic tradition, I do not lay claim to objectivity (Adler & Adler 2008). However, my choice of an ethnographic approach was influenced by the intimately complex nature of the subject matter I engaged, as much as it was by my skepticism about the positivist claims to objectivity and the idea that research activity can or should be conducted in a bias free manner.

Quite the contrary I strive to draw upon this very bias, my closeness to the research subjects, to gather in-depth personal stories in ways that a positivist survey approach might not obtain. As Emerson and Shaw (1995; 167) note, "the ethnographer's assumptions, interests, and theoretical commitments enter into every phase of writing an ethnography...the process is thus one of reflexive or dialectical

interplay between theory and data whereby theory enters in at every point, shaping not only analysis but how social events come to be perceived and written up as data in the first place.” As Aunger (1995) notes, an ethnographic approach enables a researcher to weave various situational factors in the research process in ways that account for the influence of context in shaping the meanings that subjects attribute to their situation and the understanding of the choices that they make.

My ethnographic stance served to blur my researcher identity, and instead allowed me to blend in as an integral member of Buyengo’s community. Participant observer stance, a key attribute of ethnography, enabled me to access those intimate spaces and personal lives of Buyengo’s residents in ways that enabled me to acknowledge and accommodate the influence of my identity on research subjects. Participant observation enabled me to be both an outsider and an insider. While I was the product of a privileged schooling, way beyond the imagination and comprehension of many of the research subjects, I was in other ways an insider given that I spoke the same language, and lived and farmed with them, in the same ways that any local Buyengo resident would.

Participant observation

Participant observation is, primarily, a stance that the researcher takes towards both their field site and their research subjects. It constitutes, essentially, a relationship that the researcher constructs, deliberately, with their field site and their research

subjects (Whyte 1976). A participant observer takes on the roles of and lives among the research subjects (Schensul, Schensul, & Lecompte 1999; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Bernard (1994) notes that a participant observer establishes rapport with the members of the community, learning to act in such a way that members of the community will act naturally in their presence. Goffman (1989: 125) insists that field research involves "subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their social situation. Thus participant observation enables the researcher to engage on a level playing field with research subjects, further alleviating the ways in which unequal power dynamics shape subject's responses to questions in group or individual interview settings.

For my participant observation I chose to implement an agricultural project, defined around the parameters set by the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), a Government of Uganda program. The program, intended to assist farmers to produce a surplus for the market, was at its peak during the period that I collected my data. Primarily, the project aimed to do this by increasing farmers' access to information, knowledge and technology for profitable agricultural production. Given their limited land size, most Buyengo's farmers tended to raise goats as opposed to cows, and accordingly NAADS had prioritized distribution of more productive South African Boer goats ostensibly because they would mate with local goats and produce more productive offspring—with the idea being that the improved offspring would

mature faster, produce more meat, thereby fetching a higher price to the farmer on the market. I purchased several local goats, and following the advice from the district NAADS extension workers, I built a shed, fenced off land and then purchased the NAADS Boer goat. Through this project I became one of Buyengo's farmers all striving in different ways for better returns on their farm activities.

Like Buyengo's farmers, I also sought assistance from NAADS extension workers and through this I established connections with neighbors, and other interested farmers. For example, I visited another farmer that had been successful at raising these goats to learn some tips from them. I was often notified of local training sessions and attended a couple of NAADS sponsored workshops, often also receiving as much extension advice from NAADS experts as I did from more experienced farmers in Buyengo. I generally dealt with the same joys and pains that most farmers faced, and through these shared experiences I was able to engage in many personal and intimate conversations concerning their respective household level farming activities, challenges, production and production cycles, labor dynamics and economics of farming.

This participant observation enabled me to blend into this local community, to gain legitimacy and, importantly, to have access to intimate spaces, and to have a foundation on which to start informal conversations. As Marshal & Rossman (2011; 100) note, participant observation demands first hand involvement in the social world chosen for study...and permits the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the [subjects] do and offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly

from his own experience.” My identity as a researcher was often blurred, as I was now part of Buyengo’s farming community. My role as a researcher and my role as a farmer were often blended neatly. Accordingly, I did not have to reintroduce myself, as I was now a member of the community. Raising goats also gave me a sense of purpose, allowing me to remain engaged over those moments when I was not deliberately collecting data.

Tending to my goats required that I often hired various skilled and unskilled labor to construct a goat shed, fetch water, and through this to nurture more personal relationships with my workers. I employed a young man, on a monthly salary, so we would bring the goats to pasture and return them to their goat shed every day. Through in-depth conversations with this young man, I learnt a lot about farming in Buyengo. I also worked with various local leaders, and other progressive farmers, often building on these relationships to conduct in-depth interviews. Extension workers provided valuable information, and through them I was introduced to key informants at the district headquarters.

In a village such as Buyengo where social ties remain so strong, the relationships that a researcher develops with local people has strong implications for how the community will participate in the researcher’s activities. Opinions and experiences travel fast by word of mouth, and the wider community will seek to learn from the researcher’s local associates about the researcher’s purpose in the village, their character and whether and how they should relate with them. Accordingly, this meant that it was prudent that

I proactively develop deeper relationships, relying on the opportunity presented by engaging in the same struggles and joys around goat farming both with my employee and other farmers. Goat farming provided me entry into several people's intimate lives. I was able to interview several local farmers, to conduct several key informant interviews, and four group interviews and two formal focus groups. I shadowed local farmers to two NAADS sponsored workshops and interviewed NAADS extension staff. Accordingly, the next section describes the more specific means, observation, and individual and group interviews through which I gathered data.

Observation

Observation was an indispensable tool in my data collection endeavors and often served as the first source of information with which I made my data collection choices. For example, I determined the suitability of the timing and context of interviews by observing the surroundings of my research subjects and their moods. Was the setting noisy or quiet, and was it likely to remain noisy or quiet? Did the setting promise confidentiality? If not, did I have the opportunity to bring my research subject to a less noisy and more private space? What topics were appropriate to bring up immediately, and which ones were best brought up later, in separate settings? Giving thought to these questions through observation ensured that I conducted my inquiry in settings and moments that were most likely to provide an environment that was supportive of sufficiently long in-depth conversations. But there was an additional ethical benefit that observation brought to my data collection endeavor: by situating conversations at

moments and in places that were most suitable to the circumstances of my research subjects, I mitigated discomfort that might be associated with structured, pre-determined data collection settings.

Beyond enabling choice of context and moment for my interviews, observation also provided valuable sources of empirical data. For example through transect walks, I determined the common crops grown simply by observing what was typically grown in the gardens of Buyengo. I estimated the land acreage owned and under cultivation simply by employing keen observations. Similarly, through observation, I noted the various socio-economic conditions pertaining in Buyengo such as the commodities stocked in shops in the local trading center, and items households possessed such as solar panels and radios.

Individual interviews

The spontaneous, informal and casual nature of the conversations often allowed my interviewing to develop naturally within my subject's natural social environment. Hence, my interviewees participated in my interviews with a level of comfort that enabled me to probe their personal intimate stories in great depth. Generally, I started my conversations keeping in line with local culturally acceptable norms. Conversations of a personal nature do not usually occur with strangers, and Buyengo's residents, as I noticed, have a tendency to have several versions of the same story depending on context and to whom they were speaking. In addition, villagers generally hesitate to

reveal the intimate parts of their lives to strangers, especially those that they consider to be of a different social class. In peasant societies such as Buyengo where strong social bonds and ties exist, and anonymity is less likely, the incentive for villagers to express opinions or reveal data only in politically correct ways is extremely high. Informality, casualness and trust are therefore extremely important to delving deep into sensitive and personal topics.

As my goal was to unravel what are in fact complex social and economic dynamics and relationships, I deliberately planned that my interviews would be informal, causal and in-depth, and that they adhered to usual conversational norms. Thus for example, I interviewed subjects in their usual social settings, taking deliberate steps to ensure that they were preceded by common banter around whatever topic I judged might interest my research subjects. Sometimes I broke the ice with comments about the weather or about the usual livelihood struggles. Other times I struck up a conversation with a comment about politics, if I knew the research subject to be interested in politics. Buyengo's residents generally yearn for news and I purchased the daily newspapers and deliberately used them to bring their attention to me and cultivate interest among my research subjects.

Generally, after I had gained the interviewees trust, comfort and confidence, I introduced myself, informing them that I was collecting data for my PhD dissertation and that our conversation would feed into that plan. While I let the conversation flow naturally I deliberately, at every opportunity, directed the conversation towards farming

in Buyengo. This often started with a broader question about the joys and rigors of farming, and then we would delve into the more specific conversations about farming inputs, maize, cotton, beans, etc. I expertly sought to balance my research goals with the natural flow of the conversation, sometimes redirecting or abandoning a trend in the conversation when I noticed either reluctance or discomfort on the part of the research subject.

I interviewed several leaders at the district headquarters and several local leaders in the parish of Buyengo. These included local council (LC) officials, local opinion leaders, and large and small farmers and pretty much whoever was forthcoming with sharing their experiences. I obtained interviews on the broader agricultural policy, government priorities, and the NAADS program from district officials. With LC officials and other opinion leaders I discussed the general farming environment, the challenges that farmers faced, their thoughts on trends in land sales and what was driving land sales. The choice and focus of my interviews were often driven by circumstances. For example I interviewed a farmer who I met on a village path as he returned from visiting another farmer from whom he had borrowed maize seed. Learning about the purpose of his trip, provided the opportunity for us to discuss the seed markets and seed distribution systems, the challenges farmers encountered, and how they strived to mitigate them. As I have noted above, I attended two NAADS sponsored workshops and two Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) meetings.

Through these meetings I built rapport with various farmers, taking the opportunity to delve deeper into the contribution or lack thereof of NAADS workshops and extension to their farming endeavors, the history of VSLAs, who joined them and why and how they influenced farming and agrarian relations in Buyengo.

Group interviews

Group interviews followed the same pattern of informality and casualness that I have described above. The groups however tended to form naturally. For example I would continue the conversation if, in the moment of an individual person to person interview, we were joined by one or more other people. In effect I would not discontinue the interview or ask the arriving party to depart or step aside. Instead, I used that moment to further enrich the conversation within the context of the group, drawing on each group member's insights to enrich my data. I would generally acknowledge the new arrival, explain what we were discussing and ask that they contribute to the conversation.

I generally preferred group interviews with subjects of the same socio-economic class or with a group of individuals that knew each other well enough, or were close acquaintances so that they would feel free to share their personal experiences. I would steer away from personal or intimate topics if I realized that I was among a group with individuals insufficiently known to one another. Often a disagreement might occur on an issue among individuals in a group setting, but these could quickly be discussed

deeply and a common position reached primarily because they felt comfortable to continue the conversation.

Group interviews were a key source of my data on household level political economy—farming maize and consumption patterns. I conducted four group interviews with key informants who had stayed sufficiently long in the village and had in-depth knowledge of the local culture. With each group, we discussed and reached a consensus on the material and demographic characteristics of a typical household; how much land they owned, what they mostly did for a living and the size of household. We then delved into in-depth conversations about the farming practices of such a household—what they might typically farm, how they went about farming and how much they would produce in average conditions. We then would move into the consumption patterns of the household—what they consumed on a daily and/or weekly basis, how they obtained these goods, and how much they cost. I compared data from each group interview session, and finding consistency, I became confident in the reliability of the data regarding typical production and consumption patterns for an average Buyengo household. This type of group or community meeting, in which members of the community are asked to provide historical and background information on other community members, has been used with considerable of success by Krishna et al. (2005) to examine household level poverty dynamics.

Key informant interviews

Generally, key informants have experiences with, and understanding of the subject matter, in ways that are much deeper than an ordinary person would know. In the context of my study key informants were primarily of two categories. First were local village leaders, primarily local council officials or individuals that other informants had identified as having in-depth understanding of the issues about which I was interested. Second were district officials, primarily those concerned with implementing development projects and agricultural projects in particular. Generally, I conducted my key informant interviews with local village leaders at either their places of residence or wherever I found them in the village, sometimes at scheduled village meetings and sometimes at my residence and sometimes at local shops. I generally conducted the interviews with local government officials on appointment at their places of work. Below, I will describe some of the strategies with which I gathered data from these groups of key informants.

Buyengo's residents have been selling and purchasing land for as long as they have lived here. However, since the late 1980s, when the Local Council (LC) system was established across the country, Buyengo's residents, like residents in other rural areas of Uganda, began to conduct such land transactions through the LC system. Land transactions that are not conducted through the LC officials will lack legitimacy and this on its own may be the reason that they are disputed. Accordingly, by and large people

seeking to sell or purchase land will do so through LC officials, who have land sale agreement templates. As these tend to be exclusively for legal use, and are generally regarded as confidential and private, LC will not ordinarily share them beyond the parties to the transaction. However, I managed to obtain land sale agreements in the possession of LC officials from each of Buyengo's six villages by assuring them of utmost confidentiality and clarifying the exclusive purposes for which I needed this data. As part of the effort to obtain land sale agreements from LCs I also inquired with them about the general farming conditions in their area, trends in farming and land sales, gains, risks and problems faced, which farmers might be successful, which ones might fail and why.

These interviews provided me the initial insights, and ultimately essential background data regarding agrarian relations and agrarian formation in Buyengo. Through these interviews I learnt about the typical size of land holding in Buyengo, typical family size, and how much land was sufficient for a typical family to produce a surplus for the market. In addition, through these interviews I began to isolate the issues and relationships which I needed to investigate further. I learnt from example that maize, a relatively less labor intensive crop had replaced millet. It was through these initial key informant interviews that I learnt that merchants and village savings and loans associations had recently emerged in Buyengo. It is through these insights that I became interested in the maize market and the role of merchants relative to small farmers in maize market transactions.

Using the land sale agreements that I obtained from these LCs I compiled the names of people that had purchased land and the names of people that had sold land in Buyengo since 2000. These LCs had, between them, a total of sixty-seven land sale agreements dated between 2000 and 2012. I focused on land sales since 2000 as twelve years generated sufficient numbers of transactions and was also not too far back that key informants would remember with reasonable accuracy the circumstances related to the land transaction. I identified from these sale agreements the size of land that that was sold or purchased and the price at which the land was sold or purchased. I was also able to compile the number of land sales by year and by village, and through this data I determined trends in land sales and land purchases. For example, I established that twice as many land sales had occurred since 2006, compared to the prior period, 2000 to 2005.

With the data from these land sale agreements, I then worked with four different groups of key informants, who had lived in the village a sufficiently long time and knew the community sufficiently well, and discussed with them the circumstances that had instigated each of the sellers to sell their land, what they had done with the money that they received from selling the land, and whether they had migrated or not. Further, I then had an in-depth conversation with these key informants about each of the land buyers—who the land buyers were, where they had come from, their occupational

status, what they did with the land that they purchased, particularly if they used their new acquired land for farming⁴.

I relied on key informants, in the next phase of my data collection, to obtain a deeper understanding of the political economy of farming in Buyengo and the agrarian relations that were emerging from this political economy. I needed to determine the actors and the distribution of value to the various actors at different stages of crop production. How much did a typical farmer produce? How much of this produce was sold on the market? Who were the actors in the market place? How much did the farmers earn relative to what other actor earned? Accordingly, I gathered, in the first instance, a group of key informants, and using the hypothetical case of a typical farmer in Buyengo, I investigated these questions in great depth with my key informants. Equipped with this information I then held more key informant group interviews to validate these initial findings. I found that the data I obtained from the second key informant interview was highly similar to the data from the first interview. Minor variations, such as the average prices of maize grain convinced me that I had sufficiently reliable data.

⁴ Working with communities to reconstruct prior events in the lives of community members has been used highly successfully in prior studies investigating poverty dynamics in different communities around the world. See Krishna et al. (2006), Krishna (2010).

Survey data

A survey that I conducted during the final stage in my data gathering and was intended to obtain household level data on land sellers and buyers, and to discern emerging patterns in their profiles. As I have noted above, I compiled lists of land sellers and buyers from land sale agreements that I obtained from Local Councils. Using this list and after confirming with the LC officials and local opinion leaders the appropriateness of conducting a survey among each of these groups, I proceeded to prepare a survey instrument that I administered to each of the groups on their social demographic characteristics, land size owned, farming practices, problems faced in farming and major household expenditures.

Further scrutiny of the sixty-seven (67) land sales agreements that I obtained from the LCs established that fifty-eight (58) individuals had sold land and fifty-six (56) had purchased land—a total of 114 individuals (9 were repeat sellers and 11 repeat buyers). With this list I was able to locate and interview thirty (30) heads of household, as the rest had either emigrated or were simply unavailable or declined to participate. While thirty interviews is insufficient for any meaningful statistical tests, they did provide valuable insights into the circumstances that motivated land sellers to sell their land, what they did with the money that they received and whether they stayed or emigrated from the village. Similarly, I was also able to explore whether land buyers were from within or from outside the village and what they did with the land that they bought. I established that twice as many land sales occurred from 2006 to 2012

compared to the period 2000-2005, indicating that land sales had intensified in this later period. In addition, many of the land sellers stayed in the village living on increasingly smaller land parcels, largely insufficient for their subsistence and that a significant number of the land buyers were either non-farmers or nonresidents of Buyengo. These data provide the basis upon which I further investigated the changing agrarian relations and dynamics of farming in Buyengo.

Field Notes: Memory, Management, Reliability

Note taking

As I noted above, an ethnographic approach enables the researcher to take the benefit of informality and spontaneity. This often implies that data gathering opportunities are unplanned and unexpected and that the researcher avoids doing anything that may interrupt the natural flow of events. This approach imposes several limitations to note taking strategies: pulling out a piece of paper to take notes is inevitably going to interrupt the natural flow of a conversation; it may direct the attention of the research subjects to the piece of paper and influence them to speak only in politically correct ways. A voice recorder may have an even more dramatic effect, especially where research subjects are unfamiliar with these gadgets.

To keep my naturalistic approach of ethnography I therefore chose, while in the field, to use neither note pads nor tape recorders. I was confronted with two choices: to memorize my notes and write them out in a note book in between interviews or, to type them out as soon as I reached my computer at the end of the day. I chose to use

both, writing out abridged field notes at every opportunity and typing the more complete notes at the end of every day. This required, in the first instance, that I was confident in my ability to memorize observations, interviews and field insights. Earlier, during a graduate class as part of my preparation for this field work, I practiced and tested the level of confidence I had to memorize my field notes. I voice recorded an hour long mock conversation, and then returned to my desk and wrote down to the greatest extent that my memory could serve me, the notes from that conversation. I then listened into recording and I was profoundly impressed that I recalled almost all of the conversation. This experience solidified my confidence in my ability to memorize my field notes and my choice not to use pieces of paper or recorders during my interviews.

However, despite my confidence in keeping memory I nevertheless mitigated the likelihood that I would forget my field notes in three ways. First, as suggested by Emerson et al. (1995) I kept a small pocket size notebook in which, wherever I could, I discretely noted main points and clues that would prompt me to remember as much of the conversations as possible. I also wrote down verbatim the quotes from my research subjects that I found to be outstandingly illustrative. Second, I typed out my notes as soon as I had the first opportunity, backing them up whenever I had internet access, sometimes in between interviews if these were in close enough proximity to my room or at the end of each day, or first thing in the morning if my engagements

extended well into late evening. Third, I triangulated my information, almost always asking the same question in different ways to multiple individuals. I am confident that through these three strategies, I was able to recall and record all, if not almost all, the notes from my individual and group interviews, key informant interviews and observations.

Making sense of the notes

Numerous key informant interviews and group interviews, observations, focus group discussions, over a two year period generated a massive amount of notes. As Tavory & Timmermans (2013) note, moving from messiness and abundance of empirical observations to simplified causal explanations is a challenge that ethnographers often face. I gathered a large amount of data on farming systems, land use and land sales, land buyers and land sellers, maize merchants, to list only the few major data types. Initially I went into my field work intending to study the relationship between land privatization and agricultural productivity. However, in the later stages of my field work, especially after I returned from the field, it increasingly became clear to me, as I read through my field notes and took in the entire experiences, that my data was largely speaking to agrarian crises and transitions specific to the contemporary post-structural adjustment period in rural Uganda, approximately 1988 to the present. After I made the choice to proceed along this path, the themes on which I would focus, the

key variables to which I would pay attention, and how I would organize my data, became increasingly clear.

The political economy of agrarian change invites us to examine ownership and control of the means of production, how changes in the ownership and control of the means of production are transforming class relations, and the forces that both drive and hinder this transformation (Bernstein 2009). As I looked at my data I realized that there had emerged in recent times, since the onset of structural adjustment programs, two new main distinctive sets of actors in the agriculture commodity chain: small subsistence farmers on one hand and middlemen, vendors and retailers (whom I will put under the broad rubric of merchants) on the other. Farmers were primarily engaged in production, and merchants in commodity trade, supplying inputs and purchasing farmer produce. It is with these insights that I became interested in how emerging markets, dominated by merchants, were reconstituting ownership and control of the means of production, and how farmers' responses to these new trends were in turn reshaping agrarian relations and the character of farming in Buyengo.

It is in this sense that I employed a grounded methodological approach (Emerson & Shaw 1995), whereby emerging insights in the data began to inform and shape both the focus of my dissertation and, subsequently, my data analysis plan. I focused on maize, because maize had recently become the crop upon which farmers relied for meeting their cash needs and for their capital accumulation aspirations. I therefore analyzed my data in order to examine the ways in which the political economy

around maize was redistributing value among producers and merchants, and how this was ultimately reshaping the ownership and control of the means of production.

With this in mind I identified themes and subthemes, and then proceeded to reorganize my field notes around those themes and subthemes (Emerson & Shaw 1995). As Emerson and Shaw (1995) suggest, I employed open coding to identify and formulate new ideas and or issues from my notes and focused coding to analyze the notes for in-depth insights into the themes I had identified as my major interest. Several software tools exist for analyzing qualitative data. But I chose to analyze my qualitative data manually, as Gibbs (2007) notes, in order to draw on my understanding of the context, my own biases and interest to further gain insights as I went along, and to change and adapt my focus and my inquiry as the study evolved. Gibbs has also noted that qualitative data analysis is an ongoing cyclical process that happens throughout the data collection stage.

Land is the major form of productive capital, given the agrarian nature of Buyengo. Accordingly, for example, I explored themes concerning land selling households—when they sold their land, if they migrated or stayed on the village, the circumstances that drove them to sell their land and what they did with these funds. As they were dispossessed of land and their productive capital, were they resorting to wage labor? Was this new source of livelihood sufficient to meet their subsistence needs, and what did they do to cope where wage labor was insufficient to meet their subsistence needs? Similarly, I looked out for key themes and insights concerning land buyers—

what they did with the land that they purchased, what influenced their choices and how these choices were reshaping farming and the possibility of producing an agricultural surplus. I looked at household level dynamics in greater depth to obtain insights into the ways in which shifts in property ownership, such as land, were in turn influencing the emergence of wage dependent households, and what these households were doing to cope with new and emerging forms of vulnerability.

Reliability of the data

Data obtained through interviews such as these can vary widely. Household heads may have widely differing experiences from which they draw their responses to questions, and they may as well have quite different interpretations of reality. While a positivist approach resolves this by way of measures of central tendency and correlations, a scientific approach to ethnography assesses data quality in terms of its reliability (Aunger 1995). As Aunger (1995) notes, reliability refers to the extent to which data are repeatable, such as consistency of different measures of an attribute, or consistency in different repetitions of the same measure of an attribute. It is a measure of how likely it is that similar conditions will give rise to the same observation.

In my qualitative approach I enhanced reliability of the data in several ways. As Patton (1999) notes, I constantly triangulated my data crosschecking the consistency of the data in different ways with the same respondent and from different sources. For example, I asked the same question in multiple forms to the same respondent and asked

the same question to different respondents. In some cases I started with a focus group discussion in order to obtain a general idea about the ecological conditions, farming practices, soil fertility and yield given these typical conditions and in other cases I did the reverse, starting with individual interviews, before validating this data in focus groups. I constantly compared the notes from casual interviews with my notes from in-depth and group interviews. I also drew upon different primary and secondary sources. For example, when I learnt that maize has replaced millet in Buyengo, I checked this against available regional and national level data. In cases where I got inconsistent or contradictory information to the same question, I made the effort to understand why this was the case. I would change the wording of my question, for example. I only moved onto to research other topics and questions after I determined the reason for the inconsistency, and upon determining that the inquiry was yielding consistent information, I became confident about the reliability of my data.

Ethics

Protecting research subjects

Human subject protocols demand that researchers protect research subjects in two ways. One, through informed consent so that research subjects make the choice about participating in the research after they have weighed the risks and benefits of participating. Two, by assuring informants of confidentiality and following through with proactive measures that maintain anonymity of interviewees and confidential, and

ensuring, in the event that the data is inadvertently obtained by a third party, that this third party will be unable to associate the data with any particular individual.

Informed consent presents a particular challenge to ethnographic researchers because research is intertwined with participant observation. As I noted, the participant observer becomes immersed within the lives of their research subjects in ways that completely dissolve the line between the process of gathering data and simply living with research subjects. For example, an ethnographer may be working in the field, and a seemingly mundane conversation turns into a conversation from which the research obtains information pertinent to the researcher. Moreover, the ethnographer makes note of everything, be it through face to face conversations or simple observation, in ways that might not provide the opportunity to obtain informed consent. Moreover, interrupting a flowing conversation to seek informed consent is inevitably going to disturb the natural flow of events.

I strived to inform my participants about the purposes of my research. Sometimes this occurred prior to my interview and sometimes during the interview and sometimes after the interview. Especially where I informed my research subjects during and after the interview I always assured them of confidentiality and sought their consent to include their insights and experience in my research report. I assured my respondents of confidentiality and proceeded to ensure that my data sources, where they were identifiable and the data were kept separate. I also employed pseudonyms to keep my sources anonymous and confidential.

In quite a few cases, to avoid the problem of deception, I made my research intentions explicit. I was not in the area to offer solutions to pressing problems, and I was not even sure that my research would yield any tangible changes to their livelihood struggles, even while I promised to disseminate them, as I describe below, in user friendly formats. I did this to ensure that I did not create the perception that my researcher would fix local problems. The goal was so that my research subjects cooperated and participated purely for voluntary reasons.

Giving back

Over and beyond protecting human subjects, I have been, and was confronted by the ethical dilemma caused by the extractive, and therefore exploitative, research paradigm. A few years ago, as I sought the assistance of local leader for a prior research project, the local leader agreed that he would be willing to assist, but it is the statement with which he followed his consent that has forever lived with me: “we have always assisted in these kinds of project, but nothing ever changes”. During my time in Buyengo, I was confronted with similar concerns, even while they were expressed in slightly different ways. What was the purpose of my study? What was I going to do with the data? One member directly expressed the wish that I return and help to alleviate the issues that I was studying. It seems to me these questions and concerns could only partly be alleviated by obtaining informed consent following full disclosure of the purpose of my research. While, being forthcoming with the fact that researchers are in fact likely to be the sole beneficiaries of their academic projects might empower the research

subjects and clarify expectations, it would unlikely help to alleviate the concerns and discomfort related to subjects' feeling that they were being exploited by the researcher.

I did promise that I would give back to the community either through short descriptions of my findings that were written in a manner that was comprehensible to the local people, or through radio talk shows. And yet my inability to deliver on this promise (at the time of writing this ethics section) speaks to the constraints that researchers such as myself often confront. The demands of writing the dissertation combine with career goals to direct immediate attention and energy away from community engagement activities through which findings might be disseminated. Responsibilities to my immediate family often rendered the choice between less financially rewarding community engagement and more financially rewarding occupations (at least in the short run) a difficult choice to make. I am still committed to community engagement activities through which I will disseminate the findings and insights gained in this dissertation process, and my hope is that I have started on this venture or accomplished it by the time you are reading this section.

Chapter Three: The Making of Buyengo's Maize Market

Introduction

Maize grain markets have historically been part of rural Buyengo's social life. But the character, purpose and drivers of the maize grain market currently operating in Buyengo is a far cry from maize grain markets of the past. While Buyengo's present-day maize grain market bears in some ways previous histories, customs and practices—local farmers continue to barter and sell so they obtain cash with which to purchase basic necessities—they are fundamentally different in many respects from the ones gone by. Maize grain markets of the past served the needs of those that lived locally, were negotiated within a moral economy of redistribution and operated with an ethic of trust. But this new market has merchants that are driven primarily by profit and who are highly integrated into international commodity markets.

To maximize these profits merchants employ dubious practices such as short weighing maize grain and manipulating grain prices to cheat, steal and plunder from less powerful small maize grain farmers. Thus, when they produce for the market the material interests of Buyengo's small less powerful maize grain farmers stand at sharp odds with profit maximization interests of the more powerful maize grain merchants. In effect, rather than becoming dis-embedded from their social relations, Buyengo's commodity markets have increasingly become deeply embedded in, and shaped by local power asymmetries.

Using the notion of ‘making’ as its anchor, this chapter traces the contemporary origins of these practices which, by and large, have shaped the character of Buyengo’s present-day maize market. In academic discourse the concept of “making” is closely associated with E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. EP Thompson insisted that working class consciousness was a product of a confluence of the conditions arising from the processes of capitalism’s development and the agency of the masses. For Thompson, it is this dialectical interaction, of the structural forces emanating from the rise of capitalism and responses to these forces by English workers, the subjects of capital, which produced an English working class consciousness.

I draw from this framing to trace how the character of Buyengo’s present day maize market arose from a dialectical interaction of two opposing forces: a civil society⁵ agitating against economic insecurities arising from economic liberalization of structural adjustment and a political elite determined to undermine this civil society so as to hold on to state power. I will show that as a civil society emerging out of structural adjustment attempted to agitate for economic emancipation and to deepen democratization, a ruling political elite, in response, set in motion a repressive politics to curtail this civil society. We will see that as economic liberalization unleashed economic insecurity, civil society began to mobilize for economic justice, and the

⁵ I use civil society here to refer to groups or organizations working in the interests of citizens, but operating outside of government and for profit sectors. These include media organizations, farmers, teachers and medical workers associations, and various other associations formed by individuals laid off due to retrenchment of economic liberalization.

political elite began to pursue policies that were meant, primarily, to undermine the power of this civil society. A confluence of these forces have produced a new political reality of repression and a highly incapacitated civil society, which has allowed maize merchants to engage, with impunity, in dubious practices. I argue that the character of the present day maize market, the unchecked practices of merchants, is firmly rooted within the contradictions arising from Uganda's structural adjustment programs. I will argue that Maize merchants can now engage unhindered in dubious practices in part because the power of civil society has been severely weakened.

This chapter aims to place the making of Buyengo's maize market within a particular socio-economic, socio-political conjuncture. January 1986, when Yoweri Museveni captures state power following a five-year civil war marks the starting point for my elaboration. This moment marks a fundamental shift in Uganda's post-independence politics: Museveni sweeps into power, forms a new government premised on respect for human rights and the rule of law, and this inspires national euphoria similar only to that seen at independence in 1962 (Rules 1987). And yet because Museveni inherited a bankrupt government he was unable to deliver basic goods and services that Ugandans so desperately needed. Thus, the euphoria that greeted Museveni quickly turned into widespread public discontent, which began to undermine his legitimacy and his hold onto state power (Perlez 1989, Nassanga and Makara, (unpublished)). His remedy to this politico-economic crisis—turning to the IMF/World Bank for public funds and accepting the economic liberalization conditions

with which they came—fundamentally transformed Uganda’s future socio-economic trajectory in ways unparalleled in the region. The radical restructuring arising out of economic liberalization of structural adjustment and its political consequences made these reforms particularly unique, and it is this link between economic crisis instigated by austerity and the rise of civil society that forms the backdrop for this chapter. I will argue that to understand the emergence and character of the maize grain market in contemporary rural Uganda, one would have to walk through the historical unfolding of economic liberalization and political mobilization by civil society as its antidote, and it is within these twin process that I will trace the sort of social, economic and political conditions that have enabled the type of maize market that we see in Buyengo today.

Epistemological points of departure

Most analyses of economic development in the global south have tended to use the terms economic liberalization and structural adjustment interchangeably⁶. And yet while economic liberalization defines a neo-classical economic creed emerging from the IMF/World Bank in the late 1970s, structural adjustment describes a set of policies and programs embraced by or negotiated between the IMF/World Bank and a nationally based political elite, to be implemented in the respective country’s territory. World Bank and IMF technocrats pushed economic policies that were largely derived from classical economic theory but government bureaucrats, in response, negotiated putting in place

⁶ See for example Babb 2005; Bahigwa et al 2005; Brett 1998, Bello 2002, 2006; Easterly 2005.

programs they deemed to be in the best interest of the country. The outcome of these negotiations were what are now popularly called structural adjustment programs or SAPs. Thus, these SAPs largely represent an outcome of a contested process: the World Bank/IMF pushing their agenda and the local political elite pushing theirs. Thus, as economic liberalization signifies an abstract theoretical frame, structural adjustment describes concrete programs of action or outcomes of IMF/World Bank economic policies given unique historical realities. It is for this reason that SAPs, while generally fitting within a classical economic frame, differed in scope, depth, structure, form, etc., from one country to another, within the same time frame in the same geographical region⁷.

And yet several scholars have employed the term structural adjustment in ahistorical ways thereby erasing its contextual, contingent and constitutive particularities. For example, in commenting that Uganda is often seen as an African showcase of the beneficial results of structural adjustment, Geske & van Donge (2001) conceive of structural adjustment as a universal program, similarly present in disparate national contexts, rather than as a process that is uniquely constituted in each country given unique historical conditions⁸. Evaluating the effects World Bank economic

⁷ Within Africa Ghana and Uganda implemented by far the most comprehensive structural adjustment programs. Delpuch & Leblois (2013) have also shown that Anglophone Africa implemented structural adjustment programs more extensively than Francophone Africa.

⁸ For example some countries implemented decentralization and devolution as part of their structural adjustment programs whereas others did not, just as some countries privatized their agricultural input supplies chains whereas others did not.

policies, Brett (1998) notes for example that “these views were dominant in the early 1980s and were spread across the globe in the form of structural adjustment programs” (314). Thus, Brett and other such scholars conceived structural adjustment in trans-historical ways, consequently stripping structural adjustment of temporal and spatial specificities, and employing its descriptive rather than its analytical qualities.

Babb (2005: 201) suggests a more nuanced analytical use of the term, noting that policies associated with this term have shifted over time, that the term is no longer associated within any particular lending program and that rather than employing it as a technical term, she employs its more interpretive and historical meanings. Thus, to see the term as having interpretive and historical meanings implies that SAPs become contingent outcomes, and from this point of view one would have to argue as I do here that Uganda’s SAPs can only be grasped by analyzing how IMF/World Bank economic liberalization doctrine on one hand and national histories and politics on the other, converged. Seen in this light Uganda’s contemporary maize grain market that emerged from SAPs becomes a contingent outcome of foreign originated economic liberalization ideas and particular domestic histories and their politics. This methodological distinction defines the scope of my foregoing explorations, allowing me to situate commodity markets historically and temporally and to make the following two claims.

First, a tendency to reify structural adjustment and to strip it of its politics—of the agency of those who hold state power in their hands—is evident in much social

science writing. This notion that structural adjustment programs were imposed from above, quite popular in both leftists and mainstream scholarship, for example Bello (2002), Brett (1998) and Easterly (2005), inadvertently silence a complex political history and mutes agency in the domestic sphere. As I will show, sections of Uganda's political elite embraced IMF/World Bank economic liberalization policies, translating them into Uganda's structural adjustment program, primarily for reasons that were self-serving, and to come to grips with this agency it is imperative to explore the history through which it was forged. Second, just as the claim that SAPs were imposed silences agency in the local space, a tendency in the literature to portray SAPs trans-historically falls short of accounting for temporal shifts in national policy. For example, this tendency may fail to explain why Museveni passionately supported civil service reforms in the early 1990s, but seemed to oppose them in the early 2000s. This lack of attention to conceptual specificity and temporal contingency lends itself to a discourse on structural adjustment that is only partial at best, and in this way falls short in its account of the ways in which SAPS shaped the character of Uganda's present day markets.

I will overcome these lacunae in three ways. First, this chapter will bring the political and the economic in productive conversation. In doing this, I will reinterpret Uganda's recent political history in light of the mutually constitutive consequences of economic and political reforms. Second, I will examine the processes through which a historically specific agency was produced. I do this by situating the unravelling of SAPs within a confluence on one hand of a historical struggle over political power and on the

other hand the political effects of externally instigated IMF/World Bank economic liberalization policy. Third, I will distinguish early structural adjustment, 1987 to 1998, from late structural adjustment, 1999 to 2011. This periodization allows me to show how early structural adjustment was characterized by a contradictory dynamic: reforms in the public sector jeopardized economic welfare of those that were ejected from the public sector as well as the wellbeing of many small rural agricultural producers, and yet simultaneously, these reforms created spaces in which civil society began to agitate for social and economic rights in ways that challenged the political elite. In their attempts to hold onto state power, the political elite began to engage, in the late structural adjustment period, in repressive politics so as to restrain the political activism of this civil society. As a consequence of this controlled civil society merchants can now engage, unchecked, in an unregulated, unrestrained market place. The next section outlines the immediate context preceding structural adjustment, before I delve into the politics of early and late structural adjustment.

The antecedents, January 1986-July 1987

If the balance of payments problems triggered by the oil price crisis of the late 1970s were their impetus on a global scale, the immediate backdrop to Uganda's structural adjustment was the political and economic devastation that lasted fifteen years, from 1971 to 1986 (Mamdani 1990). Nineteen eighty six forms a critical backdrop to structural adjustment, precisely because the country had just come out of a long war

waged between Obote's forces and Museveni National Resistance Army (NRA) guerillas. Museveni took power from Obote on January 26th 1986 following which he promptly embarked upon remaking the country's political, social and economic infrastructure. But just as the new leadership of Museveni was faced with a broken economy and a hostile domestic political landscape, the international financial institutions used this internal crisis to leverage austerity of economic liberalization (Brett 1998)⁹.

The political apparatus that Museveni established and the economic policies that he implemented right at the start of his rule reveal his radical socialist ideas (Haynes 2010). Resistance Councils, regarded by his government as popular democracy and an apparatus for grassroots political mobilization, were modeled along Chinese People's Councils and the Libya's People's Committees (Kitaka 1986)¹⁰. Indeed Museveni maintained strong political and economic ties with many socialist states in the first few years of his rule (Mwenda & Tangri 2005, Kitaka 1986). His attempts to negotiate barter trade with Cuba, Algeria, Lybia, Egypt, North Korea, Yugoslavia and Tanzania provides evidence of his links to these socialist states (Nassanga and Makara (unpublished)), and reveals the extent of his leftist orientation at that time. His socialist leanings were apparent, for example, in his speech marking his first year in power in which he

⁹Naomi Klein's claim that capitalism uses social crisis to impose neoliberal economic policy is of particular salience here.

¹⁰ Museveni had studied in Dar es Salaam University then a bastion of Marxist ideas, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist debates. As a young man he was engaged with Frelimo, the leftist military outfit for the liberation of Mozambique.

reiterated his commitment to national self-reliance, pledging that he would accept foreign aid only if international donors did not “interfere with government’s own policies” (New York Times, Jan 28, 1987)¹¹. The Times of London reported for example that “the Tanzanian educated President has shown a distrust of IMF economic models” (The Times, December 5th 1986)¹².

And yet only one year later, in 1987, Museveni had renounced his socialist ideals, signing on to implement IMF/World Bank neo-liberal policies: privatization, public sector retrenchment, deregulation, etc., and by 1989 Museveni had become one of the most passionate supporters of IMF/World Bank economic liberalization programs in the region (Brett 1998, Mwenda and Tangri 2005). This fundamental shift, from radical socialist ideals to market fundamentalism, invites us to critically examine the circumstances in this intervening period, which precipitated this shift if we should fully comprehend the character of free market forces that emerged out of Uganda’s structural adjustment program¹³.

The fiscal challenges faced by Museveni’s government in 1986 are well illustrated by a single case. It has become the norm for governments of the global south to receive

¹¹ Sheila Rules (1987) Uganda, at peace, is facing economic battles. The New York Times Jan, 28, 1987.

¹² Mcewen Andrew (1986). Chalker Advice for Uganda. The Times (London) December 5, 1986, Friday

¹³ Nassanga and Makara (unpublished) note for example that “due to the regime’s initial Leninist ideological convictions, at first it attempted barter trade mainly with Cuba and Tanzania. The global economic realities forced the regime back into Western fold, and in 1987 adopted a liberal economic regime, supported by the World Bank and IMF.

loans and grants of various kinds from Western bilateral and multi-lateral agencies. However, it is quite unusual that a sovereign state receives a cash donation from a representative of a foreign government. Linda Chalker's¹⁴ five million British pounds donated to the Government of Uganda in February 1986 and another ten million pounds in November of the same year (The New Times, London Dec 5th 1986) to alleviate a burgeoning political crisis that was rooted in an equally burgeoning economic crisis¹⁵ reveals the depth of the predicament that Museveni faced. Uganda's industrial and commercial sectors had completely stalled, and a political crisis was gradually emerging from a population increasingly feeling economically underserved¹⁶. The political risk posed by armed remnants of previous regimes still positioned in the north, northeastern Uganda and Southern Sudan created a national security emergency. And yet within the same period the military alone was consuming 80 million dollars, almost as much as half of the total national budget¹⁷, and up to \$200 million was spent on servicing bilateral and multilateral loans (The New York Times 1987). While Museveni

¹⁴ Minister of state for overseas development and Africa in the UK government from 1989 to 1997.

¹⁵ Perlez, J (1989) After Years of Terror: A new Political Stability Emerges. New York Times, June 15th 1989.

¹⁶ A New York Times article (Jan 28, 1987)¹⁶ noted that according to prominent Ugandans, Uganda's economy, shattered by years of war, mismanagement and corruption, was the most serious issue facing Mr. Museveni's government. While, Museveni had brought peace to most of the country, he had found it virtually impossible to translate promises of economic progress. Basic commodities were severely short or were completely unavailable.

¹⁷ According to The New York Times, Mr. Museveni inherited a government treasury that contained only about \$500,000 in foreign exchange, according to the same source, of the \$400 million, the country received from coffee, more than half was going towards servicing foreign debt and much of the rest for purchasing oil and sugar and to meet the army's needs for spare parts and other material. (Jan 28, 1987).

needed a well-equipped military to achieve and maintain control over Uganda's geographical territory, supplying basic goods became the basis upon which his government could claim internal political legitimacy. But supply of these goods and services required a substantial supply of foreign currency, and with a shortage of viable alternatives Museveni resorted to the whims of the IMF/World Bank to support the economy as a way to secure his hold on to state power.

And yet to interpret Museveni's acquiescence to IMF/World Bank conditions as a consequence of mere compulsion conceals one important fact. In speaking passionately about the follies of state control and the benefits of "free" markets, Museveni often exceeded the rhetoric emerging from the IMF and the World Bank¹⁸. Did Museveni shift from his socialist ideals simply because he now truly appreciated the virtues of privatization and economic liberalization in ways that echoed the message in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* or was his shift shaped simply by a pragmatic struggle for political survival? The answers that one finds to this question is going to lie in how one interprets the sort of politics engendered by Uganda's structural adjustment economic and political reforms, and how Museveni acted in response. This reinterpretation of Uganda's recent history forms the substance of the rest of this chapter.

¹⁸ See Museveni speeches to the UN General Assembly for example, national budget day speeches and The State of the Nation Address 2012.

Early structural adjustment, 1987-1998

Ten years into the implementation of SAPs in 1998, Uganda had achieved one of the most liberalized economies and one of the most vibrant civil societies in Africa (Mwenda and Tangri 2005), prompting a Western diplomat to ponder Uganda's economic progress relative to her neighbors (Richburg 1992)¹⁹. Parastatals had been disbanded and price controls largely removed. Agricultural cooperative unions once quite active in agricultural commodity markets were dismantled and gradually replaced by multinational companies and an emerging profit oriented local merchant class (Haynes 2001). In 1992 government ministries were reduced from thirty-eight to seventeen (Mwenda 2005) and a civil service reform program trimmed the government work force from 320,000 to 100,000 (Langseth 1995, Kiragu and Mukandala 2005)²⁰. These reforms occurred in tandem with large-scale demobilization in the military, which cut the number of the men in uniform from 130,000 to 40,000. In part, the rationale for these retrenchments was that these savings would be reinvested in higher wages for those that remained. And yet by 1996 this goal hadn't been achieved. Public sector salaries remained comparatively much lower than salaries in the private sector and wide

¹⁹ Richburg K (1992) Ruler Brings Stability to Uganda: Aid Donors Look for Looser Rein. Washington Post, March 3rd 1992.

²⁰ Uganda's civil service in 1986 was bloated, highly corrupt and inefficient. It was incapable of performing basic service delivery or policy implementation functions. Many civil servants did not turn up for work as rates of pay were nominal and most had other sources of income to meet basic needs. There were a large number of 'ghost workers' on the government payroll who either did not exist or were deceased. Bribery was rampant. The disastrous state of the civil service was the product of years of political strife and civil war, which contributed to economic chaos (Langseth 1995)

inequalities in salaries within the civil service continued to cause significant disaffection (Robinsons 2011).

These economic austerity measures exacerbated income inequality and instigated public discontent. At the same time reforms in national and local government structures and liberalization of the broadcast and print media were opening spaces via which civil society began to challenge the state. A decentralization policy created fifty-four districts, and local elections to district councils at various levels of the local government structure became the avenue through which civil society could express its discontentment. Legal reforms removed restrictions on freedom of speech and print and audio media were liberalized. As a result, FM radio stations proliferated across Uganda's airwaves and by the mid-1990s, with over one hundred FM radio stations, Uganda had one of the most liberalized media on the continent. Teachers, health workers, doctors and university lecturers frequently went on strike and expressed their displeasure about their economic situation via these FMs radios. If this industrial action cast a dark shadow upon the future of Uganda's political elite, it is the protests by policemen's wives, an important section of the state security apparatus that signaled the extent to which economic insecurity posed a threat to the political elite.

Thus, this early structural adjustment period is characterized by two trends that placed the economic sphere and the political sphere on contradictory pathways. On one hand economic austerity produced massive unemployment and an insecure urban class and on the other hand political reforms opened the space from which these insecure

groups began to agitate for economic and political rights from within these spaces. Put differently, as these reforms sowed the seeds of public sector efficiency, they in turn produced economic insecurity, which ultimately instigated a politically charged civil society. This in part is the contradiction of the early structural adjustment period, and to understand the impact of these reforms and the sort of politics that emerged from them, it is necessary to trace their progression with some level of detail.

Political implications of public sector reforms

Political reforms have economic implications just as economic reforms have political impacts and a review of Uganda's recent political history illustrates this truism. As we have seen, civil service reforms laid off thousands, casting them into insecure urban informal sector livelihoods. And yet this situation was further exacerbated by deregulation and privatization of cooperative unions, which unleashed variability in commodity prices and led to a shortage of farm supplies, thereby imposing a new set of hardships upon Uganda's rural farming class. Thus, a new urban class rendered precarious by insecure informal sector activity was joined by an equally precarious rural agricultural class of small producers, which posed somewhat of a political dilemma to the ruling establishment. The rest of this chapter traces the evolution of this dialectic, between the political and the economic dynamics of structural adjustment.

The challenges posed by demobilization in the military, extreme because of their relatively higher potential to destabilize the state, will illustrate the predicament faced

by this surplus labor. Many demobilized men could not be absorbed into any formal jobs given that they generally lacked that knowledge and skill set (Byamukama undated). Recognizing the extent of this problem, the government set up a body, the Uganda Veterans Assistance Board, and charged it primarily with reskilling and reintegrating demobilized men into ordinary social and economic life. As Byamukama (undated) and Mondo (1995) report, the program was fraught with many logistical problems: cash packages were short, were frequently late, and many veterans lacking money for which to pay transport expenses did not collect their transitory packages, while a substantial number were not served at all.

And yet the larger plight of Uganda's veterans was tightly intertwined with the plight of the rest of Uganda's urban and rural working classes. Attempts by veterans to reintegrate into the rural agricultural sector were thwarted by equally precarious rural agricultural livelihoods, further exacerbated by highly unstable and insecure commodity prices, and education and health care systems that were equally commercialized. As a consequence, many veterans opted to remain in the relatively better served urban informal sector. But this also meant that their urban presence constituted veterans into a potential political problem for the establishment. Moreover, veteran's issues made it to the political platform not simply because of their historical contribution in bringing the ruling elite to power but also because, organized under their umbrella national

association, they were sufficiently organized so as to pose a political and security threat to the establishment (Byamukama undated)²¹.

This precarious and surplus labor, laid-off public servants and fairly organized former military men, frequently expressed their frustration via occasional street protests, via the numerous media outlets and at every election cycle. Taking advantage of liberalized media airwaves and proliferation of FM radio stations, a vocal class of discontented individuals and groups frequently voiced their frustrations in the open. Known as *ebimeza*, talk shows had become highly popular by the early 2000s, and subsequently government agencies began a swift crackdown to rein them in. Each of these arenas, becoming sites for various forms of political contestation, were a significant source of concern to the political elite and this moment marked the beginning of political repression, which ultimately incapacitated civil society in its attempts to challenge the state on economic policy at the national level, and to confront and rein in the practices of merchants at the local level.

Political implications of agricultural sector reforms

The classical economics assumption that economic liberalization would spur productivity provided the ideological basis for Uganda's agricultural sector reforms. It

²¹ In the 2001 elections, demobilization was a political concern for President Museveni. Again see The New Vision, 23 January, 2001 p.12, The New Vision January 2001; The New Vision December 2001. In 2014 Museveni was compelled to conduct a national-wide tour to attend particularly to the problems of veterans (New Vision January 2001)

was assumed that “free” commodity markets would emerge from these reforms and inspire growth in ways that would lead to a convergence in incomes between developed and developing countries (Williamson 1994, pp. 27-28). Following this logic, the Government of Uganda swiftly disbanded agricultural cooperatives, removed agricultural subsidies and eliminated all agricultural commodity price controls. Since their onset, substantial scholarly attention has been placed on the extent to which these reforms in the agricultural sector increased farm gate prices and boosted agricultural production. However, contradictory interpretations of that evidence and incomparability of that data have produced no consensus about the extent to which these agricultural sector reforms delivered their promise. Some evidence points to the reforms boosting productivity and other evidence suggest the contrary.

What seems relatively clear however, is that these reforms reshaped livelihood opportunities in Uganda’s rural areas in ways that produced material benefits for some groups and material losses for others. For example, several scholars have pointed to decreasing availability of agricultural input supplies, which disproportionately impacted especially small rural producers negatively (Gibbon et al. 1993, Kherallah et al. 2002, Dorward et al. 2004, Oya 2001). Others such as Ponte (2002) and Peters (2004) have suggested that falling levels of public investment in agriculture, due to austerity measures of structural adjustment, usually resulted in growing undercapitalization and greater indebtedness of small farmers. Still, others (Oya 2007, Kherallah et al. 2002, Dorward et al. 2004, Oya 2001) have argued that liberalization and privatization

interrupted agricultural input supplies, compromised quality of output and led to erratic commodity prices that disrupted the incomes of small farmers quite significantly.

Mixed impacts on different agricultural sectors and on different groups of farmers have also been reported. Kherallah et al. (2002), Bryceson (2009), and Dorward et al. (2004) have suggested that higher farm gate prices were paid to coffee farmers in 1990s relative to many other crops and that private sector actors made selective investment in more profitable niches such as output and seed markets as opposed to input supply and agricultural credit. While agreeing that Uganda's stabilization and adjustment reforms led to GDP growth in the economy, Muhumuza (2002) notes that this growth did not translate into improved living standards for the majority. Several scholars have also suggested that evidence of rising Gini coefficient implies that a decrease in rural poverty was accompanied by a corresponding rise of inequality within rural areas (Bahigwa, Rigby and Woodhouse 2005)²². Along these lines, Brett (1998) has shown that in the early 1990s 74.3% of households spent less than \$10 per capita each month and only 1% spent more than \$60. Attesting to the spatially uneven distribution of growth, Brett adds that in 1994/1995 per capita incomes in the urban centers was about 38,000/- Ugandan shillings compared to 12,500/- Uganda shillings in rural areas.

²² Bahigwa, Rigby and Woodhouse (2005) show that consumption levels in 2000 were up to one half of those of urban households, but all urban and most rural households recorded a drop in consumption during 2000–03. It is perhaps significant that the exception was the highest decile of rural households, which registered a 5% increase in consumption expenditure.

A regional disparity is also seen in per capita income of 19,000/- in the rural areas of the central region, compared to only 9,500/- in the rural areas of the north.

This uneven distribution of growth and the burdens of structural adjustment occurred in tandem with a freeze on public expenditure in the health sector in 1992, followed further by retrenchment in higher education. In response to declining funding to the health sector, Health Unit Management Committees, established as part of government policy, started to levy cost sharing and other user fees in government healthcare units as the government also imposed various cost cutting measures in public universities. The net effect of these social sector reforms was that groups that were marginalized by structural adjustment were further underserved by retrenchment in health and education sectors (Deininger & Mpuga 2004).

While some scholars commended these user fees for filling a critical financing gap (Kyomuhendo et al. 2006), other scholars condemned these user fees for excluding rural marginal poor from accessing health care services (Xu et al. 2006). The abolition of user fees by President Museveni in 2001 and his pledge to provide free healthcare was enthusiastically received and signaled the extent to which these fees had become a political liability. And yet the government did not follow through with sufficient funding to the healthcare sector, and free healthcare became somewhat of a fantasy and ultimately a hotbed of political agitation. In many rural places healthcare deteriorated as a consequence of erratic government funding. Essential drugs and health personnel

were perpetually severely short in many rural health units, further rendering precarious the livelihoods of many small producers in Uganda's rural areas (Xu et al. 2005).

As contentious as the debate may seem, it is generally well acknowledged that, taken together, these austerity programs further exacerbated living conditions for small rural agricultural producers that were unable, due to capital related constraints, to benefit from these agricultural sector reforms. As critiques point out, growth was neither inclusive nor evenly distributed. In addition, increases in coffee prices were only short lived and in any case coffee is grown in only the volcanic areas in southwestern and eastern Uganda. Fish exports expanded, but at the expense of supply to local markets²³. A rise in food crop exports such as maize, beans and other legumes triggered local food insecurity. While the volume of flower exports grew substantially this sector remained exclusively under the control of large multinational companies, and employed poorly paying low skilled jobs. National level data suggested that SAPs were largely successful in promoting growth, but these national figures are a very poor indicator of everyday lived experiences of ordinary rural and urban folks²⁴. Regional differences and social inequality played out in ways that rendered national level data quite detached from the everyday experiences of the majority. Rosy aggregate figures coming out of

²³ This for example was a point around which the opposition rallied support against the ruling party in both the 2001 and 2006 national elections.

²⁴ In 1992 89.8% of the population of Uganda was classified as poor or insecure poor; in 1999/00 this figure was 77.7% and in 2012/2013 it was 62.0%. The report also reveals regional imbalances. In 2012/13 Central region had 60.1% classified as middle class, 21.2% in the East, 19.3% in the north and 47.5% in the west (MoFPED 2014 p 8 & 11).

government policy documents concealed regional and class disparities, and paying attention to the growth in the cash crop sectors inevitably painted only a very partial representation of rural local reality.

Just as there was little consensus in the academy about the impacts of agricultural sector reforms, a lively debate about the lack of growth and biting rural and urban poverty was ever present in Uganda's public discourse. A government poverty monitoring survey suggested that growth had occurred rapidly in the mid-1990s but notes that this was confined to urban areas and the coffee zones in the central region (Brett 1998). Similarly, a poverty status report revealed that the northern region remained the poorest while the eastern region had seen the slowest poverty reduction (MoFPED 2014). A general concern about rising inequality, concerns about distribution, availability and quality of various social services was and still is evident in popular media and public discourse (MoFPED 2014). In western Uganda, where poverty is said to have declined most substantially, the distribution of this growth was [and remains] quite unequal, producing a contentious class based politics. High levels of malnutrition and conflicts over land especially among small producers, and between pastoralists and sedentary ranchers in western Uganda suggest that unequal distribution of growth and the rise of economic exclusion is taking material expression. A large discrepancy between popular perception and rosy statistics on poverty trends painted by the government has been a frequent concern on local radio talk shows and other fora.

The point of this exposition is not to validate the negative social impact of agricultural sector reforms or otherwise. Rather the point is to illustrate a rapidly shifting social terrain and, mixed experiences for different social groups in Uganda's rural areas and unequal distribution of growth as a consequence of structural adjustment. These rural livelihood struggles pre-date structural adjustment and Ugandan's have been struggling with precarious livelihoods for a very long time. And yet these reforms produced livelihood opportunities for some and foreclosed them for others, as they simultaneously opened spaces of political engagement, in quite unprecedented ways. None of the governments preceding Museveni had instigated such massive rapid social transformation, with profound uneven consequences for the different rural and urban groups. And yet, similarly, none of these regimes had allowed civic and political liberties in the same ways that Museveni allowed in the early structural adjustment period. Thus, this social differentiation in Uganda's urban and rural zones was producing politically charged urban and rural groups, in a context in which avenues for political protest and debate had been greatly expanded. Like the disaffected insecure urban class, a rural discontented class found expression on the numerous talk shows on the numerous privately owned FM radio stations, painting an ominous future for Uganda's new political elite.

Program to Address Poverty and the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAPSCA)

The Program to Address Poverty and the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAPSCA) was initiated two years into the onset of SAPs, primarily to address “some of the urgent social concerns of Uganda's most vulnerable groups through “collaborative and integrated development interventions between communities, NGOs and the Government and, in the medium term, to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Government to identify, formulate and maintain interventions for assisting vulnerable groups” (World Bank 1996: p 1). And yet as World Bank reports note, PAPSCA goals were not met because the program design was flawed and the funds set aside, \$106 million for the program, were insufficient relative to needs of the target groups. One could argue that this project was, at best, an exercise in public relations, and one that was simply meant to alleviate public outrage at the social impacts of austerity²⁵. The key point that the PAPSCA program signifies, however, is the extent to which the government and the World Bank recognized the negative effects of structural adjustment, and just as importantly, its failure demonstrates the unmet needs for rural and urban groups that were increasingly marginalized.

²⁵ In an admitting failure, the World Bank notes in its implementation completion report that “overall, the project outcome is marginally satisfactory. [Only] four components, constituting 37.5% of the total project costs, have been evaluated to be highly satisfactory or satisfactory. The education rehabilitation component, constituting another 35% of the total Project costs, has had an unsatisfactory outcome because of the low physical completion rate” (World Bank 1996, p 8).

But if in setting up the PAPSCA program the Government of Uganda and IMF/World Bank betrayed the extent to which they failed to anticipate the social impacts of these reforms, it also signaled how the impacts of these austerity programs posed a political risk to the establishment. The emerging insight is as follows: civil service reforms substantially downsized public sector employment, but the emergent surplus labor found neither alternative means sufficient to their subsistence nor a social safety net through which to secure their means of subsistence. Only some surplus labor did find its means of subsistence via growing NGO and informal sectors, with jobs that were in fact highly insecure and extremely low paying (MoFPED 2014). The rural small farming sector, which could have absorbed the bigger share of this labor, had already been severely incapacitated by the very reforms that were meant to improve it.

It is within this context, one in which public sector retrenchment was instigating income inequality and social insecurities of various kinds, that democratization and popular participation created opportunities for civil society to challenge the political elite. And as civil society began to challenge the state on social and economic policy the political elite, in response, resorted to foreclosing the avenues and opportunities for civic action. The next section of this chapter will discuss democratization and popular participation in the early structural adjustment period. The final section of the chapter, will examine how setbacks in democratization and popular participation in the late structural adjustment period foreclosed the means through which civil society could prevent maize grain merchants from engaging in dubious acts in the market place.

Democratization and popular participation

As economic austerity was intensifying income inequality and social insecurity, decentralization and other reforms in the civic sphere were simultaneously opening spaces for civic participation and popular democracy. Decentralization had taken root by 1998, the local council system had been legally codified, tribal Kings were restored, and a press that was just as vibrant as it was free had emerged. The popularity of these reforms enhanced Museveni's democratic credentials and boosted his popularity both within the national sphere and international development circles. However, as Museveni reaped political dividends from these reforms, they also inevitably provided the platform through which civil society— media organizations, farmers, teachers and health workers, and various other organized groups of laid off workers following retrenchment of economic liberalization, etc.—would begin to launch a challenge to his rule. In response, Museveni's government began to roll back and de-legislate these political reforms as a way to maintain control of the political space and his hold onto the state apparatus. To appropriately situate the counter reactionary rule that I examine in the late structural adjustment period, this section will briefly discuss the institutions for democracy and popular participation that emerged in that moment.

I do not attempt to examine the full range and implications of political reforms implemented in this early structural adjustment period as doing so is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I will focus my analysis on two key aspects of reform at that time: decentralization in local government and the liberalization of the print and

broadcast media, for two main reasons. First, Uganda's decentralization policy constituted a radical departure both from conventional democratic practice and from the politics of the past. I will argue that this system established local political institutions that inspired political practices and a brand of popular democracy that ensured that the various forms of civil society groups could hold the political elite accountable. Second, I will focus on the media reforms because the media provided the forum through which this civil society—teachers and health workers associations, organized demobilized groups, etc.—increasingly found expression, and through which they challenged the political elite.

Uganda's decentralization policy has its roots in Museveni's political mobilization methods during his "liberation" war in the early 1980s, but was materialized with a formal policy announcement in 1992, and a supporting law that was enacted in 1993 (Onyach-Olaa 2003). As the policy and the law codified this decentralization, it set up five levels of local government, LC I to LC V. The local council I (LC I) is comprised of all adult residents 18 years and above in a single village. The LC I elects an executive committee of nine persons, led by a chairman. This LC I executive committee organized village council meetings at least once a month, which discussed issues pertinent to village residents. The ambiguity of the law on what could or could not constitute topics for the village council meeting meant that nothing was off limits. The local council meeting often discussed topics such as subversion of civil rights by state officials, economic livelihoods of residents, expected behavior of residents, admission or

expulsion of persons from the village, etc., topics that in the previous regimes would have earned a charge of treason or extra-judicial punishment. Further up that ladder, the local council II is comprised at the parish level of all executive committee members of each village. Still further up the ladder you have the LC III council, at the sub-county, that is primarily comprised by directly elected representatives from each parish. The LC III is also led by a directly elected chairperson, who in turn appoints nine members to his/her executive committee. The LC IV is intended for only municipal councils, while the LCV is formed at each district level. Like the LC III council the LCV council is comprised of representatives from each sub-county in the district. All councils should be elected every five years²⁶.

Some scholars have suggested that decentralization (the LC system in Uganda) was primarily intended to extend a neo-liberal agenda into relatively harder to reach rural locations. But if this was primarily its purpose, its unintended effect was that it created spaces through which various civil society groups could assert their interests, participate in salient political debates, protest affronts to civil liberties, discuss and resolve local livelihood issues and demand accountability from the local district and central government. This demand for accountability and intolerance for abuse of state power is demonstrated at national level by how the Uganda parliament's compelled President Museveni to dismiss two Government Ministers, Jim Muhwezi and Sam

²⁶ Local Council I elections have not been conducted since 2001.

Kuteesa, on charges of corruption and at local level by instances in which district level elected Local Council leaders frequently exposed and protested corruption, abuse of state power and misuse of public resources by both central and local government staff.

Mamdani (1996) has written about the extent to which these local councils democratized the despotic apparatus of the colonial institution of the local chief, inherited at independence and reproduced in the post-independence political order. Earlier in 1987 a Mamdani led commission of inquiry into Uganda's local government system had warned that the popular democracy emerging in Uganda at that time could thrive into the future only if the LC system remained detached from the state²⁷. Oloo (2003) notes for example that the LC system increased opportunities for citizens to determine how they should be governed and to make choices regarding the type and quality of public services they desired. Local Council leaders often ensured that medicines dispatched to health centers were delivered, and that they were utilized within their local health unit jurisdictions (Kyomuhendo et al. 2006). Just as these local councils placed their keen eyes on service delivery, they also focused keen interest on issues of national importance. National and local elections were overseen by these local councils, and this popular participation in electoral processes generally prevented electoral malpractice.

²⁷ It is in this way that the LC was practically a part of civil society as opposed to a part of government or the state.

The background to the launch of the decentralization in 1992 and the Local Government Statute of 1993 was in part the extent to which this system had gained popularity and, largely explains how it became codified in the 1995 constitution by people's elected representatives in the Constituent Assembly. Indeed the passing of the new constitution in 1995 marked a key moment in constitutional and political reforms that intended to consolidate democratization, and the institutions of popular participation. As I have noted above, the LC I is comprised of all adult members of the village and the LC I executive called monthly meetings. Buyengo's residents recalled how the LC I monthly meetings provided the forum through which they discussed and resolved everything from local livelihoods to the needs of individual community members. While Buyengo's residents could not precisely explain why the LC system had become less powerful, they often pointed to lack of sufficient funding and others to the length of time it had taken to hold LC elections. I will return to the subject of local councils and the state of popular democracy and popular participation in the last part of this chapter.

As this democratization and popular participation was taking shape, reforms in media laws were enabling proliferation of new print and broadcast media outlets, private FM radios and TV stations and newspapers, completely dismantling the monopoly maintained by the state over Uganda's airwaves and print media. Prior to these reforms, the Government of Uganda owned and controlled Uganda's major media broadcast and print media outlets, Uganda Television and The Newvision. The Minister of

Information, acting on the whims of the Government, had the authority to appoint the board of directors and senior managers of these bodies. Following liberalization of the media, the number of private, independent FM radio stations expanded from five in 1997 to one hundred and twenty by 2005, and with over fourteen million radios, over 80% of Uganda's households owned or had access to an FM radio set (Geske 2010). These FM radio stations greatly expanded the range of messages the citizens received from an increasingly diverse pool of civil society organizations and political activists.

Private FM stations are primarily set up to earn their owners a profit, and the major source of this profit are revenues from advertisements. However, this revenue depends in large part on the size of its listenership. As is the case in other media markets, listeners are essentially attracted to radio programming that plays music of their taste and talk shows that they find engaging and which speak to the issues that resonate with their priorities. Geske (2010) reports that by the late 1990s almost every radio station in Uganda hosted dozens of talk-shows every week and that talk shows began to take up more space than music on the airwaves. Government officials were often invited or were forced to come to news rooms to clarify, respond to, or defend the government on a broad range of political, economic and social issues. Boundaries of politically charged topics were often breached as talk-shows pushed the limits of political discourse in their bid to capture and retain listenership. Mutabazi (2008) writes that Uganda's media and civil society organizations become powerful avenues through

which public opinion on a range of issues was shaped and masses mobilized to oppose the shortcomings and/or excesses by the state.

While talking about key political individuals was taboo in the previous regimes, now these political figures could be discussed in the open by rank and file ordinary citizens. Capital Gang, a Capital FM radio talk show and *Ebimeezas* on Radio One and Radio CBS Buganda led the way in challenging these taboos and in opening the political apparatus to public scrutiny in quite unprecedented ways (Geske 2010). *Ebimeezas* is a Luganda word which loosely translated means tables around which people sit for political debate. Airing every Saturday afternoon, Radio One's and Radio CBS Buganda's *Ebimeezas* became the most popular and between these two, they embodied the ways in which common people, local activists could articulate positions that were counter to, or critical of the political establishment (Geske 2010). The popularity of these talk shows grew rapidly, soon overflowing with participants, whereby around three hundred people including members of parliament, businessmen, scientist and civilians from around the country joined in open debates about hot political topics every week. By the early 2000s various radio stations in Kampala alone were hosting at least seven active *Ebimeezas*.

Talk shows continued to grow in popularity and by the late 1990s and early 2000s these talk shows were a popular feature on ordinary people's weekend schedules. Government policies became a frequent subject of intense public scrutiny. Civil society under Umbrella Groups such as Civil Society for Democracy, the Uganda Land

Alliance, the Uganda Farmers Association, the NGO Forum and the Uganda Women's Movement worked to build civic consciousness and to mobilize the public around key social issues using their extended network to Uganda's rural areas. On quite a few occasions President Museveni personally listened into these talk shows and on a quite a few occasions phoned in or personally attended these talk shows to defend his regime against various charges by talk show participants. Museveni's regime also made a coordinated effort to send government officials or other party officials to participate in these public debates and to answer their critics. But these efforts were clearly not having desired effects and the listenership was expanding and, as talk shows gained in popularity, more private FM stations started including talk shows in their programming.

The double effect of structural adjustment—economic liberalization instigating economic insecurity and political reforms creating the spaces for civil society to agitate for economic and social justice is what made this period in Uganda particularly unique. Public sector retrenchment—deep cuts in public sector workers and demobilization of the military created a mass of people that could not find sufficient livelihood in a context in which social services had become commercialized. Simultaneously, reforms in local government and in the media created avenues through which civil society groups frequently challenged the state and the political elite. This period, early 1990s to late 1990s, was characterized by a double and contradictory dynamic: economic insecurity and an emergent vibrant civil society agitating for economic justice. This dynamic is what led to the politics of the late structural adjustment period, to which I

now turn, and provides the backdrop to political repression that restrained civil society thereby enabling maize merchants to engage, with impunity, in dubious market practices.

Late structural adjustment, 1999-2011

The defining feature of late structural adjustment was the erosion of progress in democratization and popular participation that were achieved in the early and mid-1990s. Museveni's government has recentralized local authority, reinstated laws and put in place administrative measures limiting media freedoms, weakened the local council system and eroded other avenues for popular participation. As a consequence of these moves, maize merchants can engage, unhindered, in various dubious practices that dispossess rural small producers of their means for production. This final section of this chapter traces this erosion in democratization and participation, and by doing this the chapter outlines the broader context in which unregulated, free markets operate, and merchants are able to engage unhindered in dubious practices that dispossess rural small farmers.

Re-centralization of local authority

While decentralization in local authority in the early structural adjustment period opened spaces through which ordinary citizens and various civil society groups could challenge the state, the late structural adjustment period became the period during which these spaces were foreclosed by the political elite. Two key features define the

state of decentralization in the late structural adjustment period. First, in 2003 the government effectively recentralized the office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) from the local authority to the minister of local government through the Local Government Amendment Act of the same year. Second, in 2005 the government issued an executive order that abolished a local head tax, known popularly as the Graduate Tax (GT) (Manyak & Katono 2010). I will deal separately with each of these features and their implications.

(i) *Recentralization of Chief Administrative Officers*

The chief administrative office is essentially the chief executive of the district. The CAO hires and fires district staff, oversees the development and implementation of the district development plan and is the chief accounting officer of the district. The CAO decides the issues and the areas upon which the district development plan places priority for implementation. In every shape or form, the CAO is an extremely powerful institution in each respective district.

Decentralization in Uganda evolved in various phases and steps. Between 1986 and 1987 the Government of Uganda set up elected Resistance Councils at every village, parish, sub-county and district. The government gradually introduced fiscal and financial and policy making powers to these resistance councils until 1995 when they were entrenched in the new constitution and renamed Local Councils (Mugabi 2004). The constitution in effect rendered the office of the CAO accountable to and under the

control of the district council. The district council could hire and fire the CAO, who was accountable to the same body (Manyak & Katono 2010). The theory of decentralization anticipated that this reporting relationship and accountability to locally elected leaders would in turn return power to and empower local people and institutions, increase people's participation in decision making, improve transparency and accountability, placing power in the hands of the people to develop their districts at their discretion, with their own resources (Mugabi 2004). As a consequence of these reforms, in 2002 Uganda ranked second on decentralization among thirty five countries surveyed in Africa (Atwoti & Helmsing 2014) and yet by 2008 this progress had been largely reversed (Golooba Mutebi 2008).

In reality, however, political pressures from elected district chairpersons and district councils, habitually sought to override local government procedures, often forcing CAOs to bend procurement and contract award procedures for their personal gain (Manyak & Katono 2010). In response, in 2003, the government amended the Local Government Act recentralizing the office of the CAO from local authorities to the central government, thereby reversing one of the most important elements of the policy. By re-centralizing the CAO, the government in effect retook control over district level staff hires and fires. While the government argued that the reform aimed to protect the CAOs from abuse by local councilors, one would have to note that rather than putting in place measures to deter and punish indiscretions by councilors, the reforms severely weakened local governments. The implication of this move lies less simply in

the staff hiring and firing power that was transferred to the central government and more on its impacts on local social policy, local social policy agendas, and on what became defined as urgent and not urgent for the local level.

The initial decentralization framework placed fiscal and policy making functions in the hands of the CAO, with district council oversight and approval. By making the CAO accountable to the Minister of Local Government, the Local Government Amendment Act essentially eroded the power of these district councils and their ability to influence the responsiveness of local policy to local issues. And to place in perspective the impact of central government policy on district policy making, one has to remember that free market, private sector led growth has been the hallmark of the Government of Uganda development policy since 1987, when the government signed onto IMF/World Bank economic liberalization policies. As central government policy emphasized reliance on free markets and the private sector to drive production and growth, the Chief Administrative Officer, who was now under the direction of the central government, was inevitably going to pursue local development policy within the boundaries of free market, private sector led growth, rather than interfere with or develop a district development plan that was at odds with central government policy. It is in this context that one has to place the emergence of maize merchants and the absence of a public policy response to their actions.

(ii) *Abolition of Graduated Tax:*

It is in part the unpopularity of Graduated Tax (GT) with local masses that led Museveni to abolish the GT in 2005 (Manyak & Katono 2010). The amount of Graduated Tax one paid was determined by how much one earned or was estimated to earn. Unemployed and informal sector employed adults were however required to pay a fixed flat amount and in 2005 this was 20,000 shillings, just under \$10 per year at the time. All persons in formal employment had their GT remitted by their employer directly in some cases to the district of their residence and in other cases to the district of their origin, and by 2001 this rate stood at 80,000 shillings per year.

All GT went to the local government budget, which at the same time took charge of enforcing collection. Collection from persons in formal employment was automatically deducted from pay by the employer, while rural unemployed adult males were required to pay in person, usually by the end of April each year. Lacking alternative viable means of enforcing collection from unemployed rural adults, local governments often resorted to physical force to enforce payment. Individuals that defaulted were often arrested, sometimes in the middle of the night, and held in local prisons (Manyak & Katono 2010). It is this reason that Museveni cited to justify GT elimination. However, if enforcement was brutal it was likely because the GT constituted the single largest source of revenue for rural districts and the major pot of funds about which districts had sole discretion.

The abolishment of the GT has a significant political dimension, and this political dimension is in part tied to the predicament of the lower rural classes within the larger

economic crisis of the dynamics of structural adjustment. The lowest amount of Graduate Tax per adult per year, was only 20,000 shillings, just under \$10 at that time. The unwillingness or inability of the adult males to pay this sum, which instigated brutal collection methods, speaks about widespread economic insecurities among the rural masses just as much as it speaks about the salience of the tax to district local revenue.

And yet the abolishment of GT, while popular with the lower class working masses, was heavily resisted by district leaders, the private sector and NGOs (Manyak & Katono 2010; New Vision 2015). The *Newvision* report quoted Charles Opolot, a Director of a public policy Think Tank, arguing that GT collection should have been reformed rather than abolished, and that GT conferred legitimacy and sense of belonging to citizens. One may conclude that the difference in how elimination of the tax was received between the masses and middle class formal employees was simply an expression of divergent social class interests. And yet at the time of its abolition, GT was earning local governments 85 to 100 billion shillings, through which districts could supply essential social services (Manyak & Katono 2010; Auditor General 2016). Several studies showed that GT formed a major source of local revenue for lower local governments and mitigated local government dependency on central government for service provision.

Beyond the revenue shortfall caused by the abolition of GT, this single move suddenly rendered rural districts wholly dependent upon the central government for budget support, and with this their ability to set and pursue local priorities and agendas

became severely restricted, a point that the Auditor General made in the annual 2016 report (Auditor General 2016) and by Manyak and Katono (2010). The Local Government Act provides that districts are funded through central government grants, local revenue collection, borrowing and/or donations from development partners. However, by and large central government grants contribute 85% of the district budgets, with more than 90% of this funding coming as conditional grants²⁸ (Office of the Auditor General 2016). The same report notes that “this heavy reliance on central government grants for financing has left local governments with very marginal opportunity for local fiscal autonomy and discretion in resource allocation decisions” (pp VI). I interviewed local government officials in Busia district about local revenue base, district priorities and the district development plan. In every single case, district development officials lamented the constraints imposed by central government funding, the limits imposed by conditional grants and the gross insufficiency of central government funding generally.

I did learn from these interviews that market dues were in fact the sole and most significant source of local government revenue. Several key informant interviews revealed that business licenses and fees, market dues and levies collected from merchants and vendors in various municipal, community and roadside commodity markets and from merchants and vendors at roadblocks as they transported

²⁸ Local Governments must spend conditional grants on projects that are specified by the central government.

commodities constituted the single largest source of locally generated revenue. This reliance by the district local government upon markets and merchants for local revenue generation is of profound significance within the context of this discussion because merchants and traders are now the major source of local government revenue and, in effect, these merchants and traders have become constituted as the source of the solution to district funding gaps, rather than as a source of the problem to small rural farmers' capital accumulation aspirations.

District development policy making

As I have already noted, the office of the CAO directly influences local government public policy and civil liberties in their respective district. The CAO, oversees policy making, prepares the district development plan and supervises district development programs, hires and fires local staff and is the chief accounting officer of the district. The choices that the CAO makes directly affect equity and quality of social services, the privileges and rights of staff hires, and to which projects public funds are put. The office of the CAO is thus an extremely powerful position, especially in a context in which poverty is widespread and the desire of formal employment runs extremely high. The choices that the CAO makes affect public policy agendas at the local government level, the extent to which the District Development Plan addresses itself to violations and inequities in the market place, the behavior of merchants and the powerless of rural small farmers.

In my several interviews with local government officials about their development plans for the district—what they saw as urgent issues, pressing problems related to rural livelihoods, their priorities and the reasons for those priorities—local government officials betrayed an understanding of the problem facing local farmers in ways that were not only at odds with farmers lived experiences, but consistent with national development policy. Farmers, I was frequently told, are lazy; they needed to adopt modern farming practices; they were ignorant; what they needed was startup capital such as micro-finance. I was frequently told that “rather than tending to farming, youth of nowadays seemed predisposed to gambling and the easy way out, such as riding *boda-bodas*²⁹”. When I brought to their attention the unfairness in the marketplace, the theft and plunder that small farmers encounter as they traded, and the fake seeds that farmers unknowingly purchased at a great personal loss, I was frequently told that “we are now in a free market dispensation” or that “the behavior of merchants was the business of law enforcement” or that “central government priority was on agricultural modernization”. When I brought up the value of organizing farmers or a policy that would encourage farmers to form cooperatives or any such associations so that they could invest collectively in storage facilities or in collective bargaining, I was flatly told that “the central government policy abolished cooperative unions”!

²⁹ “*Boda-boda*, a local contraction from border to border, initially referred to bicycle riders that transported passengers between Uganda and Kenya border points, and is presently used across that country to mean all bicycle and motorcycle transporters.

It is unclear to me that these district officials genuinely believed in the validity of their claims, and it was not my goal to verify this belief. What is extremely clear though is that central government policy had material expression in the agendas of local government public policy making. Local government programs are funded almost exclusively by the central government, and funds are disbursed as conditional grants, which means that they are meant exclusively only for those activities that are earmarked as a priority by the central government. In a context in which government policy was heavily built on the pillars of economic liberalization—privatization and deregulation—every single development grant from the center to the district was meant to be for purposes, at the exclusion of projects intended to interfere with the “free” market. Any attempt to organize farmers into cooperatives or to establish storage facilities to protect farmers from merchants or middle men would at the very least remain unsupported or at worst would be resisted by the state.

Weakening democracy and popular participation

Uganda has had a long history of political repression, in part because the fissures and contradictions sown in the colonial period were reproduced and amplified in different ways in the post-colonial period (Mamdani 1996). Between 1986 and 1999 Museveni’s government largely dismantled these instruments of repression, establishing in their place institutions that were charged with protecting and promoting various civil and political rights and empowering citizens. For example, after he captured state power

in 1986, Museveni abolished the institution of the local chief, in which the colonial government had combined unchecked executive, judicial and legislative power. He replaced the chief with popularly elected Local Councils (Mamdani 1996). The print and broadcast media were also largely liberalized by the late 1990s. After 2001 however, in the late structural adjustment period, Museveni's government started eliminating and undermining the same institutions of popular democracy and people's empowerment that he had put in place and restricting the media and other civil liberties. I will deal separately with each of these trends.

(i) Restrictions on popular participation

Citizens often find political expression via various community based organizations (CBOs), membership based organizations (MBOs) and non-government organizations (NGOs). Several scholars for example have argued that CBOs, MBOs and NGOs constitute a critical form of civil society and provide the forum for advancing and protecting citizen's social, economic and political rights. The environment and legal regime under which, CBOs, MBOs and NGOs operate is inevitably going to facilitate or hinder their functions.

To explore the legal and administrative environment in which NGOs and CBOs operate is therefore critical to obtaining insights into the potential and limits placed around the extent to which civil society can promote and protect popular struggles. In Uganda all NGOs and CBOs seeking registration must apply to with the National NGO

Board at the national level and the district NGO Monitoring Committee at the district level, respectively. The National NGO Board is housed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs—which primarily comprises of various internal security agencies, and is appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs³⁰. Similarly CBOs and MBOs, which largely operate in rural districts, are registered by the department of community development at the district, and are monitored by a district NGO Monitoring Committee. The district NGO Monitoring Committee is chaired by the Chief Administrative Officer and comprises of a Resident District Commissioner (RDC), the Chief Administrative Officer, and representatives from internal security, community development, health and education. A CBO applying for registration “submits a constitution, areas of intervention, a work plan and a budget and their application must be approved by LCI through LCIII and by the sub-county Internal Security Officer”³¹.

One notices that the regulatory framework of CBOs and NGOs is deliberately set up so that CBOs and NGOs are compelled to work for and towards achieving the objectives and development priorities outlined by the government. As we see, the NGO Monitoring Committee comprises of individuals that are also charged with implementing government development projects; the CAO initiates and supervises government development projects is a government appointee. The same applies to

³⁰ The NGO ACT has undergone several amendments, in 2003, 2006, 2011, and 2016. The 2016 Amendments eliminated the NGO board and constituted a National Bureau of NGOs in its place.

³¹ Interview with District Official.

community development, education and health departments. In addition, NGOs and CBOs risk deregistration if they work against or at cross purposes with the state. As mentioned by a district official, “CBOs supplement government programs where the government is unable to meet all the people’s needs”. One also notices, as the same district official put it that “the NGO monitoring committee regulates actions of all CBOs—they have to conform to the guidelines and laws outlined in the NGO Act and NGO policy”.

One also notes that the National NGO Board and the District NGO monitoring committee are comprised largely of officers of the government security apparatus. As I have already noted above, the National NGO Board is housed in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, whose mandate is internal security. Similarly, the NGO monitoring committee is chaired by the RDC, a representative of the president at the district, who also doubles as the chair of the District Security Committee. In addition, a CBO seeking registration must obtain approval from the sub-county security officer. CBOs and NGOs risk deregistration should they overstep their approved work plans or are deemed to engage, in the interpretation of the District Security Committee, in any activities that are prejudicial to the interests of the state or state policy.

(ii) Weakening local councils

As I have already noted, a Local Government Review Commission specifically recommended that the local councils should continue to be divorced from the state, if

their brand of popular democracy was to thrive, and if that institution was to remain part of civil society. However, contrary to this recommendation, the government has at different times taken steps the effects of which are to coopt LCs within the central government apparatus. First, in 2006 the government promised and made plans to provide all LCs with bicycles (New Vision Sept 29 2011). While the purposes of these promises may have been to gain the support of the multitude of LCs across the country, its ultimate effect was to reverse accountability and allegiance of the LCs to the state from the citizens.

Second, at their inception LCs volunteered their services for the common good of their communities. And yet in 2011 the government promised that LCs would be paid a quarterly salary of ten thousand shillings, funded by the central government budget. In addition to offending the principles for which the LC system was initially established, this move inevitably undermined the extent to which LCs would serve as true people's representatives. Third, the government has not organized LC elections since 1996. This has eroded the legitimacy and power of the LCs and left several positions in the LC system unfilled due to lack of interest, migration or death.

(iii) Limiting media freedoms:

By the year 2000 Uganda had over 100 FM radio stations that provided a considerable forum for political participation, civic expression and mobilization, following liberalization of the broadcast (print and audio) media in the early 1990s.

However, by 2006 the government had intensified intolerance towards the media, arbitrarily arresting journalists with trumped up charges (Human Rights Watch 2006), in ways that have foreclosed the potential for the media to provide citizens a forum for free expression.

The Uganda Communications Commission is charged with developing, regulating and licensing the policy and actors in Uganda's broadcast media, within the provisions outlined in the UCC Act of 2013. The ACT accords considerable authority to the Uganda Communications Commission and, given the ambiguity of the ACT, the Commission has often acted in quite arbitrary ways. On several occasions, the Commission has threatened media organizations with closure if in their perception the respective media organizations were broadcasting messages that run contrary to state policy.

For example, the Uganda Communications Commission suspended licensing of new FM stations that did not abide by the UCC ACT. Secondly, the Uganda Communication Commission ordered that talk shows only be held within the precincts of the radio station and within the walls of the radio station's studio. In 2002 the Commission closed *The Daily Monitor*, an opposition leaning daily, for ten days allegedly for publishing false news. In 2002 and again in 2005 the Commission took off air KFM, a radio station typically critical of the government, allegedly for publishing "false news" (Mutabazi 2008). In 2009 the Commission took off air several radio stations, Central Broadcasting Service, Suubi FM, Radio II and Radio Sapencia, allegedly for inciting the

public against the State. The closure of the opposition leaning *The Daily Monitor* in 2013 marked the climax of a pattern of harassment of the media by security agencies³². In each case the government set conditions for re-opening, which included firing of journalist critical of the regime and editing political commentary³³. The effect of these moves was to intimidate journalists and media house manages, ultimately limiting popular participation of civil society in matters that affected their communities.

Conclusions

Markets do not operate in a vacuum; they are influenced by the political and social dynamics in which they function. To trace and understand why particular markets function in particular ways one must inevitably also understand the political and social dynamics from which they arise. This entails that we review the particular histories that have produced the particular market dynamics. This chapter has reviewed this history, starting in 1987, when World Bank and IMF economic liberalization programs were first systematically introduced in Uganda. As we have seen structural adjustment programs of economic liberalization unleashed economic insecurity as they simultaneously created spaces for civil society to agitate against this economic insecurity. As the political elite felt threatened by this agitation, they began to roll back

³² Several journalists critical of the regime were constantly dragged to the police and charged with various media related offences. Daniel Kalinaki of *The Daily Monitor* faced several court cases between 2003 and 2004 and again in 2009. Andrew Mwenda a journalist with KFM was similarly charged with sedition.

³³ See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/21/uganda-growing-intimidation-threats-civil-society>

this civil society and to dismantle the institutional apparatus through which this civil society could find expression.

Thus, the immediate backdrop to Uganda's present markets are the economic and political liberalization programs that led to the structural adjustment programs implemented from 1987. These economic liberalization programs, and the response to these programs by the political elite from above and by civil society from below, created the sort of dynamics that eventually stripped the markets of necessary controls. The dubious practices by Uganda's maize merchants, which we will examine in the next chapter, are only possible because structural adjustment stripped markets of the institutional apparatus through which these dubious practices could have been checked.

I have endeavored to demonstrate that contrary to conventional wisdom, structural adjustment programs were not a one sided affair—they were not simply imposed from above, and received by passive political actors below. In some cases, as in Uganda, sections of economic liberalization were embraced wholly and in other cases these political actors modified these economic liberalization programs to suit their narrow interests. It is thus this contested process that gave rise to SAPs, as distinctive from World Bank/IMF policies of economic liberalization. Hence, SAPs were inevitably a consequence of a convergence of local histories and politics and economic liberalization. It is for this reason that SAPs are different in diverse geographical and historical contexts and Uganda's agricultural commodity markets particularly unique.

The idea that economic and political processes cannot occur and should not be understood exclusive of each other underpins this chapter. Rather, economic and political processes, operating mutually, unleash particular social dynamics. Citizens respond, through political actions, to their economic circumstances, just as the political elite respond, through political maneuvers, to the actions of citizens. A convergence of the actions of citizens to economic circumstances and the political reactions of the political elite to the actions of citizens are what have constituted the particular dynamics operating in much of rural Uganda's agricultural commodity markets.

As we will see, markets are fraught with power relations. Those with power wield it to their benefit at the expense of those that lack that power. In effect, rather than being free, "free" markets are precisely the space in which those with power are able to exercise that power. This chapter aimed to trace the social and political dynamics that have given rise to this "free" market. The policies of deregulation have created the opportunity for those with power to deploy it to their benefit at the expense of those lacking that power. The implication, as we shall see, is that rather than being free, markets, left unregulated, will be captured by those that have power, at the expense of those that lack power.

Chapter Four: The Political Economy of Buyengo's Maize: Markets, Exploitation and Dispossession

Introduction

Chapter three traced the political and social conditions that have enabled local merchants to engage, unhindered, in dubious practices. This chapter explores how these relationships of exploitation are reconstituting agrarian relations in Buyengo. I draw on a theoretical framework of political economy to explore how maize merchants—intermediaries in the market place who have recently emerged following structural adjustment programs—affect what farmers earn for their maize and how this in turn shapes how farmers use their land, and labor relations emerging in contemporary Buyengo.

As I noted in the introduction to this dissertation, exploitation is central to understanding the processes through which inequality occurs, and how distinctive socio-economic classes form (Avent-Holt 2015). This chapter explores these relations of exploitation, using the political economy of Buyengo's maize farming as a case study. I explore the conditions through which maize merchants dispossess small farmers of their means of production. To assess the extent of this exploitation I first determine, using the Labor Theory of Value (LTV), the value of farm gate maize and then compare this farm gate value to the income that farmers earn at the different maize grain price points. I analyze the practices and coping mechanisms of small farmers and the practices of maize merchants in the market place. As Avent-Holt (2015; 219) notes

observing the seller buyer relationship is central to investigating dynamics of exploitation. The final section of this chapter examines the agrarian consequences of this exploitation—subsistence crisis of various kinds, distress land sales, shifting identities and occupational categories of new land owners and their impacts, and the contingent agrarian formations and relations that these new social formations engender.

The Political Economy of Buyengo's Maize

I conducted fieldwork for this dissertation on the maize market in Buyengo Parish, Busia District in eastern Uganda³⁴. Some farmers in Buyengo Parish grow maize primarily for domestic consumption but many more have to produce a surplus for the local market if they should purchase basic household commodities. How much maize is used for food and how much is sold depends in large part on how much they harvest and various other highly contingent household level circumstances. As is the case in many other semi-subsistence societies, moral economies of reciprocity and redistribution shape Buyengo's exchange relations. In this chapter I am concerned with only the political economy of that maize that is destined for the market, rather than the portion that is used for domestic consumption and as such I exclude from my analysis those moral economies of redistribution and reciprocity.

³⁴ As stated earlier, in Uganda the village is the smallest unit of local government administration. A parish, which typically has 6-10 villages, is the next level. After the parish you have a sub-county that comprises of several parishes, also typically 6-10. Similarly 6-10 sub-counties comprise a district. Each level has a local council (LC) executive committee. Local councils should be elected every five years but no elections of new LCs have been held since 1996.

Buyengo's small farmers sell their farm produce as they obtain much of their subsistence needs from various markets in ways that belie the classical image of peasants as self-sufficient. While no reliable statistics exist regarding the proportion of their farm output that ends up on the market, official Government of Uganda data suggest that households in rural Uganda are increasingly engaging in market transactions. For example, maize and beans are largely grown by small farmers using small hand held tools, and yet Uganda's maize exports doubled and beans exports tripled between 1990 and 2011 (MoFPED 2014)³⁵. Further, Uganda's National Household Surveys report that the average monthly per capita consumption expenditure on non-durable and durable items such as food, rent, and personal goods medical and health care for rural households almost doubled between 2000 and 2010 (UBOS 2010)³⁶. Evidently, commodity markets have increasingly become major features in the circuits of household subsistence in Uganda's rural areas³⁷.

³⁵ Maize exports increased from 26,733 in 1990 to 54,978 tons in 2011, and of beans from 9,278 in 1990 to 28,014 tons (MoFPED 2014).

³⁶ Household expenses on durable and non-durable goods have risen from 109,400 shillings in year 2000 (UBOS 2003) to 197,500 shillings in year 2010 (UBOS 2010).

³⁷ One would have to ask, if this indicates that increased market participation indicates that farmers now earn more income, and therefore are producing more. FAO data also shows that volume of production of major crops grown in the eastern Uganda had declined by about 8% from 2000 to 2016. A Bank of Uganda survey found that 26.5% of households in Eastern Uganda reported that they had received remittances from abroad. This does not include cash transfers from urban to rural areas (BoU 2008).

More than 90% of Buyengo's households grow maize, and most middle income³⁸ or larger farmers produce it primary for sale³⁹. Accordingly, this chapter critically examines how maize, as a commodity form, and the maize market as a space of class based contestation, reshapes livelihood possibilities for Buyengo farmers. The chapter is guided by two questions, each central to understanding how the maize market is transforming land use, labor relations and class formation in contemporary Buyengo. First, how does the relationship between the value of farm gate maize and its market price shape livelihood possibilities in Buyengo? Second, how does this relationship in turn shape access to land, land use, labor relations and, more broadly, contemporary agrarian relations in Buyengo?

Answers to these questions draw upon Buyengo's empirical context, where commodity markets presently play a central role in household level production and social reproduction. This proliferation of commodity markets has occurred in tandem with structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s and answers to these questions should thus provide critical insights into the ways this has become the

³⁸ Various key informant interviews (see methods chapter) noted that households in Buyengo own land ranging in size from ¼ acre (just enough for the dwelling unit and a small backyard garden) to 5 or 6 acres. They also noted that 2-3 acres is what an average household owns in Buyengo, and that this is what is sufficient to farm for both household consumption and produce a surplus for the market. It is on the basis of this data that I define a middle income farmer in Buyengo as one that owns 2 to 3 acres of land.

³⁹ Several key informants (see methods chapter) reported that over the last 25 years maize had replaced cotton as the major source of household cash income. In addition, a survey that I conducted revealed that in the 2012 long rains season (March to August) 80% of Buyengo's households had planted maize compared to 56.7 % that planted cassava, 43.3 % that planted beans, 26.7 % planted that planted sorghum, 26.7 % that planted sweet potatoes and 16.7% that planted millet.

moment in which we see new mechanisms of exploitation and various agrarian crises emerging as a result. Scholars such as Peters (2009) and Araghi (1995) have appealed to contemporary scholars to situate the analysis of agrarian questions within larger global processes such as economic liberalization. Oya (2007) and Ploeg (2013) have also underscored the importance of micro household level analysis. As Ploeg (2013; 23) appropriately notes, “the micro level is where trends, predictions, price relations, changes in agrarian policies or any other macro processes are actively interpreted and translated by farmers and other actors”. In responding to these calls, this chapter also contributes to a growing literature on dynamics of capitalist development in Africa (Oya 2007; Scoones et al. 2012; Cousins 2013) and impacts of neoliberal economic policy on farming systems (Isakson 2014; Eakan 2014).

The first section of this chapter employs Marx’s Labor Theory of Value to explore how a “free” market has produced a contradictory dynamic, whereby the **price** of maize grain on the market is consistently lower than its real farm gate **value** or what I will refer as exchange value henceforth. I will argue that by creating this discrepancy, economic liberalization programs of structural adjustment have intensified exploitation of Buyengo’s farmers of the value of their labor power.

However, while the Labor Theory of Value reveals the exploitation that Buyengo’s farmers suffer when they sell their maize in the market place, it falls short in the extent to which it does not provide a framework for conceptualizing the relations of power and powerlessness that enable covert and overt dubious tricks, such as short

weighing grain, through which merchants exploit small scale farmers. Along these lines, the next section explores how maize markets have become arenas in which these tricks continue unhindered, and argues that the contemporary liberal market, far from being “free”, is a space in which market actors are able to use their power to exploit less powerful local farmers. The final section of the chapter returns to the framework of political economy of agrarian change and argues that a critical focus upon commodity markets helps to unveil re-distributional effects of “free” markets and the power relations that shape how “free” markets operate. As market transactions dispossess small rural agricultural producers of their means of subsistence, an absence of sufficient alternative livelihoods in industry, and cultural attachments to land, produces an agrarian social form in which small farmer continue to pursue their subsistence, and yet do so in conditions of intense social insecurity. I will elaborate how this agrarian social condition, *dispossession without displacement*, shapes social relations of production and the structure and type of farming emerging in contemporary Buyengo.

Exchange value of maize, market price and redistribution of capital

Maize farming has replaced cotton farming as the main source of household income in Buyengo. But while cotton farming was regulated by the state, and a local cooperative union supplied farmers with cotton seed and agricultural extension, and purchased their cotton, maize farmers must obtain inputs and supplies from private retailers, as they also sell their maize grain in an unregulated market place. Second, the

importance of maize as a cash crop has become even more salient as farmers increasingly need cash with which to purchase subsistence goods of various kinds, increasingly provided via this unregulated market. A farmer having no cash would find it extremely difficult to obtain treatment at local health units, send their children to school and may even be denied access to local water sources⁴⁰ and many other commodities that households now find essential. Analyzing the political economy of maize is therefore essential if we should understand the social relations of production in contemporary Buyengo, how these are being transformed, the conditions in which small farmers struggle for survival, the choices that they are forced to make and the agrarian consequences of those choices.

Buyengo's present maize market is primarily comprised of two sets of actors, maize farmers and maize merchants. This section of the chapter explores how these maize merchants exploit maize farmers. I will show that the local maize commodity chain is heavily skewed in favor of the maize merchants, and against maize farmers, in ways that discourage maize farmers from growing a surplus for the market. As I noted above, I draw upon the Labor Theory of Value to establish the exchange value of maize as determined by the amount of labor embodied in it. As I will show, the exchange value of the maize is generally lower than its price on the market and, as a consequence,

⁴⁰ In the 1990's for example, the Department for Water Development implemented a scheme in which households were required to contribute a proportion of water source construction and installation costs and maintenance user fees.

farmers face exploitation whenever they find maize price levels on the market that are lower than maize exchange. In addition, grain merchants engage in dubious practices such as short weighing grain, through which they further exploit farmers, which instigates dispossession of farmers of their productive capital, primarily land. I suggest that these two trends arise not in spite of, but because of the “free” market and that the notion that these markets are “free” obscures relations of power through which powerful market actors construct the market to their benefit at the expense of the less powerful producers.

The Labor Theory of Value:

The relevance and utility of the labor theory of value dominated debate in the 1990s, with especially those on the ideological right claiming that flaws rendered the theory inapplicable. However, a non-prejudicial reading of the theory finds it relatively straight forward. In elaborating the theory Marx starts with a central undisputable premise: all things that are used to satisfy needs have use value. In other words, a physical thing has utility or a use value to the extent that it satisfies a human want.

Marx adds that human beings cannot practically produce all the things that they need to satisfy their human wants. Some human beings produce only some essential things and other human beings produce other essential things, and a process of exchange is inevitably essential if the myriad of human needs are to be met. Specialization and exchange thus ensues and it is at this moment that these things take on an exchange value. But exchange value is not determined in some arbitrary ways.

The value of things is determined in relation to the value of other things, and this is in turn determined by the amount of labor time that is used to produce them. Thus, while use values derive from the natural properties of things, exchange value is determined by the amount socially necessary labor power required to produce the thing;

As the exchangeable values of commodities are only social functions of those things, and have nothing at all to do with the natural qualities, we must first ask: What is the common social substance of all commodities? It is labor. To produce a commodity a certain amount of labor must be bestowed upon it, or worked up in it—Karl Marx 1844.

Marx is signaling that labor is the central substance of all values or to put it rather simply, that labor time is what constitutes exchange value. A thing conveys the value of that labor when it is exchanged, and the exchange value of commodities is comparable only by the amount of labor time needed to produce different commodities. Hence, the value of a thing changes with the value of labor that it takes to produce it. In other words, the value of a commodity is equal to the amount of labor, in average conditions, that is required to produce that commodity. This implies, therefore that the value of a commodity in one set of conditions at a particular point in time is going to vary if the conditions in which the thing is produced change the labor that is required for its production. In effect the same thing could have different values at different times, if the conditions in which the commodity is produced also change.

Hence, one should reasonably conclude that Marx employs the LTV to determine the value of a commodity as determined by the labor required to produce the commodity, as opposed to the price that is assigned to that commodity in a market

place. Marx clearly refers to the natural or real value of a commodity, which is inevitably and clearly distinguishable from its market price. The real or natural value of a commodity expresses the labor time embodied in its production, while on the other hand the market price may be determined in all kinds of other arbitrary ways. For example, monopolies could set prices at whatever levels that they wish, or producers having leverage in the market set commodities at prices that are above their labor value, or as in classical economic terms, prices may be set by demand and supply forces.

To further explore the conceptual distinction between exchange values and market prices, I draw on Banaji's excellent summary of Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question* (Banaji 1976). Banaji notes that the conceptual distinction between exchange value and price is often lost in scholarly debates, and as a consequence the premises of the LTV are largely misunderstood. Banaji clarifies that products of labor power that are produced for home consumption, and therefore not destined for the market are not commodities in the Marxist sense. A primary motivation for the production of these products is their use value rather than their exchange value. Banaji notes that "use value is a precondition of value, but it is not the factor that determines the amount of this use value...variations of supply and demand can, of course explain why the price varies—note that I do not say 'value'—of a given commodity can rise or fall from one day to the next" (pp 11). Banaji adds that while use value derives from utility, exchange value derives from the cost of labor power that goes into producing a given commodity, given average social conditions. While use value accrues to the utility of a product in the

society, exchange value accrues to the amount of labor power required to produce it, and market price accrues to the value of a product as determined in the market arena.

In sum, the price of a commodity is determined not by its exchange value but by the forces of demand and supply in the market. Hence, the price of a commodity may be lower or higher than its exchange value. The two are not the same the same thing. A farmer finding a price of maize in the market that is lower than its exchange value maize suffers exploitation and a farmer finding a price of maize in the market that is higher than its exchange value accumulates a surplus. The relationship between exchange value of maize and its market price arises only in the difference between the labor power embodied in the maize and the value expressed in its market price. It is in this sense that we see a distinction between market price of a commodity as determined in the market and exchange value of a commodity as determined by labor power.

And yet, supply and demand forces are neither forces operating independently of the agency of market actors, nor simply terrestrial forces that occur outside the free will of men. To start and end with the assumption that commodity prices are determined by forces of demand and supply grossly ignores power relations in the market place: the power of monopoly and of oligopoly, imperfect knowledge, uneven control over production and distribution and arbitrary price setting by merchants purely for profit maximization purposes. Hence, one could persuasively argue that exchange value expresses the real value of a good, while its market price expresses a value that embodies the profit maximizing interests of the merchant. As I show, the maize farmer

has minimal leverage in determining the market price of maize, relative to the leverage that the maize merchant wields in determining the price of maize grain.

Determining the value of labor:

For Marx exchange value embodies labor power and it is crucial to appropriation of value in a capitalist system. This then raises the question: how is the value of labor power that is embodied in a commodity to be determined? Marx says the value of a commodity is primarily a function of the socially necessary labor power that is required to create the commodity. But socially necessary labor is equivalent to the amount of labor that is required to reproduce, develop and maintain labor power. If, for example, a worker needs \$10 dollars a day for his reproduction (food, water, health and all other necessities) and assuming that his entire day is spent on creating the product, then the exchange value of the commodity that he produces is \$10 dollars. Thus, exchange value is the equivalent in working hours that are required to create the commodity given average conditions and average skills.

However, we are immediately confronted by three problems. First, the reproduction of labor power is itself dependent upon use and consumption of a myriad of commodities many themselves products of labor power: household level goods produced at subsistence level and manufactured goods such as fuel, soap, etc. Second, numerous non-monetized inputs, such as women's domestic work, biological reproduction, clean air, land and water that are not amenable to a monetary calculus, especially in a semi –subsistence economy where labor is undivorced from its means of

social reproduction—go into commodity production. Third, highly variable farming conditions (rainfall variation, seed and soil quality, pests and diseases) similarly render extremely variable the productivity of two acres of maize.

If we should attempt to resolve the first problem by determining the value of labor power embodied in the manufactured goods we may be drawn into a fruitless cyclical inquiry: goods consumed in one production cycle embody labor that has itself been reproduced by consuming other goods. To cut the cycle, I will use current wage levels as a measure of labor power, because current wage levels are socially understood to be the price of labor power. I resolve the second problem, numerous non-monetized inputs, because Buyengo's producers did not regard items such as land and water as expense categories in the maize farming cycle. In any case, including these inputs in the total exchange value of maize would drive the exchange value even higher, which would serve to further raise the amount by which the producer is exploited. In effect, excluding these non-monetized inputs from the model does not undermine the validity of my claims. I resolve the third problem by determining what Buyengo producers generally estimate to be the value of the resources that they know it takes to grow maize on a two acre plot in average conditions (labor, seeds and other such materials that the community generally considers necessary for farming maize). The total aggregate cost of these items in the farming of maize is the exchange value of maize in Buyengo.

Given the distinction between exchange value and market price that I have outlined above—the former being the labor embodied in the maize grain—exchange

value—and the latter being the price of the grain on the market. I will show that exchange value of maize remains relatively stable while the market price of maize grain fluctuate extremely widely, with the market price of maize in Buyengo consistently remaining lower than the exchange value of maize for most of the year. I will show that Buyengo’s farmers are forced to sell their maize at prices that are lower than the exchange value of their maize, and suffer exploitation as a consequence. Accordingly, I will first determine the exchange value of maize, shown in table 1 below, compare this exchange value with the market prices of maize (table 2), and then I will draw out some implications of this political economy to agrarian relations and formations in Buyengo.

*Table 4.1: Typical Estimated Exchange Value of Maize Produced on a Two Acre Plot**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Unit cost</i>	<i>Qty/Days</i>	<i>Total cost</i>	<i>Period</i>
Seeds Kgs	5,000	26	130,000	N/A
Slashing per day	5,000	10	50,000	Early Mar
Initial digging per acre	60,000	2	120,000	Mid-Mar
Mixing the soil per day	30,000	2	60,000	Mid-Mar
Planting per acre	50,000	2	100,000	Apr
First weeding per day	80,000	1	80,000	May
Second weeding per day	80,000	1	80,000	May/Jun
Harvesting per day	60,000	1	60,000	Aug
Transport from garden	40,000	1	40,000	Aug
De-combing & threshing	30,000	1	30,000	Aug/Sep
Bags	1,500	30	45,000	N/A
Total			795,000	

Source: Estimates by author based on key informant and group interviews

*All prices in Uganda Shillings. At the time of the study 1 USD was exchanging for 2,500 shillings Uganda shillings⁴¹

⁴¹ It is also necessary that I make a further caveat. This table does not reveal the intra-household division and distribution of the products of labor, which as many studies show, is skewed against women. This is because the household, rather than intra-household relations, is my unit of observation.

Table I above shows the estimated total cost of inputs and labor that are required to produce maize on a typical two acre plot of land. Two acres is what on average, Buyengo's middle farmer owns and is also roughly the minimum land size that one would need if they aspired to produce a surplus for the market, given local technologies and local ecology⁴². Households producing on less than two acres are likely to be surviving on the margins, supplementing their subsistence with wage labor. The unit costs shown in Table I above are estimates based on average conditions, (rain and other weather elements, soil fertility, etc.). Fertilizer costs, though frequently incurred, are not included because we assumed average soil conditions, which will also produce average yield. Other than seeds and bags, all other unit costs accrue to labor: slashing, digging, planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation and de-combing. As in many agrarian societies, Buyengo's farmers rely heavily on family labor, using handheld tools. As such, farming tends to be very labor intensive, which imposes constraints on how much land a single household may farm.

The farm labor shown above does not generally include child labor for two reasons. First, given the heavy nature of farm work, children below ten years of age make a negligible addition to farm labor because they are simply not yet sufficiently strong. Older (adolescent) boys, who may drop out of school, tend to establish their

⁴² Table I above and the rest of the empirical data below are derived from several key informant interviews, corroborated with my observations of the ecological conditions in Buyengo.

own gardens and/or engage in other informal IGAs, and by about eighteen years of age they likely have moved from their parent's household to their own, just as girls of about the same age or a little less often move on in marriage. Second, schooling in Buyengo is more or less compulsory and runs concurrently with seasonal farm activities, in March to April and August to November. Moreover, while it is not legally mandated, community level social sanctions impose a compulsion on parents to send their children to school. In addition, most of Buyengo's parents attach a very high premium on schooling. Unsurprisingly, the best performing school in the region, Buyengo Primary School, is located here.

The monetary values in the table are also generally reliable because wage labor has become quite common and average wage levels for the different types of farm work are generally well known, and form the basis for wage negotiations between middle level farmers and labor for various other farm related tasks. For example, how much labor time is required to slash one acre of land and the reasonable compensation for this labor was generally known⁴³. A shared understanding about how much labor time is required for each task as well as the average wage levels associated with that task in the maize farming cycle indicates the extent to which Buyengo's labor has become highly commoditized. This commoditization of labor has in turn produced a practice

⁴³ This however is different from claim that labor is governed by the market. Rather, family labor is performed in response to how other actors in the market place are compensating labor power. To say that labor is governed by the market risks according it with some form of inherent agency rather than paying attention to the behavior of market actors.

whereby labor is socially regulated, is increasingly measurable and is generally rationalized⁴⁴. Wage levels for one activity are determined in light of the time and effort it takes to complete the activity relative to the time, effort and the wages of a similar activity. By assigning a monetary value to labor, farmers determine the tradability and comparability of farm labor relative to other farm and other non-farm labor. Given the pervasiveness of farm wage labor, many producers are able to assign an average monetary value to their labor in different activities, including their own. Table I above is drawn from this widely shared understanding, developed from information provided by key informants and group interviews.

Two consequences arise from this rationalization of wage labor. First, households have begun to attach a monetary value to their labor power. Increasingly, they weigh the benefits of applying their labor power to producing a surplus for the market relative to the benefits of pursuing their subsistence via the local labor market. Thus, although family labor is unpaid labor, farmers increasingly weigh the benefits of working on their farm relative to benefits of selling their labor⁴⁵. Farmers often worked on their lots to produce only the food that they would consume and resorted to the local labor market to earn cash with which to obtain other non-subsistence goods.

⁴⁴ The day in the case was typically four hours, from about 6:00am to about 10:00am. Beyond 10:00am the laborer may work on his farm or get involved on other non-farm wage labor or simply rest.

⁴⁵ In Malawi, for example, Michalelowa and colleagues report that in response to a higher marginal return, poor rural households in Malawi often chose *Ganyu* at the expense of own farm labor (Michalelowa et al 2010).

While family labor is not obtained from the market, the choices that farmers make about farming on their lots is often influenced both by conditions of the family farm and by what is happening on the labor the market. This is particularly evident in the duality in household crop production: one part of family land is devoted to food for domestic consumption and another part is devoted to producing crops destined to the market. As conditions in the market become unfavorable some households will choose to withdraw from the market, as they farm only for domestic consumption⁴⁶. Some households choose to withdraw from farming a surplus for the market, if they deem that the cost of farming is high relative to the benefits that they anticipate to obtain from the labor market—they may choose to farm only for domestic consumption. Second, class struggle over wages and working conditions are articulated within a contradictory co-existence of highly rationalized labor and cultural expectations of reciprocity and redistribution. I will explore the origins, meanings and consequences of these phenomena more thoroughly later in this chapter.

As shown in Table I above, the total financial outlay on two acres of maize, including all cost of inputs and labor, is approximately Uganda shillings 800,000 shillings. This is the farm gate or exchange value that producers attach to and the minimum they should earn from maize grown on a two acre plot given average

⁴⁶ For example, a study in Busoga within the same region, found that coffee farmers cut down coffee trees and converted the land to producing for food when coffee prices became unacceptably low (Nsibirwa undated).

conditions in Buyengo if they should recoup their outlay. In the next section I will explore the meaning of this exchange value in relation to the larger context of Buyengo's maize market dynamics, and the cost of subsistence at the household level in Buyengo and the broader agrarian context. Table II below provides data related to the production and sale of maize, with which we begin to examine maize grain prices and income from maize relative to cost of producing maize in Buyengo.

*Table 4.2 Analysis of Buyengo's Maize Economy**

Month	Price	Tot						
		Harv	Gross Y	Expen	Net Y	Mtly Y	T Subst	Deficit
Jan	300	2,400	720,000	800,000	-80,000	-13,333	204,000	-217,333
Feb	500	2,400	1,200,000	800,000	400,000	66,667	204,000	-137,333
Mar	900	2,400	2,160,000	800,000	1,360,000	226,667	204,000	22,667
Apr	1,100	2,400	2,640,000	800,000	1,840,000	306,667	204,000	102,667
May	1,200	2,400	2,880,000	800,000	2,080,000	346,667	204,000	142,667
Jun	900	2,400	2,160,000	800,000	1,360,000	226,667	204,000	22,667
July	500	2,400	1,200,000	800,000	400,000	66,667	204,000	-137,333
Aug	200	2,400	480,000	800,000	-320,000	-53,333	204,000	-257,333
Sep	400	2,400	960,000	800,000	160,000	26,667	204,000	-177,333
Oct	500	2,400	1,200,000	800,000	400,000	66,667	204,000	-137,333
Nov	600	2,400	1,440,000	800,000	640,000	106,667	204,000	-97,333
Dec	400	2,400	960,000	800,000	160,000	26,667	204,000	-177,333
Average	625	2,400	1,500,000	800,000	700,000	116,667	204,000	-87,333

Source: Key informant and group interviews

*All prices in Uganda Shillings. At the time of the study 1 USD was equal to 2,500 shillings

Table 2 above provides the basis upon which one begins to analyze the political economy of Buyengo's maize. I will highlight several features shown in the table that are relevant to the discussion that follows. The price of maize grain in the market, as shown in the second column, is extremely variable. In August, at the start of harvest, the maize market price at 200 shillings is at its lowest, while in May at 1200 shillings it

is at its highest. Given average ecological conditions two acres will yield a total of 2,400 kilograms of maize grain⁴⁷, shown in the third column. The fourth column, Gross Y, is a product of the price and the total harvest, assuming that the farmer sold all their maize at once. The fifth column, Expen, is the total cost of growing that maize, as derived from Table 1 above. It is important to note that the cost of production, 800,000 shillings remains constant essentially because the cost of labor and other inputs remain stable throughout the year. The gross and net income values are however variable because maize market prices change.

I have shown, in the sixth column, net income (Net Y), which is what the household will earn if they sold all their maize at this point, after subtracting the cost of producing maize grain (800,000 shillings). Thus, to reap the maximum possible income for their maize, Buyengo's producers would have to sell all their harvest in May, when the price of grain is at its highest. A farmer that sells their maize in May earns a gross income of 2,880,000 shillings and a net income of 2,080,000 shillings. On the other hand, a farmer that sells their grain in August earns a gross income of 480,000 shillings and will incur a loss in the amount of 320,000 shillings, given that they spent 800,000 to produce this maize. As Table 2 shows, a farmer harvesting maize in August

⁴⁷ Several scientific studies suggest that this is a low yield and that application of modern or advanced technology would increase the yield and improve incomes. While I do not dispute the validity of this claim, my aim here instead is to show how the price mechanism, in this specific context in this particular moment of neo-liberal capitalism, works to the disadvantage of producers and to the benefit of merchants. In addition productivity per unit of land is actually much higher as maize is intercropped with crops such as beans. However, crops such as beans are not sold as much as maize and their contribution to household income is relatively minor.

would have to wait until May of the following year—nine months to be precise—if they should sell their maize at the peak price of 1,200 shillings. The line at the bottom of the table shows the average for each of the columns. For example the average price of maize stands at 625 shillings, and we note at that this average price the household would incur a deficit of 87,333 shillings.

Indeed some farmers strive to hold onto their maize grain waiting for higher market prices, selling a little bit in August, gradually selling more of their maize as prices improve. However, unforeseen contingencies, storage costs, cultural rituals, illnesses and other pressing financial needs render this possibility unrealistic for most farmers. In looking at Table 2 one also notices that the net income from maize sold in January and August falls below its cost of production, and the net income less than 200,000 in September and December renders families that sell maize in these months equally vulnerable to contingencies.

Insights from a local grain merchant, shown below, illustrate how grain merchants profit from the dilemma that farmers face given pressing expenses and the combined pressures of highly variable market prices, and social services that are presently monetized, following structural adjustment programs.

“If you want to make money, wait until the peak of the harvest and then purchase maize. It is called “bagging”.

“You could buy animals, typically goats and cows, during the school fees season, at the beginning of each school term. During this period parents, desperate to raise fees for their children, will sell their goats and cows at giveaway prices”.

Grain merchants typically used the term “bagging” to describe a practice whereby they purchased maize grain at low prices, stored and sold it when prices were higher. As a consequence, a culture of speculation was taking root in Buyengo’s local economy and many of Buyengo’s residents desired to engage in maize grain trade rather than in farming. Knowing too well the higher profits from maize grain vending relative to farming, many young men expressed a preference for maize trade over maize farming. Local village based grain venders purchased small amounts of grain from local farmers so that they could sell it to larger grain merchants later in the year when the prices were higher. Some often resorted to borrowing funds from the numerous local Village Savings and Loan Associations present in Buyengo primarily to invest these funds in low priced maize grain. While emerging merchants exploited small farmers, and as consequence of this exploitation, small farmers resorted to selling their labor or to selling their only means of production such as land to offset their crises, thereby setting in motion a process of dispossession.

As I have noted above, many of Buyengo’s small farmers knew fully well that they could earn higher returns if they sold their maize harvest in May. And yet for many, especially farmers surviving on the margins, this was hardly a possibility they could accommodate. Local leaders and many ordinary farmers confirmed to me that most farmers sold their maize in November. Table 2 shows that maize sold for shillings 200 shillings in August, rising to 400 in Sept, 500 in October and 600 in November. After November, maize grain prices begin to slide again, falling as low as 300 shillings in

January, their second lowest point in the year. Farmers had to wait a further three months, until April, to obtain a similar price or higher for their maize grain. As I have noted above, I learnt from local leaders and from several small farmers that many small farmers were unable to wait until April to sell their maize as they needed to offset all kinds of urgent contingent expenses and unforeseen emergencies.

As I have noted, farmers that live on the margins, who have neither physical nor cash savings nor the protection offered by remittances from a kinship network, were the most vulnerable to the effects of this maize price variability and they were relatively more susceptible to selling their grain at prices below farm gate value. The extent of this vulnerability was contingent upon prior ownership of assets and access to social networks through which pressing crises could be offset. As I will show in the next chapter, village savings and loan associations had proliferated in Buyengo in part due to both the aspirations and vulnerabilities that this price variability generated.

Further on the right in Table 2 we see three other columns: Monthly Income (Mtly Y), Total Subsistence (T Subst), and Deficit, to which we should pay close attention in order to further analyze the political economy of Buyengo's maize and its effects. The seventh column, Mtly Y, shows the farmer's monthly net income, assuming they sold all their maize, respectively in the months shown. This is how I have determined this figure. Maize may be grown twice in a year and income from maize shown in column Net Y may also be earned twice in a year. In effect, therefore a household may spread this income over six months, assuming they grew and harvested

the same quantity of maize in the second half of the year. I have therefore divided Net Income (Net Y) by six, the period during which the household will survive on this income before the next farming cycle arrives. Assuming a household sold all their maize in January, at 300, they would incur a monthly net income loss of 13,333, in February they would earn surplus of 66,667 and so on. Notice that the net monthly income, over this six month period is also highly variable, because the grain prices are just as variable. As is to be expected this net income from maize is at its lowest if a farmer sold their maize in August and at its highest if the farmer sold their maize in May.

To fully appreciate the meaning of this net income to household subsistence it is useful to think about it in light of minimum household subsistence needs in average conditions given average family size of six persons. The daily minimum requirements of such a family are Uganda shillings 4,000 for 4 kilos of flour (maize or cassava), 2,000 for soup; (mainly *Obuduba*; a type of small fish), 200 for paraffin and 600 for soap⁴⁸. Thus a total 6,800 is needed every day, 204,000 for a thirty day period⁴⁹. This is their total monthly monetary cost of subsistence, shown in the eighth column, T Subst⁵⁰. Note that this excludes schooling costs, contingencies such as illnesses and depreciation

⁴⁸ Some of the harvested maize may be used for domestic consumption. Assuming that the harvested maize was the sole source of flour a household consumes 720 kilos over a six month period, which would then leave 1,620 kilos for sale. I assume a hypothetical case in which all maize is sold.

⁴⁹ As I show in the methods chapter, I collected and triangulated this information through multiple group and individual interviews.

⁵⁰ The Uganda National Household Survey for 2002/2003 reports that the average household size in rural eastern Uganda was 5.5 persons (UBOS 2003, pp 8).

in household property⁵¹, occurrence of which further intensifies vulnerability. Again as is evident, this subsistence cost is also constant since the same individual members in the same household will generally consume the same amount every month in a given year.

The last column, Deficit, shows the surpluses or deficits that the household incurs, again assuming they sold all their maize in the given month. The deficit/surplus is obtainable simply by subtracting the monthly income from total monthly cost of subsistence⁵². As we can see, a household producing maize will run into deficits if they sold their maize in any of these eight months, January, February, July, August, September, October, November and December. A household earns a surplus if they sold their maize in only 4 months of the year, March, April, May or June⁵³! As I will

⁵¹ The Uganda bureau of statistics survey of 2009/10 reports that the per capita mean consumption expenditure for Eastern rural Uganda is 32,950 per month. For a family of six persons this would come to approximately 198,000. This is 6,000 less than what Buyengo's key informants report as the figure for Buyengo in 2012/13. Our figure is therefore lies within the regional range especially when the annual inflation rate is factored in. The survey defines consumption expenditure as that expenditure that excludes non-consumption items (UBOS 2010). In the survey for this dissertation I have limited subsistence to basic essential items: food, and other indispensable basic necessities. This simplifies recall, but also measures only the basic indispensable items. Contingencies will include expenses on health and education, durable goods such as house repair.

⁵² Drawing from Chayanov, Ploeg (2013; 24) has called this the labor (family) product the difference between the gross product (obtained through commercializing the farm's produce) on the one hand and material expenditure required during the course of the year.

⁵³ This begs the question: Why do these farmers continue to grow maize when they are doing so at a loss? Maize has become the major source of subsistence cash, and buyers of maize are readily available relative to buyers of other crops. Cotton farming, which was the major course of cash before the onset of structural adjustment, was interrupted by a shortage of inputs and a price regime that was even less favorable. Maize has become, relative to other crops, the most viable source of much needed cash, as a consequence of these conditions.

show below, these frequent household income deficits begin to encourage Buyengo's small farmers, especially those that live on the margins without alternative safety nets, to resort to joining the rural wage labor market, to sell their land or to rely on other informal sector livelihood strategies. The extent to which small farmers resort to wage labor to offset their subsistence crisis is often mediated by class, property and kinship relations, a theme to which I turn.

Wage labor as an alternative source of subsistence

Within scholarly discourse on the political economy of agrarian change, wage labor is often cited as a major survival strategy for rural households that are dispossessed of land (Akram-Lodhi 2005). For example, a study in rural China shows that rural labor markets had expanded significantly over the last twenty years preceding the study and contributed to the rise of per-capita rural household income (de Brauw et al 2002). In their study in rural Philippines, Estudillo et al. (2006) report that rising rural wages benefited landless and relatively less educated households. On the other hand, scholars have expressed skepticism about the potential of wage labor to sufficiently offset household subsistence crises (Bezner-Kerr 2005, Li 2009). In her study in northern Malawi for example, Bezner-Kerr points out that while rural farm labor is a livelihood strategy, it also signals persistence of vulnerability, rather than a type of social capital. Exploring the dynamics, potential and meanings of wage labor is therefore necessary to

further understanding the dynamics of agrarian change and its impacts access to productive capital and to livelihoods in Buyengo.

In Buyengo, the bulk of rural farm wage work occurs during the peak of the farming season, which as shown in Table 1 above occurs from March to August in the long rainy season and again from September to December in the short rainy season. I limit my analysis here to the long rainy season, which also corresponds roughly with half the calendar year, six months, and is also the more productive of the two farming seasons. Typically, wage work is performed in the early hours of the day, between 6:00am and 10:00am. Occasionally however, some wage work is performed later in the afternoon. This is more an exception than the norm. The reasons for this limited work time period lies partly in cultural practice and partly in limitations imposed by environmental conditions. Most laborers also grow food on their own gardens for home consumption and therefore must spare some time to work on their own gardens. This tends to occur in the late morning, 10:30 to 1:00pm or later in the afternoon, 3:00pm to 5:00pm away from the heat of the mid-day sunshine.

The average wage rate for this type of work ranges from Uganda shillings 3,000 to 5,000 per day. The period from preparing the garden to harvesting maize is six months, from March to August. However, actual labor time in the gardens is needed only for a few days within this six month period. Let's draw on the example of maize farming shown in Table 1 above to illustrate the actual labor time that is needed to produce maize, relative to the actual days in the life of maize farming. We see that actual

days for all the activities needed to farm on two acres of maize are twenty one, spread over the entire farming cycle. If in taking the most favorable scenario we assume that a single laborer earns 5,000 per day, such a person could earn 105,000 in total for the twenty one days that it takes to grow and harvest maize, over the six month period. However, because the total monthly subsistence cost is Uganda shilling 204,000, one notes that wages from working exclusively on maize gardens will be grossly insufficient for meeting subsistence needs of households. In reality, as a consequence, rural households subsisting on the labor market strive to find alternative wages from activities such as casual labor in construction, carpentry, felling a tree, digging up an anthill, tending to a wealthier farmers' farm animals or fetching their water⁵⁴. Again let us look at the best scenario and assume that a single wage laborer is somehow able to sell his labor in any of these labor markets for the entire half year period at the best possible wage rate, Uganda shillings 5000 per day. People do not generally work on Sunday, in staying respectful to Christian religious beliefs and for some it simply is a day off. Thus, most people will work for twenty six days in the month and will therefore earn a total of 130,000 per month, given the best scenario.

Let us look further at Table 2 above. The figure in the second column from the right, Total Subsistence (T Subst), shows the basic cash subsistence needs of a household of six persons. These cash needs accrue regardless of the class position of

⁵⁴ Casual labor at a building site typically lasts the whole day, from about 9:00am to 4:00pm.

the household and regardless that growing crops or selling labor is their main source of subsistence. While the figures in the table are constructed for a middle class farming household, there is reason to suspect that lower class households consume at this same level as middle class households, given that this consumption estimate is generally comprised of basic and essential consumption needs.

We have seen that at full employment, a household relying on wage labor would earn Uganda shillings 130,000. However, as we see in Table 2, this income is insufficient to offset their household deficits assuming they sold their maize in January, February, July, August, September, October, November and December—eight months or $\frac{3}{4}$ of the calendar year! Moreover this deficit inevitably becomes much bigger should a farmer suffer any unforeseen emergencies such as illness and other fixed costs such as school fees which do arise with a fair level of frequency (Krishna et al. 2006). The immediate consequence of his predicament is that most middle income farmers insist that the woman of the household also finds paid wage work, if she already has not done so already. This sets in motion the feminization of the rural labor market in Buyengo. Given the gendered division of the rural labor market⁵⁵, most women seek work in digging, weeding and harvesting activities which typically earn 3,000 shillings per day⁵⁶, just over half of what the men will typically earn.

⁵⁵ Digging up anthills, construction and other such non-farm based work are typically unavailable to women. Exceptions exist however especially with separated or widowed women.

⁵⁶ Most household women will also go the swamp to forage for green leaves (*esubebe, dodo, etc*). Given that communal land rights have disappeared, they will request owners of land that is fallow for permission to trespass in order to and pick different types of green leaves. Foraging for other types of

As I have shown, household subsistence cost remains fairly stable while household income fluctuates extremely widely. This wide fluctuation in income renders it highly likely that small holder household will experience a deficit even if farming conditions are perfect. To avoid a deficit the small holder household must sell all their maize at a price that is substantially above subsistence, likely in May. However, to be able to hold onto their maize they must have another source of funds, such as savings or remittances from relatives or the protections of a social safety net, with which to pay for schooling and healthcare, and other unforeseen emergencies. And yet by and large these conditions were not present for the vast majority of Buyengo's farmers and, as a consequence, consumption smoothing (Deaton 1997) was not a possibility.

On being asked why they did not hold onto their maize and sell it in May when the prices were higher, farmers mentioned constraints imposed by the costs of storage—space, risk of theft, pesticides—and the pressing needs for cash. Hence, farmers living on the margins, lacking social safety nets and savings, were more likely to be forced to sell their maize at market prices that are below its exchange value, and to be forced to sell their households assets, as John's perspective in the quote below illustrates.

food is also not uncommon. Households will typically not have lunch in April, May, June and July because this is a “dry” season and children will mostly be served porridge during these months. Cases of domestic violence are common, when husbands return home in the evening to find no food because their wife cooked and served it for lunch while they were away.

“Maize is the main cash crop and food crop. People grow maize to sell. There is really no other source of cash” John says. So I ask, “What do people do, say if they have to pay schools fees for say secondary school?” He says, “Well you must have some business?” What kind of business I ask? “Well anything small; you scratch here and there.” Well, I ask, in your case, what did you do? “I sold animals and now I am left with only one”. And what would happen, I ask, if next year you had to pay fees too? “I would then have to sell my land. What else would I be left with?” (Conversation with a key informant small scale farmer).

Ultimately, farmers living on the margins were more vulnerable to exploitation by the maize merchants and were consequently also more likely to sell their household assets such as land, and to seek alternative sources of living outside farming. For these small holder farmers, who are living on the margins of subsistence, this discrepancy constitutes a major source of dispossession thereby casting them further into livelihoods of intense social insecurity. And yet this discrepancy between maize farm gate value and its market value was not the only mechanism through which subsistence merchants exploited Buyengo’s small farmers. Further in this chapter I will discuss in more extensive ways the implications of this exploitation and eventual dispossession on agrarian relations in Buyengo. In the next section I will examine the unscrupulous behavior of merchants in furthering exploitation and show the ways in which it similarly has its roots in economic liberalization’s “free” market.

A market of exploitation: unscrupulous practices of grain merchants

The “free” unregulated market has become the avenue in which maize merchants exploit small farmers via dubious practices such as short weighing farmer’s produce,

selling fake farm inputs and manipulating prices. Indeed the “free” market has provided the opportunity for merchants to wield their power in the market place at the expense of powerless small scale farmers. Merchants exercise more power in the market place because they have savings, are better organized against farmers that lack savings whose bargaining power through organized groups or cooperatives was severely undermined after their cooperative unions were abolished.

One morning as I walked on the village, I met Fred. Fred had a small brown bag in which was contained approximately four kilograms of maize seed. What are you up to? I inquired. Where are you coming from so early this morning? Displaying some consternation, as if not to reveal his predicament, he informed me that he was coming from a neighbor’s home from whom he collected maize seed that he would use to plant his garden in the coming season. Why I asked? Did he not have his own seed? Why did he collect seed from this particular neighbor? His response to my question alerted me to a whole new dimension to the political economy of maize seed in contemporary Buyengo. I will use the terms GMO/hybrid concurrently because, while I recognize that the two terms are technically different, I lack the means to tell whether the seed on Buyengo’s maize seed market is one or the other.

A protective pesticide is applied to the GMO/hybrid seed that is supplied to Buyengo’s farmers gives it a variety of unnatural colors. These colors are meant to distinguish GMO/hybrid seed from the ordinary seed. Unscrupulous merchants have found a way to dye seed in exactly the same color as the GMO/hybrid seed. Fake seed

is packed in khaki bags that were of the same color and type with the same instructions as the packet in which the GMO/hybrid was packed. Fred informed me farmers had no means to determine whether fake seed was packed by retailers or whether it was packed by the various seed companies currently producing these seeds or whether the seed did not germinate because it was unsuitable for Buyengo's ecological conditions. I learnt from Fred that farmers concluded that the seed they planted was likely fake only after it did not germinate.

Table 2 above shows that a farmer planting maize on a two acre garden would already have spent Uganda shillings 460,000 by the time they concluded that the seed they planted was fake seed. This is quite a substantial sum, considering Buyengo's low household income level, small asset base, few alternative livelihood opportunities and lack of social safety nets. A farmer planting seed that did not germinate was suddenly faced with both heavy financial losses and a serious food security crisis. I asked Fred about a remedy, a recourse of action, in the event that the maize seed they planted did not germinate. "Nothing", he replied. "You have already purchased the seed. You cannot go back and complain. Goods once sold are not returnable". He added: "In any case they may blame you: perhaps you did not follow their storage and handling instructions or you mixed up the seed". I examined the seed bags myself and I found that one company had the following statement inscribed on the seed packet:

'LIMITATION: Purchasers' sole and exclusive remedy for any loss and breach of warranty, negligence or other cause shall be limited to the refund of the seed purchase price provided a claim is made within thirty days of purchase. The

claimant shall co-operate fully with any investigation of such a claim. Purchaser accepts this warranty on purchase of the seed”.

And yet this statement largely goes unnoticed given this context where approximately one third of the community is unable to read. As the statement warns, the company will not entertain a claim that is made beyond thirty days following purchase, and yet the period between purchase and expected germination date is much longer than thirty days. Moreover, the seed supply chain, from the seed company to the seed retailer had many actors and yet of these several actors the seed company was the least accessible to the farmer. Illiteracy, distance and financial barriers render extremely difficult any attempts by farmers to file a claim against retailers or seed companies for a remedy. The seed market was in effect favorable to seed companies and retailers at the expense of farmers.

The myriad of unscrupulous practices by merchants in the market place may be further illustrated. Maize farmers may sell their grain in one of two places. To village based merchants who move from door to door purchasing maize seed or who set up shop at locations in the local trading center or to merchants that have set up a relatively bigger shop in the nearby town of Busia. Both village-based merchants and town-based merchants essentially accumulate profit by buying cheap and selling high. Thus, they have an inherent interest in wide variability in farm gate prices of maize grain, and especially in keeping prices low. Merchants, having better knowledge of the dynamics in the maize market, often have a stronger bargaining power. They also often

collaborated to set the price for the day. A farmer striving to sell their maize in town will move from one maize grain buyer to the next, and will encounter the same market conditions, precisely because the merchants agree upon the price and other market conditions. Moreover two maize mills, operating in different corners of the town may be owned by the same merchant.

One may appreciate the predicament in which producers find themselves, considering that they physically carried their one hundred kilogram bag of maize grain to the town merchant on bicycle for up to forty-five minutes, descending and ascending valleys and hills on dirt roads littered with holes, bumps and rocks. Moreover, urgent and pending financial needs, from school fees, acute illness, unpaid labor, unpaid debts, leaking roofs, etc., rendered unfeasible the option of returning home with the grain and returning at a later date. After all they would encounter the same market conditions if they made a second trip back to town with their grain. Ultimately many farmers were forced to sell their maize if only to cut their financial, material and energy losses.

And yet these conditions, stacked against the farmer, were not the only means through which merchants exploited Buyengo's farmers. Merchants typically measured the maize grain that they purchased using tins. However, increasingly these merchants used a tin whose bottom they forced outward so that it collected more grain than it normally should. Higher up the merchant chain the practice of directly taking more seed than normal became more sophisticated and less visible. Buyengo's small scale farmers repeatedly complained that town merchants used two weighing scales, one for

purchasing grain and one for selling seed and that often merchants altered their weighing scales so that the one used for purchasing grain provided a weight that was significantly lower than the actual weight of the maize grain, and the one they used for selling provided a higher reading than the actual weight of the grain. As I have already noted, a producer who transported their maize grain to town would be faced with the unappealing prospect of cycling it back in the event that he was displeased with weighing scales or grain prices. The debilitating impacts of these practices were widely known, but many people expressed sense of powerlessness in any effort for redress.

While these forms of exploitation point to the vulnerability of the farmer to the unscrupulous practices of merchants, they also signal the powerlessness of the farmer relative to the merchant in the market place. Having already ridden with his heavy load, to the town merchant, the farmer started in a highly powerless position. The merchant on the other hand could sit back knowing well that he wielded power over an extremely vulnerable and desperate maize farmer. As I noted previously, the farmer's pressing financial needs limited their options, a predicament the grain merchant was too often aware of. Based on classical economic theory, economic liberalization postulated that the free market would instigate competition among maize merchants and that this competition would compel merchants to offer better prices to farmers. However, quite to the contrary the action of merchants in this "free" market rendered maize grain prices, to fall below the cost of maize production, highly variable and highly unstable and, hence a source of financial insecurity rather than stability.

As opposed to popular notions in the mainstream literature that portray market actors as atomized, the ways in which merchants leveraged their power to further their profit goals speaks to the extent to which the maize economy is deeply enmeshed in relations of power. A seed retailer might also double as a maize merchant. Seeds might be sold, for example, by a farm supply shop that is owned by the local agricultural extension worker, while another might be owned by a businessman that had a job in Kampala. In other instances a seed distributor might be an agent of and be part of a more elaborate chain of a larger national seed breeder. The grain merchant business may be owned by the local agricultural extension agent, who also dispenses various agricultural extension services to the farmer. The businesses may also be owned by the local police chief, or the business owner may be a close relative of the local business chief. These extensive networks of seed retailers and seed merchants are deeply embedded in the power relations in which they operate in ways that render idealistic and notions of a “free” market.

Reshaping Buyengo’s agrarian relations

As I have shown above, households whose income falls below their subsistence needs experience crises of subsistence. Lacking the protection of sufficient safety nets, they resort to wage labor, engage in various informal activities and if these fail as they so often do, they may sell a piece of their farm land, as they strive to offset these crises. Land sales, are therefore primarily driven by distress. And yet conventional economic

theory postulates simply that it is the dynamics of efficiency and inefficiency that drive peasant farmers to sell their land. As Li (2009) has shown, these processes—dispossession, proletarianization and the development capitalist relations production—often do not unfold neatly. To investigate how this messy process played out in Buyengo, I explored trends, and dynamics of land sale transactions in Buyengo, and the reasons that instigated land sales.

In Buyengo, as is the case in much of Uganda, land sale agreements are prepared, and witnessed by local council chairmen. Local council chairmen also keep records, typically copies of the land titles, of respective transactions, in their possession as evidence of the legitimacy of sale. Relying on these records, I compiled a list of land sellers and land buyers in Buyengo since the year 2000 and then proceeded, with the aid of various key informant interviews and group discussion, to investigate the circumstances that precipitated land sales, what the seller did after they sold the land, to whom they sold and what the buyer did upon acquiring the land. The sections that follow discuss these findings and their implications for agrarian relations and conditions in Buyengo. The first section explores the trends, dynamics and the forces driving households in Buyengo to sell their land. The second discusses the emerging consequences on agrarian relations of the coping strategies of those households in Buyengo who, having sold their land, lack sufficient alternative means of subsistence. The third section turns from the coping strategies of Buyengo's land sellers to the agrarian choices of the new land owners, the circumstances that have driven their choice

to purchase land, how their occupation and national identity shape their land use choices, and how these in turn are reshaping agrarian relations and the character of farming in Buyengo.

Trends, dynamics and forces driving land sales

A survey of the records obtained from the local council chairmen reveals that land sales in Buyengo have intensified over the last twelve years and also seem to occur with increasing frequency every passing year. Between 2010 and 2012 twenty-two land sales were recorded, compared to eight that were recorded between 2000 and 2002. Overall all, twice as many land sales (66%) had occurred in the second half of the previous twelve years. In addition, of sixty-seven recorded land sales in the twelve years, thirty-two (48%) were driven by some type of distress, and 60% of the people who sold their land were still living in Buyengo.

As several authors have shown, agrarian households sell land due to distress especially in this neoliberal moment (Ruben and Masset 2003). Similarly, in Buyengo, the intensification of land sales seems to coincide with the unravelling of structural adjustment programs. As we have seen previously, markets of all kinds—triggered by structural adjustment—have become stacked against small scale farmers. As social reproduction has become increasingly monetized, households have in turn become increasingly dependent on the market to earn needed cash. And yet, as we have seen, the forces in the market, stacked against small scale farmers, have rendered markets a

source of distress for Buyengo's farmers. Contrary to conventional economic wisdom, markets have become an arena of dispossession as opposed to becoming a source of opportunity. The cases cited below illustrate the range of distressing circumstances that drive households to sell their land and provide insights into the extent of household vulnerability.

Dickson's wife took out a lot of loans from village savings and loan groups and when he failed to pay he sold his land bit by bit. He also kept selling to invest in businesses which were constantly failing. He sold to different individuals. He moved to Busoga, having bought a small piece of land on which to live. He had about three sons. One son refused to leave and he stays on the village. The seller gave him a small piece of land to support his livelihood

Sande just saw people selling and he also sold. But he had debts in the village banks so he sold to pay the loans. He lives there and is still farming.

Jackson had bought his land, and sold part of it to pay school fees for his son. He is around, and he is still farming. The son has done a diploma.

Moses sold to buy a bodaboda [motorcycle transport]. He sold all his land with a plan to buy elsewhere with the rest of the money. But this did not happen. He has since died and when he died his brother had mercy on him and he was buried on his land. His brother also allowed his family to come and live there.

Stephen has sold his land to many different people. He says he sold to pay fees for his sons. But his son did not finish senior four. He is around and he remained with some land. He also sold to build a semi-permanent house.

John sold because his son was arrested in Kenya and wanted to pay and get his son out of prison. He remained with a small piece of land, and he is farming.

"Maize is the main cash crop and food crop. People grow maize to sell. There is really no other source of cash" John says. So I ask, "What do people do, say if they have to pay schools fees for say secondary school?" He says, "Well you must have some business?" What kind of business I ask? "Well anything small; you scratch here and there." Well, I ask, in your case, what did you do? "I sold animals and now I am left with only one". And what would happen, I ask, if next year you had

*to pay fees too? “I would then have to sell my land. What else would I be left with?”
(Conversation with a key informant small scale farmer).*

I have noted already that households suffer exploitation from merchants, who benefit from an erratic, unregulated market. This exploitation gradually erodes households’ capital base, leaving them highly vulnerable to shocks that trigger the sale of family assets; mostly land, a primary source of their livelihood. As the cases above illustrate, these triggers include mundane emergencies such as school expenses, the prospect of a prison sentence for a family member, sickness, business failure and failure to pay debts. Previous studies (Krishna et al. (2006) have also pointed to sickness and health expenses as a major contributor to attrition of household assets in Uganda. And yet, sickness and health expenses become a source of crisis only because the household is rendered vulnerable due to loss of their savings, itself largely a consequence of exploitation.

Schooling costs, failed business ventures and legal fees feature prominently in these stories, as shown in the interview with John, a middle aged small scale farmer in Buyengo. As I came to learn, farmers pay school fees because they yearn for a future for their children away from the rigors of farming and because they have little faith in a farming future. And yet investment in education did not always live up to its promise, as exemplified by Stephen’s case, who sold his land to pay fees for his son. Similarly, attempts to invest in business ventures represented a desire for a future outside farming, but in turn ended in failure, as illustrated by Moses’s case. Constant failures in farming

and in business often led households to resort to borrowing, and upon failing to pay back the loan, facing the daunting consequences of default, resorted to selling their land. As each of the cases illustrate, land sellers did not migrate out of farming, but rather stayed on the village, living on diminishing land parcels. The next section deals with the emerging subsistence crisis, household coping strategies and their impact on agrarian relations in Buyengo.

Subsistence crises, coping strategies and impacts on agrarian relations

While selling land is a consequence of financial distress due to exploitation, its social effects among Buyengo's households are extreme anxiety about a bleak future and intense fear of the permanence of these conditions. Inevitably, in a community among whom land constitutes by and large the sole source of subsistence, loss of land unleashes intense social insecurities of various kinds. Over relatively few years households in Buyengo increasingly remained with ever dwindling pieces of land, without viable alternative livelihoods within the village nor outside it. But even as they sold their land, Buyengo's households remained largely planted in the village. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Buyengo households rendered vulnerable neither migrated to the city nor found sufficient subsistence opportunities within the village. The cases featured below represent a typical trend unfolding in Buyengo.

Amos is not yet 30, he is probably 27 or 28 years old. He used the land for farming with his brothers. Amos sold his land to go to town and enjoy the money. He sold about 2 acres. He sold all his land and remained with his compound. He gets his

food from digging for others. He simply gambles to get food to eat. Fortunately his kids are not yet of school going age. He has two boys, three girls and one wife.

Wilber sold to solve his problems. He got nothing out of it. He is there. He is a farmer but not successful. He works in Busia Millers, a private company. He sold at small amounts at a time. And he would sell and simply waste the money. He is a repeat seller. He sold a lot of land. Most of the land Hukibiri [mile 2] was his.

Ruben and Masset (2003) have shown for example that land sales constitute a livelihood coping strategy of last resort for most rural households. As loss of land usually implies a permanent attrition of their reproduction capacity, households will often prefer to reduce their consumption rather than sell their land, what Deaton (1997) has referred to as consumption smoothing. However, in Buyengo consumption smoothing was often not an option, particularly for those households that were already living on the margins of survival. The consequences of this situation were livelihoods of intense social insecurity; a struggle for survival leading to increasing incidences of crime, fractured social relations and community bonds; disputes over wages and conditions of work leading to foot dragging, sabotage by wage labor against farmers that sought to produce a surplus, I will deal with how each of these situations impacted agrarian relations and farming in Buyengo.

As we have noted, households, members of households, or dependents stayed in the village even as they sold land on which they depended for their survival. For example, Amos stayed on the village with land only the size of a compound. As the key informants put it, “fortunately” his children were only of school going age. By implication, the key informants were indicating that the situation would have been

worse had the children been older, and therefore needing land of their own on which to establish their own homesteads. Notice also that key informants report that Amos “simply gambles to get food”. It is profoundly significant that Amos must gamble, an effort that by no shape or means will guarantee that Amos will in fact be successful in obtaining such a basic essential need.

As land, the main source of their subsistence diminishes in size, household vulnerability to future emergencies is further intensified. This is best exemplified by Amos’s case above, who despite still being relatively young and has children that are not yet in school, has already been driven to selling his labor and to gambling for his survival. Other cases are also similarly illustrative. Dickson’s son “refused” to leave the village after Dickson sold family land, leaving him with only a small piece. Sande and Jackson sold land, and they still live on the village. Moses, sold his land to the point that none was left for his grave, and his brother, out of compassion, allowed his family to live on only a small piece of that land. In a cultural context where mysticism for the dead and associated cultural attachments to land hold so strong, lacking land for burial, let alone for food, imposes unimaginable stigma, anxiety and distress. Each of these cases illustrate extreme cases of social distress, they are not atypical and occur with an increasing level of frequency.

While the circumstances that triggered land sales illustrate the vulnerability of the households to shocks and triggers, it is their coping mechanisms, the choices that they make for their survival that begin to provide a window into the new and emerging

agrarian relations and the agrarian crises unfolding in Buyengo. Exploring these agrarian relations and agrarian crises provides us insights into the present, and future, state of labor, social relations and farming in Buyengo, if this trend should continue.

I will start with a trend, which I was told had become common in Buyengo, to illustrate the strain on individuals that suffered distress and how this stress eroded community relations, and the arising consequences. I was told that theft had become rampant in Buyengo. Households were increasingly choosing to sleep with food in their houses rather than store them in their granaries because of the fear of theft. I heard frequent reports from farmers hiring labor to grow a surplus that their yield was highly affected by theft, either from hired labor or from villagers who stole bits and pieces from the garden. In effect, a culture of crime was setting in, consequently further rendering farming an even more precarious endeavor.

Community responses to incidences of crime is also instructive. I was told that every once in a while, the community would gather, and people asked to write down on a piece of paper any person or persons they suspected to be engaging in acts of theft. A person mentioned by ten or more people would be strongly warned to stop the habit as it was “inconceivable that ten or more people would list them if they were not a thief”. This person or persons would then be warned in public that they would have to stop this practice, otherwise they would suffer mob justice in the event that they were caught. If a person hailed for assistance as their house was broken into at night, as one group of men run to the victims’ house to offer protection, another group run to lay

wait at the suspect's house to confirm that they were in their house. If the suspect was not in his house, the mob would wait for them to return, and if they did not have a satisfactory alibi, they could be subjected to mob justice since "they could only have been out of their house because they were at the scene of the break in". While the increase in criminality may suggest a rising level of desperation, the incidences of mob justice suggest an increasing erosion of community bonds.

As we have seen, producers are dispossessed of their land, but largely remain in the village. Inevitably, with the passing of time, decreasing sizes of land was further eroding household capacity to meet their subsistence needs. The effect was to create a larger class of households that were dispossessed but not displaced. They had lost their land, their major source of subsistence, but they had not found alternative means of subsistence. This was a class of people staying on the village, without sufficient alternative means of subsistence, especially as opportunities outside farming were largely absent.

Further exploring the livelihood coping strategies of those households who, having lost their land but stayed on the village, provides insights into how changing property and labor relations were reshaping new and emerging agrarian relations in Buyengo. To illustrate, we consider the case of John (pseudonym), who pursued his subsistence on a two acre farm, quite similar to the one that I described earlier. John typically planted maize, beans, sweet potatoes and cassava depending on the season and the specific material and financial needs of his household. John had three children. The

youngest, a girl, was not yet in school at the time that I conducted this study. Two boys are older and they both attended nearby Buyengo Primary School. To cover the household budget deficit such as the one I illustrated above, John had to find work and he had to balance this paid work and his own domestic labor demands. Hence, John was forced to alternate days between his garden and wage work, or he had to work a couple of hours in the early parts of the morning, typically between 6:00-10:00am on wage work, and typically between 11:00am-1:00pm on his garden.

A household budget deficit that John faced over the last several seasons compelled him to consider one of three survival strategies: sell family land and start a local business; migrate to find work in the capital city or nearby district town; or demand higher wages for his casual labor. However, each of these choices had major dire implications for John's subsistence survival. If he sold family land to finance a business startup, he risked exposing his household to total loss of livelihood in the event that the business venture failed. Starting a business venture often implied that John had to reduce the time and effort he spent on his own gardens, which would inevitably reduce the quantity of household food supply (especially as wages are insufficient for food purchases) and deepen his vulnerability to the exigencies of commodity markets. If he resorted to wage labor, he joined a class of rural wage labor pursuing their subsistence in a contradictory relation with the wealthier labor employing class.

All three options constituted different consequences for agrarian relations, in ways that similarly had different implications for the type and nature of farming

possibilities in Buyengo. In reality however, farmers such as John, often chose a combination of these livelihood strategies. Most sold only a portion of their land as a way to mobilize capital for a business venture as they simultaneously maintained a plot of land upon which their wives would continue to produce food for the family.

Conventional political economy generally anticipated that as capitalist social relations of production emerged in agrarian settings, productive capital would become concentrated among emerging capitalists and new wage opportunities would emerge for those dispossessed. And yet, as we saw previously, the emerging work did not offer wages that were sufficient to offset household subsistence needs. Just as was the case in Buyengo, studies done elsewhere in Africa have shown that emerging wage work did not translate into sustainable subsistence livelihoods for those dispossessed. For example Bezner-Kerr (2005) showed that in Malawi emerging wage labor (*Ganyu*) reduced labor available to household food production and intensified food insecurity.

While empirical data on food security trends in Buyengo were generally unavailable, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest that the quality and quantity of Buyengo's food security situation has been deteriorating⁵⁷. For example, as the impetus to deploy their labor to wage work away from their own gardens intensified and as highly monetized circuits of subsistence impose an increasing need for cash

⁵⁷ In his study of agrarian change in rural Vietnam, Akram-Lodhi (2005) also argues that caught between farming and wage work, the creation of this semi-proletariat does not reflect a process of social transformation but rather one of growing immiseration.

income, farmers have shifted from farming millet to farming maize. I learnt that millet farming is highly labor intensive, and that millet is also generally planted using the broadcast method, which implies that millet gardens are highly concentrated and weeding is time consuming and labor intensive, a trend confirmed by Tenywa et al. (1999). In the past, a culture of labor sharing mitigated the problem of labor intensive millet farming. But as we saw, as labor has become monetized and rationalized, this culture of labor sharing has been undermined, and has virtually disappeared. As a consequence, labor intensive crops such as millet have been replaced with less labor intensive crops such as maize, a shift that is also confirmed by Orr et al. (2016). And yet compared to millet, maize is much less nutritious (Padulosi et al. 2015), and the emergence of maize at the expense of millet represents an overall decline of food quality in Buyengo, a dilemma that both old and young, male and female frequently acknowledged.

In addition, key informants confirmed that food granaries (*ebyaki*) were neither as common nor as full as they were twenty five years ago. Data on malnutrition trends suggest that food quality and quantity in the wider district is declining. The district health information system reveals that 454 cases of malnutrition for all ages were reported in 2004/2005 compared to 2,756 cases only four years later, in 2008/2009 (Busia District Local Government 2011). As these pieces of data suggest, given the widespread use of hand held tools, and the consequent inelasticity of labor productivity,

new demands imposed on household labor are likely to have a dramatic negative effect on farm output.

Wage work and agrarian relations

Beyond their material food security impacts, the emergence of wage labor was having various secondary impacts on class relations in Buyengo. A contradictory social relation between the class of wage labor on one hand and the wealthier wage employing class on the other was emerging and producing class tensions. In Buyengo, farmers such as John that had already entered the rural labor market intensified agitation for higher wages. This agitation sowed the seeds of struggles over wage levels and working conditions between this class of wage dependent laborers and their wealthier labor employing neighbors. This tension was mediated through and intensified by a contradiction between a wage dependent classes that interpreted their agitation for higher wages from the perspective of a moral ethic, at odds with the perspective of wealthier wage employing class that interpreted wage levels within a market logic.

As in Wolford's investigation of Brazil's agrarian moral economies and neoliberalism (Wolford 2005), contradictory meanings of land reform among Buyengo's agrarian elite and the wage workers emerge from divergent experiences. Poorer wage dependent labors expected that farmers, possessing relatively more wealth, should pay higher wages. These wage dependent farmers were often offended by the unwillingness of wealthier farmers to pay a higher wage in light of the income inequality that they perceived to be unjust. The refusal of wealthier farmers to pay higher wages

was particularly offensive to the moral code of the wage workers, which had its basis in a social and cultural norm of reciprocity and redistribution. In the twilight of their work day producers such as John, together with other men would use the privacy of their space, a local brew (*malwa*) drinking group to reflect privately on their predicament and contemplate the choices available to them. They complained about the stinginess of larger farmers, whom they reasoned, did not seem to appreciate their predicament. These farmers, they complained, insisted on paying the same wages that they paid two years ago, even while they were relatively materially well off and the cost of living had risen. They resolved collectively not to accept wages less than 5,000 shillings per day!

Beyond driving up the cost of wages, the immediate impacts of this social solidarity among local wage labor was contestation over local wage rates between poorer wage laborers and their wealthier labor employing neighbors. These class tensions were sometimes played out in the open, but often took a more subtle character and occurred beneath the surface, away from the prying view of wealthier labor employing farmers. The consequences of these new agrarian tensions were two, one having social implications and the other having material implications. While their immediate impacts were a break down in social bonds of trust, reciprocity and redistribution between the class of laborers and wealthier farmers, its longer term material impacts was a reduction in the productivity of land and labor.

I took several opportunities to interact with and speak to wage dependent class of workers in Buyengo. Three quick instances stand out. One was the young man that

I employed to work on my goat farm. The second were the insights I obtained observing wage workers on a middle farmers' garden, and obtaining insights from conversations among them. The third were conversations to which I was privy in the local *malwa* drinking joint about livelihood in the village and wage work in particular. I noted a couple of key trends or occurrences. First, wage laborers were much more inclined to work for each other at rates that were much lower than the rates they demanded from middle scale farmers. Second, these laborers were generally unsatisfied with the wages paid by the middle income farmer. Third, a tendency among wage labor to speak about the middle scale labor employing farmers in generally condescending ways. Evidently, a class based contestation over wages and working conditions was present in Buyengo.

To explore the contours around which struggles over wage rates are conducted, and the actions of both wage labor and employers, I will employ a distinction between reciprocity and redistribution, relating this to the difference between a fair wage and a just wage, to examine the origins of contradictory meanings of wages among wage laborers and their employers and their impacts. Claims to reciprocity arise from an expectation that a person receiving a good or a service should return to the giver an equivalent services or good. Claims to redistribution however arise from a claim by the underprivileged to assistance by those with privilege. While reciprocity is imbued with expectations of equal exchange, redistribution is imbued with ethics of morality (Gardin 2014). Like reciprocity, the perception of a fair wage is formed within a market dynamic; it alludes to a comparison between what one is paid and what deserves to be paid given

the task they performed. A perception of a just wage on the other hand alludes to what one is paid relative to what the employer could pay. Hence, while a perception of a fair wage is shaped by a market logic, a perception of a just wage is a consequence of a moral ethic.

In seeking better wages on the basis of a perception of a wealthier farmer's income relative to their wages, Buyengo's wage laborers were staking a claim not to reciprocity but to redistribution; not to fair wage but to a just wage. Buyengo's employers on the other hand, in insisting that they could find other willing workers for the same or lower wages, were interpreting the wage labor relation through the prism of the market logic. Claims to assistance by lower classes to wealthier farmers were guided by norms of redistribution rather than reciprocity. Wealthier farmers justified wages for labor from a material reciprocal basis rather than a social, redistribution ethic. These contradictory meanings of wages were both a product of and impacted, in quite adverse ways, Buyengo's new and emerging agrarian relations.

It is within these contradictory meanings of wages, between wealthy farmers and wage workers out of which emerged coexistence of differentiated wage rates for the same work in Buyengo's labor market. The labor market, just like the grain market, is not shaped simply by forces of demand and supply. Labor supply might be in excess relative to the work available, but laborers nevertheless, forging solidarity around a common moral platform determine wage rates on terms that they have set collectively. Laborers might accept to work for farmers in their social class for much less than what

they will work for upper class farmers. If person X is perceived to possess more wealth than person Y then surely person X must pay higher wages than person Y. Mutual assistance and wages, driven by a morality of reciprocity, were more likely to be negotiated among individuals who perceived that they belonged to the same social class.

In addition, farmers in the same class generally shared the same social networks and patronized the same social spaces. Reciprocal relations were therefore more likely to occur among farmers of the same social class. Hence, while reciprocity was a mediating factor when labor was exchanged between farmers of the same class, the same was not the case when labor was exchanged across class lines. And yet these lower wage rates often came to be known by the wealthier farmers, further fracturing existing bonds of social solidarity and defining agrarian relations on the basis of social class.

New land owners and emerging agrarian relations

As I have already noted, land is the single dominant source of subsistence and, understanding how and why land ownership is changing provides insights into the form and dynamics of agrarian relations that have emerged and are emerging. Just as I did with the land sellers, I compiled names of individuals that had purchased land in Buyengo over the twelve year period preceding my fieldwork. I then followed this with key informant interviews, group discussions and household interviews, through which I explored the social profiles of land buyers: their source of capital, residence,

citizenship and other relevant details, and how these shifting identities of land owners was reconstituting land use and agrarian relations in Buyengo.

The data reveal that land buyers were of four broad, not mutually exclusive categories: One, are the land buyers that are farmers; two, land buyers who are not farmers; three, land buyers who are Ugandans and four, land buyers who are non-Ugandans. So, for example, in Buyengo you have land buyers who are Ugandan and are also farmers; land buyers who are Ugandan but are not farmers; land buyers who are non-Ugandan and are also farmers; and land buyers who are non-Ugandan and are also non farmers. By and large land buyers who were farmers had purchased land from other local farmers, were resident in Buyengo, and obtained their subsistence largely from farming. Land buyers that were not farmers obtained their subsistence from formal jobs or informal sector activities outside farming and could be residents or nonresidents of Buyengo—they could own a house on that land and visited occasionally and owned land largely for cultural purposes. Land buyers that were not Ugandan were largely small scale farmers from neighboring Kenya, who purchased land and migrated to Buyengo.

Ugandan land buyers are those that both self-identified and were identified by the larger Buyengo community as Ugandan citizens. Similarly, non-Ugandan buyers both self-identified and were identified by the large community as non-Ugandan. This non-Ugandan group largely comprised of Kenyan Luhyas, the larger ethnic, cultural and linguistic group that straddles the Kenya/Uganda border region, in which Buyengo also sits. This group of Kenyans finds it relatively attractive to purchase, just as Buyengo's

residents find it easy to sell them land, because of the ease with which they assimilate within Buyengo's cultural community⁵⁸.

A descriptive analysis of the entire repertoire of the social profiles of land buyers reveals that 34% of the land buyers were farmers while 31%⁵⁹ were not farmers (they neither lived in the area nor farmed the land; in effect they were absentee land owners). Forty-five percent (45%) of the land buyers were Kenyan compared to 51% that were Ugandan⁶⁰. This descriptive analysis together with the selected social profiles listed below provides the basis on which I begin discussion.

As we shall see, occupation and citizenship defined buyer's land use choices, which in turn shaped the trajectory of Buyengo's farming practices and emerging agrarian relations. Constitutional and legal provisions regarding citizenship rights confer a set of rights to citizens and it simultaneously denies non-citizens, in ways that influence how these distinct groups interpret their possibilities for civic duty, political participation and land use. Similarly, land buyers that are not farmers pursue their aspirations within a set of limitations that are relatively different from the limitations that farmers encounter. Each of these unique citizenship rights, and farming aspirations shaped land use and types of farming ultimately producing new, peculiar and contingent

⁵⁸ These non-farmers identify and are identified as ethnic Basamia, who however live outside and earn their income from a formal or informal sector employment outside the village. Upon accumulating capital, they opt to purchase land in the village. They are therefore likely to be sons of the soil, whose main source of livelihood is nonfarm work, outside the geographical boundaries of the village.

⁵⁹ This makes a total of 65%. The rest straddle both spheres and may therefore not be strictly placed in either category.

⁶⁰ We could not establish with complete certainty the national identity of about a 4% of land buyers.

agrarian formations and relations. The cases below illustrate, and provide the basis of my discussion further below.

Musa is a lecturer in Kampala. He studied there and then found work. He went to school in a local school. His mother is alive but father is deceased. He bought about an acre of land. The sellers listed belong to one family. He bought land to farm. He does not live there and has no house there. Currently he grows maize, cassava etc. He often comes to the village. He farms mainly for domestic consumption. His mother and his wife consume the food. It is mostly his wife and mother who till this land. They live in the village but not on the land. He has bought plenty of land in the parish; he may have accumulated 6 acres by now. He consolidated land from several owners.

Margaret came from Kenya. She bought. She is single and about middle aged (50 years). Her family is in Kenya. Her daughters are all married in Kenya and she had separated from her husband. She farms. She also sells her labor. She mostly farms for domestic consumption but also sells cassava and maize to buy needed domestic needs like soap. She has not bought any additional land. Her daughters come and visit her occasionally and bring her some assistance. Her sons in law rarely visit.

Alice is a matron at a local school. She is a farmer and farms simply for domestic consumption. She has about 4 children she is married to a policeman. Her husband visits often.

Tom bought a plot to build a house. He may be from Kenya. He does not live here. He bought a plot and built but his home is in Kenya. He is farmer in Kenya but does not farm here. He is also a bodaboda rider. He built at the center and has tenants. The house has two rooms.

David lives here. Is mostly a farmer and he has cattle as well. He does not do anything else and he rarely goes to Busia. He got most of his money from farming. He grows maize, cassava etc. He grows mostly for food and does not sell a lot of the harvest. He sold cows, and then bought more land. He has bought multiple times from the same seller to expand his land. He sells his cows, combines it with income from farming and then buys land, which he also sells at a higher price. His children go to the local schools.

John lives in Busia and works in the local government. He bought about three acres and established a farm which has pigs, goats and local cows and trees. He has only

a house for the caretaker on the land. He set up the farm very recently. He does not live in the village.

He just bought here but is not from this village. He came from neighboring sub-county. His wife is the Bursar at a local primary school. He is often seen riding the district motorcycle to his farm. He is a bit elderly. He is a court broker in Kenya. This is all he does. He hardly does any farming. He bought the land for his wife to farm. The food is mainly for domestic consumption.

Richard teaches at a secondary school. He has taught for a long time. He lives in Buyengo A but bought in Buyengo B. He does some farming mainly for domestic consumption. He employs labor. His wife is simply at home and sometimes operates a grinding mill. They have many children.

Francis is from Kenya. Came here from Kenya, stayed for some time and then sold and returned to Kenya. His wife said she could not manage life here.

Michael lives in Kampala. Comes here sometimes. But has no home here. He simply bought this land because his relatives (uncles) were selling the land. He works in electrical in Kampala. He is from Kenya. This land is rented out to local people to farm on it.

Grace is in Kenya. The land she bought is not used. She simply bought the land and left. The land is minded by a relative who brought them.

Muna is a headmaster. He has planted trees on this land. He is repeat buyer. He has bought almost in every village. He buys land mostly to plant trees.

Boss is a neighbor to the seller. He lives abroad, perhaps in Germany. He was a pastor and left that. He sends money to relatives and they have planted trees. He rarely comes to visit.

These stories capture only a slice of, but are a fair representation of the myriad of social profiles and motivations for purchasing land. However, it is useful first to consider the contingent impacts of land sales more broadly, notwithstanding the identity of the land buyers. Historically, Buyengo's land tenure system was largely communal and family oriented. Thus, while negotiations regarding the sale of land

generally occurred between a group of sellers, the wealthier purchaser was a single individual. Hence, prior to selling land access and use rights were dispersed among different groups of the same cultural community, a single purchaser consolidated these access and use rights exclusively in their own single arms. Seen from this perspective, a new land tenure regime has initiated a process that encloses the commons⁶¹ and transforms land tenure regime in Buyengo from communal to private ownership.

This shift from communal to private ownership has profoundly transformed land and food access. Traditionally, Buyengo's residents have relied on the commons for harvesting different kinds of wild plants from which they obtained medicinal herbs and nutritional supplements of various kinds, and also for wood fuel. For example, several studies done in the wider ecological zone of Luyia land have shown that these wild plants, what they have called African leafy vegetables, contribute substantially to enriching local food systems (Francisca & Eyzaguirre 2006, Rubaihayo 1997). In Buyengo *Omutere, Esaka, and Emiro* are some of the wild plants household harvest (Abukutsa-Onyango (2005)⁶².

But as land is enclosed and rights of use and access are consolidated in a single pair of hands, land boundaries increasingly became clearly defined and processes of excluding the wider community from accessing these resources have begun to take

⁶¹ Musembi (2007) for example finds that land titling programs in Kenya dispossessed women of their land rights and consolidated them in the hands of their male spouses

⁶² Scientific names, respectively: *Corchorus olitorius*, *Cleome gynandra*, *Crotalaria ochroleuca*.

shape. While new land owners were generally accommodating, frequently allowing access to whomever needed to harvest these plants and woodlots, the fact that harvesters had to obtain consent speaks to the authority conferred upon the new land owner, to new exclusionary practices and to the potential for new land owners to completely prohibit access in the future.

Let's now turn to the ways in which nationality and residence of land buyers impact agrarian relations in contemporary Buyengo. Uganda's constitutional law defines several citizenship rights and obligations, two of which are most relevant to this discussion. The first of these is the requirement that non-citizens may not legally own land in Uganda; they may only obtain leaseholds for a defined period of time and land sellers and new land purchasers know these constitutional stipulations. And yet despite knowing the illegality of these transactions both parties proceeded with the transaction because in many cases they were sanctioned by local council officials.

As I have noted, the ease with which they could assimilate in Buyengo's cultural community encouraged Kenyans of Luhya ethnicity to purchase land in Buyengo. And yet the local council authority that rendered legitimacy to these transactions was nevertheless constrained by the higher national constitutional law. As a consequence new immigrants from Kenya were constantly apprehensive of the limited rights to land ownership that the law imposed, as they farmed their newly acquired lots. I learnt that it was for this reason that these new land owners generally hesitated to permanently establish their residence in Buyengo. The effect of this was to discourage them from

building more expensive mortar and tin roof permanent houses, thus living in mud and wattle. Similarly, they refrained from growing perennial crops because they perceived their residence as temporary. Their aspirations, formed within the limitations of the law, affected the character of land use and cropping patterns in Buyengo.

While this hesitation to establishing permanent residency constituted the material consequence of constitutional laws proscribing foreign nationals from owning land, the constitutional provisions prohibiting non-nationals from participating in politics had similar, but less material impacts. Elections are often moments of intense political mobilization and competition. I learnt that it is thus during these moments that identity and voting rights become even more salient, a trend identified by Eifert et al. (2010) in their study of the relationship between identity formation in Africa and election cycles. Similarly, the tensions generated in the build up to national elections and localized mobilization for political support served to further ascertain who among Buyengo's polity was ineligible to vote. Thus, every five years, when elections were held, the community amplified the foreignness of Kenyan immigrants further entrenching in Buyengo's historical memory identities of these new arrivals as outside others.

Understanding how the aspirations of land buying non-farmers shape land use in Buyengo's agrarian relations is critical, and it is to this group that I will now turn. As I showed above, this group comprised 31% of land buyers between 2000 and 2011. These land buying non-farmers have their main source of subsistence outside farming and they are unlikely to have residence in Buyengo. I learnt that their non-residence and

non-farming profile shapes their land use choices in primarily in two ways. First, being non-farmers implies that they often lack sufficient knowledge and skills for successful farming. Second, being mainly occupied outside the village and lacking time, they will employ hired labor should they use their newly acquired land parcels for farming. But supervising the farm from a distance is almost always unsuccessful. Indeed, they expressed frustration about high farming expenses relative to agricultural produce market prices (as I showed in Table II above), labor that was as unreliable as it was difficult to supervise, frequent thefts and stray animals that destroyed crops and so on.

I learnt that as a consequence, these constraints tended to compel absentee land owners to make one of three choices: one, they may leave the land idle; two, they may permit neighbors or the seller to continue using the land for farming and; three, they may opt to plant trees. As we will see these choices are shaped within a narrow range of possibilities, defined by the ways in which contingent concerns have converged. These choices are also neither mutually exclusive nor fixed in time; the land owner may opt to let out the land for two seasons and then plant trees. However, I will consider them individually to illuminate both the sort of conditions in which those choices are made, and how they are impacting Buyengo's agrarian relations.

The choice to leave land idle seems fairly simple, especially when the new land owner earns sufficient income outside farming and has no interest in immediately putting land to productive use. After all, neither used nor unused land attracts any kind of tax, and no statutory use obligations are imposed upon the land owner. However, I

learnt that a land owner that left their land unused for a long period, especially for reasons other than soil regeneration, was faced with three difficult situations. First, land may become overgrown with bush, upon which the community may express their displeasure about the hazards that this may pose. Second, given land pressures, local people may encroach upon the land to use it for farming, jeopardizing the land owners land rights⁶³. Third, local norms, formed within a moral economy, are unaccepting of land being left idle for a long period; it is generally expected that land should be used to produce food. Despite these limitations, land was in fact often left idle, implying that land was left unused that previously may have produced food. In keeping with local norms, the new land owner may then permit neighbors to use the land for farming for a limited period. Sometimes they may require the land user to pay them a portion of the harvest; most times, however, this was completely free of any obligations.

I will pay closer attention to the third choice, tree planting, in part because it presents relative to the others more profound land use change which has had, and is likely in future to have, greater impacts on Buyengo's agrarian relations. In addition, the rise of private tree planting is relatively new, and indeed in many rural parts of Uganda one sees swaths of trees on land that ranges in size from a few to several thousand acres. To understand the rise of tree planting and its future impacts on agrarian relations in

⁶³ The Ugandan land law confers rights to individuals that settle and/or use land unhindered ten or more years, and they must be compensated in the event that the owner evicts them.

Buyengo, I will situate it within the incentives presented to and challenges faced by land buying non-occupational farmers.

I have already noted that land buyers that are non-farmers lack the skills and time to engage in farming. Thus when they attempt to farm, the inconvenience of distance makes it difficult for them to ensure that labor that they hire performs according to their expectations. Their crops are also vulnerable to thefts and to stray animals. As I have noted, leaving land idle is shunned and the community may protest the hazards that this poses. In these circumstances, absentee land owners opt for tree planting in part as a reaction to these local limitations and in part as a response to the incentives provided by various Government of Uganda supported and international donor funded reforestation projects⁶⁴.

Three new tree species, Eucalyptus, Caribbean Pine and Grevillea, are seen on several recently planted woodlots in Buyengo. All three are fast growing species and none is indigenous to Buyengo nor to Uganda. Uganda's National Forestry Authority, with international donor support, distributes all three tree species free of charge and has, in addition, provided grants to private individuals in many parts of the country to

⁶⁴ The National Forestry Authority is a Government of Uganda body charged with protecting forestry and promoting reforestation. Government of Uganda forest policy states for example that "The private sector will play the major role in developing and managing commercial forest plantations. This may be either through large scale industrial plantations on government or private land or through small scale plantations on farms. The role of government will be to support and regulate this development. The government will create a positive investment climate to encourage private investment in commercial forest plantations" (GoU, 2001).

plant commercial woodlots and plantations⁶⁵. Several other stand-alone donor funded projects are also supporting tree planting in rural Uganda. For example, a European Union funded initiative, SAWLOG Production Grant Scheme (SPGS) promotes these “high yielding fast growing forestry plantations” (SPGS undated)⁶⁶ for commercial tree planting. SAWLOG provides technical support and grants to private tree planters and since 2004 over four hundred small and large investors have been supported by SPGS to establish over 37,000 hectares of timber plantations, worth over USD 20 million⁶⁷.

A visual survey in Buyengo suggests that Eucalyptus is the most common of the three tree species recently planted, followed by the Caribbean Pine and Grevillea. Buyengo’s small farmers also planted these trees, but they did so along boundaries of their gardens and along paths leading up to their homes. And because Buyengo’s small farmers planted only a few trees and spaced them out unevenly and widely, it is not likely that their trees would have serious deleterious side-effects on local vegetation and gardens. New absentee land owners on the other hand planted several acres of trees in rows and gaps necessary for (and stipulated by tree planting scientists) commercial tree planting (Sawlog 2011) in ways that formed a canopy over land beneath. Eucalyptus woodlots were planted closer to and in Buyengo’s wetlands and Caribbean Pine on higher, dryer lots. And yet several scientists have shown that both Eucalyptus and

⁶⁵ <http://www.nfa.org.ug/>

⁶⁶ <http://www.sawlog.ug>

⁶⁷ <http://sawlog.ug/index.php/about-us.html>

Caribbean Pine produce detrimental allelopathic substances that inhibit vegetation growth, in addition to having other negative biodiversity effects (Craig 1971)⁶⁸. Buyengo's residents largely depended on surface springs and underground water sources. And yet Eucalyptus has been faulted for draining surface and underground water sources (Morris et al. 2004). While these hydrological effects are not scientifically proven, people reported that underground water sources now take longer to recover in the dry season than they did in the past.

Grevillea is also known to be harmful. Flowers and fruits from Grevillea contain a chemical, hydrogen cyanide⁶⁹, a highly toxic substance. While it may have been too early for the community to feel the effects of these new toxins, the ways in which they interact with local practices of land use, land shortages and motivations and limitations imposed on new absentee owners is extremely revealing about the character of farming in Buyengo in future. A local farmer may sell their land to mitigate a subsistence crisis, which further jeopardizes his food security. Given that the new absentee land owner is not immediately putting his land to productive use, the seller approaches the new land owner with a request to plant food for a few more seasons. The new land owner agrees to this request on condition that the seller will plant tree seedlings for the land owner and tend to them till they grow sufficiently big. The land owner in effect, offsets labor

⁶⁸ Craighead, F. C. 1971. *The Trees of South Florida: The Natural Environments and Their Succession*. University of Miami Press, Coral Gables, FL.

⁶⁹ Everist, S.L., *Poisonous Plants of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, 1974

costs that could have gone into planting and tending to the trees. Gradually, as the trees grow, allelopathic agents from Eucalyptus, Caribbean Pine and Grevillea prevent these planters from the using the land for crops as, simultaneously, grown trees increasingly require less care.

I plant food crops only in the first season as a way to prepare the land for planting trees. I allow neighbors to plant crops on his land on condition that they will tend to my young trees. Crops are not the primary interest, trees are. Cropping farming does not earn a profit, you only make losses. You may not get anything out of it. Besides these local people may steal your crops further making farming very difficult. (A Key informant had recently purchased land)

Conclusions

New forms of exploitation, having quite profound implications for agrarian relations and the agrarian condition, have emerged as Buyengo's small scale farmers have become deeply integrated in, and their dependency intensified on, commodity markets. Commodity exchange is now generally widespread, following structural adjustment programs of economic liberalization. As structural adjustment programs eliminated farmers' cooperatives, local merchants positioned to both purchase agricultural produce and to supply farm inputs took their place. Within this new market framework of deregulation, merchants have found an open arena in which to practice dubious practices such as short weighing grain, hedging erratic grain prices, supplying fake inputs to their benefit at the expense of small scale farmers. The scales, as they say, are heavily tilted against the interest of small scale farmers.

The political economy of maize, a crop that has recently become the major source of much needed cash, provides excellent insights into the dynamics of this new market framework, and provides the basis upon which we discern implications of this political economy for new and emerging agrarian relations and formations. The prices of farm gate maize grain fluctuates extremely widely, from a low of Uganda shillings 200 in August to a high of Uganda shillings 1,200 in May. As we saw, the typical farmer produces 2,400 kgs of maize grain, in average conditions. Given these price fluctuations, the cost of producing the maize and total monthly subsistence, a farmer is going to spend more than they earn from maize eight of twelve months in a year. One could assume that the farmers could hold onto the maize and sell it when the prices are right. However, this is often a choice that is beyond their means given the lack of savings and urgent financial pressures and other emergencies.

As a consequence of this skewed maize price regime, Buyengo's small scale farmers live with a constant subsistence crisis. Unable to meet their subsistence needs, they resort to selling their labor for wages. But wages from labor are generally unable to offset the deficit, and over time Buyengo's small scale farmers must resort to selling their land to cope with their subsistence crisis. From the records we saw that compared to the first period, 2000-2005, twice as many land sales had occurred between 2006 and 2012. Land sales were apparently intensifying and, without sufficient livelihood

opportunities both within Buyengo and outside in urban settings, Buyengo's small scale farmers were increasingly living lives fraught with intense socio-economic insecurity.

However, rather than confronting the relations of exploitation in which they were presently embedded, Buyengo's small scale farmers were pursuing coping mechanisms that served to exacerbate the present agrarian crisis. Thefts, as means of survival, were increasingly common further rendering farming precarious and risky. A livelihood existence of intense social insecurity and subsistence crises were instigating rising incidences of crime, which in turn were straining social relations and community bonds. As more and more households resorted to wages for subsistence, disputes over wages and conditions of work further fracturing social bonds among neighbors.

Of profound significance however, were the implications to agrarian formations and relations of the choices of new land owners. Of the total number of land buyers between years 2000 and 2012, 34% were farmers and lived in Buyengo, while 31% were non-farmers and did not live in Buyengo, and 45% were Kenyan. The land use choices of these new land owners were significantly shaped by their occupation and citizenship identity. Non-farmers that did not live in Buyengo tended to leave land unused or to plant it with trees. Kenyan new land owners tended to desist from making long-term land-based investments, on account of their perceived impermanence. These choices were having profound impacts on the character of agrarian formations in Buyengo. Tree lots, especially of eucalyptus species, were now more prevalent in Buyengo as were

unused land lots. I learnt that Kenyans tended to build mud and wattle houses and were less inclined to plant perennial crops and longer maturing trees.

Chapter Five: Collective Action in a Neo-Liberal Era

Introduction

All categories of Buyengo's farmers: men, women, youth, old, poor, wealthy etc., were generally exasperated about the maize market, and the social conditions emerging from it. They knew that merchants sometimes short weighed their grain. They also knew that merchants manipulated grain prices to maximize profits and they knew that the grain market worked at their expense, to the benefit of merchants. To take just one example, a local leader lamented the unpredictability and extremely low prices of their agricultural output, placing blame upon "an Indian who has taken over the whole business of purchasing maize grain all over East Africa"⁷⁰. And yet while others saw the market and the action of merchants as unjust, others saw them as acts of ingenuity and hard work.

And yet there was neither open protest nor active mobilization to transform these relations of exploitation even among those perceiving the acts of merchants as unjust. Among this group, it is inconsequential that some of these sentiments may have been false or were exaggerated. Instead, the salience of these sentiments lies in the extent to which Buyengo's farmers believed them to be true. This level of consciousness about their predicament, without them taking deliberate action to transform the terms within which merchants traded with them, raises several questions that are fundamental to understanding peasant politics and the dynamics of collective action, or lack thereof,

⁷⁰ Local leaders comment during impromptu group interview.

in Buyengo specifically, and in this neo-liberal era generally. Why did consciousness of their exploitation take the form of silent resentment rather than proactive steps to transform the relations of exploitation in which they were embedded? What do the answers to this question illuminate about Buyengo's contemporary political economy that is so deeply enmeshed in neo-liberal market exchange?

This chapter examines the processes that have produced a contradictory co-existence of disaffection and an apparent shortage of popular action in Buyengo. I argue that while this disaffection is central to cultivating and maintaining a shared consciousness of exploitation, it did not transition into collective action due to influences of multiple kinship relations and competing social and political identities, each of which were shaped within a context of conflicting social class relations. To explore the influence of these multiple identities and social class relations, I will examine the historical conditions in which they have emerged, how and why they subvert the rise of overt collective action.

It is pertinent that I draw a line between chapter three and the present chapter. Chapter three explored state policy and practices—those dynamics external to the social setting of Buyengo such as undermining the institutions of popular democracy and recentralization of local authority—that have enabled maize merchants to engage unhindered in dubious practices. The present chapter explores those dynamics that emerged within the social context of Buyengo to prevent a shared consciousness from mobilizing collective action. I will show that these dynamics were constituted within

two recent trends of major significance. One, a rise in heterogeneous, fluid identities and social relations and; two, a normalization of the market as a “free” space, among a section of Buyengo’s farmers, which has further legitimated the practices of merchants as entrepreneurial rather than exploitative. These twin processes, emanating from below, undermined the potential for a shared consciousness of exploitation to evolve into popular protest against the exploitative practices of merchants.

Heterogeneous, fluid social relations and the subversion of collective action

From classical Marxist perspectives, we learn that class formation sows the seeds of class consciousness, from which the shoots of a socialist revolution will germinate. In other words, that class formation provides the foundation upon which pillars of rebellion stand. For classical Marxist theory this consciousness is shaped within a specific set of material relations. Hence, when workers are separated from their means of subsistence, they form a distinctive class of wage labor that is bound together by their shared experience of exploitation. As their shared experience of exploitation is materialized by the toxic effects of alienation and oppression, it establishes the social conditions in which a spark will trigger a revolution that tilts relations of production in favor of the worker’s material interests.

Class formation and crystallization of class identity are therefore central to a Marxist analysis of social change. Accordingly, this chapter explores how new and emerging relations of production have produced class identities in the contemporary

peasant economy, and yet argues that their contingent, fluid and contradictory character precludes the emergence of collective action. I will show that the ultimate effect of this contingent, fluid, and contradictory nature is to cause a severe shortage, not in consciousness, but in class-based politics and coalitions.

To explore this fluidity and this contingency, this section will draw upon some of the historical insights from the previous chapter, and through them, reinterpret the shortage of collective action of Buyengo's residents against the relations and institutions that reproduce and deepen the relations of exploitation about which they frequently complain. As we will see, multiple identities are formed and negotiated within a set of complex social relations whose materiality obtains salience within and because of changing social circumstances. In the section immediately following, I explore the ways in which new social and material relations emerging in Buyengo have shaped contemporary identities, and therefore politics in Buyengo. The sections following later will then examine the ways in which practices and values of reciprocity, patronage relations (political and kinship) and divergent meanings of citizenship rights (indigenous and alien) have attenuated class identities and collective action in Buyengo.

Social relations of production and the politics of collective action

The bulk of Buyengo's small scale farmers relied on land, the market and some form of wage work for their subsistence. Buyengo's farmers were therefore neither fully dependent on land—peasants in the hypothetical sense—nor fully dependent on wages. Secondly, many small scale farmers were embedded in contentious relations with the

agrarian elite—in a struggle over wages and working conditions. And yet both the small scale farmers and the agrarian elite encountered the experience of exploitation when they both encountered the dubious practices by merchants in the market place. Both sets of conditions had severe implications for mobilizing collective action against the grain merchant. The first set of conditions—a semi-proletariat social form—offered Buyengo’s farmers the possibility of pursuing their subsistence livelihoods, without engaging in endeavors that confronted the merchants. The second set of conditions—contentious wage relations—mitigated against the potential for all farmers, semi-proletariats and agrarian elites, to collaborate in mobilizing against merchants. I will deal separately with the dynamics and implications for mobilizing of both sets of conditions.

The co-existence of multiple and parallel means of subsistence—a semi-proletarian means of existence—offered Buyengo’s farmers the possibility of pursuing their subsistence livelihoods, without engaging in endeavors that could upset the status quo. This half-way world, between wages, land and the market, ensured that Buyengo’s small scale farmers could disengage from the market, and fallback on land for their subsistence, without openly confronting the exploitation in the market arena. They could fall back to their land—what James Scott has called a subsistence ethic—rather than risk the perceived difficulties of confronting middlemen.

The relative availability of land implied that all farmers could in fact engage in farming a surplus for the market, if all other conditions were favorable. And yet as I came to learn several farmers had opted to produce only what was sufficient for

domestic consumption. I spoke to Eunice, a widow who owned sufficient land, who intimated that “she had given up on producing for the market. The market was so unpredictable”, she complained. “We do not get anything out of farming” many farmers reasoned. At one moment, as we discussed the complications and risks present in the market arena, Geoffrey Wabwire, a middle aged resident that owned three acres of land, intimated to his peers that “I have told you this all along....this is why I do not farm maize to sell”.

Could the choice available to them of relying on land and be assured of food needs, rather than confront middlemen, explain the absence of open agitation? I put this question to several key informants. Their responses were largely non-committal and inconclusive. I noticed that while they generally agreed that merchants were cheats—a point to which I will return—they did not go as far as to suggest that they should organize against these practices. They lamented the abolishment of cooperative unions, but they did not seem inclined to engage in efforts to name and shame the merchants. While the data here is inconclusive, it does suggest that the subsistence ethic, the preference to resort to land to assure their subsistence, rather than risk the consequences of confrontation, could explain this mindset⁷¹.

⁷¹ As Scott observes, “local self-help and mutual help tend to be both initial responses to subsistence problems and lasting residual alternatives when other courses fail. The combination of labor intensification and mutual reciprocity among the poor, though it may meet critical short terms needs, is untenable in the long run outside the isolated subsistence sector. It is a retreatist strategy inasmuch as it involves “making-do” with the resources at hand rather than recapturing the surplus taken in taxes and rents by the state and landowners. Shared poverty and self-exploitation may be inevitable,

The second set of conditions to which I now turn relates to the multiple contradictory relation in which Buyengo's small scale farmers were integrated. An example will illustrate, from which I will derive some insights. Fred was twenty-four years of age, with a young family, two children and one wife at the time of this study. Fred was at the early stages of his adult life, he owned and farmed just under two acres of land for food and cash with which he purchased other household subsistence needs. Fred and his wife also did engage, occasionally, in wage labor to supplement their income from their land. Accordingly, Fred's household characteristics, property ownership and social relations of production, were quite similar to the typical household in Buyengo.

It is essential, first of all, to tease apart the relations that Fred had with the agrarian elite, in order to illustrate how this complex relationship attenuated the possibility for them both to forge a common front against the grain merchant. As I have noted, Fred was bound to the agrarian elite by a contentious wage relation, and yet both were united in the extent to which they shared the experience of exploitation when they both encountered the merchant in the market arena. Hence, on one hand a tension existed between Fred and the agrarian elite over wage rates and working

but they offer no long term solution to the local dilemmas of subsistence and economic insecurity.” (Pp 206): Moral Economy of the Peasant.

conditions, and on another hand they shared the experience of frustration with the merchant.

As Scott (1976) notes, for class struggle to crystalize it must involve a sufficiently high level of cooperation among the resisters (Scott 1976). And yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, conflicts over wages and other terms of work between Buyengo's agrarian elite and Buyengo's semi-proletariats preclude a solidarity, and impede a shared consciousness of exploitation from translating into collective action against merchants. While the semi-proletariats were bound to the agrarian elite by the extent to which they shared the experience of exploitation, the semi-proletariats were conflicted about forging solidarity with the agrarian elite against whom they were engaged in a struggle over wages and working conditions, struggles that were high in intensity because they bore implications for their material wellbeing and possibly their very survival.

The class-based resentment that we saw in Chapter Three is perhaps best explored through James Scott's metaphors of hidden transcripts and public transcripts (Scott 1990). Scott juxtaposes hidden transcripts and public transcripts to signal the ways in which feelings of resentment by the subordinate class towards the superordinate class are hidden from public view. Scott illuminates the ways in which the will of the superordinate class falls short of shaping the consciousness of the subordinate class, and helps us to map the class contours that would otherwise go unnoticed to the eyes of the unsuspecting observer. Scott succeeds in alerting us to the ways in which the consciousness of the downtrodden is reproduced and why it endures.

Scott's frame could also be deployed to cast a lens upon the transcript produced by the upper class and therefore to explore resentments expressed by the upper class towards the lower classes, and their material expression. In other words, one would have to note that just as the subordinate class produced a transcript that was critical of the superordinate class, the superordinate class also produced a transcript that was as critical of the subordinate class. However, despite deliberate attempts to keep transcripts hidden from either group, they were often not lost to the group to whom they were directed. Tensions among and within different social groups and individuals often opened fissures via which these hidden transcripts were revealed, through backbiting, back stabbing, betrayal, etc., to the group or individuals to whom they were directed. This contagion of rumors served to produce a set of relations and tensions that were as complex as they were imbued with suspicion and contempt, which further undercut efforts at building a broader foundation of solidarity.

I have shown how Buyengo's underclass attenuated their predicament by relying on land from which they obtained their basic subsistence needs and to protect them against a complete disintegration of their household political economy, rather than addressing the relations of exploitation in which they were embedded. However, these conditions, one could argue, largely applied to marginal, poorer segments of Buyengo's society, rather than its entire civic polity. Hence while the poor strived only to maintain

their subsistence, the more wealthy farmers often pursued profit⁷². Thus the material interests of these marginal classes and interests of the upper classes were generally at odds. These divergent interests may be grasped more concretely when we explore the contradictory material relations between the lower class and the upper class and contentious politics, expressed within local institutions of social reproduction and their salience. While in the previous chapter I situated the disintegration of cultural practices of labor sharing and reciprocity within processes of class differentiation, in this section I will further elaborate those social dynamics by critically examining contentious social practices within an institution that is relatively new to Buyengo: the Village Savings and Loan Associations, simply referred to in local lexicon as “Village Banks”. I will underscore the heterogeneous character of Buyengo’s social structure, and how it shaped a contentious politics and forestalled the possibilities for collective action.

Buyengo’s Village Banks: sites of class tensions and class based politics

Village Banks were initially introduced to the larger region of Eastern Uganda by Friends of Christ Revival Ministries (FOCREV), a religious oriented NGO, primarily to provide micro-finance loans, encourage a saving culture among Buyengo’s women, and enhance their participation in the local economy⁷³. These microfinance strategies were part of the efforts at women’s empowerment that emerged from the United

⁷² This is consistent with James Scott’s subsistence ethic. Wealthier farmers also have the potential to deploy their surplus capital for profit (Mamdani 1987).

⁷³ These groups did eventually also receive training and material support from various other entities and NGOs including from a Government of Uganda USAID funded project, the Private Sector Foundation.

Nations Decade for Women. Over the years however, these village banks proliferated and their membership grew exponentially. I was told that up to one hundred village banks served Buyengo's adult population of approximately one thousand. I learnt that each village bank had a membership of between 30-35 members and that lately most adults were members of at least three Village Banks. These Village Banks had assumed a life of their own, and taken an existence that was completely independent of their initial sponsors.

To explore the contentious class based politics playing out in the arena of village banks it is essential that I describe their operations in some detail. A village bank is essentially a group of people that come together with a common interest to mobilize savings and channel these savings towards alleviating the financial needs of those among their members. While the village bank is a group that has formal leadership and its existence well recognized in the community, it will unlikely have a formal address nor formal office space. Rather, the village bank is in effect a social institution that operates on the basis of rules agreed by members.

Members of Village Banks typically met once a week, for about ninety minutes each time. They held weekly meetings, primarily, to collect membership dues and to disperse loans to eligible members. Each Village Bank had developed its own unique contribution structure and internal borrowing rules. For example, interest rates varied as did the amounts of compulsory and voluntary contributions. While all Village Banks that I investigated charged an interest rate of 10% per month, some charged this interest

on the principle and others on the total amount of the loan. Payments varied from 500 shilling to 1000 shillings.

And yet beneath these nuances there existed some common fundamental principles. Two types of dues and two types of loans were disbursed, typically. Each member was required to pay a weekly contribution, typically of between 500 shillings to 1000 shillings towards a welfare fund, and at the same meeting each member could also contribute a discretionary amount, typically in the region of 5000 shillings, to a loan fund. Loans paid out from the welfare fund, typically between 15,000 shillings and 30,000 shillings did not incur interest and were paid to one or two members, depending on how much was raised in the welfare fund. As opposed to the welfare fund, a loan from the loan fund attracted an interest on the principle of up to 10% per month, or 120% for the calendar year, if the borrower took the money for twelve months! At the end of the calendar year the total amount earned from interest would be paid out proportionately, according to the amount contributed, to the members that had contributed to the loan fund. In effect, those members of the community having surplus funds would invest them in the village bank to earn a profit, while those members in distress borrowed and paid interest on the loan. It is important to reiterate that a 120% net margin is quite lucrative to the lender and quite debilitating to the borrower.

To appreciate the ways in which the operation of these village banks were shaped by and shaped Buyengo's social relations, it is necessary to critically consider first, the meanings of their dual and complementary functions: welfare and profit; second, to

explore how these dual and complementary functions became sites in which class-based politics found expression; third, how these village banks further strained social relations in Buyengo. The variability of the rules and contribution structure among the different village banks speak to the extent to which these institutions were spaces of contentious class-based politics and interests⁷⁴.

It should be clear that only the financially well-off could pay the discretionary contribution, 5,000 shillings per week, to the loan fund. On the other hand, each member was required to make a contribution of up 1000 shillings, notwithstanding their financial status, to the welfare fund. In effect, the Village Banks were serving two complementary functions: welfare and profit. On one hand, the more wealthy contributed to the both the welfare fund and to the loan fund, and did not need to borrow. On the other hand, the less wealthy contributed only to the welfare fund and were predisposed to borrow from the loan fund. In effect the village banks had brought together, in one social institution, two classes of groups: the local petit bourgeoisie and the local proletariat, each coming with different and opposed interests.

It is important to note that I learnt that the welfare fund was always insufficient, relative to the needs of the people present. Often these funds were needed to alleviate health emergencies or pay school fees or repair a leaking roof. Almost always the total

⁷⁴ Village savings and Loan association governing rules and regulations were frequently a sites of contestation, and out of which we see a diversity of operations. For example a cap was put on how much one could invest or how much interest one could earn or on the requirement that one borrows first before they are eligible to save in the loan fund.

funds needed by the members exceeded the amount that was available. If each of the thirty five members paid the maximum amount, 1000 shillings, they would have a total of 35,000 shillings in the welfare fund⁷⁵. Thus given the shortness of the welfare fund, many members in financial distress resorted to the loan fund. Two implications, primarily, can be discerned from this dual welfare/profit system: the individuals, mostly women, who are poor because of widespread gendered dimensions of poverty and inequality, borrowed from the loan fund at interest rates that were excessively high. Second, the more wealthy people, mostly men that had disposable income, were able to pay into the loan fund thereby investing their surplus capital in the Village Bank from which they earned astronomically high returns⁷⁶.

Contentious class and gender-based politics were at once evident, and they played out dynamics and effects that were often quite predictable. As I have noted, the Village Bank primarily brought together two classes of Buyengo's residents: the poor, and therefore mostly women, who joined the Village Bank because their distress rendered access to the welfare fund an attractive prospect, and the relatively well-off, mostly men who joined the Village Bank because it was an institution through which

⁷⁵ These welfare loans were restricted to health needs and other emergencies. Because they were insufficient desperate individuals would have to borrow from the loan fund to alleviate their distress.

⁷⁶ A representative from a commercial bank in Busia town had learnt about the enormous amount of funds that village banks generated on a weekly basis and he attempted to convince their members to save with the bank. Members refused for two simple reasons. One, saving in the bank would not earn as much interest as investing locally and two, all funds were loaned out with nothing left to be taken to a formal bank account.

they could save and accumulate capital, given the high interest rates they earned on their savings. Both the poor (women) and the wealthy (men) were thus bound together by a material interest, albeit a contradictory one⁷⁷, one that assumed an economic relation, but at the same time eroded collective political action. At once, the Village Bank became an institution through which antagonistic class relations were amplified rather than through which they were resolved—the Village Bank became divisive rather than unifying.

To explore and highlight the ways in which these Village Banks shaped social relations and collective action in Buyengo I will start by discussing loan default: who was most likely to default, the consequences of defaulting and the ways in which investors in Village Banks strategically positioned themselves to dispossess defaulters of their property. As I have already observed, by and large a substantial number of borrowers were largely the poor, most of whom were also women, who took out loans to alleviate financial distress. I have also noted that the interest rates, 10% per month were excessively high, especially if a borrower took a loan for several months. If for example a borrower took out 100,000 shillings, they would owe 220,000 by the end of the year, more than twice the amount that they borrowed. If they took it for four months, they would owe 140,000 and so on and so forth. To put this rate of interest in perspective, one would have to note that in highly developed economies the public gets

⁷⁷ This explains why Village Banks, initially started by NGOs exclusively for women, now had a high participation by men. Almost always the leadership of the group was dominated by men.

highly agitated when interest rates surpass a 10% mark per annum or 0.83% per month, and this high interest rate becomes highly politically contentious. As a further example, when commercial bank interest lending rates surpassed 25%, a public outcry from the business community compelled the Government of Uganda to restrain the commercial banks! But Buyengo's civil society did not openly resist this high interest rate nor did the Government of Uganda restrain these village banks. Quite the contrary, local police were often called in to enforce repayment.

These high interest rates obviously bore very grave consequence for Buyengo's lower class borrowers. In several instances many sold their land parcels to make good on their loan. A story was told how in one instance a female spouse borrowed from a Village Bank, and upon defaulting on the loan, was forced to sell all their family land and they were forced to emigrate. In yet another case, a male household head was quite embarrassed when he was compelled to relinquish their household possessions, beds, chairs, cooking pans, etc., upon defaulting on his loan. These stories were just as common in Buyengo as were the ways in which investors in Village Banks went about "auctioning defaulter's property. Investors in Village Banks would generally know who was falling behind on their loan payments, and therefore likely to default. On the final day of the saving cycle, when the loan was due, they would gather at the defaulter's home and proceed to "auction" their property at prices that were set quite arbitrarily. I was told that loan repayments and these "auctions" were often enforced with the full power of the local police. If the voluntary nature of the borrowing guaranteed the

legitimacy of the loan agreement, the national policy ensured that the claims by the investor against the borrower were enforced. Loans from Village Banks had come to be known metaphorically as burning ember (*esikenge*) which speaks to their debilitating potential.

It is in this sense that Village Banks had become yet another medium of exploitation. Local investors accumulated capital, while the defaulters were dispossessed of it. The effect was to engender twin processes of accumulation and exploitation that unfolded within a set of processes, which triggered class-based resentment entrenched in the memories of several future generations. The defaulter will inevitably leave with feelings of bitterness and frustration, especially if they thought that their neighbors and friends had shown no regard about their social circumstances. But while defaulting on Village Bank loans and the methods of their collection generated resentment, the Village Banks had created another unintended effect: they had strained cultural norms of reciprocity, captured in the following quote:

“In the past we used to lend each other money. You could go to your neighbor and ask him to lend you money if you had an urgent problem. But nowadays your neighbor will not lend you the money. He will simply tell you to go to the village bank”. (Interview with household Head)

Just as the tendency to refer your next of kin to the Village Bank for a loan rather than offer relief, the increased commonality of thefts indicates the extent to which cultural norms of reciprocity and common bonds of morality had been become undermined. Indeed common thefts have become quite widespread in Buyengo. For

example, Ouma's goat was stolen and he suspected that his neighbor, of similar class position as him, was the culprit. Similarly an agrarian elite, Bernard, had his grain stolen from his granary and he reported that he was sure that the suspects were village mates, of lower class status and desperate for survival.

Thefts across lines are easier to comprehend given the clear discrepancies in material conditions, and interests, among the different groups. The prevalence of such suspicions within classes, however, suggests a contradictory dynamic, in ways that foreshadow the presence of intra-class fissures and tensions, and undermine the mobilization of intra-class protests. It also suggests that bonds of class solidarity are highly fluid rather than static. They are dynamic and are shaped by whatever material interests and issues prevailing at the moment. A casual laborer might have bonds of solidarity when it comes to wages, but these bonds immediately dissolve when they contest a land boundary with a neighbor or when one farmer, out of desperation, is forced to steal from a neighbor of the same social class.

The extent to which these thefts were common and within members of the same class suggests that these acts should neither be construed as acts of resistance, nor of class struggle. These were simply acts or consequences of desperation. They were not products of class struggle, or, every day forms of resistance. These acts of desperation had become sources of social tensions within individuals of the same social class. These acts of desperation demonstrate that social solidarity may be shaped by production relations as much as it may be affected by material conditions, as by rumors,

disagreements over boundaries, ownership, use and access of property. Thus, social solidarity had become highly variable and contingent across time, space and social relations. Moreover, how and why some identities took salience over others in shaping solidarity was itself highly variable and contingent. As common thefts may undermine this cooperation, it may not be regarded as a sign of class struggle. In part this explains why the thieving was common even within classes, for the act was borne out of a desperate need for survival, and occurred at the expense of solidarity.

In this section I have attempted to show that the mobilization against a common experience of exploitation was undermined by a fractured solidarity, just as the possibility of resistance was undercut by a subsistence ethic. As a subsistence ethic was defined by the material circumstances of the underclass, it also pushed them to borrow from Village Banks, just as the material circumstance of the upper class inspired them to invest in the Village Banks. Contradictory class relations thus played out within the institutional setting of the village banks. In the next sections I will explore the material dynamics of these class relations in the practice of elective politics, and following this, I will examine their effects within the realm of national citizenship law.

Patronage relations, elections and collective action

In chapter three I explored the ways in which a national political elite, through various maneuvers undermined the power of civil society. This section shifts this lens from the national to the local level and explores how patronage relations shaped the

character and agenda for collective inaction in Buyengo⁷⁸. As I will show, the absence of collective action in Buyengo was as much a product of fluid and contradictory relations of production as it was a product of patronage⁷⁹. To explore these complex relations of patronage it is essential that I distinguish political patronage from kinship patronage. Political patronage is constituted within the political apparatus, while kinship patronage is largely constituted within cultural expectations of redistribution⁸⁰. Political patronage is driven by a desire to mobilize a political constituency, while kinship patronage is driven primarily by a moral code of redistribution, only gaining political significance when these kinship relations are recruited into political processes.

The salience of political patronage rose as competitive electoral politics gained traction within Buyengo's local social setting, while the salience of kinship patronage was intensified as social inequality intensified. In other words, as competitive elective politics became the vanguard for political patronage, social inequality furnished the moral basis for kinship patronage. I will show that the rise of both forms of patronage have served to strengthen ties of loyalty to a nationally based political elite, allowing them to deploy these bonds of loyalty to influence and shape Buyengo's political and

⁷⁸ I define political patronage as giving various forms of favors (gifts, jobs, money, jobs, contracts) by groups or individuals who possess wealth and power to groups or individuals with less wealth power in ways that create bonds of loyalty of the receiving group or individual to the giving group or individual.

⁷⁹ While the patronage relations were both internal and external, i.e. present between and among Buyengo's residents and between Buyengo's residents and elites outside Buyengo, I will limit my attention to patronage relations that existed between elites outside Buyengo and residents in Buyengo.

⁸⁰ Here it is crucial to distinguish between reciprocity and redistribution within the social relations in the village and redistribution between elites and village residents.

social agenda in ways that were detrimental to mobilizing collective action around pressing social issues.

I will start with a highly illustrative example of the debilitating effect of political patronage on collective action. In July of 2012 I attended a burial ceremony in Buyengo. As had happened much too often, death had once again claimed an elderly citizen, a single, childless woman in her seventies. The exact cause of her death was unknown, but as was the case with many that passed on before, the usual story, always told briefly, was that she had succumbed to illness. As I witnessed the events at the funeral, I was struck by their political character. After the master of ceremonies (MC) had gone through the usual protocols: inviting guests, relatives and in laws, introducing the clergy and outlining the program for the funeral proceedings, he informed the mourners that he had set aside time for announcements, and that important personalities would be invited to “greet the people”. As I was soon to discover, funeral ceremonies are not just occasions of grieving and coming to terms with death. They also had moments of humor, as if intended to uplift somber moods, but especially recently, these ceremonies had also taken a highly charged political character.

Typically, as was the case with several other funeral ceremonies the MC invited whichever local leader was present to “greet his people”. In most cases, candidates, of rival political parties would be given the opportunity to make a speech. At this event, representatives of the main political parties, NRM and FDC, were present. Both were local agrarian elites. The representative from FDC, the opposition party, was first to the

microphone, and in a short speech he expressed his condolences to the family, deliberately mentioning that the deceased sympathized with FDC, and then he announced their donation of Uganda shillings 20,000 towards funeral expenses.

Next, the representative from NRM, the ruling party took the microphone. He too observed the usual protocols, mentioning how well he knew the deceased and how she was a “woman of the people”. The announcement that he made prior to his departure from the microphone caught my attention, not simply for the reaction it elicited from the mourners but because of its political overtones. He announced that his party would hold a meeting for party members on the following Saturday at 2:00pm. Only registered party members would be admitted to the meeting he emphasized. The meeting would discuss issues internal and exclusive to the NRM party, he stressed. He repeated his warning: members of rival parties would not be allowed to attend that meeting. The material weight of his announcement was immediately evident. People murmured to each other: did it mean that going forward NRM would exclude nonparty members from its development projects? Why was the NRM party cadre so emphatic in announcing that only party members would be admitted to the meeting? Was this the onset of a winner take all political system?

A few months earlier, a casual conversation I had with Musa, a chairman of the local chapter of one of the opposition parties, drove home the implications of this type of patronage politics. It was inevitable, Musa argued, that he approach membership to a political organization with pragmatism and careful attention to the opportunities that

this membership presented, given his level of social and economic need. Musa informed me that he was switching his party affiliation from the opposition party to the ruling NRM party. Otherwise, he reasoned, the risk of not receiving perks and other development projects was too much for him to contemplate. This he pondered, could jeopardize his and his family's welfare and social mobility⁸¹. Musa argued that this was especially critical since the ruling party was almost inevitably going to win the elections and tighten its control over recently discovered oil resources. Rumors circulated that only party members would benefit from the oil windfall. Oil was Museveni's pet project, and given that the country had adopted a multiparty political system, Musa reasoned, benefits would go to only those individuals and families whose loyalty to the NRM was unquestionable.

To appreciate the full weight of these rumors, I will make specific reference to how politics of patronage have fractured local social solidarity. Prior to the 2011 national elections, the ruling party was faced with a dilemma: how to select candidates that would hold the party torch in the next parliamentary elections⁸². After reviewing the party constitution, the national executive committee of the NRM decided that they would hold party primaries. But to hold the party primaries, they needed a register of party members. Accordingly, they went about compiling a list of party members in each

⁸¹ Members of Parliament are frequently known to pay schools fees and to pay off set many other expenses for their local agents.

⁸² All the major politics parties rely on these networks to build their local support base. I refer only to NRM because it is what I observed and because the NRM has much more finances relative to other political parties.

village, in what came to be popularly known as the NRM Yellow Book. Having your name in the Yellow Book was particularly instrumental because, for the first time a list confirming party affiliation of villages was in plain view in the community.

If the intended effect of this register was to prepare for party primaries, its unintended effects were three: First it demobilized opposition supporters, as demonstrated in Musa's case. Second, for the first time in Uganda's political history an individual's party affiliation was in plain view and was a subject of popular debate. Third, the register served to dissuade activism of both members of the ruling party and of the opposition. Going forward ruling party members would have to adhere to party policies and positions, including throwing their weight behind whomever the party nominated to be their flag bearer. Individuals that were not registered in the Yellow Book, and therefore by implication members of the opposition, could be potential targets for persecution, especially if they engaged in any form of political activism, and be subjects of ridicule.

Local party politics also played themselves out in ways that created social fissures and amplified them. The ruling party appoints thirty party officials in each village, who it then charges with local mobilization. With its six villages, Buyengo would therefore have a total of one hundred and eighty ruling party cadres. These party cadres were the conduits through which funds for party activities were channeled and other party-related activities organized. These local party functionaries tended to exclude individuals and families that they suspected or knew to be critical of the government.

But this exclusion was also often driven by selfish reasons and other personal feuds, rather than by party policy or principle. For example Mukisa, a local representative of the NRM, was contesting for a local council position in the 2014 bi-elections. Rumors circulated that Mukisa had received 300,000 Uganda shillings for mobilization activities in the village. Villagers were upset that he had received this money but had not shared it with them. I would often hear people talk ill of Mukisa. He was selfish, they claimed. He cared only for his own interest they charged. He had received money from an MP of the ruling party but he had used it for his own daughter's school fees. One local leader claimed that the local MP had castigated Mukisa, saying "he is always running to me for his son's school fees at Makerere University. But that money is too much. I would rather this money was spent on a project that would benefit the whole community".

It is not difficult to imagine how these petty party politics became diversionary and undermined the potential for a common position to emerge around key social issues. If the NRM party was going to selectively reward individuals in the village, then they would not vote for the NRM candidate, local people vowed. A few days before the elections President Museveni visited the area to drum up support for the ruling party candidate. The district would not get perks and other development projects from the government if they voted for the opposition party candidate, he warned. Later I was told that NRM cadres had to pay 500 shillings to lure people to attend the President's rally. Indeed on the day of the elections, voter turnout was extremely low. In the midday

local news cast, a local FM radio station reported on the election. The news cast, running live, featured an interview with a local leader. He explained, on air, that voters were not turning out because they had not been paid! Within a few hours, I was told, the ruling party had allegedly distributed 30,000 shillings to each of their cadres to distribute to voters in the villages!

Rather than a politics based on policy positions or performance or how the electorate weighed the likelihood of performance, political choices came to be shaped by expectations for cash payments and other material items. Belonging or not belonging therefore had critical immediate livelihood consequences. In a context in which many people live on the margins, where likelihood for social mobility is very low and where the future for many is bleak, the stakes of belonging and of political affiliation became extremely heightened, at the expense of the emergence of a politics defined by local issues. Political processes took on serious material consequences and defined livelihood possibilities and social mobility. Peasant identities were no longer shaped simply by their relations in the mode of production but by the articulation of national politics in the local polity. Political identities were at once also added upon various other contingent identities, occupation, gender, age and clan, further intensifying peasant heterogeneity in Buyengo.

While politics of political patronage were pervasive throughout the year, they tended to intensify during the campaign period: a few months before and during national elections, with effects that tended to linger several months later. Especially in

the recent past these patronage politics had intensified, as electoral politics were split along parties lines and politics became more commercialized. Patronage politics had impacts on two dimensions: one was outward, in the extent to which relations between local citizens and the state were reconstituted, and the other was internal, in the extent to which they fractured relations between and among Buyengo's residents, that had hitherto generally been cordial.

The outward dimension essentially redefined the state-civil society relations. As nationally based elites formed patronage client relations with local agrarian elites, they tended to gain influence over the sort of issues around which local agrarian elites could mobilize. Generally, nationally based elites dissuaded local agrarian elites from issues or actions that challenged government policy or embarrassed the ruling party. In several instances I observed conversations at which national elites talked against political mobilization and its risks. The expectation of material perks, alleviation of distress through political patronage, etc., served to displace what could have been a critical political issue. Rather than challenging the policies that historically reproduced their predicament, Buyengo's residents generally tended to seek social mobility via patronage relations. In effect, patronage relations provided the alternative to agitation, further depoliticizing what were in essence highly charged political questions.

The inward impact of these patron client relations, on the other hand, produced a kind of local politics that tended to fracture the peasant class along political affiliation, which redefined the character of Buyengo's social relations in quite profound ways.

Politics of patronage tended to foment ill feelings, jealousy and competition among the villagers. Arguments between members of rival political parties often ended in acrimony and vendettas, leading individuals to stay away from public spaces and social activities that were attended by their rivals. Social relationships that hitherto were defined by kinship and reciprocity became highly compromised by party affiliation. As party affiliation meant, for some, access to material resources and to social mobility, they often viewed rival party members as a threat to their livelihood. The fissures that these patronage politics created tended to inhibit the possibility that peasants might forge a solidarity and evolve a common purpose. For the first time, I began to understand the full meaning and genealogy of the claim “people are difficult” whenever I inquired why broader mobilization around key social issues was absent.

These fractured social relations were well exemplified in a meeting that I attended in April 2013. This meeting was convened by a prospective political candidate to brainstorm a plan for his campaign. The meeting was attended by four local opinion leaders who he had been invited for their knowledge of the area. They suggested that first, he would need to call a meeting of all opinion leaders in Buyengo at which he would announce his plans, and seek their consent and counsel. The processes of compiling the list of invitees, and then deciding who would be requested to invite which persons, revealed to me the complex and contentious social relations in Buyengo. Person A could not be invited if person B would be present, given their recent feud. Similarly, if Y was invited and X was not, X would feel excluded and be offended as a

result. Only X could pass the invitation to Z, and so on and so forth. Beyond feelings of alienation and suspicion that this sort of politics fueled, they also tended to render collective action around a common cause extremely difficult.

Kinship patronage and collective action

While political patronage is fashioned through the political apparatus and is primarily driven by competition for political office, kinship patronage is motivated by cultural norms of redistribution. Generally, individuals that acquired education and wealth, were expected to offer material and financial resources to members of their kinship group, especially when they were in distress. For example Juliet built a house for her father, and when it came to political choices or membership, Juliet's opinions and preferences prevailed over her father's choices. Hence, these seemingly mundane acts of generosity tended to have profound political effects. An individual is obligated to share their wealth with kinship relations that have relatively less wealth and power. The giver obtains loyalty from the receiver—and this is the sense in which I define these acts of generosity as kinship patronage—which gives him/her substantial leverage in local politics. His/her political influence was largely purchased through this cultural expectation of redistribution. On the other hand, people higher up the social class hierarchy who did not engage in this redistribution lacked this political leverage and were often the subject of ridicule. They were regarded, largely, as misers and inconsiderate. While their unwillingness to give invoked dislike, the generosity of the giver generated praise.

But as is often the case, the giver had acquired their wealth through some form of connection to the state. They were generally working with a state agency or they were in the business of obtaining contracts from the state. They also had acquaintances in the government and in the ruling party. With this acquired wealth, they were able to offer material goods and to alleviate the distress of their kin. Particularly during the election season, potential candidates, especially at the national level, relied on these kinship networks—on the individuals that had acquired this level of loyalty and political influence—to gain entry into Buyengo’s political space. The city-based elite would thus be frequently requested to contact their kinship network in Buyengo and persuade them to vote on the side of whomever had contacted them. Similarly, the city-based elite was often requested to prevail upon their kinship group to switch sides. Kinship patronage relations therefore mediated the effect of the state bureaucracy. Political influence gained potency, as we have seen, through the cultural institution of redistribution, through which the Kampala-based elite were able to exert their influence.

Wealthy individuals were more likely to have connections in the government and in the ruling party relative to less wealthy individuals. These wealthy individual used these political connections to help strengthen their social ties in Buyengo, just as a villager in Buyengo relied on these kinship ties to navigate hurdles of various kinds, which were imposed by the state bureaucracy. For example, Wabwire’s daughter sat her primary seven exams, but she did not obtain sufficient grades to make the cut off points to gain entry to a top secondary school in Kampala. Wabwire then contacted his kin

MP in Kampala who had connections in the ministry of education, so they could use their influence to get the daughter enrolled in a top secondary school in Kampala. As a further example, Ouma had a criminal case pending in court. He then appealed to his kin in Kampala, who then spoke to the relevant office to have the case delayed or the charges dropped. These examples serve as just a few of the several examples that I repeatedly heard were the ways in which people hoped that they would solve their everyday struggles through connections that they had with people in Kampala. They perceived having a connection, a relative or even a friend in Kampala as a promise to various material and non-material goods.

The political salience of these kinship networks had grown as income inequality and the gap between the rural and the urban grew. Cash transfers from the urban to the rural had increased. People in government, in the urban core, provided cash transfers and other material support to people in the rural periphery. The urban core was thus seen as a source of local capital and social mobility in Buyengo. Social mobility was closely associated with access to urban capital. Just as a local person used his kin connection to circumvent the state bureaucracy, the local grain merchant might have obtained his funds from the urban core. But the urban core also had close links with the state, with politics and the political apparatus. These kinship networks carried immense political capital, precisely because of their promise to material wellbeing, just as the political connections reinforced the social network.

Citizens, aliens and politics

The existence of multiple citizenship identities within Buyengo's body polity served to undermine the emergence of a common position around key local social issues. The concept of citizenship specifies the legal status, and confers rights and obligations of the holder within the context of a nation-state (Kymlicka & Norman 1994). Citizenship determines the social and political rights that the individual may exercise within the context of the state. It shapes what the person may do or not do, within limits of the citizenship status that the law confers upon them. An individual's citizenship status therefore determines the extent to which they will lay claim to their social and political rights, and the extent to which they will join others, to exercise these rights.

Uganda's constitution confers citizenship only those individuals whose parent or grandparent is or was a member of any of the indigenous communities existing and residing within the borders of Uganda as at the first day of February 1926. That individual is a citizen by birth. The constitution also qualifies an individual to apply for citizenship if they have lived in Uganda continuously since 9th October 1962 or if they lived in Uganda for twenty years prior to the 1995 constitution coming into force or married to a Ugandan citizen, upon proof of a legal and subsisting marriage of five years. If their application is approved, that individual will be regarded as a citizen by registration (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Govt of Uganda, 1999). Marriage does not

automatically confer citizenship. Children of non-citizens do not automatically qualify for citizenship.

Given the legal definition of citizenship, immigrants can only acquire citizenship by naturalization upon their application being approved. In effect migrants, including their children, who do not go through the formal approval process remain aliens for the rest of their lives. The law prohibits them from owning land, from contesting for political office and from voting in national elections. Moreover any claims that they could make to any social and political rights are largely extinguished by their marginality. Moreover their physical distance from power centers and their low levels of education render highly remote the likelihood that they will apply or that they application will be approved. These constitutional restrictions combine with local nationalist sentiments to further curtail their rights as immigrants. We can immediately begin to discern the meaning of these constraints on Buyengo's civil society that is comprised of individuals and families that recently immigrated to Buyengo.

As I showed in chapter three, a large influx of non-citizens had arrived in Buyengo from Kenya. A substantial number of Kenyans had purchased land parcels in Buyengo, spreading out from parcels right at the border to parcels further inland. Land sales are witnessed by the local council chairmen who also keep copies of the sale agreements. In a scrutiny of the agreements I was able to establish that 45% of land

purchasers were from Kenya⁸³. And yet as I was told, this number represented a fraction of all purchases by Kenyans as several sellers may not have reported sales to the local council chairman in fear of the illegality.

The large influx of Kenyans is in part driven by two processes; one external, another internal. The external impetuses are, relative to the Ugandan side, the higher population density, depleted soils and higher land prices across the border in Kenya. The internal impetuses are the strong cultural affinities between ethnic groups on either side of the border⁸⁴. These incentives had led many Kenyans to resettle on the Ugandan side. In Buyengo it was widely known which families and which individuals had immigrated. Thus, Ugandan's homesteads were interspersed with Kenyan's homesteads. The consequences of this convergence were contradictory state-civil society relations. The indigenous group having, and exercising claims to citizenship rights and the alien group on the other hand have rights whose definition is confined within the rights of aliens.

I don't aim to suggest that immigrants should be expelled from Buyengo. Rather, I aim to illustrate the political effects of constitutional law in specific places—to uncover its social and political ramifications at micro-levels. The consequences of being an alien have a material and a non-material dimension. As I have already noted,

⁸³ We could not establish with complete certainty the national identity of about a 4% of land buyers.

⁸⁴The Luhya are the larger cultural community that straddling Western Kenya Uganda and Eastern Uganda.

noncitizens cannot legally own land, they cannot vote and they cannot participate in elections. These consequences are material. However, having been labeled as alien, and being well-known as having no land ownership and political rights yields important nonmaterial implications for those aliens that have purchased land in Buyengo. Aliens self-excluded just as they were excluded from local social and political institutions and processes. And yet these immigrants from Kenya were primarily embedded in the same relations of exploitation as their Ugandan neighbors. Just like their Ugandan counterparts, they generally planted crops and pursued their livelihood and subsistence needs. And like their Ugandan counterparts they also sold their agricultural produce in the same local markets and they participated in the same labor market.

But while their Ugandan counterparts were generally vocal about their social circumstances the aliens generally tended to remain quiet. Their sense of social insecurity was largely betrayed by the type of houses they built and the types of crops on their gardens. Tin roofed houses cost more than grass thatch houses. Perennial crops also require a large investment outlay and may take longer to mature. Aliens' homesteads generally had grass thatched houses. They also did not plant trees, relative to their Ugandan neighbors. Just as their alien status dissuaded them from investing in permanent ventures, it also dissuaded them from participating in local politics. Their illegal status was often invoked when particular constituencies felt threatened⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ This was also the case with the Banyarwanda immigrants in the election of 1980, when the main political party, UPC, defined them as supporters of political opponents (Mamdani 2001).

Normalization of the “free” market and the subversion of collective action

Political and kinship patronage determines the distribution of resources from those with wealth and power to those without it. They shape the material wellbeing of recipients and determine the character of social class. Relative to social class, perceptions have a less direct tangible relationship to material wellbeing. Perceptions are largely ontological; they shape how people view their world, their place and the place of others in the world, and their roles within it. And yet their consequences can be just as concrete and real. Perceptions shape understanding of possibility. Ontological interpretations of reality determine what people see as the range of possibilities within their repertoire of choices. This section turns to that section of Buyengo’s farmers who, rather than seeing the acts of merchants as unjust saw them as entrepreneurial and ingenious.

This section of Buyengo’s farmers largely perceived the market prices as natural outcome of demand and supply forces. They regarded the prices of maize grain not necessarily as a consequence of manipulation by merchants. While they knew of dubious practices by merchants such as short weighing they did not regard them as unfair. In addition they regarded the erratic maize grain prices of maize as the inevitable consequences of supply and demand forces. Even while farmers complained about the unpredictable commodity prices and the very low prices during harvest, they generally attributed these to cycles and bumps in supply of farm produce during harvest season. These farmers tended to blame natural farming cycles for the price regime, rather than

to point to possibilities of price manipulation by merchants. In part this may have occurred because of the close correlation between harvests and price cycles. While they knew that middle men hoarded commodities, waiting for prices to rise, they did not see this as particularly wrong. Instead of looking at this practice from an ethical perspective, they saw it as ingenuity and as a benefit that accrued to those who had the capital to invest in maize grain. In effect, they saw the market not as a site of exploitation but as a site of opportunity.

But just as the invisibility of the state rendered its excesses obscure, and therefore even more potent, the discourse of the market operating in Buyengo concealed, as they legitimized, the actions of market actors. Just like national policy, local discourses of the market in Buyengo conceptualized markets as “free spaces”, in which forces of demand and supply were the prime movers of price, opportunity, resource use and distribution. These discourses rendered the actions of market subjects invisible, separated the market from society and reified it. By insisting that there was such a thing as a ‘free market’, in which an invisible hand determines commodity prices, this discourse concealed manipulation by actors who wielded their power in the market place, which as I showed were evident in the dubious practices by merchants such as short weighing of maize grain. These discourses reproduced and reinforced the notion that the market was a site of opportunity rather than one of exploitation. Largely, this group of farmers aspired to exit farming altogether, preferring to be merchants vending and trading in maize grain. These local discourses have been promoted and entrenched by the ideology of

neoliberalism, and they have largely shaped how the people perceived the market and their role within it.

As this ideology became pervasive on Wall Street, it became deeply ingrained within Uganda's body politic. Locally, it shaped the ways in which this group of Buyengo's residents interpreted their predicament, and separated their own failures from the failures of the state. This attitude was evident in the ways in which this section of Buyengo's producers interpreted price fluctuations, which they repeatedly acknowledged were detrimental to their production potential. But rather than seeing erratic and unfair pricing as consequences of wanton excesses of market actors: merchants; they saw them as byproduct of excessive supply and insufficient demand. Consequently, they tended to attribute blame to seasonality of harvests—and sometimes to themselves—rather than to the institutions and practices that operated within their markets. This market fetishism concealed power relations that operated in the market and blinded its victims of the sources of their predicament: the specific places, institutions and practices that operated in the market. This market fetishism concealed the sources of their problems and dampened the possibility for collective resistance to emerge.

Concealing concrete market processes meant that the market's exploitative and extractive power was subtle. To the extent that extraction and exploitation was mediated by market relations, this generated and reinforced feelings of the inevitability of natural price cycles. By perceiving that forces of demand and supply determined

market prices they reified the market. As such this perception ensured that Buyengo's farmers regarded erratic maize prices and prices that were too low as a natural and inevitable consequence of "market forces", rather than a consequence of market manipulation by merchants. Thus, they tended to internalize their predicament as a consequence of their own bad choices.

Conclusions:

This chapter has analyzed why a shared experience of exploitation among Buyengo's small scale farmers did not translate into covert attempts to transform the relations of exploitation in which they were embedded. We find the answers to this question in the fluid and contingent nature of the social relations presently playing out in Buyengo. While a class of wage laborers was emerging in Buyengo, this class of wage labor was often as dependent upon land as they were on wage labor. This semi-proletariat form of existence meant that Buyengo's small scale farmers could resort to land for subsistence, rather than confront the relations of exploitation in which they were embedded. These choices by small scale farmers, to assure their subsistence rather than pursue a risk confrontational strategy illustrate Scott's subsistence ethic (Scott 1976).

Added to the preference of subsistence over risk were the multiple and fluid social relations, over and beyond relations of production, in which Buyengo's small scale farmers were integrated. Politics of patronage and kinship patronage relations were presently operating in Buyengo, with profound impacts on the possibility of

mobilizing for political action. Recent practices of multi-party politics found expression in Buyengo in ways that fractured hitherto cordial social relations. With belonging to a political party having profound material and social mobility effects, individuals had begun to define others along political affiliation in ways that further complicated identity politics in Buyengo. Rather than seeing one another as victims of exploitation, political affiliation came to define interests, at the expense of, or over and above, social relations of production. As multiparty politics took root, allegiance along political lines also assumed a central importance in defining how different individuals perceived each other's action and how they related to one another.

In addition, kinship patronage relations further complicated the story. We have defined kinship patronage as a relationship in which an individual with wealth and power, and likely with links to the political established, provides material (cash, welfare, access to resources) to a less privileged relatives in Buyengo, and who then employs this relationship of philanthropy to dissuade their relative in Buyengo from engaging in political actions. As income inequality between the urban and the rural had grown, the potential to rely on kinship ties to alleviate economic stress had intensified, which in turn increased the potential that kinship patrons emerged and leveraged their relations to influence Buyengo's local politics. As politics of patronage have intensified at the national level, they have simultaneously increased in their salience at local level.

We have also seen that Buyengo's diverse socio-economic classes found expression in the Village Banks. Village Banks were initially launched as organizations

that would empower disadvantaged women through loan and savings. However, in the recent past Village Banks had become institutions in which those having surplus capital could make this capital available to lower capital deprived classes for a profit. While the astronomical interest rates and the high returns presented the largest incentive for these local petit bourgeoisie to invest their capital, they presented the largest point of contention and exploitation for those needing capital. Inevitably, the process of recovering borrowed funds, an often highly contentious process, had become the high point for further straining social relations in Buyengo, and ultimately preventing a shared consciousness of exploitation from translating into collective action.

Finally, a substantial number of new arrivals in Buyengo were Kenyan, and therefore non-citizens. Uganda's national laws prevent non-citizens from participating in elections, as they prescribe various rights and benefits to which non-citizens are ineligible. And yet as we saw, up to 45% of new land owners were Kenyans, and like Buyengo's Ugandan residents, they were just as embedded in relations of exploitation, with merchants. Every election cycle amplified their non-citizenship status, and therefore every election cycle served to dissuade them from engaging in acts that could be construed as political, and therefore existing outside of their rights and obligations. They risked instigating their expulsion, if they did engage in these acts, and outcome that they rather did not face.

Chapter Six: A Market Gone Awry, Conclusions, and Implications

Classical political economy assumes that markets are sites of opportunity; that they will allocate resources efficiently; that those producing with a superior input-output ratio will outperform, and displace, those producing with an inferior input-output ratio⁸⁶; that when demand exceeds supply, prices will rise, and these higher prices will provide the incentive for producers to allocate resources in that direction. It is assumed that prices, especially in a free market, generate efficiency and build equilibrium in the economy. It is in this sense that markets are seen as the remedy to the problem of underdevelopment. This study, primarily an ethnography of the market generally and the maize grain market operating in Buyengo in particular, critically examines those assertions. Accordingly, in this concluding chapter, I will first make final observations regarding the “free” market, and then I will end by drawing out some implications for political economy of agrarian change.

Imperfections of the “free market...”

As markets have become pervasive—with small scale farmers increasingly integrated in, and dependent on the market for a large portion of their social reproduction, it has become even more pertinent to study the operation of markets, and their implications for agrarian change and agrarian relations. As I have shown, markets, especially “free” markets, do not always operate as mechanisms for generating

⁸⁶ For many Marxist scholars (see for example Wood (2002b) market dependency is an essential and inevitable precursor to the development of capitalist relations in agricultural and to spur labor productivity.

equilibrium and efficiency and, quite to the contrary, are in fact sites for those that have power to leverage the market for their benefit at the expense of those that wield comparatively less power in the market place, eventually instigating social insecurity and disequilibrium. Left unregulated, markets will have deleterious effects on those that are relatively powerless.

Other countries in Africa did not liberalize as extensively as Uganda, and they did not embrace the ideology of free markets as much. For example Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania continue to regulate their commodity markets in some form. Since embracing IMF/World Bank policies of economic liberalization in 1987, the Uganda state has pursued an extensive policy of market deregulation. A government policy of free market fundamentalism was both directly and indirectly contributing to a broader immiseration of small holders. As a consequence, dubious practices by middlemen (fake farming inputs, etc.) were instigating exploitation and dispossession, and merchants had the freedom to supply fake farming inputs primarily because the state had abdicated its regulatory and law enforcement function.

As opposed to the historical experience of peasants elsewhere, Buyengo's peasants were not embedded in feudal relations of production nor were they sharecropping nor were they trapped in exploitative plantation wage labor relations. They owned their land and all the resources found on it. What they lacked was control over the market value of the products of their labor, which structural adjustment

programs had largely placed in the hands of merchants and middlemen. Widespread monetization of social reproduction had made it imperative that peasants had to earn cash, and the market (merchants and middlemen) was the only source of that cash. And yet the market had become the site through which relationships of exploitation operated.

Thus, capital accumulation in Buyengo was hindered, not because farmers were lazy, nor because they lacked appropriate knowledge nor appropriate technology, as policy and modernist theorists tends to claim, but because Buyengo's small scale farmers were trapped in intense relations of exploitation in the market arena. And yet state policy, expressed via NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Services), driven largely by a modernist logic, was promoting knowledge and technology transfer, rather than addressing the unequal power relations and widespread fraud in the market place.

Implications for Political Economy...

The development of capitalist relations in agriculture lies at the heart of the political economy of agrarian change (Byres 1995). As we have seen, capital accumulation, and the potential for capitalist relations to emerge in Buyengo, was impeded by the operation of the "free" market. Rather than instigating capital accumulation and consolidation of land, a major factor in the process of capital accumulation, the "free" market was generally leading to diminishing land sizes and gradually yielding a highly insecure landless peasant class. Land parcels were gradually diminishing in size as desperate peasants sold off pieces of their land to Kenyan

immigrants who were just as insecure, and to non-farming urban elites. An agrarian crisis, rather than accumulation and the formation of capitalist relations in agriculture, was unfolding.

In particular, the market had concealed processes of exploitation and the triggers of dispossession. Contrary to classical experiences where primitive accumulation, also called the original crime of capitalism, entailed forceful expropriation of capital, especially land, through war violence, enslavement, etc., (Hall 2012), primitive accumulation (and dispossession) in the present moment of deep market integration in Buyengo was unfolding via market relations. The commodity had therefore become the primary means through which exploitation, accumulation and dispossession were mediated. Exploitation, accumulation and dispossession were unfolding in less visible, more subtle ways, via commodity exchange. I will make two quick further comments.

First, in the classical process of the emergence of capitalist relations, the twin processes of accumulation and dispossession are assumed to occur concurrently. Thus, dispossessed workers either find alternative livelihood opportunities through sale of their labor to emerging capitalists within the agrarian context or they migrate to the cities and towns to find work. In Buyengo however, widespread relations of exploitation were also yielding widespread immiseration, foreclosing the possibilities that alternative livelihood opportunities outside farming could emerge. As a result, an exploited and dispossessed, increasingly landless class was gradually forming in Buyengo. The

shortage of livelihood possibilities within the agrarian context, coupled with landlessness was unleashing a social existence of intense social insecurity—a very peculiar but contemporary agrarian crisis—a social condition that I have called *dispossession without displacement*.

Second, while Historical Materialism assumes that political protest will emerge from a shared consciousness of exploitation, in Buyengo, peasant politics shaped within heterogeneous social relations, political party politics and patronage relations were preventing the possibility that a shared consciousness of exploitation could develop into a popular actions to transform these relations of exploitation. To come to grips with this dynamic one must therefore look beyond production relations to broader questions at the intersection of culture and politics.

Social change does not always play out in ways that classical theory anticipates. Buyengo's peasants did not seek to challenge the relations of exploitation in which they were embedded, even while being fully conscious of the debilitating effects of those relationships of exploitation. As we have seen, this was largely because Buyengo's peasants were embedded in all kind of relations, over and beyond relations of production. Kinship relations and party politics mediated their material condition as well as social relationships among them. A class structure could emerge, but this was often blurred and complicated by kinship, cultural norms of reciprocity and redistribution. Relationships of production were often not as clear cut as classical theory

assumes. At different times and in different places the same peasant was a wage worker or a subsistence farmer or both. And, at different times within the same class of peasants, conflicts over land boundaries, ownership, access to and use of property occurred among them in ways that preempted the emergence of a singular class of peasants.

These contingent relations complicate analyses based exclusively on production relations. More importantly, they invite us to employ a broader repertoire of methodological approaches and analytical tools. People impute meanings to their social situation in tandem with, or over and above, relationships of production. Their material wellbeing is often shaped within a set of conditions that extend way beyond the relationships of production in which they are embedded. Peasants are not separated simply on the basis of relationships of production alone, just as they are not isolated from the myriad of social relations that span country and city. Methodologies, such as ethnography allow for more intimate access to lives of peasants in ways that illuminate these relationships, experiences and meanings.

In sum, to fully grasp the agrarian crisis in Buyengo requires a peculiar set of theoretical tools, which go beyond relations of production. An analysis of the market, especially of the commodity and commodity exchange, must be at the center of such analysis. Second, peasant politics must be situated within the particular historical moment in which they operate, taking the fuller context of culture and politics into

account. On a final note, this dissertation does not proclaim the death of the small scale farm, nor the unviability of small scale farming. Quite the contrary, I have endeavored to demonstrate that the small scale farm can thrive, produce a surplus and maintain its ecological integrity if the conditions are right.

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