



Land grabbing and resistance of indigenous landowners in Ibadan, Nigeria

International Sociology

2022, Vol. 37(1) 143–159

© The Author(s) 2021

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/02685809211046408

journals.sagepub.com/home/iss

Henry Uche Obuene^{ID},
Olayinka Akanle^{ID}
and Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale^{ID}

Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

The focus of existing studies on land grabbing in Nigeria has been on acquisition by foreign investors for their socio-economic gain, usually supported by the national government. However, narratives on land grabbing by government through the Land Use Decree and the consequent resistance deployed by the indigenous landowners are scarce. The Accumulation by Dispossession theory and an exploratory design were combined with qualitative methods to gather data from 41 participants through a combination of key informant and in-depth interviews and focus groups in Ajoda New Town. Data were ethnographically and content analysed and findings revealed that locals resisted government activities consequent upon their exclusion from compensatory and resettlement activities promised by the government. Displacement from patrimonial inheritance led to resistance, though government claimed it discharged its financial and moral responsibilities. Resistance took the form of violent, economic and civil protests.

Keywords

Ajoda New Town, government officials, indigenous landowners, land grabbing, resistance

Introduction

Since its pre-colonial origins, land grabbing has become a global problem (Borras and Franco, 2010; Cotula, 2012; Cotula et al., 2009). While land grabbing by foreign investors for their socio-economic gain with the support of national and/state governments remains frontline, its discourse in Ajoda, Nigeria, has remained largely invisible even

Corresponding author:

Henry Uche Obuene, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 234, Nigeria.

Email: henuch1@yahoo.com

with pockets of resistance from natives of Ajoda. This article investigates land grabbing by governments using the instrumentality Land Use Act and forms of resistance mounted by indigenous landowners as a result. Studies on land grabbing have shown that locals resist governments' or investors' activities primarily because of their exclusion from activities promised by the governments or investors (Ndi, 2017; Petrescu et al., 2020; Tura, 2018). The dominance this has gained in the literature requires scholarly investigations and Ajoda New Town in Ibadan, Nigeria, is an insightful reflection of this resistance consequent on public land acquisition for developing housing and commercial estates. The processes involved in most acquisition of indigenous land and its relative implications for the people concerned define the terminology of 'land grab', though it remains contentious (Borras, 2012; Doss et al., 2014; Klopp, 2000; Nuhu, 2008; Ocheje, 2007; Odoemene, 2012; Scoones, 2009; Suleiman, 2015). This study draws on scholars' (Borras et al., 2012a) conceptualization of 'land grab', that indigenous landowners easily lose prime, ancestral lands through eviction and their survival is threatened (Bouniol, 2013; Busscher et al., 2019). Since land is a means of survival in Ajoda New Town, this research examines the processes taken to acquire Ajoda New Town and the consequent local resistance, by answering this question: what is the land grabbing experience in the Ajoda community and how was the resistance carried out by natives?

Literature on land grabbing and resistance

Land grabbing cuts across regions of the world. In Latin America, the major players in land grabbing are often the government(s), private firms and individuals who speculate for vast arable land for agriculture, agro-fuel and private investment, often transacted across countries from mostly the poor and peasantry (Borras et al., 2012a; Daniel, 2012; Hules and Singh, 2017). It manifests at a fast pace and in some cases, results in dispossession with little or no compensation to victims (Borras et al., 2012b). For example, in Colombia, it is connected with violent processes of marginalization and expropriation of the locals. Consider the case of Tayrona National Natural Park in Colombia (an ecotourism centre), where acquisition of land for the park produced violent resistance (Ojeda, 2012). Furthermore, Wilkinson et al. (2012) highlighted that land grabbing in Brazil was orchestrated by the government in connection with foreign investors who acquired lands for agricultural and forestry purposes. Studies (Borras et al., 2012a; Cotula et al., 2009; Hall, 2011; Daniel, 2012; De Schutter, 2011) also revealed that high level land grabbing is a current experience in South and Central American countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, and to the list can be added Panama, Mexico and Nicaragua.

There are various schools of thought offering different interpretations and meanings of the concept of resistance. For instance, the classical idea of collective action sees resistance as an exception and inaction as a norm. The position is premised on neoclassical economics and rational choice theory, which emphasize that individuals strategically weigh potential benefits and risks of particular courses of action and then proceed in their self-interest. The high risks of collective resistance are likely to manifest as loss of time, arrests, physical assaults and assassinations. Here, a keen observer and the individual may likely sit on the fence hoping to benefit from the gains of others' risk-taking

and sacrifice. Marxist scholars opine that there is a link from shared grievances to collective action, and recognizing that some forms of resistance are individual, they tend to assume that common oppression gives rise to class politics and common political projects (Barker, 2014).

Further insights on resistance are seen in the works of Polanyi (1944), Foucault (1994), Gramsci (2008 [1971]) and Scott (1976, 1986, 1990). These scholars explain why and how resistances are provoked. Polanyi (2001 [1944]) equates resistance to land grabbing to the industrial capitalism in Europe, submitting that it emerges from both the state and civil society, consequent on capitalism's exploitation of both labour and nature to generate surpluses. This safeguards the social value of the lower class from the capitalists in order to control the market exploitation of land and labour. However, the state leads the promotion of capitalist expansion through land grabbing, which thereafter provokes resistance by the locals. Foucault (1972) shows that power relations are the denominators for resistance and clarifies that power is the driving force between the state and society or the ruler and the subjects. The exploitation of a group results in resistance in relations to the power exercised. Thereafter, how forces are employed results in how resistance is orchestrated (Foucault, 1994).

Gramsci (2008 [1971]) identifies subaltern groups who act based on particular experiences with specific material and political conditions behind resistance. He further clarifies that the hegemony or supremacy of the state and the elite classes, whose interests are served by state institutions, policies and hegemonic ideologies, is the basis of class-based resistance. He argues that resistance by the subaltern is rarely categorized under the idea of 'class consciousness', but rather from gains from materialism as a result of class domination. Thus, resistance cannot only be understood within the scope of adherence to an ideology, but also through a diverse natural consciousness that later culminates in a cohesive collective resistance. Scott (1976, 1986, 1990) explains the covert in 'everyday forms of resistance'. In demonstrating this, he describes resistance as a response to power relations, often provoked in defence of subsistence and the material interests of the subaltern. Engagements, such as clandestine sabotage – theft, false alarm, foot-dragging, destruction and others – are employed to challenge the authority of the capitalists.

In addition, Visser et al. (2012) show that elites in Russia are blessed with different business ideas on land use. They were favoured with the 2002 land code/decreed which made land grabbing possible, eventually making peasants' organizing and protests against the ruling class irresistible. Also, Odoemene (2015) discusses the resistance provoked by land grabbing in three different communities – Dominion Farmers in Mutum Biyu, Gassol Local Government area of Taraba State; Wilmar International Farm in Ekong-Amaku, Cross River State; and against Zimbabwean farmers in Kwara State. The resistance in these three localities generated natives' mobilization and protest, spearheaded by nominated leaders (Attah, 2013; Odoemene, 2012, 2015). It was organized and peaceful, involving letter writing to the ruling class and peaceful demonstrations by the peasants.

Accumulation by Dispossession theory

Accumulation by Dispossession theory is anchored in Marx's concept of 'primitive accumulation' (Harvey, 2003, 2005), which expresses the idea of colonial, neocolonial and

imperial processes of asset appropriation (Harvey, 2003: 145). Furthermore, it typifies the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations. This emphasizes the corporatization and privatization of public assets and utilities, showing how the lower class is enclosed or dispossessed. Also, these processes of dispossession provoke widespread local resistance, which is currently applied against any form of globalization (Harvey, 2003). The conversion of various property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights are highlighted in this theory. This underscores one of the conceptual issues of land grabbing in the turning of public land into government's exclusively, and companies'/conglomerates', thereby dispossessing the locals who are in the lower class (Attah, 2013; Odoemene, 2012; Sparks, 2012). It demonstrates the suppression of rights of the commons, the commodification of labour power, and the suppression of alternative (and indigenous) forms of production and consumption.

In addition, the politics of civilization mainly disempowers individuals especially in the lower class, as demonstrated in the theory. This gives opportunities for a radical resistance; in this vein, the collection of class brings the consciousness of resistance in the society. Class resistance is a struggle over the appropriation of work, property, production and taxes. According to the theory, the peasants revolt because they are aware that the lands are acquired through deceit. They are also aware that resisting can provoke a change that will culminate in the reversal of the acquisition of their land; and not resisting can lead to famine or other dreadful situations. Also, the theory elucidates that peasants resist government's use of 'eminent domain' to acquire and transfer their land to private companies for development. This is exemplified in Ajoda New Town, where hectares of land were acquired and appropriated by the Ministry of Lands hiding behind the Land Use Decree for public use. Hence, this penetration by the government thereby dispossesses the indigenous farmers of their livelihood and provokes resistance by the locals.

Methodology

The Ajoda New Town area of Egbeda Local Government in Ibadan was the study area. It was purposively selected due to the resistance that was provoked among in the communities. Also, the case has remained largely controversial amongst many housing estates established by the Ministry of Lands. It is located north-east of Ibadan 4° 2' east of the Greenwich Meridian and 7° 23' north of the equator. To the west, Ajoda New Town is bounded by the Omi River and in the north by the new Iwo road. The physical boundary on the eastern side is approximately 2 km east of the dual carriageway; the southern boundary is formed by the new Ibadan–Ife road. From Ibadan, the area can be reached on the Ibadan–Ife road or the Ibadan–Iwo road, which is being enlarged to deal with increased traffic. On both roads, the distance to the designated area is approximately 15 km from the edge of Ibadan formed by its eastern bypass (see Figure 1).

The exploratory design was adopted to discover the various resistances carried out by the indigenous landowners in Ajoda. We gained access to the community by obtaining consent from the traditional rulers and data collection was conducted over a period of eight months from December 2016 to August 2017 in the locations. Participants were



selected because they participated in the resistance organized by the communities. The study population included natives of Ajoda New Town, 'allottee'-residents and 'allottees' that never came to build as a result of the indigenous resistance. Non-participant observation took three months, and a combination of key informant (KII) and in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus groups (FGD) and case studies were undertaken for the study. We utilized the purposive and snowball techniques to locate participants and conducted (18) key informant interview sessions among traditional ruler/chiefs (3), family heads of children of the landowners (4), indigenous landlords (2), 'allottee'-resident landlords (2), chairman (landlords' association), a youth leader, 'allottees' (2), and government officials (3). Twenty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 'allottee'-residents (10),

indigenous landlords (10) and a counsellor; while two male and female indigenous land-owners participated in two focus group discussion sessions. Locating women participants for the study was difficult until a gatekeeper from the indigenous women who was zealous about the subject of the study was appointed. She further explained to women in the communities that the research was aimed at advancing knowledge. Two case studies were conducted among 'allottee'-residents (1) and indigenous landlords (1). We sourced secondary data from the minutes of the landlords' meeting of the Ajoda community and from newspapers, court proceedings on the Ajoda community and government reports on Ajoda.

Data analysis based on the study's objectives was through ethnography and content analysis. The indigenous nature of the research necessitated that 98% of the data be collected in the Yoruba language using a tape recorder; data were later transcribed into the English language. Research findings were coded into themes and arranged for easy identification in order to fit into each unit of analysis. This was achieved by several counts of the various useful content. Overlapping, redundant and irrelevant information was later ignored. Thematic frames include the locals' mood and perception of urban renewal policy; implementation and considerations for the economic survival of indigenous land-owners in terms of ownership and compensation; and resistance through organized and self-help strategies, i.e. invoking cultural norms and taboos. To ensure reliability and validity of data analysis, participants responded to the same interview guide, and we assigned and reassigned codes (where necessary) to each theme consistently and coherently over a period of time as stated in the coding's translation set rules. Back translation into Yoruba was done to ensure accuracy by linguistic experts. Finally, the data were analysed and triangulated with both the literature and theory. This process ensures thoroughness and was very useful to provide insightful representations of the subject matter by the participants, although it was time consuming.

The next sections of the article describe respectively the processes of urban policy and consequent resistance against land grabbing. Thereafter, the concluding section summarizes the research findings.

Urban congestion and public policy

Ibadan is still classified as both urban and rural settlements to the present day, with six local government areas (LGAs) constituting urban settlements and rural Ibadan comprising five LGAs (Onibokun and Kumuyi, 1996). The urbanization efforts of the state government have made Ajoda a popular town amidst other rural areas in Ibadan. Therefore, the settlement, as one of those rural enclaves jostling for development, attracted government attention. A government official affirms:

In the mid-1970s, the Ibadan metropolitan area and the undeveloped districts witnessed a population explosion, which as a result led to an immense strain on the city's social and physical infrastructure. The government's plan for Ajoda was to become a satellite town that accommodates people displaced in urban Ibadan, a situation that necessitated government's development intervention to provide [the] basic need[s] of its inhabitants. The problems bordered on poor housing, improper sanitation, unemployment, inadequate supply of water and

electricity, acute shortage of health and educational facilities, dilapidated roads and a general dearth of infrastructural services. (Government official/KII, 2 December 2016)

This report shows that government was aware of the critical infrastructural deficit in Ibadan and was working on a plan to remedy this and develop the area. In the mid-1970s, Ibadan witnessed a congestion problem which had cumulative effects on the social infrastructure in the metropolis. This was the rationale behind Oyo state government's urbanization extension project. Ajoda, one of the rural settlements, was then chosen as a site wherein to implement this urban decongestion scheme, in which people would be moved from Ibadan to new towns. However, this quest for communal land in Ajoda did not go down well with the indigenous people, who were afraid of expropriation and displacement that could endanger their indigenous authority over their communal land. The government, notwithstanding, proceeded with the policy and acquired the Ajoda settlement. This policy implementation presupposes 'urban renewal' and it is in line with extant literature positing that urban renewal is usually done for effective security, safety and the comfort of residents; and to attract investors, thereby enhancing the economic activities of the area. This must be maximally executed and is best utilized in strict conformity to the conceived design (Egolum and Emoh, 2017). Also, Harvey (2005) avers that urbanization is created from surplus value – a product of geographical and social concentration of surplus products (land). Hence, it has always been a class-dominated phenomenon, where surpluses are extracted from somewhere and somebody (usually an oppressed peasantry); and to make class domination a reality, the resultant enclave is controlled by the minority. Summarily, the processes of land grabbing for Ajoda New Town commenced in 1976, when the military government set up a committee on the decongestion of Ibadan. The committee recommended the acquisition of 1200 hectares at Egbeda for the establishment of a residential and industrial estate. Then, the dislodged indigenous owners were compensated for land and crops. Later, the government enacted the Land Use Decree of 1978 and acquired a further 3800 hectares for this purpose, but compensated for crops only. The indigenous owners viewed non-compensation for land as exploitation and 'theft' by patrimonial possession.

Resistance against land grabbing in Ajoda New Town

The resistance in Ajoda was perpetuated by the peasants because they realized that their lands had been deceitfully acquired by government who sold on to private individuals. In the theory of Accumulation by Dispossession, Harvey (2005) describes this form of acquisition as commoditization and privatization of assets (land). He opines that peasants were aware that resistance could provoke a change that would culminate in the reversal of the acquisitions, and that absence of resistance could lead to famine or other negative outcomes. Also, it explains that resistance could be peaceful or violent. Our findings revealed that indigenous landowners at Ajoda had earlier employed peaceful means to express their grievances to the government over the acquisition of their land. They did this by writing letters to express their feelings, but the government did not respond to their plight positively. For example, 'appeal letters' were written to their indigenous Very Important People (VIP) in public service at both federal and state levels

to appeal to the then military governor to revoke the detrimental land order. Among these letters were the ones written on the quoted dates shown below:

Save Our Soul

Re: Our Letter of Protest and Appeal for the Revocation of the Order of Acquisition of the Ajoda New Town Scheme (18 October 2000)

Letter of Appeal for Release of Ajoda Land (21 March 1984)

The successive letters written to the government reveal the extent to which the indigenous landowners wanted the reversal of the land acquisition by the government. This is in line with extant literature suggesting the ways and manner the lower class resists through letter writing to upper class individuals (Hennings, 2015; Ndi, 2017). However, the negative responses from the government to the indigenous landowners' correspondence informed other methods of resistance to government activities regarding their land. For instance, the indigenous landowners expressed their feelings in another way by suing the government through the courts where they thought justice could be secured in their favour. An interviewee said this:

We went to court because there have not been any positive responses so far. We have written series of letters to the Governor too without any effect. We have sent different types of people to him; still, there is no change. (Youth representative/KII, 28 February 2017)

These data indicate that the indigenous landowners took Oyo state government to court. This corroborates studies that have shown that locals resist by referring their case to a court of law where justice could be sought for their grievances, especially with regard to land (Attah, 2013; Odoemene, 2012). Resistance could also be violent and findings reveal that indigenous landowners employed both violent and symbolic means in resisting the government's incursion into their lands to execute its dream plan of Ajoda New Town. The indigenous landowners succeeded in transferring their resistance tactics among the descendants of the original owners through resistant socialization. One of the government officials interviewed related the experience of indigenous landowners' resistance in the following words:

One of the ways the indigenous landowners resisted the government is by attacking our surveyors, using diabolical means such as charms, cutlass and threats with [a] gun in some cases. Many people that are notorious in that village, such as a boy nicknamed Oluomo, or Oluaye, have been threatening, attacking and doing a lot of things. In fact, they are the illegal sand miners who deface the topographical surfaces of our land. They illegally sell land to many people without minding the presence of government in that area. That is what we have been experiencing. (Government official/KII, 28 November 2016)

The data presented so far reveal that weapons such as machetes, cutlasses and charms were used by the indigenous landowners in resisting the officials of the Oyo state government. The violent resistance was spearheaded by some notorious individuals,

while the indigenous landowners laid ambush for the inspectorate, thereby disrupting their routine activities on the sites. The confrontations between indigenous landowners and government officials, at times, led to the arrest of both parties. The community members engaged in these acts to bring their grievances to the attention of the government in anticipation of a better understanding between the two parties. This practice is consistent with what Harvey (2005) describes as locals protesting against the upper class to attain mutual understanding. The foregoing discussion reveals that the resistance demonstrated in Ajoda community was violent, similar to what Ojeda (2012) found in the case of the government grabbing of land for the Tayrona National Natural Park in Colombia. There is violent resistance because, as Nnoli (2003) noted, human beings are users of land; they are not like mammals that only occupy land. As a result, they tend to be violent towards any land acquisition denying them the right to make adequate use of their land and dispossessing them of their ancestral attachments to the land.

Furthermore, the indigenous landowners were hostile to government inspectorates whenever they wanted to carry out their inspectoral activities on the acquired land in Ajoda. For example, the data collected show that the individual nicknamed Oluomo or Oluaye was not a direct native of Ajoda. He had become a beneficiary of the crisis to the extent of using the opportunity to enrich himself. He was always at the forefront of the struggle against the government. Also, the indigenous landowners are always on the look out for the government officials. The indigenous landowners would mount roadblocks and barricades, preventing government officials from leaving the community after discharging their duties. They kept themselves closely informed about the tactics of government officials. To get through the roadblocks sometimes, government inspectors would have to pay. Money thus becomes a central phenomenon in the resistance and in the relationship between indigenous landowners and government officials. This is because dual payments were made (to government and indigenous landowners) before any meaningful construction was done in Ajoda. Also, indigenous landowners collected money from 'allottees' and officials to protect them from any ill-treatment at the hands of the indigenous landowners. All these actions were adopted by the indigenous landowners to signal to the 'allottees' and the officials the primordial recognition of their land.

Harvey (2005) maintains also that non-resistance to oppression by locals could result in scarcity and famine and the indigenous landowners in Ajoda were also aware of these likely consequences of non-resistance. This is shown in one of the letters they wrote to the government:

Initially, the then military government made provisions for adequate compensations for the crops destroyed but the rates were later reduced, thus dashing our hope on compensation. We are not mechanics, bricklayers, and motor-drivers; in fact, we are not traders but peasant farmers whose source of income is mainly from farming in the acquired areas. We have been suffering for the past 8 years. We are hungry. We are not settled and unable to get three square meals a day as it can be seen that we cannot farm on our land again. We have to pay our annual tax and have to cater for our wives and children. It has been stated that a man who goes without food for 24 hours will quarrel, one who is denied food for 48 hours will steal and one who is

without food for 72 hours will fight. Thus, the difference between peace and anarchy in most countries is a matter of only a few days without food. (Appeal letter, 1 March 1984)

The position described above indicates that the affected indigenous landowners found it difficult to earn their livelihood as a result of the government's land grabbing. They stressed that inability to find food and other basic necessities can easily lead to a state of anarchy. The experience of the Ajoda indigenous landowners is consistent with Polanyi's (1944) position that resistance can emerge from both the state and civil societies, consequent on capitalists' exploitation of both labour and nature with the aim of generating surplus. Resistance, in this way, is aimed at regulating, protecting and resisting market exploitation of land and labour. Also, the indigenous landowners' experience is consistent with the positions of Schneider (2011) and Adnan (2011), that peasants are the victimized, whose means of livelihood are threatened – and as a result oppose any form of land grabbing in their communities.

Findings revealed that some of the indigenous landowners of the Ajoda community were compensated following the promises by government in 1976. However, the research found out that some villages deliberately rejected the compensation.

This issue of compensation caused a lot of problems in Ajoda then. Indigenous landowners from Tanmo village collected compensation while villages such as Mosafejo, Awaye and a host of others did not. So, the people were sad after knowing what came out of the compensational arrangement. (Indigenous landowner/KII, 3 March 2017)

The data show the complexity of compensational payments, which was also evident in Ajoda community. Not all the indigenous landowners accepted the monetary compensation from the government – a situation that resulted from the divide and rule tactic earlier explained.

Another way in which the indigenous landowners resisted government takeover of their land was by engaging in sand mining. Portions of sand on the acquired plots of land were sold off by landowners turned sand miners. It serves as an alternative source of income for them to meet their needs. Sand mining, however, has a negative impact on government plans. The land from which sand is mined is destroyed, its topography is defaced, and its economic worth is devalued. Contrarily, the indigenous landowners who engaged in the act maintained that sand mining 'does not destroy the land, as the land is not sold but the top soil: the land remains fixed where it is'. They argued that since their means of sustenance was threatened by the government's takeover of their land, they had to find another way to survive. Interviewees noted that during sand mining, charms which the original landowners had buried underground were excavated. The 'allottee'-residents considered this an advantage to them. This was reported by an interviewee:

The indigenous landowners are selling the top soil and have removed all the beckons [posts differentiating plots] on the land. They will tell you they are not selling the land but the top soil. But, you see, that happened to be an advantage for us in a form. These sand miners exhume most of their rituals in the process. Doing that is one advantage for us here. But the disadvantage there is that the land owners will not be able to locate their land or plots unless the Housing Corporation staff now come to proffer solutions to it. ('Allottee'-resident/IDI, 4 March 2017)

Implied in the data, the indigenous landowners considered justifiable the sale of portions of the land acquired by the government. They maintained that they had to give parcels of land to their wards whenever they showed interest in building in Ajoda. They also emphasized that they had no alternative and were troubled by their expulsion from their ancestral lands. They could not understand why the government dispossessed them of their land to create a new town. This action demonstrates their strong attachment to their inherited land and equally shows their resentment of the government's intentions in acquiring the land. Furthermore, they used charms to scare away any of the government's operatives and 'allottees' on their land and government officials on sites were always warned to be observant and proactive:

We usually warn our staff that whenever they see things like that, they should take caution because *moja mosa la n ba akinkanju logun*.¹ You can't say it is just an ordinary voodoo and just go on the site anyhow. It is not done anywhere. Every human being has the potential for being fetish [casting evil charms] and you can't determine the efficacy of all these things. Well, you may think they are not effective while they are tremendously effective. (Government official/KII, 2 December 2016)

As indicated in the data above, indigenous landowners used charms to prevent government officials from discharging their duties. Government officials were always warned to be careful and not to underrate any of such charms. The charm mostly referred to as '*Iga*'² is mounted on any plot when there are scores to be settled, especially on monetary terms. It is usually mounted when a buyer is about to start building a structure on the land. The indigenous landowners would make sure that they are recompensed monetarily based on the term(s) of agreement between them and the 'allottee' from the government. That is, after buying from the government, the 'allottee' still buys from the original landowners. This experience is captured here:

I met a stiff resistance from the original landowners. I was prevented from occupying the land except [if] I was going to pay a certain amount on the land again. But then I would be a tenant to the government and to the original landowner which I couldn't meet. Then, I abandoned the place because they prevented me from occupying it. ('Allottee'/IDI, 10 March 2017)

The data above show one of the strategies deployed by the indigenous landowners in ensuring that 'allottees' pay them as well. They established that they have to be recompensed in order to have peaceful relations with the 'allottees' and their plans to build on the plots. Also, it is a way of ascertaining the identity of the buyer and ensuring the recognition of the powers of the indigenous landowners over the land. This is because the buyer will be compelled to locate the original landowner for recognition and settlement. However, the application of these meta-physical methods does not affect the government, as mentioned by some of the respondents. They said that when the government is ready to perform its operations, nothing stops it, even though government has specified no time for the execution of its project. The original landowners therefore take advantage of that to re-sell the land to whomsoever indicates interest, since the government does not have a specific time plan, especially on the new town agenda. This is one of the ways that these original landowners in Ajoda resist government activities. An interviewee described the situation thus:

Ah, well; you know government is different from [an] individual. '*Oniwele mu o, Oni o maa se asasi, committee melo loo lu l'oogun.*'³ You know, whether they like it or not, government owns the land. But before the government comes, let us see what we can do. That is it now. Since the government is not serious about it. They sell land now for N200-N300 thousand naira per plot here. You can imagine. ('Allottee'-resident/IDI, 1 March 2017)

This shows that sale of land was indeed one of the ways the indigenous landowners resisted the government's plans in the Ajoda community. The data reveal also that the government, which owns the land, would someday come back unannounced. Hence, they orchestrated land sales as a medium of resisting government activities. The indigenous landowners have become conditioned to strategizing on the dynamics of resistance against the government.

Placing curses was another method used by the indigenous landowners. It was emphasized that the government could be cursed by the indigenous landowners if it failed to reverse the action and release the land to the original owners. One of the interviewees, an indigenous landowner, argues:

If that [urban] decongestion must take place, the people to be dislodged should be heavily and adequately compensated. So that *won ni sepe fun ijoba*.⁴ That is the truth. I'm a village man to the core. (Indigenous landowner/KII, 9 March 2017)

From the above data, resigning to fate may cause those who were dispossessed of their land to place curses on those who acquired their land, in this case the government. Another way the Ajoda indigenous landowners resisted government was to assemble and physically disrupt ongoing building activities in the community. They may also request money at every stage of the development or ask for full payment in some cases. This is another strategy adopted by the indigenous landowners to earn a living. Literature in line with this posits that resistance is usually organized in groups and the aim of such among locals is not to overthrow or suppress a domination structure, but for survival (Harvey, 2005; Moreda and Spoor, 2015; Scott, 1986). This is evident in the fact that, if they secured the required amount of money from prospective builders, the indigenous landowners could render assistance in securing the building under construction till the point of completion. This, in a way, brings peace to the 'allottees' and the contracted builders. They saw it as an avenue to make money while the building was still under construction. An interviewee in this regard said this:

The only thing is that whenever an allottee wants to build his/her house, the *Omo-onile* may come to him for their *Omo-onile*'s money. The *Omo-onile* know that if the landowners or users build the house, there may not be any chances to collect money from them again. At least, they too will eat now. (Indigenous landowner/IDI, 28 February 2017)

This revelation is another method the indigenous landowners employed to resist government's acquisition of their land. They would go about in groups, making money off any prospective builder allotted land by the government. Harvey (2005) addressed the force and power intensified in a group in this style of resistance for executing a class struggle. Group formation proves an effective way of fighting.

Conclusion

To relieve urban congestion in Ibadan in 1976, the government apparently saw Ajoda New Town as a solution. The intention of the government was initially lauded by the indigenous landowners but was later perceived as risky to their patrimonial connection to the land. This was evident in their perception of unfair treatment in the process of land acquisition and the introduction of the Land Use Decree of 1978 by the government. The indigenous landowners concluded that their only means of survival and hope for the 'future' was taken away unjustly, which provoked fierce reaction. This article has shown that the landowners in Ajoda New Town resisted land grabbing in various ways in the community. It demonstrates the collective consciousness of indigenous landowners' reactions to counteract government activities consequent upon its plans to construct a new town. In this vein, the Accumulation by Dispossession theory finds expression in the indigenous reactions against the purported government exercise of power in privatization and commodification of the ancestral land. The indigenous landowners were not so keen in demonstrating resistance against the government's moves in creating a new town in order to resolve urban congestion in the overpopulated metropolis, but argued that government disappointed them in its promises to them. They blamed their leaders for conniving with government representatives while using the instrumentality of the Land Use Decree of 1978, diplomacy and the tactic of divide and rule. They also emphasized that such a negotiation could not have taken place but for the betrayals by their community leaders and the fact that the period was a 'dark age' when the community was left in ignorance. Originally, any visitor resembling a government representative was seen as an august visitor who had come to liberate them from their abject poverty. Their anguish over loss of their inherited lands might never end because their sources of wealth and means of survival were deceitfully and coercively taken from them. This degenerated into resistance that manifested in several ways. The study also shows the strength in the unity of a group to galvanize the resistance in the Ajoda community. The political-economy of resistance in Ajoda New Town highlights the prospects and strategies of amassing wealth for survival. Therefore, it calls for a thorough inclusion or participation of indigenous landowners in decision making before a transaction over vast areas of land is ratified. Based on the resistance at Ajoda New Town, there should be series of meetings between the government and the indigenous landowners in readdressing the social contract, especially with regard to the terms of compensation where necessary.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Henry Uche Obuene  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8948-7948>

Olayinka Akanle  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4707-4491>

Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7455-1695>

Notes

1. That is, confronting and retreating describes a warrior at war.
2. A fetish palm-frond design mounted on a piece of land in dispute to avoid entrance onto or penetration of the land.
3. That is, if you are caught by the government fee collector and you said you will go fetish (cast charms), how many committees are you going to enchant? In other words, the government is all powerful.
4. So that the government is not being cursed by the indigenous landowners.

References

- Adnan S (2011) Resistance to accumulation by dispossession in the context of neoliberal capitalism and globalization: Struggles for defending and gaining land rights by the poor peasantry in the Noakhali Chars of Bangladesh. In: International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, Future Agricultures Consortium, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 6–8 April 2011.
- Ajoda New Town Master Plan (1978) Ajoda New Town Development Corporation, Oyo State, Nigeria.
- Attah NE (2013) Land grabbing in Nigeria and responses: Protest or acquiescence? In: 5th European Conference on African Studies on African Dynamics in a Multipolar World, Centro de Estudos Africanos – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (Centre of African Studies of the University Institute of Lisbon), Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), 27–29 June 2013.
- Barker C (2014) Class struggle and social movements. In: Barker C, Cox L, Krinsky J and Nilsen AG (eds) *Marxism and Social Movements*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, pp. 41–61.
- Borras S Jr (2012) The politics of transnational agrarian movements. *Development and Change* 41(5): 771–803.
- Borras S Jr and Franco J (2010) From threat to opportunity? Problems with the idea of a ‘code of conduct’ for land-grabbing. *Yale Human Rights and Development Law Journal* 13(1): 507–523.
- Borras S Jr, Franco JC, Gómez S, Kay C and Spoor M (2012a) Land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3–4): 845–872.
- Borras S Jr, Gómez S, Kay C and Wilkinson J (2012b) Land grabbing and global capitalist accumulation: Key features in Latin America. *Canadian Journal of Developmental Studies* 33(4): 402–416.
- Bouniol J (2013) Scramble for land in Romania jeopardizes rural territories development. In: Franco J and Borras S (eds) *Land Concentration, Land Grabbing and People’s Struggles in Europe*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, European Coordination Via Campesina, pp. 158–181.
- Busscher N, Parra C and Vanclay F (2019) Land grabbing within a protected area: The experience of local communities with conservation and forestry activities in Los Esteros del Ibera, Argentina. *Land Use Policy* 78: 572–582.
- Cotula L (2012) The international political economy of the global land rush: A critical appraisal of trends, scale, geography and drivers. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3): 649–680.
- Cotula L, Vermeulen S, Leonard R and Keeley J (2009) *Land Grab or Development Opportunity? Agricultural Investment and International Land Deals in Africa*. Rome: Food and Agriculture

- Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, and International Institute for Environment and Development.
- Daniel S (2012) Land grabbing and potential implications for world food security. Sustainable agricultural development. *International Business and Economics Research Journal* 11(6): 687–696.
- De Schutter O (2011) Forum on global land grabbing: How not to think land grabbing: three critiques of large-scale investments in farmland. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(2): 249–279.
- Doss C, Summerfield G and Tsikata D (2014) Land, gender, and food security. *Feminist Economics* 20: 1–23.
- Egolum CC and Emoh FI (2017) The issues and challenges of urban renewal in developing economy. *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability* 5(1): 32–44.
- Foucault M (1972) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault M (1994) The subject and power. In: Faubion JD (ed.) *Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3*. New York: The New Press, pp. 326–348.
- Gramsci A (2008 [1971]) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Hall R (2011) Land grabbing in Southern Africa: The many faces of the investor rush. *Review of African Political Economy* 38(128): 193–214.
- Harvey D (2003) *The New Imperialism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey D (2005) The ‘new’ imperialism: Accumulation by dispossession. *Socialist Register* 40: 63–87.
- Hennings A (2015) Resistance against land-scale land acquisitions: Bougeinvillie’s peace process under threat. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 42(3–4): 671–694.
- Hules M and Singh SJ (2017) India land grab deals in Ethiopia: Food security or global politics? *Land Use Policy* 60: 343–351.
- Klopp JM (2000) Pilfering the public: The problem of land grabbing in contemporary Kenya. *Africa Today* 47(1): 7–26.
- Moreda T and Spoor M (2015) The politics of large-scale land acquisitions in Ethiopia: State and corporate elites and subaltern villagers. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies* 36(2): 224–240.
- Ndi FA (2017) Land grabbing, local contestation and the struggle for economic gain: Insights from Nguti village, South West Cameroon. *Sage Open* January–March: 1–14.
- Nuhu B (2008) Compulsory purchase and payment of compensation in Nigeria: A case study of Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. *Nordic Journal of Surveying and Real Estate Research Special Series*, 3: 102–126.
- Ocheje PD (2007) ‘In the public interest’: Forced evictions, land rights and human development in Africa. *Journal of African Law* 51(2): 173–214.
- Odoemene A (2012) White Zimbabwe farmers in Nigeria: Issues in ‘New Nigerian’ land deals and the implication for food and human security. *African Identities* 10(1): 63–76.
- Odoemene A (2015) *Socio-political economy and dynamics of government-driven land grabbing in Nigeria since 2000*. GEG Working Paper, No. 2015/103, University of Oxford, Global Economic Governance Programme (GEG).
- Ojeda D (2012) Green pretexts: Ecotourism, neoliberal conservation and land grabbing in Tayrona national natural park, Colombia. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 357–375.
- Onibokun AG and Kumuyi AJ (1996) *Urban poverty in Nigeria: Towards sustainability strategies for its alleviation*. CASSAD (Centre for African Settlement Studies and Development) Monograph series 10, Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Petrescu DC, Hartel T and Petrescu-Mag RM (2020) Global land grab: Toward a country typology for future land negotiations. *Land Use Policy* 99: 104960.

- Polanyi K (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schneider A (2011) What shall we do without our land? Land grabs and resistance in rural Cambodia. In: International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, Future Agricultures Consortium, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 6–8 April 2011.
- Scoones I (2009) Livelihoods perspectives and rural development. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36(1): 171–196.
- Scott JC (1976) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Scott JC (1986) Everyday forms of peasant resistance. In: Scott JC and Kerkvliet BJT (eds) *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in South-East Asia*. London: Frank Cass, pp. 5–35.
- Scott JC (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- Sparks DL (2012) Large scale land acquisitions in sub-Saharan Africa: The new scramble? *Journal of International Business & Economic Research* 11(6): 688–696.
- Suleiman HM (2015) Grabbing of communal range lands in Sudan: The case of large-scale mechanized rain-fed agriculture. *Land Use Policy* 47: 430–437.
- Tura HA (2018) Land right and land grabbing in Oromia, Ethiopia. *Land Use Policy* 70: 247–255.
- Visser O, Mamonova N and Spoor M (2012) Oligarchs, megafarms and land reserves: Understanding land grabbing in Russia. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3–4): 899–931.
- Wilkinson J, Reydon B and Di Sabbato A (2012) Concentration and foreign ownership of land in Brazil in the context of global land. *Journal of Development Studies* 10(1): 417–438.

Author biographies

Henry Uche Obuene is a doctoral graduate of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He teaches Sociology and Rural/Community Development in the Department of Philosophy at SS Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan. Dr Obuene has a vast experience in research and the areas of his research interest include sociology of development, social problem, conflicts, industrial sociology and sociology of the family.

Olayinka Akanle is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He is also a research associate in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the South African Research Chair Initiative (SARChI) in Social Policy, College of Graduate Studies, University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa. He has won other scholarly awards like World Social Science Fellow (WSSF) of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), Paris, France, Laureate of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), Dakar, Senegal, and University of Ibadan, Nigeria Postgraduate School Prize for scholarly publication awardee. He is a researcher, an academic, a scholar and an expert on group dynamics, development studies, sociological theories, youth, childhood, gender and family in postcolonial Africa. Dr Akanle has attended many local and international scholarly conferences and has published widely in local and international journals, books, technical reports and encyclopaedia. He is the author of *Kinship Networks and International Migration in Nigeria* (Cambridge Scholar Publishers) and has co-edited books including *The Development of Africa: Issues, Diagnosis and Prognosis* (Springer).

Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale (PhD) teaches Sociology at the University of Ibadan. Dr Omobowale studies development in context. He has won the University of Ibadan Postgraduate School Award for scholarly publication, 2007, Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique Research Fellowship 2009, the American Council of Learned Societies-African Humanities Programme Post-Doctoral Fellowship 2010 and the African Studies Association (USA) Presidential Award

2014. Dr Omobowale was also a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for African Studies, Rutgers University in November 2014. His works have appeared in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes locally and internationally. He served on the board of editors of *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (2009) and he is the author of *The Tokunbo Phenomenon and the Second-hand Economy in Nigeria* (2013). Dr Omobowale is also the editor of *Ibadan Journal of Sociology* and an International Partner and Participant in the International Network on Women on the Move COST Action (CA19112) 2020–2022.

Résumé

Les études existantes sur l'accaparement des terres au Nigeria se sont surtout intéressées aux acquisitions faites, généralement avec le soutien du gouvernement national, par des investisseurs étrangers pour leur bénéfice socioéconomique. On trouve en revanche peu de récits sur l'accaparement des terres par le gouvernement intervenu à la faveur du *Land Use Decree* (Décret sur l'utilisation des terres), et sur la résistance des propriétaires fonciers autochtones qui en a résulté. Dans cet article, nous combinons la théorie de l'accumulation par dépossession et un modèle exploratoire à des méthodes qualitatives pour recueillir des données auprès de 41 participants moyennant des entretiens avec des informateurs clés, des entretiens approfondis et des groupes de discussion à Ajoda New Town. Les données ont fait l'objet d'une analyse ethnographique et d'une analyse de contenu. Les résultats montrent que les habitants se sont opposés aux pratiques du gouvernement après avoir été exclus des opérations de compensation et de réinstallation promises par celui-ci. La perte de l'héritage patrimonial a conduit à des actes de résistance, bien que le gouvernement ait affirmé s'être acquitté de ses responsabilités financières et morales. Cette résistance a pris la forme de violentes protestations, économiques et civiles.

Mots-clés

Accaparement des terres, Ajoda New Town, propriétaires fonciers autochtones, résistance, représentants du gouvernement

Resumen

El enfoque de los estudios existentes sobre el acaparamiento de tierras en Nigeria se ha centrado en la adquisición de tierras por parte de inversores extranjeros para su beneficio socioeconómico, generalmente con el apoyo del gobierno nacional. Sin embargo, las narrativas sobre el acaparamiento de tierras por parte del gobierno a través del *Land Use Decree* (Decreto de Uso de Tierras) y la consecuente resistencia desplegada por los terratenientes indígenas son escasas. Este artículo combina la teoría de la acumulación por desposesión y un diseño exploratorio con métodos cualitativos para recopilar datos de 41 participantes a través de una combinación de informantes clave y entrevistas en profundidad y grupos focales en Ajoda New Town. Los datos se han sometido a un análisis etnográfico y de contenido, y los hallazgos revelan que los lugareños se resistieron a las actividades gubernamentales como consecuencia de su exclusión de las actividades compensatorias y de reasentamiento prometidas por el gobierno. La pérdida de la herencia patrimonial generó resistencia, aunque el gobierno afirmó que cumplía con sus responsabilidades financieras y morales. La resistencia tomó la forma de protestas violentas, económicas y civiles.

Palabras clave

Acaparamiento de tierras, Ajoda New Town, funcionarios del gobierno, resistencia, terratenientes indígenas