

## Neo-Colonialism and Foreign Corporations in Africa

### INTRODUCTION

Nkrumah's writings on neo-colonialism identified two main sources of foreign co-optation and control. Namely, he focused on the role of multinational companies and foreign donors, such as the USA and Britain. In the case of foreign companies, Nkrumah argued that such entities entered into African territories and accumulated such economic clout that they could sway the political decision-making of host governments. He explained that foreign companies' initial presence within African states could be traced back to processes of (neo)colonial influence, often with the support of foreign states such as the USA (1965: 12–14). Nkrumah stressed that he (and African socialists like him) was not opposed to Africa's participation in global markets. Nor was he opposed to all forms of FDI (1965: 9). However, he did loudly condemn the role of certain foreign companies in entrenching forms of neo-colonial power in their dealings with 'sovereign' African countries.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, this chapter examines whether Nkrumah's writings on corporate power and neo-colonialism still bear relevance in the contemporary era of African development. As noted in the first chapter, many scholars are sceptical about the reliability of Nkrumah's analysis. In fact, many are squeamish about the very language of neo-colonialism, arguing that such discourse lends itself to polemic rather than to rational debate, and that it obstructs discussion of the misrule of African elites (see for instance Taylor (2004) on the culpabilities of African politicians). Many

(neo)liberals, moreover, enthusiastically welcome FDI into Africa's strategic sectors, particularly oil, minerals and agribusiness. They claim that such investments bring new technologies into African countries, provide jobs for otherwise underemployed African citizens, and enhance the productivity of domestic agriculture, central to food security concerns (Moyo 2008). What negative elements exist in dealings between foreign companies and African governments are meanwhile pinpointed on the predatory behaviour of corrupt African politicians. Indeed, many imply that foreign companies are often the 'victim' of foul play and this negatively impacts upon the business investment climate (see for instance Fraser Institute [2017] on mining companies in African contexts).

In this context, the chapter first juxtaposes the warnings of Nkrumah with moralised language surrounding liberal analysis of FDI in strategic African sectors. This explores the ideational legitimisation of such endeavours on the grounds of international 'development' and of pro-poor North–South relations. It engages liberal scholars who emphasise the positive potential of foreign investment and who lament the 'resource curse' which African governments apparently bring upon their citizenries. It also engages the language of certain foreign companies, notably in terms of agribusiness interests involved in the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN). The second section of the chapter then problematises these positive claims about 'development' in terms of the material impact of corporate interventions for African citizenries. It does this through examination of foreign investment in the oil sector, with particular focus on Ghana owing to its status as Nkrumah's home-nation. The third section of the chapter continues this critique through examination of foreign companies' investment into agribusiness activities. This explores 'land-grabs' associated with the NAFSN and the impact for local populations. The fourth section considers the meaning of the oil and agribusiness case studies for a critical understanding of neo-colonialism in the contemporary era of African relations with foreign corporations. It argues that much of Nkrumah's analysis remains relevant. Moreover, his work remains emancipatory in terms of its call for progressive action to support genuine, empirical forms of African sovereignty. The conclusion summarises these arguments and underscores the need to engage donor forms of influence in Chaps. 3 and 4.

## FOREIGN CORPORATIONS FOR ‘DEVELOPMENT’ IN AFRICA?

Nkrumah did not oppose all forms of FDI into Africa. He emphasised that certain forms of external company involvement—when guided by the African state on a developmental model—could be beneficial for development (1965: 9). He emphasised, however, that newly independent African states should remain sovereign actors, particularly in the cultivation of Africa’s natural resource wealth and its land assets. Having fought against old-style imperialism, Nkrumah knew too well the dangers of foreign corporations’ potential exploitation of African resources and host communities. He highlighted how mining operations (for gold and other valuable raw materials) had historically worked to the advantage of the colonialists and not to that of African citizens themselves:

Generally speaking, in spite of the exploration costs, which are written off for tax purposes anyway and many times covered by eventual profits, mining has proved a very profitable venture for foreign capital investment in Africa. Its benefits for the Africans on the other hand, despite all the frothy talk to the contrary, have been negligible. (1965: 13)

Even in the early years of independence in Africa, meanwhile, Nkrumah warned that certain foreign companies were engaging in neo-colonial forms of interactions with African territories. Namely, that they utilised their economic clout to sway the decision-making processes of African elites, to side with alternative elites should their demands not be met, and to mobilise foreign states (through lobbying) to assist the entrenchment of their business interests within Africa. In this context, Nkrumah advised that:

Colonialism has achieved a new guise. It has become neo-colonialism, and neo-colonialism is fast entrenching itself within the body of Africa today through the consortia and monopoly combinations that are the carpet-baggers of the African revolt against colonialism and the urge for continental unity. (1965: 31)

In the place of such (neo)colonial patterns of trade and investment, Nkrumah advocated for the construction of (what today we term) developmental states in Africa. This, as discussed in more detail in Chap. 8, would be buttressed by a continental Union of African States. Economies of scale conducive to industrialisation and value addition

would move African economies away from reliance upon the export of cash crops and minerals to Europe. Certain forms of FDI might be permissible, but only if subordinated and regulated in relation to the needs of developmental planning. In *Africa Must Unite*, he set out this vision of developmental success:

there is absolutely no doubt that the key to significant industrialization of this continent of ours lies in a union of African states, planning its development centrally and scientifically through a pattern of economic integration. Such central planning can create units of industrialism related to the unit resources, correlating food and raw materials production with the establishment of secondary manufactures and the erection of those vital basic industries which will sustain large-scale capital development. (1963: 170)

Nkrumah's analysis inspired a number of critical authors to investigate this alleged corporate form of neo-colonialism in the first decades of African independence. Woddis (1967: 86) claimed that many foreign corporations extended a form of economic dominance—and rule—over African territories. His analysis underscored the intertwined nature of corporate and foreign donor influence in Africa:

At the centre of all the activities of neo-colonialism lies its economic policies. These are directed to assisting the profit-making functions of the big monopolies, to providing the Western powers with the necessary economic power in the new States so as to be able to wield political influence over the governments there, and to foster a certain [growth] of capitalism.

Lanning and Mueller (1979) in a comprehensive analysis of mining activities in Africa pointed to the role of certain African elites in allying themselves to the resources of foreign multinationals. With parallels to debates about the comprador class within dependency theory, the authors explained that:

These elites, accustomed to, and buttressed by, their intermediate role between international capital and national resources, have not been under such political pressure to increase the productivity of the agricultural sector, nor have they chosen to solve the unemployment problem by building up manufacturing industry. Rather they have expanded the government bureaucracy and the armed forces at the expense of productive investment in other sectors of the economy. (Lanning and Mueller 1979: 500)

Their analysis highlighted how exploitative forms of FDI might retard development (and developmental states) in African contexts. Rather than endow the nation with taxation revenues and employment, regressive interventions might provide private ‘rents’ for co-opted African elites beholden to foreign interests. These neo-colonial African leaders would maintain the status quo for foreign corporations, enriching themselves while neglecting the wider prosperity of the citizenry (on whose taxation they were no longer dependent). This echoed the work of Nkrumah (1965: xiv) who warned that unscrupulous leaders would align themselves to the interests of external business at the expense of long-term development in newly independent African states.

Interestingly, much of the current literature within African studies neglects analysis of the dual role of *both* corporations and African elites in maintaining regressive relations contrary to the achievement of ‘development’. Many recent contributions to the ‘resource curse’ literature, for example, identify African governments as being almost the sole culprit for the ills of certain states, such as the DRC and (to a much lesser degree) Nigeria. Scholars such as Sachs and Warner, Collier, and Atkinson and Hamilton align themselves to the neo-patrimonialism literature, pinpointing the decisions of African leaderships for the misappropriation of resource rents (Hilson and Maconachie 2008: 59–61). This neo-patrimonialism lens is echoed within the official policy sphere in terms of global governance efforts to (apparently) improve the development opportunities of FDI into Africa. For instance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) underscores the need for democratic reform of African governments to ensure that predatory elites do not squander natural resource wealth. This EITI emphasis on the behaviour of African leaderships is viewed by critical scholars such as Hilson and Maconachie (*ibid.*) as an omission that occludes the culpability of foreign actors:

In explaining why countries in sub-Saharan Africa dependent on mining and oil production are performing so poorly, [EITI] donors have tended to shy away from placing blame on the foreign companies that generally control operations, and from implicating Western parties in general.

Hilson and Maconachie also usefully explain how the academic literature dominant in African studies today shies away from critical analysis of the behaviours of foreign corporations:

There is now a wealth of scholarly literature... that suggests the paradox of a resource curse in mineral- and oil-rich regions of sub-Saharan Africa is largely due to corruption within host countries. (ibid.)

In addition, they argue that companies value their participation in the EITI programme for the very fact that it downplays their own role in questionable extractive operations (and concomitant ‘market externalities’) while emphasising the culpability of African governments for any social or environmental consequences of foreign investments.

Many foreign companies themselves, meanwhile, actively utilise a language of ‘development’ that portrays their interventions into African strategic economic sectors as opportunities for poverty reduction and for social progress. In terms of the EITI scheme, for instance, its participants—including Royal Dutch Shell and Total—emphasise that they are not only committed to tackling corruption issues, but that their presence in Africa positively facilitates economic modernisation and social development:

Our operations generate revenue through taxes and royalties for governments... These funds can help support a country’s economy and contribute to local development. We believe greater transparency in payments to governments... We work openly with governments on matters of taxes and royalties. We are a founder and board member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). This initiative requires both governments and companies to disclose revenues received from oil and mineral activities. (Royal Dutch Shell cited in EITI 2017)

This ‘development’ language is echoed within segments of the current scholarly literature. Many (neo)liberals emphasise that foreign companies investing into agribusiness and other lucrative sectors may bring about modernisation, job creation and tax revenue (Moyo 2008; Barrientos et al. 2011; Gereffi and Lee 2016). This perspective aligns with the Post-Washington Consensus and its recent policy endeavours, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Post-Washington Consensus—supported by major donors and corporations—emphasises that private sector development (PSD) and foreign investment facilitates social prosperity in developing countries. Poorer states must open themselves to the opportunities of FDI and liberalise vis-à-vis imports entering their country from overseas. In a departure from the earlier

Washington Consensus dominant in the 1980s and 1990s, however, developing countries will be given Aid for Trade to ensure that pro-poor forms of development are achieved within a level-playing field. The Post-Washington Consensus will ‘make markets work the poor’ and put developing countries into the ‘driver’s seat of reform’. This is in recognition of concerns about the social impact of ‘big bang’ liberalisation pursued in the ‘lost decade’ of the Washington Consensus (Stiglitz; Fine). Global governance initiatives such as the EITI and the NAFSN will ostensibly ensure that African countries realise the social potential of free markets in the Post-Washington Consensus.

There are, however, significant grounds on which to contest such positive visions of foreign investment into extractive industries (as governed by the EITI), and African agribusiness (under the NAFSN). In both these spheres, there are serious concerns about the conduct of foreign companies—whether from the West or from newly emerging economies such as China. Accordingly, the next section considers these concerns in the context of oil production. Thereafter, the chapter examines the negative repercussions of certain forms of foreign investment into agriculture as part of the NAFSN, with focus on ‘land-grabs’. These sections together help us to consider the current relevance of Nkrumah’s warnings about a corporate form of neo-colonialism affecting African development.

## AFRICAN OIL AND FOREIGN MULTINATIONALS

The oil sector in Africa is an interesting case for the analysis of FDI and its ‘development’ merits. Many liberal scholars have welcomed the opportunity for African countries to enact a Norwegian model of petrodollar development. Others, meanwhile, have decried neo-patrimonial rule in countries such as Nigeria and the DRC. Neo-patrimonialism is largely blamed for the ‘resource curse’—the apparent paradox that resource-rich African countries fail to achieve economic development. These Afro-pessimists also point to resource abundance as a cause for civil strife and violent conflict within the affected African nations themselves (Taylor 2008; Collier and Hoeffler 2005).

However, a critical stance interested in the concept of neo-colonialism can help us to rethink the contours of debate surrounding oil extraction in African economies. Engagement with Nkrumah can help us to consider the relative omission of the role of foreign companies within

the current analyses of mal-development that Hilson and Maconachie (2008) identify. The case of recently discovered Ghanaian oil is of particular interest—especially given this country’s status as the nation in which Nkrumah rose to power in the throes of the anti-colonial struggle. Ghana in the 1950s and early 1960s was seen as a guiding light within the wider pan-African movement. In the contemporary era, Ghana retains a symbolic status given its apparent democratic credentials in West Africa. It was to Ghana that the newly elected President Obama paid his first African visit. The nation remains at the centre of international debates surrounding the challenge of ‘development’ in Africa.

The oil industry, meanwhile, has been hailed as a great opportunity for Ghanaians to tackle their reliance on energy imports. It is also seen as an opportunity for the creation of large numbers of skilled jobs, particularly in relation to the offshore Jubilee Fields which fall within Ghanaian waters. In this context, the presence of US and Anglo-Irish oil companies—Kosmos and Tullow (respectively)—with their technological expertise is seen as a positive for the country and its social trajectory. Indeed, many Ghanaians praised God for having delivered them this resource when Kosmos first announced that its exploration in the Ghanaian maritime area had yielded positive results. The then President Kufuor announced that Ghana would ‘fly’ now that it had discovered oil (McCaskie 2008: 323).

Kosmos—as the leading company in the Ghanaian oil sector—emphasises its on-going commitment to the wellbeing of the Ghanaian people. Its corporate activities will not merely focus upon profit generation but will apparently respect the aspirations of the Ghanaians to better their social and economic standing. A company report from 2014 explains that:

Some people believe oil and gas companies focus their efforts solely on what happens below the earth’s surface. At Kosmos, we’ve made a choice to operate differently. We recognise that delivering lasting benefits to local communities and developing mutual trust with host governments is just as important as operating competently below the ground... [we aim to be] a force for good in our host countries and create a positive legacy. (Kosmos 2014: 4)

This positive development language is echoed by its Anglo-Irish counterpart, Tullow (2015: 5–6):



As an African-focused oil company, we also recognise the importance of resource-led economic growth in helping to alleviate poverty. The countries where we operate have contributed little to man-made climate change and understandably want to develop their natural resources, as they seek to drive economic development. We need to play our part in trying to ensure that resource revenues help these countries to diversify their economies and to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

In particular, Tullow (2015: 6) makes clear that it is opposed to all forms of bribery, corruption and fraud in its dealings with host governments:

A strong commitment to ethics and compliance has always been part of the way that we do business. Forming an Ethics and Compliance sub-Committee underlines our zero-tolerance approach to bribery, corruption and fraud.

Both of these major foreign investors in Ghanaian oil therefore make clear their commitment to the development of the country and to principles of social justice in their African operations.

An examination of the Ghanaian oil sector soon leads, however, to questions as to whether such FDI is in fact a boon to progressive development or, alternatively, whether the Ghanaian people are being exploited within forms of North–South relations once outlined by Nkrumah. In particular, the Kufuor government—in office during the discovery of oil in 2006—appears to have come to iniquitous arrangements with foreign oil interests. Most notably, the Kufuor government did not come to a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) with the foreign oil companies as is standard international practice. Instead, it signed what is termed a Hybrid Model Concession which awarded individual oil blocks to specific oil companies for extractive activities. Domestic Ghanaian civil society bodies such as the Ghana Institute of Governance and Security (GIGS) estimate that this failure cost the Ghanaian state approximately \$4 billion in the first 4 years of oil production (The Chronicle 2014). Citing the World Bank’s figures, GIGS explain that:

Ghana would have earned US\$6.428 billion in 4 years and over US\$60 billion from the entire production life of the Jubilee fields by adopting pure PSA as against the US\$2.75 billion in 4 years, and US\$19.2 billion estimated by the World Bank under the current prevailing system. (ibid.)

Interestingly, in terms of the concept of neo-colonialism, there are also apparent claims that Kosmos utilised ties with the innocuously named E.O. Group to secure its oil licence. The E.O. Group, named after its founders Dr. Kwame Barwuah Edusei and George Owusu, apparently played a pivotal role in cementing relations between Kosmos and the Ghanaian government (The Enquirer 2010). Indeed, it is claimed that the E.O. Group successfully negotiated Kosmos' inclusion on an oil licence only 3 days after informing the Ghanaian National Petroleum Company (GNPC) and the Ministry of Energy of its liaison with this US firm. The Enquirer (2010) notes that this 3 days period 'was a record time, as petroleum agreements generally are preceded by due diligence and hard negotiations to maximize benefits for Ghana'. Significantly, one of the founding members of the E.O. Group is said to have had close personal relations with key officials within the Kufuor administration, including the President and the Energy minister. For this liaison role, the E.O. Group apparently received handsome payments from Kosmos as well as shares within the oil block. The Enquirer (2010) notes that:

The E.O. Group, a company whose 3.5% interest in Ghana's first oil find is estimated to be worth over \$200 million, never operated any visible office... whose promoters are about to face trial for various acts, which are said to border on criminality... The Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) say they have uncovered a web of shocking criminal conduct involving the promoters of the Group and some top government officials connected to former President John Kufuor.

These apparent linkages between Kosmos, the E.O. Group and the Kufuor government in the granting of a lucrative oil deal are supported by Phillips et al. (2016). The authors conducted interviews with key personnel including GNPC staff and found allegations that:

Kosmos had used openly acknowledged personal connections between the EO Group and President Kufuor to negotiate a petroleum agreement on what GNPC personnel considered to be 'scandalously generous terms'... [the] agreement had been designed to be favourable for international investors, including a significant reduction in both royalties for the government and the participating stake held by GNPC... the specific petroleum agreement offered to Kosmos was on considerably more generous terms than those offered to other international oil companies. (2016: 30)

Kosmos—in this fashion—apparently obtained a multi-million pound oil concession through connections with the E.O. Group and, through it, the government. This recalls certain warnings of Nkrumah about the role of foreign companies to denude the empirical sovereignty of an African nation over its natural resources through lubrication of elite networks.

The case of Kosmos, however, also demonstrates the partial ability of certain African leaders to stall the advance of foreign corporations even within neo-colonial forms of North–South relations. Kufuor’s successor—John Atta Mills—successfully impeded the transfer of Kosmos’ oil stake to the larger US firm, ExxonMobil. According to Phillips et al. (2016: 31–32), the President was angered by the manner in which ExxonMobil officials apparently presented this transfer as a *fait accompli*. The President and the wider Ghanaian government, therefore, asserted their right to first refusal on Kosmos’ sale of its oil properties. Specifically, the Ghanaian government entertained interest from a Chinese state enterprise that offered to partner with Ghana’s own oil corporation (the GNPC) to take over control of production from Kosmos. The ability of the Atta Mill’s government to apparently balance US corporate interests with that of Chinese oil corporations meant that Kosmos called off the sale, and ExxonMobil withdrew from the proposed transfer. Kosmos thus maintained its original presence in Ghana, collecting lucrative oil revenues based upon the deal secured with the assistance of the E.O. Group. Nevertheless, an apparent affront to the dignity of President Atta Mills was prevented through appeals to another foreign power, namely China (*ibid.*). The fundamental power imbalance of foreign corporations gaining riches from African natural resources was not redressed, but the Ghanaian leadership (in this instance) were able to utilise the apparent threat of a Chinese intervention to express displeasure to their US partners.

It should be noted that ExxonMobil and major oil corporations in the USA had long expressed an interest in African oil resources, and had lobbied US government personnel to diversify oil resources into West Africa. ExxonMobil placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* on 1st November 2001 proclaiming ‘Africa: A Wealth of Opportunity’. This coincided with the third biennial US–Africa Business Summit ‘a meeting of industry and government leaders on American business opportunities in Africa’ (Turshen 2002: 1). Furthermore, US oil interests founded the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG) in 2002,

which lobbied the US Congress on the need to diversify US oil stakes into the ‘New Gulf’ in West Africa. The AOPIG recommended that the US navy should play a role in securing US interests in the region (McCaskie 2008: 316). The ambitions of large corporations, such as ExxonMobil, to enter the Ghanaian oil sector should thus be contextualised in terms of the broader military and security interests of the USA. The dispute over the selling of Kosmos stakes should also be understood in this wider context of US geopolitical interests. Ghana’s decision not to press ahead with the Chinese takeover of Kosmos’ oil resources, and to allow this US company to retain its original stake (even after its proposal to sell to ExxonMobil) should be understood in the wider ambit of US–Ghana bilateral ties.

It should also be noted that Chinese interests have successfully been pursued in other instances with regard to Ghanaian oil. In 2012, Ghana’s President—John Dramani Mahama—agreed a \$3 billion loan from the Chinese Development Bank Corporation, promising to deliver China 13,000 barrels of oil per day. The President also agreed a \$850 million deal for the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation to partner with its Ghanaian counterpart for the construction of a major pipeline (Bloomberg 2012). Interestingly, this Sino-Ghanaian arrangement has met with fierce criticism on the part of Ghana’s own citizenry, and even among certain politicians. For example, Kofi Adda—a member of parliament—condemned the fact that oil would be transferred directly over to the Chinese, claiming that this would ‘surrender the nation’s sovereignty to the Chinese bank’. On a popular Ghanaian social forum, meanwhile, citizens noted that their government had likely been offered side-payments by Chinese oil corporations, and the Chinese government. They doubted the benefit of such arrangements for Ghana’s development. One such post commented: ‘it is even suspected that our Leaders have dubiously manipulated the system to ensure a special cut for themselves directly or otherwise’ (cited in Rupp 2013: 122–123). Another Ghanaian citizen meanwhile stated that:

Giving out concessions to foreign oil companies is lazy, inefficient use of resources. So the oil will be extracted and sold, like gold and the other abundant minerals, profits will be made by these companies, and we will remain poor in the midst of abundant wealth.... We must act now, else we will continue to wallow in poverty. (ibid.)

Concerns are clearly present within Ghanaian society as a whole. Indeed, this citizen discourse relating to China in Africa reflects existing anxieties (and material problems) as they relate to African development. In certain instances—as in the case of Kosmos oil stocks—the presence of China might be utilised by certain African elites to counterbalance overt forms of power politics displayed by Western corporations such as ExxonMobil. Nevertheless, the emergence of China does not liberate Ghanaian society from the situation of neo-colonialism but instead entrenches it through new regressive linkages to the external.

Furthermore, there are apparent concerns that the Anglo-Irish oil company in Ghana—Tullow—has mobilised home state resources in support of its oil revenues in this West African context. There is concern that the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has been apparently mobilised as a *de facto* arm of Tullow's long-term profit-making in Ghana. Notably, DFID (with an apparent view to Tullow's interests) has lent support to groups within Ghana to ensure the government's acquiescence to a new Oil Exploration and Production (E&P) Bill (Lungu 2016a). The E&P bill was passed in August 2016 and prolongs the situation in which oil companies may operate under the 'Hybrid System'—avoiding a more standard PSA. Moreover, the legislation grants the Minister for Energy discretionary power to bypass competitive tendering for new oil resources. In this context, DFID launched what it termed the Ghana Oil and Gas for Inclusive Gas (GOGIG) programme, which has done much to support the long-term viability of foreign corporate extraction. Indeed, as part of such initiatives, DFID allocated £1.9 million to the Ghana Petroleum Commission (GPC) (Lungu 2016b). It also allocated resources to two influential think tanks, the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) and the African Centre for Energy Policy (ACEP), for what DFID opaquely describes as 'specific advocacy related activities' (DFID 2015). Two of these organisations—ACEP and GPC—openly supported the new E&P bill, while NRGI remained supportive despite issuing certain caveats about the minister's discretionary power on tendering (The Herald 2016).

It should be stressed that these apparent concerns about the influence exerted by foreign oil corporations—directly in terms of their dealings with African governments—or indirectly in terms of their mobilisation of home state governance bodies (such as UK DFID)—are not confined to Ghana. There is widespread concern across Africa that oil corporations are extracting large quantities of natural resources (and profits) without

due proceeds returning to local populations for ‘development’ (Acharya 2013; Cash 2012; Ackah-Baidoo 2012; Vokes 2012; Holterman 2014; Global Witness 2014). Moreover, cases of apparent corruption—as implied by certain commentators in their discussion of the E.O. Group—can be found in other country contexts. Tullow Oil, for instance, was apparently accused of corrupt practices in its dealings with the Ugandan government over that nation’s discoveries. Interestingly, this allegation was implied by a corporate rival, Heritage Oil, who had been embroiled in a dispute with both Tullow and the Government of Uganda. Tullow have denied these claims and attribute them to forged documentation (The Telegraph 2013). Nevertheless, in the Ugandan situation, there are widespread concerns that foreign oil companies are operating at the expense of social and environmental standards. There is also concern that the administration of President Yoweri Museveni (while having obtained a PSA arrangement) is gaining largesse from the presence of foreign operators, particularly in terms of election spending in recent years. In addition, his government is seen to have militarised certain oil outlets on the pretext of defending resources. Many fear that this is a means by which the government, alongside foreign companies, can occlude transparency over the use of oil and to remove subsistence farmers from valuable land tracts (Vokes 2012: 309–310). Moreover, the PSA which Museveni has agreed with operators such as Tullow has not been publicly disclosed in terms of specific content. This goes against standard international practice and has raised questions as to the government’s rationale for such secrecy (ibid.: 308).

It would seem from such oil scenarios that the warnings of Nkrumah (1965) about neo-colonial relationships between foreign corporations and certain African elites do bear credence in the contemporary era. Rather than omit consideration of the role of foreign companies in entrenching what might be termed ‘underdevelopment’, a critical engagement with cases such as Ghana and Uganda underscores that companies often *do play* a pivotal role in creating regressive conditions. Whether in terms of the alleged use of liaison outfits such as the E.O. Group, use of lobbying in the case of AOPIG, overtures to home state bodies (such as the US Congress or UK DFID), or the negotiation of lucrative Hybrid System arrangements (or indeed PSAs), oil companies do exert major influence on the outcomes of oil scenarios in Africa. Unfortunately, these scenarios often lead to the diminution of genuine state sovereignty and the perpetuation of poverty for ordinary citizens.

It is important to note, however, that these situations are not unique to the oil extractive industry. As the next section demonstrates, concerns about neo-colonialism are equally apparent in the case of foreign companies' investments into agriculture and land in African contexts.

### AFRICAN AGRICULTURE AND CORPORATE 'LAND-GRABBING'

While extractive industries such as oil and mining are often the focus of debates surrounding the 'resource curse' and mal-development, equal attention should be paid to the situation of agribusiness and land. Critical engagements with foreign corporate power in Africa should explore the ways in which companies (such as SABMiller, Diageo, Monsanto, and Unilever) gain access to domestic agricultural systems, particularly in terms of fertile land for intensive agribusiness. In this context, there have been many recent civil society campaigns that have drawn attention to corporate 'land-grabs'. Namely, that foreign companies have negotiated land deals with African governments which lead to the displacement of indigenous communities (Borras et al. 2011; ActionAid 2015). Oftentimes, this is done in the name of 'development' and economic progress—with the implication that the indigenous villagers are backward and unproductive. This is despite the fact that subsistence agriculture in the traditional manner is the backbone of food security (GRAIN et al. 2014). Access to soil—and to local water resources (especially for fishermen)—is essential for the maintenance of food systems that feed the local populace. The entry of foreign agribusiness interests and the takeover of land resources is therefore a highly controversial act, one which threatens the food security of local citizens.

In terms of a discussion of the concept of neo-colonialism, the role of foreign corporations within the NAFSN is particularly interesting to examine. Foreign corporations such as SABMiller moved in the aftermath of the World Food Crisis in 2008 to lobby donors for greater access to African agricultural systems (ActionAid 2015). This was promoted in the language of modernity, productivity and food security (Brooks 2016: 770). The World Food Crisis had apparently unveiled the stagnation of traditional African food systems. In the post-crisis phase, therefore, multinational corporations, development donors and African governments would partner together to upscale agribusiness ventures and bolster agricultural productivity. The World Bank, UK DFID, USAID and other Western donors came to enthusiastically back

this corporate initiative, concurring with the need to enhance FDI on the basis of food security. An ActionAid report (2015) explains that the wider group of G8 states including the EU, the USA, Canada, Russia and Japan have:

Committed \$4.4 billion to the 10 [African] countries of the New Alliance... the G8 support... is part of a drive to secure larger agricultural markets and sources of supply in Africa for multinational corporations. New Alliance partners such as Monsanto, Diageo, SABMiller, Unilever, Syngenta have major commercial interests in Africa and close connections with Northern governments.

Importantly, the NAFSN discursively moralises foreign corporate involvement in Africa in relation to pro-poor development goals in its official policy statements. These communications—combined to that of the individual donors and participant companies—lay the ideational and discursive framework for the justification of enhanced FDI in Africa's food systems. The NAFSN (2014) website, for instance, declares that the scheme:

is a shared commitment to achieve sustained inclusive, agriculture-led growth in Africa. Given the overwhelming importance of African agriculture in rural livelihoods and its enormous potential to bring people out of poverty, public investment in food security and agriculture has significantly increased... Agricultural transformation in Africa is a shared interest of the public and private sectors and presents a unique opportunity for a new model of partnership.

Via the language of public–private partnerships, job creation, economic growth, food security and ‘development’, the deeper involvement of companies such as Monsanto and Unilever in African agriculture is presented as a win–win outcome for all concerned. External companies are not seen merely as profit-driven entities concerned with the bottom-line, but also as altruistic partners concerned with the moral cause of African citizenries’ social wellbeing.

Specifically, the NAFSN advocates the construction of agricultural corridors within African nations as part of this legitimising ‘development’ discourse. ActionAid (2015: 13) explains that these corridors (or staple-crop processing zones) are:



large areas of land that are earmarked for agribusiness. In these zones, companies are incentivised by host governments and supporting donors to establish their operations by a series of tax, regulatory and land incentives, as well as by new infrastructure (roads, railways, ports, irrigation, storage, processing facilities, etc). The projects focus mainly on agriculture, but also include forestry and mining. To ensure big business acquires these large tracts of land, governments are promoting reforms to change land tenure legislation.

The concept of agricultural corridors was apparently the ‘brainchild of Yara’, a major company involved in the fertiliser sector and actively involved in the foundation of the NAFSN (Pan Africanist Briefs 2014). The land transfers involved in such initiatives can entail massive tracks of fertile soil. Malawi alone has acquiesced to the release of 200,000 ha under the auspices of the NAFSN. The country’s National Export Strategy, meanwhile, indicates that up to one million hectares may in fact be allocated to agribusiness and foreign corporations. This accounts for approximately 26% of Malawi’s arable land (ActionAid 2015: 1).

Additionally, the implementation of the NAFSN involves the signing of formal Cooperative Framework Agreements (CFAs) between the participating African nations, the donor community and the founding foreign corporations. Ten African countries have currently signed up to the NAFSN and have undertaken CFA negotiations—namely Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Benin and Nigeria (ibid.: 12). Raising concerns about a ‘new scramble for Africa’, each nation has been assigned a donor to lead in the NAFSN roll-out (Frynas and Paulo 2007). For instance, the oversight of the NAFSN in Nigeria has been entrusted to the UK government and DFID (McKeon 2014: 12). Crucially, the CFAs commit the host country to a number of reform measures that entrench earlier liberalisation undertaken in the Washington Consensus of the 1980s and 1990s (as well as liberalisation taken in the early 2000s as part of Post-Washington Consensus) (Oakland Institute 2016). This ensures, for example, that any private property rights associated with land corridors will be safeguarded by the host government. In some cases, there is also emphasis upon respect for Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). This is particularly controversial in terms of ‘seed sovereignty’ and the activities of corporate actors such as Monsanto in asserting patents over certain seed configurations (ibid.: 12). The European Parliament (2015: 10) notably published

a study questioning the deep reform expected within the CFAs under the NAFSN—with emphasis on these IPR clauses. Meanwhile, the individual companies (such as Syngenta) sign a Letter of Intent as part of the CFA under the NAFSN endeavour. This describes in detail their long-term investment plans for the African nation in question (McKeon 2014: 3–5).

It is these close connections between the participating corporations and the official donor community which are of particular interest for a modern study of the concept of neo-colonialism. Nkrumah indicated that foreign corporations would work in tandem with their home-nation state(s) to penetrate, and secure, African markets and resources. In the case of the UK and its main ‘development’ arm (DFID), these close connections are very apparent. Kiwanga (2014) notes that Unilever’s external affairs director ‘was previously at DFID and DFID’s director of policy used to work for Unilever’. The World Development Movement (2014: 30) underscores these close connections between corporations and the UK government in even starker terms:

Unilever board member Paul Walsh (chief executive of Diageo) is an advisor to the Department of Energy and Climate Change and a member of David Cameron’s Business Advisory Group. Conservative MP Malcolm Rifkind is also a current board member and former overseas development minister and now Conservative life peer... Former home secretary and trade commissioner Leon Brittan was a board member between 2000 and 2010. Former minister for trade and competitiveness David Simon, now a Labour peer, was an adviser to Unilever and was vice chairman and senior independent director between 2006 and 2009. In addition, staff have moved between the company and government.

The role of the aforementioned company, Yara, moreover, demonstrates the way in which policy formulations derived from corporate headquarters can be successfully integrated into the official ‘development’ strategy of donor bodies such as UK DFID. There appears to be a blurring of the roles of companies and ‘development’ donors. Language of win–win cooperation and FDI has so permeated development discourse that this does not apparently raise questions of conflicts of interests. The corporate interest of Yara (and others) in establishing highly contested land

corridors within Africa is deemed fully compatible with poverty alleviation goals of ‘development’, and with the wellbeing of African peoples themselves.

There are significant grounds to question whether the corporate mobilisation of the New Alliance has in fact led to better conditions for workers and villagers within the participating African countries. As mentioned, there are already major concerns about corporate ‘land-grabs’—that is, the construction of corridors that lead local people being denied access to their natural resources. There are also widespread allegations that villagers have been forcibly removed from so-called inactive land tracts (McMichael 2015: 442). This has involved the use of state security forces to effectively entrench the rights of foreign corporations and to infringe the rights of local small-scale farmers. The World Development Movement (2014: 37) notes that in the case of Ethiopia (a NAFSN country) that:

375,000 hectares of land are being cleared to make way for sugar cane, palm oil, cotton and grain plantations... 260,000 people... are being evicted from their farmland... leaving them little option but to move to designated new villages and work on the plantations for low wages. Those people that have resisted have faced beatings, rape... intimidation, arrests and imprisonment. In order to force people to move, the military have prevented people from cultivating their land and destroyed crops and grain stores to cause hunger, then lured them to the new settlements with food aid.

Subsistence agriculture is deemed unproductive and, accordingly, the soil is to be utilised by more ‘able’ agents—namely the companies involved in the NAFSN project.

A comprehensive report on ‘land grabbing’ by GRAIN et al. (2014) usefully points to the paradox of these activities being justified in via the discourse of food security. The crops which NAFSN corporations prioritise are export cash crops, rather than foodstuffs for local consumption. The use of the language of food security to moralise these ‘land-grabbing’ processes is thus wholly dubious:

it is clear that these firms are not interested in the kind of agriculture that will bring us food sovereignty... One farmers’ leader from *Synergie Paysanne* in Benin sees these land grabs as fundamentally ‘exporting

food insecurity' because they are about producing food for export markets, creating food insecurity for the producers. They are about answering some people's needs – for maize or money – by taking food production resources away from others. (GRAIN et al. 2014: 16)

Worryingly, research by Oxfam also indicates that foreign companies are deliberately targeting those nations which perform most poorly in terms of corruption indicators. There is the distinct implication, therefore, that certain of these 'land-grab' deals may not fully adhere to norms about transparency and legitimate revenue accumulation. Despite the development discourse of the NAFSN and its corporate-donor participants, there appears to be a situation in which foreign companies are exploiting the poor governance records of developing African countries. Oxfam (2013: 4) makes clear that:

Oxfam believes that investors actively target countries with weak governance in order to maximise profits and minimise red tape. Weak governance might enable this because it helps investors to sidestep costly and time-consuming rules and regulations, which, for example, might require them to consult with affected communities. Furthermore in countries where people are denied a voice, where business regulations are weak or non-existent, or where corruption is out of control it might be easier for investors to design the rules of the game to suit themselves.

These concerns are supported by Owen et al. (2015: 3) in a report for the London School of Economics. They argue that corporate investors in Zambia have not sought the necessary consent of local chiefs for land acquisitions. Instead, they have bypassed these local authorities by appealing to the Zambian government itself. Conversely, in Ghana, foreign companies have bypassed the national government in Accra and have gone directly to local chiefs to secure land acquisitions. The authors claim that 'bribery by investors has been used to motivate chiefs to neglect the rules [which emphasise the need to respect the wellbeing of local communities] in allocating land' (ibid.).

It is important to emphasise, however, that the NAFSN and the involvement of (Western) corporations such as Monsanto, Diageo, and SABMiller in African agribusiness is not an isolated case. Instead, the concerns raised by the NAFSN point to wider trends in Africa, not always involving traditional Western actors. Notably, there appears

to be a rise in investments from Middle Eastern countries, as well as India and China. Middle Eastern nations—and their corporations—are particularly keen to future-proof themselves from water scarcity problems (Robertson and Pinstrup-Andersen 2010: 273). Many argue that land acquisitions may be more about access to water resources in the longer term than about crop production and agribusiness profits (GRAIN 2012). Similar to the involvement of Chinese oil companies in Ghana, the investment of Middle Eastern corporations into Africa again raises the prospect of a wider neo-colonialism. Or in alternative language, it raises the prospect of a competitive ‘scramble for Africa’ involving many nation states and their constituent corporations. This of course may pose certain short-term benefits for African elites in terms of negotiations and balancing between foreign actors (as occurred in the case of Kosmos oil). Nevertheless, it does little to redress the fundamental inequalities that characterises African countries’ engagement with external parties on issues of extraction and land purchase. African sovereignty over raw materials and land resources would appear to be further undermined by a proliferation of ‘development’ corporate actors and foreign donor bodies, with regressive consequences for ordinary citizens.

### CORPORATE ACTIVITIES AS NEO-COLONIALISM IN AFRICA?

The preceding discussion of the oil sector and agribusiness (the NAFSN) raises questions about inequalities in relations between African countries and corporate ‘partners’. The oil industry scenario in Ghana demonstrates the way in which governments, such as that of President Kufuor, may agree regressive commercial pacts which are detrimental to the national interest. Kufuor’s signing of a Hybrid System arrangement denied Ghana its rightful revenues from oil reserves as compared to a standard PSA. This is corroborated by the World Bank’s own figures and drawn upon by civil society protestors who resent the status quo enjoyed by companies such as Kosmos. The apparent intermediary role of the E.O. Group, meanwhile, demonstrates how outfits close to the presidency may exert (undue) influence over such tendering processes. The involvement of DFID, moreover, in terms of the E&P Bill (containing a discretionary clause to exempt the Energy Minister from need to send oil resources out to competitive tender) raises serious alarm about the relationships between foreign corporations and ostensible development donors. The role of the Chinese oil entities, furthermore, raises serious

concerns about a proliferation of ‘partners’ amidst a new scramble for Africa’s resources.

The discussion of the NAFSN and the role of agribusiness interests in mobilising Western donor and wider G8 support for entry into African agricultural sectors also raises several important points about inequalities in the global system. The impact of ‘land-grabs’ secured under CFAs raises alarm about abuse of local villagers deemed insufficiently productive (Oram 2014: 10–11). The alleged use of bribery by certain corporations in their dealings with chiefs and national governments also draws attention to unequal power plays which exist to undermine the sovereign interest of African citizenries in the fair cultivation of their natural resources. Meanwhile, the close connection between personnel situated in the leading corporations and government agencies (such as David Cameron’s Business Advisory Group) underscores how corporate and donor interests may become blurred in terms of ‘development’ interactions with African countries. Furthermore, the entry of Middle Eastern and Asian nations into the ‘land-grab’ scenarios unfolding in Africa lends itself to another dynamic. Namely, the proliferation of ‘development’ actors keen to secure their own segment of African resources (often to avoid future water scarcity in their own home countries).

In this context, it is wholly pertinent to ask whether Nkrumah’s (1965) concept of neo-colonialism should be reclaimed for contemporary scholarly purposes. While not usually invoked within polite academic conferences and leading journals, the concept does guard against an excessive focus upon the supposed nepotism of African leaders themselves. Nkrumah’s analysis—while recognising the potential role of co-opted local elites in maintaining systems of neo-colonialism—sheds critical light upon the actions of foreign corporations and their respective donor agencies (whether UK DFID, USAID, the China Development Bank, and so forth). His warnings about neo-colonialism draw attention to the ways in which foreign corporations seek to maintain colonial patterns of trade and production—namely the export of lucrative raw materials and cash crops from Africa to their home nations. Meanwhile, his analysis also rightly points (albeit not in sufficient depth) to the ideological elements behind this current phase of neo-colonial intervention. Indeed, Nkrumah warned of how development discourses and the language of aid might be utilised to justify (and moralise) new forms of external intervention in Africa despite the detrimental material impact

such interventions might have for workers and host communities. This appears a pertinent lesson when examining current phenomenon such as the NAFSN and its impact on subsistence smallholders.

It does seem a peculiar omission, therefore, that Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism remains largely absent from polite scholarly enquiry into Africa's current situation vis-à-vis corporations in sectors such as oil and agribusiness. While Ghanaian citizens themselves align to a critique of neo-colonial intervention in their own discussions about foreign involvement in their oil sector, this discourse remains somewhat taboo within Western academic circles (unless when used to critique Chinese interventions, discussed in Chap. 4). There is in fact a distinct scholarly squeamishness about invocations of Nkrumah, and there is a suspicion that his analysis is a vulgar form of Marxism that is redundant in a post-Cold War setting. The preceding analysis and its 'snapshot' focus on oil and agribusiness points to how the concept may shed light on current controversies in a more fruitful fashion than those accounts which focus preponderantly on the so-called neo-patrimonial regime in African states. Again, this is not to deny that certain African politicians and their civil servants may be implicated in systems of external relations that work to perpetuate conditions of poverty. It is, however, to assert a greater need to engage with the realities of corporate conduct in Africa. It is also to assert a greater need to engage with the realities of donor 'development' agendas, as they pertain to schemes such as the New Alliance and its agribusiness focus.

Furthermore, Nkrumah's focus upon how foreign corporations and governments may work in tandem to subvert empirical sovereignty in African countries opens up necessary conversations about strategies for change. As noted in the first chapter, Nkrumah identified the need for pan-African endeavours to nullify some of the worst effects of neo-colonialism. Rather than depending upon 'global governance' initiatives such as the EITI, for instance, African governments might do better to pursue pan-African solutions to labour rights violations, environmental damage, and resource exhaustion as brought about by certain unscrupulous corporate entities. Rather than engaging in schemes such as the NAFSN, moreover, African governments might do well to establish pan-African development programmes aimed at supporting African agriculture, while supporting the rights of traditional smallholders in rural locales. Nkrumah's work also helps to immunise scholars (and civil society groups) from 'common sense' adherence to the development narratives

propounded by donor agencies such as UK DFID and their corporate benefactors. The scepticism which his work invokes with regards to aid monies, for example, lends itself to a critical stance in the examination of the material impact of so-called 'pro-poor' actions in Africa. Nkrumah's work would appear to offer much potential for a reinvigoration of debates surrounding corporate (and donor) power in relations with apparently sovereign African countries.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the concept of neo-colonialism in terms of corporate power within Africa. Nkrumah focused (rightly) on the dual role of foreign companies and donor development partners in entrenching unequal power relationships after the formal end of Empire. He argued that foreign companies could utilise their economic largesse to co-opt certain African elites, to ensure that they sided with their benefactors rather than with the long-term interests of their own citizenries. Moreover, he alluded to the manner in which companies could mobilise foreign governments to assist their business stakes in strategic African sectors. Foreign business enterprise could work to perpetuate neo-colonial forms of North-South relations in which African citizens were denied the fruits of the fair cultivation of their natural resources.

The above focus on the oil sector and on agribusiness demonstrates how Nkrumah's work may find relevance in a Post-Washington Consensus setting. Rather than being condemned to relative obscurity, his analysis deserves much closer scrutiny (and respect) within current academic circles. Citizens in countries such as Ghana when facing the prospect of lost oil revenues through disadvantageous 'Hybrid System' deals with US and Anglo-Irish companies realise the relevance of Nkrumah's critique. As they do also when faced with the prospect of Chinese loans lubricating their government, on the condition of the direct export of vast quantities of oil to their foreign benefactor. Critical scholars concerned with emancipatory movements should likewise engage Nkrumah more substantially when seeking to describe, and to explain, the current power strategies of foreign corporations in Africa. Nkrumah's analysis can shed a critical light upon the apparent 'new scramble' for African resources, as undertaken by corporations from the USA, UK, China, and Middle Eastern states (among many others).



It is perhaps important to restate, however, that Nkrumah himself did not deny the need for certain regulated, limited forms of FDI in African countries. What he did call for was forms of intervention which were tied into genuine developmental state strategies, overseen by sovereign state ministries, and pursued in a fashion that preserved the wealth of Africa for Africans. This is clearly a form of development that is not found within programmes such as the NAFSN, or in terms of current oil arrangements in Ghana. It is also important to emphasise that Nkrumah did not examine the role of corporations in isolation from their donor counterparts. As this chapter has implied, there is a close connection between foreign corporations and donor institutions as they collectively act to pursue (and impose) certain policy preferences in Africa. The next two chapters therefore examine donor institutions and their challenge to African empirical sovereignty in the case of ‘traditional’ Western donors (such as the EU and UK DFID) and in the case of ‘emerging powers’ (such as China and Turkey). These chapters together raise further questions as to the potential relevance of the concept of neo-colonialism for making sense of mal-development in Africa today.

## NOTE

1. For instance, he condemned mining companies which from his perspective exploited both Africa’s natural resources and its ill-treated labourers.

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