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FOREIGN LAND ACQUISITION IN TURKEY: NEOCO- LONIAL TENDENCIES OR NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC GROWTH?

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APPROVAL

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DECLARATION ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND PUBLISHING METHODS

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- that this Master of Arts Thesis that I have submitted is entirely my own work and I have cited and referenced all material and results that are not my own in accordance with the rules;
- that this Master of Science Thesis does not contain any material from any research submitted or accepted to obtain a degree or diploma at another educational institution;
- and that I commit and undertake to follow the "Kadir Has University Academic Codes of Conduct" prepared in accordance with the "Higher Education Council Codes of Conduct".

In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

Tuğba Sevinçtekin

25/07/2024



To the Land I belong...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis has come a very long way. The emergence of this thesis has been a process that started with me and extended to me by blending with the events I have experienced in the last two years. The February 6 earthquakes I experienced in Turkey once again reminded me of what social sciences are and how it has a soul. This thesis was written in this spirit on behalf of the lands in Turkey.

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FOREIGN LAND ACQUISITION IN TURKEY: NEOCOLONIAL TENDENCIES OR NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC GROWTH?

ABSTRACT

After 2008 Financial crisis, “foreign land acquisition (FLAs)” phenomenon which is also known “land grabbing” has unprecedented accelerated all over the world. After the acquisition of the territory of the Global South countries in large proportions, especially in Africa, it has been seen that this trend has recently spread to developing countries as well. Turkey is one of the countries with a complex outlook on the land grabbing trend due to the fact that it is both an investor and a target country. Recently, the rapid increase of foreign land acquisition, especially agricultural land, in Turkey has opened some discussions door in the Turkish public opinion. Who are the foreign investors in Turkey’s agricultural land, and is the sale of land to these foreigners neocolonialism or a neoliberal economic development opportunity? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 agricultural investment companies in Turkey in order to clarify those questions. According to the results, the Gulf countries as investors are at top of the foreign land acquisitions in Turkey. Behind these territorial acquisitions is the effort of the Gulf countries to ensure food security due to the food crisis experienced after 2008. On the other hand, it has been observed that the acquisition of land by foreigners in Turkey carries neocolonial tendencies and may be an opportunity for neoliberal economic development at the same time. This situation indicates that Turkey is at a deadlock in the foreign land acquisition in their lands. In these circumstances, the exit door is in it is the creation of correct and effective legal procedures and policies appropriate for the agri-business sector.

Keywords: FLAs, foreign land acquisition, neocolonialism, land grabbing, neoliberalism, agro-imperialism, development opportunity, Turkey

TÜRKİYE'DE YABANCI TOPRAK EDİNİMİ: NEOKOLONYAL EĞİLİMLER Mİ, NEOLİBERAL EKONOMİK BÜYÜME Mİ?

ÖZET

2008 Finansal krizinden sonra, “toprak kapma” olarak da bilinen “yabancı arazi edinimi” olgusu tüm dünyada benzeri görülmemiş bir şekilde artmıştır. Küresel Güney ülkelerinin topraklarının özellikle Afrika'da büyük oranlarda ele geçirilmesinden sonra bu eğilimin son zamanlarda gelişmekte olan ülkelere de yayıldığı görülmüştür. Türkiye hem yatırımcı hem de hedef ülke olması nedeniyle arazi kapma trendinde karmaşık bir görünüme sahip ülkelerden biridir. Son zamanlarda Türkiye'de başta tarım arazileri olmak üzere yabancı toprak ediniminin hızla artması, Türkiye kamuoyunda bazı tartışmaların kapısını aralamıştır. Türkiye'nin tarım topraklarındaki bu yabancı yatırımcılar kimler ve bu yabancılara toprak satışı neokolonyalizm mi yoksa neoliberal bir ekonomik kalkınma fırsatı mı? Bu soruları cevaplamak amacıyla Türkiye'deki 11 tarımsal yatırım şirketi ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, Türkiye'deki yabancı arazi alımlarında yatırımcı olarak Körfez ülkeleri en üst sıralarda yer alıyor. Bu toprak edinimlerinin arkasında Körfez ülkelerinin 2008 sonrası yaşanan gıda krizi nedeniyle gıda güvenliğini sağlama çabaları yer almaktadır. Öte yandan, Türkiye'de yabancıların toprak edinmesinin neo-sömürgeci eğilimler taşıdığı ve aynı zamanda neoliberal ekonomik kalkınma için bir fırsat olabileceği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu durum, Türkiye'nin kendi topraklarındaki yabancı toprak ediniminde bir çıkmazda olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu koşullarda çıkış kapısı, tarım sektörüne uygun, doğru ve etkin yasal prosedür ve politikaların oluşturulmasıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: yabancıların toprak edinimi, neokolonyalizm, toprak kapma, neoliberalizm, agro-emperyalizm, kalkınma fırsatı, Türkiye

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP: Justice and Development Party

EU: European Union

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

FLAs: Foreign Land Acquisitions

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFPRI: International Food Policy Research Institute

ILC: International Land Coalition

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IPARD: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance Rural Development

KOSGEB: Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization

LSLAs: Large-scale Land Acquisitions

MENA: The Middle East and North Africa

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

NGOs: Non-governmental Organizations

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

TIGEM: The Telethon Institute of Genetics and Medicine

TKDK: Agricultural and Rural Development Support Institution

TLAs: Transnational Land Acquisitions

UAE: United Arab Emirates

UN: United Nations

UNCTAD: United Nations Trade and Development

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of transnational land acquisition (TLA)¹, foreign land acquisitions (FLAs) or commonly known as 'land grabbing', which has recently become a notable global trend, has entered the international agenda as a crucial and controversial issue. Most of the time 'land grabbing' term has been used notoriously by NGOs and civil society institutions. However, its meaning is beyond this understanding. Although there is no single definition of the concept of land grabbing, it can be simply described in the following way:

Land grabbing can be defined as being the control (whether through ownership, lease, concession, contracts, quotas, or general power) of larger than locally-typical amounts of land by any person or entity (public or private, foreign or domestic) via any means ('legal' or 'illegal') for purposes of speculation, extraction, resource control or commodification at the expense of peasant farmers, agroecology, land stewardship, food sovereignty and human rights.(Baker-Smith and Miklos-Attila 2016, 2)

As can be understood from the complex definition of the concept, this action renders the acquisition of large amounts of land by foreign states and individuals outside their own territory controversial. The 2008 food crisis was the catalyst for the recent acceleration of land grabbing (Grain 2008). The very high prices of wheat, maize, rice, and other agricultural products in 2007-2008 put the food crisis on the agenda of many countries. Food security was a particular concern for countries with low agricultural productivity and large populations, such as South Korea, India, and China. This has led these countries to look for opportunities to invest in water- and land-rich, low-cost developing countries (Pezzi 2009).

The other reason is that the effect of global warming on the soil due to air and temperature variations is quite apparent. Especially in recent times, situations such as declining rainfall and water crises caused by global warming have fundamentally affected food production. Rather than being far away from us, climate change is at the heart of our vital

¹ For more information on the meaning of the concept, please check: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/transnational-land-deals-1>. Accessed: 29.07.2023

problems. This effect has been seen in agricultural production rates. Global agricultural productivity has fallen by 21 percent since 1961(The World Bank 2022).

In particular, the countries of the Gulf region are among the countries most affected by this problem (Woertz 2013). Countries such as Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar, which are poor in water and arable land, have been trying to solve the problem of the food crisis, which has been even more acute since Covid-19, through the acceleration of agricultural investment projects abroad. Their choice of countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia in the African region, which has a colonial past and is perceived as a sensitive point where most land investments have been made, has been accused of land grabbing (England and Tezaron 2020). “The most heavily targeted states are, by far, Sudan and Pakistan, followed by quite a number in south-east Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam), Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uganda, Ukraine, Georgia, Brazil ... the list goes on.”(Grain 2008)

Moreover, considering the targeting of agricultural lands by these countries and the production technology of the products to be obtained from those lands, as well as the export of the products and their transportation, it can be seen how it affects and revitalizes the agro-business sector. The fact that not only governments but also foreign individuals have acquired a certain proportion of land in various countries has led to the revival and growth of private agricultural investment companies. These companies, which bring out the entrepreneurial spirit of agribusiness and thus nourish the profit-oriented market, have sprung up, especially in the center of the countries where land is being acquired. From this point of view, it is an indisputable fact that international land acquisition has created a chain of triggering and feeding aspects.

So far, this part of the study has attempted to explain what international land acquisition as a land grab trend is, what it is like, and how its components are related. But the main debate has been going on in theoretical aspects and usage within countries and its relations.

The most analyzed countries in terms of foreign land acquisition are those in Africa where there is a history of colonialism by Western powers in the literature. Because it is the region where the most arable land is bought by different foreigners. “According to the

Land Matrix public database, Africa is targeted by large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs)² more than any other world region''(Toulemonde 2021, 1). Many European, Chinese, Gulf Region countries have bought millions of hectares land from Africa. Naturally, this kind of gigantic acquisitions have led to African region is to be hub for land grabbing. However, the main debate is based on whether such a big land acquisition in Africa continent indicates that it is a neo-colonialism. Especially, the African continent's colonialism past that was implemented by Western powers has evoked the allegation of neo-colonialism unintentionally. There are sufficient and valuable overarching studies in the literature on Africa's land in relation to neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965; Baumer 2010; Hodges 1972; Langan 2018a; Nolte and Ledermann 2022; Martin and Palat, n.d.; Okolo and Akwu 2016). As seen, the first and foremost theory in foreign land acquisition is neo-colonialism and its indication and impacts on targeted countries.

Looking at which countries in Africa are most targeted in international land acquisition; according to the latest Land Matrix Databases (2022), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, Liberia, Mozambique, South Sudan, Mozambique, South Sudan and the Central African Republic have been the countries with the highest number of international land acquisitions since 2000. At the same time, the countries that make up the Global South are the ones that are acquiring the most land, especially agricultural land, and signing the most international land agreements.

Although the largest and most land purchases are taking place in Africa, many other developing countries have been started to being part of this land grabbing trend. Latin America, Eastern Europe and South East Asia are also targeted regions for land acquisitions (Lay and Nolte 2018, 68). Similarly, the investor countries that buy land from these regions are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, China and South Korea, which are also experiencing a food crisis and trying to ensure food security for their populations (Robertson and Pinstrup-Andersen 2010, 274). Particularly poor in land and water, but

² There two types of land acquisitions according to their size. Large-scale land acquisitions and small-scale land acquisitions. Large-scale land acquisition is used for more than 200 hectare (ha) unlike small-scale land acquisitions is used less than 5 hectares (Giz 2019,1).

generally rich, these countries are mostly viewed from the perspective of neocolonialism to buy land from underdeveloped and developing countries.

However, another perspective about this international land acquisition is whether this trend can lead to economic development and give potential benefits to poor nations. The host country can benefit from the free market brought about by neoliberalism, foreign direct investment, and transnational corporations.

The rapid increase of large-scale land acquisitions in developing nations has been followed by a contentious debate from the start because the effects on the target nations and their populations are debatable. On the one hand, supporters stress that capital inflows can bolster the frequently structurally weakened agricultural sector of emerging nations and so help to advance agricultural modernization and combat poverty. Large-scale agricultural investment is frequently viewed in this context as promoting economic growth because it can provide more employment and tax income. Investment projects can also help transfer technology and expertise and boost the development of rural areas through infrastructural improvements, which will help a nation's economy as a whole (Giz 2019).

On the other hand, it is also recognized that these land acquisitions can disrupt the livelihoods of local people and destroy the ecological balance (Messerli et al. 2014, 453). While some land leases have the potential to promote rural development, they may not be implemented on equal terms between investors and local people. In particular, local actors who have been dispossessed of their land are unable to negotiate the terms of the agreements in a way that benefits them in this unequal power relationship. They may be at a legal disadvantage in the event of breaches of land agreements or failure to provide guaranteed employment (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 2).

From this point of view, scholars have examined whether the acquisition of foreign land is a neo-colonial activity in general or a neoliberal economic development and win-win situation. However, in the literature, countries such as Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Laos, Rwanda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Brazil have been examined as case studies in foreign land acquisition, while Turkey has not yet been studied as a case study.

What makes Turkey 'exceptional ' rather than other countries is; its contradictory and complex outlook in foreign land acquisitions. In 2014, Turkey attempted to lease 850,000 hectares of land from Sudan to feed its growing population and ensure food security(World Bulletin 2014). However, this agreement was canceled due to civil unrest in Sudan. Turkey attempted to lease land from Sudan again in 2022. By the same token, in 2019, Turkey announced the launch of an agricultural project in Somaliland (AA 2020). Turkey claims that its land investments in the African region are for 'development' and that it is far from its colonial past.

While Turkey, along with many other countries, has been seen as an investor country in international land acquisition and as part of the neo-colonialist movement in Africa, the recent increase in the number of agricultural investment companies in its territory and the sale of its own agricultural land to foreigners indicates that it is a new type of country in the land grab movement.

In 2017, According to Daily Sabah News, Foreign investment in Turkish agriculture has lately increased, according to the minister for food, agriculture, and livestock, Faruk Elik, who said that 85 foreigners from 23 different nations have purchased 2,159 decares (534 acres) of farmland across 20 provinces (Ateş 2017). Turkey has become a country that both buys land from other countries and sells its land to foreigners due to the recent rapid increase in the number of these agricultural investment companies and their sale of agricultural land to foreigners.

1.1 Research Questions and Aim of the Study

This study attempts to analyze the sale of agricultural land to foreigners in Turkey through agricultural investment companies. In parallel with this, this study's research questions are:

- What does the recent increase in land sales to foreigners mean in Turkey and how Turkey can be perceived in the global land acquisition trend?
- Is the sale of agricultural land in Turkey to foreigners a neocolonialism or a neoliberal economic development opportunity?

This thesis tries to enlighten the recently rising sales of land to foreigners in Turkey around these two main questions. The recent increase in land sales to foreigners in Turkey has taken a big place in the headlines of media reports. The acquisition of agricultural lands by foreigners, especially through companies operating under the name of "agricultural investment", was the subject of discussion whether the sale of Turkish lands was an exploitation.

From this point of view, it has been determined that the Gulf countries are in the first place in the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey. It has been assessed that the biggest reason for targeting the territory of Turkey is due to the food crisis they are experiencing and that they have acquired land from Turkey to ensure their food security. In this context, it has been examined whether the lands that foreigners have acquired from Turkey through agricultural investment companies are a neocolonial activity or an economic development opportunity supported by neoliberal policies. This topic has tried to examine Turkey as a case in the axis of the “neocolonialism- economic development or win-win debate” that already exists in the literature. For this reason, Turkey will be the subject of this discussion in the literature for the first time as a country without a colonial history. This shows that developing countries can now also be the subject of this discussion that exists in the literature.

The biggest contribution of this thesis study will be to shed a light on the sale of land to foreigners that exists in Turkey. Although Turkey's name is mentioned in the literature in the sale of land to foreigners in general in the world, there are not enough studies. In Turkey, the person who has been working on this issue so far is the work of Özkesen from Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University (Özkesen 2023). Although her article is a preliminary study in this field, she examines Turkey only within the scope of international land agreements. This thesis study emphasizes Turkey's special position in the general global acquisition of land, but also provides a theoretical perspective (neocolonialism and neoliberalism) on the issue. The results of this study may be a resource for the agricultural investment sector which is tackle with this foreign land acquisition in the Turkey.

In the first chapter after this part, general information about global land acquisition will be given. The driving forces behind the recent increase in foreign land acquisition in the

world will be examined, and then this phenomenon will be evaluated on a geographical basis. Which countries are the foreign investors who are grabbing land, which countries are the target countries? Detailed information will be given about these issues.

In the third chapter, the theoretical framework that forms the backbone of the study will be examined. The foreign land acquisition will be looked at from a theoretical point of view. In the first place, the concepts of agro-imperialism will be discussed in relation to what the concept of neocolonialism is. Later, foreign land acquisition, which is a new type of neocolonialism, will be examined from this point of view. In the second part, neoliberalism will be discussed. How neoliberal policies have transformed the concept of land into an economic asset and the agri-business sector will be looked at from a financial point of view. Finally, this section will be concluded by analyzing foreign land acquisition through the debate on whether neocolonialism or neoliberal economic development opportunities exist in the literature.

In the fourth chapter, general information about the methodology of the study will be given. What methods were used, and what were the limitations of the study? such questions will be answered.

In fifth chapter, Turkey will be examined as a case study in the sale of land to foreigners. First of all, the image of Turkey in the field of agriculture will be illustrated, and then information about the agricultural investment sector will be provided according to the interviews conducted. Who are the investor countries in Turkey, and which cities were targeted? such questions will be answered. In the last part, it will be discussed whether the sale of land to foreign investors in Turkey is neocolonialism or an opportunity for neoliberal economic development.

In the sixth and last part, the results obtained according to the research will be given and its discussion will be held. The special position of Turkey in the acquisition of foreign lands and how this neocolonialism problem should be addressed in the future will be discussed and finalized.

2. GLOBAL LAND ACQUISITION

The financial crisis of 2008 can be seen as a milestone in the realisation of the importance of the acquisition of land for both states and corporations around the world. The convergence of the world's agricultural, economic, financial, and environmental issues over the past few decades has resulted in a significant revaluation of the ownership of land. Strong national and international economic players, including businesses, governments, and private equity firms, have looked for "empty" property, frequently in far-off nations, that may be used as locations for food and fuel production in the event that prices soar in the future (Borras Jr. et al. 2011, 209). Especially, food crises and need for a food product for states which have an unarable and arid lands occurred a tremendous effect on this 'land grab' circulation all over the world.

2.1. Drivers of International Land Acquisition

The recent surge in the global acquisition of land and the fact that land has become more valuable than 'gold and oil', especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, has had a major impact. Especially the concern about food shortage around the world has triggered most of the countries which are poor about cultivable land to buy a Large-scale land acquisition (LSLAs) from other countries (Grain 2008; Borras Jr. et al. 2011; Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhangi 2014). This situation drew the world's attention to farms. Investors began a race for farmland. Foreign investors both public and private sectors have started buying and leasing property in greater numbers with the goal of establishing commercial farms for the production of agricultural commodities (Lay and Nolte 2018, 59). These movements have also been breeding initiatives "Agriculture Investments" from agribusinesses.

As Deininger and Byerlee (2011, 14) assert that the demand for land has reached incredible proportions. Before 2008, the average yearly growth of agricultural land worldwide was less than 4 million hectares. By the end of 2009, however, large-scale farmland deals worth almost 56 million hectares were reported. Africa has accounted for more than 70% of this demand; in recent years, nations like Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan have given millions of hectares to investors. These numbers clearly indicate how Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) have become a growing market all over the world.

As it is known, Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) is not a new phenomenon. Even if it started from the ancient times when a big proportion of lands were taken by colonial governments and domestic and foreign investors (Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhangi 2014; Adbib 2012; Deininger and Byerlee 2011; Hunt 2015) along with 2008 Financial Crisis, it has gained different shaped apart from its past version.

According to White vd. (2012, 627) in global land acquisition in terms of large-scale land acquisition (LSLA), some of the key factors and drivers behind this trend are similar to the past, while some of them are again newly formed through past acquisition relationships. In this respect, especially, understanding the causes of today's rapidly rising global land acquisitions is crucial to understanding the trajectory of this trend.

The question of what influences the global land acquisition is acknowledged by academics as a significant gap in the literature (Orsi, Zanchi, and Mazzocchi 2024; Mazzocchi, Orsi, and Sali 2021; Messerli et al. 2014). Scholars have recently looked into the ways in which particular institutional, social, economic, and environmental characteristics—at the investor as well as the target—may affect the international flows of Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs)(Orsi, Zanchi, and Mazzocchi 2024, 65).

In general, if we look at the literature, we can see that there are certain common main factors that lead to the global acquisition of land. These can be listed as; global food crisis (Hazell and Wood 2007; Mechiche-Alami et al. 2019; Sommerville, Essex, and Le Billon 2014), food security (Sommerville, Essex, and Le Billon 2014; Abdullah 2019; Mahony 2012; Mechiche-Alami 2020) , biofuels (Brown 2013; Giovannetti and Ticci 2016; Renzaho, Kamara, and Toole 2017; Thondhlana 2014), climate change (Mechiche-Alami 2020; Mazzocchi, Orsi, and Sali 2021; Davis, Rulli, and D'Odorico 2015; Seo and

Rodriguez 2012), market forces (De Maria 2019; Messerli et al. 2014; Hazell and Wood 2007) and development aid deficits (Cuffaro, Giovannetti, and Monni 2013; Robertson and Pinstup-Andersen 2010; Gilbert 2016). These factors will be analysed in detail in the rest of the thesis.

2.1.1. Global food crisis

“Beginning in 2006, international prices for basic agricultural commodities rose to levels not experienced in nearly three decades” (United Nations 2012, 62). Especially in the 2008 financial crisis, this rise peaked. Many explanations have been given as to the reasons behind this. To understand better what are the main drivers behind this 2008 food crisis, 1974 and 2008 Food Crisis have been examined by researchers (D. D. Headey and Fan 2008). It has been found that some reasons behind these crisis such as; oil and energy crisis are the same, some of them are specific for 2008 Food Crisis such as; changing in diet order and export bans on main staple crops (Sommerville, Essex, and Le Billon 2014, 255).

According to Headey and Derek D. (2008, 5) the global increase in food costs that occurred between 2006 and 2009 is attributed to the growing use of food crops for the manufacture of biofuel and high oil prices. But main assertion is that increased main staple food prices (D. D. Headey and Fan 2008; United Nations 2012; Mahony 2012).

As shown in (Figure 2.1), food prices rose sharply in 2008. Although they fell sharply in 2009, they have remained high ever since. These sudden fluctuations in food prices have also reduced confidence in the food market which is dominated demand and supply of products. These products consist mainly of soybeans, corn, wheat and rice.

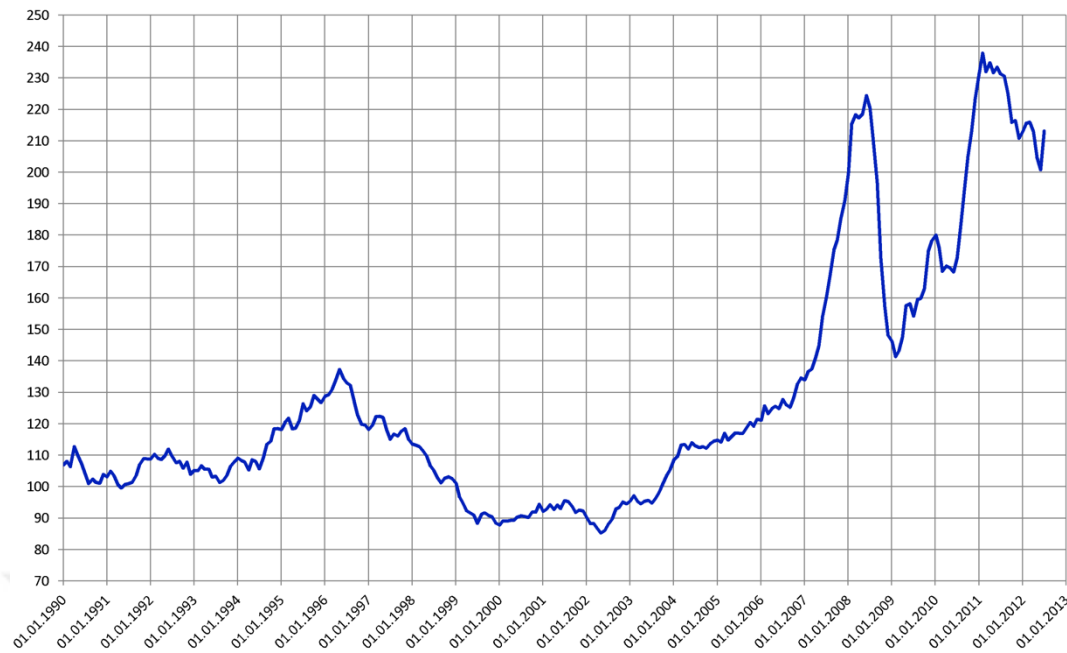


Figure 2.1: World Food Price Index (1990-2012)

Source: (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 2012)

Fluctuations in the prices of these staple foods were a strong indicator of distrust in the global food market at the time of the 2008 crisis. Especially among food products, rice prices affected the market the most. Rice-producing countries such as China, Indonesia, Brazil, and India imposed export restrictions and bans to stabilize rice prices in the domestic market during the food crisis (Timmer 2010, 6). Thus, they protected more than 2 billion producers from high prices. These developments, together with the insecurity of food-importing countries in the market, have led to food safety policies in their domestic policies.

To sum up, with the 2007/2008 Financial Crisis, rising food prices and its effect on the global food system have triggered food export countries to implement restrictions on their staple crops, herewith food importers have lost his confidence to the global food system. This situation also shows the collapse of the global food system (D. Headey and Fan 2010, 3). This sharp and effective food crisis leads us to another main driver of the last global land acquisition.

2.1.2 Food security

The world population, currently estimated at 6.94 billion, is predicted to rise to 10.5 billion by the year 2050. If unchecked, this population might reach 256 billion, particularly as long as fertility and subsistence costs continue to rise (Abdulrahman 2013, 41). The world population, which is increasing at such a rate, increases the need for food in direct proportion. Notably, the growing middle classes in countries such as China and India, which account for the majority of the world's population, are one of the main factors contributing to the food crisis and the associated global land grab (Robertson and Pinstруп-Andersen 2010, 274).

After the 2008 food crisis, rich countries with limited natural resources and infertile soils started to acquire large amounts of land in other countries under the guise of 'agricultural investment' in order to ensure food security³ at home. If we look at the countries that have acquired land for this purpose, we find countries such as the Gulf States, China and South Korea.

The oil-rich Gulf countries, who must import the majority of their food due to their huge deserts, are undoubtedly drawn to Africa's fertile land. According to Marie Bos, an analyst at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai, "the gulf states have an incredible surplus to invest, and now that the old economies are facing recession, they are looking at Africa." Despite the fact that affluent nations like South Korea and the Gulf states can readily afford to import food, the instability of the world food markets may have made it more crucial for food-importing nations to protect their own supply chains (Walt 2008).

The Gulf countries are at the top of the countries that have made a large amount of land purchases due to food security concerns. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian aggression against Ukraine, dynamic population growth, the effects of climate change,

³ "Based on the [1996 World Food Summit](#), food security is defined when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." ("What Is Food Security? There Are Four Dimensions," n.d.)

and the destabilization of supply chains, the Gulf Cooperation Council⁴ (GCC) countries have been forced to improve their food security, particularly in terms of their ability to withstand external crises. Abd al-Rahman al-Fadhli, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, declared in September that the country would invest about \$25 billion to advance regional food production. Qatar's investments in food production surged by 69% between 2017 and 2021. In response, the United Arab Emirates began executing its National Food Security Strategy in 2018, with the goal of producing 100,000 tonnes more strategic food items by 2051 (Nowacka 2022).

The Gulf countries' land purchases from foreign countries with food security concerns are mostly manifested in their support for large corporations and companies. For instance, the Kuwait-based Arab Economic and Social Development Fund (AFESD), the Saudi Agricultural Investment and Animal Production Company, the Arab Agricultural Investment and Development Authority, the King Abdullah Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad, and the Al Amoudi Company are the leading companies in terms of agricultural land acquisitions for investment purposes.

By the same token, In response to the issue of food insecurity, South Korea has also initiated a vigorous land acquisition effort abroad, emulating affluent but food-insecure nations such as China, Japan, Vietnam, and the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar (Rosario 2016, 57–58). What makes South Korea exclusive is that the attempt to acquire land in Madagascar led to political upheaval in the host country. According to Financial Times (2008) news; The South Korean company Daewoo Logistics has purchased land in Madagascar to grow corn and palm oil on a land half the size of Belgium.

The general Manager at Daewoo Hong Jong-wan has shared their intention like; “We want to plant corn there to ensure our food security. Food can be a weapon in this world. We can either export the harvests to other countries or ship them back to Korea in case of

⁴ Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman are the six Middle Eastern nations that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic partnership. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) aims to unite its members via shared goals and comparable political and cultural identities derived from Islamic and Arab traditions (Zeidan 2024). For more information: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gulf-Cooperation-Council>

a food crisis.’’ As can be seen from what he said, food security concerns have played a major role in South Korea acquiring land from African countries. Along with the speculation created by the government of Madagascar after this land deal with the Daweoo company, the government overthrew a few months later, and this situation brought about many controversial issues such as; local farmers right, legal producers in land tenure and etc.(Rosario 2016, 67).

Another country which is suffering from food security concern is China. Brautigam and Ekman (2012, 483) indicates that one of the main participants in this land rush was thought to be China, which has been a net importer of food since 2004. The widely held belief that the Chinese government is actively looking for land in Africa to ensure China's own food security uses Mozambique as a point of reference. Among the countries acquiring land in Africa, China is by far the leading country. China's vast population and limited arable lands are the fundamental features that occurs the food security projects by its government. Indeed, most of the foreign land acquisitions (FLAs) by Chinese government and private groups and companies focuses on African continent so as to fulfill food shortages.

Nevertheless, with food security problem, biofuel and energy exigency is an another push factor for China to obtained large-scale lands from abroad. Furthermore As von Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009, 1) demonstrates that from the 2007 IFPRI report, China acquired 2.8 million hectares of land for an oil palm plantation and biofuel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China is thus responding to the food crisis by meeting its demand for energy and biofuels, especially from African countries, but also from developing countries whose other land is fertile but needs investment (Brautigam and Ekman 2012, 485).

In a nutshell, Food security is one of the main driver of global land acquisition in the World. Many wealthy countries have purchased lands from developing countries whose soil is fertile but needs agricultural investment, especially African countries, due to the food crisis they are experiencing due to the inefficiency of their own lands and disruptions in the food supply system (Hazell and Wood 2007; Cotula 2013). Even if these

acquisitions reflections have a widely and critically foothold in the international arena, food security is going to be a main factor in the global land acquisition.

2.1.3. Biofuels

Nowadays, a lot of people believe that biofuels⁵ can solve all of the problems that our world is facing. Because biofuels derived from biomass can take the place of fossil fuels in transportation, they are seen as a potential solution to issues like climate change and energy insecurity brought on by the decline in the oil supply (Widenhorn 2013, 4). On the other hand, because of biofuel productions high profit return, most of the emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil made an farmland investments in developing countries (Cotula and Leonard 2010; Cotula 2013).

Government policies are one of the biggest factors in the increase in biofuel investments. Globally, governments from Brazil, China, India, the US, and the EU have set mandated goals for the percentage of biofuels to be used in transportation fuels. This has created a stable market for biofuels that will exist for many years to come (Cotula, Dyer, and Vermeulen 2008, 9). So why have Governments decided to start investing in biofuels? What are the driving forces behind these decisions?

According to the report, “Biofuels: Strategic Choices for Commodity Dependent Developing Countries” which is written by Dufey et al. (2007, 9–10), ascertains prevailing push of governments to encourage the growth of biofuels companies in their nations is linked to four important policy objectives:

- **Energy security:** In order to improve energy security at the local and national levels, there is a need to lower the energy import bill, increase the production of petroleum substitutes from agricultural commodities, and deal with rising energy costs and uncertain energy supplies in the future.
- **Development of rural areas:** Biofuels create a new market for agricultural goods, lowering surpluses and raising prices. This offers the chance to increase agricultural production with added value and to enhance agricultural jobs and

⁵ “Biofuel is a type of renewable energy source derived from microbial, plant, or animal materials. Examples of biofuels include ethanol, biodiesel, green diesel and biogas.” (J. Chen 2022).

livelihoods, particularly when small-scale farmers are involved in the cultivation and the conversion facilities are situated close to rural feedstock sources.

- **Development of exports:** A lot of nations view biofuels as a way to expand their agricultural export markets and boost their export earnings. The reason for this is that many emerging nations in tropical and subtropical regions have an edge in producing biofuel, but the primary international customers (the northern countries) will not have the domestic ability to meet their whole domestic demand.
- **Mitigation of climate change:** Growing international obligations made under the Kyoto Protocol and awareness of the harmful environmental effects of fossil fuels are pushing industrialized nations, in particular, to include biofuels and other alternatives in their energy portfolios. Significant interest in biofuels is also being generated in underdeveloped nations by the possibility of luring investment into the biofuels sectors, for instance through carbon trading schemes like the Clean Development Mechanism.

These policies have shown that governments have taken full account of all the factors that spark food and energy crises, thereby generating policies to tackle with these problems by applying to land acquisition.

“The Biofuels Boom and Poor People's Access to report by Lorenzo Cotula, Nat Dyer, and Sonja Vermeulen is the most comprehensive study on land acquisition for biofuels and its impacts. In this report Cotula et al. (2008, 13) asserts that biofuel production can provide income opportunities in rural areas. By generating income, biofuel production can help improve the prospects for food security, i.e. enabling farmers to buy food on the market. It can provide an opportunity for farmers who have traditionally suffered from low agricultural prices to improve their terms of trade and for countries with abundant land but few other natural resources to pursue new development opportunities. In addition, biofuel production can help poor countries and communities achieve energy security and mitigate the negative effects of high oil prices, thereby helping to improve food security.

On the other hand, the ‘food versus fuel’ debate has resurfaced in the context of the global land acquisition boom again. What makes this debate hectic is the production of biofuels

may put food crops in competition with it and have a major detrimental effect on food security. In the coming years, pressure on global food prices may increase due to competition between biofuels and food, either as alternative land uses (e.g., oil palm against food crops) or as an end-use of the same crop (e.g., maize, sugarcane). Poorer and more disadvantaged people are likely to have less access to food as a result of rising food costs. This is the reason why Jean Ziegler, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, boldly denounced the increasing use of biofuels as a danger to life on Earth. The robust population growth and increasing urbanization prevalent in African, Asian, and South American nations are expected to intensify these pressures (Annie Dufey 2007; Cotula, Dyer, and Vermeulen 2008, 13–14). As it can be seen, Biofuel is one of the major drivers of global land acquisition in terms of food and energy crisis.

2.1.4. Climate change

In addition to being a phenomenon that causes the greatest damage to the ecological face of the world, climate change⁶ is also one of the biggest factors in global land acquisition. The worldwide land rush may be greatly impacted by climate change, however this influence has not been fully acknowledged. The world faces a significant challenge from climate change given how quickly human demand for food and energy is growing. The recent trend of governments and corporations purchasing huge swaths of land in emerging nations raises the possibility that climate change has a significant influence in this development (Davis, Rulli, and D’Odorico 2015, 1). Because climate conditions and the food crisis are closely linked.

Almost every element of human civilization and the environment is impacted by climate change, but agriculture and food production are particularly hard hit. Given that many agricultural regions have already seen sudden floods and prolonged droughts brought on by global climate change, weather and climatic variability may alter the suitability of land for agriculture as well as agricultural output (Schmidhuber and Tubiello 2007, 2–3; Seo

⁶ Independent of the main topic of this thesis, for more information about what is climate change generally, you can check “World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal” <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/overview#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20the%20significant,change%20from%20natural%20weather%20variability>.

and Rodriguez 2012, 172). As can be seen here, agriculture itself is quite sensitive to the climate conditions and its fluctuations.

However, Davis et al. (2015, 299) asserts that in their seminal article, which is 'The Global Land Rush and Climate Change', land acquisition is impacted by climate change in two significant ways. First, in reaction to the effects that greenhouse gas emissions are already having and will continue to have on the climate and, consequently, the world economy, numerous governments have passed legislation. Land-intensive policies appear to boost land demand through carbon credit systems (e.g., Kyoto Protocol, Clean Development Mechanism, lowering emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) and mandates for renewable energy (e.g., US Renewable Fuel Standard, EU Renewable Energy Directive). Second, recent global climate extremes have impacted agricultural productivity in many regions, driving up food costs and igniting worries about the security of food and energy.

As can be seen here, climate change appears in global land acquisition not only as a factor in the food crisis but also as a factor on its own in the implementation of climate crisis-based policies. Especially, one type of agriculture product (monocrop, such as; soybeans, maize and etc.) in vast areas of lands have a detrimental effect on the regions's biodiversity and inevitable threat to the environment. Because in those areas mostly laid down in tropical forests, they have a fertile flora and landscape for sustain a balanced nature circle. In case of any implementation into those lands, this balanced natural circle may be badly destroyed and thus affects global land acquisition.

Furthermore, The primary issue with climate change and food security is that it may set off a vicious cycle in which hunger is exacerbated or caused by infectious diseases, which in turn increases the susceptibility of the impacted populations to infectious diseases. As a result, there may be a significant drop in worker productivity as well as a rise in mortality and poverty. There is mounting evidence that the pressure to spread disease is impacted by nearly every aspect of climate change, including drought, rising temperatures, and excessive precipitation. These changes also have an effect on food security and safety (Schmidhuber and Tubiello 2007, 3).

Generally, in addition to being a factor of climate change itself, it is observed that it also has an impact on the main factors in global land acquisition. It is observed that climate change triggers the food crisis by reducing the arable land availability due to the effects that it creates on the soils of the regions that receive the most sun, especially tropical regions. Thus, it has pushed countries that already have non-arable lands and have a high population to aggressively and uncontrollably buy land from other countries. To sum up, climate change is one of the biggest factors in the race of 'land grabbing'.

2.1.5 The need for development aid

Today, the world's agricultural investment needs are greater than ever. The fact that food has become one of the biggest needs along with the climate crisis, coronavirus, and the Ukrainian war observed in the world over the past two decades has made the need for international investment in agriculture even more obvious. According to UNCTAD (2024) report “Despite reaching historical levels in 2022, Official Development Assistance decreased by 2% (\$4 billion) for developing regions, affecting over 70 countries and almost 3 billion people.” In spite of the fact that even if development aid is so high in general, it is dangerous for developing countries to be low. Because from an agriculture investment perspective, developing nations possess the majority of the world's remaining arable land (Cotula 2009; Robertson and Pinstup-Andersen 2010, 273; Lele et al. 2022). Agricultural lands in many developing countries are planted by local farmers, so the number of crops is low. This hampers the capacity of these countries with high climate and soil suitability to meet the needs of the world (Hallam 2009a, 5). At this juncture, foreign investments to developing countries are vital for agriculture development in the world. One of the main causes of the current food crisis and the challenges developing nations faced in responding to it has been highlighted as a lack of these investments.

Several developing nations are working very hard to encourage and help foreign investment in their agricultural industries. Although it is unclear how much of these investments actually go toward satisfying their actual investment needs, they view foreign direct investment as a potentially significant contributor to closing the investment gap. The apparent financial benefits of asset transfers to host nations are minimal. For instance, land rent demands are usually little or nonexistent, and tax revenues are lost due to the several tax breaks provided to foreign investors. On the other hand, foreign investments are

thought to have the ability to advance development through the creation of jobs, technological transfer, and infrastructure. A major question is whether these possible benefits for development are likely to materialize (Hallam 2009a, 5).

With the food crisis of 2008, developing countries recognised the opportunity for foreign investment in agriculture as global land acquisition accelerated again. For this reason, the African continent is one of the countries that need development investments the most. Both the problem of hunger and the fact that it has a large amount of arable land desired by foreign investors have made it one of the countries that want to benefit from this aid (D. D. Headey and Fan 2008).

The fact that developing countries are the main actors of these development aids in global land acquisition also determines how and in what way agricultural investment will be. For instance, the size of the lands in the African region and which crop to plant differs from a country in the Asian region. This situation requires that the investment in land should vary from region to region (Cotula 2009; Cotula and Leonard 2010).

Consequently, the need for development aid for land in a developing countries is a significant factor for global land acquisition. It pushes the land market for working hard and taking to much lands all over the world.

2.2. Geographical Distribution and Hotspots of Global Land Acquisition

The geographical distribution of global land acquisition, which countries buy land from which countries, at what rates and for what production these lands are acquired is at least as crucial as this concept itself. When the acquisition of land by foreign countries from other countries is considered in the context of a cobweb, it becomes possible to discern the relationships between the various actors involved.

However, all these acquisitions which is known as a 'land grabbing' could not been precisely analyzed because of lack of data sets and official datas. All the information in the

current literature has been obtained from such as GRAIN, Land Matrix Data⁷, Oxfam, ILC (International Land Coalition), FAO, IFPRI and Farmlandgrab.org media and data resources. Among these sources, Land Matrix shared by far the most data.

According to the information shared by Land Matrix on its own page; by gathering and disseminating information on large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) in low- and middle-income nations, the Land Matrix is an independent land monitoring project that encourages responsibility and openness in these decisions. For this reason, it entails highly related informations about foreign land acquisition in worldwide with transparent datas. It is a very crucial source for analysing the data collected by region. It shows the relations between the Global South and the North. This feature makes this initiative a primary source for those who are working in this field and trying to reach the right information. Therefore, the next stage of the study will provide general information on global land acquisition using data from Land Matrix.

Yet, how and where 'Land Matrix' collects all these informations? These datas in the Land Matrix are collected from many different sources. According to Land Matrix all datas are composed of %29 Media Reports, %24 Company Resources, %24 Research Papers/Policy Reports, %11 Government Sources, %7 Personal Information, %3 Other and %3 Land Contracts. As shown from the numbers, most of the informations come from media reports. This also indicates the data shortage in this 'land grabbing' trend.

However, when we check out the last updated datas, we have seen two analytical reports which are released by Land Matrix Initiative about international land deals. First one is published in 2012 under the name of; "Land Matrix Analytical Report 1: Transnational Land Deals for Agriculture in the Global South." by Ward Anseeuw, Mathieu Boche, Thomas Breu, Markus Giger, Jann Lay, Peter Messerli and Kerstin Nolte. Second one is published in 2016 under the name of; "Land Matrix Analytical Report 2: International Land Deals for Agriculture – Fresh Insights from the Land Matrix" by Kerstin Nolte,

⁷ Due to the insufficient data on 'Global Land Acquisition' and the fact that the only initiative with the most comprehensive information in this field is 'Land Matrix', all the necessary data were mostly obtained from this initiative during the dissertation. For more information: <https://www.landportal.org/landmatrix>

Wytse Chamberlain, Markus Giger. The two reports in question represent a valuable source of information for those seeking to gain insight into the geographical patterns and actors involved in recent agricultural land acquisitions. The last report was rewritten as a revised version of the 2012 report and the acquisition of land by foreigners was examined in more detail.

In accordance with Land Matrix data, an international land monitoring initiative, since 2008, there have been approximately 2,150 large-scale land deals globally, covering over 63 million hectares.

2.2.1. Overview of agricultural land acquisition

In accordance with Land Matrix data, an international land monitoring initiative, since 2008, there have been approximately 2,150 large-scale land deals globally, covering over 63 million hectares. These numbers captured from 85 different countries. These agreements usually entail the purchase of agricultural land for uses such as mining, tourism, conservation, food production, and the generation of biofuels.

First of all, when we look at the general situation of land deals in the world, it is an important issue how many of the planned land deals have been achieved or not. As Table 2.1 below shows that compared to the failed and intended agreements, the concluded agreements are far smaller. This suggests that numerous issues that can only be resolved on a smaller scale may arise in extraordinarily large-scale initiatives. For instance, managerial and technological challenges may surface during the implementation phase, particularly in challenging ecological, political, and socioeconomic situations (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 8).

Table 2.1: Intended deal sizes based on different negotiating stages

NEGOTIATION STATUS	MINIMUM (HECTARES)	MAXIMUM (HECTARES)	MEDIAN (HECTARES) ⁴	MEAN (HECTARES)	NUMBER OF DEALS	TOTAL SIZE INTENDED (MILLION HECTARES)
Failed	200	1,000,000	20,000	74,406	97	7.2
Intended	400	1,500,000	19,000	95,511	212	20.3
Concluded	221	619,759	10,000	47,484	1,204	57.2

Source: Nolte, Kerstin, Wytke Chamberlain, and Markus Giger. 2016. p.8 “International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II”. Land Matrix Initiative.

Furthermore, Although the desire for land acquisition is great, it is quite difficult to conclude this. It is necessary to read not only through the result of the intended land acquisition, but also through what cannot be concluded. Failed deals are significant in terms of seeing difficulty within foreign land acquisition procedures.

Nonetheless, all these deals can be made with different combinations. Firstly, governments may make a deal with governments. For giving an example of this kind of deal; the Indian government made a deal with the Ethiopian government. The parties signing the mutual agreement were the governments of the countries. Second, the private sector can make a deal with the governments. Investors might come from special companies or groups. Third, the Private sector makes a deal with another private sector. Such as; deal between Hyundai and Khorol Zerno. The last one is Agricultural Investment Funds. In this kind of deal, some specific Investment funds such as ‘Agri-Vie’ in Africa or ‘Agricapital’ in Bahrain can give funds to specific countries or general to world for the sake of agricultural development (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 5–9).

On the other hand, the other crucial point is that for which these land deals are made. What kind of investment we are talking about? What will be done in this acquired large-tract lands? As illustrated in Table 2.2 below, agriculture investments are at the top of the list. Food crops remain the predominant crop in terms of area and number of sales, with agrofuels coming in second. The high percentage of agreements (23% by area) that do not indicate that agriculture would be continued is primarily attributable to flex crops, the

ultimate purpose of which is unknown. The largest of these crops is oil palm, which is used for food, fuel, and cosmetics (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 10).

Table 2.2 Intention of global land acquisitions

INTENTION	NUMBER OF TIMES INTENTION IS MENTIONED	TOTAL CONTRACT SIZE (MILLION HECTARES)
Agriculture	1 403	24.1
– Agrofuels	221	5.1
– Food crops	553	9.2
– Livestock	130	2.0
– Non-food agricultural commodities	236	2.3
– Agriculture (unspecified)	263	5.6
Forestry	187	12.0
Tourism	25	1.7
Industry	33	0.4
Conservation	20	1.4
Renewable energy	57	0.9
Other intention	28	1.0
No information	30	1.0
Total	1 783	

Source: Nolte, Kerstin, Wytse Chamberlain, and Markus Giger. 2016. p.10 “International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II”. Land Matrix Initiative.

The fact is that it is not surprising that investments for agricultural purposes are among the most demanded investments. Because after the 2008 food crisis, the main focus was on agricultural products. In particular, countries suffering from a food crisis had to prioritize their food security before energy or profit-making investments. This is also reflected in agricultural land agreements. The focus of this thesis on ‘agricultural investments’ in global land acquisition is precisely for this reason.

2.2.2 Main targeted countries in global land acquisition

When we look at which countries foreigners prefer the most in the acquisition of agricultural land, it is seen that the African continent is at the top of the list. As it can be seen in

Table 2.3 below, with 422 finalised land deals and 10 million hectares, African continent takes the lion's share in this global 'land grabbing' trend.

Table 2.3: Targeted regions for agricultural deals

REGION	NUMBER OF CONCLUDED DEALS	TOTAL SIZE OF CONCLUDED DEALS (MILLION HECTARES)
Africa	422	10.0
Eastern Europe	96	5.1
Asia	305	4.9
Latin America	146	4.5
Oceania	35	2.2
Total	1 004	26.7

Source: Nolte, Kerstin, Wytke Chamberlain, and Markus Giger. 2016. p.16 "International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II". Land Matrix Initiative.

The second most preferable region is, with 96 land deals and 5.1 million hectares of lands in Eastern Europe. As these data have explicitly shown that even if concluded deals are less, its covered area is much more crucial in terms of land acquisition. After Eastern Europe most targeted region is Asia continent, with 305 land deals and 4.9 million hectares. In terms of land deals calculation, it is coming after Africa. The fourth region is Latin America with 146 concluded land deals and 4.5 million hectares. Lastly, at the end of the list, there is Oceania. Even if the numbers and proportions of grabbed lands are small, when it is compared to the general trend it is still high.

Consequently, according to obtained data, while geographically 'Global South' is the most targeted region in global land acquisition, specifically 'developing countries' are the first priority. The reason why these investments concentrate on developing countries is low production costs and amplexness of land and water sources. Moreover, the climate for the favored staple crops and the proximity of the country's location are other factors that affect investments. Many nations are looking for land to grow crops used as biofuel in addition to land for food production (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 1).

On a country basis, according to the report published by Land Matrix (2012), it is seen that there are some changes in the countries targeted within 5 years. According to the 2016 Land Matrix report, the top five target nations alone, which have the highest concentration of foreign land acquisition, account for 46% of the overall value of all completed agricultural transactions (25% of the overall number). As Figure 2.2 illustrates the most five targeted countries are Indonesia, Ukraine, Russia, Papua New Guinea, and Brazil. On the other hand, In the 2012 land report, the five targeted countries were sequentially; Sudan, Mozambique, Philippines, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.

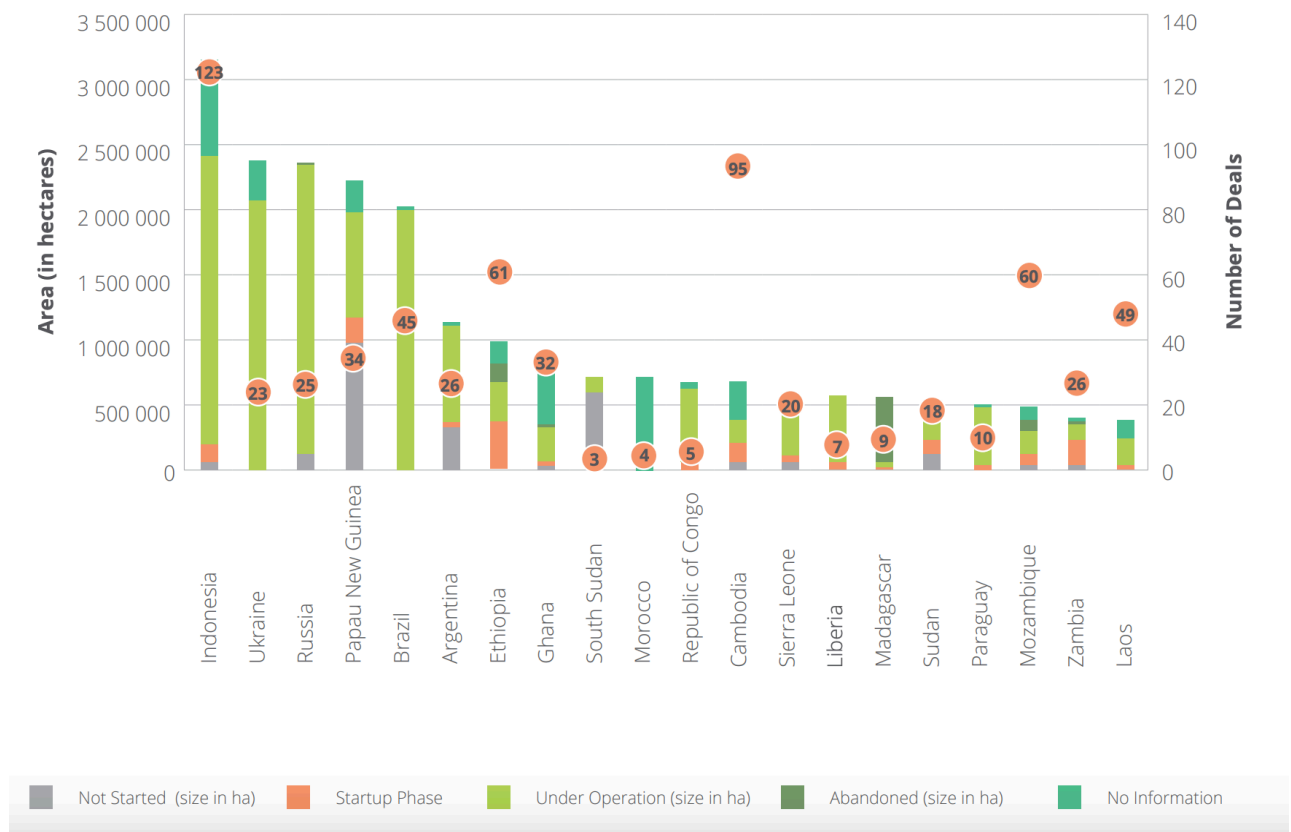


Figure 2.2: Top 20 target countries based on the size of completed deals

Source: Nolte, Kerstin, Wytke Chamberlain, and Markus Giger. 2016. p.18 “International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II”. Land Matrix Initiative.

Following the list, countries such as Russia, Brazil, and Indonesia were the countries with the most land deals in the last report. There are several reasons for this change. Firstly, the fact that African countries have been at the forefront of the countries that have taken the most land from the very beginning has been criticized from many points of view. The colonial history of the African continent and the fact that the lands taken are in very large proportions have made agricultural investments in the region challenging. Conversely, since most of the large amounts of land in the African region have already been taken, new land regions are being chased by investor countries. For this reason, as it can be seen in Figure 2.2 above, Asian and Eastern Europe countries are the new attractive and relish countries for investor countries. However, there are couple of reasons why these countries are targeted by investor countries. First of all, these 20 targeted countries have large-scale lands which are suitable in terms of lands and wheater conditions. These properties have been given an ability to acquire vast products with cheap price. This means it is profitable to acquire lands from these countries. Especially, countries near Nile river are fertile in the way of water resources. That is why East African countries are the most demanded for agricultural investment (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 3–4). Second one is about land tenure system. Most of these countries land tenure system are weak. Inadequate tenure security may also incentivize land acquisitions by providing investors with the chance to quickly get legal access to significant land holdings (Gilbert 2016, 355).

Besides, Russia and Ukraine are the top targeted countries accordingly land matrix 2016 datas, in 24 February 2022, Russia invasion of Ukraine has dramatically changed this situation after this conflict in terms of land acqusition. Beginning on February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine that has had a negative impact on the country's agricultural industry and its recently established farmland market. A drop in agricultural exports followed Russia's mid-February blockade on sea trade, and on the day of the invasion, the land market came to a complete halt.⁸ Nevertheless, despite the difficulties faced in the early stages of the conflict, Ukraine was able to largely resume

⁸ For more information on how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has affected global land acquisition: Ruta, Michele. 2022. "How the War in Ukraine Is Reshaping World Trade and Investment". World Bank Blogs. 03 May 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/how-war-ukraine-reshaping-world-trade-and-investment>.

agricultural exports and maintain its status as one of the world's major suppliers of grains with the aid of the international community. This situation is an obvious indication of how political context effects the international economic market and political economy is one of the important concepts to perceive the complex relationship of land and political situation.

2.2.3 Investor countries of global land acquisition

In the 21st century, the countries that invest in this field are at the vanguard of the most pivotal actors of global land acquisition in the world. Investors are also demanders who shape the acquisition of lands by determining and transforming with how, how many, and where questions asking to global land rush.

Again, according to Land Matrix data (2016) there are many different types of investors. As Figure 2.3 below indicates with their involvement in almost 3.7 million hectares, Malaysian corporations are particularly notable among Asian investors. High-income nations like the United States and Western Europe are also popular among investors; the UK has the most transactions of any nation. The largest investor region is South-East Asia, with 315 finished transactions (31.4% of all deals) including investors from high-income European nations spanning roughly 7.3 million hectares (27.2% of all land). The remaining investors are concentrated in the British Virgin Islands tax haven, South America, and the Middle East (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 23).

When these results are compared again with the Land Matrix's report in 2012, it is seen that the investor countries have changed. In 2012 report, the top five countries were China, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, UAE and South Korea. Although these five countries are still actively taking lands from other countries, more Asian investors are apparent.

The participation of investors from developing nations is one of the most noteworthy aspects of the most recent wave of large-scale land transactions. Together with the majority of the developing Asian nations, this group consists of the BRICS nations (excluding Russia). These nations may have very little arable land, yet they are often wealthy in

capital. Several of these nations—South Africa, India, China, and Brazil—are the sources as well as the destinations of investment flows (Anseeuw et al. 2012, 38).

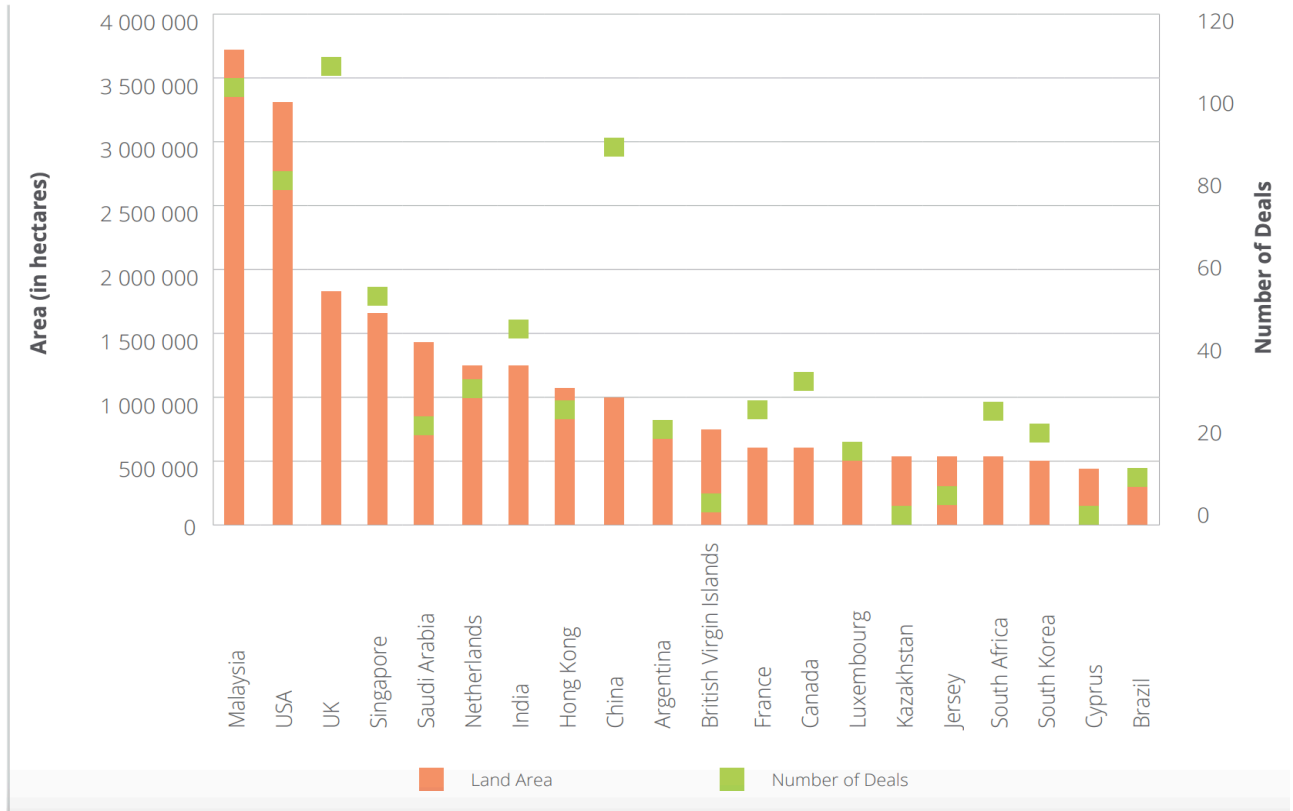


Figure 2.3: Top 20 investor countries for agricultural investment deals

Source: Nolte, Kerstin, Wytke Chamberlain, and Markus Giger. 2016. p.22. “International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II”. Land Matrix Initiative.

Indeed, with all these informations Land Matrix report points out that “The massive involvement of investors from emerging countries illustrates a new trend towards regionalism characterized by South-South relationships.”(Anseeuw et al. 2012, 38). Mostly, investor countries have preferred to invest in countries in their close regions as target countries. Because proximity in terms of locations and other specific areas, (such as; cultural, political, economical and environmental sides) allures investor countries inasmuch as it makes land acquisition effortlessness and profitable. Another attractive feature of

targeted countries for investor countries 'weak local land tenure system'. All investors demand easy legal procedures for their land acquisition and operation to maximize their profits. So, they easily prefer such kind of countries (Cotula 2009; 2013).

If there is a general classification to be made at the point of investors, it can be generalized as a "emerging countries, Gulf states and agribusiness from the Global North countries" (Anseeuw et al. 2012, 37–38). As mentioned above on the previous page, in recent years emerging countries rise as dominant actor in global land grab trend. Also Latin American countries particularly, Argentina and Brazil countries are seen highly active in terms of agribusinesses even though its initiatives are not fully well documented.

Another rising star in land grabbing trend is China. It has been vigorously engaged with land acquisition in Africa continent. China mostly has made a Project in countries such as; Republic of Congo, Zambia, Senegal, Ethiopia, and Sudan. The China's needs to safeguard food supply and raw materials to sustain its sizable population and industrial sectors is what motivates its land investments. However, China's operations in Africa seem to be exaggerated, especially in media reports. China's geographical priorities do not include specifically African agriculture (Buckley 2013, 431–32; Bräutigam and Zhang 2013). But it is one of the potential economical benefits for Chinese foreign initiatives. Furthermore, it mainly focuses substantial food crops like; maize, sugar and palm trees for alleviating national food security concern. Thus, it also promises a infrastructure development and job creation for host countries, such as; Ethiopia and Zambia (Buckley 2013, 444). Naturally, all these operations by China has triggered a new debate from scholars and media headlines that whether it is a new type of 'neo-colonialism' or 'mutual benefit' (Brautigam and Ekman 2012; Y. Chen 2015; Okolo and Akwu 2016; Deych 2019). Beyond this argument, it is an undeniable fact that China's agricultural land acquisitions in Africa are large and effective.

As can be seen in figure 2.3 above, another top investors United States and United Kingdom are the dominant of the land acquisition from Global North. While USA is the second country in terms of land area after Malaysia with approximately with 3.5 million ha lands; the United Kingdom is the country with the highest number of agreements in the list.

Additionally, there are also actors from Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, and other European nations. If one looks simply at the more trustworthy statistics, German and French investors also seem to have a bigger impact. Land agreements have mostly been handled by investors from North America and Europe on the African continent, as well as in South America, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Anseeuw et al. 2012, 38–39). In the light of these informations, it can be said that big western countries perpetuate its colonial legacy in their previous countries.

Another top investor countries in terms of agricultural land acquisition are the Gulf states by aiming to control food crisis in their countries. The top nations for agricultural investment are part of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Alami 2014). Saudi Arabia is the leading countries among these countries. It started “Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad” encouraging Saudis to invest in agricultural lands in foreign countries. With this intention, most of the Saudi investors both private and public, went to other part of the world for acquiring large tracts of land by expending billions of dollars (Cooke 2016). Pakistan, Sudan and Philippines are the top targeted countries by the Saudi Arabia (Chatham House 2013, 7). With King Abdullah's Saudi Investments Abroad Initiative, Saudi investors have also acquired land in Africa with promises to develop Africa's agricultural sector. They have leased a total of 1,000,000 hectares of land in Ethiopia, Morocco, Mali, Mauritania, Sudan, South Sudan and Senegal until 2014 (Bahati 2014). With all these investments, Saudi Arabia is leading the way in the purchase of foreign agricultural land for food security reasons in the Gulf countries.

Another Gulf country investor is the UAE. It is also among the countries that make the most agricultural investments after Saudi Arabia. In order to ensure food security in the UAE, it has acquired large agricultural lands from many African countries, especially Pakistan, for the cultivation of crops such as rice and wheat (Bräutigam and Zhang 2013).

The third and last place is Qatar. Qatar, through its sovereign wealth fund and different state-owned enterprises, has been operating in large-scale land acquisitions, mainly in Africa. The motivations are akin to those of the Gulf neighbors, which are focused on

food security and strategic manifoldness of assets. Key target countries include Sudan, Kenya and Australia (Hertog 2017, 21).

Investors from the Gulf states specifically keen on regions with a shared culture and religion, such as the Horn of Africa and Northern Africa, as well as Muslim-majority Asian nations like Pakistan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Specific nations have occasionally made investments in developed nations (e.g. Qatari investments in Australia) (Anseeuw et al. 2012, 38).

However, investor types are also crucial to elucidate the investors real operations under land investment. Again, according to Land Matrix (2016) descriptions, there are 4 type of investor types in global land acquisitions. These are; private companies, state-owned entities, investment funds and stock exchange-listed companies. In line with Land Matrix datas, private companies are top investors in large-scale land acquisitions in Global South with roughly %40 acquired lands which represents largest share of all land acquisitions. Their operations mostly occur in Africa and America. The “ABCD Group” in Latin America, “HADCO” by Saudi Arabia, “Cargill” and “Louis Dreyfus Company” in South America can be given as an example for well-known private companies. In the second place, there is stock-exchanged company which is occasionally invest in multiple deals. The top investor in the world is “Olam”(a Singapore-based company). They have been highly engage in food production and trading in terms of nuts, cotton, rice and coffee. Their targeted regions are the African continent and Latin America. “The fact that stock exchange-listed companies often engage in multiple land deals focusing on a single geographic area.”(Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 29; Hallam 2009a, 4).

After private and stock exchange-listed companies, Investment funds are in third place in global land acquisition as a investor type. In contrast to publicly traded firms and private enterprises, investment funds represent comparatively lower levels of regional investment. Few investment funds with bases in Europe and Africa buy land in the area. The Land Matrix shows that Asia is neither a source nor a destination for investment money, with the rare transactions in which Asian investment funds are involved focusing on land outside of Asia. Ten of the seventeen Asian acquisitions in the Land Matrix are related to

the Hong Kong-based Pacific Century Group's ownership of Calyx Agro shares. Yet, the amount of these investments is bigger than typical, almost matching the area under contract of the several European investment funds (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 29). The state-funded companies in the last place mostly cover the territories acquired from foreign countries within the scope of the food security policy of the governments of the countries affected by the 2008 food crisis. Indian and Chinese companies can be given as an example in this way. Chinese provincial governments that have operations for farming in Kazakhstan by obtaining land leases. In a similar vein, the Indian governments of Andhra Pradesh and Punjab have laid out plans to buy land and relocate Indian farmers to Kenya and Ghana, respectively. China and Vietnam's state-owned firms are the top of the concluded land deals (Nolte, Chamberlain, and Giger 2016, 30).

3.THEOROTICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Neocolonialism

3.1.1.Theory of neocolonialism (Definition, related terms, historical background)

Although the independence movements in colonial countries, especially in Africa and Latin America after the Second World War were seen as the end of colonialism, they led to the emergence of a new type of colonialism. When it looks to colonialism definition⁹ even if it has a complex meaning, In plain words, “colonialism is a form of domination-the control by individuals or groups over the territory and/or behavior of other individuals or group” (Bräutigam and Zhang 2013). However, the term ‘colonialism’ which is changed and transformed into ‘neocolonialism’ even if had been coined and used firstly by French Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in 1956, it has been known mostly by Kwame Nkrumah who is the first president of Ghana and leading proponent of Pan-Africanism. The term neocolonialism has been used in more detailed and theoretically in his most influential and important book which is *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism* that is published in 1965. He gazes at Africa in terms of the neocolonialism lens in which is composed of more complex tools and moves that enable African continent exploitation. He starts his books strikingly with “neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage” (p.xi) sentence to indicate how neocolonialism intricated functions in terms of exploitation. At the same time, this beginning also indicates that Nkrumah perspective about neocolonialism comes from Marxism and Imperialism by Vlademir Lenin and how they inextricable connected to each other.¹⁰

According to Nkrumah (1965), Contrary to the known functioning of colonialism which is works as a direct power control over state, “neocolonialist control is exercised through

⁹ For more information about “Colonialism” definition: Horvath, Ronald J. 1972. “A Definition of Colonialism.” *Current Anthropology* 13 (1): 45–57.

¹⁰ Based on Vladimir Lenin's thesis that "Imperialism is the highest stage of Capitalism", Kwame Nkrumah proposed that "Neocolonialism is the last stage of Imperialism". In order to understand their theoretical interrelationships: Mazrui, Ali A. 1997. “Nkrumah: The Leninist Czar.” *Transition*, no. 75/76: 106–26. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935397>.

economic and monetary means”(p.ix). “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside”(Nkrumah 1965,ix). This new portrait, defined by Nkrumah, is the most important indicator of the way in which globalisation and capitalism have taken hold of countries, insidiously and by various means. The colonies that have gained their independence may now be under an ‘independent flag’, but they are still under the thumb of economically and politically powerful countries.

Moreover, today, neocolonialism is not only a phenomenon practised by former colonial countries. Many multinational corporations and international financial groups, especially the US, are the new actors of neocolonialism(Nkrumah 1965, 129). Although Africa is the forefront of neo-colonialism, neo-colonialism is in practice today in many countries which do not have a colonial past. Liberia and Ethiopia can be cited as examples of this (Afisi 2018). At the same time, it is not only developed Western countries that are neo-colonial states as they once were. Countries like China, India and South Korea are today's new type of neocolonial states.

When we look at the way neo-colonialism is implemented, the first thing we see are foreign and international companies. These companies mostly operate in the territory of foreign countries under the name of ‘investment’ and ‘aid’. Especially the imperialist countries, under Western donors aid, which approach the economically underdeveloped countries under the name of aid, use the surface and underground natural resources of the country according to their own interests. In particular, international organisations such as the IMF, World Bank or other international and multinational organizations and corporations have infiltrated underdeveloped countries under the guise of loans and aid with the growth of globalisation and the impact of capitalism. Thus, western imperialist countries, which put the perception of colonialism in the past in a different guise, tried to legitimized their actions in the name of aid and investment in underdeveloped countries.

As well as foreign aid, Nkrumah emphasized - and denounced - the involvement of foreign companies within Africa, which he said sought to exploit local labour and natural resources without effectively contributing to state revenues, employment or

industrialisation (Langan 2018b, 6). Although investors claim that they help the development of the country in which the investments are made, in practice it is not an equal relationship.

Furthermore, According to Nkrumah (1965), Neocolonialism is expressed not only through economic means and instruments but also in the political, cultural, ideological, and religious fields (239). Therefore, many foreign actions can be analyzed from this perspective.

On the economic analysis of neocolonialism, at first glance, foreign capital that is given by investor countries may have seen development aid, but the fact that these investments provide unequal relationships. Even though investor countries assert that foreign capital is 'development' for underdeveloped countries, in fact, their action is exploitation and this represents neocolonialism.

Superficially, foreign investment in underdeveloped countries seems mutually beneficial, but it makes the underdeveloped country dependent on the developed country. Moreover, these investments, carried out under neo-colonialism, widen the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world instead of closing it (Nkrumah 1965,x). Looking at how this came about, however, allows us to see the connection between neocolonialism and *dependency theory*.

3.1.2. Neocolonialism and dependency theory as a world system¹¹

To begin with, dependency theory is the study of how people perceive the world. Scientists' efforts to comprehend the contemporary world system, state division, and interstate relations resulted in the development of dependency theory (Azizli 2017). This theory, originally, developed by Latin American scholars at the end of the 1960s to explain the challenges of development in that region, the idea has received a great deal of attention both in the literature and in the countries of the Third World (Ahiakpor 1985, 535).

¹¹ In this study, studying neocolonialism from the perspective of 'Dependency Theory' is important for understanding how the world system works and how countries relate to each other from a more general and comprehensive perspective. It is necessary for the sake of study to mention How 'North-South relations' are constituted in a way that neocolonialism creates an inequality and a fraction with dependency theory.

The origins of the theory can be traced back to two studies published in 1949 by Hans Singer and Paul Prebisch, who found that the terms of trade of less developed countries deteriorated over time relative to those of developed countries. While developed countries have acquired more raw materials from underdeveloped countries; underdeveloped countries have acquired less manufactured goods from developed countries (HKT 2020). This deepening gap have shown that there is literally an unequal relationship between these countries. However, Paul A. Baran's 1957 book *The Political Economy of Growth* was the first systematic discussion of the theory from a Marxist perspective.¹²

According to Paul Baran, capitalism exploits the Third World¹³ due to its intrinsic qualities. It is in the capitalist world's interest to preserve the backward world as an indispensable hinterland. These less developed countries provided raw materials and economic surplus to the developed countries (Mondal 2014). While the developed countries exploited the underdeveloped countries for raw materials and labour, they also created an economic and political dependency on the underdeveloped countries. This dependency has created a world system with the Western capitalist industrialised countries at the “core” and the developing countries at the “periphery”, which are not industrialised and need the transfer of technology and knowledge from abroad.

According to more developed ‘world systems analysis’ proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein in the early 1970s, the world is divided into core, semi-periphery and periphery. This theory analysed countries on the basis of regions and within the capitalist system and according to the division of labour of countries, which is the most advanced and generalised form of dependency theories.

‘Core’ states concentrate on higher-skilled, capital-intensive industry; they are militarily strong; and they appropriate a large portion of the global surplus (Wallerstein 1974, 400). Peripheral areas are focused on low-skill, labor-intensive industries and raw material extraction; they have weak states. Semi-peripheral areas are less reliant on the core than

¹² For more and detailed information about Dependency Theory: Namkoong, Young. 1999. “Dependency Theory: Concepts, Classifications, and Criticisms.” *International Area Review* 2 (1): 121–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/223386599900200106>.

¹³ “‘This terminology is used for a developing nation, an underdeveloped country, or a low- and middle-income country (LMIC).’”(Banton 2022)

peripheral areas; their economies are more diverse, and their nations are stronger. According to this system, the relations of countries with each other and the dependencies they create can be seen from a more general and higher perspective.

Moreover, the system formed on the axis of this dependency adds wealth to the fortunes of the western capitalist countries that form the centre, while further impoverishing the developing and underdeveloped countries. The increasing income inequality gap across the world clearly shows this.

Going back to start again, Nkrumah's neo-colonial exploitation and enrichment of western countries through neo-colonial exploitation of southern countries and the creation of a kind of unequal dependency is the essence of the world political economy system. In this respect, neocolonialism and dependency theory are in an intricate and close relationship and even inseparable parts of each other (Rao 2000, 169).

3.1.3. Agro-imperialism

The increasing interest in agricultural lands in terms of exploitation of natural resources, especially during the food crisis after 2008, has turned the land into a rising 'neocolonial product'. As Pfrimer and Barbosa (2017, 12) maintains “‘agro-imperialism’” term is mostly used for describe high-income countries’ the foreign land acquisition from developing and underdeveloped countries for growing food. This understanding, which carries the essence of neocolonialism, has created a different kind of exploitation system based on the product productivity of the land. This imperialism style primarily lies on natural resources extraction and its usage by the foreigners with the aim of economic advantage. However, until The New York Times has published “‘Is There Such a Thing as Agro-Imperialism’” this phenomenon has not been catches the eye of anyone. In the article, Rice (2009) points out the how agricultural land transforms into a colonial product, especially by rich-import countries. He also refers to food security problem and the emergence of insecurity toward the global food market for which paved the way for aggressive ‘land grabbing’ from investor countries. They are very enthusiastic about lucrative and virgin land for satisfy their appetite because of they found this food security problem as an existential threat. This perception leads to an exploitative way of acquisition in which grasping and controlling the natural resources. Al Arabi Mohammed Hamdi, an economic

adviser to the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development, supports this fact with his own words; “the only way to assure food security is to control the means of production.”(Rice 2009). From this perspective, agro-imperialism generates the ground for neo-colonialism practices in terms of economic domination and exploitation. Thus, neocolonialism is observed in regions with many and fertile lands and in countries where it is easy to acquire land in terms of its legal framework of land tenure.

Furthermore, land is not just a ground for product. It is much more than this. It means also ‘sovereignty’. In this context, generally, "sovereignty" refers to the place of ultimate authority, control, or decision-making ability over the region and its society. But in the agricultural land position, it is a little bit complex. Neoliberal policies made land ownership more private and free. Naturally, this situation has caused land ownership to bring some problems along the axis of the concept of national sovereignty.

Territorial sovereignty is mainly impacted, for example, when huge portions of the land are leased for 99 years to foreign governments—a common provision in many land agreements. Foreign state entities or private investors acquire the right to utilize the land and dispose of its agricultural products, therefore effectively weakening domestic authority over important land resources, even while they legally retain ultimate jurisdictional control over certain portions of the territory. Therefore, the government's official authority and decision-making power over the territory itself, while facilitating the occurrence of land-grabbing, also contribute to the formation of a "structural hole in the tissue of national sovereign territory."(Bernstroff 2013, 3). This directly engenders ‘foreignisation of space’.

The region where the acquisition of land by these foreigners in the world is headed is Africa. Approximately, 35 million hectares of African large-scale lands have been obtained by foreign investors last 20 years. From 2000 onwards, several tens of millions of hectares of African agricultural land area which is slightly greater than Côte d'Ivoire has been acquired by Chinese, Emirati, Lebanese, American and European investors. These land deals made with concession agreements (Toulemonde 2021). Due to the fact that African countries have a colonial past and systemic problems in their political system, the region is widely discussed in neocolonialism studies. First of all, African continent is the

most hunger region in the world. Burundi, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone have the highest score in the Global Hunger Index (GHI). Sub-Saharan Africa region where the GHI has increased since 1990 (Jamann and Arnold 2009, 5). It is an obviously irony that countries suffering from a food crisis in this region has been captured by rich-countries with the purpose of extenuate national food security concerns.

3.1.4. Neocolonialism in foreign land acquisitions

Acquisitions of agricultural land abroad, sometimes referred to as "land grabbing," are a fundamental aspect of neocolonial economic dominance. Anseeuw et al. (2012, 41) indicates that these land agreements generally entail large-scale agricultural land transfers from global poor south countries to developed countries, usually with the obtaining food or biofuels for export. This dynamic highlights how local economies are subject to the demands of global markets, continuing colonial patterns of resource exploitation.

Large-scale land acquisitions by foreigners result in economic dependencies that restrict the alternatives available for growth in the host country. These acquisitions frequently result in the host nation's dependence on the foreign investor for jobs, technology, and access to markets. Because of this reliance, the local economy is always dependent on the intentions and success of outside forces. This neocolonial understanding establishes an economic exploitation system and makes the targeted country dependent on itself in every respect. This situation provides an unequal exchange, as well as allows the land, which is a natural resource, to be easily exploited (Hall 2011, 194). This dependency mosly have seen in African countries. Most of the investors do not create mutual relationship in these land deals. In contrast, they dominate and control the process of these investments and create a fully dependence for host countries.

Another neocolonial act from investors is exerting political influence on host nations governments. They try to create exploitation through methods such as establishing relationship with the host country's government by bribery or other means, being active in determining policies in tax and land agreements, or even trying to get directly involved in domestic politics (Cotula et al., n.d.; Rao 2000; Baumer 2010).

In the same token, according to Baumer (2010, 45), neocolonialism reveals itself in foreign land acquisition in a two ways; “indirect political domination by a core power in the policy formation and operation of LDC and the establishment of unequal economic relationships between bilateral state relations.”

On the other hand, looking at the indicators of neocolonialism, unequal agreements and lack of transparency is the crucial to perceive implications of exploitation. Unequal land agreements spark off imbalances between investor country and host country. Indeed, investor countries prepare all these agreements for their advantage while these agreements provide lesser advantage or disadvantage for host countries (Cotula et al., n.d., 101–2). Moreover, lack of transparency in land deals or land acquisitions informations is another indication of neocolonialism. Most of the research on foreign land acquisition is missing and not full because of intransparent informations. These agreements are mostly made in a secretly without being shared with the public. Therefore, without any control mechanism, the interests of the host country or local landowners cannot be fully taken into account (Arezki, Deininger, and Selod 2015, 218–19). Currently, lots of the studies on the acquisition of land by foreigners are not be able to have a full impact because the information about these land agreements cannot be accessed.

Another important neocolonial indicator is the situation of farmers who have a close relationship with the land and the local people who live there. Communities displaced by governmental land appropriation have historically used property as collateral in times of financial need; however, the appropriation of customary land for large-scale farmland development leaves displaced communities without collateral to secure monetary assistance for land redevelopment, resulting in terminal losses. Farmers displaced by large-scale, capital-intensive farms or plantations with no contract farming option will struggle to recover from economic losses associated with the acquisition of their land (Robertson and Pinstup-Andersen 2010, 276). Furthermore, local farmers are working on their own land with very low salaries and poor conditions. In some circumstances, this situation might go further by exiling the local families and destroying the livelihoods.

In similar vein, indigenous communities are self-sufficient and view their lands as home, they represent multiple layers of cultural, spiritual, and social significance. As a result,

the occupants place a high value on their lands and are only willing to sell for the highest price. In addition, they only accept compassionate treatment and practices regarding environmental and social issues, as well as community involvement in projects (Eraslan 2021, 32).

On the other hand, there are also some sociopolitical consequences of the acquisition of land by foreigners. Wolford et al. (2013, 195) claims that studying land agreements requires a conflict-focused approach since they have historically been marked by violent disputes over usage and ownership. The various connotations attached to land—as a resource for production, a source of income, a place to call home or a country, a way of establishing stability, etc. form these tensions. Moreover, these transactions occasionally result in greater corruption and weaker local government institutions as foreign firms exert their influence on circumvent laws and norms. For this reason, any small spark can ignite rebellion within local peoples who are living in their land. In such a circumstance, all process might continue for local livelihoods like; authorization, entitlement, elimination from the land. Hence, “In the context of land control conflict arises not only regarding the exploitation of land and resources, but also in respect gaining the authority over land.”(Eraslan 2021, 33).

Another crucial indicator is permanent environmental degradation. Especially, large-scale agricultural land acquisitions from investors trigger natural resource degradation and cause food shortage and have a detrimental effect on local people livelihoods for today and future. In an interview with UN, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier De Schutter indicated the scale of problem with his words (2011):

The practice of “land grabbing,” exemplified by biofuel production, large-scale infrastructure projects, carbon-credit mechanisms and speculation, is threatening food security for hundreds of millions of people by imperilling small-scale producers. If countries do not face international monitoring and are not encouraged to report to their national civil societies about the progress achieved, much of the added value of the voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests will be lost.

Uncontrolled planting of uniform products in large proportions in the gaps, erosion of existing soil, destruction of natural habitat by these technological seeding methods are just some of the damages caused to nature by the land grabbing trend (Lazarus 2014, 75).

Furthermore, all these vast track land acquisitions are coming up with another problems. Land deterioration effects forests and other land environments. Than, green grabbing effects water resources like; oceans, rivers, lakes etc. It's a destructive cycle.

In this context, as Dell'Angelo et al.(2017, 122) suggests that land and water grabbing can be characterized as a critical threat to local and global sustainability in light of the worldwide agreement on the SDGs. Because it has a detrimental impact on nearby populations, traditional land users, indigenous peoples, and the environment; thereby land and water grabbing is seen as a danger to sustainable development. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Bank (WB), United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) have been tried to establish rules for credible agricultural investment (Margulis, McKeon, and Borras 2013, 4). Their initiatives are meaningful in terms of mitigating environmental risks which are composed of land grabbing, green grabbing and water grabbing stemmed from foreign land acquisitions.

The manifestations and components of neocolonialism in overseas property purchases are complex, involving aspects of the social, political, cultural, and economic spheres. This part of the research emphasizes how these acquisitions have a widespread and frequently negative effect on the host nation, perpetuating colonial practices of control and exploitation. To address these concerns and guarantee that the advantages of land acquisitions are distributed fairly, more meaningful participation from local people in the decision-making processes, fairer agreements, and increased openness are necessary.

3.2. Neoliberalism

3.2.1. Theory of neoliberalism (Definition, related terms, historical background)

In the last 20 years, "neoliberalism" term has become a highly debated and profound topic in the world. Even if it is talking too often, most of the time this term's real meaning

is missed or misused because it has bunch of meanings which are used in different situations. In addition to this, it is used mostly in a pejorative way (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, 139; Magness 2024, 3). When it was scrutinize the best and spot-on definition, this meaning can be given; “Neoliberalism is a pervasive and increasingly global ideology, associated with the favoring of free market competition and private property rights, reduction or abolishment of government intervention and expenditure, and valuation of individual “freedom of choice.” (Carlquist and Phelps 2014, 1232). From this definition, neoliberalism should not understand directly freedom of everything in global political system and political economy. Rather, it can be perceived more as a free economy model in which a certain degree of control is provided by the state. This complex structure of neoliberalism is best described precisely by David Harvey (Harvey 2005, 2):

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture.

From this perspective, neoliberalism is a system in which transforms society in a way of market-oriented structure and global economic system.

However, some of the people conflate liberalism and neoliberalism because they have similar characteristics. For this reason, Mirowski clarifies (2013) that liberalism and neoliberalism are different in that the former promotes a laissez-faire economic policy while

the latter takes a proactive stance and supports a powerful government to implement market-like changes across society.¹⁴

Looking at a brief history of neoliberalism; its history started at the beginning of 20th century. Neoliberalism intellectual soul lies on works of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. Hayek in his book “The Road to Serfdom” (2007) asserts a free-market economy ruled by the law so as to protect individual liberty and economic efficiency, and he also opposed centralized planning. In the same token, Ludwig von Mises, in “Human Action” book (2012), he gave an argument that individual actions affect the economy as a whole. People interact, make decisions, work together, compete, and exchange goods and services. He provided this explanation of the evolution of complicated market phenomena.

But the main breakthrough of neoliberalism came in the 1970s and 80s after the Second World War. The Reagan administration and Thatcher government introduced a number of neoliberal economic changes in the early 1980s in an effort to combat the persistent stagflation that both the United States and the United Kingdom had suffered during the 1970s. Until the Great Recession, neoliberal policies dominated American and British politics (Jones 2014, 6). Additionally, neoliberal policies were exported from the United States and Britain to nations in Latin America, the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, and China, where they were widely implemented. Furthermore, through the process of "structural adjustment," the World Bank and the IMF pushed neoliberal changes in several developing nations by attaching conditions to loans (Harvey 2005, 29). These structural changes have prompted to all other countries with globalization and international organization.

From this point of view, globalization and capitalism are two important concepts in order to exactly understand how neoliberalism function from a holistic perspective in terms of economically, socially and politically. Firstly, looking at the concept of globalization, it can explained in a way of a growth in cross-border resource flows and economic

¹⁴ For more information about what is differences and continuousness between liberalism and neoliberalism, please check: Gane, Nicholas. 2015. “Trajectories of Liberalism and Neoliberalism”. *Theory, Culture & Society* 32 (1): 133-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413510021>.

exchanges that results in a qualitative change in the relationships between nation-states and their respective national economies (Baker, Epstein, and Pollin 1998; Kotz 2002, 8). Regarding this definition as a basement, globalization is a key driver of neoliberal mentality throughout the world. It advocates taking down national boundaries and other obstacles to let market forces to govern the world economy (Share the World Resources 2006). Adbib (2012, 15) briefly summarize globalization as the much quicker and accelerated movement of people, commodities and services, ideas, cultures, technology, etc., which is a relatively recent phenomenon that gained steam at least from the periods of the Industrial Revolution. From this point of view, intersection of globalization and neoliberalism portrayed themselves in; trade liberalization, privatization and corporate expansion, labor market flexibility and financial deregulation (Wolf 2005; Cerny, Menz, and Soederberg 2005; Friedman 2007; Scholte 2005).

In order to promote the free movement of products and services across international borders, neoliberalism provides for the elimination of tariffs, quotas, and other trade restrictions. This fundamental idea underpins globalization by allowing nations to focus on producing areas where they have a comparative advantage, thereby boosting total economic development and efficiency. This interdependence is represented by the growth of free trade agreements and regional trade blocs, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Erkisi and Ceyhan 2019, 82–83).

By the same token, also Tan et al. (2020, 2) points out that due to the fact that neoliberalism's emphasis on privatization, public resources and services are now frequently transferred to for-profit businesses, most notably multinational corporations (MNCs) or transnational companies (TNCs). These MNCs accelerate the process of globalization by expanding internationally to take advantage of new markets and resources, all motivated by the goal of maximizing profits. MNCs' worldwide activities serve as prime examples of how economies are intertwined and how capital, products, and services are transnationally moved. Accordingly, it is a salient that neoliberal globalization have been buttressed by institutional organizations for which lay the groundwork for sustaining rapid movements of liberalization trade in global economic system.

Furthermore, neoliberal policies support also the free movement of labor market in which lowering labor protections and encouraging flexible work schedules which are provides increase of production in global market and low labor costs. Many international organizations supported this, such as the OECD and the IMF (Brodsky 1994, 58). This situation, hence, overlaps with neoliberal policies and globalization system's relationship.

Lastly, neoliberalism has also enabled financial deregulation as a feature of globalization. "Finance" or "financialization" terms are noteworthy because they dominantly shape and transform today's neoliberalism in a way that is complex and intertwined.

Before to revealing the how neoliberalism and financialization relationship shape, definition of financialization should put forth. "Financialization means the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of domestic and international economies." (Epstein 2006, 3). So all financial activities are part of financialization procession. Generally, "it deals with stocks and bonds, mortgages, financial derivatives, futures, foreign exchange, and many other types of assets, as well as making old fashioned loans" (Kotz 2002, 4). Therefore

However, as Krippner (2011, 432) points out that aiming to facilitate the free flow of capital across national borders, neoliberalism advocates for the deregulation of financial markets. Hence, portfolio investment and foreign direct investment (FDI), two essential elements of economic globalization, have increased significantly. The facilitation of capital access through the integration of global financial markets has allowed companies to invest in new technology and markets. This development had a tremendous effect on the global economy, which provides free capital movement via investment vehicles. Thus, neoliberal policies have turned the existing trade into a more dynamic and high profit margin movement in the world.

Nevertheless, this financial system also has an error sometimes and passing through some crisis. The Asian financial crisis (1997) and 2008 global financial crisis can be given as examples. Naturally, these crisis have plainly revealed the fragility of the global financial system under neoliberal politics and given some mistrust to financial investments functioning under this global economic system. (Lucarelli 2012; Lapavitsas 2013; Plys 2014).

In this regard, financialization and neoliberal transformation of global economic system, in tandem, have given a momentum for a new asset; the land.

3.2.2. Transformation of foreign land acquisition under neoliberalism and financialization

In Thomas Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd", the character of Oak was more than a farmer running a farm in the vast fields of England, he portrayed the economic development and prosperity of a nation in Victorian English agriculture with the character of an honourable, productive and land-owning farmer (Lee 2015, 109). From that time to the 21st century, the meaning of land has changed considerably. While in the 1800s, land meant something together with human beings, today it has been commodified with the profit-oriented approach brought by capitalism. Indeed, the vantage point of this process is neoliberal transformation of land in 1980.

Neoliberal policies support trade and investment liberalization while decreasing in government interference in the market. This has resulted in the loosening of prohibitions on foreign ownership and the liberalization of land ownership regulations in the context of land markets. (Erkisi and Ceyhan 2019, 83; Share the World Resources 2006). This change is fascinating because until that time, land has been seen in a perspective of sovereignty and security of nations even though land acquisition has slightly carried out in the world. Thus, even if land fixed asset, its usage has gained momentum and mobility throughout the world. Hence, a large number of nations, especially those in the Global South, have given a chance to international investors access for their land markets (Chadwick 2019, 51). Besides, land is not just solely asset alone, its product also an asset. For this reason, land market also carry food market inside as a whole. The fact that the 'land as an asset' and the its product 'food as an asset' take place in the world economic market makes the land economically profitable as a package. The crucial period when soil and food made the biggest leap in the world was the 2008 financial crisis.

In 2008, while house market blow up in US and real estate market got stuck into the stagnation, US farmland market started to, in an inconceivable way, boom. Of course, there are couple of explanations about this issue. After food prices started in 2007 and

skyrocketed in 2008, grain producing countries have suddenly imposed trade restrictions while trading with a free economy in food trade market, which led to panic of countries such as Saudi Arabia, China and South Korea that depend on food. And this has led countries dependent on food imports to aggressively attack other countries' lands to direct access to food (Grain 2008; Cotula 2009; Fairbairn 2014b, 235). So agricultural lands and farmlands get huge attention from not just only from governments but also international investors. Especially, some famous billionaires, like George Soros, are investing farmland with enormous numbers and tracks.

“George Soros, the billionaire hedge fund manager who has acquired over 1 million acres of farmland in Argentina and owns over 20% of the South American farm company Adecoagro.” (Meriçli 2022). Another well-known billionaire investor who understands the benefits of agricultural investment is Bill Gates, who has amassed 270,000 acres of farmland spread over 19 US states. The Gates Foundation founded the Bill & Melinda Gates Agricultural Innovations LLC, sometimes known as Gates Ag One, in January 2020 (Meriçli 2022). The purchases of land by billionaires to such a large extent also show how gigantic of the international land market is. In the business world, all of a sudden, focus immediately laid from real estate markets to land markets. The volatility of global financial system, pushed the investors for searching long term and stabilize investment areas, such as; land market. End of the day, foreign land acquisition find a place itself within “agricultural investment”.

Yet, the real and secret igniter behind this boom of land market is financialization of the land and thereby, reconstruction of farmland investments. Fairbairn (2014a, 4) explains this transformation that in the economy, land has two functions: it is a necessary tool for production, but it also serves as a store of value and generates wealth via appreciation. Put otherwise, it is an asset that creates income on the side. Despite the fact that speculators have always found farmland to be somewhat appealing financially, the financialization of the world economy starting in the 1970s created new opportunities for farmland to be integrated into financial networks. A rising interest in tangible, productive assets is combined with financialization as the underlying rationale of the present agricultural investment surge.

The concentration of financial capitalism on agricultural lands brought with agri-business sector which is composed of multi-players from the land market. Under the name of “Agricultural Investment”, agri-business world started to operate on the different countries with the aim of making profits from the land and food. This cogwheel, which is fed by the owners of capital with large investments, has created a large land sector with its complex structure and profit margins. In order to perceive entirely this agri-business system, their dynamics and components’ relationship should be understood concurrently. In **Figure 3.1**, chain of farmland investment and relationship of components is explicitly demonstrated.

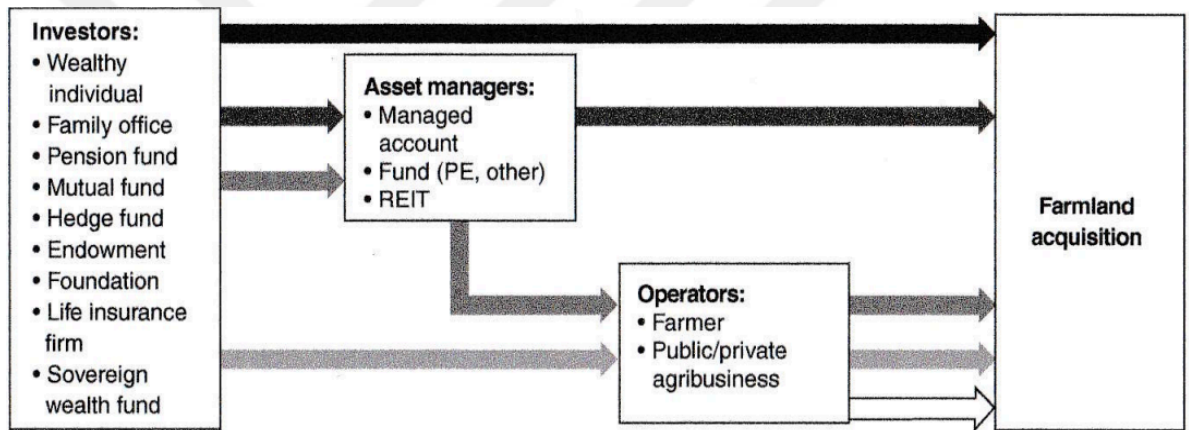


Figure 3.1: Chain of Farmland Investment and Operation of Agri-business

Source: Fairbairn, Madeleine. 2014. P.241 “Just another asset class?: Neoliberalism, finance, and the construction of farmland investment”.

As it can be seen in **Figure 3.1**, main tenet of agricultural investment is investors. These investors composed of different groups of investments; for instance; wealthy individuals, pension and hedge funds or firms and foundations. These diversification explicitly indicates that agricultural land investment is considered profitable and attractive by various investors. Secondly, asset managers are also crucial in terms of determine the investment vehicles and create portfolio. These enclose managed account, Fund and REIT. Another indispensable component of this chain is operators because they are in the field

and well aware of local factors. In a nutshell, they are in one-on-one contact. This makes them decisive in this agricultural investment chain. These operators are mostly farmers and public or private agribusinesses. Besides, sometimes investors act as an asset managers and also asset managers can be investor as well.

From this point of view, there is a monopoly of agricultural investment by big companies, groups or corporations when the first time mentioned till today.(Crocombe 1987; Lauck 1996). This monopolization of agricultural lands by big investor groups has a detrimental effect in a multiple way. For instance, it feeds and sustains inequality in economic order over the world, destroying cultural and social heritage in land environment, environmental degradation so on and so forth (Lauck 1996, 208). However, scrutinizing for prominent monopoly powers in global agriculture sector, there are big groups and companies which are dominate the agricultural land and food market.

According to Hungry for Profit report (Kiezebrink and Hietland 2024), the five largest agricultural commodity merchants saw a threefold increase in earnings over the previous three years. Staples including grain, corn, soy, and sugar are monopolized worldwide by ADM, Bunge, Cargill, COFCO, and Louis Dreyfuss Company (ABCCD). Because of their ability to control costs and prices, they have been able to make excessive profits and have contributed to inflation. Between 70 and 90 percent of the world's commercial grain trade is controlled by ADM, Bunge, COFCO, Cargill, and Louis Dreyfuss Company combined. These companies are highly vertically integrated, controlling a significant portion of food supply chains, collaborating closely through joint ventures and shared investments, and gathering copious amounts of data on harvests, prices, and political developments worldwide(Kiezebrink and Hietland 2024).

Consequently, the easy buying and selling of land by foreigners with neoliberal policies after the 1980s in the world has created a large land market. The food crisis, especially after the 2008 Financial Crisis, increased the interest in agricultural land and turned land and food into a new economic commodity (Fairbairn 2014a; 2014b; McMichael 2012; Chadwick 2019). The financialisation of land and food has shaped the agri-business market and caused a lot of speculation. Many researchers and observers are currently debating whether this booming agricultural investment is a bubble or not (Saitone and Sexton 2007;

Gutierrez 2013; Baldos and Hertel 2014). At the end of the day, agricultural land will continue to be of interest to investors and will continue to be a growing investment in the world market in every way.

3.3. Neocolonialism or Development Opportunity?

Until Grain organization published “Seized: The 2008 landgrab for food and financial security” article, there had not been a highly interest towards foreign land acquisition all over the world. But the “Seized” term rang the danger bells, and in light of the Grain’s article on “land grabbing, the phenomenon has begun to be discussed (Grain 2008). This term is mostly used in a bad way in the media, and it tries to get people’s attention to this foreign land acquisition. This discussion also ignites scholars to study on what is going on in the world in terms of foreign land acquisition and started a debate also in the literature.

Actually, what the experts and scholars who are studying in this field, substantially curious and suspicious about this huge track of foreign land acquisitions all over the world is this land acquisitions whether economic development or a new type of exploitation.

There is, therefore, a deep debate in the literature as to whether this foreign land acquisition is neocolonialism or a development opportunity (win-win or mutual gain)(von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009; Robertson and Pinstup-Andersen 2010; Adbib 2012; Cuffaro, Giovannetti, and Monni 2013; Harrigan 2014; Goetz 2015; Lungu 2017; Deych 2019; Nolte and Ledermann 2022; Albers and Muhammed 2023).

The region where this debate is most conducted is the African continent. Naturally, given the presence of the colonial past of the African continent and the acquisition of land by foreigners today (especially considering that governments are also involved), the African countries are the region that sells the most land (Bahati 2016). Land concerns are sensitive because they evoke memories of the "bad old days" of colonialism and abusive plantations, particularly when large-scale transfers are made to foreign interests (Cotula et al., n.d., 68). Therefore, most of the studies are rolling around African continent.

Cotula et al. (n.d., 68–69) asserts that in his prominent report in this field, (all data collected from Sudan, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mozambique and Tanzania.) “‘Land grab or development opportunity?’” in terms of neocolonialism a significant obstacle to both land purchase and the larger government-to-government agreement that may accommodate individual agreements is a lack of openness. Observers generally believe that discussions and agreements take place behind closed doors. Private agreements exist between host governments and foreign or domestic investors. Several data sources, like the national land registration in some jurisdictions, may be available to the public, but generally just for a restricted amount of information on completed transactions. In several cases, even getting access to the land registry for this research proved to be difficult. On the other hand, “‘international land deals may constitute a development opportunity in recipient countries by bringing capital and know-how, creating employment and developing infrastructure’”(n.d., 81). To sum up, foreign land acquisition’s assessment hinges on land deals terms and conditions. If the deal is so opaque and transparent in terms of its terms, it gives trust to both host and investor countries.

In the same way, in Albers and Muhammed study on Ghana (2023, 1) they rigorously demonstrate that there is an imbalanced distribution of power in the African region because the legal frameworks give precedence to foreign entities over the rights and well-being of impacted local populations. Most of the time, the projects' short-term benefits and the loss of local residents' means of subsistence are concealed by the jobs they provide. Unlike it is a development opportunity for Ghana, it is literally neocolonial activity.

As much of it, China has been rising as a dominant investor in the African continent. That’s why in last 20 years, China is closely watched in terms of land acquisition activities by the scholars and experts (Bräutigam and Zhang 2013; Y. Chen 2015; Okolo and Akwu 2016; Deych 2019). Deych (Deych 2019) asserts that, when looking at the economical perspective, it can be avidly seen that China is coming with big investments in to Africa. Massive infrastructure initiatives, such as building new railroads and highways, improving aviation communications, developing new energy projects, building industrial parks, and building seaports in coastal nations, are all part of China's agenda While all these investments indicates the opportunity for economic development (Deych 2019, 63), such accusations such as asserting that China breaches human rights and disobeys

environmental laws in an effort to seize as many natural resources as it can, all in the name of furthering its own interests with neocolonial intentions. In the midst of all these controversies, China's biggest advantage is that it does not carry the imperial past that European countries carry in Africa (Hallam 2009b). Moreover, the fact that it has been keeping its investment promises to African countries as quickly as possible indicates that it was making a win-win initiative rather than being neocolonialism.

Additionally, China's land acquisitions from African countries have also examined under "soft power" implementation on land and natural resources in which also represents Beijing's power tendency towards Africa (Okolo and Akwu 2016, 46). This approach differentiates China from Western developed countries which they have an direct and dominant power relationship on Africa for centuries. Due to China's different power relationship with Africa, its land acquisitions named as "South-South development relationship" or "win-win" (CHAN 2018, 1). As can be seen, it seems that China's land acquisitions tend to be read in a positive way in its relationship with Africa and their mutual economic benefits.

Another instance from neocolonialism or development opportunity debate is EU's agricultural land acquisitions from Africa. This differentiates from a little bit China, because African continent and EU relationship's history old and more complex than China (Langan 2018a, 53). Lungu (2017, 8) elucidates that while European Union agricultural land relations with Africa can not directly run away from their colonial past, they might create balanced partnership with institutional continuity and centralisation for agricultural development. This system can be applied for the aim of African partners to strengthen their position in terms of power dynamics and fully benefit from the EU's preferential trade framework. Overall, in EU's circumstances, its relative power superiority over African economy, specifically agriculture sector, insofar as balanced in agricultural land sector. In this point of view, the fact that every economic relationship depicts itself power relations and thus, neocolonial basement is an inevitable.

However, when making a comparison between economic development and neocolonialism, we need to talk about exactly which indicators and applications. Agricultural land acquisitions from foreign investors can be seen as an opportunity in terms of increased

investment. Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick (2009, 2) presents that proponents of these investments highlight a variety of potential advantages for the impoverished in rural areas, such as the development of rural infrastructure, the creation of a sizable number of employment both on and off farms, and the building of facilities that will lessen poverty, including schools and health clinics. Furthermore, resources for innovative agricultural techniques and technology, future stability in world prices, and enhanced food crop output that might serve both domestic and foreign customers. On the other hand, neocolonialism portrayed itself in the land acquisition as a land deals creation and implementation. Notwithstanding the fact that certain land-lease agreements include provisions for investments in rural development, it's possible that the parameters of these agreements favor the investors more than the local populations. (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 2; Cuffaro, Giovannetti, and Monni 2013). In these negotiations, the foreign company has the upper hand, particularly when its goals are backed by the host government or local elites. When dealing with such strong national and international entities, smallholders who are being forced off their property are unable to properly negotiate conditions that benefit them, nor can they enforce agreements if the foreign investor defaults on the promise of jobs or local services (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, 2). Even, the end of these practices can go up to a regional conflict. (such as the acquisition of land by Daweco companies in Madagascar).

One of the most important studies in this debate comes from the article by Nolte and Ledermann. Their article is “Are foreign land acquisitions the latest form of neo-colonialism in Africa.” In this study, Nolte answers yes to this question, while Ledermann answers no. In this way they offer the reader a comparative analysis with explanations of their answers. Firstly, Nolte (2022, 80) asserts that land acquisitions in Africa definitely a neocolonialism or at least it has neocolonial aspects. She explains his assertion mainly in four aspects. First indicator of the neocolonialism is that lack of transparency in land deals and land operations. There is a few data and this makes all these land acquisitions are so suspicious (Nolte and Ledermann 2022, 83) Second parameter is that most of the investors are coming from wealthy European and North American countries. This undoubtedly sustains power imbalances between host and investor countries. So, in such a relationship exploitation from powerful countries is an inevitable (Nolte and Ledermann 2022, 84).

The other element is the implementation of projects. Land tenure system affects all land acquisition process and system because of it limits or gives a movement area for investors (Cotula 2013).

In the end, Nolte asserts that most of the land acquisition in Africa is a neocolonialism. She highlights that not every land acquisition is a neocolonialism but it depends on the each single land projects and how they operate.

On the other hand, Ledermann (2022, 91) pinpoints that foreign investments to agricultural land is a big chance for host countries. The distinctive point of these investments is that, the acquired lands should be middle-sized farms, not large-scale, thereby small farmers can benefit easily from foreign investments. According to Ledermann, crucial point in these investments should be secure land titles. Thus, there will be incentive from farmers to taking and keeping investments in their land (Nolte and Ledermann 2022, 92). With this chance, they can easily reach trust source informations, knowledge and technical informations from foreign investors and also they can harvest their products to them with competitable prices (Hall 2011). From this perspective, foreign land acquisitions can boost and rejuvenate the agricultural sector in host countries. It should be keep in mind that without regulation and arrangements of land title and legal framework of land acquisition from foreigners, neocolonialism can be revealed implicitly and this situation might deteriorate host countries' land coherence.

As a result, neocolonialism and development opportunity debate has been arguing among scholars in the literature to allaying ambiquities in the foreign land acquisition in the Global South countries and they try to shedding light on this hot discussion with their studiyings. Especially, statement of “land grabbing” in media headlines have triggered a lot of speculation about this phenomenon and made big accusations towards land investors and also some governments in a pejorative way. Because of this reason, scholars and experts who are studying this field have a glance on most debatable area.

Yet, the problematic part of this debate is the lack of information about foreign land acquisitions in the countries. Most of the land deals are not transparent and no one can reach data or numbers about the details of land acquisitions, totally. For this reason, the discussion remains in a somewhat vicious circle. In order to make the discussion more scientific

and satisfactory, it is now essential to obtain data on this land grabbing around the world. On the other hand, debate has been carried out mostly around African region's countries. Indeed, that is understandable. Because most of the large-scale land acquisitions happen in Africa and Africa's colonial past and abundance of natural resources have put this region center on this discussion naturally. Besides, most of the time, there is a tendency to discuss neocolonialism on countries with a colonial past. But neocolonialism, as Nkrumah pointed out, can also take place in any country without a colonial past. Because this concept is about intentions and actions and has its own practices. Neocolonial studies should therefore also deal with other countries in the field of foreign land acquisition. However, the acquisition of land by foreigners in the world has increased significantly in developing countries in recent years (Grain 2008; Hallam 2009a). With the acquisition of African lands on a large scale already, foreign investors have turned their eyes to developing countries that have fertile lands and already foreigners have started buying land from these countries. Especially Eastern European and Southeast Asian countries are major countries in this acquisitions. So far, in the "neocolonialism or development opportunity" literature, there is no any examination of developing countries. In order to address this deficiency and to emphasize that the discussion should now be held especially in newly emerging developing countries, Turkey will be examined as a case study in this dissertation.

4.METHODOLOGY

The fact that the main subject of this study is the field of International relations, which is a subunit of Social Sciences, makes this study a qualitative research. “It is exploratory, and seeks to explain ‘how’ and ‘why’ a particular social phenomenon, or program, operates as it does in a particular context. It tries to help us to understand the social world in which we live, and why things are the way they are.”(Mohajan 2018, 24). The fact that the subject of this thesis is the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey has made it inevitable to use the qualitative method. In this sense, the case analysis method combined with the qualitative method was applied in this study. While Turkey is included as a case study in its own right, companies that sell land to foreigners in Turkey are also a case study. The biggest reason why Turkey was chosen as a case is that land sales to foreigners have increased recently. Especially agricultural lands. This has also caused public speculation. From this point of view, the necessity of holding a projection to Turkey was born.

Firstly, the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey was investigated by content analysis. Content analysis has been preferred to access information due to the lack of quantitative data on this issue in Turkey. A research technique called content analysis is used to find specific words, themes, or concepts in a given set of qualitative data, or text. Researchers can measure and examine the occurrence, significance, and connections of particular words, topics, or concepts by using content analysis (Columbia University 2016).

In content analysis, local newspaper sources(Sözcü, Anadolu Agency(AA), Daily Sabah, Economist, Cumhuriyet) and NGO’s reports and websites (GRAIN, Land Matrix Data, FAO, IFPRI and farmlandgran.com) are used to analyze first-hand information about foreign land acquisition in Turkey. General information was obtained from these sources by content analysis. At the same time, official sites of Turkey; Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre and sites such as TIGEM were also examined within the scope of this study.

Apart from these, official documents on the websites of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, especially the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre, have been

used to get information about the general and legal process of land acquisition by foreigners in Turkey. All of these sites and related documents on these sites have been examined by content analysis method. But mostly local news sources were used.

After the media coverage of the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey, the field was launched in order to conduct a deeper research. The sale of land to foreigners in Turkey, which is the main subject of the study, was investigated through "agricultural investment companies." In this context, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 agricultural investment companies. First of all, the reason why agricultural investment companies are chosen is that they are institutions that make land sales to foreigners one-on-one. They have been selected for the reason that they have one-on-one contact with buyers and sellers and provide the fastest and most efficient information in this field. While 7 of these 11 companies are of foreign origin, 4 of them are of Turkish origin. (see Appendix A). These companies were collected through social media applications (Linkedin, Twitter, Google web search) and by asking the interviewees.

The biggest reason for choosing the semi-structured interview method is that it is crucial to understand how companies evaluate the sale of land to foreigners along with basic questions. The questions are usually "how did your agricultural investment project come about? Who are the most buyers? which regions sold the most? What are the differences between Turkey's land sales to foreigners from other countries? questions such as (see Appendix B) were asked to the interviewees. Thus, an attempt was made to reach the overall picture in Turkey.

The interviews are recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The recorded interviews were deciphered and thematically analyzed by the author herself. All interviews conducted in Turkish were translated into English by the author. The information obtained from here has made a great contribution to the study.

After the general view of the acquisition of land to foreigners in Turkey was obtained, the main controversial part was examined with a theoretical approach to whether it was an exploitation. In connection with this; neocolonial and noel liberal theories were used in the study. For any research, the theoretical framework serves as the cornerstone around which all knowledge is built, both literally and symbolically. It provides the framework and

backing for the study's justification, problem description, goal, importance, and research questions. The methodology and analysis—and most significantly, the literature review—are grounded, or anchored, by the theoretical framework (Grant and Osanloo 2015, 12). Starting from this point, the study tried to understand whether these agricultural lands acquired by foreigners are a neocolonialism or a neoliberal economic development opportunity. For that reason, theoretical framework constitutes the essence of the study.

When we look at the limitations of this study, it can be said that two problems are the main ones. The lack of sufficient information and data about the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey is the biggest limitation of the study. Secondly, it is the number of companies interviewed. Within the scope of the study, 11 companies were interviewed. These are the limitations of this thesis study.

5. FOREIGN LAND ACQUISITION IN TURKEY UNDER “AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENT COMPANIES”: NEOCOLONIALISM OR NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

5.1. Turkey's Outlook in Global Land Acquisition

While global land acquisition in the world has continued to increase at a great pace since 2008, according to the latest data from Land Matrix, foreign land acquisition in developing countries has overtaken Africa for the first time. Turkey is one of these developing countries. When we look at Turkey's place in this "land grabbing" trend, it is seen that it is given as a country “land grabbed” not an “land grabber.” According to GRAIN data (2011), as demonstrated below in **Figure 5.1**, Turkey is the target country for investors in terms of foreign land acquisitions. In accordance with this demonstration, again according to GRAIN's 2008 report, it was part of the targeted developing countries in the “land grabbing” trend in the world. It is also valid for Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick's policy brief report for IFPRI, Turkey is part of the target countries in the the global land acquisition. In the news reflected in the media headlines, it has also been stated that foreigners, especially investors in consider Turkey as a target country (Hürriyet 2011; Hürriyet Daily News 2010; Ateş 2017).

However, Turkey is not only a country whose lands are sold in foreign land acquisition, it is also a country that has initiatives to potentially grab land from other countries (land grabber). This fact has been explicitly seen in media news headlines and also in also official data site “Land Matrix.” When we look at the countries where Turkey has signed a territorial agreement, it is seen that it is turning to the African continent, as many other investor countries do.

Turkey's first agricultural land purchase initiative has started in Sudan. Since 2014, Turkey has been preparing to grow a sizable amount of the agri-food it needs on land it leases from Sudan. The "Agreement on Bilateral Agricultural Cooperation and Partnership

Between Turkey and Sudan" was signed by Sudan and Turkey on April 28, 2014 (AA 2014). Although this agreement has been tried many times since it has failed (AA 2022a).But it is important in terms of reflecting Turkey's goal of acquiring territory in Africa.

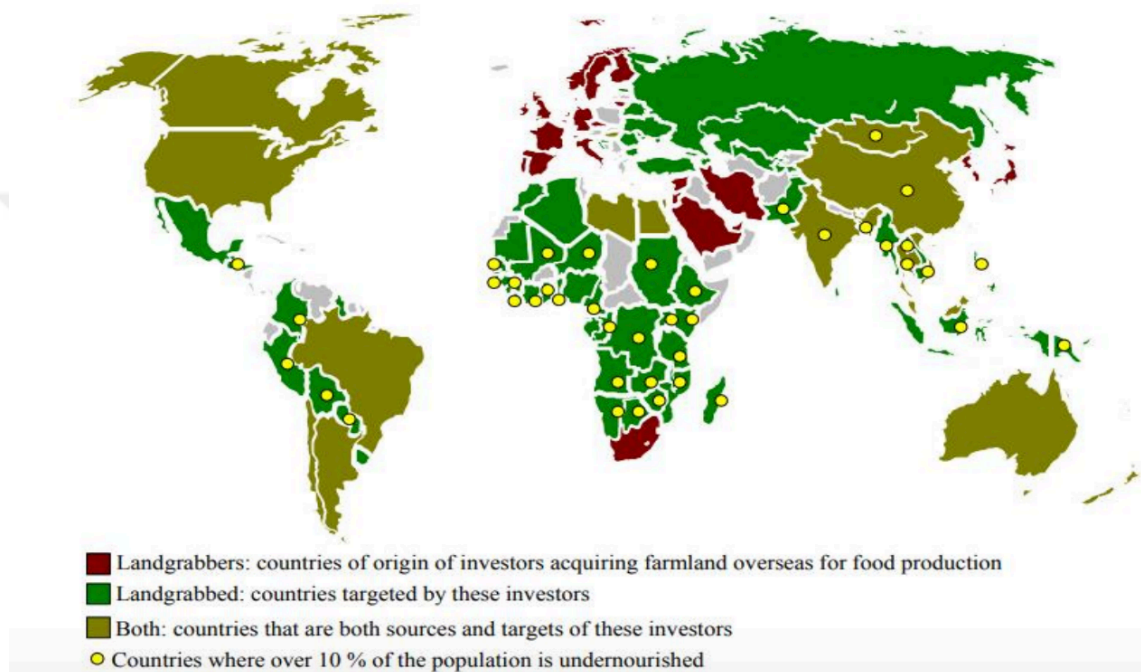


Figure 5.1 : Geographical Indications of Global Land Acquisition

Source: Grain. 2011. "Land Grabbing and the Global Food Crisis - Presentation". 11 2011. <https://grain.org/en/article/4164-land-grabbing-and-the-global-food-crisis-presentation>.

Following Sudan, Turkey has also leased land in another African country, Niger. According to Independent Türkçe news; turkish officials announced that fodder crops production is planned here (Elmacioğlu 2022). Based on Land Matrix data,the first major step taken at the government level was the agreement on the acquisition of land from Madagascar. In the same way, the Korean Daweoo Company's attempt to acquire land from

Madagascar ended in a big fiasco, while Turkey's negotiations on this agreement ended just as they began.

Moreover, Turkey has also made an agricultural deals with 6 different African countries. These are Congo, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Guinea, Rwanda and Gambia. In 2017, Turkey's Food, Agriculture, and Livestock Minister Faruk Celik said: “African continent holds one-fourth of the whole arable land in the world. That is why it is not possible to ignore the agricultural potential in Africa.”(AA 2017). Furthermore, Turkey is also planning lease farmland from Latin American countries; such as Venezuela and Eastern Europe for instance Ukraine (Hürriyet Daily News 2022). All these developments indicate that Turkey is differentiating from other developing countries in the global land acquisition trend in the world. It draws a profile of a country that is both ‘land grabbed ’ and trying to rent or buy land on the African continent, as other major colonial powers have done. There is only one country that is “Brazil as a country that is included in all these categories, allows both land grabbing in its own country and has grabbed lands in various African countries.”(Özkesen 2023, 24).

As a result, Turkey has a more complex and varied outlook in the global land acquisition trend, unlike many developing countries. Its appearance is an indication of how aggressively and uncontrollably land acquisition is now growing in the global land-grabbing trend.

Yet, there is no general and detailed study on the sale of Turkey's own lands, especially agricultural lands, to foreigners. In the next section, information will be given about the sale of agricultural land to foreigners in Turkey as a result of the research conducted on this topic.

5.2.) Foreign Land Acquisition in Turkey under “Agriculture Land Investment”

5.2.1.) Turkey’s agricultural outlook

Turkey is one of the top ten agricultural economies in the world, with over a quarter of the workforce working in the sector and half the nation encompasses of agricultural land. Turkey is the world's largest producer of apricots and hazelnuts and a major producer of

wheat, sugar beets, milk, chicken, cotton, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables (International Trade Administration 2024).

When looked at the last statistics, according to the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM), turkey's agricultural exports reached a record \$9.3 billion in the first quarter of 2024, up 8.6% from the same period the previous year. This achievement, which indicates 14.6% of the country's overall exports, demonstrates the industry's resiliency in the face of geopolitical unrest and problems with the world food supply (Güzyurdu 2018).

Different export categories had distinct growth rates: fresh fruits and vegetables rised by 2.6%, while grains, pulses, oil seeds, and their products increased by 7%. Notably, dried fruits and their derivatives soared by 29.9%, while other fruit and vegetable products increased by 28.9%. Germany and the US have become crucial markets for Turkish agricultural exports (Daily Sabah 2024).

As it can be seen, Turkey's agricultural potential is a really high among all other countries. For this reason, with the increasing need for land and agricultural products in the world in recent years, Turkey is an robust market in this regard. In accordance with Turkey's this agriculture potential, FDI investments for this sector is an another factor for Turkey's agricultural development. After 2008 food crisis, most of the countries which are the suffering from food shortage have searched for arable lands for mitigate their food security problems in their home country. Hence, land market has gained weight again in the world. This also starkly effected FDI's for agriculture sector. Because of the global food crisis, particularly in 2007 and 2008, foreign direct investments, which have been trending upward globally, have also been trending above in the agricultural and food industries. Moreover, Turkey's potential in the food and agriculture sectors must be taken into consideration while assessing the country's suitability for foreign direct investment (Fidan and Acartepe 2019, 1).

Unfortunately, there is no sufficient information about FDI flows to Turkey's agricultural sector yet. Nevertheless, there are consensus among scholars in the literature that Turkey has a relevant growth in agriculture sector according to past years (Fidan and Acartepe 2019; Ateş 2017). Each year foreign investors are becoming more and more interested in

the agricultural sector in Turkey(Citak 2018). In the similar vein, this situation has affected the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners in Turkey in recent years.

5.2.2 Investor countries and their motivation

While Turkey has been leading the way in real estate sales to foreigners for many years (Royal White Company 2022), the sale of agricultural land to foreigners has experienced a meaningful increase in recent years compared to past (Aydınlık 2024). In parallel with this, foreign companies making agricultural investments in Turkey have also started to be interested more.

This unexpected increase in the sale of agricultural lands to foreigners in Turkey has started to take place in the news headlines. CHP Niğde Deputy Ömer Fethi Gürer, who wants to clarify this discussion, left a question proposal to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Minister of Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Murat Kurum shared datas which are taken by General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre (Sözcü 2023).

Sözcü newspaper shows that 219 thousand 309 square metres of agricultural land sold to foreigners in 2018-2023. Only in 2022, 5 million 219 thousand 309 square meters of agricultural land were sold to foreigners in Turkey. It was stated that 765 foreign nationals bought agricultural lands including fields, vineyards and gardens. The top ten countries in terms of foreign purchases are given in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1: The top 10 countries that receive agricultural land (2018-2023)

Country	Area (square metres)
1.Jordan	984.611
2.Palestine	656.962
3.Israel	519.158
4.Saudi Arabia	385.955
5.Qatar	379.519
6.Yemen	280.744
7.Egypt	245.318
8.Lebanon	231.659
9.USA	196.8
10.Iraq	195734

Source: This table created by the author with the datas which are obtained by General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre

As it can be seen clearly, Jordan, Palestine and Israel are on the top 3. But overall, the list composed of mostly Middle Eastern countries. Indeed, this is not surprise because MENA region countries are not just customers of agricultural land but they are also big investor general real estate in Turkey (AA 2022b).

However, In order to provide a deeper explanation of the discussions about which countries most of the foreigners who buy agricultural land in Turkey come from, 11 interviews were conducted with companies that sell land to foreigners under the name of "agricultural investment" in Turkey within the scope of this thesis. According to the information obtained from the interviewees, **the Gulf countries are the leading countries that receive agricultural lands in Turkey. These countries are Saudia Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Bahrain, UAE, the US, England, Canada, and Spain.** One interviewee, a Lebanese-born agricultural investment company CEO stated how the Gulf countries flocked to Turkey and for what purpose they intended as follows:

But the **Saudis are coming**. You will see in this year, 2023, 2024, too many Saudis, big companies will come. I know this. But they are not like us. They come with very big projects, huge projects, not the small They are coming. They are now focusing on doing something in agriculture here. Because you know Sahara. In Saudi Arabia, they cannot produce everything. So now, they will see that Egypt and Turkey are the ideal land for them if they own and to make wheat and whatever. They are not for trading. **This for their security, for food crisis.**

Gulf countries that have acquired land for food security purposes in global land acquisition have identified Turkey by taking a new target. Another Qatari-based agricultural investment company owner emphasized the same intention:

Because in countries like Qatar, since there is no agricultural work there, we are looking at what we can produce here to send there. Since there are no agricultural activities such as greenhouse cultivation or viticulture in Qatari countries, Turkey came to our mind by looking at the countries that grow it.

As clearly identified in the interviews, Gulf countries are among the leading buyers of agricultural land in Turkey. And these purchases are fuelled by the food crisis in the Gulf.

Another interviewee a Turkish-based company's CEO also stated that:

In other words, if we make a production of up to 2 tons and 400 kilograms in America, I predict that we will already be a country capable of meeting the food of all the countries around us. We can meet the food and drink demands of developed countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, that is, countries with very high rich income levels.

On the other hand, investors from western wealth countries are also increasing such as; US, England and Canada in Turkey. The CEO of one of the Turkish-based agricultural investment companies operating in Manisa stated that there have been huge increases in agricultural investment in Turkey on the basis of both domestic and foreign companies as well as individuals. He said that some of the major South Korean companies were among them.

5.2.3.Targeted cities in Turkey by investors

The cities where foreigners buy the most agricultural land in Turkey are listed in table 5.2 below:

Table 5.2: The most targeted cities for agricultural land by foreigners in 2022

Cities	Area (square metres)
1.Konya	772.263
2.İstanbul	583.708
3.Bilecik	452.035
4.Manisa	332.496
5.Sakarya	283.710
6.Kırklareli	262.852
7.Eskişehir	237.376
8.Denizli	230.970
9.Bursa	225.321
10.Kocaeli	195.830

Source: This table created by the author with the datas which are obtained by General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre

As it can be seen in Table 5.2, Konya is at the beginning of the cities where the most land is taken. Konya is also the city with the largest area in Turkey. It is followed by Istanbul,

Bilecik, Manisa and Sakarya concurrently. In the interviews conducted in parallel, the cities that received the most agricultural land were listed as follows: **Manisa, Uşak, İstanbul, Bursa, Trabzon, İzmir, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Malatya, Sakarya, Bilecik, Denizli, Balıkesir, Kırklareli, Muğla and Antep.** Among these, Antalya, İzmir, Manisa, Bursa, Bursa, İstanbul and Mersin are more suitable for agricultural investments.

5.2.4. Most planted crops

The most common crops grown on these agricultural lands acquired by foreigners are as follows: walnut, almond, olives, mushrooms, fodder, peanuts, apples, pomegranates and blueberry. Of these, walnuts, almonds and olives are among the most preferred ones.

One of the interviewee as a General Manager of Turkish-based company points out that walnut and olives are so popular in Turkey. With his own words:

In our region, for example, there are many companies with walnut land. People invest in such things. Some of them make walnuts, some make cherries, some make almonds. They make pistachios. So there is also this about agriculture. You know, it is the biggest dream of many people, I lived in İstanbul for a long time, to own a piece of agricultural land in Turkey. Especially there is a fondness for olives. There is a very serious interest for olives. Olives are also worth money this year.

From this perspective, olives and walnut dominates the planting market in food. The manager of the Qatar-based company who was interviewed stressed that these planted products were sent to Qatar, especially to their own countries. He said that products such as peas and beans are planted on the territory of Turkey, then canned and sold to Middle Eastern countries, especially Qatar, under the brand name "Anatolia". And at the same time he added as follows: **“The food industry never dies, it may sleep, but it doesn't die.”** Another agricultural land company owner from the South-East supported this with the following remarks: **“The coronavirus and the food crisis have shown how important 'food' is and that it is a sector that needs to be further developed.”**

When the interviewed company owners were asked whether they mostly sell the products they produce in the domestic market or in the foreign market, **mostly all of them said that they sell them in the foreign market.**

5.2.5 Why Turkey and how it differs from other countries?

Turkey stands in a different position compared to other countries in the world where agricultural investments are made. First of all, Turkey differs from African countries. While in African countries there have been large-scale land acquisitions; in Turkey there have been small-scale land acquisitions. Likewise, while land acquisitions in Africa are carried out on the basis of states, in Turkey they are mostly carried out through intermediary companies or companies formed by personal initiatives or large corporate groups may run a company branch in Turkey.

On the other hand, Turkey stands in a different position from European countries. Compared to European countries, it is one of the countries with the most fertile lands in the world. One of the interviewee Turkish-owned company manager highlighted that “The world knows that Turkey is indispensable in agriculture.”

In an interview with a Turkish CEO who runs a company in Manisa, he described the characteristics of Turkey as follows:

Turkey is one of the best countries in the world for agricultural investment. First of all, climate. The most important thing is climate. We are an agricultural country. Our ancestors and grandfathers have always been engaged in agriculture. We are a country that knows agriculture really well. And water resources. OK, we are not a very rich country in terms of water resources. Some regions are a big problem in terms of water. But in the end, Turkey is an ideal place for agricultural investment in the real sense, after the selection of water, climate and labour force is done well and investment is made in a place.

When we look at what the interviewee said, it is seen that Turkey has a long-established agricultural history. Especially, its location on the climatic zone where the four seasons are experienced and its possession of fertile lands makes it a favorite of foreigners in agricultural investment. In addition to this, these features are also emphasized by another Turkish company owner in the same way.

Turkey is a favourable geography for agriculture. Above all. People who already come are more attractive because they live in the desert. **In terms of climate, Turkey is actually a good climate.** Since it has good seasons in summer, winter and spring. Therefore, Turkey is a preferred geography especially in fruit growing.

The climate that Turkey has is the feature that holds its hand the strongest in agricultural investment. Sometimes foreigners who want to acquire land in Turkey can buy agricultural land only because it has a good climate and four seasons. Sometimes, they can evaluate these lands they have acquired as summer cottages or farms.

The CEO of the Kuwait-origin agricultural investment company, who was one of the other interviewees, explained why Turkey is preferred as follows:

Turkey, because near our region, it's Middle East, you know, it's between. **Geography.** From Gulf area, and the European country, and Turkey is near us. So it's one, one reason. Any plan between here and any European country, two hours or three hours. True. The culture, it's the same between Arabic people and Turkish people. Some difference, but it's little difference. And the religion, because the Muslims here and here and there, so the people found a lot of different between. The, it the maybe, they can't find a lot of different between the culture, their culture and the Arabian country, or, and here. So it's good, good, good region or country to invest on it.

According to what interviewee explained here, the geography of Turkey is very pivotal. Due to the fact that it is close to Europe and located just below the geography of the Arab countries makes it a transit country. Especially the fact that the man emphasized 'You are in Europe in two hours to board the plane' emphasizes the importance of Turkey both in terms of speed and convenience. On the other hand, the emphasis on the cultural similarity of Turkey and Arab countries is very crucial. The similarity of features such as religion and culture may cause investors to find Turkey more suitable for investment. This situation represents how critical the socio-political situation of the investor and the target country is in agricultural land investments. This corresponds exactly with the determination in Nolte et al. (2016, 23) report prepared for the Land Matrix. In there, he stressed that the Gulf countries are looking for regional proximity when choosing a target country and tend to buy agricultural land in countries similar to their socio-political characteristics. It is seen that their approach to Turkey is also in this way. As a result, Turkey is a very attractive and profitable country for foreign investors in the acquisition of foreign agricultural land with all its characteristics. In the same way, it is as the interviewee of a company of Lebanese origin said: “geography, facilities and cheap prices. With these, it is a package of opportunities.”

5.2.6. Government support to foreign investors and situation of international funds or assistance

When we look at the supports that Turkey provides to foreign or domestic investors within the scope of agricultural investment, it is seen that it provides some facilities. One of the CEO agricultural investment company interviewee explains these supports from government in this way:

In Turkey, there are some supports provided by the state for agriculture. It is not just because we are selling it to foreigners or doing this or that. You went and bought an agricultural land, 100 decares, for example, you established an almond garden. In such a project, the state says that I give you a sapling support of 400 TL per decare. In 100 saplings, you will receive 40 thousand tl sapling money support. Behind it is the pressurised irrigation system, i.e. drip irrigation system. Why is he doing this? He says that water resources in Turkey are in serious trouble. For this reason, he says, go and put a drip system here so that you consume less. And I will support this. Here, he says, let me support this. There are similar supports. For greening the nature, if you are a villager, if you are someone from that region, up to 65 per cent, if you are someone from outside, 25 per cent of the project cost is given as a grant. There are similar supports. In the European Union, there is something given through **IPARD**, **TKDK**. This is like this; it is given to companies engaged in agricultural production. Not to a farmer and so on. You have a walnut almond garden. You produce the product, but you want to establish a factory to operate it or you want to establish a small business. Then TKDK gives it. It also gives fifty-five per cent grant. The money given by TKDK is already an income from the funds given by the European Union to support agriculture.

As can be seen here, Turkey provides some facilities to foreign investors in terms of agriculture. “IPARD”, “TKDK” and “KOSGEB” are some important institutions which are created by Turkish government that supported foreign investors in agriculture sector. These are mostly small-scale aids provided for the cultivation of agricultural products to bring profit. When the companies investing in agriculture were interviewed, it was generally stated that they did not receive much international aid or funds.

The important point is that foreign investors from the Gulf stated that they received a certain amount of assistance from their own region and from many different countries. This information shows that although it is said that there are no direct foreign

government-based land purchases in Turkey, they may provide incentives and acquire land through compradors.¹⁵

5.2.7.Spain, Turkey's rising agricultural investment partner

Spain is one of the crucial countries in agricultural investment in the world. Especially in the last couple of years, Spain's increasing interest in the field of agricultural investment in Turkey is an important point in relations with Turkey.

The eighth intergovernmental summit between Spain and Turkey, which has been held every 15 years and continues the two nations' close bilateral relationship, was attended by Presidents Pedro Sánchez of the Spanish government and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey in 2024. In this meeting some informations have been highlighted again: Spain is Turkey's fourth EU consumer and largest supplier. Turkey is also a favorable location for Spanish investment, which bolsters economic expansion and the creation of high-quality jobs. In addition to this, the president mentioned that about 700 Spanish businesses are now active in Turkey (La Mocloa 2024).

The cooperation between Turkey and Spain in agricultural investment (in 2008) has firstly been observed by the “Region of Knowledge Project ” in agriculture and food industries. The project will be carried out in conjunction with the provincial government of Mersin, a province in southern Turkey. Under the initiative, which has a 919,000 Euro budget, they will collaborate with one another to get a share from the global food and agriculture industries(Bloomberg 2008).

This date is quite meaningful because 2008 was the year of the food crisis. In order to prevent the agricultural and food crisis, Turkey and Italy, which have the same climate zone, have entered into cooperation in agriculture and food. On the other hand, one of the Spanish companies operating in Turkey, Agro-Invest Spanish company, can be given as an example. They opened walnut and almond process factories in Turkey and this factory is the biggest factory in the region in this field (Agro-Invest 2020).

¹⁵ Comprador is “ a person who acts as an agent for foreign organizations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation.”(Oxford Languages 2024). This concept will be examined in the next section from the point of view of neocolonialism.

However, one of the interviewees who is an owner of a Turkish-based agriculture investment company has said that they have a cooperation with Spain in agricultural investment. He reported their cooperation with Spain as follows:

For example, there is also sapling production for which we also act as a distributor. We have licensed almond and pistachio varieties in Turkey. A Spanish company has developed these varieties with a university. It gives these varieties to each country as a distributor to the institutions with which it has an agreement. We are one of them. Now we do this business with these companies. For example, I went to Spain last year. When I visited them there, this is what they told me. **Labour force is very expensive in their country and land in our country.** Taxes, etc. are also very different. Their procedures are much more difficult than ours. Naturally, there are many customers in Far Asia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. In order to appeal to them, they say, let's establish a place in Turkey or let's produce them in your nurseries, and let's appeal to this region through you. We only have an association with them.

As the interviewee said, Spain franchises its own agricultural investment companies in Turkey. Turkey is both a partner country for them in agricultural investment and a transit country that they use to appeal to their customers in Central Asia. In the interviews, 6 out of 11 companies said Spain to the questions of which countries other than Turkey would you like to invest in or would you like to make joint cooperation. There are certain reasons why Spain is so popular in respect of the Turkey. One of the interviewee who is lebanese-based company's owner clarifies in this way with his words: "Now, I'm talking to Spanish lawyers. Because Spain also in Europe is not expensive and it's affordable. And easy to start business. We are still young as company. So, I think it needs one year, two years." As can be seen here, Spain is a country that is open to land purchase due to factors such as the cheapness of agricultural land and the convenience of the business area in terms of investment. In particular, it is observed that Mediterranean countries, which share the same climate zone environment and have common characteristics in terms of both land and water, show b characteristics in land purchase and agricultural investment. Therefore, not only Spain, Portugal, Italy and even Greece are the countries that Turkey should tenuously evaluate in terms of agricultural investment.

5.3. Neocolonialism or Neoliberal Development Opportunity in Turkey's Land?

5.3.1. Is it neocolonialism?

The recent increase in the sale of agricultural land to foreigners in Turkey has created a great resonance in the media and civil society organisations. Especially, some local newspapers ran striking headlines (Ekonomim 2024; Sözcü 2023; Economist 2024). "Frightening number" and "farmland is being sold parcel by parcel"¹⁶ are some of them (Sol 2023; Sözcü 2023). Even the claims have been put in headlines that go even further like, "Our farmer became the marabah of strangers in his own land" (T24 2022). The reason behind these claims lies not only in the increase in the sale of land to foreigners in Turkey, but also in the absence of any official data exactly. This situation has also led to the discussion of this issue, which is being discussed all over the world, on the axis of Turkey. Is the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners in Turkey a neocolonialism or a neoliberal development opportunity? This question generates the main center of this issue, which is currently being speculated on the most in the country.

Unfortunately, there is no detailed data on the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners in Turkey before starting to discuss the issue. Only recently, due to the fact that this issue has been discussed a lot, the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre has specified only certain figures and the countries of the customers who bought the land. Apart from that, there is no significant information. Therefore, within the scope of this thesis study, interviews were conducted with 11 companies, 7 of which were foreign-origin, 4 of which were Turkish. It will be tried to shed some light on this discussion in the country through the information obtained from here, official state websites and media resources¹⁷

First of all, The acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners in **Turkey is not large-scale land acquisition like in China and Southeast Asia. It is rather small-scale land acquisition.** The area subject to private property shall not exceed 10 per cent of the total area of the district and 30 hectares (300 acres) per foreign person per country. However, the Council of Ministers is authorised to increase the 30 hectares per person by up to 2

¹⁶ The Turkish titles have been translated by the author.

¹⁷ All the datas about the topic was given in methodology section.

times. As a result of this regulation, foreign citizens will be able to acquire 60 hectares (600 acres) of immovable property in Turkey with the decision of the Council of Ministers (Öngören & Karali 2020). Even if, these numbers seem small and insignificant in terms of evaluation of neocolonialism, with each passing year, it is seen that the way for foreigners to acquire land has been paved. Because, before the total area of immovable properties that foreigners could buy could not exceed 2.5 hectares (25 thousand m²). Turkey had a very strict approach to the sale of land to foreigners. According to the latest legal regulations, it is seen that it leads to the purchase of land to foreigners. Each arrangement involves the purchase of a larger amount of land. From this perspective, it is remarkably relevant for the neocolonial studies.

Secondly, the freehold system is used in the ownership of agricultural land which means that once you buy the land, it belongs to you completely. For instance, there is a land leasing system in African countries. Many investor countries have leased large amounts of agricultural land in Africa for 99 years (Wolford et al. 2013). Turkey also has 99-year land leasing initiatives in Sudan. From this point of view, land leasing and use regulations are also of great importance in terms of exploitation of the target country. Turkey is quite controlled and cautious in this respect.

Another crucial point is that land agreements and companies selling agricultural land are not open and accessible in a way of data and land deals. The transparency and openness are the two vital elements when assessing neocolonialism in foreign land acquisition. The fact that states make land agreements with other states behind secret doors; or agricultural investment companies that sell agricultural land do not share certain data with both the public and state authorities are the biggest indicators of neocolonial suspicion. That is exactly why all information about foreign land acquisition in the world are mostly gathered via media resources and NGO's report. In a similar vein, Turkey has suffered lack of information about FLAs. Generally, non-transparency and non-opacity are the major indicators of neocolonialism. Since Turkey also has this problem, it stands at a meaningful point in terms of neocolonialism.

However, Even if Turkey has not a colonial past, neocolonialism can also take place in countries without a colonial past. The countries which are part of the neoliberal capitalist

system live in a state that is open to this danger at any moment. The fact that neocolonialism runs through corporations makes it more dangerous. Because the economy is vital and indispensable for every country. On top of this, the imperialist countries that create an exploitation system to secretly and deeply affect the target country. At this point, agricultural investment companies in Turkey can be analysed from this perspective.

According to the information obtained from the interviews, there are not many specific 'agricultural investment companies' in Turkey. However, recently, they have also been operating under real estate companies. Their sudden mushrooming and high visibility, especially in social media, brings with it another concern: the formation of the comprador class. Comprador means: "A person who acts as an agent for foreign organizations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation"(Oxford Definitions 2017). Rising of individual entrepreneurship through agricultural investment companies can be indication of comprador class. In particular, although the companies investing in agriculture in Turkey were established as individual enterprises, the incentives they receive from their countries of origin and the fact that the majority of the products produced are sold either directly to these countries or to other countries indicates the possibility that the owners of these companies may be compradors.

Another important point is whether the products obtained from these sold lands are sold in the domestic market or mostly to the foreign market. These agricultural lands acquired by foreigners are a natural resource by itself with the foods its produce. From a neocolonial point of view, the colonial power that owns the land also owns the products of the land. This situation is meaningful on the basis of Turkey. Because Gulf countries are among the leading countries buying agricultural land in Turkey. Indeed, the biggest reason for these countries to invest in Turkish lands is food security based on the food crisis they are experiencing in their own countries. A Qatari company and a Kuwaiti company owner who were interviewed underlined this insistently: "We are here for food."

According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), Turkey's imports of food products, which stood at \$14.9 billion in 2019, reached \$21.1 billion by the end of 2023. Although the food sector has posted a foreign trade surplus of \$5.4 billion with exports of \$26.5 billion in the same period, the high bill for imports of food products is

getting higher (T24 2024). As these data have shown that despite Turkey increases its food exports every year, import rates are also increasing. At this point, these agricultural lands acquired by foreign investors for food purposes are in many respects unfavourable to Turkey as Turkey's need for food is increasing day by day. Moreover, there is a “water grabbing” behind every “land grabbing.” (Grain 2012). The acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners also brings with it the acquisition of water. This also reflects the form of exploitation of natural resources of neocolonialism. Like a growing snowball, each exploitation gives birth to another. Considering that Turkey is a country suffering from water shortage, it can be seen that these foreign acquisitions are negative.

Neocolonialism indicates itself explicitly in the case of the indigenous people in the region where foreigners have acquired land, and the local farmers of the country in general. The number of farmers decreased to 512 thousand by the end of 2021 in Turkey. This shows that the number of farmers has decreased by 28.7 percent in the last 5 years and by 55 percent in the last 10 years. According to SSI data, the number of farmers was 718 thousand in 2016. This indicates that approximately 200 thousand farmers have left their jobs in the last 5 years (Euronews 2021). In interviews with companies, they said that there was a shortage of workers to work on agricultural lands. They stated that they could not find any workers. But 85% of them stated that they employed Turkish and 15% foreign workers. Most of the Turks are also seasonal workers. This is another indicator of neocolonialism. It shows that the local owners of the land have lost both their economic and land-based political power over time, along with the land ownership of large investors.

According to the interviewee who is an owner of an agricultural investment company in Denizli: Many Turkish landowners or family farmers sold their land and went to the cities. Arable land is now empty in Turkey. This situation leads to the emergence of foreign investors as a hegemonic power in agricultural lands whether they want to or not.

On the other hand, land is not just an economic object. It also has a political meaning. It is a part of sovereignty. Owning the land means owning not only production, but also sovereignty. This is the essence of neocolonialism. The cheap selling of land in Turkey to foreign investors and their unexpected increase in Turkish territory have also triggered

attitudes that come with some nationalist feelings. The owner of a Turkish agricultural land company in Antep conveyed his ideas on this issue as follows:

I mean, I'm talking about it with regret. Our farmer is really uneducated. What can people be who can't even read and write? And that's really sad too. For example, an acre of land in England comes to a million pounds. For example, an acre of land here takes 50 thousand TL. So we could face a very scary picture. **This means that the country and the land are being sold.**

As can be seen from this statement, unlike other big countries, the cheap sale of land in Turkey is read entirely through sovereignty. In fact, there have even been comparisons between Israel and Palestine in the region. Again interviewee continues in this way:

This is not an agricultural sector. I see it as an occupation of agricultural land or country. I mean, I'm just sad. As you know, things are happening in Palestine now. Israel has occupied Palestine. The Israelis also defended themselves by saying that the Palestinians sold us the title deeds of their land. The point reached today is terrifying. Now we can't say that the same thing won't happen to us. Our southeast region is in danger in this sense. **The origin of agricultural investment companies in our country should also be investigated.** If they are occupying countries, they should be intervened.

The acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners poses a big problem from the point of view of neocolonialism when it is look over the territorial sovereignty of Turkey. The Palestinian-Israeli situation given by the company owner above is an indication of how big and realistic the concern on this issue is. The feeling of endangering the territorial integrity that Turkey has felt since its establishment on its own internal territory is also manifested in the sale of land to foreigners. In particular, it is observed that the some of turkish owners of the companies interviewed emphasize this.

All of that aside, Gulf countries are the largest investor group in the acquisition of agricultural land in Turkey. The uniform dominance of investors and the lack of diversity is one of the biggest indicators of neocolonialism. After the Syrian civil war in 2011, Syrian refugees and migrants flocked to Turkey. Yet, the increasing migration that Turkey receives from the Middle East region every day has also led to an increase in racism and nationalism discourses. The terrorism and security problems carried by Turkey in its geographical region have led to the evaluation of the territory in terms of sovereignty and

security. For this reason, the Gulf interest in Turkey's territory is perceived negatively by the Turkish public opinion.

Furthermore, in Turkey, there is the issue of granting citizenship to foreigners on the basis of land, which is currently the most controversial issue. In Turkey, foreigners were given citizenship in return for acquiring real estate for 150 thousand dollars. This was increased to 400 thousand dollars with the latest regulation (Ekonomim 2023). The granting of Turkish citizenship on land caused a great reaction in the public opinion. With a recent regulation in the state, the land also imposed the obligation to have buildings and housing (Bloomberg 2023). As can be seen in these legal regulations, Turkey has set a very strict and difficult process for foreigners to buy agricultural land. From this point of view, granting citizenship to foreigners through agricultural lands can be seen as a new method of exploitation beyond neocolonialism.

On the other hand, there are also company owners who have the opposite opinion on this issue. One of the interviewees who is an owner of the company investing in land in Manisa conveyed this opposite opinion as follows:

Yes, true. A person who invests 400 thousand dollars has the right to obtain citizenship. If he starts a company, he needs to start a 500 thousand dollar company. He can get citizenship through him again. If you look at him, someone who wants to get Maltese citizenship can do it when he invests a million dollars, when he buys real estate. Portugal and Spain someone 500 thousand euros someone 350 thousand euros. This could also be agricultural land. In fact, let me tell you this. Let me even give an example from Portugal and Spain. If you buy a place in Portugal from Lisbon, the state says 500 thousand euros, I will give you citizenship. But if you go and buy it from somewhere in the countryside from the village, he says 350 thousand euros. So it leads you to the countryside. It's cheaper. Because he wants to revive that place too. That's why he's doing it. So we're not the only ones doing this. The whole world is doing it.

When we look at the explanations here, it is seen that we are not the only country that is granted citizenship through land. Most of the other developing countries have this implementation. It is clearly observed that these foreign land acquisitions are compensated by making those people citizens of the country at the end of the day. But some company owners consider it normal and part of economic development, while others call it purely neocolonialism.

Consequently, the interviews conducted with the owners of foreign agricultural investment companies within the scope of this study, it can be said that the purchase of agricultural land by foreigners in Turkey has “*neocolonial tendencies.*” But what about the chance for investment on land by foreigners?

5.3.2. Neoliberal development opportunity with land investments by foreigners

Apart from analysing the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners in Turkey from a neocolonial perspective, it should not be overlooked that these land investments can lead to economic development. The reality is like every developing country in the world, Turkey needs investment in the field of agriculture. As stated by the company owners in the interviews conducted with the companies, many arable fertile lands are empty in Turkey. One of interviewees who is a Lebanese company owner describes this situation as follows:

I understand if I am from Istanbul and some foreigners come and take very prime vocation, I will be jealous. I will not be happy. Really. This is normal. That's normal. But in Denizli, nobody is caring, you know. That is true. **The people that are running away from the Denizli. We as foreigners come and make some opportunity.** I mean, they need to help us. I'm not taking something from something very important. No, I'm taking something super zero and I am developing it.

It is clear from these statements that agricultural investment companies believe that the fertile land in Turkey has already been left vacant by Turkish owners, and that they are now operating these lands from scratch and making an economic contribution. This situation pinpoints another crucial reality is that Turkey's agriculture sector is not very developed when it is compared to another sectors (Statista 2023). It needs external investment to increase its value in its domestic market.

One of the interviewee who is a general manager in his company demonstrates the Turkey's agricultural situation and what are they doing in this field with his own words:

In the end, we are not a self-sufficient country related to the sector we are related to the work we do. When you look at our walnut production, we meet 70 per cent, maybe 80 per cent of our walnut needs from outside. What are we doing? We somehow ensure that this money stays inside. As a result, we provide employment to the region we are in. We get service from many subcontractor companies there. **In fact, when you look at it, there are many economic advantages.** The most

important advantage is that most of the lands we have made were idle lands that were not economically utilised. Since we have brought many of them to agriculture, I can say that we are actually proud of ourselves for bringing economy.

As it can be seen in here, the company owners assert that, this is a economic development for Turkey. Cause nobody cares agriculture in Turkey anymore. Especially locals farmers and citizens. This means that the foreign investor does not take land from the locals, but grabs the empty land. Although this may sound bad, it is certainly more beneficial to utilise the vacant land than to leave it empty. From this point of view, foreign investment can be a great opportunity for the Turkish economy with the right legal regulation and functioning.

Another important point is that foreign investors do not only come with a certain amount of money. They also come with certain knowledge and technology. In particular, the development of and access to technologies that increase productivity in agriculture and reduce the need for manpower is of vital developments. Turkey can benefit from foreign investors at this point. Another interviewee who is a company owner operating in Gaziantep describes these developments as follows:

If you ask me why, I am really amazed by the following developments. For example, I am amazed by the researches on the economic use, the accumulation of climate-related knowledge up to the formation of climatic conditions in the atmosphere, the efficient use of soil, the reduction of chemical substances, the reduction of chemical fertilisers, and the use of real fertilisers instead. So there are really great developments. **Compared to three years ago, there are great advances. Especially in terms of technology.** But as I said, this is a whole. I mean, the whole technology issue has developed, data has met. **But finance is a problem in Turkey.** I guess that if the three components are not united, this time it will take a similar blow from there. **Foreign investors coming to our country really have issues in which they are ahead of us in this regard. In other words, they have knowledge not only on data, but also on revenues and finance.** Also, when foreign investors meet with us, the numbers that seem big to us seem like a very small amount to them. I am amazed, so it is a normal amount for them.

Considering the statements of the interviewee, foreign investors coming to Turkey come with great technologies and knowledge. One of the biggest effects of neoliberal policies on the land in Turkey is the entry of a certain technology and data transfer into the country.

At the same time, with these investments, new business lines are developed and employment is provided. Considering the shortage of workers and farmers in Turkey, the importance of foreign investment is seen in this way. Another interviewee who is an owner of an investment company selling agricultural land in Manisa explains this situation as follows:

It's a huge contribution to the economy. Do not look at it only in terms of agricultural land. An irrigation system is installed on this land. The company that makes the irrigation system wins. Wire work is being done. Whoever makes the wire wins. Saplings are planted and the company that sells saplings wins. **Everyone wins here.** I just told you. I bought 300 acres of land from an uncle. He cultivates 30 acres of the land. The rest is not cultivated. 270 acres are rubbish. Here, 300 decares of 300 decares of this land have been brought into the economy. 12 thousand saplings were planted on 300 decares. There are a lot of people working on the land. There are 7-8 working staff. Now what is bad about this? **This man doesn't take all of these lands on his back.** For example, when I first started to work in Gördes, Manisa, there were 5 thousand decares of walnut orchards in Gördes. There were nearly 200 people working there for a while. All of them benefited the economy there.

As it is clear from these explanations, any investment in agricultural land in Turkey can make a great contribution to the Turkish economy if it is operated in the right framework. Especially labour employment in agriculture is important at this point. This transfer of knowledge and technology brought by foreign investors can also provide an opportunity for local farmers to acquire and train them in agriculture. Because according to the information obtained from the interviews, it is seen that Turkish local farmers have only traditional knowledge and do not know much about new technological developments. This foreign investment can be of great benefit in this respect.

Ten of the agricultural investment companies interviewed, except for one, consider these foreign investments as an economic development for Turkish agriculture. Moreover, Agricultural investment companies stating that Turkey is inadequate in terms of finance and for this reason foreign investment in the Turkish agricultural sector is an inevitable.

5.3.3 Deadlock of Turkey's Foreign-Land Acquisition

The phenomenon of land acquisition by foreigners, which has been increasing recently in Turkey, is a controversial issue in many respects. Issues such as which lands are acquired

by which foreigners, who have gained citizenship through this means, which companies have made profits with these purchases, are a matter of curiosity in the country overall. Especially in the 21st century, the increasing weight of the political economy, and the neoliberal economy taking a new shape in compatible with the increasing inequality and loss of prosperity in the world, has caused countries to develop new paradigms in terms of FLAs. The crises in the financial system brought about by the neoliberal economy, especially the Financial Crisis of 2008, have caused foreigners to become more aggressive and competitive in acquiring land. That's why this phenomenon called "land grabbing". From this point of view, it is a serious question whether foreign land acquisitions in Turkey are a neocolonial activity. Because normally, while the colonial powers have a lot of territorial acquisitions in the Global South, especially in Africa, this is gradually expanding and today it reaches the developing Eastern European countries. From this point of view, although Turkey does not have a colonial history, it can be evaluated under the umbrella of neocolonialism in the sale of its own lands to foreigners. So is this really neocolonialism or is it just a window of opportunity for new land investment created by the food crisis? As shown in the previous part of the thesis, as a result of interviews with agricultural investment companies in Turkey, it is observed that there are "*neocolonial tendencies*" towards the lands of Turkey.

On the other hand, Turkey seriously needs foreign investment in the agricultural sector. While Turkey is weak in terms of financing in the agricultural sector under neoliberal policies, can achieve an economic recovery with foreign direct investments. That's why these FLAs can be an "*economic development opportunity*" for Turkey. But the main problematic point is that, unlike the classical liberal economic order of neoliberalism, authoritarianism, which has been rising in the world recently, also means an increase in state interventions in the economy.

In this regard, Akçalı (2020) has indicated that the state frequently has to intervene with updated socioeconomic policies to address the deficiencies in attaining social justice brought about by neoliberalism and this increases state interference and control in both the political and economic domains. She also drew attention to the variegated and mixed nature of neoliberalism across different regions to illustrate its relationship

with authoritarianism. In this context, a very different picture can also be encountered when examining the acquisition of land by foreigners in Turkey.

Due to the fact that the top investors of foreign land acquisition in Turkey are the Gulf states, The AKP government's political and economic relations with the Gulf countries can be read in terms of neoliberal authoritarianism. Since 2002, Turkey has actively worked to strengthen its bilateral investment and economic ties with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to enjoying a substantial volume of commerce in products and services with all GCC countries (Habibi 2019, 4). The AKP government wants to enter into economic cooperation with the Gulf countries. This initiatives have seen between GCC and Turkey under “win-win dynamic” relationships (AA 2015).Owing to the fact that the Gulf countries have a large amount of money, the Turkish government also wants to attract these funds under the name of investment. From this point of view, this new authoritarian face of neoliberalism can feed neocolonialism in economic and political relations with foreign countries.

In a nutshell, while foreign land acquisitions in Turkey carry “neocolonial concerns” by the local population, it also exhibits “neocolonial tendencies in practice”. On the other hand, at the same time, it is also seen that this foreign investment, which comes with the need for foreign foreign investment of agricultural lands in Turkey, carries an “economic development opportunity.”

To sum up, foreign land acquisitions in Turkey can be evaluated in both sides in combined of “*neocolonial tendencies and opportunity of neoliberal economic development*”simultaneously and this creates a *deadlock*.

In order to get out of this impasse, Turkey should make the right legal arrangements and develop the right policies in the agricultural sector and turn these incoming foreign investments into an economic opportunity.

6.CONCLUSION

With the increase in land acquisition by foreigners in the world after 2008, a new term has emerged: “land grabbing”. According to this term, many foreign companies or countries buy fertile land in other countries. While Africa is normally the most targeted region, recently, developing countries have started to be targeted by investor countries and companies. This shows that the Global South, the target region for international land acquisition, is growing towards Global North and East.

The main purpose of this study is to answer the questions of how Turkey is evaluated in terms of this “global land grabbing” trend and whether the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners is neocolonialism or an opportunity for neoliberal economic development. When Turkey is analysed within the scope of this study, it is determined that it has a different and complex picture in foreign land acquisition.

In the literature on foreign land acquisition, it is normally portrayed as a target country by foreign countries, but, in this study, it is also seen as an investor country. Turkey not only sells fertile agricultural lands to foreigners, but also buys large amounts of land from regions such as Africa. This puts it in a separate place from other countries in the literature. This complex image drawn by Turkey has created a result that will hit the general classification of countries in global land acquisition. But the main point of the study is to clarify in detail the sale of agricultural land in Turkey to foreigners.

Some important information has been obtained as a result of semi-structured interviews with agricultural investment companies. Turkey has already entered this global land-grabbing trend. But the land acquired by foreigners in Turkey are not large-scale lands like in Africa, it is mostly short-scale land acquisitions.

However, the most important result is that Gulf countries are leading the way in the acquisition of land by foreigners in Turkey. These countries are composed of Saudia Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Bahrain, and UAE; generally GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council). These Gulf countries mostly take the most fertile lands of Turkey. The main purpose of these land acquisitions of the Gulf countries is that they want to

ensure food security in their countries through the lands in Turkey due to the food crisis they are experiencing. There are also some other countries like Canada, UK and Spain. But their rates are low when they compared to Gulf states. In these results, Spain stands in a different place. Because Spain has been found to be the country where Turkey has established the most partnership in agricultural investment. Spanish and Turkish companies share their customer base not only through land sales to foreigners, but also customers that buy lands.

The discussion of whether the acquisition of land by foreigners in Turkey is neocolonialism or a neoliberal economic development opportunity was another question of the research. As a result of the study, "neocolonial tendencies" were identified in the land acquisition of foreigners in Turkey. This result shows itself through the following indicators.

Firstly, Gulf countries are the most dominant countries among investors and there is a lack of diversity among investors. This means that Gulf-based agribusiness companies and groups dominate the economic market. This is clearly a sign of economic neocolonialism. Although the Gulf countries do not make land agreements with Turkey on a state basis, it is seen that they make economic profits through company groups under the name of agricultural investment. This means that comprador companies have been established in Turkey. Another important indicator is that the Gulf countries sell the food they obtain from the fertile lands in Turkey in their domestic markets due to the threat of food security due to the food crisis. This situation, which could normally be considered as a simple export, is written as a loss to Turkey's own household due to the increase in Turkey's food imports day by day.

Another important issue in the debate on neocolonialism is the granting of citizenship to foreigners over land. This means that a foreigner who makes an investment of 400 thousand dollars in land can obtain citizenship. The issue of citizenship through land was met with such a great reaction in Turkey that according to the latest legal regulations, the obligation to have a building on the land was introduced. This situation is sharply seen as a neocolonial threat. Besides, if Turkish landowners and farmers in Turkey sell their land cheaply to foreign investors, this could also damage the nationality of Turkish land. This could lead to Turkish citizens becoming foreign labourers on their own land. This is

supported by the fact that nearly eighty per cent of the farmers working in the fields are seasonal Turkish workers.

However, in neoliberal economic development perspective, these land acquisitions can be a development opportunity for Turkey. According to the results of the study, Turkey needs foreign investment in agriculture as well. According to the results of the interviews, most of the arable lands in Turkey are empty. This means that it should be utilised.

On the other hand, Gulf investors come with knowledge and technology. Turkey can benefit economically in this respect. Turkey's local farmers still use traditional methods on the land and could be trained in the latest innovations in agriculture. Moreover, new business lines can be established with these investments, which means job creation.

Furthermore, the fact that foreign foreign investment in agriculture in Turkey is relatively low compared to other sectors also shows the need for foreign investment. As a result, foreign investment in the territory of Turkey can provide opportunities for economic development.

When we look at the limitations in this study, it is seen that only semi-structured interviews were conducted with companies. However, the neocolonial study also deals with how local residents and farmers in the place where the land was acquired are also affected by the purchase of land by foreigners. On the other hand, interviews could also be conducted with authorized persons from the government and state bodies. They could have been statesmen from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry or the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre. These shortcomings are the limitations of this study.

Consequently, while Turkey has “*neocolonial tendencies*” in land acquisition by foreigners, it is also seen as an “*opportunity for neoliberal economic development*” at the same time. This creates a contradiction in itself. In order for Turkey to get out of this deadlock, it is necessary to establish a sustainable policy in the agricultural sector, conduct AR-GE studies and eliminate neocolonial trends and these concerns with the necessary legal regulations. It may be possible for foreign investment to benefit economically only through trade agreements that observe the principle of reciprocity and in which both sides can conduct a “*win-win relationship*.” Another suggestion is that Turkey should go to

regional collaborations with the countries in the same climate zone. Countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece are countries with the same climate and soil conditions as Turkey. These countries are experiencing the same problems in agricultural investment (such as water shortage and climate change). Subsequent research on the acquisition of land by foreigners may lead to classifications as “*the acquisition of land by foreigners in countries in the Mediterranean belt.*” This can help in the emergence of healthier research.

In conclusion, Turkey is becoming much more preferred by foreign investors every day in foreign land acquisition. Turkey will realise by foreign investors in terms of more land sales in the next 10 years. It continues and will continue to carry a great potential in this market.

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APPENDIX A

Table A. Interview Method Table

Agricultural Investment Companies	Saturation	Status	Recording	Length
Qatari-based agricultural company	Yes	Conducted face to face	Audio Recording	35 minutes
Kuwaiti-based agricultural company	Partial	Conducted face to face	Audio Recording	37 minutes
Lebanese-based agricultural company	Yes	Conducted face to face	Audio Recording	20 minutes
UAE-based agri-tech business company	Yes	Conducted face to face	Concurrent notes	40 minutes
Syrian-based agricultural company	Partial	Conducted face to face	Concurrent notes	28 minutes
Turkish-based agricultural company in Manisa	Yes	Conducted in online	Audio Recording	38 minutes
Turkish-based agricultural company in Denizli	Yes	Conducted in online	Audio Recording	24 minutes
Turkish-based agricultural company in İstanbul	No	Conducted via e-mail	E-mail transcript	-
Syiran-based real estate	Partial	Conducted in online	Concurrent notes	27 minutes
Syrian-based agricultural company	Yes	Conducted face to face	Audio Recording	20 minutes

Turkish-based company in Gaziantep	Yes	Conducted in online	Audio Recording	28 minutes
Egypt-based agricultural company	-	Declined	-	-
Turkish-based real estate company	-	Declined	-	-



APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1) How did you come up this project's idea?
- 2) Which of your customers mostly invest in this area? And why do they prefer agricultural investment? What are their motivations?
- 3) What are the expectations from the project in the long term?
- 4) Is agricultural investment a trend in the world?
- 5) Is there a sector like this in European countries and the UK as well?
- 6) Why was Turkey preferred for such an investment? What is the peculiarity of Turkey in this sense?
- 7) Where are the products obtained from this agricultural investment marketed? And to which countries are these products sold mostly?
- 8) Is your land pricing cheap relative to the market or above its value?
- 9) What are the annual profit rates of your project? Are there plans to invest in other countries as well?
- 10) Are legally supportive policies implemented by the state in Turkey or vice versa?
- 11) Which regions are currently more suitable for agricultural investment in Turkey?
- 12) What kind of investment system do you use in the land? (Leasehold system, freehold system or customary land system?)
- 13) Does your project receive assistance from the government or any national or international organizations?

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