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Imagining Agricultural Development in South–South Cooperation: The Contestation and Transformation of ProSAVANA

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Summary. — This paper discusses South–South cooperation by examining ProSAVANA, a flagship agricultural development program seeking to apply Brazilian experience to Mozambique. ProSAVANA is a joint Japan–Brazil–Mozambique initiative in the savannah zone of Mozambique's Nacala Corridor region that was initially inspired by the Japan–Brazil PRODECER program in Brazil's Cerrado region. ProSAVANA subsequently became the focus of fears about land-grabbing in the Nacala Corridor, attracting strong civil society contestation. We show how distinct imaginaries of agricultural development in Mozambique and Brazil were used to mobilize for and against ProSAVANA, thus revealing the contentious nature of the similarity claims underpinning South–South cooperation. In particular, we focus on the role of landscape imaginaries associated with the savannah and the Cerrado. We examine the use in the promotion and contestation of ProSAVANA of visual representations that draw on these imaginaries, including GIS maps of Mozambique's savannah region made by Brazilian agribusiness consultants and an advocacy video of Brazil's Cerrado region filmed by Mozambican land rights activists. Noting that the latest ProSAVANA planning documents differ significantly from those expressing its initial vision, we argue that the contestation of ProSAVANA has had a series of productive effects even before the program has moved to full implementation. These productive effects are visible not only in the program itself but also in the wider context of state-society relations shaping debates on South–South cooperation in Mozambique, Brazil, and beyond.
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1. INTRODUCTION

South–South development cooperation is premised not only on a commitment to solidarity and an interest in "mutual benefit" but also on a claim of similarity. When deployed by Northern or multilateral development agencies interested in supporting South–South exchange via Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC), the similarity claim is "frequently constructed in depoliticized and essentialist terms, presenting a 'natural' congruity between very different southern states" (McEwan & Mawdsley, 2012, p. 1887). When deployed by "rising powers" such as Brazil, China, or India, it tends to be more overtly political, often invoking a common geopolitical position or shared historical (colonial) experience (Six, 2009). Rising powers also deploy similarity claims that emphasize the technical rather than the political, as is the case with India's effort to promote its technologies as suitable for Africa because they are "affordable, adaptable and appropriate" (Nayyar, 2012, p. 561). Such claims have underpinned the rapid expansion in recent years of rising powers' efforts to export their agricultural technologies and rural development strategies to Africa—efforts in which Brazil has been particularly prominent (Scoones *et al.*, 2016). In legitimating its development cooperation strategies, Brazil has made effective use of both "political" and "technical" similarity claims. As Abdenur (2015, p. 13) puts it, the country has differentiated its development cooperation from Northern aid by emphasizing "solidarity with African partners, especially by highlighting Brazil's past status as a former colony and its shared historical and cultural bonds with Africa" as well as "compatibility, by claiming that its own development experiences are more similar to those of African countries".

These similarity claims have gained particular potency in the agricultural development cooperation field. Domestic and international actors alike have come to assume that Brazil's remarkable growth in agricultural output and record of innovation in tropical agriculture make it a natural source of know-how for Africa (Cabral *et al.*, 2016). However, similar claims have been made for other rising powers, including China (Xu *et al.*, 2016) and India (Chaturvedi & Kumar, 2015). What sets Brazil apart is the way in which claims that the country's agricultural development models are particularly suitable for export to Africa have been supported not only by narratives focusing on innovation and production growth, but also by powerful representations of the Brazilian landscape that has both shaped and been shaped by these models. These representations focus on the *Cerrado* savannah zone of Central Brazil, and are deployed in ways that both emphasize the *Cerrado*'s biophysical similarities with African savannah

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regions and evoke narratives of its transformation by pioneering farmers from a sparsely-populated bush zone into one of the world's most important regions of export-oriented agricultural production (Cabral, Shankland, Favareto, & Costa Vaz, 2013).

There is now a burgeoning literature that interrogates the optimistic assumptions about transferability that have marked the resurgence of interest in South–South cooperation, with Wolford and Nehring (2015, p. 214), for example, arguing that 'the term "South–South" highlights the dangers of the Cartesian logic that ascribes similar characteristics to groups of countries that fall within the same latitudinal coordinates and fails to do justice to considerable political, economic and social differences'. Several scholars have also highlighted the increasing contestation within the South of the use of such claims to legitimate "sub-imperialism" (Bond & Garcia, 2015). In this article, however, we focus on a hitherto neglected aspect: the particular productive power that landscape-based similarity claims can give both to the promotion and to the contestation of South–South agricultural development cooperation.

We explore this productive power in relation to Brazil's largest agricultural development cooperation project in Africa, the Program for Agricultural Development of the Tropical Savannah in Mozambique—ProSAVANA. This is a TDC program that involves Mozambique, Brazil, and Japan and is coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security of Mozambique (MASA, formerly known as MINAG), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC). It was initially designed with a view to replicating in Africa the experience of the Brazil–Japan Cooperation Program for the Development of the Brazilian *Cerrado* (PRODECER), described by JICA as having produced a model of sustainable and inclusive development (Hosono & Hongo, 2012). In addition to technical cooperation in agricultural research and extension using experience and know-how from Brazil, ProSAVANA's design included a "Master Plan" component intended to guide significant private-sector investment in commercial agriculture and agro-processing in its target region, the Nacala Corridor in Northern Mozambique.

ProSAVANA has been widely contested by a coalition of Mozambican and international NGOs, highlighting fears that its agribusiness component will lead to land-grabbing (Clements & Fernandes, 2012; Mello, 2013). It has now become the principal focal point of mobilization against land-grabbing in Mozambique, despite the evidence that an influx of Brazilian soy-farmers has not materialized (Wise, 2014). In fact, ProSAVANA has yet to establish a visible presence in Northern Mozambique, beyond an agricultural research component (mainly focused on soybeans) whose results have reached very few farmers, while the boom in ProSAVANA-supported commercial agriculture envisaged by a leaked version of the "Master Plan" has been limited to half-a-dozen small-scale "quick impact projects" financed by a specific JICA fund with only tenuous Brazilian involvement (Mosca & Bruna, 2015). After significant delays in implementation, ProSAVANA, having been first hailed as a transformative initiative and then vilified as "the biggest land-grab in Africa" (Justiça Ambiental, 2013; Mello, 2013; Nogueira & Ollinaho, 2013; Wise, 2014), is now beginning to be seen, even among its erstwhile backers, as a failed project or a broken Brazilian promise. Nevertheless, ProSAVANA has remained both an intense focus of civil society contestation and a powerful brand for attracting private-sector interest to the Nacala Corridor region.

In this article, we explore the particular ways in which both ProSAVANA's promotion and its contestation have mobilized material and symbolic resources, and the particular effects that this process has had not only on the program itself but also on pro-peasant networks in Mozambique, Brazil, and beyond. With a history that dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Borras, Edelman, & Kay, 2008), and having grown in activity and visibility following structural adjustment and the neoliberal turn of the 1980s (Moyo, 2005), national and transnational pro-peasant networks are now reconfiguring themselves to engage with South–South cooperation in a context marked by the expansion of global capital and by authoritarian national regimes in much of Africa. We argue that ProSAVANA has accelerated this reconfiguration by providing a particularly potent rallying-point, and that this potency derives from the fact that alongside particular—and divergent—imaginaries of farming systems and desired scales of production, the mobilization of particular landscape-related imaginaries has played an important role in shaping not only the promotion of the program but also its contestation. This is key to understanding why, despite the program's apparently limited impact on the ground, ProSAVANA has become the focus of such a powerful contestation process, and why this process has had such significant effects. It has been powerfully productive of changes not only in the program itself (whose official narrative has now undergone a major reconceptualization), but also in the political and social relations shaping agricultural and development cooperation policy in Mozambique and Brazil. This, in turn, has wider implications for the future of South–South cooperation.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study builds on a tradition of research on imaginaries that stem from the work of Taylor (2002, p. 106), who uses the term "social imaginary" to account for "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings [which] is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends". As Gaonkar (2002, p. 4) puts it, imaginaries "exist by virtue of representation or implicit understandings even when they acquire immense institutional force; and they are the means by which individuals understand their identities and their place in the world". They also frame the ways in which individuals and groups imagine each other's roles in development encounters, in a process that Hilhorst, Weijers, and van Wessel (2012) have termed "mutual imaging".

We extend this conceptualization to consider the mobilizing power of other imaginaries, particularly those connected with landscape. As Greider and Garkovich (1994, p. 1) put it, landscapes carry "multiple symbolic meanings that emanate from the values by which people define themselves". Following Thompson (2012, p. 1), we term these representations "landscape imaginaries", as they lie at the intersection of historically-constructed perceptions of particular landscapes and "modern social imaginaries". Echoing the work of historians such as Schama (1995) who explore how different societies' cultural, institutional, and political trajectories are shaped by the power of ideas about landscape, Thompson (2012, p. 1) argues that "imaginaries we have inherited from the past [...] continue to shape our landscapes and constrain our environmental choices today". In development studies, a substantial body of research has examined how persistent colonial imaginaries have shaped an ongoing process of

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