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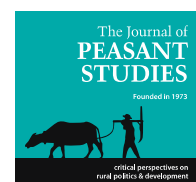
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Brazil's agricultural politics in Africa: More Food International and the disputed meanings of 'family farming'

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Brazil's agricultural politics in Africa: More Food International and the disputed meanings of 'family farming'

Lídia Cabral, Arilson Favareto, Langton Mukwereza and Kojo Amanor¹

Abstract

Brazil's influence in agricultural development in Africa has become noticeable in recent years. South–South cooperation is one of the instruments for engagement, and affinities between Brazil and African countries are invoked to justify the transfer of technology and public policies. In this paper, we take the case of one of Brazil's development cooperation programs, More Food International (MFI), to illustrate why policy concepts and ideas that emerge in particular settings, such as family farming in Brazil, do not travel easily across space and socio-political realities. Taking a discourse-analytical perspective, we consider actors' narratives of family farming and the MFI program, and how these narratives navigate between Brazil and three African countries – Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. We find that in Brazil, family farming has multiple meanings that expose contrasting visions of agricultural development as determined by history, geography and class-based power struggles. These multiple meanings are reflected in the disparate ways MFI is portrayed and practiced by Brazilian actors who emphasize commercial opportunity, political advocacy, or technological modernization. We also find that African countries adopt their own interpretations of family farming and MFI, and that these are more attuned with mercantilist and modernization perspectives, and less mindful of Brazil's domestic political struggles. This has prompted a reaction from those on the Brazilian side fighting for an alternative agricultural development trajectory. The significance of this reaction is yet to be determined.

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1 Introduction

The complementarity between one model of large-scale agribusiness and another of small-scale family farming is a common narrative reproduced by the Brazilian government (Presidência da República, 2006, 2011), and one that is reflected in Brazil's development cooperation in Africa (ABC, 2010). For example, the ProSavana program in Mozambique draws mainly on Brazil's experience in large-scale agribusiness development in the *Cerrado*, an area portrayed as similar to the African savannah (Shankland, Gonçalves, & Favareto, this issue). Alongside ProSavana, the Brazilian government is implementing More Food International (MFI), a cooperation program inspired by Brazil's More Food Program and that aims at strengthening the productive capacity of smallholder farmers in African countries, who are claimed to bear a resemblance to Brazil's family farmers.

However, the complementarity argument is disputed and an alternative view portrays Brazilian agriculture as a dualism in which a hegemonic battle is fought out between the two paradigms (Pierri, 2013). The social mobilization against ProSavana which called for a family farming alternative to the program's agribusiness thrust (Shankland, Gonçalves, & Favareto, forthcomingb) is such a battle. In the present paper we engage with a less visible dispute—regarding the contested meaning of family farming in Brazil—and analyse how this dispute travels to African countries through the implementation of MFI.

As our analysis illustrates, policy constructs that emerge in particular settings, such as Brazil's family farming and the dualism argument, do not travel easily across socio-political realities. Yet, although following a universal development formula has long been criticized (e.g. Cornwall & Brock, 2005), it remains standard practice. South–South cooperation of the type Brazil claims to exercise (Abreu, 2013) adds a new rationale to the blueprint bias in development, in that it claims affinity across the so-called South—particularly between Brazil and Africa—and are used to justify common strategies (Scoones, Amanor, Favareto, & Gubo, this issue). Indeed, the idea that 'for every African problem there is a Brazilian solution' has become a popular slogan of Brazilian cooperation in Africa (Amorim, 2011).

Accordingly, the family farming model, along with the *Cerrado*–savannah parallel, has been uncritically incorporated into Brazil's agricultural cooperation framework, with the assumption that the concept and associated policies will undergo straightforward transplantation to the African context. However, the ways in which African countries have interpreted and operationalized Brazil's family farming and associated programs have not quite matched Brazil's own experience. Although this is hardly surprising, in the present article we set out to elucidate why this should be the case by focusing on MFI, and considering both the Brazilian context and three African countries—Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe—all localities in which the program has been implemented.

2 A discourse-analytical perspective on a cross-national policy domain

Taking MFI as a case study, our analysis centers on the politics of Brazil's development cooperation; we define the latter as a cross-national policy domain with two distinct spheres of action: the sphere of the provider country, Brazil, and the sphere of its target countries, which, in our case, is represented the three aforementioned African nations. We focus primarily on the dynamics on the Brazilian side, whereby we seek to explore the sociopolitical climate in which the family farming model and MFI program originated, and examine how they travel to Africa and feedback to Brazil. Although the impact of the program in Africa is beyond the scope of our research, we consider the initial reception MFI and its inherent family farming concept have had in the three countries, as this helps in understanding the dynamics of the Brazilian side, not least the reconfiguration of one of the program's components.

Conceptually, our starting point is the literature that emphasizes the influence of domestic politics over international relations (Gourevitch, 1978), and which has been applied to the analysis of foreign aid (Lancaster, 2007). This literature accentuates the role of domestic institutions, and actors' interests and ideas within the provider country in shaping foreign policy. Therefore, in order to understand MFI in

Africa, we first need to consider the domestic sociopolitical climate that generated the program in Brazil. In addition to extending the literature that focuses on traditional aid into the domain of the emerging development actor of Brazil, we also complement the former by adopting a discourse-analytical perspective on the cooperation policy process.

The focus on discourse or ‘meaning-making’ processes is widely present in the study of policy-making (Shapiro, 1981; Fairclough, 1992; Roe, 1994; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Hajer, 2005; Torfing & Howarth, 2005) and in the study of development policy narratives specifically (Roe, 1991). As noted by Fischer (2003), public policy is a discursive construct, and ‘at the level of everyday interaction, discourses represent specific systems of power and the social practices that produce and reproduce them’ (Fischer, 2003: 73). On this basis, the perspective adopted by our research can be situated within the family of discourse-analytical approaches concerned with the broad manifestation of discourse as a political struggle for the meaning of social phenomena—thus, differing from those that adopt a micro focus on the use of language and linguistic repertoires in spoken or written text, such as conversational or content analysis.²

Indeed, in its broadest sense, social meaning is understood to be partly or temporarily fixed through discourse (Torfing, 2005). The analysis of discourse in policy-making is connected with the analysis of politics and power struggles, which, in turn, draws on the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s notion that discourse and power are mutually constitutive—that is, policy actors use discourse to exercise power but they are themselves constituted by the discourse they reproduce (ibid). Within this tradition, Hajer (1997) defines discourse as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (ibid: 44); and ‘storylines’ as the narratives on social reality that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding or the achievement of discursive closure (ibid: 62).

Drawing on these definitions, in this paper we use the term ‘discourse’ to signify a higher-level theoretical concept that concerns the meaning-making process, and ‘narrative’ to represent the translation of such a discourse into storylines that relate to concrete policy issues. However, while Hajer (1997) is concerned with the visible, ‘argumentative battle’ between different narrative storylines out in public spaces, we are interested in examining concealed discourse dynamics within a shared family-farming construct. These dynamics reflect “*hegemonic struggles* that aim to establish a political and moral-intellectual leadership through the articulation of meaning and identity” (Torfing, 2005: 15).

We start by considering narratives of family farming and MFI in Brazil, and find that the meaning of family farming is not fixed, but, rather, a ‘floating signifier’ (Torfing, 2005) that is open to multiple interpretations. These not only represent an expression of different agendas and understandings of the agricultural sphere, but also operate as a tool for constructing and reinforcing such agendas and ideas. MFI reproduces the multiple meanings of family farming as reflected in the distinctive narratives of the program, which we respectively label ‘productivist modernization’, ‘territories of life’ and ‘conservative modernization’.

We then consider how these Brazilian narratives travel to Africa through the channel of cooperation, and explore the extent to which Brazil’s domestic discourse gains new contours when it reaches a different continent. This approach connects our analysis with research on the policy transfer process, which is concerned with the transfer of policy content, instruments, institutions, and ideas from one setting to another (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996, 2000; James & Lodge, 2003; Evans, 2009). In our study, we provide an account of how such transfer entails the navigation of discursive constructions across different contexts (Brazil and the three African countries) and, specifically, how narratives of MFI and family farming in these contexts compare and why. With this focus, our empirical evidence indicates

² Glynos, Howarth, Norval, & Speed (2009), Torfing (2005), and Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) offer overviews of different discourse analysis approaches and methods.

that, for reasons around the preferences of African governments and the prevalence of a commercial agenda in Brazil's cooperation framework, the particular view that emphasizes mechanization-led agricultural modernization dominates program practice. Yet, this view is resisted by those both inside and outside government who advocate for a 'territories of life' perspective on family farming, or one more akin to 'agroecology' practices and 'food sovereignty' goals.

Our analysis draws on research undertaken in Brazil, Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe between November 2011 and February 2015. Fieldwork consisted mainly of qualitative interviews with individuals directly or indirectly connected with the MFI program. In Brazil, interviewees were selected from across government agencies,³ rural social movements, civil society organizations, and the agricultural machinery industry. In Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe respondents included a combination of Brazilian diplomats and resident cooperation officials, and local government officers. In Mozambique, civil society organizations that had actively monitored Brazilian cooperation in the country were also interviewed. The analysis also draws on the program's media coverage in the four countries, including MDA's own news releases, and the limited available documentation on the program—industry brochures (Baldan, 2011), leaked listings of requisitioned equipment (ABIMAQ, 2014) and, in the case of Mozambique specifically, official program documents (República de Moçambique & República Federativa do Brasil, 2011; República Federativa do Brasil & República de Moçambique, 2013).

We employ these primary and secondary sources to identify the narratives through which contrasting meanings of family farming and MFI are constructed. Narratives of family farming and the Brazilian domestic More Food Program emerge from our analysis of secondary literature and, on this basis, our understanding of Brazil's agrarian politics. Narratives of MFI are drawn from interviews with key informants and program documentation, and linked back to the other narratives. Our aim is not to identify all possible interpretations (there are certainly others not addressed in this paper), but to demonstrate that there are contrasting understandings of family farming and expectations around what MFI can achieve in Africa. They suggest a more diverse contestation of interests and perspectives than implied by the standard family farming-versus-agribusiness dualism. These disputes are not explicitly manifested in the public domain but are revealed by our analysis of how actors involved in MFI discuss family farming and the program.

Thus, moving beyond the aforementioned simplistic dualistic representation helps in our understanding of Brazilian foreign aid cooperation politics in all its complexity and the various domestic forces at play. These, in turn, confront other agendas and forces in Africa, as well as in the domain of international organizations and networks. What is taken forward as agricultural development is therefore a product of constant negotiation and reinterpretation. However, before we make a detailed analysis of these meaning-making dynamics with regard to Brazil (Section 4), and in the African context (Section 5), a fuller overview of the case study is required. Accordingly, the next section addresses the genesis and set-up of the MFI program.

3 Introducing More Food International: A new hybrid of Brazilian cooperation

MFI is part of a wider portfolio of agricultural cooperation programs the Brazilian government is sponsoring in Africa (Cabral, Shankland, Favareto, & Costa Vaz, 2013). Until recently, Brazil's agricultural cooperation on the continent was characterized by sporadic technical assistance involving the delivery of short training courses and peer-to-peer sharing of tropical agriculture science and technology—activities that were conducted mainly by the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*: EMBRAPA). Brazilian cooperation took on greater diversity when an additional set of actors outside the agricultural research domain joined the program,

³ Government agencies interviewed in Brazil included the MDA, Ministry of Development, Industry and Trade (MDIC), Chamber of Commerce (CAMEX), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazilian Cooperation Agency, and Export Promotion Agency (APEX).

bringing a focus on public policies and the practice of cooperation as a dialogue around public policy rather than just technical exchange based on agronomic expertise.

The Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA) in particular developed MFI as its main cooperation instrument. MFI draws on Brazil's domestic More Food Program, which offers subsidized credit to family farmers⁴ in order to support modernization through the acquisition of agricultural machinery and implements aimed at boosting productivity (Patriota & Pierri, 2013). Such assistance is part of a policy package that targets family farming under the framework of the National Program for the Strengthening of Family Farming (*Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar: PRONAF*), which has been in place for 20 years and remains the main policy instrument for this group (MDA, 2010).

Drawing on this experience at home, MFI was established as an export credit facility for developing countries in which a concessional loan was tied to the purchase of agricultural equipment manufactured in Brazil. The loan targets a group of farmers equivalent to Brazil's family farmers, which in sub-Saharan Africa are expected to be small- to medium-scale producers. In addition to hardware financing, MFI includes government-to-government exchange centered on Brazil's experience with public policy aimed at family farmers, and specific activities designed to strengthen technical assistance and rural extension systems in partner countries (MDA, 2015b).

The program was launched in 2010 when African ministries of agriculture gathered in Brasília for the *Brazil–Africa Talks on Food Safety, Hunger Alleviation, and Rural Development* (ABC, 2010). This was a buoyant time for Brazil, whose economy was thriving and its international profile—which outgoing President Lula da Silva had personally nurtured—was at its highest (Dauvergne & Farias, 2012). Partnering with this burgeoning country and farming giant was appealing to many African countries as an alternative to traditional development donors; and, for Brazil's part, boosting relations with Africa was an aspect of the broader geopolitical strategy of a trend towards promoting South–South relations (Visentini, 2009). It also helped garner support for José Graziano da Silva as Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which was confirmed in June 2011 with wholehearted support across the FAO's African membership.

The 2010 launch assembled delegations from more than 40 African countries who were introduced to a range of agricultural public policies in Brazil (ABC, 2010). Amongst them was More Food, which had been launched in Brazil at the time of the food prices crisis in 2007-08 to boost food production through improvement in family farm productivity (Patriota & Pierri, 2013). The program also aimed to operationalize a 'countercyclical industrial policy' through agricultural machinery market expansion in a context of economic crisis (ibid: 140). It was well received by the African delegations and the image of tractors being shipped from Brazil soon made headlines in Ghana and Zimbabwe (Ghana News Agency, 2011; The Herald, 2011). In early 2011, the Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (CAMEX) approved a concessional loan of US\$640 million to finance MFI in five African countries (Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal and Zimbabwe). Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were subsequently allocated a sum of just under US\$100 million each (Patriota & Pierri, 2013: 142).

Zimbabwe received the first MFI shipment four years after the Brasília launch. The delayed start was mainly due to the novelty of the program for the Brazilian authorities, which, for the first time, were obliged to confront a technical cooperation project combined with a sales operation, meaning that a new legal framework had to be created and operational mechanisms defined (Cabral, 2015). Setting this up was not a mere technical exercise but also a political process in which the interests of a range

⁴ In Brazil, family farmers represent a category of agricultural producers who necessarily fulfil four criteria established by legislation (Law 11-326/2006): (i) landholdings cannot be larger than four fiscal modules; (ii) non-wage family labor is predominant; (iii) household income derives mainly from activities on the farm; and (iv) the family manages the farm. However, this precise definition notwithstanding, it is worth noting that family farming is not a clearly defined statistical category at the global level and is therefore subject to various interpretations across countries (Graeub et al., forthcoming).

of stakeholders had to be accommodated, including those of politicians, and the bureaucracies of the agricultural and foreign affairs domains, as well as the business sector.

In addition to the MDA as the lead institution in the program's design and implementation, other actors were involved, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE), as the patron of development cooperation; CAMEX, as the export credit oversight agency; the Bank of Brazil as the lending institution; and various Brazilian industry representative bodies.⁵ Further adding to the diversity of actors, within the MDA, two separate departments were directly engaged in implementation: the international relations team, which was responsible for the overall conception of the program and negotiation with partner countries (alongside the MRE); and the Family Farming Secretariat, which implemented the hardware component. The publication of a ministerial decree in 2013 detailing conditions for the sale of components (República Federativa do Brasil, 2013) eventually cleared the way on Brazil's side; it was then up to partner countries to finalize operational arrangements on their side and select the desired equipment from the program's menu of items.⁶

In terms of the non-hardware component, MDA officials claimed that policy dialogue with partner governments had taken place as part of short-term technical missions. However, as discussed below, the extent to which the family farming political message got across is thrown into doubt by the concentration of effort on the delivery of hardware and reported bias in the selection of equipment towards relatively sophisticated items with questionable applicability for those (small- to medium-scale) African farmers identified as the target group (Amanor, 2013b).

Yet, criticism was not restricted to the issue of suitable targeting. Brazil's own version of the program had been accused of prioritizing the interests of industry over those of family farmers (Sá, 2012). The following section reviews the debate around family farming and its policies in Brazil in order to illustrate that MFI exported with it domestic disputes, ambiguities, and, specifically, the multiple meanings attributed to the concept of family farming. This will help in our understanding of how such a plurality of understandings was transferred to the African context, in which they were subject to reinterpretation by local actors.

4 Brazil's narratives of family farming and the More Food Program

The view that Brazilian agriculture encompasses two social forms of production—i.e. agribusiness and family farming—has its origins in the 1990s, and is expressed in the governance structure whereby two ministries oversee a single sector: the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (MAPA) promotes agribusiness, while the MDA supports family farmers and agrarian reform (Pierri, 2013). Some commentators contend that these two forms of production are complementary and central to Brazil's agricultural success. Indeed, the country possesses an entrepreneurial class that is highly productive and makes a major contribution to exports, which coexists with one that is labor intensive, relies on family enterprise, and fulfils the social function of generating jobs and food for the domestic market (MDA, 1999). However, this view may be set against a contrasting argument that emphasizes conflict between the two production forms. This is the contention articulated by rural civil society groups, not only in Brazil but now also in Africa (Shankland et al., this issue), which point to the social and environmental costs of an agribusiness model focused on high levels of productivity and corporate integration; and, therefore, campaign for a change in priorities, and an increase in public resource allocations to agrarian reform projects and family-based farming (Contag, 2014).

However, the line that separates agribusiness from family farming is not fixed but, we argue, subject to a socially constructed and shifting demarcation; and where the boundary is drawn depends on how different actors—both inside and outside the state—exploit these discursive categories to articulate their respective positions. Deconstructing the multiple dimensions attributed to family farming vis-à-

⁵ CAMEX respondent and MDA respondents 3 and 4, November 2013.

⁶ MDA respondent 4, November 2013.

vis agribusiness is crucial, given that the purpose and meaning of such agricultural programs when exported to Africa are contentious.

As discussed later in this section, the More Food Program is justified in Brazil either as an instrument of modernization that is utilized in the interests of production and productivity increases, and can be adapted to small-scale agriculture, or as a means of preserving a certain way of life that represents the countryside as a rich environment that is able to sustain a diversity of livelihoods. According to the latter argument, the establishment of an entrepreneurial family farming sector is crucial for rural development as it strengthens the social fabric in the countryside. Nevertheless, More Food is also accused of promoting the use of technology in ways that primarily favor the industry's own agenda; compromising the sustainability of family farming livelihoods by exacerbating dependency on large agricultural corporations; and increasing levels of indebtedness. To fully appreciate where these perspectives originate from it is necessary to consider the origins of Brazil's family farming concept and the multiple meanings that have been ascribed to it over time.

4.1 Narratives of family farming

The origins of the family farming concept are, according to some commentators (e.g. Abramovay & Veiga, 1999; Guanziroli, 2014; Wanderley, 2014), associated with a study on Brazil's agricultural policy conducted in the mid-1990s (INCRA & FAO, 1994) that undertook a comprehensive analysis of the sector's history since the military dictatorship and described a process that became known as 'conservative modernization'. It recounts how, during the modernization period, from the early 1970s till the early 1990s, agricultural production increased significantly and the food supply crisis was addressed without having to undertake agrarian reform; but also argues that the policies adopted paradoxically exacerbated land concentration and migration to urban areas. The study concludes, however, that after two decades of modernization, and despite the high degree of land concentration, there emerged a significant group of small agricultural production units whose performance was similar to that of large farms, the fact that the former had not been the target of credit programs or technological innovation notwithstanding (INCRA & FAO, 1994; Delgado, 2012; Leite & Wesz Jn, 2014).

In addition to emphasizing policy imbalances, the study also highlights the diversity of the sector, a finding corroborated by more recent research (Medina, Almeida, Novaes, Godar, & Pokorny, 2015). According to the criteria adopted, 85% of the 4.8 million agricultural units in Brazil could be described as family-based, accounting for 76% of the agriculture labor force, but only occupying 30% of farmland, and contributing just 38% of the total value of national production (Guanziroli, Buainain, & Sabbato, 2013). Within this group, a subset of about 400,000 units had income levels similar to those of large-scale agribusinesses, which is described as 'consolidated family farming'; there were about two million agricultural units with very low incomes, referred to as 'peripheral farming'; and there was an intermediary subset of 2.4 million units labeled 'transition family farming'. The latter was the target of a raft of public policies that aimed to increase its productivity and contribution to the economy through a process of modernization (ibid). Established in 1995, PRONAF was the first credit program with such a purpose, and a year later, the MDA was created with a mandate to support this diverse family farming population (MDA, 1999).

Thus, Brazilian agriculture comprises a multiplicity of distinct categories rather than just the two indicated by the dualism construct. Indeed, family farming is itself a highly heterogeneous aggregation of farmers (Medina et al., 2015; Graeub et al., forthcoming), each category reflecting particular socioeconomic characteristics and relationships with the market and state, and, therefore, different opportunities and interests (Schneider & Cassol, 2014; Medina et al., 2015). It is such a fragmented political structure that feeds into the debate around family farming in Brazil—and a similar argument could be made about land reform, a highly contentious agricultural policy area in its own right (Wolford, 2007, 2010).

With our focus on family farming and its dialectical relationship with agribusiness, we now turn to distinct narratives in use. Although we argue that, in broad terms, these narratives reflect dominant

positions in Brazil's agrarian politics, we should make the proviso that they are stylized storylines that inevitably simplify a complex reality.

One narrative suggests there is only one manifestation of agriculture or that all farming is agribusiness. Those who advocate this view refute subdivisions within the agribusiness sector (Rodrigues, 2010; Presidência da República, 2011), or regard the ostensible family farming–agribusiness dichotomy as politically-motivated rhetoric (Navarro & Pedroso, 2011; Buainain, Alves, da Silveira, & Navarro, 2013). Aside from the scale and level of capitalization, there is, they argue, no fundamental difference between the modern family farmer—established or transitional—and the large producer; the existence of differentiated policies (such as PRONAF) and institutional spaces (such as MDA) for family farming is therefore regarded as unnecessary, and the disappearance of a large proportion of low-income family farmers seen as inevitable (Alves & Rocha, 2010; Navarro, 2010; Buainain et al., 2013).

Business leaders who perceive themselves to be the modern entrepreneurs of the rural sphere, and are represented by groups such as the Rural Brazilian Society and National Agricultural Confederation (CNA), subscribe to this view. It is one that is also conveyed by MAPA at ministerial level and the *Bancada Ruralista*, a political lobby group, in the National Congress. This sector comprises not only large- and small-scale producers from the South, Southeast and *Cerrado*, but also established landowners in the northeastern semi-arid region and agricultural frontier on the fringes of the Amazon biome.

An opposing narrative asserts that there is an economic and ideological opposition between family farming and agribusiness, and calls for the former to be accorded an identity of its own (Contag, 2014). This narrative was established during the 1990s and promoted by certain rural social movements (Favareto, 2006) that were mostly organized by unions connected to the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), and, subsequently, the Family Farming Workers Federation (FETRAF). This narrative finds expression at state level inside the MDA.

The concept of family farming adopted by the MDA, CONTAG, FETRAF and other social movements encompasses all family producers from established to transitory and peripheral, in spite of their very different social positions and socio-economic statuses. Such indiscrimination also leads to some ambiguity in the discourses of social movements, whereby alternative conceptualizations—e.g. those encapsulated by the terms 'food sovereignty' or 'agroecology'—cannot not necessarily be applied to those family farmers who are well integrated into the global market and/or adopt modern, high-input technologies, including the use of sophisticated machinery and cultivation of genetically-modified crops.

Geographically, this narrative represents small-scale farmers in the South of the country, and similar poor producers in the northeastern and Amazon regions. However, again, there is a problematic relationship between this narrative and the more capitalized small-scale producers in the South, Southeast and *Cerrado*, as although often regarded as aligned with agribusiness, they are nonetheless represented by social movements as family-based producers.

From the end of the 1990s, and especially during the 2000s, another narrative emerged, which we refer to as 'peasant family farming'. This storyline combines environmental concerns with the historical claim of the necessity to radical transform Brazil's agrarian structure (Peterson, 2009). At its core is a critique of the capitalist nature of modern agriculture, and it thus confronts family farmers who operate in the market and employ modern technology. More recently, this narrative has incorporated issues such as agroecology and food sovereignty (Stedile & de Carvalho, 2010).

This narrative is promoted by the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) and its global network *La Via Campesina*⁷; it is also espoused by a range of non-governmental organizations that support

⁷ *La Via Campesina* is an international peasant's movement.

agroecology. Compared to the ideologies of other rural social movements, its proponents are less ambiguous in relation to topics such as food sovereignty, which they actively promote, and technological modernization and market integration, which they condemn. At state level, although the MDA agency INCRA (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária*: National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) is the government institution most closely aligned with the MST, this narrative has been adopted by a range of MDA leaders and bureaucrats who see in the positioning of La Via Campesina an alternative that suits their opposition to agribusiness.

The main social base of the peasant family farming narrative comprises poor farmers at the peripheral fringe and, to some extent, some of those located in the transitional group—individuals drawn from amongst poor farmers in the South, and the Amazon and northeastern semi-arid regions, as well as other areas throughout the country; landless farmers; and those dispossessed of land by conservative modernization. All other family-based producers are regarded as the small-scale expression of the model represented by agribusiness.

4.2 Narratives of the More Food Program

Each of the narratives of agriculture and family farming discussed in the last section—with its particular historical origin, core rural constituency, interest groups, and geographic location—is reflected in Brazil's national agricultural programs. We now focus on the narratives of the More Food Program as a means of unveiling the different interests, beliefs and ideologies it replicates domestically as well as abroad.

Alongside elements of the family farming narrative, the 'all farming is agribusiness' narrative emphasizes 'productivist modernization' as synonym for agricultural prosperity. Increases in productivity facilitated by modern inputs and machinery, associated with market integration, are the best ways to increase farmers' income and wealth; from this perspective, the More Food Program is held to be an important policy instrument (Agro Analysis, 2009).

By contrast, some proponents of the family farming narrative who more actively oppose agribusiness argue against productivity-focused modernization and call for a 'territories of life' approach (CUT, 2008). Here, the emphasis is on livelihoods that allow rural populations to remain on their native lands, thus avoiding a rural exodus and dismantling of the social fabric. According to this storyline, the More Food Programme offers an opportunity to unlock the diversification potential of family farming. Although such a narrative is hostile towards the technological package financed by the program and its relationships with large corporations, it emphasizes the alternatives stressed by the program's broader policy advocacy. The More Food Program is more fiercely criticized by proponents of the 'peasant family farming' narrative, who argue that the program serves the interests of large capitalistic corporations and is therefore a vehicle of conservative modernization (Ibase, 2006; Sá, 2012; Teixeira, 2013).

These narratives thus highlight the contentious nature of the More Food Program: rooted in ideological and class struggles, different groups see it in different ways, and this, in turn, reflects wider historical debates in Brazil (Wolford, 2005). Indeed, the More Food Program itself was born out of a commitment by the state to invest countercyclically at a time of economic crisis, and of serious disputes in the agriculture sector (Patriota & Pierri, 2013). The political coalition headed by Lula da Silva and, subsequently, by Dilma Rousseff was backed by Brazil's industrial entrepreneurs who benefited from the state's developmental programs in the second half of the 2000s; the More Food Program thus allowed the MDA to gain support from this coalition through its commitment to purchase tractors and other farm equipment, and so to increase its budget significantly and gain influence within the Cabinet.

Yet, our research suggests that within the MDA itself, there was no uniform position on the aims of the More Food Program. Some bureaucrats rejected the conservative modernization critique and emphasized how the program made it possible for farmers to increase their incomes, thereby combining territories of life and productivist modernization narratives. At the same time, the

mercantile nature of the program was justified on the grounds that it strengthened the national economy and promoted the export of Brazilian technology, thus facilitating an increase in the MDA budget.⁸ However, other officers argued that the subjects of the various narratives were all farmers and that modernization was the only way to move forwards with rural development.⁹ Finally, there were those who regarded the More Food Program as a tactical opportunity to increase resources and gain political space for family farming in its opposition to agribusiness.¹⁰

Overall, the MDA's fragmented positioning reflects a heterogeneous political environment in which the ministry as an institution must respond to different agendas, including alignment with industry if it is to push forward its political agenda. Thus, given the complex contours of the domestic political economy that has framed Brazil's More Food Program, the question arises as to how the implementation of the program's international version is shaped in Africa.

5 How narratives get reconfigured when they travel to Africa: insights from Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe

In this section, we focus on how narratives are transformed when they are exported to the African context. First, we consider Brazilian narratives of the MFI program, and then analyze how the program and its storylines have been received in Africa and the repercussions of its implementation on the continent.

5.1. What narratives does Brazil export to Africa?

The Brazilian government's portrayal of MFI typically highlights its contribution to the strengthening of family farming production and food security through increases in productivity supported by appropriate Brazilian technology. For example:

The program's objective is to establish a line of technical cooperation that highlights food production by family farmers as a way towards food and nutrition security in participating countries. Alongside technical cooperation, the intervention includes financing of technology adapted to the socio-environmental conditions of local family farming, as a way of increasing production and productivity of rural units. (MDA, 2012)

Brazilian MFI inputs include agricultural machinery and implements sold through export credit, as well as expertise passed on through technical cooperation activities and policy dialogue. However, the importance attributed to each of these channels is variable, which points to contrasting expectations about the program and its underlying aims. Actors' accounts are illustrative of these disparities; the starkest contrast being between those that emphasize the program's business dimension—in terms of opportunities created for trade and Brazilian industry—and those that stress the political agenda of strengthening family farming. We elaborate on each of these below, while considering some nuances and variations.

A business agenda

Since its inauguration, MFI has been talked about mainly as a sales operation, the hardware component standing out in most public pronouncements, including government news releases (Valor Econômico, 2013; MDA, 2014a, 2014b, 2015b). Indeed, even early descriptions of the program suggest the importance of the business agenda:

With the increase in productivity, and consequently, income, they will become regular clients of Brazilian agriculture technology. (MDA, 2012)

⁸ MDA respondents 2 and 5, November 2013.

⁹ MDA respondent 3, November 2013.

¹⁰ MDA respondent 1, November 2011.

This is the view expressed by Brazilian industry, which regards sub-Saharan Africa as an important market to be opened up (MDIC, 2013), and by trade promotion agencies, which look to diversify the composition of Brazilian exports.¹¹ Yet, it is also a view shared by some inside the MDA, one senior bureaucrat asserting bluntly that the ministry's technical cooperation policy in effect comprises "a commercial agenda [that aimed to establish Brazil as an international] reference in exporting agricultural technology and not just soybeans";¹² a point of view that had already been publicly announced:

The program is consolidating itself as a policy for the export of machinery and for contributing to food production, especially in African countries. We are exporting to Africa agricultural technology produced in Brazil. (MFI coordinator cited in MDA, 2014)

Business with a legacy

MFI is, however, not regarded as a conventional export operation; rather, it is portrayed as an example of Brazil's responsible approach to business and African development, which gives Brazilian exports a comparative edge vis-à-vis more ruthless competitors such as China.¹³ Post-sales support¹⁴ and technical cooperation are the extras that the program offers to clients, and these are regarded as a contribution to Africa's development process. An industry representative articulated what we refer to as the 'business with a legacy' perspective:

Can we think of Africa as a place from which to extract advantages, or suck advantages from? No. Africa is a place for you to make an investment from A to Z: it is about training labor, including an African labor force, in projects, preparing Africans for growth. There is no point in having that old perspective of 'let's take advantage', or, in my case, 'let's sell the machinery and run away.' That does not exist anymore. If someone still thinks like that, such a person is slightly, well, significantly, out-of-date. In reality, our business model entails a lot of training of locals, a lot of knowledge transfer, know-how transmission... It is about helping them to organize themselves and develop in a correct manner. (Brazilian industry respondent 1, July 2014)

This perspective resonates with President Rousseff's pragmatic view on development cooperation, which emphasizes commercial and investment opportunities for Brazilian enterprises while urging them to leave a legacy to Africans through the transfer of technology, training, and social programs (Valor Econômico, 2011).

Political advocacy

The view that MDA technical cooperation represents a commercial agenda—even if with a social conscience—is not widely shared within the ministry. In fact, the idea that the main focus of the program is business oriented is firmly refuted by those who argue that the MDA's relation with Africa is "an entirely political agenda."¹⁵ The latter strategy is geared towards helping Africa build a development trajectory centered on the notion of family farming similar to Brazil's own experience through the establishment of an institutional framework for family farming, and the strengthening of state institutions and public policies that support such a framework. Some research participants regarded the agenda as the expression of a counter-hegemonic movement against a neoliberal rationale that is seen as favoring agribusiness, that is, large-scale production that mainly targets export markets. Rather, it was regarded as supportive of a "logic of income distribution, public policy, and affirmation

¹¹ CAMEX respondent, November 2013, and APEX respondents 1 and 2, July 2014.

¹² MDA respondent 3, November 2013.

¹³ CAMEX respondent, November 2013, and APEX respondents 1 and 2, July 2014.

¹⁴ Repair and maintenance services guaranteed by companies selling agricultural machinery and equipment under the program (República Federativa do Brasil, 2013).

¹⁵ MDA respondent 2, November 2013.

of the role of the state,” which, it was argued, promoted food production and was mainly oriented towards the domestic market.¹⁶

This political advocacy perspective puts the emphasis on the MFI policy dialogue component, which is expected to be carried out through interaction with local counterparts as part of the technical missions implemented in partner countries. Accordingly, the sales component is regarded as compatible with this model and portrayed as instrumental to the reproduction of family farming, which reflects the position of compromise that is most typical of the MDA, given the heterogeneous nature of its target population. However, our research suggests there are subtle variations to this type of positioning. Some interviewees spoke of mechanization as part of a process of agricultural modernization that could make farms more productive and commercially viable, whereas others regarded it as an effort to reduce drudgery and retain people in rural areas. These two perspectives echo the contrast between productivist modernization and territories of life narratives.

Raising productivity and creating new commercial possibilities

The productivist modernization narrative is present in arguments that emphasize the productivity gains and commercial possibilities of mechanization. The types of agricultural machinery and implements made available through MFI are, in principle, the same as those utilized in Brazil’s domestic More Food Program.¹⁷ As such, they consist of equipment suited to the characteristics of Brazilian family farms, and encompassing about 4,500 different items including plowing, harvesting and transportation machinery, the utilization of which is thought to be sufficient to respond to the technological needs of farmers in target countries and raise their productivity.

In addition to increasing output, such mechanization is also expected to open up new commercial possibilities to target farmers, as one Brazilian industry representative exemplified:

Mechanization will generate, let’s say, much greater production. Technical assistance itself will also help production. And then you will have a situation that offers options: “Well, what are we going to do? Are we going to export this as a commodity or are we going to process it within the country? How do we guarantee a market? Am I going to produce oranges and sell them at a local market, or am I also going to make juice? Shall I do jam or only sell at the market? Shall I export my grain or process it?” (Brazilian industry respondent 1, July 2014)

Mechanization as a means of reducing the drudgery of farming and keeping people in rural areas

Moreover, and echoing the territories of life perspective, mechanization is also regarded as a means of reducing drudgery and offering the younger generation an incentive to remain on the land by turning farming into a more dignified activity:

Let’s take the business of machinery, that is, the More Food Program. I had the chance of participating in debates several years ago when the program was set up... and I went to several regions to talk to people about what they thought about it, especially the tractors, where there is some criticism... The most common answer I got and the one that impressed me the most was that it served several purposes, but the most important [from a parent’s perspective] was that it offered the possibility that their children would remain in the activity, for two main reasons. First, the [eradication of the] hardship of farm labor...and, second, social recognition. Hard work is [regarded as] a poor person’s job; it is a job for people with no brain. (MDA respondent 5, November 2013)

¹⁶ MDA respondent 2, November 2013. Cabral (2015) also discusses this contention.

¹⁷ MDA respondent 3, November 2013.

Family farming is therefore portrayed not only as a particular means of production but also as a way of life;¹⁸ and mechanization plays a social role by encouraging young people to stay in rural areas by allowing them to pursue a dignified livelihood.

So how are Brazil's disparate MFI narratives received in Ghana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe? Which ones are embraced by local dynamics and which get lost in translation?

5.2. What policy elements do African governments import and why?

By early 2015, MFI was at different stages of implementation across the three case-study countries, and the hardware component dominated local headlines, which dwelt solely on tractors and other agricultural equipment (Ghana News Agency, 2012; The Herald, 2013; Notícias online, 2015). Zimbabwe was at the most advanced stage, having begun to receive equipment, although it had yet to be distributed to farmers (Mukwereza, 2015); Mozambique came next, with the first batch of equipment already on its way (MDA, 2015a); and, lastly, Ghana was still at the stage of equipment selection.¹⁹ In terms of the non-hardware component, Mozambique was in receipt of special attention from the MDA, with an ongoing discussion on the Brazil side as to how technical assistance activities should be restructured.²⁰ We now present a detailed analysis of these patterns with regard to each case, followed by discussion of target-country government's motivation.

In Ghana, MFI conforms to an agricultural mechanization policy whereby the state assumes a central role in procuring and subsidizing technology (Diao, Cossar, Houssou, & Kolavalli, 2014). This strategy led to the establishment of the Agricultural Mechanization Service Center (AMSEC) program, which promotes the development of private mechanization centers that hire out tractors and other equipment to farmers. The program is premised on a modernization agenda that aims to replace outmoded shifting agriculture with modern agricultural practices based on permanent cultivation and the use of up-to-date inputs and machinery. The Ghanaian government regards low productivity and low technological uptake as the result of the limited availability and high cost of machinery—constraints that the mechanization policy aims to address (Amanor, 2015).

Against this background, the Ghanaian government expects MFI to supply tractors and other equipment to AMSECs in line with its mechanization strategy, and in addition to other ongoing agricultural machinery funding programs—notably, that implemented by India (Diao et al., 2014). MFI is therefore understood as another aid-funded technology transfer intervention and not as a special program designed to promote agricultural cooperation between Ghana and Brazil. Indeed, no interdepartmental linkages between the Brazilian MDA and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Ghana (MoFA) have been developed in order to deliberate either on the relevance of the Brazilian experience to the Ghanaian context or on previous experiences of mechanization programs in Ghana.²¹ Moreover, those responsible for drawing up MFI at the MoFA were not even made aware of the domestic Brazilian version of the program or its family farming policy framework, but were, rather, presented with a list of Brazilian equipment to draw from to supply the AMSECs.²²

Ghana's list of requested items is dominated by tractors and tractor implements (ABIMAQ, 2014), the suitability of which for the conditions of the average Ghanaian farmer has been questioned (Amanor, 2013a; Benin, 2014). For example, the advantages and disadvantages of tractor technology in relation to local factors such as minimum-tillage have not been examined. Yet, the EMBRAPA Ghana representative had advised the Ghanaian government to pursue an agricultural conservation strategy that included no-tillage farming and equipment such as the Brazilian manual jab planter known in

¹⁸ MDA respondent 2, November 2013.

¹⁹ MDA respondents 6, 7 and 8, July 2014.

²⁰ MDA respondents 6, 7 and 8, July 2014.

²¹ Respondent from the Agricultural Engineering Services Directorate, Ministry of Food and Agriculture of Ghana, July 2014.

²² *ibid.*

Portuguese as *matraca*.²³ However, the Government of Ghana largely ignored this advice, choosing to adopt the technology modernization approach offered by the MDA through MFI.

The tendency for case-study African governments to request tractors and other relatively sophisticated equipment was noted by some MDA officials as something they sought to discourage, as this type of equipment (e.g. the hydraulic excavators demanded by the Mozambican government²⁴) was considered less suitable for the small- to medium-scale farmers that the program was designed to target. Yet, since the Brazilian government was committed to non-interference and demand-driven cooperation principles in South–South relations (Abreu, 2013), program implementers could not reject (only discourage) partner countries' requests.²⁵

In Mozambique, one Ministry of Agriculture respondent who worked on MFI implementation articulated the following vision of Brazilian cooperation:

What we have been witnessing regarding Brazil's development is very interesting. I think Brazil has increased its production significantly in the last 10 years: it has transformed its family farmers almost into commercial farmers. We want to benefit from that experience. (Mozambican Ministry of Agriculture respondent, March 2015)

With the Mozambican government's committed to the expansion of large-scale commercial farming, and Brazil's involvement in this goal through the ProSavana program (Shankland et al., this issue), local government officials do not differentiate between MFI and other Brazilian initiatives. It is the much-hailed agribusiness success of the *Cerrado* (The Economist, 2010) and EMBRAPA technology that are well-known and have been suggested as models for African savannah development (Morris, Binswanger-Mkhize, & Byerlee, 2009), while the nuances and complexities of Brazil's own family farming debate are not appreciated. Mechanization and technology transfer is therefore seen in a different light to that perceived by the family farming advocates at the MDA.

Rural social movements and civil society organizations in Mozambique, together with their Brazilian peers and international networks, have reacted against the stance of the Mozambican government, as reflected by the demonstrations against ProSavana (Shankland et al., forthcomingb). These groups accuse the program of being the largest land grab in Africa (Wise, 2015) and a business plan for corporate takeover of agriculture (JA!, 2013), calling instead for a peasant family farming alternative based on food sovereignty and agroecology ideals (UNAC, 2012; JA!, 2013). Although there has not been similar mobilization against MFI, both Mozambican and Brazilian civil society actors are critical of what they consider to be a conservative modernization bias to the program.

Finally, in Zimbabwe, government officials also interpret MFI as essentially a contribution to the government's mechanization policy, whereby machinery and implements can be deployed for food production but also for cash crops. In terms of the non-hardware component, whilst senior officials involved in MFI negotiations are aware that it relates to a policy dialogue on the promotion of family farming, middle-level and frontline extension staff in relevant departments of the Ministry of Agriculture only know about the equipment.²⁶

While apparently removed from the political thrust of the More Food Program with regard to family farming in Brazil, MFI retains a degree of political significance in Zimbabwe. The country's land reform is seen by some at the MDA as a process to be supported and from which Brazil can learn (The Herald, 2011).²⁷ The politics of international aid relations also matter to both sides. On the one hand, the Zimbabwean government gives special significance to Brazilian cooperation in coming to its

²³ EMBRAPA in Ghana respondents 1 and 2, March 2012 and 2013 respectively.

²⁴ MDA respondent 3, November 2013.

²⁵ MDA respondent 3, November 2013, and MDA respondents 6, 7 and 8, July 2014.

²⁶ Ministry of Agriculture Zimbabwe respondent.

²⁷ A view confirmed by MDA respondent 1, November 2011.

rescue when traditional donors isolated the country through sanctions, amid spirited lobbying for other countries to do the same, following the 2000 land reform (Mukwereza, 2015). It thus regards Brazil's support as an endorsement of this policy, as new equipment will also benefit population resettlement. On the other hand, for Brazil's part, cooperation with Zimbabwe feeds into the South–South solidarity discourse whereby it is helping out when Northern donors have abandoned the country. Brazil's gesture in selecting Zimbabwe to be among the first beneficiaries of the program is also viewed as an affirmation of the country's policy of non-interference in the politics of sovereign countries.

Overall, across the three case-study countries, MFI appears largely stripped of the political symbolism it holds at home, where it is regarded as the outcome of a social struggle for political recognition of family farming. This symbolism melts away when the program materializes in Africa as an instrument of mechanization, or of aid politics. The nuances between different types of family farming associated with different constituencies in various parts of Brazil and the struggle for recognition by each are dissolved once the program reaches Africa. Rather, MFI is embraced as an opportunity to modernize agriculture and open up new commercial avenues for the sector. This reflects the interests of the political elite in each country respectively, who have naturally taken the leads in negotiating deals.

In Ghana, the hardware component of MFI not only accords with the government's technology modernization narrative but also serves the alliance between government and international agribusiness (Amanor, 2013b). Moreover, tractors and other hardware provide opportunities for political patronage (Ghana News Agency, 2009).

In Mozambique, social mobilization notwithstanding, the political elite retains a strong commitment to external investment in land and agriculture, as witnessed by ProSavana and other initiatives (Clements & Fernandes, 2013; Garcia, Kato, & Fontes, 2013). Additional equipment for the modernization of the agriculture sector also suits the country's agrarian elite, who are closely allied to core political constituencies (do Rosário, 2012; Hall & Paradza, 2012).

In Zimbabwe, the government is keen to secure support for land reform, but commercial banks have not provided any meaningful backing in the face of a liquidity crunch that has persisted since the economy's dollarization in 2009. In any case, with all entitlement to land now vested in the state and real estate ceasing to be an acceptable form of collateral, commercial banks have been reluctant to lend to new farmers, particularly in respect of capital to purchase equipment that has to be repaid over time. Furthermore, in the absence of any public statement on the subject since the first tranche of Brazilian equipment arrived at the end of 2014, rumors are rife that it will be distributed along partisan lines (NewsDay, 2015; Mugabe, 2015).

Owing to this configuration of interests in the three case-study countries, ideas formulated in Brazil—e.g. replication of advances in the domestic family farming model, reduction of farm-work drudgery, retention of people in rural areas, etc.—have had little resonance. However, the questions of the effect of MFI on those on the Brazilian side who have engaged with the program on a political-ideological basis, and the nature of feedback loops generated by the reception that MFI has had in Africa remain to be answered. Developments identified in respect of the program in Mozambique offer evidence of the response that is taking shape, and concern a reframing of the MFI technical assistance element that we interpret as an attempt to reinstate the program's family farming advocacy thrust.

5.3. Feedback loops: a Mozambique story

Having cleared the way for implementation of the hardware component, the MDA's international relations team focused on revisiting the technical assistance—or non-hardware—component of MFI.²⁸ However, until early 2015, this was only evident in respect of Mozambique. Changes envisaged included giving MFI a more explicit focus on technical assistance and rural extension (known in Brazil as *Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural*: ATER), targeting family farmers, and connecting the

²⁸ MDA respondents 6, 7 and 8, July 2014.

intervention to other ongoing cooperation initiatives in the country with the same target group, notably the Food Purchase Program for Africa (*Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos-África*: PAA-Africa) and a school feeding program;²⁹ both agricultural cooperation initiatives were endorsed by Brazilian social movements.³⁰ The MDA team responsible for the adjustment expected the addition of an ATER element to improve coherence and effectiveness across Brazilian cooperation initiatives targeting family farming in Mozambique, and bring developments to the agriculture model more in line with the territories of life narrative.³¹

However, harmonization with the hardware component could not be guaranteed, as there was no mechanism in place to ensure that farmers accessing MFI-provided machinery would be the same as those targeted by other Brazilian cooperation initiatives. Our interviews with MDA officials suggest indeed a growing breach between the program's hardware and non-hardware elements. The former appeared to have gained a life of its own and was now in the hands of implementers at MDA and the countries' authorities. One MDA respondent even expressed embarrassment at the course followed, and the fact that the program had become exclusively associated with the selling of machinery.

We are discussing how to mobilize them [the Mozambican Ministry of Education] as partners in the ATER proposal that we are putting together, as I guess [anonymous informant] has told you. [Interviewer: Concerning More Food International?] Yes, it is about More Food, but we do not like to refer to it in that way because we feel embarrassed about More Food. [Interviewer: is that because of the association with the sale of tractors?] Yes. (MDA respondent 9, July 2014)

The choice of Mozambique as the target of these adjustments to MFI should be assessed in the light of other developments in Brazil's cooperation portfolio in the country. First, Mozambique is a special given case given that it receives the largest proportion of Brazil's overseas agricultural aid and investment (Cabral et al., 2013). Second, the high-profile ProSavana program has garnered much negative publicity and mobilized public opinion against it, a position that has been exacerbated through the connection of local civil society organizations with anti-land grab- and agroecology-friendly international networks (Shankland et al., this issue). This situation has impacted on debates around agricultural cooperation within the Brazilian government—criticism that has been replicated within the MDA—and ProSavana has been described as a “model not to be followed,” and “contrary to the interests of family farming.”³² The MDA is therefore eager to reinstate its credentials as the champion of family farming, and distance itself from ProSavana and the criticism that the former also serves a business agenda.

Nevertheless, although not officially articulated, the reframing of MFI in the personal accounts of MDA actors as a bi-modal hardware/non-hardware initiative suggests an internal reaction not only against the program's business motivations but also against agricultural modernization. While this may not sit easily with Brazil's foreign policy objectives, which ProSavana serves more neatly given its focus on providing a platform for Brazilian agribusiness companies and EMBRAPA technology, it is a movement supported by recent developments at the international level with which Brazil has been associated. The current Brazilian director general of the FAO is highly supportive of PAA-Africa and the family farming model in general, and has called for a “paradigm shift” in agriculture such that agroecology is seen as a means of moving food production onto a more sustainable footing (UN News Center, 2015).

²⁹ Both programs draw on Brazil's own national domestic policies on food and nutrition security respectively. See Rocha (2009) for an analysis of Brazil's experience of these programs.

³⁰ Brazilian social movement respondents 1 and 2, November 2013, and respondent 3, December 2013. See also Schlesinger (2013).

³¹ MDA respondents 6, 7 and 8, July 2014.

³² MDA respondent 2, November 2013.

Conclusion

The Brazilian government's narrative on the suitability of its technology and policy experiments in Africa is premised on a claim of affinity between the two contexts (Scoones et al., forthcoming). Yet, policy concepts and ideas that emerge in particular settings, such as family farming in Brazil, do not travel easily across space and socio-political realities, and must be historically and geographically contextualized. This study sought to do this by analyzing: (a) the genesis of Brazil's family farming concept and its distinct formulations; (b) the various interpretations by Brazilian actors of the More Food Program and its international version, MFI; and (c) the reception and reconfiguration of MFI in three African countries.

First, our examination of Brazilian actors' narratives pointed to the contentious nature of family farming, which can best be understood as a 'floating signifier' whose multiple meanings mirror Brazil's historical sociopolitical struggle and complex agricultural system—both of which have been shaped by institutional politics, class dynamics, and geography. This indicates that Brazil's domestic agrarian politics is more complex than a simple family farming–agribusiness dualism framing suggests, as family farming is itself a disputed concept.

Second, the transfer of the More Food Program to Africa should be considered within the framework of Brazil's overall development cooperation, the channel for policy transfer. Indeed, we found that the implementation of MFI not only reflected Brazil's complex agrarian politics but was also integrated into its foreign policy, in which business and diplomatic imperatives also played a role. This confluence of different agendas generated MFI's hybrid form, whereby tractors and other equipment sold on concessional terms served the export industry, and the non-hardware component assumed the role of a political advocacy impetus that was exploited by the Brazilian state as well as various social movements.

Third, understandably, the convergence of these different interests and perspectives was not free of tension. Rather, MFI was revealed as an arena in which Brazilian actors replicated abroad the battles they fought at home. Yet, unlike the high-profile clash that erupted with ProSavana in Mozambique, disputes concerning MFI and family farming were largely concealed. Indeed, rather than argumentative confrontations in the public sphere, they remained discursive battles for meaning played out behind the scenes and revealed to us through the disparate ways in which MFI and family farming were articulated.

Fourth, the different understandings of family farming exported by Brazilian actors through MFI gained new interpretation upon reaching Africa, where recipient governments developed their own views on the program and this mode of agriculture. The coincidence of interests between African political and bureaucratic elites and the Brazilian hardware exporters was visible in all three case-study countries. This ties in with the wider push for the technology-intensive Green Revolution and development of large-scale commercial agriculture in Africa as a response to food insecurity (Africa Progress Panel, 2014). However, such an imperative rather leaves aside family farming advocacy, with its origins in the Brazilian struggle for autonomous farming livelihoods as an alternative to corporate agriculture—although the family farming narrative is not necessarily adverse to engagement in the export market or modern technologies.

Sometimes expressed as a 'territories of life' narrative, this position was not successfully articulated in Africa, at least, not until non-governmental mobilizations in Mozambique. Reaction to the particular type of large-scale, corporate Brazilian intervention implemented here mainly targeted ProSavana but also had a broader impact, including that on MFI. Although non-governmental actors generally praised the latter for advancing the family farming narrative, they criticized its mechanization element for reinforcing the value-chains of corporate agriculture and compromising the sustainability of family farming over the long term.

Fifth, it was in the context of such a visible dispute over agricultural development models that the non-hardware element of MFI was reaffirmed and links forged with other programs—notably PAA-

Africa—as well as Brazil’s other international initiatives, including those implemented through the FAO. Thus, the apparent reconfiguration of MFI in Mozambique reflected not only the concerns of Mozambican social actors regarding favored models of agricultural development in Brazilian cooperation, but also the need—as expressed by a coalition of Brazilian and international actors—to consolidate a certain understanding of family farming that had so far gained little traction on the recipient side.

Overall, MFI, as well as Brazil’s agricultural cooperation more broadly, can be viewed as a discursive battlefield where best models and visions of agrarian development and aid are in dispute. Beyond the specifics of Brazil’s domestic politics and its agricultural interventions in Africa, the MFI experience speaks to wider scholarly debates around agrarian change that highlight the continuous class-based power struggle between different groups within the state as well as society at large (Borras, 2009; Byres, 2009), together with the need to consider the politics of knowledge (and discourse) that are underpinned by struggles between different framings of reality (Scoones, 2009).

As MFI implementation in Africa continues, further research is necessary to trace its trajectory. It will be worth investigating, for example, whether the apparent fracturing of the program into two separate initiatives driven by different agendas materializes and spreads beyond Mozambique. If such a division were confirmed, this would question the ability of the Brazilian government to achieve a convergence of development solidarity and business objectives in its cooperation framework. Additionally, there is scope for a more detailed analysis than was possible in the present paper of how African actors perceive and draw on Brazil’s family farming experience, and how such understandings evolve over time.

Finally, the discourse-analytical approach to our study on MFI revealed the less visible dimensions of policy transfer: the program not only exported goals, instruments and concepts from Brazil to Africa, but also intrinsic struggles for meaning that concerned, not least, family farming and the role of mechanization in agricultural development. Yet, questions around the impact of MFI and the meeting of its goals in the African context remain to be asked—bearing in mind, however, the distinct rationale ascribed to the program on this continent.

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