Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia

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Brazil and Latin American agrarian transformations

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Abstract

Historically, Brazil has played a great role influencing agrarian transformations in the Latin American region. Besides Argentina, it led the implementation of the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, changing significantly the internal agricultural production and supporting the expansion of agricultural frontiers, expanding its influence into neighbor countries like Uruguay, but especially across the borders of Paraguay. The leading crop was the soy cultivation, expanding from the south to the north of Brazil – into the Amazon region –, but also occupying millions of hectares of the Paraguayan land. Such agricultural modernization, expansion and production put Brazil as one of the leading countries on exporting commodities, but it also generated deep internal and external agrarian transformations, like rural exodus, land conflicts and dispossession, deepening inequality in the rural areas. Decades later, such influence still remains – including the expansion of Brazilian agricultural frontiers to another countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, Suriname and Guyana –, but it has been reshaped, expanded and deepened, including influence and domination of non-agricultural sectors like mining and infrastructure construction, especially by loans of the National Bank of Economic and Social Development (BNDES). Brazil's role in the region has led to agrarian transformations (?) – use of land, dispossession of local population, and so on –, resulting from private investments and public support or State's incentives, especially through trade and economic agreements, financial aid, and political alliances. As a preliminary approach, these discussion notes is about the State's support on reshaping and deepening the influence of Brazil, looking for investments and support related to the transformations of land use in some countries basically in the South America region.

Introduction

The BRIC(S) initiative started as an inter-regional agreement (2006) and, lately (after 2009) – based on summits and meetings of heads of the States –, moved to agreements of trade, investments (basically in infrastructure) and (economic) co-operation:

- After 2011, with the inclusion of South Africa (gateway to the African continent?), the BRICS showed its geopolitical perspective (in a multipolar world order);
- In this geopolitical perspective (and as an inter-regional agreement), the BRICS is 'promoting' global players (G20) as **regional leaders** or **regional powers**;

Parallel (or complementary) to BRICS, it is important to keep in mind other regional initiatives of cooperation (or integration) like the 'old' Mercosur (created in 1991 but reanimated and strengthening after 2003) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), created in 2006, both heavily centered on the Brazilian state's influence (Kellogg, 2007);[1]

These initiatives are a combination of political (election of left wing, progressive or popular governments) and economic changes; 'the major economies in Latin America have returned to growth' in the middle of 2000s (Kellogg, 2007: 191), especially because of Chinese influence in the continent;[2]

Brazilian investment projects in infrastructure and cooperation projects with other Latin (or South) American countries are (or were) based on economic expansion fueled by the States (like the other BRICS, the state is the driver);

BRICS (Brazil) in relation to the Middle Income Countries (MICs), like Argentina, Venezuela, Chile and so on = history of cooperation (like the economic agreements of Mercosur) and competition (long history of disputes and Brazilian cases of land grabbing in Paraguay and Bolivia);

Related to agrarian transformations – besides the historical perspective of cooperation and/or competition –, it is crucial to consider:

- The hegemonic reality of the agribusiness model (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and so on) = based on land concentration (land grabbing), monoculture, production of grains for export, dispossession of peasants and rural communities, etc.;
- Recently, there is no much investments of Brazilian large farmers in buying land in the neighbor countries (Hypotheses: the Brazilian agricultural frontiers are still open; there is no need to go abroad to expand/invest in the grain production), but there are investments of Brazilian agro-industries;

Recently, large business groups play a key role, especially the ones linked to agribusiness and mining (including Argentinian firms/capital investing in land in Brazil); and infrastructure investment projects (construction companies) as well; State action shaped by large business groups' interests (agro-strategies) together with the strategy of national champions;

To a lesser extent, positive experiences stemming from policy networks related to family farming and social policies: mostly related to the action from the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), from the Ministries of Agrarian Development (MDA) and of Social Development (MDS), and some areas (research and technical cooperation) from the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation

[1] According to Kellogg (2007: 189), 'The UNASUR, while a challenge to US hegemony in the region, is completely embedded in a very familiar logic of capital accumulation and corporate rule. ALBA [the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas], by contrast, is closely associated with the mass movements, which are at the core of the leftward move of many of the region's politics'.

[2] 'Representative of this growth is a series of resource-extraction initiatives, particularly various proposals for continent-wide pipelines, the biggest infrastructure initiative the region has ever seen. This return to growth is shaking up political as well as economic alliances' (Kellogg 2007: 191).

(EMBRAPA);

1 Brazil in Latin America as a regional power *(waddling duck or flying geese?)*

Agribusiness model = historical process of dispossession and land concentration X land struggle and rural resistance (indigenous resistance and struggle for territories);

Agriculture and rural development account for an important share from cooperation projects with other Latin American countries;

Challenges to Brazil become a superpower from the agribusiness perspective (Barros, 2009): a) restore investment pattern in infrastructure and technology; b) investment in human capital; c) stricter property rights concerning the ownership of the land; d) stronger use of biotechnology in agriculture and, e) public sector action to deal with environmental issues and trade negotiations;

Closer to home, the Lula government (2003-2010) focused attention on South America through policies directed at specific countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay and Venezuela. Ideological and political identification were factors that determined closer attention to the South American continent. Even though they did not always yield the expected results, the policies pursued and resources invested in this region served to enhance Brazil's influence. Such policies and aid included forgiving Bolivia's debt (US$ 52 mi in 2004), investments by Brazilian government agencies such as the Bank of Brazil (*Banco do Brasil*) and the National Bank of Economic and Social Development (BNDES), which made available resources for regional projects and the establishment of the Initiative for South American Infrastructure Integration (*IIRSA*), in 2000.[3]

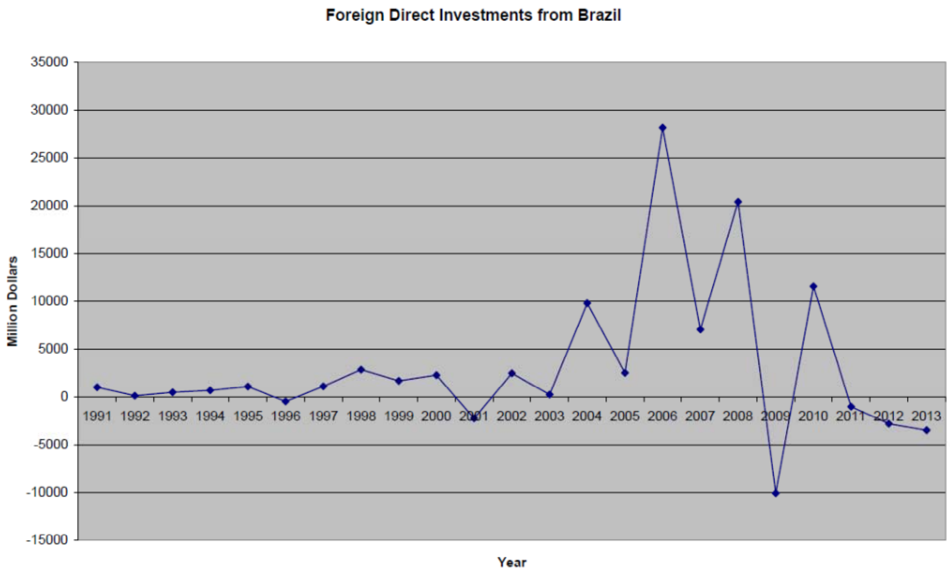
Table 01 – Foreign Direct Investment (FDI): stocks from Brazil in Latin America (excluding the fiscal paradises)

	2001		**2007**		**2008**		**2001-2008**
Countries	**US$ million**	**%**	**US$ million**	**%**	**US$ million**	**%**	**Growth %**
Argentina	1,789	14.2	2,496	6.3	3,521	7.3	96.8
Uruguay	3,603	28.6	2,030	5.2	2,518	5.2	-30.1
Paraguay	58	0.5	125	0.3	169	0.4	191.4
Mercosur	5,540	43,2	4,651	11.8	6,208	12.9	13.9
Peru	50	0.4	587	1.5	249	0.5	398
Mexico	75	0.6	547	1.4	282	0.6	276
Chile	160	1.3	526	1.3	417	0.9	160.6
Venezuela	40	0.3	222	0.6	296	0.6	640
Colombia	130	1.0	203	0.5	331	0.7	154.6
Bolivia	51	0.4	64	0.2	59	0.1	15.7
Ecuador	72	0.6	40	0.1	33	0.1	-54.2

Source: The Central Bank of Brazil (BACEN)

[3] There were other initiatives after 2003 like strengthening of – or even the resumption of negotiations within – Mercosur, and the creation of the South American Defense Council (*Conselho de Defesa Sul-Americano*) and of the Union of South American Nations (*Unasur*).

Figure 01 – Rise and fall from Brazilian FDI (1991-2013)



Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA) – 2000

- Regional integration by cooperation: 510 infrastructure projects (US$ 74,5 bi);
- IIRSA projects: 62.3% of the investments done by national governments; 20.9% done by the private sector; around 20% of the investments should come from financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Andean Development Corporation (CAF) and the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES);
- Regional integration = mainly for creating and/or improving 'export corridors' (see Safransky and Wolford, 2011).

The Peru-Brazil-Bolivia Hub is made of 26 projects organized into three project groups, with an estimated investment of US$29,089.8 million. Of this amount, 62.6% goes to the Brazilian project known as 'Madeira River Hydroelectric Power Complex (Santo Antônio and Jirau Hydroelectric Dams)', which is being executed.

There are no official (governmental) programs (or public policies) supporting investments in the agriculture sector abroad (thus, agrarian transformations are occurring because of 'indirect' investments on land). On the other hand, 22% of the Brazilian investments in technical cooperation were for the agriculture sector, especially done by EMBRAPA (Renzio *et all* 2013) in 2010.[4]

2 Brazilian public investments (BNDES) and agrarian changes in Latin America

According to Guedes and Fontoura (2013: 7) '…development banks turn out to be hybrid institutions that act simultaneously as governmental institutions – with functions of formulation and implementation of policies and development – but also as financial institutions *strictu sensus* with

[4] Recently, Brazil has invested in technical cooperation activities to tropical regions through EMBRAPA, which opened regional offices and research units abroad. The first Regional Office was created in West Africa (Ghana), in 2006 as part of EMBRAPA Africa. Two years later, another office was created in Caracas (Venezuela), and other in Panama in 2010. There were 47 cooperation projects involving partnerships with Embrapa in 2010, and 39 of these were in African countries and the ProSavana (Mozambique) the most important of all (Renzio et all 2013).

basic functions of a bank';

Created in 1952, the BNDES (The National Bank for Economic and Social Development) is among the world's largest development banks; it is 'national bank with regional coverage' (Gudynas 2008);

The BNDES' role has changed accordingly to the dynamics of the Brazilian and world economies (Guedes and Fontoura 2013: 7);

- in the 1950s, the BNDES supported energy and transport sectors; in the 1960s, it supported the basic industry and consumer goods industry, small and medium enterprises and technological development;
- in the 1970s, it financed the governmental politics of import substitution for the basic sectors of the economy and the consumer goods industry;
- in the 1980s, it supported energy, agribusiness development and the competitive integration in the global market; in the 1990s, the BNDES sought to finance infrastructure, incentives to exports, privatization and urban and social development;
- In the 2000s, BNDES has as its priorities infrastructure, exports, local production arrangements and social inclusion;

Investments of US$ 82.00 billion in 2013 and in 2014 (total investments) – around 5% of the Brazilian GNP;

- 2014: investments in infrastructure – around US$ 24.8 bi (exchange rates 2013); investments in agriculture – around US$ 6.4 bi (exchange rates 2013);

Investments in Latin America (South America):

The goals of the BNDES' financial support (loans) are: a) to promote the export of goods and services to South American countries, increasing Brazilian trade balance; b) to promote the regional integration under IIRSA agreement; c) to help the (economic) leadership of Brazil, favoring the competitiveness of Brazilian companies in the regional market (Guedes and Fontoura 2013: 8);

Since 2011, BNDES' investments are being double (or more) than the World Bank's loans in the region (Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Ecuador, Cuba, Colombia, Uruguay);

- US$ 6,7 bi invested in 2011 – mainly in subways, highways, hydroelectric and gas pipelines – basically under the IIRSA;
- 18% is the Brazilian share of engineering services in Latin America and the Caribbean market (only behind Spain in engineering services);

Table 02 – Infrastructure projects funded by BNDES loans in South America for the export of engineering and other services (2008)

Countries	Amount of Loan /U$ million
Argentina	516
Bolivia	152.1
Chile	208
Colombia	678
Cuba	682
Ecuador	511.2
Paraguay	77
Peru	420
Uruguay	29
Venezuela	218.9
Total	2,610

Source: Iglesias, 2008.

Table 03 – BNDES loans for Brazilian multinationals in the food industry between 2008 and 2010

Companies	**Amount of loan (U$ million)**	No. of branches in Latin America*
JBS	4.274	38
BR Foods	924	37
Marfrig	629	18
Minerva	70	5
Total	5.897	

Source: Arbix and Caseiro 2012.

* Researched and assembled data by Mackey (2105, 7)

This amount for agribusiness companies (the first three are beef and poultry processors) represents 21% of the total loans to Brazilian multinationals, which amounted to U$ 27,988 in 2010;

According to Mackey (2015, 7), 'the large size of these firms means that activities of one or a handful of organizations may nonetheless have an outsize financial impact on agroindustrial restructuring in Latin America. This is best demonstrated by the firm JBS, which had a revenue of over thirty-nine billion dollars in the year 2013 and which has since become the largest private firm in Brazil and the largest meat processing firm in the world';[5]

According to Mackey (2015, 7), there are evidences that '…a more heterogeneous set of firms [agribusiness groups] than exists in the literature on the globalization of agribusiness in Latin America', including firms (and cooperatives) specialize in grains;

Internally, studies of agrarian transformation must include the 'crops booms', especially soy and sugarcane;

Thus, recently (especially 2006-2010), there have been huge amounts of foreign investments (including oil companies, like Shell and British Petroleum, and 'food' companies like Bunge and Cargill) in the Brazilian sugarcane sector (see Sauer, Pietrafesa and Pietrafesa 2015; Mckay; Sauer; Richardson and Herre 2015);

Table 04: The corporate control of Brazilian sugarcane

Company	**Mills / Related Assets in Brazil**	**Production/year**	**Share of Brazilian market**
Copersucar S.A (2014 – merger with Cargill, 50 per cent owned by each company)	Controls exclusive sale of sugar and ethanol volumes produced by 47 member mills and 50 non-member units	Sugar: 6.9 million tons Ethanol: 3.7 billion liters	Sugar-Ethanol complex (inc. transportation, storage, processing commercialization): 22 per cent Sugar sales: 19 per cent Ethanol sales: 16.3 per cent
Raizen (2011 merger - Royal Dutch Shell and Brazilian conglomerate Cosan)	24 mills 4,700 Shell service stations 54 airports 60 terminals	Sugar: 4 million tons Ethanol: 2 billion liters	Sugar-ethanol complex: 9.5 per cent Sugar: 11 per cent Ethanol: 8.8 per cent
Biosev (2009 merger –	12 mills	Sugar: 2.8 million tons	Sugar-Ethanol complex:

[5] According to Mackey (2015), '…a small number of vertically-integrated groups drive uneven and multi-scalar processes that principally operate in sectors that are downstream of livestock production in subnational regions of the Southern Cone'. His (Mackey 2015, 3) main argument is '…that agroindustrial production by firms from Brazil in Latin America is an uneven and multi-scalar process by a small number of firms that specialize in downstream sectors and livestock and grains commodity network rather than a Brazilian agri-food globalization across Latin America'.

Louis Dreyfus Commodities sister company after merging with Brazilian sugarcane producer and processor Santelisa Vale		Ethanol: 1.8 billion liters	7 per cent
Odebrecht Agroindustrial (Brazilian-based engineering, construction, and chemical conglomerate)	9 mills	Sugarcane: 40 million tons Ethanol: 3 billion liters	Sugarcane: 6.8 per cent Ethanol: 13.2 per cent
Guarani (Acquired by French sugar conglomerate Tereos in 2002; Petrobrás buys 46 per cent stake in 2011)	7 mills	Sugarcane: 20 million tons Sugar: 1.9 million tons Ethanol: 860,000 m3	Sugarcane: 3.4 per cent Sugar: 5.2 per cent Ethanol: 3.8 per cent
Bunge (US-based food processing corporation)	8 mills	Sugarcane: 21 million tons	Sugarcane: 3.6 per cent
Adecoagro (Argentina-based company heavily backed by US billionaire George Soros)	3 mills	Sugarcane: 17 million tons	Sugarcane: 2.9 per cent

Source: Mckay; Sauer; Richardson and Herre (2015) from various data sources.

3 Brazil and 'positive' influences in public policies in South America

Brazil = exporting its own internal contradictions, since there are support to the large investments (agro-strategy), but also by promoting public policies to family farming (or small farming sector);

Regional initiatives such as the creation of the Family Farming Specialized Network (REAF)[6] among MERCOSUR member countries, in 2004, has been important to disseminate the concept of 'family farming', heavily influenced by Brazilian public policies to this social sector (Schneider, 2014):[7]

- Among contributing factors: poverty reduction and improvement of economic and social indicators resulting from public policies in support of family farming (or smallholders); the combination of economic growth, political and institutional stability and incentives for agriculture and rural development has contributed to the reduction of hunger and poverty in Latin America (Schneider, 2014);

Cooperation projects with Latin American countries (ongoing and concluded cooperation projects)

[6] 'This is a new process that started in the mid-1990s in Brazil, evolved and, from the 2000s on, was disseminated to other countries in the region' (Schneider 2014, 4). Recently, initiatives taken in the Central American region, with emphasis on the Family Farming Plan (FAP) of El Salvador is also important in disseminating the concept and public policies supporting 'family farming' in the region (Schneider 2014).

[7] 'The Specialized Meeting on Family Farming [REAF] was a political initiative of the Brazilian government that was included in a broader context of foreign policy reorientation, aimed at regional integration and strengthening ties with developing countries' (Schneider 2014, 9).

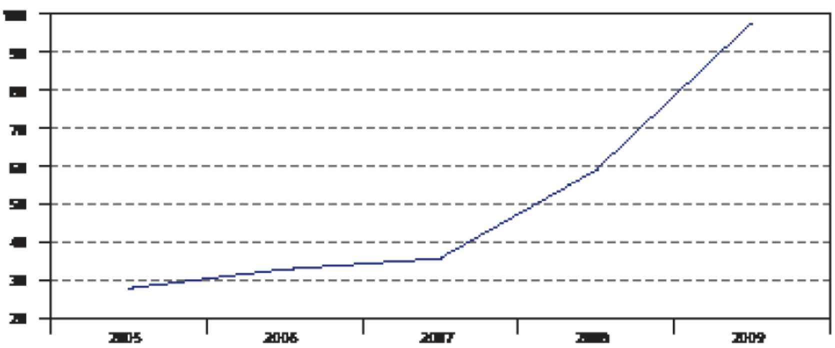
Table 04 – Cooperation projects in Latin America

Countries	Number of cooperation projects related to agriculture and rural development
Argentina	1
Bolivia	9
Colombia	6
Ecuador	6
Guiana	4
Paraguay	4
Uruguay	2
Venezuela	6
Costa Rica	2
Nicaragua	4
Panama	5
Jamaica	2
Haiti	3
Cuba	3
Total	57

Source: Brazilian Agency of Cooperation (ABC)

Around 76% of all Brazilian humanitarian assistance (between 2005 and 2009) are for Latin American countries (ABC – the Brazilian Cooperation for International Development);

Evolution of annual resources invested in Technical, Scientific and Technological Cooperation – 2005-2009
(In R$ million)



Source: Survey of the Brazilian Cooperation for International Development 2010.

Concluding remarks

BNDES – as a development bank – has undertaken many operations involving all types of infrastructure projects in Latin America (and Africa) related to the construction of aqueducts, sanitation and water projects, airports, highways and ports, gas pipes, hydroelectric dams, subways and transmission lines (BNDES, 2010);

On the other side of the Atlantic, African nations attracted innumerable visits by Brazilian authorities, including the president and chancellor, aside from other ministers, culminating with the opening of new embassies. However, despite considerable increase in cultural and economic exchange and scientific and technological cooperation, including the construction of the A-Darter Missile with South Africa, Brazilian business with Africa remains at relatively modest levels—US $9.2 billion in 2010, representing about 4.5 per cent of total exports;

Neoliberal turn towards the role of the state in economic and social development in Brazil and the end of the commodity boom threaten its position as a regional power - less south-south cooperation, less political effort to enhance regional leadership, less financial resources for cooperation projects with other Latin American countries;

The narrative of ‘developmentalism’ – and the national development project – has run out of steam and became worn out. One major reason for that was the lack of complementarity between industrial policies and macroeconomic policies conducive to economic growth. Notwithstanding the huge fiscal incentives for manufacturing, the situation of domestic manufacturing firms became worse due to overvalued Real and skyrocketing interest rates (among the highest in the world). In addition, the increase in real wages was not followed by an increase in productivity;

Commodity-boom dependency and deindustrialization are charging their price with strong negative consequences for the economic growth as well as Brazilian Foreign Direct Investment;

Brazil’s strategy or lack of a clear strategy reflect the tensions and contradictions from its presidentialist coalition government with the Workers' Party;

However, the social policies transfer may be an important lesson for the other Latin American and BRICS countries.

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An international academic conference
5-6 June 2015, Chiang Mai University

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The purpose of the 2015 Chiang Mai conference is to contribute to *deepening* and *broadening* of our understanding of global land deals, resource conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations – in the specific regional context of Southeast and East Asia, with special attention to climate change mitigation and adaptation policies as well as the role of China and other middle income countries (MICs) within the region.

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