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**BRICS in Africa: Exploring the politics and poetics of South-South Cooperation**

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## **BRICS in Africa: Exploring the politics and poetics of South-South Cooperation**

**Cecilia Schultz**

### **Abstract**

*This paper is a theoretical exploration of BRICS' land access in Africa, where land access signifies their ability to use and benefit from the continent's natural wealth. It attempts to draw attention to the role discourse play in the production of the group's ability to enjoy the continent's natural resources, especially in the contemporary 'global land rush.' To a large extent, I claim that BRICS extractive capabilities are a result of how this wave of interest in Africa's arable land is framed as a development opportunity, as it opens the possibility of capital accumulation - denoting the neoliberal regimes of truth that governs the production of development discourse. I focus especially on the productive aspect of discourse: the manner in which it attaches meanings to social subjects/objects and how this system of meanings produces the subjectivities of actors across the globe, governing their actions and behaviours. As such, discourse is not to be understood as something neutral, but rather framings of meanings and lenses of interpretations that penetrates into thoughts and actions. Furthermore, this paper also pays special attention to role symbolic politics play in production of BRICS abilities to benefit from Africa's agricultural capabilities. Here, I aim to shed light on the manner in which symbolism enables the group to be presented in a particular way, especially in relation to Africa, that is conducive to the rhetoric of South-South Cooperation (SSC). This enabling function of symbolism is accompanied by the poetic function of speech, which dominates the group's performance at global diplomatic summits. Instead of being empty rhetoric, the symbolic politics of SSC not only further enables and legitimises the group's presence on the continent, but also reify and sediment the neoliberal rationalities that governs land access on the continent, with the effect of reproducing global capitalist power relations.*

### **Introduction**

In the past few years, the South-South multilateral forum BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) successfully posited itself as a 'development partner' for the global South (BRICS, 2013, 2014, 2015). This portrayal signifies a commitment to the principles of South-South cooperation<sup>1</sup> (SSC), such as equality, mutual gains, national sovereignty, solidarity and especially 'non-conditionality'. The principles of SSC are rooted in the 1955 Bandung Conference, where delegations consisted of 29 countries from Africa and Asia, discussing and emphasising the need for decolonisation and the collective demand for development (Meukalia, 2010:2; Rist, 2014:82). The conference earmarks a watershed moment in the history of SSC, characterised by a determination to reform the hegemonic world order. Here, Richard Wright's (1956) often cited depiction of the atmosphere at the conference bears repeating:

<sup>1</sup> For the full list of South-South cooperation principles, see <http://www.g77.org/doc/Declaration2009.htm> paragraph 70, as reaffirmed in the Ministerial Declaration of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Group of 77 and China, 25 September 2009, New York, USA.

The despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed – in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. Here were class and racial and religious consciousness on a global scale. Who had thought of organising such a meeting? And what had these nations in common? Nothing, it seemed to me, but what their past relationship to the Western world made them feel. This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgement upon the Western world!

This rhetoric of solidarity in sharing the historical experiences of being exploited by the North underpins much of contemporary discourses on SSC, evident in for instance BRICS' summit declarations, media releases and briefings made by political authorities as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation policies. The reiteration of SSC principles signals that BRICS' cooperation with the global South will embody an alternative form development, based on mutual respect and solidarity and therefore not lead to exploitation (Hamdani, 2013; UNECA, 2014). In this paper, I argue that such iterations epitomise what Roman Jakobson refers to as the poetic function of a speech act: where the 'palpability of the sign' becomes more important than what it means (Jakobson, 1985:356-357). Roman Jakobson (1985) identified the poetic as one of six different functions present in any speech act, the others being emotive, referential, phatic, expressive, conative and metalingual (Chandler, 2007:184). In any speech act, several functions operate in a 'hierarchical order', where the dominant function influences the general character of the message. When the poetic function dominates, for instance in thematic declarations to the principles of SSC at BRICS-Africa summits, media briefings or conference addresses, the speech act is organised according to the material qualities of the signifier (the words used) itself rather than to its referential aspects (meaning). In other words, to take Jakobson's (1985) paradigmatic example, when a word is selected in a poem in order to rhyme, its referential function (what it means) is less relevant than its homophonic relation to another word (how it sounds). Poetics thus places attention on the materiality of the signifier itself (Larkin, 2013:335).

In this paper, I argue that the extent to which BRICS' engagement with the continent represents an 'alternative' notion of development exists in the poetic component of speech acts and that global diplomatic events like summits or conferences are key sites where this function can be performed. In other words, BRICS' use of signifiers like 'friendship', 'mutual benefits' or 'equality' to frame their development cooperation with Africa, act as symbolic innuendoes to the Bandung Spirit, dominating their overall message with the effect of de-emphasising its relative meaning. This is not to suggest that the poetics of SSC, as used by BRICS, are merely symbolic or 'empty rhetoric'. Indeed, I aim to draw attention to the manner in which this poetic function of speech, performed at BRICS-Africa summits or international ministerial conferences, can be seen as an attempt to symbolically represent the group in a particular way - especially in relation to Africa. These attempts are situated in the context of a 'new scramble for Africa', i.e. the twenty-first century rush for the continent's natural and material resources

- especially farmland - and mounting criticism against the group's engagements with the continent that often falls under the banner of 'neo-colonialism' (see Bond & Garcia, 2015; Lumumba-Kasango, 2011; Amisi *et al.*, 2014). To counter critiques of this ilk, the group often reverberate how their engagements with Africa is a manifestation of SSC. For instance, responding to China's portrayal as 'neo-colonialists' at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China wrote in a report (2015) 'China, in developing its relations with Africa, adheres to the principles of sincerity, practical results, affinity and good faith, and upholds the values of friendship, justice and shared interests.'

This paper therefore explores the *enabling* function of the symbolic, theatrical performances BRICS conduct at summits, and how this governs global land access according neoliberal, market rationalities. Yet, I do not aim to contribute to the growing historical materialist critiques that frame BRICS as 'neo-colonialists', by giving excessive explanatory weight to the structural hegemony of capital (Bond, 2013, 2014; Bond & Garcia, 2015; Amisi *et al.*, 2014; Flynn, 2007). I recognise that power is determined by material conditions, whether it is primarily located in the constitutive force of transcendental structures and capital or in an ideological domain of false ideas (Paudyn, 2014:69). Rather, I explore a range of converging discourses that have enabled agro-extractivism on the continent, specifically land acquisitions. These practices, which includes not only acquisitions made by foreign investors but also a range of entrepreneurial conducts of the state that eases land acquisition for commercial uses, cannot exist prior to, or independently from ideas and beliefs about them. Land and other natural resources take on value only through a social and discursive network which underpins the expectation that the commodity retains its value over time and space (De Goede, 2003:81; Campbell, 2005). Following Marieke de Goede (2003), I argue that, in order to comprehend the politics of the contemporary 'global land rush', requires a rejection of the dichotomy between the ideal and the material, and starts with a consideration how current discourses of agricultural development have taken shape at the expense of other, possible representations of social organisation. Discourses produce and attach meanings to various social subjects and objects, which enables certain possibilities of actions and preclude others (Doty, 1993:303). Discourses are constituted by certain limits, and it is within these limits where the possibility for BRICS to present an 'alternative' form of development becomes questioned: not solely because of some inherent interest of actors to act in self-interest, but rather the manner in which particular rationalities of development govern the subjectivities of subjects. This paper employs a governmentality analyses to explore the rationalities governing development, and how these mentalities inform BRICS-Africa development cooperation. By so doing, it is possible to offer an explanation of why SSC often resembles mainstream, capitalist engagements with the continent. The paper is

structured as follows: the first section situates the current ‘rush for land’ in Africa within a broader geopolitical history of the continent. In this discussion, prominence is given to the role of the West’s ‘global imaginary’ of Africa, which played, and continues to play, a large part in the continent’s international relations. The second section offers a theoretical explanation of governmentality, which sheds light on how de-politicised rationalities of development governs the subjectivities of actors that ultimately allows for the production in similar actions, interests and mentalities in global development cooperation. Lastly, I explore the manner in which neoliberal governmentalities govern land access on the African continent. Contrary to the first two sections, this discussion elucidates the manner in which discursive representations of land, Africa and BRICS, allows for the material benefits of market actors.

### **BRICS, South-South cooperation and geopolitical imaginaries**

For centuries, the problematisation of Africa’s ‘progress’ successfully fashioned the continent, as Mbembe (2001:4) evocatively depicts, into the “supreme receptacle of the West’s obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of ‘absence,’ ‘lack,’ and ‘non-being,’ of identity and difference”. The identification of Africa as ‘backward’, ‘barbaric’ or ‘underdeveloped’ are constructed, according to Stuart Hall (2000:17) within discourses,

[...] produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies [...] they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion [...]

From this perspective, it is important to view identities and their discursive representations as subjected to a play of difference, constructed across a division from the place of the Other (Hall, 2000:18). The signification of identities is based on their capacity to exclude the opposite, by determining – despite being silenced – what the Other ‘lacks’ in order to represent some notion of ‘normality’. Identification through exclusion exemplifies what Derrida define as Logocentrism – thinking in binary terms – and establishes a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles, for example material/discursive; good/evil; white/black; civilised/barbaric or developed/underdeveloped (Hall, 2000:18; Edkins, 1999:66). In this binary of opposites, priority is given to the first term and conceives the second in relation to it as a compilation, negation or disruption of the first. As a result, identities such as developed/underdeveloped are oppositional, they are ‘never simply neutral but are inevitably hierarchical’ (Devetak, 2005:168).

The reality(ies) of Africa’s produced identity is evident in the manner in which the continent epitomise a space of geopolitical predestination for countries across the globe, aiming to ‘save’ or ‘assist’ Africa

from its backwardness (Lee, 2006; Slater, 1995). Ranging from colonial missions of ‘civilisation’ as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, to a series of development models, constructed, implemented and evaluated in the post-war<sup>2</sup> era, Africa’s discursive representation opened a space for global capitalism to ground itself (Slater, 1995; Mbembe, 2001; Nakano, 2007; Matondi *et al.* 2011). As stated by Andrew Merrifield (1993:520) ‘the global capitalist system does not occur solely in some abstract sense; it has to ground itself and be acted out in specific places if it is to have any meaning.’ Before commencing, it is necessary to note that this explanation is important for the discussion of this paper, as it disturbs the common notion of a singular and totalising centre of neoliberal capitalism, but rather suggests that neoliberal capitalism takes on meaning through place. That is, material landscapes produced by global neoliberal capitalism, becomes imbued with meaning in everyday place-bound social practices (Merrifield, 1993:520; Lefebvre, 1991; 86-90). Instead of representing a monolithic and ideological ‘boogeyman’ (Paudyn, 2014:76), I suggest that neoliberal capitalism is more ‘likely to reveal a complex and hybrid political imaginary’ that materialises in ‘composite, plural and multiform’ assemblages (Larner, 2005:205, 213). Yet, despite the ambiguous nuances, multiple outcomes and unpredictable events related to processes of neoliberalisation, they do share ontological similarity and parallelism. Following Joronen (2013:358), neoliberalism ‘incorporates monophonic politics only at the level of ontology: as a drive to reveal things in terms of calculable market value.’ To a large extent, this economic virtue that ‘enframes’ myriad forms of being can be seen as a manifestation of ontological violence, which does not merely govern the conduct of individuals by encouraging a particular form of subjectivity, but also enframe all entities for the use of market forces (Joronen, 2013). Such ‘enframing’ works through the de-politicisation of particular governmental rationalities, such as economic growth strategies to promote development, but also by globally unleashing its ‘drive to enframe’ entities. Inspired by Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Joronen (2013) explains how the ontology of neoliberalism constitutes the belief system about the nature of social reality, arguing that:

The neoliberal state is not based on the ideological or discursive turn in political practices, but on the extending drive, through which the real itself, including the ethical constitution of human conducts, natural entities, and life (with its possibilities) is ontologically positioned to serve the interests of profit-making.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, post-war refers to the period after the Second World War, coinciding the formation of not only Bretton Woods institutions but also the growing determination of developing countries to push for the reform of a bipolar world system, reflected in the formation of, inter alia the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), G77 and aspirations of a New International Economic Order (NIEO).

The ontological violence of neoliberalism lies in the way it infiltrates the subjectivity of subjects as the *only* way to develop, suppressing and silencing any ‘alternative’ knowledge systems of experiencing and interpreting phenomena (Walker, 2004).

Historically, capitalism in Africa took the form of North-South rendezvous, initially through colonial endeavours and in the post-war period, numerous development programmes that aimed to ‘assist’ African countries in their constant state of backwardness (Rist, 2014). Here, President Truman’s Four Point inauguration speech in January 1949 remains one of the best illustrations that capture the essence of Logocentrism in the post-war period. In the speech, Truman proclaimed the United States’ responsibility to make ‘the benefits of [their] scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement of growth in underdeveloped areas’ (Rist, 2014:70). What followed was a period of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs) namely the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). SAPs entailed a financial loan, which would supposedly help developing countries out of debt by enforcing a range of conditionality policies. These ‘conditionalities’ involved the restructuring of countries’ economic and political policies according to neoliberal rationalities of financial rectitude, i.e. austere budgetary deficits, disinflationary measures, the devaluation of local currencies, trade liberalisation and privatising state enterprises (Easterly, 2003:364). The outcomes of SAPs are varied and controversial, but mainly produced the opposite of what was intended: namely further marginalisation, worsened poverty rates and untold exploitation and oppression (Ferguson, 1990; Alvares, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Nustad, 2001; Li, 2007).

Recognising the problematic and condescending nature of traditional North-South development relations, BRICS echo the sentiments of the Bandung ‘spirit’ to suggest that their relations – in the form of trade, investment, or knowledge transfers – will not replicate the asymmetrical pattern of North-South relations (Hamdani, 2013). This rhetoric has become ever more relevant in recent years, as the continent’s natural and mineral wealth faces another wave of commercial interests following the convergence of global crises. These include the 2008/09 Food and Financial Crises, mounting alarms of energy depletion in conditions of peak oil<sup>3</sup>, as well as the lingering threat of climate change. These events bolstered interests from actors across the globe, and especially BRICS, to secure farmland in

<sup>3</sup> Peak oil refers to a situation where the amount of oil available for extraction in a given year starts to decline as a result of geological limitations (Tverberg, 2007). Due to the increasing difficulty of extracting oil, extraction costs increase and the amount of oil being produced worldwide declines. As a result capital inputs such as transportation, production, and processing costs escalate, causing food prices to rise.



Africa to maintain and strengthen their growing economies and ensure domestic food and energy security (Borras *et al.*, 2013; McMichael, 2013; Widengård, 2011:47).

Although farmland across the global South has been subjected to foreign interest, demand for land in Africa has been especially enormous (Deininger *et al.*, 2011). Central to this tremendous interest in Africa's agricultural capacities, relates to the discursive representation of continent's land as 'vast', 'unused', 'idle' or abundant (Franco *et al.*, 2013). These representations are posited in a frame where commercial investments - for food and non-food purposes - would make better use of these commodities for various reasons (Borras *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 2011:394). Governed by market-based logics, the commodification of land - the process which enables its acquisition or exchange in the market - would allow for its allocation to the 'rightful' owner, i.e. the one who is able to pay its market price. This allocation is furthermore justified by the assumption that commercial investments would make better use of a land's natural and mineral resources, as it will allow for the accumulation of capital (Makki & Geisler, 2011). Moreover, interest in farmland is often presented as a 'development opportunity', as the stimulation of capital has a range of 'spill-over' effects, including job opportunities, knowledge and technology transfers, infrastructure, schools etc. (Widengård, 2011:52; Coluta *et al.*, 2008). As such, it is assumed that more capital will present an opportunity for the 'backward' continent to scale up on the ladder of civilisation, by not only promoting agricultural industrialisation but also alleviating the perpetual cycle of poverty, disease and hunger.

In recent years, this opportunistic, 'win-win' narrative that frames contemporary interest in Africa's farmland has come under immense scrutiny from, inter alia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and human rights activists. According to Franco *et al.* (2013) for example, the framing of land deals as 'development opportunities' obscures more than it illuminates, especially when it is used by actors aiming to case the phenomenon as an opportunity to extend capitalist agro-industry in the name of pro-poor and ecologically 'sustainable economic development'. These sentiments are reflected in representations of the phenomenon as the 'twenty-first century scramble for Africa', 'global land grabbing', or 'modern-day corporate colonialism' - echoing concerns that this renewed, global embracement replicate the continent's historical experience of exploitation mentioned earlier (Zoomers & Kaag, 2014; GRAIN, 2008, 2013; OXFAM, 2011). Such concerns stem from how large-scale land acquisitions transpired in many spaces across the global South, often leading to dispossession (Vermeulen & Coluta, 2010; GRAIN, 2008; Borras *et al.*, 2011), the exploitation of local labour (Li, 2011; Coluta & Vermeulen, 2011; Wendimu, 2013) and environmental degradation (Woodhouse, 2012; Borras *et al.*, 2011b; Franco *et al.*, 2013).

However, despite alarming criticisms, African governments have yet to halt processes of promoting and commodifying land, like conducting land zone exercises to determine available land, relaxing labour laws or setting up national departments dealing specifically with land governance (Widengård, 2011). The political success of the ‘win-win’ narrative associated with land deals often provoked more attempts by governments to accommodate these rising interests, where BRICS is no exception. Not surprisingly, the group’s attempt to counter concerns of land deals embodying some form of neo-colonialism entails a reminder that their cooperation is based on the principles of SSC, a rationale described as follow:

South-South cooperation is a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity, and guided by, inter alia, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditionalities (GA resolution 64/222, 2009).

The success of this rhetoric is reflected in recent statements made by African politicians at the Sixth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, which convened under the theme, ‘*China-Africa Progressing Together: Win-Win Cooperation for Common Development*’, in Johannesburg, South Africa. At the meeting, South African President Jacob Zuma stated that African countries need China's help to process their abundance of natural resources – a possession of wealth that rendered the continent vulnerable to exploitation in the past (UNESCO, 2015). Likewise, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who is notorious for his dismissive views against the West’s involvement in Africa (Mwakayelye, 2016; Anon, 2014), claimed, ‘here is a man [Xi] representing a country once called poor. A country which never was our coloniser [...] He is doing to us what we expected those who colonised us yesterday to do (Brock & Mapenzauswa, 2015)’. Similar sentiments were echoed by Biéké Benjamin, a diplomat from Ivory Coast, emphasising the manner in which China’s cooperation is based on equality and non-interference, “There isn’t one partner directing to the other, whereas Western nations come in saying, ‘You go left, you go right’” (Onishi, 2015).

Yet, recent studies on the group’s engagement with the global South (and especially Africa), particularly in agricultural domains, significantly undermine these claims and suggest that BRICS’ cooperation epitomises some form of neo-colonialism, through extractive imperialism (Veltmeyer, 2013; Bond & Garcia, 2015). Other studies also pointed to the danger of essentializing the global South as a homogeneous entity (Wolford & Nehring, 2015; McEwan & Mawdsley, 2012); or critiqued their

exploitative practices in certain locations (Amisi *et al.*, 2014; Mousseau & Sosnoff, 2011; Rahmato, 2011; ASO, 2013; IANS, 2009; Wendimu, 2013)<sup>4</sup>.

Although my discussion will draw on these studies, I suggest that existing similarities between North-South and South-South development cooperation can be comprehended from a governmentality perspective. From such a perspective, resemblances are not *solely* a result of the manner in which the capitalist character of the global political economy operates to exploit populations for capital accumulation. Rather, they embody the manner in which power operates – through representations, identities, discourses and practices – within specific contexts to normalise particular discourses so that they appear as neutral ‘facts’ or common sense (Peterson, 2006:121) A governmentality analysis emphasises the historical, contingent conditions that have enabled the existence of particular meanings associated with development and the manner in which these produce and regulate particular forms of subjectivity, with the effect of authorising particular discourses and marginalising others (Peterson, 2006:121). Analyses of governmentality explore government beyond its institutional characteristics and look at how discursive dimensions of power are manifested in political imaginaries and political rationalities that guide praxis (Zanotti, 2013:287). Within this framework, the rhetoric of SSC - performed by BRICS countries at global summits and conference notes - should not be rendered as ‘empty rhetoric’. Rather, enactments of SSC at diplomatic events can be seen as moments of political theatre, ‘performative enactments of legitimacy and authority’ which play a key part in inspiring, directing and governing the conduct of global politics according to a particular rationality (Death, 2011:1). As I will explain later, it is within this particular rationality that guides development praxis, where similarities exist. In this sense, a governmentality perspective of international development looks at the ways in which development discourse is conceptualised, resulting in a myriad of practices and justification of practices in different spaces across the South (Ove, 2013:317; Watts, 2003). In the sections below, I briefly outline what a governmentality analysis entails and how such a lens enables us to shed light on the manner in which discourses penetrates into thought and actions, and the implications thereof for imagining an ‘alternative development’ and possibilities for resistance.

### **Governmentality, development and the limits of discourse**

<sup>4</sup> By drawing attention to the qualitative similarities between North-South and South-South development cooperation, I do not mean to undermine the obvious differences that often transpire through these relations (see for instance Schoones *et al.*, 2016; Schankland, 2016). Rather, I aim to problematize the group’s engagement with Africa by drawing attention to how their interaction with African actors are informed by particular, binary, representations of the continent. As I will elaborate later, it is necessary to ‘disrupt’ these stabilised interpretations, as the group’s uncritical adherence to the meanings and interpretations of the continent not only frustrates attempts to comprehend certain social realities, but also marginalise alternative or other possible meanings and reify existing social ills (Peterson, 2006:121).

Governmentality (or the rationality of government) is a problematizing activity, concerned with the 'conduct of conduct' to ensure 'the right disposition of things so as to lead to a convenient end' (Foucault, 1978:208). Here, to 'conduct' means to lead, direct or guide as well as a sort of calculation as to how it should be done (Dean, 2010:17). An important characteristic of governmentality entails that it operates from a distance, 'to create locales, entities and persons able to operate a regulated autonomy (Rose & Miller, 1992:173). Here, the concept of power becomes especially relevant as governing is not achieved as a result of power being exercised over another with the aim to punish, limit or exclude. For Foucault (1977, 1980, 1982), power should be analysed as something that circulates, whose functioning resembles the form of a chain instead of a localised commodity. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation where individuals not only circulate between the threads, but are also in the position of undergoing and exercising this power. The mere existence of certain gestures, interests and desires that constitute individuals, societies, organisations or institutions can be seen as effects of power (Foucault, 1980:98). Power, in this sense, is always considered to be in a discursive relation, acting in an autonomous way and producing subjects just as much as subjects reproduce it (McHoul & Grace, 1993:12; Foucault, 1982). Instead of the state exercising control through direct and immediate force, control is exercised through 'shaping or guiding the conduct of others through their capacity to regulate their own behaviour' (Foucault, 2008:307). Indeed, a governmentality analysis seeks to explore the workings of power beyond the state, determining the manner and extent to which the state is articulated into the activity of government, a phenomenon Rose and Miller (1992:177) calls the 'governmentalisation of the state'. This entails, as explained by Rose (1999:18):

The invention and assembly of a whole array of technologies that connected up calculations and strategies developed in political centres to those thousands of spatially scattered points where the constitutional, fiscal, organisational and judicial power of the state connect with the endeavours to manage economic life, the health and habits of the population, the civility of the masses [...]

As such, claims that BRICS's state-led development approach with African countries resembles a divergence from traditional, North-South cooperation with a focus on private sector-led development, undermines how development discourses and practices fashion states into flexible market subjects by normalising certain economic rationalities of conduct (Foucault, 2008). This works by recasting the subjectivities of actors so that they internalise the goals of government. In this process of subjectivation, discourse constitutes the central mechanism for governmentality as it allows for the formation of subject-positions and identities - key sites of control governing the conduct of individuals (Solomon, 2014; Epstein, 2010; Milliken, 1999).

Milliken (1999:229) explains that discourses are structures of signification which construct social realities by attaching meaning to things, making use of sign systems (predominantly language). These meanings aren't neutral, but are usually structured in terms of binary oppositions – developed/underdeveloped, educated/ignorant, white/black, man/woman – establishing relations of power so that one element in the binary is privileged (Derrida, cited in Milliken, 1999:229). In this sense, discourses can be understood as 'framings of meanings and lenses of interpretation, rather than objective, historical truths' (Hansen, 2006:7). Secondly, as much as discourses provide meaning, they also have a particular productive (and reproductive) aspect, by making intelligible some ways of being in, and acting towards the world (Milliken, 1999:229; Solomon, 2013; Watts, 2003). Again, this productive aspect of discourse is much in line with Foucault's (1977:194) view of power as being primarily productive, 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.' Discourses define the subjects authorised to speak and to act (for instance development experts, economists, policy officials) and the relations within which they see each other in a specific issue-area (Keeley, as cited in Milliken, 1999:229). They produce as subjects *publics (audiences) for authorised actors*, and their *common sense* of existence and qualities of difference phenomena and of how public officials should act for them and in their name (Milliken, 1999:229). For instance, the discursive representations of SSC have produced BRICS countries as the authorised actors to act in Africa's development through their common sense of 'existing in the global South'. As such, parallel to the production of subjects, discourses also construct the objects of government – i.e. the entity over whom government is to be exercised – the society, the nation, the economy (Rose & Miller, 1992:179). To sum up: discourses enable the operation of governmentality by attaching meaning to social subjects/objects, which is coupled with a structured field of actions that operates within particular, normalised limits. Of central importance here is the manner in which discourses shape the subjectivities of actors that informs them on how to speak, act or interpret social phenomena. In this sense, governing can be defined as:

Any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape the conduct by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes (Dean, 2010:18).

The idea of 'development' can thus be seen as an aspiration born directly from the interplay of activities of government. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the governing 'success' of development discourse relates to the manner in which the notion of development, equated with ideas and imaginaries of progress, operate on the level of fantasy and desire (Larkin, 2013:333).

***Governmentality and international development: control through desire and identity***

Development, as framed in modernisation theories, typically evoke images of large buildings, sophisticated infrastructures or advanced technologies which, according to Larkin (2013), stimulate feelings of promise, desire, enthusiasm or frustration. These material commodities connoted with development ‘represents the possibility of being modern, of having a future, or the foreclosing of that possibility and a resulting experience of abjection’ (Larkin, 2013:333; Edwards, 2003). Development is therefore not simply a form of rhetoric disseminated by hegemonic and political groups, but rather a system of meaning that constitutes institutions, practices and of particular significance to this paper, identities, in contradictory and disjunctive ways (Fairclough, cited in Larner, 2006:206).

Identity in global politics epitomises a key site for governmentality at work, as it entails the processes through which subjects articulate their desires in an attempt to, for instance, address their ‘lack’ of development. Here, identity should not be seen as something that is ‘fixed’ in time and space – denoting an original, natural or integral quality that unifies the subject, but rather a process of construction, located in broader socio-symbolic structures (Solomon, 2013; Epstein, 2010; Hall, 2000). It is therefore necessary to replace the concept ‘identity’ with ‘identification’ to emphasise how identity is a construction that is never fully completed, always in process (Epstein, 2010:334). Although it exists in the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it (development aid, satellite imagery to allocate land, economic growth policies), identification is ultimately conditional, lodged in contingency (Hall, 2000:17). Indeed, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the unified self is nothing more than an imaginary construct that actors need to believe in, in order to compensate for a constitutive lack that lies at the core of her identity (Epstein, 2010:335). The subject is always in a process of becoming, where the identification with collective symbolic structures (such as being ‘developed’ or ‘modern’), allows subjects to anticipate the sense of ‘wholeness’ or ‘completeness’ that these identifications will hopefully entail. For instance, by embarking on a range of projects, such as agricultural industrialisation, trade liberalisation, or implementing ‘investment-friendly’ regulations, the state identifies with traits of being ‘developed’, anticipating that her lack or incompleteness will be alleviated (Solomon, 2013:674-675). This lack of – or desire for – a ‘full identity’ sparks the subject’s continuous identification practices, even though according to Lacan (1977), this ‘fullness’ can never be met as signifiers (words and phrases) can never completely convey the exact meanings subjects want to define themselves with (Epstein, 2010:336). Through this nexus of anticipatory and retroactive temporalities, the notion of desire emerges, as a result of the subject’s ‘lack’ of never being fully represented (Solomon, 2014:675). Desire is channelled through discourse, and plays out through fantasy: the narrative frame through

which the subject pursues the promise of capturing ‘what lacks’ in order to be ‘whole’. Development epitomises this narrative frame and opens the space for actors such as BRICS to work through these fantasies, by presenting the possibility for countries in the global South to enter a symbolic order of being identified as a ‘developed’ country. In this case, governmentality not only operates by working through the desires and aspirations of subjects, but also the identification practices actors choose to define themselves.

From this discussion, it is possible to shed a different light on the rhetoric of South-South development cooperation as a representation of ‘alternative development’, particularly concerning BRICS-Africa agricultural engagements. Firstly, when considering the binary optic of discourse, development epitomise a historically constructed idea based upon the global North’s imaginary of global South (Slater, 1995; Escobar, 1995). In the words of Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1991:5-6),

Evolutionism was an imperial vision, modernisation theory bears witness to the American Century, and development thinking translates into contemporary policies [...] Privileged knowledge of the direction of change is claimed by those who declare themselves furthest along its course. Developmentism is the truth from the point of view of the centre of power; it is the theorisation [...] of its own path of development [...]

The apparatus of development – the various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge which enhance and maintain the operation of power – is highly de-politicised and conceals its obvious normative directionality. As a result, the discourse not only stabilised/normalised certain meanings and interpretations of societies across the globe, especially Africa, but also the ‘knowledgeable practices’ informing subjects, specifically states, ‘how to’ develop.

By implication, in the contemporary neoliberal epoch of capitalism, development practices have especially been confined to economic growth models (Esteva, 2010:2; Brigg, 2000:86)<sup>5</sup>. In this optic, the identification practices subjects undertake to become ‘developed’ are primarily justified through economic growth measures such as trade liberalisation, the creation of investor-friendly environments, the commercialisation of agriculture and, especially to promote ‘creditworthiness’: austere budgets, disinflationary growth measures and the devaluation of local currencies. The equation of development with economic growth – measured mainly through gross national product (GNP) per capita – renders development a highly de-politicised process, reduced to calculability and attached to particular (neoliberal) regimes of truth. According to Foucault (1976:132), regimes of truth entails the types of

<sup>5</sup> Although the emphasis placed on economic growth as the sole requirement for development evolved to include aspects such as social, cultural, or environmental concerns, economic growth – measured by GNP per capita – remains the chosen yardstick to measure development (Esteva, 2010:2; Rist, 2007:487).

discourse a society accepts in order to make it function as true, acting to some extent as an episteme, <sup>6</sup>i.e. the orderly, unconscious structures that determines what can pass as ‘acceptable knowledge’. Therefore to claim that development discourse is produced and reproduced by neoliberal regimes of truth, means that neoliberal thought acts as the episteme, where development knowledge arrives in the consciousness following a filtering: not only must particular statements submit to the (neoliberal) regime of truth, but only they, from a multiplicity of possible statements, are constructed by it (DuBois, 1991:7).

As such, development is constituted by a neoliberal politics of limits, with clear identifiable parameters, power systems and mentalities of rule, which alludes to the problematic ‘limit’ for BRICS to present an authentic alternative development strategy for Africa. . This alludes to a problematic ‘limit’ for BRICS to authentically present an ‘alternative’ development strategy for Africa, as the ontological constitution of development discourse produces the subjectivities of actors that enframes all entities as possibilities for capital accumulation. This neoliberalisation of subjects integrates the state into a whirlpool of global capital that privileges the authority and imperatives of the market/shareholder over those of the citizen (Paudyn, 2014:17). Hence, the only way in which BRICS present an alternative ‘development’ imaginary, entails the group’s symbolic, theatrical performances at global summits and ministerial conferences. These theatrical performances epitomise BRICS attempts to present themselves in a particular way, which would attach different meanings - particularly through the discourses of SSC - to their engagements with the global South.

The following section explores the intersection between governmentality, the neoliberal ontology of development and BRICS’ positioning as ‘development partner’ for Africa. It exposes the implications of ‘*enframing*’ human conducts, natural entities and life to serve the interests of profit making for the politics of land access. In the first part, I focus on BRICS’ governmental technologies – the strategies, programmes and techniques they use to shape the ‘conduct of conduct’ of others. I particularly explore how the symbolic representations of group’s diplomatic activities – global summits and conferences relating to Africa’s development – constitute a particular governing technique that solidifies neoliberal rationalities and subjectivities of development. Secondly, I refer to the *enabling* functions of global

<sup>6</sup> Although space do not allow me to go into a thorough discussion on the matter, it is necessary to point out that the operation of episteme in this discussion is not to be taken as existing separate, or independently from the notion of ontology. Whereas episteme operates in the production, ontology entails the philosophical convictions of natural and social reality and defines one’s belief system of being in the world and has a circulatory and reciprocal relationship with a society’s episteme.



summits, by drawing attention to how these political events produce the capabilities for actors to enjoy access to Africa's natural resources, and how this is authorised by a neoliberal ontology of development.

### **BRICS in Africa's: exploring the material implications of neoliberal governmentality**

As a group, BRICS have yet to embark on a joint development program, but rather focus their attention on intensifying intra-BRICS cooperation and establishing relations with other members of the global South (Ferrando, 2013). Such efforts can be seen in the numerous bilateral and multilateral BRICS-Africa summits which projects the group's declaratory commitment to assist Africa in her development objectives through SSC (UNECA, 2014; Fundira, 2012). Apart from the annual BRICS summits, these summits include for instance, the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the India-Africa forum summit, the New Africa-Asia Strategic Summit (NAASP) and the Africa-South America Summit (ASA), to name just a few. The thematic agendas at diplomatic events of this ilk usually entail some form of declaratory commitment to SSC. For instance, the third ASA summit of 2013 held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, conferred under the theme, '*Strategies and Mechanisms to Strengthen South-South Cooperation*' (Brazil Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The summit was attended by more than 100 representatives, taking part in a roundtable discussion on infrastructure, transport and energy, where state actors, international institutions and business associations exchanged ideas, experiences and best practices on the issues discussed. Likewise, the 2015 New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP), held in Jakarta and Bandung, Indonesia, convened under the theme, '*Strengthening South-South Cooperation to Promote World Peace and Prosperity*'. The historical significance of the location at this summit resonates in the continuous pledges made by delegates to:

continue to uphold the Spirit of Bandung, enshrined in the Asian-African Conference in 1955, as a beacon in guiding the future of Asian-African cooperation, while adhering to the principles of solidarity, friendship and cooperation (NAASP, 2015).

The summit ended with the approval of three key documents, of which one is the '*Bandung Message to Strengthen South-South Cooperation*'. The approval of this document (arguably) illustrates an attempt to attach different meanings to South-South development cooperation, based on solidarity and friendship. A central mechanism in which this is achieved entails as earlier mentioned the poetic function of speech: choosing signifiers with high palpability when crafting messages. By implication, the group's continuous utilisation of signifiers like 'mutual benefits', 'friendship', 'equality' etc. to communicate their interests in cooperation with Africa, serves as an enabling function to portray and interpret their presence on the continent in a particular manner. Used in this way, the poetic function of speech ultimately acts as a governing tool for the group, as SSC rhetoric not only invoke images and

fantasies of associated with being 'modern', but also achieving this identity of development without reliance or dependency on the West. Although the 'success' of SSC rhetoric may be highly contested - as seen in rising critiques against the group's engagements with the continent - the manner in which the poetic function of speech operates produces a sense of legitimacy, charisma and hegemony that enables BRICS to win support for themselves and their policies by fostering collective ethnic, geographical or class identifications (Weeden, 1998:506). South-South cooperation declarations are therefore the means by which states proffer these representations of SSC to global citizens and ask them to take it as social facts, creating a politics of 'as if' (Larkin, 2013:335; Weeden, 1998). The 'Bandung Message' must be taken 'as if' it were a realist representation, and those issuing and receiving it act as if it were a consequential document (Larkin, 2013:335). In its poetic mode, SSC - especially when referring to the recent wave of land deals transpiring on the continent - means that form is loosened from technical function. In other words, documents like the *Bandung Message to Strengthen South-South Cooperation* become 'arbitrary symbolic acts' (Mbembe & Roitman, 1995:337), which allows investments to be made, reports to be written and follow-up declarations to be pledged.

Therefore, as mentioned previously, the symbolism of SSC allows for a particular representation for BRICS in relation to Africa, an identity that can be performed at global diplomatic sites which enables a different interpretation/appreciation of the group's engagement with the continent, i.e. that of a 'true development partner'. Indeed, amidst looming concerns of exploitation mentioned earlier, declaratory promises like the ones made at South-South diplomatic conferences symbolises an attempt to persuade global audiences that delegates are serious about realising Africa's development objectives through SSC. Drawing of Judith Butler's theory of performativity, global diplomatic events constitute key sites where BRICS can 'perform' their identity into being through the repeated iteration of its basic features - i.e. SSC. As mentioned, identity not a natural phenomenon, but rather becomes 'real' through the reiteration and repetition of norms and discourses which mark them out from other categories or subjects (Butler, 1999). In this sense, SSC can be seen as an act, a performance repeated by actors such as BRICS, where this repetition is:

[...] at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation...this 'action' is public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential; indeed, the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender [the global South] within this binary frame - an aim that cannot be attributed to a subject, but, rather [...] consolidate the subject (Butler, 1999:178-179).

This explanation enables us to elucidate the performative aspect of BRICS' SSC identity: rooted in poetic functions of speech and embodied in declaratory commitments, cooperation frameworks, public speeches and media events. The symbolism and dramaturgy of diplomacy should therefore be understood not as illusions or masks for power, but rather reifying particular subjectivities, identities and relations (Death, 2008:45). From a governmentality perspective, summits act as a governing tool: operating from a distance, they become the means through which particular norms and standards of conduct are communicated to global audiences (Death, 2008, 2011). At the same time however, Butler's (1999:178-179) explanation points to the manner in which identity is performed within a particular politics of limits, controlled by neoliberal governmentalities. Indeed, as seen in the following section, the neoliberal politics of limits that constitute development discourse act as a regime of control, regulating how subjects/objects respond to problems (conduct). For instance, the problematisation of poverty is represented within a discursive framework where economic growth and development is the solution. The politics of limits of development therefore have a 'programmatic' effect of modulating development praxis. BRICS – produced by particular historical rationalities of development – through the performance of their identity at summits, acts as the vehicles that *enable* the functioning a particular rationality of development, with clear political and economic effects.

*Exploring the enabling functions of global summits: the case of land access in an era of neoliberal ontic*

Considering the contemporary wave of commercial interest in Africa's mineral and natural wealth, the enabling function of BRICS performances of SSC at diplomatic events relates to the extent in which it governs land access on the continent according to neoliberal rationalities. Here, I refer Ribot and Peluso's (2003) definition of land access being the 'ability to benefit from things - including material objects, persons, institutions and symbols'. By having access to land, one is in the position to determine its uses, which denotes the enjoyment of some kind of benefit or benefit stream (Hunt, cited by Ribot & Peluso, 2003:155). Land use is 'characterised by the arrangements, activities and inputs people undertake in a certain land cover to produce, change or maintain it (FAO, 1999). The ability to use land therefore translates into the ability to benefit from the produce obtained from the land as well as the land management actions carried out by humans to produce products and benefits (FAO, 1999). Hence, a central requirement to use land in order to benefit from its resource is land access. This focus on ability, instead of land rights as in property theory, relates to how the former alludes to the wide range of complex and frequently uneven power relations that either prohibit or enable people to benefit from resources (Ribot & Peluso, 2003:155). Such an approach is in line with the overall theoretical

framework of this paper, which focuses on the ways in which capabilities are *produced* through a variety of mechanisms. To focus on access is to:

[...] explore the range of powers - embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes and social relations - that affect people's ability to benefit from resources. These powers constitute the material; cultural and political-economic strands within the 'bundles' and 'webs' of powers that configure resources access (Ribot & Peluso, 2003:155).

From a governmentality perspective, the range of powers that enable certain actors to enjoy access to land are embodied in discursive mechanisms that produce and attach meanings to various social subjects/objects, 'thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others' (Doty, 1991:303). In a neoliberal epoch of capitalism, the 'particular interpretive dispositions' that attach meaning to social subjects/objects is driven by mono-political processes that enframe human and natural entities as an array of 'reserves' set available for market rational utilisation (Joronen, 2013:356). From this view, the current wave of land acquisitions in Africa can be seen as a result of the manner in which the production of subjectivities is constituted by a neoliberal politics of limits, which ontologically positions all entities to serve the interests of profit-making. The question of land access – denoting the ability to benefit from land use – translates into a question of who will be able to generate the most capital from the said resource, i.e. the most 'efficient' actor. Neoliberal rationalities act as cognitive simplifier that facilitates commensurability among different goods, thus generating a market evaluation that ignores value dimensions that cannot be translated into monetary terms (Carvalho & Rodrigues, 2008:274).

The economism that constitutes the discursive parameters of development justifies this market evaluation of land access, where land uses that do not generate capital returns are deemed 'less efficient'. These sentiments are reflected in Ethiopia's former minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abera Deressa, who stated with regards to pastoralism:

Pastoralists have enough land for their cattle...but at the end of the day we are not really appreciate pastoralists remaining as they are. We have to improve their livelihood by creating job opportunities. Pastoralism, as it is, is not sustainable. We want to change the environment (Butler, 2010).

Deressa's statement reveals the neoliberal governmentality of development: i.e. how it works through the desires and aspirations of actors across the globe, promoting particular (market) values and conducts as the knowledgeable practices to become 'developed'. Burdened with the identity of being 'underdeveloped' the framing of the contemporary 'rush for land' in Africa as 'development opportunities' prompted a range of 'self-optimisation' practices on the part of African countries to

attract foreign direct investment (FDI) in agriculture (Prabhakar & Alemu, 2013:238; Anseneeuw *et al.*, 2012:10; Matondi *et al.*, 2011). In development discourse, FDI is presented as a distinct development strategy. Foreign direct investment as a development strategy is justified by the assumption that it triggers certain ‘spill-overs’ in the host country that would supposedly spur modernisation: technology, human capital formations, international trade integration, a more competitive business environment and enhanced enterprise development (OECD, 2002:5). These ‘spill-overs’ supposedly contribute to higher economic growth - ‘the most potent tool for alleviating poverty in developing countries’ according to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2002:5).

This rationality of FDI intersected perfectly with the discursive representations of Africa’s underdevelopment and abundant land, as it justified a myriad of practices to facilitate land acquisitions through FDI. These ‘facilitating’ practices included selling land at dirt-cheap rates, implementing tax breaks, easing profit repatriation, or suspending workers’ right to strike (Matondi & Mutopo, 2011:70; Widengård, 2011:48). Additionally, in many African countries, governments created autonomous ‘land investment centres’, whose tasks included not only conducting land zones to allocate land to potential investors but also speeding up the land allocation process, especially in regions where processes of land redistribution are considered slow (Lavers, 2011:8). In the horn of Africa, the Ethiopian government established the Agricultural Investment Support Directorate (AISD), who operates within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) and responsible for the issuing of land leases to foreign investors. The standard for rates on land leases depends on the land’s proximity to the central market of Addis Ababa or sea ports, where a farm site located 700 km away from the capital an investor is expected to pay as little as 111 bir (US\$5,00)<sup>7</sup> per hectare per annum. From there, the price either increases by 4.05 birr/km as the location draw closer to the central market, or declines by the same rate as it moves further away from it (Makki & Geisler, 2011:13-14). These practices have rendered Ethiopia to be one of the most popular destinations for conducting land deals, which is best explained by a foreign investor: ‘We have chosen Ethiopia for investment because of availability of cheap labour, contiguous land and congenial business environment’ (IANS, 2009).

Yet, Ethiopia is not alone and similar self-optimisation practices are visible across the African continent (Lavers, 2011; Mousseau & Sosnoff, 2011:2, 2011b; Clements & Fernandes, 2013; Nhantumo & Salamão, 2010). Sierra Leone’s President, Ernest Bai Komara for instance stated in light of the contemporary rush for land:

<sup>7</sup> On the day of writing, US\$ 1 was equivalent to 22.21 Ethiopian birr.

[...] to take advantage of these untapped opportunities, private investors will rightly expect a stable investment climate and pro-business reform agenda. As a former businessman, I understand this [...] We know that it is only by attracting investment and growing the private section that African countries will sustain their economic growth and transform their societies (Koroma, 2010).

Koroma's statement reveals how the state's survival in a whirlpool of global capital incorporates a mode of subjectivity reducible to homo economicus (economic man). In the *Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), Foucault argues that neoliberal governmentality works by framing and encouraging a specific modality of self-repressive subjectivity: the economically calculating, benefit maximising and efficiently productive 'atom of self-interests', the homo economicus. Whereas classic liberalism produced homo economicus as a partner of exchange, in neoliberalism homo economicus becomes defined solely defined in terms of competition. Homo economicus is an 'entrepreneur of himself' responsible for his own capital and satisfaction (Foucault, 1979:226). Those individuals, who fail to thrive under such conditions, have nothing to blame but themselves (Hamann, 2009:38). This 'entrepreneurialisation' of the state, violently frame all modes of social existence as bare reserves of capital which become the means through which states succeed in global competition (Joronen, 2013:366).

It is within the operation of these subjectivities, where the neoliberal politics of limits that constitutes development discourse, produces land access to the investor. Control over land use becomes a matter of not only how neoliberal governmentality produces the self-optimisation activities of the state, but also how it frames the foreign investor as someone that will promote capital accumulation and strengthen the entrepreneurial capabilities of the state. Hence, an investor's land access forms part of a network of powers shaped by discourses of land, efficiency, agricultural development and within the topic of this paper, South-South cooperation. In this sense, power emerges from not only the capability of some actors to influence the ideas, interests or practices of others, but is also attached to people by being manifested in the meanings coupled with their identity (Ribot & Peluso, 2003:155). BRICS' South-South cooperation identity is coupled with a range of meanings that further enables market actors - especially foreign investors - to obtain control over farmland abroad. And even though their engagements with the African continent are often imbued with 'alternative' meanings, they operate within a particular (neoliberal) politics of limits that not only privilege market rationalisation, but also enframe all other entities for the use of capital reserves.

## **Conclusion**

This paper is a theoretical exploration of BRICS land access on the African continent. A focus on land access – the ability to benefit from agricultural farm land – elucidates the manner in which land uses

and practices on the continent are connected to a wide range of hierarchical power relations that enables particular actors to benefit from resources and others not. In this paper, I employed a governmentality framework to explore the role development discourse play in the production of capabilities for market actors to enjoy land access on the continent. By attaching meaning to social subjects/objects, discourses are the means through which we interpret, appreciate and act towards phenomena. The operation of discourses plays a governing role in global politics, as it shapes 'the conduct of conduct' of individuals, by working shaping their subjectivities to facilitate structured fields of action. This paper highlighted the manner in which the 'conduct of conduct' in the field of development is structured according to neoliberal rationalities that not only encourages a particular form of subjectivity, but also enframe all entities for the use of market forces. Processes of subjectivation works through the de-politicisation of particular rationalities and conducts, so that they appear as 'common sense'. With regards to the governmentality of development, economic growth measures have become the default method to not only measure and promote development, but also justify a range of practices that would allow capital accumulation. Indeed, this paper aimed to elucidate how the neoliberal ontology in which development discourse is framed, justifies the commercialisation and commodification of land governance that automatically privileges the authority and imperatives of the market/shareholder over those of the citizen (Paudyn, 2014:17). As a result, I aimed to shed a different light on why BRICS agricultural engagements with Africa tend to resemble historical rendezvous, by drawing attention to the manner in which development discourse governs the conduct of actors across the globe within a particular, neoliberal, ontological limit. Indeed, I argue that the neoliberal politics of limits that confines development discourse and praxis, also alludes to the problematic 'limit' for BRICS to present an alternative form of development cooperation with the global South. These problematics are embodied in mounting criticisms against the group's presence on the continent, which comes under the banner of 'neo-colonialists.' BRICS' response to criticisms exemplify another avenue of governmentality: symbolic politics.

Symbolic politics acts a governing technique for the group to attach distinct meanings to their presence on the African continent, especially through the poetic functioning of speech act. The poetics of SSC dominates the group's communicative agenda at BRICS-Africa summits in an attempt to represent the group in a particular way. Here, the theatricality of global diplomatic summits play a key role in the group's attempts to attach different meanings to their cooperation with Africa. Rolling news coverage, carefully prepared declarations, speeches, photos and sound-bites coupled with global summits are perfect opportunities for BRICS to make use of symbolic innuendoes to frame their relations with Africa

in a way conducive to the principles of SSC. Here, the poetic function of speech dominates the central character of their message, i.e. when the words used becomes more important than what they mean - since this paper disclosed how their meanings are historically rooted in neoliberal economic discourses of development. Yet, instead of arguing that the poetic function of speech epitomises an attempt to 'draw attention away from reality', I argued that it plays a key role in governing land access according to a neoliberal rationality. Indeed, the enabling function of symbolic politics - embodied in the poetics of SSC rhetoric - portrays BRICS in a particular way in relation to Africa that not only reify and sediment economic growth strategies as the only to develop, encouraging a range of self-optimisation practices on the part of African governments but also work through the desires and aspirations of a global audience by emphasising the aesthetics of development: infrastructure, technology, etc. In conclusion, this paper is an attempt to draw attention to the manner in which ideation aspects, embodied in historical discourses and images, are present in contemporary realities on the continent. The question of resistance becomes a matter of acknowledging the 'history of the present', as it opens the space for interpreting phenomena in a different manner, which could ultimately broaden the range of actions to be taken in the name of development.



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**Agro-extractivism inside and  
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## **About the Author(s)**

**Cecilia Schultz** is Doctoral student at the University of the Witwatersrand, under the supervision of Professor Lawrence Hamilton. This paper stems from my Master's dissertation, titled: The Neoliberal governmentality of land deals: a Foucauldian analysis of South-South cooperation (North-West University, 2015). My current research focuses at the politics of performing 'creditworthiness'; and how it influences the political economy of South Africa. I aim to elucidate the political rationalities underpinning creditworthiness by re-politicising the act of sovereign credit rating. This entails a rejection of the dichotomy between the ideal and material, by focusing on how financial practices do not exist prior to, or independently from, ideas and beliefs about them.

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