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Farmland investments in Tanzania: The impact of protected domestic markets and patronage relations

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ABSTRACT

Since the global land rush began in 2008, an abundance of studies have either documented the international and domestic drivers of the phenomenon or assessed the local impact of new land acquisition dynamics. However, beyond acquisition processes, the effect of farmland investments on economic growth in developing countries remains highly uncertain. In particular, the implementation gap remains substantial. Meanwhile, little is known about how global processes and national politics shape the socio-economic impact of such projects once they are operational, or why some investors are more successful than others in operationalizing their investment. This article explores these issues through a case study analysis of a large-scale land deal involving Kagera Sugar, a Tanzanian firm operating within a protected national market. Focusing on the company's contract farming scheme and the politicization of land formalization, I argue that Kagera Sugar's impact on the agrarian political economy reflects its ability to cultivate patronage relations at the national and local level. My findings support the argument that, from a socio-economic perspective, farmland investments tend to consolidate existing local processes of differentiation. Furthermore, the article sheds new light on the role played by patronage relations in shaping production models, practices, and outcomes at the local level. Finally, I underscore the importance of viewing operationalization through a political lens, insofar as political patronage plays a key role in ensuring operational profitability.

1. Introduction

1.1. Global capital and patronage as catalysts of indirect dispossession

Since the global land rush began in 2008, an abundance of studies have either documented the international and domestic drivers of farmland investments or assessed the local impact of land acquisition dynamics. Various scholars explain how the expansion of global capital and the ongoing search for new investment frontiers have served to promote neoliberal enclosure within developing countries (Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Akram-Lodhi & Kay, 2010; Glassman, 2006; Harvey, 2003; McMichael, 2013a). In addition, Becker and Wittmeyer (2013, p. 763) argue that the influence of global neoliberal governmentality on farmland commodification has created new sites of economic accumulation within host countries, while providing certain economic and political actors with preferred access. New farmland investments are therefore caught up in both global processes of capital accumulation and local political dynamics. For instance, host countries often pursue agricultural development and seek out investment with the aim of strengthening the political and territorial authority of the state (Brent, 2015; Lavers, 2012; Lavers & Boamah, 2016; Nalepa et al., 2017; Regassa et al., 2019). Meanwhile, elites and state actors see their crucial role in mediating land acquisition as an opportunity to strengthen their authority and secure their place in the evolving investment landscape (Wolford et al., 2013). And as Harvey (2003, p. 158) explains, "capitalism [still] internalizes cannibalistic as well as predatory and fraudulent practices." Indeed, many scholars embrace his concept of "accumulation by dispossession" (ABD) as a way of understanding the acquisition processes associated with farmland investments (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Levien, 2012; Theodory, 2017). From this perspective, high-level corruption has clearly allowed elites to regularly acquire the most valuable land for themselves (Macinnes, 2015; Visser et al., 2012).

In any case, farmland acquisition practices often lack transparency. Granted, the dominant narrative (Engström and Hajdu, 2019) continues to portray land deals as win-win solutions that foster local agricultural and socio-economic development. However, the existing literature fails to provide a very full picture of what happens post-investment, including how global processes and national politics continue to shape the socio-economic effects of farmland projects once they are operational, and why some

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investors are more successful than others in operationalizing their investments. In fact, existing empirical studies primarily document widespread exclusion and dispossession at the local level, with limited evidence of economic development (Engström et al., 2018; Maganga et al., 2016; Stein and Cunningham, 2017). Indeed, a substantial implementation gap remains, as many farmland investments in developing countries have either struggled to become operational or failed outright (Anseeuw & Boche, 2015; Bräutigam & Zhang, 2013; Feintrenie, 2014; Goetz, 2015; Hopma, 2015; Jensen et al., 2012; Magnan & Sunley, 2017; Nolte et al., 2016; Woertz, 2013).

1.2. The aftermath of land acquisition

An emerging body of literature compares models of production associated with farmland investments and addresses the impact on development at the local level. Findings have been mixed. On the one hand, some scholars document how investments can lead to job creation, increased productivity, and improved (or at least more stable) income flows (Aha & Ayitey, 2017; Brunstrup et al., 2016; Herrmann, 2017; Osabuohien et al., 2019; Schoneveld et al., 2010). On the other hand, some studies determine that local communities often find themselves worse-off post-investment. For example, the loss or conversion of agricultural land may negatively affect food security (Aha & Ayitey, 2017; Alhassan et al., 2018; Schoneveld et al., 2010); the small number of newly created jobs may be seasonal, low-skilled and temporary (Alhassan et al., 2018; Ayelazuno, 2019; Bluwstein et al., 2018; Li, 2011; Schoneveld et al., 2010); and mitigation measures may fail to properly address socio-environmental impacts, especially when the latter are poorly assessed (Fig, 2011; Persson, 2019).

One point scholars do agree on is that the effects of farmland investments are unevenly distributed at the local level and tend to reinforce existing dynamics of social differentiation. The poorest often find themselves excluded, whereas local elites enjoy the lion's share of benefits (Abate, 2020; Adams et al., 2019; Darkwah et al., 2017; Herrmann, 2017; Kansanga & Luginaah, 2019; Lanz et al., 2018; Porsani et al., 2019; Väth et al., 2019; Vercillo & Hird-Younger, 2019). Furthermore, identity affects access to benefits. Marginal groups, such as migrants (Boamah & Overå, 2016; Ofori, 2020) and women, tend to be more negatively affected (Alhassan et al., 2018; Osabuohien et al., 2019). Even in the case of so-called inclusive investments, such as contract farming schemes, researchers note how power imbalances lead to adverse outcomes for smallholders. For instance, the latter may be pushed into debt or otherwise exploited by their new contractual relations (Burnod et al., 2013; McMichael, 2013a; Oya, 2012; Vicol, 2017), leading Oya (2012, p. 19) to conclude that contract farming is simply a "more effective mechanism of labor exploitation."

Although the literature often hints at a political dimension to these dynamics of differentiation, few studies directly explore the role of politics in shaping the impact of agribusiness projects at the local level (exceptions include Beban & Gorman, 2017; Li, 2018). My article seeks to address this gap in the scholarship by undertaking a case-study analysis of one such investment, a large-scale land deal involving a local investor. Regularly cited by the Tanzanian government and the country's press as a success story, Kagera Sugar is currently expanding its operations (interview chief of operations Kagera Sugar 08.2016; The Guardian Reporter, 2017; Polycarp, 2018). Its parent company, Tanzania-based Superdoll, acquired rights to about 25,000 ha of land in 2004, making Kagera Sugar the largest investor in the Kagera region's Missenyi district. Through substantial infrastructure investments, Superdoll has successfully positioned Kagera Sugar as one of the key players in the Tanzanian sugar industry.

The article assesses the impact of Kagera Sugar's arrival on the local agrarian political economy. It focuses on the role of patronage relations in shaping production activities and local practices in the period after the company began operations. As recommended by White et al. (2012, p. 633), I pay special attention to how "the micro-politics of negotiations ..., access and exclusion are played out at the local level." This approach leads me to two main conclusions. First, Kagera Sugar's operational profitability depends on its ability to cultivate patronage relations at the local and national level. Second, these patronage relations shape operational processes as well as local practices, fostering socio-economic differentiation in surrounding communities. The article is divided into three sections. The first discusses the direct socio-economic impact of the company's operations, especially its role in promoting local socio-economic development. However, this direct impact proves to be both limited and uneven. Through an analysis of the broader impact of the company's arrival in the district, the second section provides a deeper understanding of the forces at play. Patronage relations play a particularly important role in shaping the local effects of farmland investments, especially in cases where the investor operates within a protected domestic market. I therefore discuss the importance of the sugar industry to Tanzanian politics and how Kagera Sugar secures political protection and preferential treatment through patronage relations at the national level, allowing the company to secure its monopoly over sugar production and distribution in the region. Finally, the third section looks at how Kagera Sugar helps shape the agrarian political economy by fostering similar patronage relations at the local level. Both the company's contract farming scheme and the politicization of land formalization provide examples of this phenomenon. Furthermore, this political dimension serves to reinforce existing dynamics of social differentiation, creating winners and losers at the local level.

My analysis is based on data collected during a nine-month ethnographic field study conducted from June 2016 to September 2017. I set out to assess the local impact of farmland investments in the Kagera and Pwani regions of Tanzania, ultimately focusing my efforts on the Misennyi district. Along with multiple visits to Kagera Sugar, I conducted 81 semi-structured interviews with company employees and managers, as well as farmers, outgrowers, community leaders, heads of associations, businessmen, and district officials in nine nearby villages. Interviews were organized and conducted with an eye to covering all relevant stakeholder groups and avoiding gender bias. Interviewees were randomly selected, and the collected data was carefully triangulated.

2. The socio-economic impact of Kagera Sugar's arrival

During the colonial period, some of the lands that have since been acquired by Kagera Sugar were granted to an Indian investor and developed for sugar production. When operations were nationalized after Independence, productivity remained low due to mismanagement and corruption, as well as a lack of maintenance and funding (interview with Chief of Operations, Kagera Sugar 08.2016). The state-owned sugar factory was bombed during the Tanzania-Uganda War of 1978–1979 and was completely abandoned in the 1980s, remaining idle until its privatization and sale in 2004. During the intervening years, nearby communities made use of the abandoned lands, thereby acquiring occupancy rights under the law. However, the government failed to properly compensate these communities before selling the property to Kagera Sugar.

Nevertheless, the company has been largely successful in maintaining peace with its new neighbors. On the one hand, villagers have been eager to negotiate with the company to secure benefits from what was previously government land. On the other hand, the company has shown a commitment to building good relationships with surrounding communities. According to my interviews, the few land conflicts that arose following the company's arrival were quickly and peacefully resolved. Superdoll has also invested heavily in local infrastructure projects through financial and in-kind contributions, while creating jobs and fostering social development in nearby communities. Company facilities provide villagers with access to quality health care, clean water, and primary education. And in addition to providing direct employment at the factory and on its plantations, Kagera Sugar offers farming contracts through an outgrower scheme.

In 2016, the company gave me a guided tour of its factory, plantation sites, and main buildings. My guide eagerly showed me the nice houses provided to skilled workers and managers, while emphasizing Kagera Sugar's commitment to the well-being of its employees. After a five-star meal at the company restaurant, I also visited the hospital, primary school, and new mosque. Company staff, as well as residents of nearby villages, can use these facilities at little or no cost. The overall message seemed to be that beyond competitiveness, efficiency, and technological improvements, the company was also focused on providing good working conditions, retaining employees, and maintaining good relations with surrounding communities.

However, a closer examination of working conditions at Kagera Sugar paints a much more nuanced picture. In fact, most local people can only access lower-paying jobs, such as cane-cutting or seeding. The few higher-paid managerial or professional positions available require not only a diploma, but also political ties to company officials (interviews farmers and villagers from nine villages, Kagera region, 08.2016–03.2017). Rather than the nice houses I visited on my tour, most workers live in slum-like labor camps, isolated in the middle of the plantation. They build houses with whatever materials they can find. Working conditions are harsh and salaries are extremely low. Local people can tell when someone starts at the company because entry-level workers "tend to slim up very quickly" (field notes and observations 2016–2017). The company transports workers between different parts of the plantation using big open trucks, similar to the vehicles used for transporting cattle. These journeys are not only uncomfortable, but also dangerous, due to the fights and knife attacks that frequently occur. Women are particularly vulnerable. They face sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and sometimes even threats of rape.

It is therefore no surprise that Kagera Sugar struggles to recruit workers for low-skilled jobs (interview human resources manager Kagera Sugar 09.2016). Local peasants are free to opt into or out of the new mode of production introduced by the company. And beyond low pay and difficult working conditions, their reluctance to sign on with the company also reflects cultural factors. The Missenyi district was previously part of the Haya kingdoms, and people who identify as Haya place a high value on education. Throughout Tanzania, the Haya are generally recognized as one of the country's most highly educated groups (field notes and observations 2016–2017). As a result, a significant portion of the local population places a low social value on the employment opportunities offered by Kagera Sugar. The company must therefore recruit staff from other Tanzanian regions—most of those who live on the plantation do not come from nearby communities—and deal with a high turnover rate among its low-skilled workers. Meanwhile, most local workers prefer to live in their home villages, even when this means commuting to the plantation every day (interviews farmers and villagers from nine villages, Kagera region, 08.2016–03.2017). So, while it is true that villagers are adapting to the new politico-economic conditions, most of those I interviewed are seeking to maintain their independence from the company. Although they appreciate the opportunities offered by Kagera Sugar, they tend to take the jobs it offers only when they need cash to pay school fees or buy farm inputs, or when the harvest is not as good as expected. And as soon as their situation improves, they usually return to working the family farm. They prefer the flexibility and independence offered by small-scale farming, even if that sometimes means barely producing enough to survive. In addition to its cultural value, land serves as a safety net for peasants. The villagers I met with appreciated both the cultural value of having their own land and the security it provided. Few of them were willing to abandon their traditional livelihood in favor of a new mode of production, such as the one proposed by the company. As Li (2011, p. 295) notes, "in the absence of national welfare provisions, even a tiny patch of land is a crucial safety net."

Indeed, whereas some aspects of Kagera Sugar's operations support Glassman's (2006) argument regarding the semi-proletarianization of the peasantry through capitalist penetration and concomitant processes of primitive accumulation, the company's arrival has only had a marginal effect on how most local peasants support themselves. And as sugar production becomes increasingly mechanized, the impact will further diminish (Li, 2011). Villagers are neither actively resisting Kagera Sugar nor passively integrating into its capitalist mode of production as semi-proletarians. Rather, most of them are reacting to developments in a way that fosters their interests. They agree to sell their labor when they have a specific need for cash but return to their traditional occupations once the need has passed.

Nevertheless, I argue that the arrival of Kagera Sugar has also affected local communities in other ways. In the following sections, I explore how the company safeguards its operational profitability, which relies on a regional monopoly and monopsony over sugar, by cultivating patronage relations at the national and local level. These activities have led to the emergence of new local patrons who use their positions to enrich themselves, often at the expense of the larger community.

3. The impact of patronage relations on the local agrarian political economy

3.1. The politics of sugar in Tanzania

Tanzania has a highly regulated sugar market, composed of just four active companies. Due to poor technology and low productivity, the country's producers would likely not survive in a free and open international market. In fact, domestic sugar production has failed to meet internal demand (Agribusiness Country Diagnostic Tanzania, 2016; MAFAP, 2012), and the government periodically issues import permits to select foreign buyers. Tight state control over sugar imports serves not only to protect the domestic sugar industry, but also to make support of local production very politically lucrative (Eriksen, 2018, p. 24).

The sugar crisis of 2016 illustrates the highly politicized nature of sugar production in Tanzania. When John Pombe Magufuli—the current Tanzanian president—took power in November 2015, he cast himself as the enemy of corruption. Setting out to reform how sugar import permits were issued, he transferred responsibility from the Tanzania Sugar Board to the Prime Minister's Office (interview program manager, Sugar Board of Tanzania, 10.2016). However, by early 2016, administrative delays had sparked a national sugar crisis, with significant shortages lasting several weeks. As sugar prices peaked, the government's handling of the crisis became a major issue that was closely followed by the national media (e.g., Kamndaya, 2016; Tairo, 2016). The government publicly blamed sugar dealers, who hoarded their reserves to draw maximum benefit from the surge in prices, accusing them of threatening not just the Tanzanian economy but also national security. It is impossible to say if the government deliberately created the shortage for the benefit of its political allies—sugar dealers and importers—or if it was just a matter of incompetence and lack of foresight. Although Magufuli's exact motives remain unclear, his actions would appear to reflect the current state of affairs in Tanzanian politics, characterized by patronage dynamics and the close alignment of business and political interests (Andreoni, 2017; Cooksey, 2012; Cooksey & Kelsall, 2011; Eriksen, 2018). Perhaps Magufuli was responding to pressure from the business community and his fellow members of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)—the ruling party in Tanzania since Independence. Many of those who led the privatization process in the 1990s now owned shares in the country's sugar producers, and a sharp increase in prices certainly would have been to their advantage.

Whatever the case, the government's response to the crisis clearly increased its control over who would receive import permits. By asserting more direct authority over the international sugar trade through the Prime Minister's Office, the president was able to protect the existing oligopoly's dominance over production and distribution, while opening up new opportunities for the small number of domestic producers. Ultimately, the entire sugar crisis—which was both caused and resolved by Magufuli's government—was more than an economic issue. It was also a cleverly seized political opportunity. The national media's extensive coverage of the crisis cast Magufuli as an effective populist leader. More importantly, under the guise of fighting corruption, Magufuli was able to assert his authority and take control of patronage networks associated with the importation and distribution of sugar (Andreoni, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, the crisis served to highlight the political importance of sugar. Operating in a tightly regulated market, Tanzanian sugar companies need to leverage their political connections in order to effectively produce, process, and distribute this lucrative commodity. As Eriksen (2018, p. 24) explains, "Sugar [in Tanzania] is a well-established industry with few players, reliance on a domestic market, and a structural deficit that has created significant rents. Responses to rent-seeking in the sugarcane sector show that even when producers and processors are well organized, criminal practices can continue to hold back a key industry."

3.2. How Kagera Sugar cultivates patronage relations and secures political protection

Kagera Sugar is the only domestic producer in Tanzania that enjoys a regional monopoly on sugar production and processing. I argue that this unique advantage reflects the company's commitment to cultivating patronage relations at the national level. And although it would be nearly impossible to find conclusive evidence, three significant factors support this argument.

First, Kagera Sugar is the only national sugar producer that can still expand horizontally. Unlike its competitors, the company can acquire new lands and enjoys unlimited access to irrigation from the Kagera River—a significant and underutilized water source. Over the medium term, the company is therefore seeking to expand its operations and capture a larger share of the national market (interview chief of operations, Kagera Sugar, 08.2016; interview program manager Sugar Board of Tanzania, 10.2016). The good relations Kagera Sugar has built with local communities will facilitate this expansion by allowing the company to acquire new land directly from surrounding villages. Land deals negotiated with village leaders are directly formalized by the Ministry of Land, without the involvement or even knowledge of authorities at the district level (interviews Missenyi district officials, 08.2016–02.2017). This reversal of information flows makes the district dependent on the company for information on land acquisitions, whereas most empirical studies of farmland acquisition in Tanzania emphasize the pivotal role played by district officials (Bélair, 2018; Engström et al., 2018). Clearly, Superdoll's political connections have allowed it to secure preferential treatment from central authorities and the ability to bypass local governance structures. At the local level, my respondents often suggested that the lands were owned by individuals other than the official owners, and that Kagera Sugar is connected to a former high-level CCM politician. Although such rumors are difficult to confirm, West and Haug (2017, p. 13) report similar allegations by villagers in their study of Superdoll's Mtibwa Sugar Estate in Kilombero.

Second, whereas Tanzanian sugar companies must compete with each other elsewhere in the country, Kagera Sugar enjoys a regional monopoly on the commodity. In the course of my research, I interviewed three local businessmen, all of whom had been forced to abandon attempts to break into the regional sugar market after encountering political difficulties (interviews businessmen, Missenyi district, 08.2016–02.2017).

Third, Kagera Sugar also enjoys a regional monopsony. Indeed, it is the only Tanzanian sugar company with an outgrower program that deals with a single outgrower association. By contrast, its counterparts elsewhere in the country, such as the Kilombero Sugar Company, must deal with numerous different outgrower associations. This creates stiff competition and increases administrative and financial costs (see Mmari 2015; interview program officer, Sugar Board of Tanzania, 10.2016). Meanwhile, Kagera Sugar has been able to avoid the drawbacks associated with a more competitive production market, and the company's political connections ensure the failure of any challenges to the established order. For example, in 2014, the commissioner of the Missenyi district (who was an outgrower himself) began to lay the groundwork for a new outgrower association. Not only did his efforts fail, but the president personally stepped in to transfer him to another district and replace him with a more compliant public servant (notes and interviews with outgrowers, 08.2016–03.2017) of the region's lone outgrower association and the leaders of the microfinance agency. At the local level, political protection also allows Kagera Sugar to co-opt the leaders of the region's lone outgrower association and the latter's microfinance program. The company therefore enjoys total control over contract farming in the district, giving it a major financial advantage. Naturally, co-opted local elites are rewarded financially for their compliance. And as the following section explains, such patronage dynamics are key to understanding the local impact of the company's contract farming program. Essentially, by drawing on its political influence at the national level, Kagera Sugar has been able to further protect its interests by establishing a similar patronage system at the local level.

4. The impact of patronage relations at the local level

4.1. Monopolistic management of contract farming

As part of its efforts to expand production (see above), Kagera Sugar established an outgrower scheme in 2007–2008. Buying sugarcane from outgrowers allows the company to maximize production, since its milling capacity currently exceeds its ability to grow sugarcane. The arrangement also provides the local population with an interesting economic opportunity: in the general absence of a market for other crops, the company offers a guaranteed price for sugarcane. Numerous small- and medium-scale farmers in the area have therefore acquired land to produce the crop. However, the system remains highly regulated. In particular, all outgrowers must register with Kaziba, the district's sole outgrower association. In theory, Kaziba is responsible for providing outgrowers with training, improved seeds, fertilizer, assistance with harvesting, and transportation services. The association also negotiates the price at which outgrowers sell sugarcane to the company.

In 2016, 384 outgrowers were registered with Kaziba. Although they come from different backgrounds, most of them are Haya from the Missenyi district who have developed small-scale sugarcane plantations (1–15 ha) on their own land to supplement their farming revenues. In cases where they acquire additional land, they usually do so through their village leaders (field notes and observations 2016–2017). However, some individuals originally from the Kagera region who now live in larger cities (such as Dar es Salaam or Mwanza) have acquired larger parcels of land (50 ha and more) for sugarcane plantations. These outgrowers normally have access to capital, as well as political connections in the Kagera region. In recent years, they have been successful in leveraging their political influence at the local and national level, in order to take advantage of investment opportunities by acquiring substantial amounts of new land. These investors belong to a different social category—what I call wealthy emigrants. In most cases, such medium-scale, elite investors hire local managers to oversee their plantations and business operations, and only occasionally visit the area in person.

Although Kaziba was initially created by farmers to increase their bargaining power with the company, its leaders appear to be increasingly focused on using their positions for personal gain (field notes and observations 2016–2017). Naturally, this has caused a number of problems, including a lack of transparency in negotiations; delays in payment; unfulfilled commitments to provide training and access to inputs, such as improved seeds and fertilizer; transportation issues; rising membership fees; and increased administrative costs. However, not all outgrowers have been equally affected. According to my interviews, those with the biggest plantations and best political connections tend to face fewer transportation issues, payment delays, and troubles accessing inputs. Moreover, they usually have better access to capital, allowing them to operate independently of SACCOS, the microfinance agency that has a monopoly on the provision of small loans to outgrowers in the district. By contrast, most small-scale outgrowers must cope with apparent collusion between Kaziba and SACCOS. The association strongly encourages its members to take out high-interest loans from the microfinance agency. However, SACCOS generally forbids them from settling their loans in a single payment, preferring to receive multiple installments over a longer period. In the words of one outgrower I interviewed,

When you get a loan with SACCOS, you [have] to pay very high-interest rates and they are blocking you from reimbursing your loan at once when you get the money. They want you to go by installments. SACCOS is even sometimes taking up my money directly from what the company should pay me, without even consulting me. How is it possible? I got a loan once with them, and I will never do it again. I hate SACCOS. I got a loan of TSH3 million [US$ 2,000] for six months. I had to pay TSH800,000 [US$ 533] in interest. I paid all at once, but I will never do it again (interview outgrower 01.2017).

These institutional arrangements have placed many outgrowers in a difficult financial position. Once association fees and loan payments are deducted from their sales, most of them are left with almost nothing. One of my respondents told me that many of them cannot even afford to send their children to school.

In short, the realities of contract farming in the region do not fully match the institutional narrative (Deininger & Byerlee, 2011) that praises microcredit initiatives and outgrowing schemes for empowering farmers economically. As Vicol (2017, p. 157) notes in his analysis of contract farming in India, outgrowers are not excluded; rather, they are adversely included. This echoes the findings of other recent studies on the difficulties faced by farmers who participate in agricultural schemes (Burnod et al., 2013; De Schutter, 2011; Oya, 2012; West & Haug, 2017). Moreover, SACCOS's monopoly tends to support McMichael's (2013b, p. 674) contention that debt relations are increasingly used as disciplining tools.

Likewise, the existing literature shows that the socially differentiated impacts observed in the Kagera region—with larger landowners faring better than smaller ones—reflect similar trends elsewhere. However, my analysis helps to explain the reasons and causes behind such social differentiation. Specifically, patronage relations and political protection at the national level in Tanzania have had lasting repercussions on the agrarian political economy at the local level. This has led to the emergence, co-opting, and empowerment of new local elites (i.e., the leaders of Kaziba and the leaders of SACCOS, as well as wealthy emigrants). Furthermore, these impacts have been felt well beyond contract farming. As the next section demonstrates, the rising demand for land has created new economic incentives for land control. In the Kagera region, this has led district officials to take control of land formalization and use the process to unlawfully dispossess villagers. Despite being illegal, such practices appear to be tolerated because they benefit other actors, namely district officials and wealthy emigrants interested in acquiring the valuable lands at the lower prices. To use the metaphor of the politics of the belly (Bayart, 1989), district officials are allowed to have their share of the cake if they help others eat.

4.2. Control of land formalization by district officials

This rising demand for land has caused prices to soar, with adverse consequences for villagers. For instance, most small farmers lack formal title to their land and are therefore very vulnerable to dispossession. Instances of local leaders or district officials using their power to strip villagers of their land rights have only increased since leasing village lands to outgrowers has emerged as a lucrative business. Meanwhile, land formalization has become both more complicated and more politicized. Anyone seeking to have their land surveyed and titled must pay district officials, who often misrepresent the legal parameters and costs associated with the process. But the fact remains that most villagers lack the financial resources required to pursue the only legal option for protecting their land rights, namely securing title to their land.

The implementation of village land-use plans (VLUPs) under the Ministry of Land's National Programme for Planning, Surveying, and Land Titling (PPSL) has spurred dispossession in several of the district's villages. The district officials responsible for developing VLUPs have manipulated the process to make land available to investors, thereby securing personal gain at the expense of local villagers. Typically, these officials exclude certain parts of a village from the official plan and threaten any village leaders who dare to contest the newly established boundaries. In many cases, the territory cut off from the village is ceded to wealthy emigrants (interviews Missenyi villagers and villages' leaders, 01.2017–02.2017).

Administrative transfer constitutes a second strategy used by district officials to seize control of valuable land. Regulated by the *Local Government Act (2003)*, which puts district officials in charge of planning, it involves incorporating village lands into new towns, which fall under the *Urban Land Act (2007)* rather than the *Village Land Act*. As part of the process, villagers are required to cede their land rights—in the form of Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy (CCROs)—to the state, in exchange for compensation, resettlement, or an option to buy land in the newly created town (interview town planner Kagera region 08.2016; interviews officials Ministry of Land, 09.2016; interview district official, Missenyi district, 08.2016–02.2017). Not only do villagers lose the right to control what had previously been village lands, they are forced to sell these lands at predetermined rates that are far below market value. The government justifies the process by arguing that it not only streamlines land administration, but also increases land values. However, the value added to the land through administrative transfer is captured by district officials charged with managing the new towns, not the villagers who most often cannot afford to buy back their ancestral land. For example, for reasons that remain unclear, district officials in Missenyi are seeking to transform a village called Bunazi into a town. The village is neither the biggest nor the most populous in the area. However, Bunazi is located near Kagera Sugar, meaning that wealthy emigrants would be interested in acquiring its lands for contract farming. Changing the village's administrative status would therefore provide a way for district officials to benefit from rising property values, by legally dispossessing villagers and transferring the village lands to investors, be they wealthy emigrants or political allies. In fact, the inhabitants of Bunazi believe that district officials had already found buyers for the land before they even initiated the process (interviews villagers 01.2017–02.2017).

Overall, administrative transfer reflects the deep-rooted paternalism of the Tanzanian state, which assumes that only central authorities can *properly* manage village lands and that villagers—or "backward peasants"—need to be guided through the socio-economic development process as villages expand (Constant Martin, 1988; Ingle, 1970; Schneider, 2014; see Scott, 1998). Such a means of dispossessing peasants also fits with Akram-Lodhi's argument (2007, p. 1444) that dispossession by accumulation entails two complementary political modes of forcible separation. On the one hand, the dominant classes rely on market mechanisms to appropriate land for themselves. On the other hand, they pursue reforms that restructure the allocation of resources in their favor. Likewise, Peluso and Lund (2011, p. 670) highlight how the dual role of land authorities as both regulators and rent seekers is key to understanding processes of dispossession.

As mentioned above, control of land formalization has provided district officials with a way of transferring land to wealthy emigrants. The latter also form part of the local political elite, insofar as they frequently have ties to either the regional or district administration of the CCM and therefore enjoy political protection and preferential treatment in the context of land distribution and titling (field notes, interviews and observations 2016–2017). Furthermore, wealthy emigrants also benefit from political connections at the national level, where patrons pursue land redistribution as part of their political strategy (Andreoni, 2017; see Eriksen, 2018). These political connections at the local and national level provide district officials with not only the authority to proceed with their sometimes illegal or violent land formalization efforts, but also the promise of political protection. Nor are patronage relations a new factor in relation to land management in the Kagera district. Shivji (1992, pp. 28–30) notes that, as early as 1992, villagers frequently complained about both the arbitrary distribution of land by the government and their loss of control over rural and village lands. So, notwithstanding the market-oriented reforms of the 1990s and the implementation of the *Village Land Act (1999)*, not much has changed in how government officials approach land management. Indeed, Bryceson's assessment of the situation in 1991 remains relevant today:

Ironically, it is the state itself or its agents, that have become the target of farmers' grievances. State agents, exercising their largely unsupervised discretionary powers, can engage in corrupt practices for the enhancement of their land-holdings or commercial interests. On the other hand, the state, both at national and regional levels, acting in the name of "public interests" can, in the eyes of local farmers, be trampling on their customary rights to land (Bryceson 1991, p. 3, qtd in Shivji, 1992, p. 116).

However, not only are administrative processes now being used much more extensively to strip villagers of their land rights in the Missenyi district, but this accelerated process of dispossession is directly associated with the arrival of Kagera Sugar and the company's impact on the regional economy. As discussed in the next section, the politicization of land formalization has affected the local agrarian system by altering social dynamics and production processes, as well as by intensifying existing local dynamics of social differentiation. Furthermore, these changes disproportionately affect the district's most vulnerable populations—migrants, youth, and women—making them the silent victims of patronage relations.

4.3. Migrants are not "real" villagers

Numerous factors explain why increasing numbers of foreign and internal migrants have been arriving in the district. To begin with, Kagera Sugar actively recruits migrant laborers to fill its lowest-paying jobs. In recent decades, conflicts in Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi have also forced residents of those countries to seek refuge in the area. Finally, many of those who fled during the Tanzania-Uganda War of 1978–1979 subsequently returned to the district, creating complex dynamics of internal migration. Nevertheless, the proportion of migrants remains small. Most villagers identify as Haya, and their families have been present in the region for multiple generations (field notes and observations 2016–2017). Meanwhile, migrants often settle on the outskirts of villages, where undeveloped land was still available at the time of their arrival. Some have lived in the area for more than two generations, thereby acquiring customary rights of occupancy on the land they cultivate.

However, most migrants never fully integrate into village life and find themselves excluded from local politics on the basis of their origin (field notes and observations 2016–2017). As a result, local leaders are less willing to defend their land rights, making them easy targets for district officials seeking to acquire land for wealthy emigrants. For instance, I investigated the case of a sub-village near Kagera Sugar. Following a series of illegal and violent eviction operations in 2008 and 2016, and amid ongoing political intimidation, the population was ultimately removed by force in October 2017. With assistance from the military, district officials even burned the houses of the evicted villagers. Based on my interviews and observations, it would appear that eight politically well-connected wealthy emigrants had already purchased the land and began using it for contract farming almost immediately (interview leaders sub-village, 09.2016).

4.4. Women and youth

An acute land shortage means there is often nothing for local youth to inherit. The significance of this issue lies in how it affects the community's relationship to land, which is traditionally passed on from father to son. In short, villagers fear they will not be able to leave anything to their children and see the land shortage as an important cause of youth unemployment. Indeed, local youth have few options when it comes to earning a living. Jobs are available at Kagera Sugar, but as mentioned above, they are not culturally valued. Local young people can also start small businesses. Indeed, many of them have become "boda boda" (motorcycle) drivers, although such work is seen as temporary due to the limited possibility of earning a decent livelihood. Finally, outgrowers often hire youth to perform physically demanding work, such as land clearing or weeding. In most cases, the land manager will negotiate payment per task, rather than paying young people an hourly wage. As a result, undervalued tasks tend to be extremely poorly paid. And since these activities constitute casual employment, they come with no job security, equipment, or insurance. Nevertheless, the workers I interviewed pointed out that working for an outgrower gives them more flexibility in terms of working hours than a job at Kagera Sugar. Meanwhile, the growing number of young people finding casual employment provides yet another illustration of class differentiation in the area, as wealthy outgrowers belonging to an emerging middle class hire laborers to work their lands. This situation reflects a profound change in the agrarian political economy: Missenyi youth are increasingly losing control over the means of production and relying on casual labor to survive.

Although there is no evidence Kagera Sugar engages in gender discrimination, few women apply to work for the company. Cultural norms greatly restrict women's opportunities for working outside the home. Rather, Tanzanian women are expected to work on their family's land, perform domestic tasks, and manage expenses related to children (field notes and observations 2016–2017). However, land scarcity has begun to impact family labor systems. And while men are increasingly unable to earn a living by working their own land, my interviews with married women suggest that the wages these men earn from employers often fail to cover family expenses. Men commonly refuse to disclose their actual earnings to their wives, preferring to maintain as much flexibility as possible in terms of their personal spending (interviews farmers and villagers from nine villages, Kagera region, 08.2016–03.2017). As a result, women are left to bear the hidden costs of a changing agrarian political economy. Left to their own devices, they must find a way to cultivate the family land and meet the needs of their children. As Glassman (2006, p. 618) notes, women's unpaid social reproductive labor is a key condition for extra-economic accumulation under changing agrarian dynamics.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

This article has taken a case-study approach to understanding the impact of farmland investments on the local agrarian political economy in one area of Tanzania. I have argued that Kagera Sugar's regional monopoly and monopsony within a projected national market has allowed the company to cultivate patronage relations at the national and local level. Furthermore, these patronage relations are key to understanding the company's impact on the local agrarian system, by allowing Kagera Sugar to exert political influence and assert its privileges. This has led to the emergence of many new local patrons who seek personal gain at the expense of community well-being.

The arrival of Kagera Sugar transformed the local political economy by creating winners and losers at the local level. The biggest winners include district officials, wealthy emigrants, and local political elites, as well as the leaders of the district outgrower association and the leaders of the microfinance agency. They have been able to personally profit from the situation by engaging in patronage relations that serve the interests of Kagera Sugar, local elites, and the central state. For instance, district officials have benefited from land scarcity and the recent surge in land prices by manipulating land formalization in a way that also allows wealthy emigrants and other elites to acquire valuable land for contract farming at very low cost.

Granted, my analysis has shown that, to some extent, the peasantry also benefits from Kagera Sugar's presence. The company provides employment, contributes to local socio-economic development, and allows communities to mitigate the risks associated with small-scale agriculture through economic diversification. But not only are these benefits unevenly distributed, they are likely to diminish over time. For example, small outgrowers increasingly find themselves in financial difficulty, while the low-paying jobs and difficult working conditions offered by Kagera Sugar are unlikely to provide a long-term solution to poverty. Moreover, because the investments made by the company tend to reinforce existing dynamics of social differentiation, the area's most vulnerable populations—migrants, youth, and women—have emerged as the biggest losers. As their land rights become increasingly insecure, these groups have limited options for earning a livelihood. I therefore conclude that farmland investments tend to consolidate existing dynamics of differentiation at the local level. I also underscore the role played by patronage relations in shaping local production models, practices, and outcomes by explicitly linking them to patronage politics at the national level.

More broadly, these dynamics reflect a more profound agrarian transformation underway in rural Tanzania. As many scholars have pointed out, a new middle class is emerging (Bluwstein et al., 2018; Cooksey, p. 6, 2012; Jayne et al., 2019; for the Kilombero Sugar Company, see Sulle, 2017). However, it is important to recognize that changes in the local agrarian political economy are multicausal. Indeed, patronage relations intersect with other factors such as the implementation of the global development agenda with regard to land formalization and privatization, as well as the push for commercial agricultural models. Furthermore, patronage relations are embedded within larger historical and socio-economic dynamics related to family strategies, gender inequality, population growth, and decreasing land fertility.

Finally, this article offers insights into a question that has so far been inadequately addressed by studies of the global land rush: Why are some landowners able to successfully operationalize their investments where others fail? My analysis highlights the significance of the politization of land formalization for farmland investments in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, the factors determining operationalization may be more political than economic. For instance, this article explains how cultivating patronage relations has been key to Kagera Sugar's success. Of course, the issue needs to be further explored. One outstanding question is whether Kagera Sugar would have been able to achieve the same success—or achieve success in the same way—had it been a foreign investor. It would therefore be interesting for future research to assess the extent to which the findings presented in this article can be generalized.

Joanny Bélair completed her PhD at the University of Ottawa in Political Science, with a major in Comparative Politics and a minor in International Relations. Her thesis, *Farmland Investments in Tanzania: A Local Perspective on the Political Economy of Agri-food Projects,* was nominated for the Prize of the best doctoral thesis. She currently holds a postdoctoral fellowship at the Faculty of Geoscience, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and is associated with LandAc, the Netherlands Land Academy. Her current research project looks at how investors' profile and level of integration within host countries' political economy influence their capacity to operationalize their agricultural investment projects. Her other research interests are on land governance, farmland investments, governance and African politics.

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