Land Grabs, Racial Governmentality and the Politics of Space and Place– Mapping the effect of ‘sweetness and power’ in Africa

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This paper seeks to engage in an examination of the nature of the forces mediating the land grabs in Africa. In particular, does an analysis of a global capitalism suffice to determine the tendencies embedded in the present practices of accumulation and dispossession in Africa as triggered by the recently experienced Triple F crises in food, fuel and finance? Or, can the semiotics and technologies of modern power also offer an organizing frame for reading African dispossession in the present? To what extent, do the contours of the land grabs by sugar supply chain companies, for example, publicly decried by OXFAM, embed a peculiarly extended instance of racially inflected ‘imperial formations’? In short, what exactly are the political modalities through which transnational actors reproduce a racializing politics of place that marks Africa by “empty spaces” and ‘black time’ in order to sustain unsustainable patterns of globalization? We suggest in this essay that questions such as these are best explored by paying attention to the way that ‘space’ is incorporated into imaginaries of power and place. To do this we deploy a concept we call ‘rural othering,’ by which we seek to suggest that a flexible racial governmentality may exist in shaping how African space is mapped into the development spaces of the modern world.