

LA RÉVOLUTION DES AGRICULTURES AFRICAINES SAISIE PAR SES MARGES : CONCENTRATIONS ET DELAISSEMENTS AU NORD DU MOZAMBIQUE

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RÉSUMÉ

A la fin des années 2000, de nombreux États africains ont adopté de nouvelles politiques agricoles dans le cadre du *Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme* (CAADP, Carte 1). Elles promeuvent l'intensification des rendements et de la commercialisation agricole ainsi que l'accroissement des investissements publics et privés dans les producteurs et les espaces les plus prometteurs. J'explore les effets de ces politiques agricoles à partir du Nord du Mozambique, un espace marginal ciblé par un corridor de développement. Cet espace largement peuplé et cultivé fait l'objet de nombreux projets de développement et d'investissement (Carte 2). Bien que la matérialisation de ces derniers soit inférieure aux annonces, ils concentrent les ressources et ont accru les tensions. Les habitants ont non seulement perdu des terres au profit d'investisseurs privés mais encore des financements, redirigés vers ces premiers et vers les membres du parti au pouvoir. Les administrations s'appuient sur l'hétérogénéité foncière - tant juridique, que vécue - pour faciliter les investisseurs et les dédouaner de contreparties. Les projets d'intensification agricole sont captés par des élites économiques et politiques et les producteurs les plus vulnérables s'en retrouvent exclus. *In fine* les interventions ont participé à accroître les violences structurelles et directes et à raviver des clivages hérités de la guerre civile. Il apparaît alors crucial de documenter les effets de la révolution des agricultures africaines à partir de ses marges, en s'intéressant tant aux espaces ciblés qu'à ceux délaissés.

THE AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION FROM ITS MARGINS: CONCENTRATION AND RELEGATION IN NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

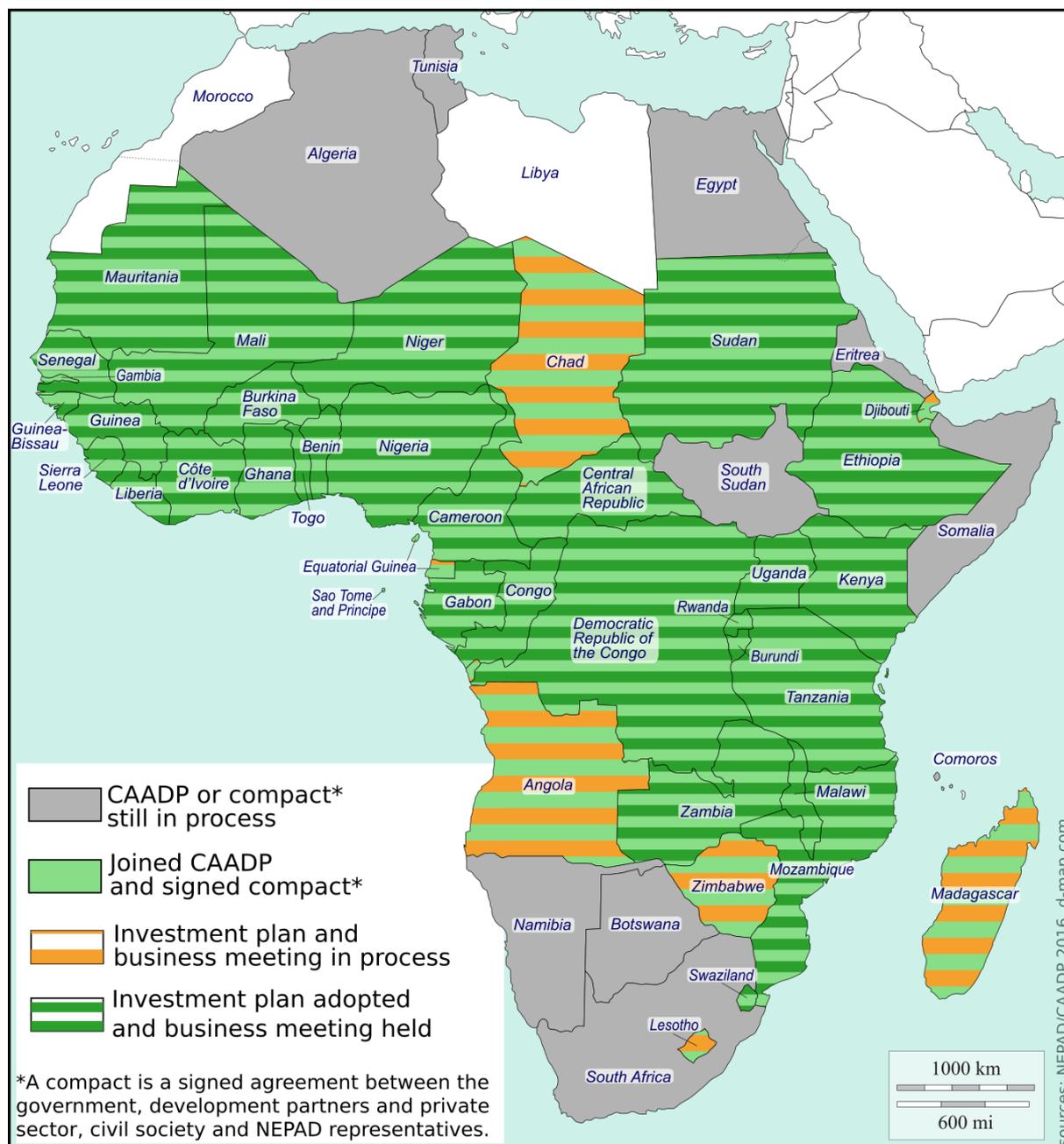
ABSTRACT

At the end of the 2000s, numerous African States adopted new agricultural policies and initiatives promoting food production and security. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP, Map 1) has been one of the most ambitious intervention, pushing for increased agricultural productivity and calling for private and public investments to focus on the most promising spaces and farmers. Its effects on the ground are assessed based on the case of Northern Mozambique, a marginal space targeted by a development corridor and several investments (Map 2). I document how the interventions have concentrated on certain spaces and farmers and forsaken others. The mismatch between the expectations and the materializations has fed tensions between inhabitants, investors and administrations, both in invested and neglected spaces. Documenting the African agricultural revolution from its

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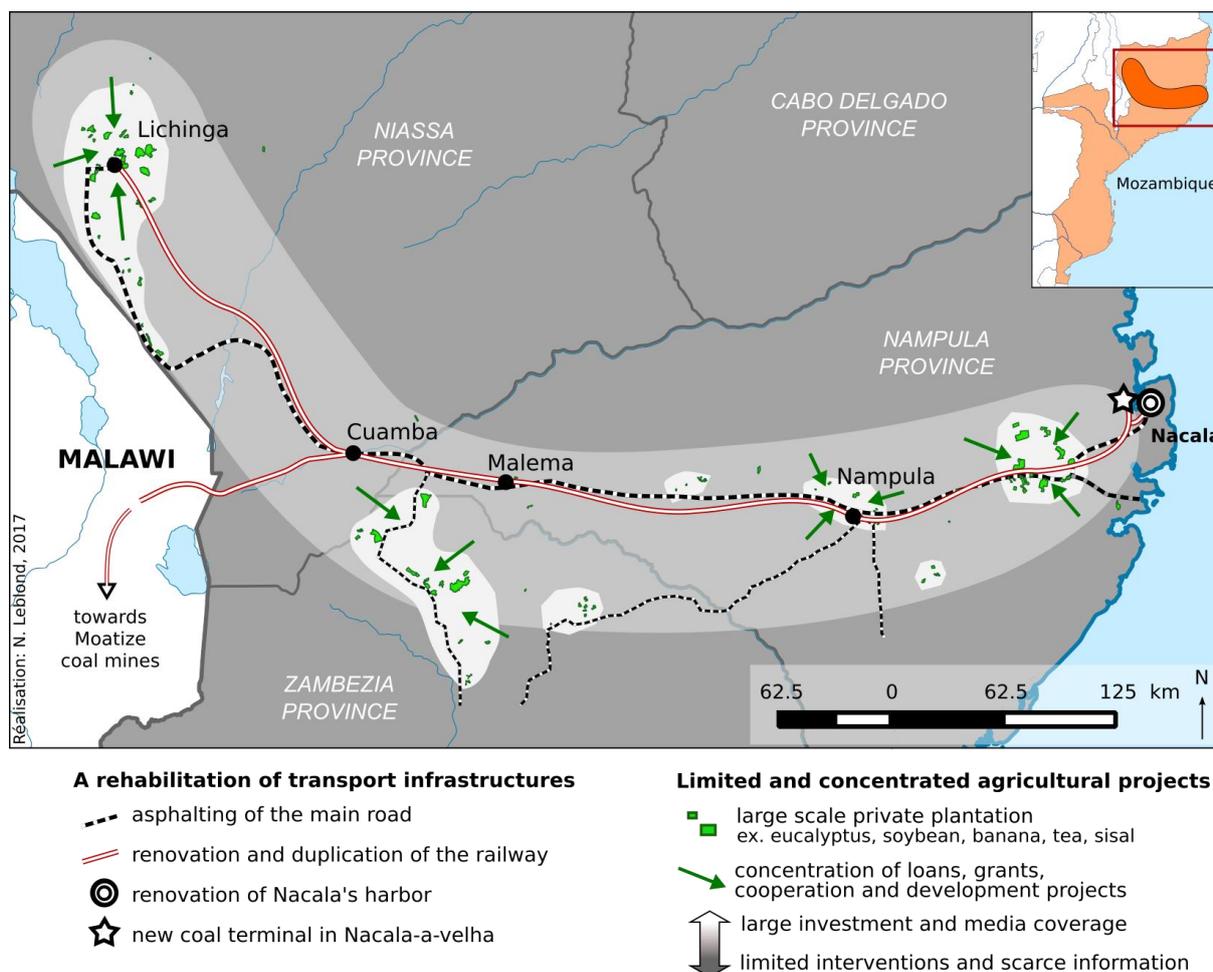
margins shows how structural and direct violence emerge from interactions with contemporary politics and previous exclusions.

Figures



Carte 1 : Etat de l'adoption du *Comprehensive Africa agriculture Development Programme* (CAADP) par les gouvernements africains en décembre 2016.

Map 1 : Adoption of the CAADP framework by African governments in December 2016.



Carte 2 : Le corridor de Nacala, une périphérie inégalement ciblée par de nombreux projets d'investissement et de développement

Map 2 : The Nacala Corridor, a periphery unequally targeted by numerous investment and development projects

A new wave of policies and initiatives to transform African Agricultures

In the late 2000s, following several decades of neglect of African agricultures, a new wave of interest for food production and security emerged among international institutions, development agencies, private corporations and African States. Several platforms, alliances, and policy initiatives have been set up such as the *Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP)*, the *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN)* and the *Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)*. The CAADP process was joined by 43 African States, and over 30 of them adopted new agricultural policies and investment plans (Map 1). CAADP claims it will considerably increase public and private investment in farming and farmland in the next decade. It is heavily supported by major financial institutions. Its four pillars are: 1. Extending the area under sustainable land management, 2. Developing rural infrastructure to improve market access, 3. Increasing agricultural productivity, 4. Improving agricultural research systems and dissemination. To maximize the efficiency of interventions, it promotes focusing on the best lands and farmers. Its advocates describe it as the “most ambitious and comprehensive agricultural reform effort ever undertaken in Africa”.

Simultaneously, critical scholars envision this massive agricultural reform or revolution as a coup for corporate capital and a way for dominant international institutions and private investors to consolidate their position in the world food regime (McKeon 2014; McMichael 2012). The discourse and initiatives promoting the doubling of food production and the intensification of agriculture have been analyzed as “productionism”, a paradigm legitimizing institutions such as FAO, and silencing questions of food access and unequal distribution (Bricas et Daviron 2008). Private foundations and corporations have actively promoted private investments in farming and farmland and pushed specific spatial forms such as agricultural clusters and development corridors (Binet 2014). The adoption and adhesion of African States to these liberal interventions and policies has been understood as an internalization of the aid regime’s conditionality in order to access critical resources (Fouilleux et Balié 2009; Leblond 2017a). Joining the CAADP enabled African elites to promise development and tap into agricultural populism while securing external funding. Yet the effects of this new wave of interventions remain under-documented.

The transformations induced by the CAADP and the concomitant green revolution are difficult to grasp for at least three reasons. First, these interventions have been embedded in an evidence base framework functioning as an anti-politics machine. It posits them as solely technical and focuses on aggregated indicators denying the socio-political dimensions of the initial and final situations. Thus it eclipses the processes and the impacts at stake. In Rwanda however, independent research documented how crop intensification programs were increasing social inequalities and failed to support worst-off farmers (Cioffo, Ansoms, et Murison 2016). Second, the land grab controversy generated a high media coverage blurring the scarcely documented question of hectares really invested, number of people dispossessed, and resources and competences truly transferred. Understanding the importance of investments and their effects on food production and security became delicate. Third, rural transformations and policy consequences are hardly the results of a specific intervention. They are shaped by long term histories and interactions with preexisting farming and food systems, as well as with other elements such as decentralization policies and economic contexts. Thus rapid and standardized appraisals are insufficient to estimate consequences and to devise causal links.

To question the effects of the African green revolution, I conducted fieldwork in Northern Mozambique. Mozambique adopted a Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (PEDSA) in 2011 and a joint Investment Plan (PNISA) in 2013. Both are aligned with the CAADP pillars and represent a major commitment to agriculture, their provisional budget approaching 3.4 billion US Dollars. They foster public and private investments along six development corridors. Between 2012 and 2017, I conducted several hundreds of interviews and observations with farmers, administrations and investors in the Nacala corridor, during four fieldworks totaling a year.

The North Mozambican margin

Northern Mozambique is often pictured as a fertile and under-occupied space and thus as a good target for an agricultural revolution (Map 2). However, in 2017, over 10 million people lived in the area. Makhuwa inhabit most of the Nacala corridor, yet they have stood at the margin of the colonial and postcolonial States. Northern Mozambique was scarcely explored by the Portuguese when it was granted to them in the 1890s (Pélissier 1984). Until the 1930s, most of it was conceded to a chartered company while the rest remained a military territory under Portugal’s rule. Though the chartered areas were reintegrated to the colony in 1929, they

remained a frontier for the colonial State. With few settlers and scarce infrastructure, northern Mozambique was exploited through a forced cotton regime, obliging the African inhabitants to grow cotton on their land (Isaacman 1996). Some of them fled to avoid cotton cultivation while others took part in the liberation struggle. The latter led to independence in 1975, to the rise of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO) to power, and to the departure of most of the European settlers. A civil war rapidly opposed the army and the FRELIMO to a guerilla movement, the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO). Initially funded by external forces, RENAMO later gained internal support as it held out an escape from FRELIMO's socialist and modernist policies (Geffray 1990). Northern Mozambique was deeply devastated by these wars, displacing hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. The 1992 peace accords led many to regain their area of origin, to the recognition of RENAMO as an opposition party, and to the disarmament of most of the soldiers. However, northern Mozambique remained at the margins of the State apparatus and of the economy (Cahen 1994).

Northern households occupy the bottom of the pyramid, gaining 88 USD/month on average, versus 168 USD/month nationally and 856 USD/month in the capital city. In the Nacala corridor, households simultaneously grow, sell and buy corn, the main staple crop, while planting cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, and sesame. They cultivate 1.1 ha on average and generate the bulk of agricultural production. Concurrently, they engage in a variety of activities, such as artisanal mining, carpentry, masonry, and formal employment in administrations. Inhabitants are highly mobile, circulating between cities and rural areas to access job opportunities and other resources. Consequently, land is at the same time a resource for farming, hunting, grazing, foraging, extracting mineral and clay, a medium where houses can be built, children left to their grandparents, and ancestors celebrated, as well as a safety net, where to find shelter and subsistence in difficult times.

Though all the land is legally owned by the Mozambican State, individual and community uses are recognized and protected by the 1997 land law. They dominate since commercial farms remained limited in the colonial and postcolonial period, reaching 400 000 ha at most, i.e. less than 1.4% of northern Mozambique. Recent decrees formalized "Community Consultations", legal steps whereby a community can accept or refuse an investor's demand for a land title and negotiate counterparts. They also introduced "Local Consultative Councils", composed of local administrations, FRELIMO secretaries, authorities and influential members of the community. They are legal representatives of "local communities", though the latter rarely consider themselves as such and recognize instead some family members as land chiefs.

Not only did the new agricultural policy and its promoters have to deal with this long term history and features of the Nacala corridor, they also had to face a specific context. In the 2010s, most of the NGOs and development agencies that had heavily supported the Northern provinces after the civil war had disengaged. The stalling of these external resources led rural inhabitants and farming associations to look for other partners, including investors. Simultaneously, Maputo-based and local officials acted as development brokers, using their positions and clientelistic networks to benefit from the implantation of investment and development projects (Fairbairn 2013). This often happened at the expense of the majority of the rural inhabitants. It fueled a land grab crisis, which in return launched a coalition of Mozambican and international NGOs, highly critical of private investments in agriculture. It blocked several public and private projects.

In addition, attacks between FRELIMO-dominated-government forces and armed RENAMO members resumed in 2013, preceding the presidential and legislative elections, and continued until 2017. It deterred corporations and cooperation agencies from investing. The economic situation further collapsed in 2015 when a major secret debt was turned public, leading the IMF and the World Bank to suspend their support to Mozambique and to the depreciation of the Mozambican metical. Certainly this situation was not accounted for by the African green revolution, nor was it its aim to address it. Nonetheless, interventions interacted with the exclusion legacy and with the short term economic difficulties and political upheavals.

Neglecting most of the rural space and concentrating resources

Though the Nacala corridor and its fertile lands were advertised as an opportunity for agricultural projects, most of the investments materialized in the renovation of the railway for coal exports, the asphaltting of the main road and the expansion of the harbor (Map 2). “Integrated Development” and “Increased access to markets” appeared as two narratives facilitating conventional infrastructural investments. They sidelined remote rural areas and were locally perceived as threats. Inhabitants’ houses and fields were displaced to build roads and rails. Their livelihoods were jeopardized with the suppression of ancient train stops. Last but not least, their spending power was curtailed as prices soared with the arrival of an external workforce and the collapse of the metical. The “development corridor” was endogenously renamed the “disgraceful corridor”.

Comparatively, few agricultural corporations settled in the region, and most of them focused on ancient colonial and state farms. These were often already cultivated but their legal is ambiguous. Inhabitants occupying them in good faith for at least 10 years could claim them, but administrations frequently refuse to grant individual land use rights on these plots. In addition, some inhabitants and civil servants reckon plots cleared by white settlers as “white lands” and consider exogenous claims are more legitimate than endogenous ones. Thus investors benefitted from heterogeneous land status and representations to access the most fertile and best located land². Consequently, they suppressed previous activities rather than bringing unused land into production. As they offered limited employment opportunities and modest compensations, benefits for inhabitants were reduced.

Simultaneously, the public and private resources allocated to the African green revolution prioritized the most fertile spaces, the brightest and strongest farmers as well as a couple of promising value chains. Funds were channeled towards a few Mozambican and foreign projects, neglecting the peripheral areas and the precarious producers. For example, several farmers and associations supported by NGOs in the late 1990s failed to benefit from the Agricultural Development Fund (FDA), from the Rural Markets Promotion Programme (PROMER) or from the Agribusiness Promotion Programme (Finagro). With rarer financial counterparts than private corporations, less appealing business plans, and weaker clientelist potential, their demands were easily dismissed. Several foreign investors secured grants and loans for new machinery while neighboring associations were left unfunded. In other places, administrators channeled grants towards relatives or negotiated retro-commissions, diverting

² I thank G. Chouquer for sharing with me a draft of his chapter entitled « Persistance et renouveau de l’hétérogénéité agraire » extracted from his upcoming book on land tenure expertise. He argues legal and territorial heterogeneity are persistent through time and are currently resurging, and drew my attention to these questions.

the money away from agriculture. Producers often felt “betrayed” by development partners and by administrations “invoking the name of the peasant” to capture funds for other purposes.

From an agricultural and a spatial point of view, the new agricultural policy and the concomitant projects restored the dualism between a “useful” and a “useless” Africa. The former is close to infrastructures, comprises a few large farms, and is well connected to national political elites and external opportunities. On the contrary, the latter is a grey space inhabited by less-capitalized producers, excluded from the access to major services and from resources’ redistribution. Modern plantations and new value chains are often showcased by journalists and researchers, while grey spaces are largely ignored. Though they remain key to food production and consumption and interact through land, worker and cash transfers, they disappear from the dominant representations. Thus the current agricultural revolution contributes to reviving and increasing territorial disparities instead of homogenizing them.

Increasing tensions and reviving political oppositions

The technical and modernist bias of the African green revolution failed to address power asymmetries and fed tensions in Mozambique’s northern periphery. Most of the private investors organized community consultations with the help of land registers and local administrations. Yet these consultations often occurred without the projects being clearly presented to the inhabitants nor their expectations being formalized. This led to numerous complaints, systematically turned down by the administrations. Thus, several Makhuwa inhabitants compared the State and the government to a colonial power and to a “god of land”, unilaterally and irrevocably disposing of land. Local Community Councils were also heavily criticized, especially FRELIMO secretaries and main land chiefs, for receiving direct benefits from investors and covertly signing official documents. In some cases, chiefs were dismissed and chased by their own families. Simultaneously, agricultural prices remained low as projects and policies did not tackle the limited negotiation capacity of producers nor enforced minimum prices. It left producers with the feeling they were being abused by private buyers and accomplice authorities, and that Makhuwa lives and harvests had no value.

The relegation of the poorest, the most remote, and the less politically aligned inhabitants led to a regain of structural and direct violence in northern Mozambique. Convinced that administrations and FRELIMO members diverted agricultural and decentralization funds, numerous inhabitants refused to submit themselves to civic duties such as building schools, cleaning roads, paying taxes or complying to laws (Leblond 2017b). They increasingly resorted to weapons of the weak such as public denunciations, sorcery attacks, and lynching. In this context, RENAMO opposition discourses and its soldiers reoccupying former military bases became attractive. On several occasions, inhabitants supported them, hiding and feeding soldiers, while taking-up their warmongering rhetoric. Far from resorbing the marginality of North Mozambique, the African green revolution reinvigorated past tensions and weakened the legitimacy of the State for many inhabitants of the Nacala corridor.

Conclusion

In northern Mozambique, the interventions promoted by the African green revolution led to a concentration of private and public resources on the most fertile lands and in the hands of political and economic elites. Simultaneously they generated grey areas, relegating the majority of inhabitants and of rural spaces. Similarly, interventions focused on “successful farmers” and “increasing water efficiency” marginalized poorest villagers in the West Bank

(Trottier et Perrier, 2017). These observations converge with the idea that contemporary interventions draw on, and fuel, legal and lived socio-spatial heterogeneities. Though the specificities of the Mozambican margin prevent further generalizations, this case study highlights the importance of documenting long term political histories and geographies of peripheral rural areas to grasp the meaning and the effects of the agricultural “revolution”.

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