

Violent conflict and shifting land control

LAND MATTERS: from conflict to peace in Colombia

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VIOLENT CONFLICT AND SHIFTING LAND CONTROL - OVERVIEW:

- Contestation over land as cause of conflict
- Land claims redefined as part of violent conflict dynamics
- Addressing contestation over land as part of peace process

General point: Major shifts in land control during violent conflict-> implications for duration/impact of conflict & challenge in peace-process



CONTESTATION OVER LAND AS CAUSE OF CONFLICT

Two central themes in academic literature:

- Land scarcity: People fighting over dwindling resources
- Unequal land distribution: 'peasant wars'

Reaction to inequality/oppression, fighting to counter threats to loss of access to land.

Relative deprivation theory

LA: *Latifundismo*-context; *hacienda*-system



CONTESTATION OVER LAND AS CAUSE OF CONFLICT

-> 'Peasant wars':

- Peasants mobilise for defending their access to land; against landlords and/or the state
- Land invasions as a strategy, violence as pressure tactic
- Organisation supporting/mobilizing: revolutionary movements 'tap' and channel the potential for protest
- Ideology & opportunity intertwined



CONTESTATION OVER LAND AS CAUSE OF CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Relative deprivation meets revolutionary agenda

- Context of inequality and oppression
- Land reform cancelled
- Violent repression of peasant/laborers organization
- FARC as organization linked to peasant agendas: representing peasant interests?

References: A. Reyes Posada



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

Background notions on protracted conflict:

- Conflicts are not linear: stakes, positions, strategies change throughout the process
- Multiple conflict agendas interact: alliance & articulations of agendas of different actors



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

- Land control: broader than formal property: who controls what land and under what access regime
- Violence crucial mechanism through which control is shifted (next to legal mechanisms, social conventions/pressures)
- Shift in control can be side-effect or intentional

Ref: Peluso & Lund, JPS 2011



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Striking redefinition of land control in conflict-ridden regions:

- Massive violence-induced displacement from rural areas
- Land acquisition for drug trade
- Land acquisition for agribusiness (e.g. oil palm)

Productive & territorial control



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Productive land crucial in war economy:

- Narco-driven land rush (since 1980s)
- Profits for paramilitary groups/agribusiness
- (FARC?)

War opportunism & War-for-profit

Ref: Teo Ballvé, Berkeley, 2011



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Displacement and 'land grab' are closely linked:

Violence-induced displacement

- creates opportunity (“empty land”)
- is a mechanism to establish control (“empty the land”)

Primitive accumulation/ Accumulation by dispossession



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Displacement and 'land grab':

“They said they came here to clean out the guerillas, but it was us, the campesinos, they cleaned out”-

peasant cited by Teo Ballvé, 2011, p.14



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Land acquisition 'at gunpoint' is legalized through state system:

- Properties accessed through forced displacement are fed into the legal process of titling and registration
- Unregistered land, or pressure to “sell”
- Collaboration of INCORA: could reallocate abandoned land, irrespective of the causes of abandonment

Ref: Jacobo Grajales, JPS, 2011



SHIFTS IN LAND CONTROL AS PART OF VIOLENT CONFLICT- COLOMBIA

Land acquisition 'at gunpoint' and the state system:

- Agribusiness profits from subsidies for “Alternative development” (e.g. oil palm since 1990s)
- -> perverse incentives- inciting land grabs?

Ref: Jacobo Grajales, JPS, 2011



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Land often central issue in peace processes:

-> Need to address grievances to avoid relapse

- Need to remove cause of conflict: Redistribution
- Repair/Address dispossession caused by conflict: Restitution/compensation (Pinheiro Principles)
- Need for reform: Titling, land governance reform



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Why difficult?

Return to pre-war situation not feasible/desirable: New reality

- New stakes developed during war: vested interests
- Competing goals: stability, social justice, development



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS- COLOMBIA

Restitution policy (started before end of conflict):

- 3.9 million of people displaced
- 2-4-6-11.4 (?) million hectares abandoned or illegally seized
- Program targets victims from violence: restitution + economic support + services

Ref: Ana María Ibáñez, Universidad de los Andes (WB paper 2013)



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS- COLOMBIA

Restitution policy – difficulties:

- Restrictions: what is ‘illegally appropriated’, what ‘victims’ qualify?
- Ca 70% of rural properties were not formally titled
- Bureaucratic institutions closely connected to paramilitary groups
- Criminalization of claims (AI report)
- Incentives to enter into agro-industrial projects rather than smallhold agriculture



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Return & restitution very complicated technically:

- Titling in itself very complex, further complicated by conflict (proof, inheritance, customary rights)
- Agribusiness backed by titles.



LAND IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Technical & political & issue of nation building:

- Leave agribusiness untouched for stability & development, sacrifice justice for the victims?
- Is there room for smallholders in the development model?
- What about invisible victims who joined the urban poor?



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- Peluso, Nancy & C. Lund (2011), 'New frontiers of land control: Introduction', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(4):667-681

Thank you for your attention!

