

January 2020

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Recommended Citation

Lugo-Vivas, Diego Andrés (2020) "Racialized and Identity-Based Inequalities as (New?) Frontiers for Academic Discussion: Future Agendas around Land Issues," *Journal of Latin American Geography* 19(1): 233-245.

DOI: 10.1353/lag.2020.0023

Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/744048>

Racialized and Identity-based Inequalities as (New?) Frontiers for Academic

Discussion. Future Agendas to Assemble around Land Issues

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Latin America and the Caribbean has long carried a heavy colonial weight. The region's history of inequality and development reflects years of conflicts, struggles, exclusions, and visions of progress that have had a particular imprint on our social landscapes. On the one hand, the construction of a highly unequal rurality centered on the hacienda, mining enclaves, expulsion of peasant, indigenous, afro-descent, LGBTIQ+, and other racial, ethnic, and gender minorities due to spatially extensive activities based on cattle, monocrop, conservation, and later, energy and hydrocarbon projects, is present in almost every Latin American and Caribbean country. On the other hand, the ongoing construction of the city and the urban frontier, with segmented settlement in which wealthier groups populate less risky areas while enormous misery belts are erected as a form of exclusion against migrant and displaced groups, summarize the history of the urban frontier.

In academia, both of these processes have prioritized a particular stream of voices, topics, and research mechanisms that might be taken as a consequence of the very colonial history. The Conference of Latin American Geographers (henceforth CLAG) and the *Journal of Latin American Geography* (henceforth JLAG) are simultaneously a reflection of that, a source of inspiration and critique, and a vehicle to propose new debates. This essay will emphasize the history of CLAG and JLAG discussions of land issues, and will propose a set of theoretical

and methodological approaches to uncover new realities and old processes related to the dispossession and displacement of a set of minorities, namely, LGBTIQ+ groups.

White, male, and north-based scholars have dominated CLAG publications and presentations for decades. A brief overview of “who has published what” illustrates the perhaps unconscious emphasis that CLAG publications have developed over time. Since its constitution as a *Publication Series* (1972-1980), *Proceedings* (1981-1983), and *Yearbook* (1984-2002), authors devoted to the study of land issues had a particular profile. Between 1972 and 2002, just over 100 total articles were published on land issues¹. Of those, eighty-six were authored or co-authored by 100 white, male, north-based scholars under single or shared authorship, while only sixteen articles authored by women were published (with no coauthored contributions, much less publications in which men were led by a woman). Since 2002, with the advent of JLAG, new frontiers have been established, though male predominance is still distinctive². Of the 245 land-related articles published during this time, 293 men and 117 women appear as authors and just eleven manuscripts have been coauthored by teams in which two or more men have followed the lead of a female voice.

These and other trends such as the fragile construction of a Caribbean emphasis (in this issue, there are authors that assess the relatively low presence of articles about the Caribbean), and

¹ The metric used to collect data for this article, was developed counting the number of articles that mentioned in their titles and abstracts, problems related to land distribution, land use land cover (LULC), land concentration, property relations, rural property regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean (processes of urbanization were left out, because they belong to other forms of development and capital mobility, although, they might be included in further research), and processes of change / stability in socio-productive systems. This sum includes peer-reviewed research articles and non-peer reviewed contributions –in the form of essays– included in the JLAG section *Perspectives*, although it does not count book reviews.

² In the count of articles published in JLAG, I followed the same instructions and selection criteria employed in the metric for the *Publication Series* (1972-1980), *Proceedings* (1981-1983), and *Yearbook* (1984-2002).

the historical prevalence of bilingual authors with few involvements of indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descent Latin American and Caribbean-born scholars, might be seen as a consequence of the very colonial history, and the exclusionary past and present. These in countless occasions, have been the subject of study of articles in CLAG publications. In that context, one of the most salient historical emphases in Latin American geography has been the analysis of land cover, land use change, and the distribution of property regimes based on homogeneous notions around land and soil as scientifically-observable research objects. In my experience as a researcher in Colombia, the academic tradition has revolved around highly unequal property regimes, processes of colonization and settlement in the agricultural frontier that have reinforced patterns of exclusion and the violence associated to the accumulation of land, which in the Colombian case have been exacerbated by the longest and bloodiest armed conflict in the hemisphere.

In recent decades, and coincident with the arrival of JLAG, political ecology has played an important role in the diffusion of new voices regarding cyclical and renewed paths of land grabbing (Ballvé, 2012; CNMH, 2011; CICIG, 2016; Grajales, 2011, 2013; Oliveira, 2013; Oxfam, 2013; Reyes, 2009; Ybarra, 2013). This eclectic stream of voices has brought attention to different colonial and exclusionary dynamics, among them the politics of conservation (Asher and Ojeda, 2009; Ojeda, 2012; Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2015; Ojeda and Devine, 2017); green discourses that mobilize resources and people for the sake of environmental preservation (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Castree 2007; Igoe, Neves, and Brockington 2008; Kramer 2009a and 2009b; for the Colombian case see: Ojeda 2012; Cardenas 2012; Indepaz 2015); state violence and corporate mechanisms to accumulate lands and resources (Ballvé, 2012; Grajales, 2011,

2013, 2015); the large-scaled land grabbing system and south-south capital mobility associated to it (Wolford et al. 2013; White et al., 2011); the momentum of extractive industries and the social and environmental impacts related to the exploitation of the subsoil (Coronado and Barrera, 2016; García, 2017; Ulloa and Coronado, 2016); and the spatial mobility and intra- and international flows of illicit extraction (Massé, 2012, 2016; Massé-Massé y Le Billon, 2017; Ortiz-Ríomalo and Rettberg, 2018; Rettberg y Ortiz-Ríomalo, 2014). And although this eclectic field of inquiry has made inequality a central point of discussion, there are topics such as racialized, female-oriented, and especially LGBTIQ+ forms of dispossession that have been systematically overlooked. Most of the above-mentioned work, fails to highlight the ways in which masculinities are constructed and how they permeate both academic discourses and processes of study. As a result, land studies almost always operate within a heteronormative and masculinist worldview.

In recent years, however, things have slowly changed and this oblivion seems to have been gradually overcome. The contributions of Asher (2017), Asher and Sijapati (2016), Djoudi et al. (2016), Edelman and León (2013), Mollet (2011, 2015, 2016), and Ulloa (2018, 2016a, 2016b), among others, based on the seminal works of Escobar (2008), Quijano (2000, 2014), Goldberg (2008), and Rocheleau et al. (1996), among others, point out to the racialization and gender-divisions of the dispossession of land in Latin America. Thus, postcolonial and critical feminist authors, just to name a few, have questioned an increasingly quantitative interpretation of the concentration and grabbing of land, as well as the violent dispossession and abandonment of properties as a matter of numbers (number of hectares, cadastral valuation, number of owners, or the ways in which increases in inequality and abandonment have been measured). This critique brings into focus the perspective of the large-scaled

grabbing system, which has been related to the contributions of Borras et al. (2011) and associated researchers (see Borras, Hall, Scoones, White, and Wolford, 2011). The rush for land, the spatially-extensive and financially-robust schemes to invest in flex crops since the 2000s, as well as the trends of re-concentration of land in Latin America –and in the Colombian case, the systemic presence of land abandonment and violent dispossession–, have received special attention as topics about land-grabbing that follow the Borras's et al. (2011) approach. Although, political ecology has been fundamental in uncovering both the financial schemes that ease land grabbing and the relations between programs of state promotion, mobility of transnational, regional and local capital, and violences of dispossession, one of the big questions that Edelman and León, (2013), Ulloa (2014), and Mollet (2015), among others, ask is: what if land grabbing has not been as homogenous as it is generally assumed to be? What is the racialization and the gender division in broader processes of land dispossession?

The contributions of Mollet (2016) and Ulloa (2016c), have been instrumental understanding these processes in Central American and Colombian. Based on their work, there is a renewed stream of focusing on how Afro-descent, peasant, and indigenous women experience more radical processes of land dispossession to the extent that their bodies represent not only the violence attached to political and socioeconomic structures of land in Latin American and the Caribbean, but also countless trajectories of racialization, patriarchalism, sexism, physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, as well as a varied constellation of gender-based inequalities.

One central question that these scholars try to address is how to move beyond the excessive emphasis put on quantitative aspects of structural land grabbing and subsequent land use/land cover change, by re-examining more naturalized patterns of land dispossession that rely upon religious, social, racial, and gendered values that exist in society. Again, the Colombian case is illustrative. According to Colombia's most recent National Agrarian Census (2016), only a quarter of the population who owns rural cadastral land is female. This scenario is even worse when racial, gender, and heteronormativity-based rules are put into context. Thus, we should not just assume (or accept) that land is just "unequally distributed" without asking how more invisible and naturalized social inequalities reinforce patriarchal trajectories of land distribution. It is necessary to open the Pandora's Box and bring to the table other analytical aspects that draw a more complex picture of rurality in Latin America.

As Ojeda (2015) notes, and something that I regularly experience in fieldwork, everyday dispossession run against women in contexts of both conflict escalation and conflict de-escalation. Policies of restitution and victims' reparation in Colombia have made visible a major obstacle that at first glance is contemptible: by being economically and financially dependent on their (now) killed or disappeared husband, brother, or father, women face the problem of being legally "incapable" of proving possession or tenancy, making difficult for them to return to a contested (and bloodied) land.³ Furthermore, especially indigenous and afro-descendant women, and LGBTQI+ communities face is that they continuously must prove that they are socially, psychologically, and racially capable and legally eligible to own

³ At the time I wrote this essay, Maritza Quiroz, a social leader who had untiringly worked in reparation, land restitution and returning programs for victims in La Sierra Nevada (Colombian Caribbean Coast) was killed, making part of the 170+ list of social leaders assassinated during 2018 and early 2019 in Colombia.

and manage property. Such obstacles increase under trajectories of gender racialization and colonial exclusion. In that vein, a solid group of scholars, mostly women, have opened the door in Latin America to approach the problem of land grabbing beyond the large-scale and numeric perspective. Ulloa (2014), Ojeda (2018), and Mollet (2014), among others, are some of the main representatives of these renewed analytical positions. However, studies on racialized and identity-based inequalities still have a long way to go, especially in contexts of new criminalities and higher illicit rents. The war-torn scenario in Colombia, in which I have developed my research would also be applicable to Central America, México, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Brazil (just to name a few countries), where more focalized criminalities are booming.

Although, critical perspectives on racialized and gendered dispossession have been discussed with some systematicity since the 2000s, there is still an inexplicable silence regarding LGBTIQ+ populations. For them, the isolation and oblivion are even greater. As a field of inquiry, changes in the property regime and new patterns of dispossession and abandonment where LGBTIQ+ groups have been the main targets, have an even longer way to go.

Again, the situation in Colombia is both illustrative and precarious. In 2015, The National Center for Historical Memory (CNMH) identifies one of the most sensitive and controversial topics for the Colombian parochial society: the multiple ways in which LGBTIQ+ groups have been victims of both the civil war and the structural vacuums of a patriarchal and sexist society based on countless cases of intimidation, threatening, annihilation, dispossession, and displacement proffered by both armed actors and closer and more familiar groups. In its institutional account, the CNMH traces the roots of the violence inflicted on LGBTIQ+

groups and the continuous sense of non-belonging, expulsion, and displacement they have experienced in contexts of armed intimidation. According to Registro Unico de Víctimas (*Single Registry of Victims*), until 2016 there were 1,795 persons with non-hegemonic sexual orientations and gender identities registered as victims of the conflict, including 1,606 cases of forced displacement, the single largest victimizing event. The Comprehensive Care, Assistance and Repair Plan for victims in Colombia, in turn, shows that for attention and assistance, there are, at least, 2,514 persons registered as LGBTIQ+ victims while for integral reparation there are at least, 1,204 LGBTIQ+ victims. Preliminarily, *gay men and transsexual* women represent the highest portion of the victimized population. In conjunction with data from social organizations that counts at least 350 homicides against LGBTIQ+ people since 2006 (CNMH, 2015), and adding problems of under-representation that probably exceed 50 percent of the entries, the impact of violence in a patriarchal and heteronormative society with strong ethno-racial divisions has on LGBTIQ+ communities deserves much deeper engagement in Latin American geography.

In contexts of war and violence, it is frequently not so much individual prejudice that motivates violence against LGBTIQ+ populations, but rather the existence of projects of social and territorial control, involving the regulation of subaltern groups. Armed actors do not attack LGBTIQ+ people because they have a wrong idea of who they are, but because they do not fit either in the moral repertoire or in the nation-state program they want to build (Rincón & Albarracín; 2013; CNMH, 2015; Esguerra and Bello, 2014; CNMH, 2015). In this vein, Latin American geographers, including critical feminists, postcolonial scholars, and political ecologists, have a pending debt with studies that approach the relationships between structural violences in contexts of both political stability and armed escalation (especially,

under the presence of more focalized criminalities) and changes in the property regime when it comes to LGBTIQ+ groups. NGOs have been relatively active in denouncing patterns of displacement and violence against LGBTIQ+ actors (International Amnesty, 2001; Caribe Afirmativo, 2011, 2014; Colombia Diversa, 2013; Astrea Foundation for Justice, 2015;). In academia, this area is underexplored, with some exceptions focusing more on the access to justice than on land dispossession and territorial impacts (CNMH, 2015; Bueno-Hansen, 2017).

Although 2,514 LGBTIQ+ victims might be considered an insignificant number in a country with more than 44 million people and over 40 million hectares of cadastral land, 2,514 LGBTIQ+ victims of forced displacement represent 2,514 different social, personal, and emotional universes that have, up to now, been off our academic radar. As a result, we lack interpretive mechanisms and theoretical devices to understand and explain the impact of their displacement into their personal or collective territorial re-configuration, and the historical trajectories (and causal components) that have defined the dispossession against trans+, lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersexual, queer, and other groups. How they feel and experience their land, their properties (if they have some), their displacement, and their spatial reallocation in contexts of dispossession and likely trajectories of global re-concentration of land in Latin America and the Caribbean, is something we still have not determined. The idea is simple: We need a better analytical toolkit that explain either the multi-scalar dimensions and operations of the dispossession against LGBTIQ + groups.

Thus, different modes of dispossession, displacement, and territorialized violence against both colonially racialized groups, especially women from ethnic minorities, and identity-

based segregated actors, mainly LGBTIQ+ communities, are fields of inquiry that deserve special attention. In both cases, the violence exceeds the intensity of an armed conflict and relies upon longstanding trajectories of racialization, colonial exclusion, and the naturalization of legal and social violence which, paradoxically, come from closer and more intimate circles, including the family, school, work, and church. To understand how property has been concentrated, readjusted, and dispossessed amid broader programs of transnational capital mobility and state territorializing efforts is a task that Latin American and Caribbean geographers should embrace, especially in the context of marginalized groups. Clearly, there is a historical vacuum in which critical geographers, postcolonial scholars, feminists, and political ecologists can intervene. JLAG and CLAG are platforms from which an active role might be displayed in the future. JLAG's 2017 special issue on Critical Geographies in Latin America (see Finn & Hanson, 2017) included the voices of female and male scholars from many different countries (though it did not include any LGBTIQ+ perspectives), and is an important step in this ladder of academic diffusion. Everyday mechanisms of dispossession and the way they impact LGBTIQ+ groups, will be central aspects in the progression of land studies during the next decades.

A critical, geographical perspective that assesses the impact that redistributive policies around land has on racialized and segregated minorities will contribute to a better understanding of those landscapes of inequality and violence so persistent throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The invitation is to extend the analytical frameworks of political ecology, post-colonial studies and feminism to uncover how land grabbing and dispossession affects racialized and gendered segregated minorities. The cases of LGBTIQ+ groups are critical, and should be a priority in the context of a more inclusive regional geography.

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