



Owning the land, but at what cost? changes in power relations and land accumulation in cattle ranching in wartime Colombia

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Introduction

- ▶ Despite the **abundancy of literature on the nature of war in Colombia**, the actors involved in it, the affected territories and the social effects derived from a confrontation of more than half a century, **little is known about the role certain agricultural activities, such as cattle, played on it**. This is of special relevance when considering that the scenarios of such war have been mostly rural.
- ▶ This research investigates some unexplored nuances of this relationship, finding that, **during the most critical years of the war (2001-2012), cattle activities underwent a significant expansion**. Although the growth of cattle ranching shows, among other things, its importance and instrumentality as a mechanism to exercise control and property over productive land for different actors, the available

data for this period also suggest other, unexpected, transformations: the **increase of women in charge of agricultural holdings for cattle**, and, therefore, their **increased participation in decision-making processes** at the productive and family level.

- ▶ The relationship of these variables suggests that **social shocks such as war influenced the increase in the number of women in charge**, placing them in productive realms historically dominated by men. New patterns in land tenure, a course of gender inequality that has been studied for a long time, points to the fact that cattle producing families also experienced great transformations in power relations, distribution of productive work, and resource management.

Objective

- ▶ Explore the repertoires and forms of territorial control of armed actors in Colombia during the mentioned period, which includes active paramilitaries and guerrilla groups (FARC, ELN).
- ▶ Understand the transformations in the ownership of agricultural holdings dedicated to cattle during the period of escalation of the conflict (2001-2012), specifically those in the hands of women, where dynamics such as displacement, rates of violence and territorial instability ended up transforming family dynamics in the tenure and administration of cattle land.

Methodology

To examine the various effects of the armed conflict on the expansion of cattle, a municipal-level panel dataset was constructed for the period 2001-2012, encompassing the most critical years of the confrontation. Likewise, discrete choice and logistic regression models were used due to the cross-sectional nature of the available information.



Farmer in Caquetá (Colombia) a region historically hit by the conflict

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Results

- ▶ We observe that, for all the crimes affecting life, paramilitaries were the armed faction that generated the greatest number of victims. When considering crimes with economic purposes such as kidnapping, guerrillas contributed the largest number of victims during the study period. The foregoing shows a substantial difference not only in the methods of each armed group, but also in their forms of financing (repertoires of violence).
- ▶ Now, regarding the expansion of cattle, we found that, although it has maintained a growing pace, its development increased visibly between 2002 and 2006, which coincides with peak times of internal armed conflict. During these years, a total growth of the number of bovines at the national level of 10.3% and a total growth of farms with bovines of 13% is observed (In exact terms, a change of 1% in the rate of violence by paramilitary or guerrilla groups for a specific municipality increases the number of cattle in that municipality by 0.04% and 0.23%, and by 0.038% and 0.13% the number of farms with cattle in it)(cattle expansion).
- ▶ Direct violence against producing families increases the chances that a woman will be left in charge of the land, since the victims of selective assassinations and combat casualties during the war in Colombia were mainly men.
- ▶ We also found that the more violent the municipalities and regions where the UPAs are located, the greater the probability that they are run by a woman, directly suggesting that crimes such as kidnapping and disappearance decisively transform the conformation of rural households, destabilizing hierarchical family relationships and “facilitating” women to formally access land.

Conclusions

- ▶ The data suggests an important and largely unexplored relationship between cattle ranching and armed conflict in Colombia. There are few narratives that amplify the relationship of ranching elites with certain sectors of the war, and only a few that address this problem from a perspective that seeks to understand why and how the agricultural sectors experienced the conflict and adapted to it.
- ▶ Simultaneously, much is known about the gendered dimensions of war. It has now been established with certainty that violence and control have been written over the bodies and lives of women. It

remains little, however, what we know about those other roles and possibilities that arose from the war as a social shock, such as owning, and administrating land.

- ▶ This study suggests that, in activities such as cattle ranching, the presence of armed actors and high rates of territorial violence have a direct relationship with the possession of productive land in the hands of women, which begins to suggest that important transformations must have also been experienced when making decisions, managing resources, and structuring homes.

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