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Control, Utility and Formalization at the "Frontier": Contested Discourses on Agriculture in Eastern Colombia.

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Control, Utility and Formalization at the "Frontier": Contested Discourses on Agriculture in Eastern Colombia[2]

Small-scale farming still plays a major role for Colombia's urban food markets (UNDP 2011). Unlike in many Latin American countries, small-scale farming is still decisive for supplying urban dwellers with their everyday fare. Yet, this is about to change. Parallel to the government - FARC peace deal, a bundle of agricultural policies aim at transforming the Eastern Colombian region of Altillanura, and with it, agrarian production. Media and government sources during the last years have taken turns in arguing for an expansion of what they call Colombia's "last grand agrarian frontier" (DNP 2011: 4). This government and corporate discourse derives from a "commodity consensus" (Svampa 2015) which appears almost hegemonic - until we begin analysing grassroots documents. On the contrary, the transformation of the Altillanura has been one of the most contested political projects in Colombia in the past years.

The economies of dispossession and land appropriation incited by a continuously extractive model in Colombia are well known by now (i.e. Ballvé 2012; Grajales 2011). However current efforts are no longer aimed at direct appropriation but rather at formalization and land control. At the same time, the Altillanura has rarely

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been the focus of academic research. This essay aims to disentangle competing discourses around the current project of agro-industrial restructuring and to identify how discourses of "frontier" and underutilization, land tenure formalization and bioeconomy[3] tend to legitimize significant changes in land control in the Altillanura – changes that benefit some in detriment of others.

The Altillanura region is predominantly rural with small urban nodes dotting the Eastern plains. Agriculture in the region increasingly focuses on palm oil production and monoculture. Capital intensive technological input is often necessary to make this type of agriculture productive. Self-identifying indigenous communities make up 30 % of the population (DNP 2011: 10).

Land control as a core concept is understood here as "practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion" (Peluso and Lund 2011:668). This concept focuses on how agents "hold on to the land" (ibid.: 669). It is linked to enclosures, a second important notion here (see Backhouse 2015). Enclosure entails claims over land perceived as legitimate, requiring "decision-making powers, ability to draw boundaries around objects within the boundaries", which Peluso and Lund (2011:673) understand as territorialization. The latter is part of the fixation of access to land.

This analysis draws from a variety of documents. Discourse analysis is based on government planning documents, national print media and corporate press releases. To exemplify grassroots discursive interventions which are not as visible in national media, I cite from a range of different publications such as press releases. The essay also draws on interviews held between 2011 and 2012 which serve as background information. The remainder of the text is structured according to the key terms around which discursive interventions are grouped (frontier, underutilization,

[3] This is not to claim that all participating agents use these terms explicitly, yet they constitute key elements in public discourse.

formalization, bioeconomy) to expose poignant discourses, sub-elements and counterdiscursive strategies.

Modernization Attempts and Expansions into the "Last Frontier"

In recent years, investors' focus has shifted from the Bogotá-Medellín-Cali urban triangle to a new economic region. The Altillanura has appeared on maps and charts of investment opportunities as the "last agrarian frontier" (DNP 2011: 4; Contexto Ganadero 2014; Restrepo 2010). Yet, Colombian imaginaries of the "frontier" expose their own contradictions. On the one hand, the Altillanura is in part constructed as a territory outside the reach of the state, on the border, to be colonized and incorporated into state territory. On the other, a static image of the state territory as a given is at the base of Colombian official discourse. In fact, discursively, the Altillanura has also repeatedly been brought to the centre of the official post-conflict imagery of the country.

These representations are continually contested: The counterpart to the "frontier" discourse associated to a necessity of economies of scale (Oxfam 2013: 10) is a reality of contested spaces. Resistance emerges in these counterhegemonic discourses, fearing the Altillanura might function as an 'agricultural enclave' (Arias 2013: 1). Even though violence appears as a thing of the past in government and corporate discourses on the "frontier" (see Poligrow website, Semana 2012), the frontier space is one of physical violence. Colombian union representatives and social organizations have demanded investigation on selective murders and the possible corporate responsibility. The "systematic violation of constitutionally guaranteed trade union rights", the firing of union-organized workers or military observation and harassment are only some of the allegations against different companies in the region (Congreso de los Pueblos 2013: 1).

Grassroots organizations of small-scale farmers, indigenous and afro-Colombian movements have formulated counter-discursive strategies to the notion of frontier,

to defend what they see as tierra and territorio (land and territory). Their discursive use of "frontier" space is limited. In their understanding, tierra as a means of production to be defended is linked to territorio which refers to a collective identity connected to the land, as a concept which encompasses cultural and commemorative elements and community institutions (ONIC 2011). A different form of territorialisation takes place here. These social movements have increasingly insisted on territory as a defining feature of their identity (Bonilla 2011; Baquero Melo 2014). Their political strategies are place-based (estrategias-basadas-en-lugar), yet also transnationalized, as the example of Via Campesina shows (Escobar 2008: 49). While historically territorios with autonomous political administration by campesinos have existed, (i.e. Palenque or Sumapaz), now communities such as the U'wa formulate communal "Planes de Vida" and claim collective economic management, planning and cultivation as well as democratic processes of decision in territorios and Zonas de Reserva Campesina which they demand be excepted from the agro-industrial model (see Cabildo Indígena del Pueblo U'wa de Tamara, Sácama y Hato Corozal 2014). The Colombian Constitution is remarkably progressive on rights to land. Indigenous rights are codified in the constitution (1991) and on a global scale by ILO-Convention 169 (1989) and the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), establishing, among others, the principle of prior and informed consent. Theoretically, land rights are at the centre of the Victims and Land Restitution Law on Displaced People (No. 1448/2011) as well as in environmental protection norms and regulations such as the Decree 1745/1995. The 1745/1995 Decree, for example, established special assessments for projects planned on land with claims of collective land titles (Baquero Melo 2014: 339 ff.). Yet, the "frontier"-discourse also exposes the uneasiness in which competing ideas about land play out in the colonial relation between the 'modern' state and indigenous organizations.

The planning of Rural, Economic and Social Development Interest Zones (Zonas de Interés Rural, Económico y Social, ZIDRES) and the presentation of the Altillanura as a scarcely populated "agrarian frontier" are intimately linked (Las2Orillas 2016). ZIDRES are special economic zones supposed to "modernize"

agricultural production and make it more efficient in the Eastern plains. They are presented as a frontier instrument, facilitating development at an imagined agricultural frontier through extraordinary regulation (Presidencia 2016). The legal package accompanying the establishment of ZIDRES condenses current constellations of forces into (still uneven) state policies at municipal, province and national scales.

Grassroots organizations opposing the government discourse argue that this official vision for the "frontier" will lead to an even aggravated concentration of land control (Álvarez Roa 2011; Farmlandgrab 2013). In fact, imageries of a future prosperous space led to a rapid increase in land prices. Even the National Planning Department (DNP, 2011: 32) admitted that there has been a "speculative bonanza in buying land by external investors" with land prices increasing by 700% since 2007, contributing to pressures on peasants and small farmers.

The "frontier" is not just a space where the presence of the state, local and transnational corporations takes a particular form, but is also marked by Brazilian and Argentine influence, presented as a transnational space of possibilities (Portafolio 2014). The project to “modernize” agricultural production looks over the border to the Brazilian Cerrado region as the leading case for the Altillanura. The media calls it the 'Colombian Cerrado' (Semana 2012). This notion borrows on the (contested) image of Cerrado being Brazil's agrarian industries' motor (Semana 2010). In 2011, for example, President Santos invoked his Brazilian counterpart, saying “When they ask me, ‘What do you want to be when grow up,’ I respond, ‘I want to be like Lula’” (CIPAmericas 2011). Brazil is presented as successful by government officials when arguing for an expansion of the ’last grand agrarian frontier‘ (DNP, 2011: 4). This government discourse clearly speaks to Argentine and Brazilian investors as agents of global investment as much as it speaks to Colombian entrepreneurial society. The opposition on the political left in turn has criticized the Altillanura project in Parliament stating that there is no way to implement the Brazilian model in Colombia (“the Altillanura is not anything like the Cerrado”) (Arias 2013). Spaces that had been marginal in political

imaginaries, are now seen as places where dreams of prosperous development will finally come true. These imaginaries are now discursively linked to productivity, progress and utility for capital accumulation: infrastructure and planning conferences, plans to build airports and pave roads constitute its representations.

Yet, the Altillanura is by no means an empty, uncontested space to be newly "developed", nor is it at the boundary of uninhabited space. Rather, if we use the term frontier more analytically, we can understand the Altillanura as a frontier of practices of land control. As Peluso and Lund (2011: 668) remind us, '[t]hese created frontiers are not sites where 'development' and 'progress' meet 'wilderness' or 'traditional lands and peoples'. They are sites where authorities, sovereignties, and hegemonies of the recent past have been or are currently being challenged by new enclosures, territorialisations, and property regimes.'

Underutilization and Land Tenure: The Crystallization of a Rhetoric of Dispossession

A particularly contested discursive element in the government's rhetoric is that of "underutilization". Santos' government is keen on a "more efficient" use of Colombia's thirty-eight million hectares of pasture and grazing lands, especially of the almost eight million of them in the Altillanura (DNP 2016: 12). Planning documents such as the National Development Plan (DNP 2015) and the Orinoquia Master Plan (DNP 2016) condense overall government strategies. These documents provide the framework for a new Global Agricultural Policy. Its "Colombia Siembra" Programme (2015-18) concentrates on terms such as "productivity", fostering the cultivation of flexcrops (soy bean, corn) via loans, technological assistance and irrigation solutions to farmers (Ministerio de Agricultura 2015).

Here we can find another link to Brazil. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO: 2003) estimates that around 2.7 billion hectares of arable land worldwide are

currently not agriculturally used. Brazil and Colombia are both among the countries with the biggest share of such 'underutilized' lands (Borras and Franco 2010). In involving the transnational scale of finance and state cooperation – the Brazilian agriculture agency Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (EMBRAPA) serves as a model for Colombia's Corpoica's technical development (CONPES 2014: 73) – the government frames the 'underutilization' of land as resolving a merely technical problem. Agroindustry is simply considered most efficient. This framing is reasonable when we understand that the Business Association for the Development of Orinoquía Asorinoquia (the directors of transnational and national conglomerates among it), actively participates in elaborating discursive strategies for the region (Portafolio 2014). The idea of utility is implicit in the discursive notion of the "integration of state territory" (CONPES 2014:2), which suggests that infrastructure investments will bring the region closer to the institutional ensemble of the state and thus facilitate valorisation and efficient land use. The Master Plan (DNP 2016) aims to support agribusiness production by providing a state financed, extensive and more intricate infrastructure network, i.e. a road and river corridor named after the oil palm industry.

Tensions over the idea of "underutilization" are obvious. The representation of indigenous territories in the Altillanura is often one of unproductive poverty. Racialized spaces of indigenous misery and backwardness are discursively pitted against prosperity and productivity, as if both were incompatible (DNP 2015: 49, 60, 110). The indigenous use of land is presented as inefficient underuse, a claim which indigenous organizations contest on the rather solid grounds of food production (Cabildo Indígena del Pueblo U'wa de Tamara, Sácama y Hato Corozal 2014; ONIC 2009). Yet, formerly influential cattle ranchers also see themselves confronted with claims to be underutilizing lands. This set of claims against extensive cattle ranches originally stems from calls for progressive, redistributive land reforms, and is distorted here to incite capital-intensive agro-industrial forms of production. The ranchers themselves seem to be utterly sceptical of "modernization", "efficiency" and "sustainability" discourses of those state institutions interested in reshaping Colombia's agriculture along industrial

agribusiness logics (Contexto Ganadero 2014; Noticias de Villavicencio 2013). Their scepticism is logically conditioned upon their quest to reposition themselves in the world economy, as agro-industries require a capital intensity provided more readily by transnational capital groups than local elites (see Peluso and Lund 2011:669)."Underutilization" turns out to be a discursive practice pointing us to specific representations of the Eastern plains: Modern, productive land use, accessibility to their markets and consumers and their accomplished, pacified integration into state territory (CONPES, 2014: 18) all go hand in hand.

Land Tenure and the Discourse of Formalization

President Santos' government aims to formalize existing property relations and link land markets to the financial sector in an effort to "modernize" rural spaces countrywide and create incentives for investment – a goal President Uribe Vélez' government, while seen as more radical, didn't reach. The government's approach is committed to World Bank and IDB discourses favouring private property and the centralized formalization of tenure (Deininger and Byerlee 2011). Investment security and clear land tenure titles are essential discursive elements here. A set of laws - from the National Development Plans to the agricultural policy Colombia Siembra, the ZIDRES and Master Plans - specifically focused on Eastern Colombia as well as on state infrastructure investments, aim for new handlings of land control and a clear-cut model of export-oriented, large-scale agribusiness production.

However, this discourse results in the formalization of property relations after displacement much rather than reversing investment processes (El Tiempo 2013; El Tiempo 2013).[4] Zoning efforts in ZIDRES will possibly prevent any reversal of the

[4] The violent appropriation of land by paramilitary forces during the 1990s and 2000s (well documented, see (Ballvé 2012; Grajales 2011) connects to two processes on global scales. 1) The high demand for land by international investors implies structural pressures. 2) The **

violent process (Las2Orillas 2016: 2). In these zones, particularly focused on production for the world market, peasant land control and production patterns are perceived as problematic. Instead, “productive alliances” are an idea central to ZIDRES. These productive alliances are vertically integrated associations of production between small and mid-sized peasants with major (global) investors (Presidencia 2016: 4) – neither a new nor a very successful idea in Colombian agrarian politics. Productive alliances are really contract farming with an inbuilt loss of the power of decision. With ZIDRES, they reappear as an instrument to bind peasants with their own land parcels to investment-led production, effectively eroding their sovereignty over land and production. Agro-industrial plantations and “productive alliances” as manifestations of enclosure profoundly transform economic and livelihood spaces of now autonomous peasants, much more so than discursive elements of utility, economic possibility and the efficiency of these associations suggest.

Even the state agency Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (CONPES), the highest organ of economic policy coordination, admits that corporations have realized "territorial planning de facto via [...] changes in land use" (CONPES 2014: 23). Yet, this only leads CONPES to call for the "security of land titles" (ibid.). In the face of existing power relations, the "security of titles" has

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concentration of seeds production at transnational companies mirrors state regulation which reduces or prohibits the exchange of local seeds varieties by small-scale farmers. The concentration of seeds production at transnational corporations and state regulation which poses restrictions on peasant-produced seeds and their exchange and sale, in order to establish countries as market destinations for seeds producers contain enormous potential conflict (Borras et al. 2012; see). In Colombia, dispossession of seeds went to extreme consequences, authorities setting fire on seeds confiscated from small farmers on the grounds of directive ICA 970. The outrage following led to the corresponding government directive being withdrawn and rewritten (Grupo Semillas 2015). The alternative cultivation of seeds becomes thus an emancipatory act. Agrarian movements have addressed seeds as central to their struggle (Góngora Mera/Motta 2014: 423).

meant security, and thus land control, only for the upper segments of the social spectrum. Colombian corporate representatives in turn claim that notarial registrations of land titles should no longer be refutable, to guarantee investment returns. In this logic, investment security and clear land tenure titles are essential because they enable promising agro-industrial investments even in regions with massive displacements in the past (and present). Many peasants in the Altillanura in turn do not have formal land tenure. Displaced people cannot prove their former control of land, their strategy has been not to argue for security of titles but for retorno (right to return). Corporations in the Altillanura, however, do not see this as necessary. This is not to say that current efforts of modernization have included the return of Colombia's up to five million displaced people to their land (PNUD 2011). Despite some new legislation on the matter, they have not. Much rather, the discursive element 'land tenure' provides the basis for formalizing property as it is. Tenure thus becomes itself a mechanism of enclosure. Land is territorialized in Peluso and Lund's (2011) understanding, with clear boundaries around it.

The one element linking each of these pieces of legislation (ZIDRES, Colombia Siembra, CONPES) is the distribution of baldío-rights which formally prohibits large-scale acquisitions of state-owned land. In the Altillanura, the so-called Family Agricultural Unit (Unidad Agrícola Familiar - UAF) regulates the maximum number of hectares which can be legally acquired if the land is still state-owned.[5] However, corporations such as Riopaila Castilla, Cargill or Poligrow (La Silla Vacía 2013a) are implicated in the illegal accumulation of land with extensions above 10,000 hectares. These companies belong to Colombian consortia such as Santo Domingo and Sindicato Antioqueño or in transnational financial networks. These large economic conglomerates have established strings of shell companies under their control which then each acquired only the allowed number of hectares,

[5] The size of UAFs is based on soil quality and other factors and in the Altillanura can not exceed .100 Ha (NASA ACIN 2014).

strategies later known as 'fragmentation of ownership' (ibid., Oxfam 2013; SOMO and INDEPAZ 2015). A clear example is the case of Riopaila Castilla SA, who schemed up 28 independent companies, all with the same amount of capital, address and representatives, which then rented their smaller plots to Riopaila. That way, Riopaila accessed some 40,000 hectares of state-owned plots (Arias 2013: 6). Similarly, the legal firm Contexto Legal established a number of companies which all coincide in parts of their names, dates of establishment and investment in the same Altillanura municipality of Primavera and were registered in the British Virgin Islands (La Silla Vacía 2013). Shareholders are unclear in this latter case. Poligrow, another company involved in rapidly transforming the Altillanura to be dominated by large-scale plantations, invests in an oil palm extraction plant in the town of Mapiripán, the point of departure for paramilitary expansion in 1997. Shareholders from Spain, Uruguay, Panama and Italy formed a complicated corporate network and illegally accumulated plots in Mapiripán around 2014 (Poligrow Agroindustrial) (SOMO and INDEPAZ, 2015: 38ff.). "Drop by drop" displacements[6] in the years prior were due in part to pressures by an armed group on town council members between 2008 and 2011. These council members were persuaded to support municipal efforts to authorize negotiations that legalised land expropriations (La Silla Vacía, 2013, SOMO and INDEPAZ, 2015: 36, 29). Patterns of fictitious investment, middlemen, and strategies such as black market peso exchange can be found in land deals across the Altillanura (SOMO and INDEPAZ 2015: 30).

In Colombian media, these events became branded as scandal yet seldom linked to the systematic restructuring of control and access to land via displacement that has taken place since the 1990s. In fact, the cases show how a multiplicity of scales of regulation (local, national, global investment flows) converged with local

[6] Drop-by-Drop displacements don't take part as the exodus of large numbers of people, but rather can be seen as a slow drain of individuals and single families giving in to pressures to leave.

constellations of social forces at the so-called "frontier", - not least armed actors and forces of coercion – linking de facto appropriation to the imperative to legalize this control. The appropriation of baldíos in the Altillanura region has shown how investment incentives contribute to violent displacement and a transition from public goods to private property. State land has become a prime frontier of capitalist expansion (Kelly and Peluso 2015). This is the "frontier" that is hidden in government discourses on formalization and security of tenure. Security of tenure thus has to be dialectically understood together with dispossession.

The Bioeconomy Dimension of Discourse: Displacement is Green and Food is Secondary

The radically unequal access to land mingles with ecological dimensions and economic, social and cultural rights in this debate. This drive for land in Eastern Colombia is intimately linked to new forms of enclosure revolving around what is now called the "bio-economy", loosely defined as a spectrum of (production) processes and services around the conversion of renewable resources into bio-based products, often celebrated as a transition to a smart, sustainable economy (Braun 2015: 242ff. for a debate on definition). The new paradigm is flex crops with multiple uses (feed, food, fibre, fuel), often harvested year-round which entail new labour processes, control measures and economic agents (Peluso and Lund 2011:668). During the last decade, oil palm production continually grew in terms of hectares, and agricultural and land laws contain incentives for those investing in the sector. The Palm Producers Federation Fedepalma itself announced that a majority of the 1.6 million hectares it has in mind for palm production until 2032 are projected in the Orinoquía region (see NASA ACIN 2014). Poligrow is one of the companies involved in rapidly transforming the Orinoquía, part of the Altillanura, into a region dominated by oil palm production and large-scale plantations. Indigenous organizations argue that this goes hand in hand with “desiccation, deforestation, substitution of woodland and the loss of autochthonous cultures” (NASA ACIN 2014); leading to various complaints being filed.

Companies in turn claim to be socially responsible and environment-friendly, developing precisely these areas: Oil palm production is presented as synonymous with “innovative concepts of energy and environment” (Poligrow, 2017).

The Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense Colombia Chapter (AIDA) called the idea to make rules more flexible and accelerate the process of getting ’express environmental licenses explosive’ (cited in La Silla Vacía 2013b) “. These organizations stress the ‘exacerbating environmental risks’ inherent in the ‘intensification of agriculture’ (Suárez Montoya 2012: 1). The profitability of energy production on a water, wind or agrofuel basis is again dependent on land control. Referring to the so-called clean tech products, two hardly reconcilable discourse coalitions oppose each other. On the one hand, grassroots organizations demonstrate how allegedly ‘clean energy projects’ clash with social and environmental rights in a tension extremely difficult to resolve (Blog RC y Sostenibilidad en Colombia 2012; Chejne 2012; Suárez Montoya 2012). For some organizations cited above, the discourse on clean energy in the Altillanura is hardly more than a badly-disguised modernization discourse (La Silla Vacía 2013b; Suárz Montoya 2012); others state, Colombia was in delay to use the benefits of clean energy. They state the need for „high value-added“ alternatives to resource extraction (Chejne 2012). We might speak of bio-enclosures to analyze this process of acquiring land control. Focusing on a similar process, Backhouse (2015) has written in detail about green enclosures in Brazil through palm oil production. The process in Colombia mirrors this, with the important difference that the bio-economy discourse expands on the basis of extremely violent displacements executed by paramilitaries since the 1990s, in logistical collusion with parts of the state.

Interestingly enough, discourses on land and bioenergy don't focus on food. So far, small-scale farming is still a core source for urban food markets (PNUD 2011). However, the priority of bioenergy and flexcrop production in the dominant discursive positions on the Altillanura imply this is about to change. As soil in the Altillanura isn't easily made suitable for intensive food farming, some scientific

discourse interventions suggest the region should actually be reserved for larger private investment, not without claiming radical land redistributions in other regions (El Espectador 2014). The vertical integration of the corresponding production chains add another layer that impedes the participation of small-scale (or even communal) farming in the value-adding steps of the chain. Other than the apparent need for biological energy production, food sovereignty makes no appearance in government and corporate discourses. For grassroots organizations, however, food sovereignty is not just an end in itself (far beyond food security), but encompasses autonomy and land control by small-scale peasants with no more than half a hectare of land (Grupo Semillas 2015; Suárez Montoya 2012). Recognizing the scale of intermediaries between producers and supermarkets who absorb large parts of profit, grassroots organizations argue for "small, local market and production circuits, so that consumers in the city and producers in rural spaces come closer together again" (Castellanos 2011:n.p.). Discourses on the Altillanura "frontier" of bio-economy thus entail an element of competition for land between different forms of production. To foster links between consumers and producers with little geographic distance is a way to foster political subjects able to link land and food politics and who can oppose the existing drive for the legalization of dispossession. As we can see below, this strategy fuelled the agrarian strike of 2013 and was strengthened during the strike.

Political Subjectivity and Visibility of Counter-Discourses

One consequence of peasant perceptions of not being heard has been the participation in massive agrarian strikes in 2013 (Semana 2013). The places where politics is enacted and discourses forged are essential in securing land control. The comments by the still influential representative of land owners Agricultural Producers' Society (Sociedad de Agricultores - SAC), Rafael Mejía in 2013 are an example (Agencia Prensa Rural 2013). As peasants were protesting low prices and pressures on them by agribusiness, Mejía's uneasy and ambiguous reaction shows how sectors represented by SAC approach autonomous political agency by peasants

in general. Mejía criticized peasants not for their protest as such but for negotiating "outside of the institutions", bypassing those arenas which had historically presented themselves as representatives of Colombian agriculture, but should be better understood as strategic interest groups for large landowners – who do hold clear land titles. The inequality in access to titling (with deep historical roots) is omitted in this discourse. In the agrarian strike of 2013, opposing agrarian restructuring in the Altillanura and the rest of the country, months- long mobilizations included grassroots organizations, with truckers, micro-businessmen in informal mining, care workers, teachers and students joining the protests. They acknowledged the link between global investment, legal discourses on the use of land and the precarious conditions for those actually producing food. A whole different worldview is encompassed in what might seem a small discursive and representational modification during and since these protests. The ruana, a widely worn poncho in rural Colombia usually associated with poor or indigenous peasants, became the symbol of emancipatory protest (CED-INS 2011). In Bogotá, supporters even put on ruanas made of paper and redefined the ruana from a symbol of poverty and" backwardness" to strength and food production. Not only did protesters deconstruct dominant imaginaries of "progress", "efficiency" and the paradigm of productivity/utility, they also awarded the conflicts at the frontier a certain mobility to be played out in more visible spaces. In Bogotá and other bigger cities, where peasants from those places usually are represented as 'near empty' and 'wild', beyond the "frontier", acquired voice.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of Colombia's efforts to restructure the Altillanura and its discursive representations certainly make clear how contested these spaces really are. Theoretical frameworks such as the concept of land control and enclosure (i.e. Peluso and Lund 2011; Backhouse 2015) help understand how this restructuring is taking place. Behind the discursive representations actual conflicts at the agricultural "frontier" exist, and dominant economic strategies are contested. The

Altillanura eludes the characterization as 'marginal-unused/underutilized-empty' land. This remaking of the Altillanura involves its commodification and distinct processes of enclosure. Grassroots organizations in Colombia approach these other (seemingly less violent) politics of dispossession creatively.

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