

# Land Rush Working Paper & Notes #002

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## The land rush in the Colombian Amazon, changing labour dynamics, and the politics of climate change

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the politics of climate change, labour and state-citizenship dynamics shaping and reshaping the global land and commodity rush in the Colombian Amazon, one of the hotspots of the global land rush. Explored from critical agrarian studies perspectives, this paper combines conjunctural analysis and landscape perspective to understand how the politics of climate change, labour, and state and citizenship dynamics are intertwined in the contemporary land and commodity rush. In an exploratory way, this paper argues that the contemporary land rush in Colombian Amazon takes place in the middle of five socio-economic and political processes. First, the political contestations around the peace agreement with the FARC-EP guerrilla. Second, is the consolidation of new territorial dynamics after the withdrawal of FARC troops. Third, it corresponds to the flows of production of illicit crops and the strategies oriented to deactivate illicit economies. Fourth, the increase of deforestation in areas previously under FARC control. Finally, the diminished institutional processes to implement the peace agreement in war-affected areas. All of these correspond to simultaneous outcomes of market relations side by side with the deployment of extra-economic coercion by the state. One implication of this study is to demonstrate the increasing need to embed studies of climate change, labor processes, and land and agrarian political economy systematically together.

## **1. Introduction: The Conjuncture of the Global Land and Commodity Rush**

It has been more than one decade since the land rush occupied the centre of the debate among scholars and experts interested in the study of agriculture, rural development, and land politics. The new cycle of large land acquisitions ignited in 2007-2008 with the food and fuel crisis (Scoones et al. 2019) was framed by the urgent need to find available land and water resources. The urgency was partly shaped by the renewed interest of investors in land assets as a financial source of profit (Fairbairn 2014) and the establishment of large-scale commercial farming (Hall, Scoones, and Tsikata 2017). This rush is distinctive in its temporality and scope (Li 2014b). Its main characteristics are its suddenness and the “spectacular riches it promises to investors” (Li 2014b:595). This phenomenon has been vast in scale and extension, it may be faster than preceding rushes during the colonial and post-colonial period (White et al. 2012) and public policy has played a central role in it. Overall, the rush has led to shifts in the global geo-economic equilibrium (Cotula 2012). An episode of such magnitude has brought about structural, institutional, and political transformations.

The new rush has involved the diversification of different mechanisms to gain control over land and other resources, which is known as ‘control grabbing’ (Borras and Franco 2012). The earliest scientific work on the global land rush corresponds to land grabbing literature, which in most cases are examined as isolated land deals: corporate pursued and successfully established. In Colombia, there has been a spike in scholarly work that focuses on land grabbing and the socio-economic impacts of corporate land deals ex: (Arias Castillo 2018; Espinoza Rincón 2020; López 2008; OXFAM 2013). However, there is limited work that comprehensively studies the broader social phenomena which includes these types of land deals but goes beyond them. Further, although some studies on land grabbing examine the impacts of land deals on the politics of climate, labour and state-citizenship dynamics, they have largely been held separately and as individual cases. Instead, this piece examines the politics of climate change, labour and state-citizenship dynamics shaping and reshaping the global land and commodities rush. That is the first attempt to examine the question of how exactly and to what extent the land rush might have impacted Colombian social life, especially the politics of climate change, labour and state-citizenship dynamics. How did the land rush unfold on the ground? How did it impact the actual lives and livelihoods of those directly and indirectly affected by it? How has it been contested both by economically and politically dominant classes and rural working people? How did the state direct such a process?

### *1.1 Making the Global Land Rush and Three Types of Land Deals*

The global land and commodities rush has been configured by three main elements: scarcity narratives (Scoones et al. 2019), the financialization of agriculture (Clapp and Isakson 2018; Fairbairn 2020), and the spectacle making logic (Tsing 2000). After 2007-2008 with the food and fuel price crises on one hand, and the setting of planetary boundaries on the other (Rockström et al. 2009), multilateral agencies adopted scarcity narratives as a central part of their discourse and their policies for land and resources. The solution presented by these discourses to limited resources relies on under-utilized resources, technical and investment solutions and comparative global opportunities (Scoones et al. 2019). Altogether, under the well-known slogan ‘from challenges to opportunities’ used by multilateral organizations ex: (Arezki, Deininger, and Selod 2015; Deininger et al. 2011; FAO 2008; World Bank 2007).

Scarcity narratives foster land value speculation, by turning farmland into a financial asset “which can be valued, easily inserted and taken out of investment portfolios, and subsequently speculated on by financial investors” (Visser 2017:187). This asset making process is a commodification process of land, which requires the potential for profit, scarcity, liquidity to be easily sold when desired, standardization to be compared with other assets, and legitimacy (Visser 2017). To turn land into an asset requires assembling

land as a resource (Li 2014b). Such processes involve standardized metrics and initiatives to facilitate land transactions, accommodate institutional environments, and implement vehicles to unlock the financial value of farmland (Clapp and Isakson 2018). The result of the whole process enables investors to realize a return (Fairbairn 2014). Although the peak of the land rush seems to have passed and its pace has decelerated since 2014, its effects continue to linger, including new institutional arrangements changing how different groups of social actors take into account land (Fairbairn 2020).

Finalization is an important component of the global land rush but is not the only one, the distinctive feature of a rush is the spectacle surrounding it, without spectacle financialization cannot occur at such a pace. The spectacle is an important ingredient to transform an episode into a global rush. In the case of farmland, it is widespread the idea that farmland investment is highly profitable with low risk. However, evidence shows that “farmland investment is not the solid, global trend that is proclaimed” (Visser 2015:283). The spectacle serves the purpose of presenting incredible economic benefits for investors and consists of the exaggeration and dramatization of the economic expectations. This occurs in specific historical moments: “when capital seeks creativity rather than stable reproduction” (Tsing 2000:118). In consequence, a process of ‘spectacular accumulation’ takes place, that is when investors speculate on a product that does not exist yet, but they are rather looking for the appearance of success instead of the product itself. Investors cannot afford to find the product because in that case, their chances to profit disappear.

The fabrication of spectacle fosters the interests of investors in farmland. Financial actors and corporations pursue land deals whose in some cases might succeed, in others, they are abandoned or simply failed. Alike to financial actors who seek to take a major benefit from the land rush momentum, local actors use the opportunity to reassemble their capacity to control land and associated resources, leading to the everyday land accumulation process, below the radar of the global land rush dynamics. In the last case, land deals are guided by “land brokers, speculators and scammers who have taken advantage of pre-existing institutional arrangements of land control to cash in on the ongoing global land rush”(Borras and Franco 2013:1727). Overall, spectacle, financialization and their interactions assemble these three different types of land deals linked to the global land and commodities rush: corporate pursued, abandoned and below-radar land deals.

### *1.2 The Global Land Rush and Three Types of Land Deals*

The land rush is revealed within the interactions of these three types of land deals: The first category corresponds to successfully established corporate land deals, mostly addressed in land grabbing literature. The second refers to corporate land deals announced or planned but later abandoned. The third category involves land transactions that are part of the everyday land accumulation processes, that is, when land control has changed without the direct or high profile participation of corporate powers, and instead driven by powerful individuals or non-corporate groups exploiting the ongoing process of the land rush. Most of the literature refers to the successful cases of corporate pursued land deals through the analysis of case studies and ignores the other two categories. However, these three types of land deals are not independent or disconnected; rather, they are interlinked within the wide phenomenon of the commodities and land rush.

Land grabbing literature is an important milestone in the examination of the impact of the global land rush. There are three distinct generations of research in land grabbing, overlapping and non-unidirectional, and in a continuum. The first generation examining land grabbing, the ‘making sense period’ (2007 -2012) (Edelman, Oya, and Borras 2013; Scoones et al. 2013) was concentrated on descriptive analysis “to make sense of a new and rapidly evolving phenomenon” (Oya 2013:1534). The second research’s generation ‘depending our understanding’ (Edelman et al. 2013) was focused on the analyses of specific cases leading to a better understanding of the political and economic dynamics of land grabbing ex:(Fairbairn 2013; Grajales 2013; Lavers and Boamah 2016; Levien 2013; Wolford et al. 2013). A third discernable generation of research beyond case studies and critically inquiring about the interactions, intersections and interconnections in spatial, economic, socio-ecological, socio-political, institutional and temporal dimensions of the global land rush. Some examples of this type of analysis are the elaborations on green

grabbing ex: (Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Cárdenas 2012; Corson and MacDonald 2012; Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012; Hunsberger et al. 2017; Ojeda 2012). Hence, there has been a move from simple and single-drivers analyses toward more multifaceted and multi-caused phenomena with context specificity (Oya 2013:1535).

Despite the evolution of literature, the land rush continues to be a less studied social phenomenon amid the overwhelming research focus on specific land deals. The large number of studies examining specific cases pursued by corporations might be because it is easier to track land investments made by large companies. The process of spectacle conjuring in the global land rush also impedes the access to abandoned land deals, as spectacle requires the successful cases to be presented in a high-profile manner and the big fiascos to be silenced. Likewise, it is difficult to access land deals below the radar, since they are not publicly advertised, nor are they executed by large companies with logos and offices. In other words, the analysis of the three types of land deals configuring the current global land and commodities rush presents a methodological challenge, which cannot be captured by the analysis of individual and isolated cases. For this reason, this paper examines the global land rush in the Orinoco-Amazon corridor in Colombia from conjunctural analysis and landscape perspective to comprehend the three currents of the land deals and the global land and commodities rush in specific settings.

### *1.3. Conjunctural Analysis and Landscape Perspective on the Global Land and Commodities Rush.*

Global commodities rushes are not new in capitalist history (Borras et al. 2011; Cotula 2013; Dell'Angelo et al. 2017; Edelman and León 2013; Sassen 2013; White et al. 2012). The Latin American historian and writer Eduardo Galeano (2020 [1971]) was one of the first in describing the role of the Americas in western economic development since the colonial period. Since the arrival of the Spaniards, the history of the continent has been the history of the extraction and export of commodities from gold and silver to cotton, sugar cane and coffee and their rushes (Ibid). Commodities extraction and exports have been part of the societal transformation process in the region. More recently, the region has witnessed a new momentum of commodity extraction, known as the commodity boom and the 'commodities consensus' (Svampa 2015). This has led to the intensification of extractive economies, which "deepen territorial fragmentation and generate a network of productive enclaves connected to global markets" (Gudynas 2010:6). Under the commodities consensus, Latin American economies have reoriented to extractive and rent based activities with little added value. This shift has shaped a new accumulation pattern based on the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources and the expansion of the capitalist frontier. Such new momentum corresponds to a specific time-lapse in certain local and geographical settings, that is a specific conjuncture and a particular landscape.

Conjunctural analysis allows to grasp the complex interactions between social actors and structural variables to address long term impacts and changes at a given time and place, that is the conjuncture. Conjunctural analysis corresponds to the examination of the situation and the relations of force, as well as "the degree of development of the productive forces, the relations of political forces and those existing between the parties (hegemonic systems within the State); and the immediate political relations" (Gramsci 1971:176). More recently Li (2014a) brings back this approach to analyze capitalist dynamics in an indigenous frontier. In this analysis, history is crucial "because every element in a conjuncture has a history that actively shapes the present, while at every conjuncture a new history is produced, sometimes deliberately, more often as an unintended consequence of how various elements combine (Li 2014a:16).

The methodological implication of this type of analysis is the search for the distinctive elements of one specific conjuncture. These distinctive elements refer to classic economic aspects such as the distribution of land and resources, land use, but also the political struggles of the social actors involved. As well as changes in the social meanings of the resources being contested (Ojeda 2018). The study of social structures and their historical construction is relevant, but it is also necessary to incorporate the conflictual processes in which the social individuals who make history are inserted (Marx 1972). How this conjuncture is perceived by its actors and how they influence its outcomes.

Each conjuncture as a moment in history is the result of multiple social processes expressed in specific landscapes. Following Don Mitchell's landscape perspective, "landscape is produced, lived and represented, it is space constructed out of the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing and cooperating social actors" (1996:30). Mitchell's work resonates with political economy and historical analysis by highlighting the landscape as a complex moment in a system of social reproduction. From the political economy side, the landscape has a role "in reproducing capitalist agriculture and the social relations that allow the agricultural system to work" (1996:34). The production of the landscape affects the equation for the extraction of surplus value within a region. Therefore, landscape production is a moment in the overall process of uneven development (Ibid). From the history side, "the study of a landscape is an exercise of historical reconstruction seeking to show how a particular culture working on and through the natural landscape created a cultural landscape" (1996:25).

The landscape perspective has been also applied in land grabs studies to assess the interactions between climate change policies, land grabs and land conflicts (Hunsberger et al. 2017). This perspective allows thinking holistically on how and why land and its associated ecological systems are altered by environmental policies, development interventions (Ibid) or in the case of the land rush by broad social processes. Hunsberger and colleagues (2017) propose six dimensions to reconstruct the multiple social processes participating in landscape creation, being those: spatial, economic, socio-ecological, socio-political, institutional and temporal. These same dimensions can be used to reassemble the conjuncture of the global land and commodities rush, with its variations and local specificities.

In an exploratory way, this paper argues that the contemporary land rush in Colombia and the Orinoco-Amazon corridor takes place in the middle of five socio-economic and political processes. First, the political contestations around the peace agreement with the FARC-EP guerrilla (Gutiérrez-Sanín 2019). Second, is the consolidation of new territorial dynamics after the withdrawal of FARC troops. Third, flows of production of illicit crops and the strategies oriented to deactivate illicit economies (Salgado Ruiz 2019). Fourth, the increase of deforestation in areas previously under FARC control (Clerici et al. 2020; Prem, Saavedra, and Vargas 2020); and fifth, the diminished institutional processes to implement the peace agreement in war-affected areas. All of these correspond to simultaneous outcomes of market relations side by side with the deployment of extra-economic coercion by the state (Grajales 2015). These five processes can be reconstructed through conjunctural analysis and the landscape approach.

## **2. The Global Land Rush in Colombia**

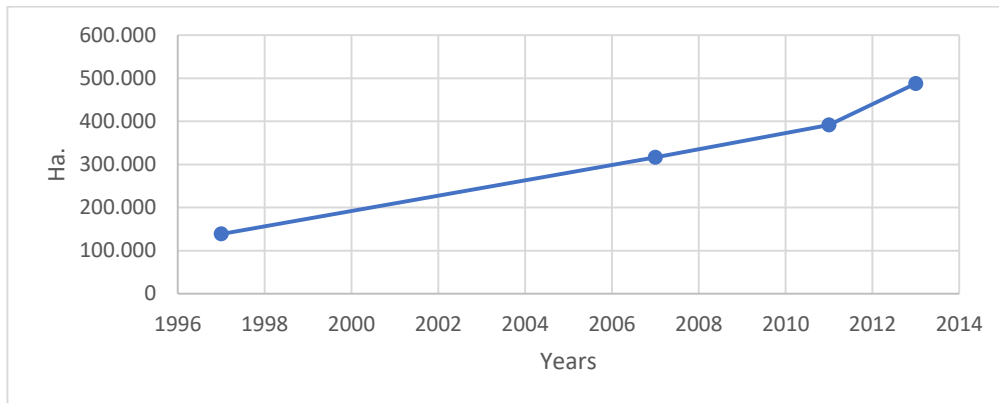
For the past decade or so, Colombia has been one of the hotspots of the global land rush. According to the global database on land grabs, the Land Matrix, in Colombia, there are 79 cases of land grabs, involving 1,178,000 ha. (Tacha and Espinosa Rincón 2021:9). Most of these cases are related to biofuels production (Ibid). Oil palm is the most prominent crop for biofuel production. In 1997 the oil palm census counted 138,458 ha allocated for oil palm production, in 2011 this number increased by three-fold to 391,187 ha (Girón and Mahecha 2015). In 2013 the total area dedicated to oil palm cultivation corresponded to 487,737 ha (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) 2016). Former president Álvaro Uribe celebrated such massive expansion of oil palm, declaring: "palm growers have settled land in the homeland for which there were no alternatives in sight. That is heroism; that is making agriculture a tool for patriotic exercise" (translated from Spanish)(Uribe Vélez 2009:125).

The earlier period of the contemporary land rush in Colombia was associated with the biofuel boom, for a domestic market, created by the adoption of blending mandates for biodiesel. By 2010, 40% of the national palm oil production and sales were used for biodiesel (Marin-Burgos and Clancy 2017). Once the national biodiesel industry was established, producers needed an outlet for the surplus resulting from the increased palm oil production. This was "provided by a biofuel-driven increasing demand for vegetable oils at the international level, especially in the European Union" (Ibid). The EU turned into an attractive market due to the increasing demand for vegetable oils promoted by its biofuels directives and the privileged access to

this market for palm oil imports from Colombia through the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (Clancy 2013).

The expansion of oil palm cultivation through 'Alianzas Productivas' (productive alliances) (a model linking small rural producers to markets through agribusiness schemes) allowed companies to gain access to land without actual direct acquisitions of such lands. Oil palm production encompassed varieties of land control such as forced displacement operated by armed groups, the takeover of abandoned land by internally displaced people, land occupation under contested ownership rights, the occupation of public lands, land-use change, and land concentration (Marin-Burgos and Clancy 2017). Figure 1 shows the evolution of oil palm in Colombia.

Figure 1 Evolution of Oil Palm Crops in Colombia 1996-2014



Own Elaboration with data provided by Fedepalma and Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) 2016

Similar to oil palm cultivation, sugarcane agricultural industrialization in the south of the country led to “the concentration of land use by regional industrialists and the corresponding exclusion of landowners and poor peasants from territorial decision-making processes” (Vélez-Torres et al. 2019:691), configuring a case of ‘control grabbing’ (Borras et al. 2012) in which local actors lose their capacity to access natural resources and to participate in the management of the territory. Such a pattern of appropriation for the benefit of the private sector initiated between 2006 and 2010 was consolidated through the ‘21<sup>st</sup>-century agriculture’ principle promoted in the governments of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014) and (2014-2018). Under this principle, the private sector makes massive investments and the state serves as facilitator. The National Development Plan formulated by Santos set to improve land access through the constitution of Peasant Reserves Zones (ZRC) and Business Development Zones (ZIDRES), to modify land-use by recovering 10 million ha of livestock for the introduction of oil palm, sugar cane and cassava production for biofuels and food export. To formalize rural property through land titling programs of wastelands and to restitute land for victims of the armed conflict (Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP 2011).

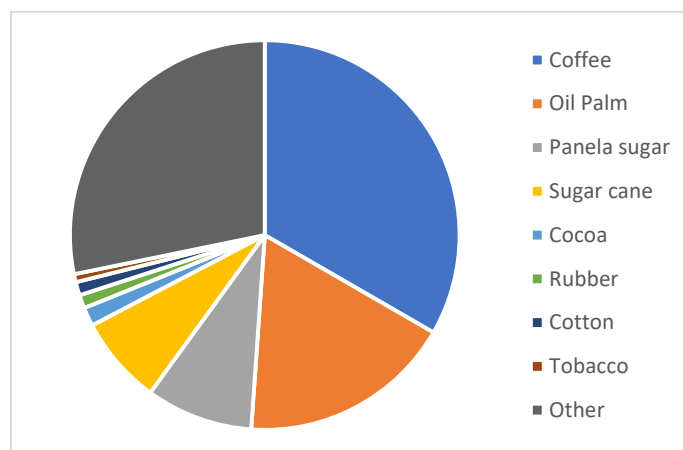
From 2010 to 2014, the national government focused on detecting and solving investment bottlenecks, such as weak transportation infrastructure. This led to the construction of roads in areas with high ecological importance such as the Amazon and Orinoquia regions. The new infrastructure projects were incorporated in the South American Initiative for Infrastructure and Regional Integration (IIRSA), seeking to boost the exports of commodities such as corn, palm oil and forestry products (Arias Castillo 2018). During the same period, the national government promoted its ‘locomotives of development’ (translated from Spanish) which included the mining-energy and agriculture sectors.

The agriculture locomotive’s objective was to convert medium and small-scale agricultural producers into entrepreneurship levels. In this model, known as “the entrepreneurization of the countryside” (*empresarización del campo* in Spanish) land must be granted to efficient producers, linked with the

financial sector with the capacity of undertaking agribusiness activities. The Peasant economy is considered inefficient and lagging. This model echoes the inaugural discourse of Juan Manuel Santos in 2010, who stated “we are going to defend the Colombian peasant, we will turn him into an entrepreneur, we will support him with technology and credits, to make every peasant a prosperous Juan Valdez”<sup>1</sup> (translated from Spanish). Juan Valdez<sup>2</sup> was originally an advertising character created by the National Federation of Coffee Growers to promote their products, symbolizing smallholder coffee production (Hough and Bair 2012; London 1999). The brand ‘Juan Valdez®’ was launched in 2002, and currently has branches in Latin America, the United States, Europe and Asia. According to the National Coffee Growers Federation “in 15 years, Juan Valdez® has left nearly \$90 billion in revenues (about 3% of annual sales) for the National Coffee Fund” (translated from Spanish)(El Espectador 2018). The declaration of the ex-president is spectacular. Is it possible to transform 2.7 million rural producers (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) 2016) into a business model like Juan Valdez®? This kind of hyperbolic claim demonstrates the spectacle surrounding the land and commodity rush in Colombia.

The narratives surrounding the ‘Agriculture locomotive’ seek to justify land grants to large-scale producers and economic groups. According to the third agricultural census in 2013, the planted area in Colombia reached 8,577,010 hectares, 35.% of the total planted area corresponds to agro-industrial crops (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) 2016). The most prominent agro-industrial crops and their participation in the total planted area of agro-industrial crops are coffee 30%, oil palm 16%, 11% Panela Sugarcane, 8% Sugarcane, 6.6% cocoa, 1.4% rubber, 1% cotton, 0.6% Tobacco and 25.4% other agro-industrial crops (Ibid). Figure 2 shows the distribution of agro-industrial crops in the total planted area.

Figure 2 Area Participation (%) by Type of Agro-industrial Crops in 2013



Source: Own elaboration with data provided by Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) 2016

In the mining sector between 2002 and 2006, 1,674 mining titles were awarded, and this would increase to 4,869 between 2006 and 2010 4,869, or a three-fold increase (Ingeominas 2010). Considering the increased participation of the mining sector within the GDP through foreign direct investment and exports, the National Development Plan (2010-2014) was orientated to consolidate Colombia “as a global mining country” (Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP 2011). The goals set for 2019 in the sector were

<sup>1</sup> This was part of Juan Manuel Santos speech during the presidential inauguration in 2010. See in: <https://www.elpais.com.co/colombia/juan-manuel-santos-anuncio-13-transformaciones-claves-para-el-pais-durante-su-gobierno.html> “Juan Manuel Santos anunció 13 transformaciones claves para su país, durante su gobierno”, El País, 7 August 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Juan Valdez is presented as a peasant from the mountains of Colombia, dressed in a *poncho* and *carrier* and accompanied by a mule carrying a load of coffee. In Colombia, it became a national icon symbolizing smallholder coffee production.



doubling the exploitation of coal and multiplying by four the exploitation of gold, placing the mining income as one of the first sources of income for the State, tripling the area of mining contracts. As well as doubling the production of traditional mining, shifting from mining districts to mining clusters, becoming the most agile mining contracting in Latin America. Tripling the basic scanning area and achieving 100% of coverage and auditing 100% of the contracts, executing environmental agendas for productive, competitive and responsible mining development and the creation of small-scale mining clean production projects (UPME Unidad de Planeación Minero Energética 2014). These figures and targets resonate with the declarations made by the former Finance Ministry Juan Carlos Echeverry in 2011, regarding the Canadian investments and mining companies in the Latin-American region, who stated: “what I like to say is that Spaniards discovered America 500 years ago, Canadians did it 10 years ago, which make us very happy” (translated from Spanish)(Semana Internacional 2011).

In 2014, the so-called Locomotives of Development were encompassed with the reforms promoted by the peace conversations between the Colombian government and the former guerrilla of FARC. The new Development National Plan incorporated the reforms that were being discussed in the peace talks in La Habana to end 50 years of armed confrontation (Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP 2015). Two contradictory processes were occurring at the same time: a democratization process observable in the institutional reforms undertaken to restitute land for victims of the conflict, the effort to achieve a political solution to the internal armed conflict; but, at the same time a fierce struggle for controlling land, particularly in areas highly affected by the conflict. Within these two contradictory processes, the land rush has been evolving in Colombia. Table 1 summarizes the 3 main stages of the land rush in Colombia and the main economic sectors prioritized by national development policies during these periods.

*Table 1 Land Rush Stages and Economic Sectors prioritized by National Development Policies*

Land Rush Stage	Years	Economic sectors prioritized by development policies	Government
1 <sup>st</sup> Stage	2002-2006	Expansion of the mining sector	Alvaro Uribe
2 <sup>nd</sup> Stage	2006-2010	Oil Palm Expansion	Alvaro Uribe
3 <sup>rd</sup> Stage	2010-2018	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Agriculture and the Locomotives of Development	Juan Manuel Santos

Own elaboration with information provided by (Departamento Nacional de Planeación 2002, 2007; Departamento Nacional de Planeación DNP 2011, 2015)

### *2.1 Land Investments and the Land Rush in the Orinoco-Amazon Corridor*

In 2011, the *Llanos Orientales* (eastern plains) became an attractive investment location for national and international economic groups. A business magazine headlined "The new 'llaneros'" (translated from Spanish)(Revista Dinero 2011) referred to planned investments by the businessmen Alejandro Santo Domingo, Luis Carlos Sarmiento and Harold Eder in the *Llanos Orientales* seeking to transform the region into a food-exporting hub. More than a decade has passed since these million-dollar investments were announced, a whole spectacle was created to make the *Llano* fashionable. The spectacle included around 43000 land hectares and 600 USD million. Table 1 shows the disaggregated investments by investor, type of crop, hectares and location.

Table 2 Land Investments in the Eastern Plains and the Departments of Quindío and Cesar

Investor	Total Hectares	Type of crop	Total Value of the Investment (USD million)	Location
Harold Eder	40000	Sugar cane	300	Meta and Casanare
Jaime Liévano	13000	Maize, and Soya bean	100	Meta
Luis Carlos Sarmiento Angulo	16000	Oil Palm, rubber, Rice and Cotton	100	Meta
Germán Efranovich	9550	Coffee, Oil Palm, and Pineapple	100	Quindío and Cesar

Own elaboration with data provided by (FEDEPALMA 2011; Revista Dinero 2011)

In this regard, the journalist and sociologist Alfredo Molano, comparing what was occurring in the *Llano* with the Californian gold rush, wrote:

Like the businessmen of East California in the twenties, as John Steinbeck describes in ‘The Grapes of Wrath. They are possessed by the spirit of progress: bulldozers, excavators, lime - millions of tons of lime - roads and, of course, labourers (translated from Spanish)(Molano 2011).

The Llanos Orientales is located in the Orinoquia and Amazonia region, which represents 55% of the Colombian national territory, the predominant landscapes are grasslands and jungle, which legally are under the category of National Protected Areas, among which the Forestry Reserve of the Amazonía and the Special Management Area of La Macarena (AMEM) stand out (CODHES 2011). Some of these protected areas overlap with Indigenous Reserves of the region and Peasant Reserve Zones (Ibid). In 2011, the most prominent economic activity in this geographical corridor was agriculture, particularly in the department of Meta. Followed by cattle ranching, livestock in this region represents a quarter of national livestock, oil accounts for 69.4% of national production, and coca leaf crops represent 40% of the total area of illicit crops at the national level (CODHES 2011:21). Moreover, this area has been historically affected by armed conflict and has been disputed by different armed groups (CODHES 2011; García Rincón 2018).

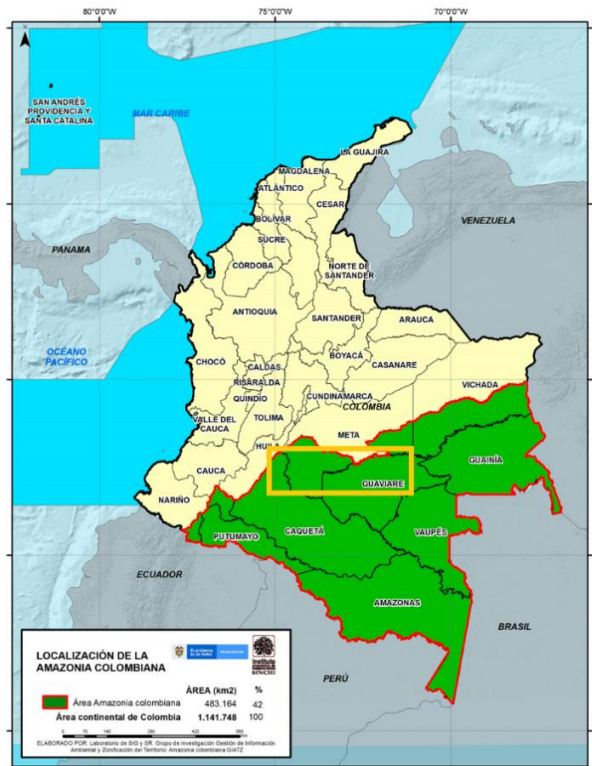
The Amazon and Orinoco regions have been articulated into the national system as marginal territories. According to Fajardo (2009), “they have become sources of resource extraction and spaces for the operation of enclave economies with low levels of road and service articulation”(translated from Spanish)(2009:135). The extraction of raw materials since colonial times has marked the historical development of these geographical areas (CODHES 2011; Fajardo Montaña 2009; Molano 1989, 2006; Rincón García 2018). During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this area was “a place of refuge and confinement for revolutionaries and individuals considered socially marginal: criminals, thugs, bandits, guerrillas, etc” (translated from Spanish)(Gómez López 1989:85). Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century the slave trade was occurring in the area, ‘Tropas de Rescate’ (rescue troops) raided indigenous lands to capture indigenous to be traded for work tools and weapons with Dutch, French and English merchants from Guyana (Gómez López 1989). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘Casas de Indios’ (indigenous hunting) occurred amidst land occupations and colonisations (Ibid). Interethnic conflicts played an important role in the socio-historical processes of the region, crucial as the incorporation of new land into production and the boom of certain commodities (Gómez López 1989; Molano 2006).

The numbers and figures, but most importantly the extravagant announcements about land investments in the *Llanos Orientales* presented above help to illustrate partly how the contemporary commodity and land rushes took place in Colombia in three main stages (2002-2006) –(2006-2010) and (2010-2018). These

stages cannot be studied separately since they mutually shape each other. Unlike most literature on land grabbing analyzing separate cases to understand the complexity of the global land rush in the Colombian Amazon is necessary to examine agro-industrial activity in the Orinoco-Amazon corridor, hydrocarbons extraction in La Macarena and deforestation and land accumulation in the Picachos, Tinigua and La Macarena National Parks. This analysis departs from the premise that these three phenomena are interconnected and one cannot be understood without the other.

The current interest in land in the region corresponds to another cycle of land grabbing in the regional history of Amazon and the Orinoco regions. To understand the contemporary phenomenon is necessary to look back at history. As Edelman and León explain “land grabbing tends to occur in cycles, or waves, depending on historically specific regional and global dynamics of capital accumulation. Each new cycle has had to take into account and is profoundly shaped by pre-existing social formations and local particularities” (Edelman and León 2013:1697).

Figure 3 Location of the Orinoco-Amazon Corridor (Coveting the Meta, Caquetá and Guaviare Departments)



Source: Instituto Sinchi, retrieved online 18 February 2022

## 2.2 The rise of the agro-industrial enclave in the Orinoco-Amazon

*Poligrow Ltda* is a company dedicated to the development of a profitable, scalable and beneficial agronomic project for the development of the municipality of Mapiripán in the Department of Meta<sup>3</sup>. The project currently has 7,000 ha of oil palm. The goal set by the project is to establish 15,000 ha with oil palm. This project is developed through strategic alliances between the company and small and medium-scale producers, where the company acts as a mediator between producers, financial entities and the government

<sup>3</sup> The completed description of the company and the oil palm production project can be found in: Poligrow, “Nuestros Números” see in: <http://www.poligrow.com/grupo-poligrow/nuestros-numeros/>

to provide credit, incentives and technical assistance to producers. The company also offers contract farming schemes for their allies, as the company refers to the producers participating in the alliance. Additionally, in 2016 the company started its certification with the label Rain Forest Alliance.

Poligrow operations began in 2008 and expanded its plantation with the acquisitions of public wastelands (Arias Castillo 2018). The company acquired 5,577 ha that used to be in hands of the national state and under special protection due to imminent forced displacement. Despite debates about the illegal nature of the company's land acquisitions and the current legal procedure, in which board members have been investigated for illegal appropriation of wastelands, the company continues its operation in the area (Álvarez Roa 2017; Corporación Claretiana et al. 2020). This is an example of a corporate land deal that has been pursued and successfully established. Cases like this became more common in the area since 2009, such as the Riopaila Castilla, Cargill and Monica Semillas land investments. All of them have in common the acquisitions of lands officially classified by the government as 'public wastelands'. They have gained access to subsidies and incentives provided by the government and deployed the legal and illegal strategies to carry out land deals, which were beyond the land size limit allowed by law through the (UAF)<sup>4</sup> (Family Agriculture Unit) regulated by the Law 160 of 1994 (article 72). These companies also created shell companies to facilitate the acquisition of public lands and vacant lots to establish agro-industrial productions (Álvarez Roa 2017; Arias Castillo 2018).

The acquisition of land of this size is not a minor issue in a country with the most unequal land distribution in the Latin American region (Economía Portafolio 2017). While the peace agreement with the Comprehensive Rural Reform (Equipo Negociador del Gobierno Colombiano y las Farc- EP 2016) was aimed to distribute land to landless peasants, the state continues to prioritize private companies to acquire large extensions of public lands, which have evaded existing legislation. How can one explain the coexistence of the efforts to reconstitute land for victims of the armed conflict, as envisaged by Law 1448 of 2011 (Congreso de la República de Colombia 2011), with the awarding of vast tracts of land to private companies over landless peasants and victims? And finally, why the implementation of the Comprehensive Rural Reform and its components has taken so long, while these companies have managed to gain access to land in record time. These questions provide an initial insight into the impacts of the global land rush on the National and regional levels.

### *2.3 Hydrocarbons Extraction in La Macarena*

In 2016, the Colombian government granted the exploration and extraction permits for hydrocarbons to the company Hupecol. The project contemplates 150 oil wells in an area of 30,800 hectares. However, the National Authority for Environmental Licenses (ANLA) approved the investment only for 16,300 ha<sup>5</sup>. The license was suspended in April of 2016 due to the possible impacts on the protected area of La Macarena, a fragile and strategic ecosystem. Hupecol claimed that the conservation argument used to suspend the license did not apply because the extraction activity will not affect the protected area. This case exposes part of the disputes and tensions from the development model in the countryside. On one hand, the mining and energy sector defended the strategic value of the exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons for the country. According to representatives of the hydrocarbon sector, the national government was sending a

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Art 38 of the Law 160 of 1994 UAF is defined as "Family Agricultural Unit (UAF) is understood to be the basic agricultural, livestock, aquaculture or forestry production enterprise whose extension, in accordance with the agro-ecological conditions of the area and with appropriate technology, allows the family to remunerate its work and have a capitalizable surplus that contributes to the formation of its patrimony" (translated from Spanish)

<sup>5</sup> The discussion process of the license for the company was framed in an environmental debate due to the location of the Project, 68 km close to a protected area "Hupecol no va más en el bloque vecino a la Serranía de la Macarena", Semana, 19 of April, 2016 <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/la-macarena-anla-revoca-licencia-ambiental-a-hupecol/470209/>

signal of 'juridical insecurity' to future investors. On the other hand, inhabitants accused the company of the pollution of common water sources<sup>6</sup>.

After the license suspension, La Macarena became a scenario of multiple socio-environmental conflicts, not only over hydrocarbons projects but also over conservation activities involving the deployment of military forces through the Artemisa Operation in protected areas to evict peasants *colonos* (EFE 2019). Although the hydrocarbon project was suspended, it transformed the dynamics of land use and access to land, creating a scenario of competition between oil extraction, conservation and family farming activities.

The case of Hupecol and the subsequent conflicts over land use in La Macarena shows the differentiated way in which the Colombian state and its institutions make use of environmental arguments to deal with peasants and companies. On the one hand, peasants are evicted from their farms through military operations, as they are accused of environmental crimes. On the other hand, the national government grants oil exploration licenses in protected areas, which can only be revoked after lengthy litigation initiated by the peasants (V. Nieto, personal communication, May 28, 2020). Moreover, the private company accuses the national government of sending the wrong message to future investors by suspending its license. Due to the suspension of the license this case does not fall into the category of Corporate Pursued Land Deal and remains unstudied.

Similar situations have arisen in other parts of the Amazon-Orinoco corridor, such as land use and tenure conflicts in protected areas. The peasant occupants, when expelled by military campaigns with the slogan of preservation, ask for the recognition of their land rights through the subtraction of their lands from the protected areas (Mesa Municipal de concertación Agroambiental por el derecho a la tierra de Cartagena del Chairá 2022). However, the national government has modified the procedures for land subtraction in protected areas for the benefit of corporations ex: (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible 2022). With this, the Colombian government continues the differentiated treatment between rural inhabitants and corporations.

#### *2.4 Deforestation and Land Accumulation in the Natural Parks of the Orinoco-Amazon Corridor*

Since 2016, with the expectations generated by the peace negotiations, socio-environmental conflicts exacerbated in conservation areas, especially in the ones under the previous control of FARC. One example of this exacerbation is the significant increase in the deforestation rates in protected areas (PAs) after the signature of the peace agreement (Clerici et al. 2020; Prem et al. 2020; Salazar et al. 2018). FARC's withdrawal from their territories opened the door not only to the spatial expansion of capitalist accumulation expressed in the granting of titles for the extraction of minerals or the increasing of land transactions, but also the escalating of deforestation (Clerici et al. 2020). Most areas historically affected by the armed conflict coincide with fragile natural ecosystems. "Forest biodiversity has been shaped by cycles of gun-point land grabbing and abandonment that have resulted in complex mosaics of spontaneously regenerated vegetation and patches of natural forests" (Baptiste et al. 2017). Since the peace talks started there has been an exacerbation of the environmental conflicts in strategic and fragile ecosystems (Clerici et al. 2020; Prem et al. 2020).

Deforestation can be driven by extensive agricultural activities, including large, devoted areas to grazing or it can result from small-holding agriculture. The first case corresponds to massive deforestation patterns, depending on the investment interests of large agro-industrial businesses. Meanwhile, the second case may be a consequence of formerly dispossessed or forcibly displaced peasants returning to their lands by taking

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<sup>6</sup> Peasant's leaders denounced that the water pollution affects 40 farms and criticized the actions of the company who have not consulted its decisions with the community. The participation mechanisms were not respected, and the company has turned them into socialization scenarios to inform activities that have already carried out. As it was reported by the local press: <https://llano.extra.com.co/noticias/econom%C3%ADa/acusan-hupecol-de-contaminaci%C3%B3n-en-puerto-l%C3%B3pez-44348>

advantage of the cease-fire and the subsequent security improvements (Prem et al. 2020:4). In the case of the protected areas of Picachos, Tinigua and La Macarena, deforestation rates are driven by extensive agricultural activities (Ibid).

Table 3 Deforestation rates in PROTECTED AREAS in the Orinoco-Amazon Corridor. before and after the peace agreement

Protected Area (Name)	Deforestation before the peace agreement ( $km^2$ )	Deforestation after the peace agreement ( $km^2$ )	Deforestation Change ( $km^2$ )	Percentage Change (%)
Cordillera los Picachos	10.6	33.0	22.3	210.1%
Sierra de La Macarena	41.4	91.2	49.8	120.4%
Tinigua	37.5	159.5	122.0	325.7%

Source: Own elaboration with data provided by (Clerici et al. 2020)

Despite the scientific evidence presented on the drivers of deforestation following the peace agreement, the national government has promoted a narrative that holds colono peasants responsible for the increase in deforestation rates, especially those residing in the vicinity of protected areas and coca leaf growers. The response by the government is the militarization of these areas, leading to the expulsion of peasant families who have occupied these lands for more than 50 years and their judicialization.<sup>7</sup> The peasants who have inhabited this territory for more than half a century denounce the arrival of *terratenientes* (landlords) after the peace process, whom they accuse of indiscriminate logging in the region. With documented evidence, peasants warn of the oil explorations that private companies are trying to carry out to get them off these lands.<sup>8</sup> Similar circumstances were denounced in 2016 by peasants organizations in the municipality of Doncello Caquetá<sup>9</sup>, when peasants and cattle ranchers protested against the development of seismic exploration by oil companies in the municipality (ACUAMADHU<sup>10</sup>, personal communication, February 18 2022).

Therefore, a new scene of confrontation has been set up for the appropriation and control of land and natural resources in which the national government blames local communities, while peasants blame private companies. This is a complex scenario since these land grabs and resource appropriations cannot be traced through the revision of property titles or purchase and sale contracts, but are expressed in massive fires, with which the land is cleared sometimes to establish new production activities or speculative purposes. These are examples of everyday forms of land accumulation, generally below the formal institutional radar of government monitoring, which is left out from land grabbing studies.

<sup>7</sup> Several press reports have presented it:

“Crece tensión en Meta y Caquetá por operativo en el parque Tinigua”. *Semana Sostenible*, 24.02.2020. <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/impacto/articulo/continua-la-protesta-campesina-por-operativo-en-el-parque-tinigua/48763>.

“Gobierno anuncia fuerza de tarea conjunta para proteger los parques nacionales”. *Semana Sostenible*, 24.02.2020. <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/impacto/articulo/crearan-fuerza-de-tarea-conjunta-para-proteger-los-parques-nacionales/48759>

“Confrontación entre campesinos y Ejército en parque natural Los Picachos, Meta”. *Semana*, 22.02.2020. <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/parque-cordillera-los-picachos-campesinos-se-enfrentan-al-ejercito/653260/>

<sup>8</sup> “Petróleo, terratenientes y colonos: la disputa por la tierra en La Macarena”. *El Espectador*. (2020, 02 27). Retrieved from Infoamazonia: <https://infoamazonia.org/es/2020/02/27/petroleo-terratenientes-y-colonos-la-disputa-por-la-tierra-en-la-macarena/>

<sup>9</sup> “Denuncian presunto abuso del Esmad contra campesinos y ganaderos en el Caquetá”. *Caracol Radio*, 14.08.2016 [https://caracol.com.co/radio/2016/08/15/regional/1471221374\\_036480.html](https://caracol.com.co/radio/2016/08/15/regional/1471221374_036480.html)

<sup>10</sup> Asociación de Campesinos Unidos por la Acción comunal, el Medio Ambiente y los derechos Humanos

### **3. The Politics of Climate Change, Labour and State and Citizenship in the Global Land and Commodities Rush.**

The politics of land and land grabs have been explored extensively in the global and Colombian literature. However, it is less so from a 'land rush' perspective. Even rarer is studying the land rush amid the era of climate change, the current conjuncture of neoliberal global capitalism where hyper economic growth is accompanied by jobless development and the exponential growth of 'relative surplus population'. The explosion of land issues, interspersed between the politics of climate change and the evolution of labour regimes, has led to the contemporary shaping of broader politics that seek to influence the terms of the restructuring of agrarian relations. This necessarily brings new meanings to contestations over the state and citizenship. Thus, the current restructuring of land relations does not only arise from the simple commodification of land but in a 'land rush', entangled with the politics of climate change, evolving labour regimes and contestations around the state and citizenship.

The changes entailed to the global land rush simultaneously occur in the three spheres, on one side, climate change imperatives are incorporated in government agendas, governments create institutions and arrangements on behalf of the state to mitigate or adapt to climate change, states modify and adapt its institutions and reconfigure their relationships with citizens. On the other side, these actions modify labour regimes in rural areas by inducing land-use change with mitigation and adaptation initiatives such as REDD+ and the promotion of climate-smart agriculture (CSA), and rural dwellers lose control over land resources by participating in them or migrating to urban areas.

#### *3.1 The Politics of Climate Change*

The land rush occurs in a context in which 'climate action' (IPCC 2018, 2019) is part of all government agendas, and is a global effort calling for the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The neoliberal economic efficiency narratives and market-based mechanisms framing the global land rush are extended to climate politics through "the use and expansion of carbon metrics of nature conservation" (Borras and Franco 2018:2) and the implementation of land-based strategies to meet reduction targets (Hunsberger et al. 2017).

Uneven power dynamics (Clapp, Newell, and Brent 2018) and conflict are part of both processes the global land rush and climate change politics. The latter is understood as "the dynamics operating in the spheres of social structures, institutions and political agency..., among and between different social classes and groups within the state and in the society that set and shape the meanings of climate change, its causes and consequences, how it can be addressed, by whom and when" (Borras, Franco, and Nam 2020:2). Thus, climate change politics can trigger the global land rush by fostering land grabbing, legitimizing the land grab process and de-legitimizing people's mitigation and adaptation practices to climate change (Borras et al. 2020).

Since the 1980s, with the emergence of neoliberalism, market solutions to environmental problems such as biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation have become the new rule for dealing with the ecological crisis. Market-oriented solutions came in the form of mitigation measures, partnerships and new commodities production, providing an answer to the interrelated crisis of economy, finance and environment by looking and redesigning the mechanisms of conservation and increasing opportunities for capital accumulation (Arsel 2019; Arsel and Büscher 2012). Among these solutions stand out the establishment of carbon markets, cap and trade schemes for GHG emissions and the implementation of Reduced Emissions for Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) programs. In synthesis, conservation initiatives have become an integral part of capitalism growth (Brockington and Duffy 2010).

In Colombia since 2018, the government has promoted REDD+ initiatives and carbon offset markets more strongly. Both efforts are aimed at reducing deforestation, which is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, followed by agriculture (Ideam 2016). the national government has committed to the expansion of protected areas (terrestrial and marine) and has received US\$30 million from the governments of Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom to reinforce the deforestation policy in the Amazon (Ministerio

de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible 2021). However, the government's strategy to curb deforestation has been widely criticized due to the deployment of the Artemisa military campaign<sup>11</sup> with which the government evicts peasants from protected areas. The rural inhabitants of these areas have been living there for decades and, in addition to being evicted, they are forced to sign a legal agreement to leave the territory. This is a form of judicial dispossession within protected areas, but also corresponds to a case of control grabbing. What happens then to these expelled peasants? what are the alternatives they have to achieve their subsistence?

### *3.2 Labour Politics*

Rural populations affected by the global land rush are not able to turn from rural dwellers into proletarians. As Li expresses “the truncated trajectory of the agrarian transition in much of the global South, one in which there is no pathway from country to city, agriculture to industry, or even a clear pathway into stable plantation work that pays a living wage” (Li 2011:296). With this, she brings labour at the centre of the land rush debate.

To understand the labour question in contemporary trajectories of agrarian change and capital reconfiguration in the Global South linked to the global land rush, the concepts of ‘Classes of Labor’ (Bernstein 2010) and ‘working people’ (Shivji 2017) must be considered. Both of them are an account of the emergence of households who combine all sorts of livelihoods strategies – on-farm/off-farm in the rural-urban continuum to ensure their own reproduction. Both notions can be traced back to what Davis calls ‘the informal working class’ (2006). Since 1980 informal-sector employment has grown faster than formal-sector jobs, they have reversed their relative structural positions, “instituting informal survivalism as the new principal mode of livelihood in most cities from the South” (Davis 2006:178). The emergence and faster growth of these labour relations are framed under the dynamics and sources of the ‘relative surplus population’ (Marx 1990, Orig. 1867).

In Colombia, between 1980 and 2010 that 6.6 million ha of land were grabbed from their traditional owners (Garay Salamanca et al. 2011). Moreover, due to the armed conflict, in 2020 Colombia has 5.5 million internally displaced persons (IDMC 2020). The question then arises: how have these people affected by the historical processes of land grabbing, violence and displacement ensured their reproduction? Has a similar phenomenon occurred with the people affected by the global land rush in the Amazon-Orinoquia corridor? What are the economic activities with which these people ensure their reproduction? And finally, what are the expectations of the Colombian state with these people, to turn every evicted peasant into a prosperous Juan Valdez?

### *3.3 The Politics of State and Citizenship Dynamics*

In the global rush, states play a key role in land deals and transactions by calculating and negotiating the costs and benefits of the contemporary moment to maximize returns on marginal lands and communities (Wolford et al. 2013). However, the role of the state is not exempted from contradictions because the state is not a monolithic entity with coherent behaviour. Within states there are several actors with uneven expectations, competing among themselves to win benefits from the access to land (Ibid). From a broader perspective, O’Connor (2002) and Fox (1993) explain the dual and contradictory tasks of the state: accumulation and legitimation. The state sets the conditions for profitable capital accumulation and at the same time creates the conditions for social harmony (O’Connor 2002:6). Social actors within the state make choices to balance these competing pressures in which conflicts, interests, identities emerge, the overall interaction process sets the limits and possibilities for the state action (Fox 1993). This is a difficult balancing act that often results in unexpected and unintended outcomes in state actions. States can also orchestrate dispossession and actively shape a regime of dispossession, in which the state “is willing to

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<sup>11</sup> The campaign is aimed to combat organized crime linked to deforestation, taking place in all the Natural Parks in Colombia as it was presented by Colombian President Ivan Duque. According to the National Government, these military operations are part of a collaborative strategy between the National Police, the Colombian Army, and the National Prosecutors’ office to stop deforestation in protected areas (EFE, 2019).

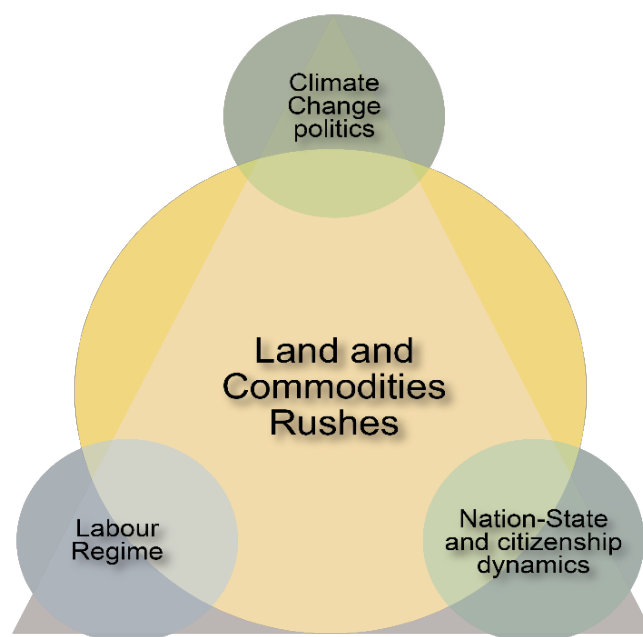


coercively expropriate resources from one class to another for a set of purposes that it seeks to legitimize through claims to the public good”(Levien 2013:402). All this is part of the contradictory tasks of the state.

Recent literature examining the role of the states in the global land rush reaffirms the complexity of the state and societal actors within this phenomenon. In some cases, the promotion of agricultural investments linked to the land rush is used to enhance the territorial control of the state, becoming an important part of state-building processes, as it occurs in Ethiopia (Lavers and Boamah 2016). In other cases, like Ghana social actors taking advantage of the momentum re-affirm their authority over land and the state (Ibid). In contexts of violence and conflict like Colombia, the global land rush and its institutional and violent mechanisms of land grabbing are interwoven with the historical processes of state formation and market reconfiguration (Grajales 2013). The linkages between organized violence, land grabbing and the state’s territorialization processes show how crime and violence are not separated elements from political institutions, on the contrary, they are constitutive components of them (Ibid).

In the Latin American context, a possible rural democratization path is marked by the emergence of new political identities in rural areas “to challenge the state and the disadvantageous terms of contemporary citizenship”(Yashar 1998:24). In the case of Colombia, one of these identities is the *cocalero* (coca growers) identity, which has been consolidated through the mobilisation of producers of illicit crops to respond to the criminalisation and stigmatisation by the Colombian state (Ramírez 2001, 2011). Ultimately, *cocaleros* seek to be recognised as Colombian citizens in marginal rural areas (Rojas and Dessein 2019).

Figure 1: 3 Spheres of the social life and land/ commodities rushes



Source: Own-elaboration

These three spheres of social life: climate change politics, labour politics, and the politics of state and citizenship dynamics in Colombia are all intersected by the agrarian structure, characterized by the concentration of land ownership (Ibáñez and Muñoz 2012; Suescún 2011, 2013) and the role of violence in the acceleration of capitalist penetration in the countryside (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas 2015; Kalmanovitz 1981; Thomson 2011). As well as, the existence of the peasantry struggling for the recognition of its rights and forms of production (Salgado Ruiz 2012). Furthermore, the dynamics of land grabbing in

Colombia have involved the arrangement of coalitions with armed groups by the state seeking to obtain territorial control and promote capital accumulation in rural areas (Vargas Reina 2021). Thus, the institutional and violent mechanisms of land grabbing have contributed to the state formation and market reconfiguration processes (Grajales 2013). The transformations of the land rush with these three spheres of social life in Colombia entangle with the effects of the armed conflict, among which are 6,459,501 people forced displaced (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015:16) and as well as reinforcing land concentration, inequality and an exclusionary development model in the rural sector (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2015).

#### **4. Discussion: Integrative perspectives of the global land rush in the Colombian Amazon.**

Land grabbing literature has been prominent in the study of contemporary land politics, especially in the global south. However, prescriptive definitions of land grabbing focused on the land size involved in the deal, the origin of the capital and the negative impact on food security (Gómez 2014) miss complex social and political processes related to land-based social relations and agrarian change trajectories (Borras et al. 2012; White et al. 2012; Zoomers 2010). In turn, the 'control grabbing' perspective (Borras et al. 2012) puts at the heart of the analysis the restructuring dynamics of capital seeking profit. These dynamics include the changes in resource use orientation towards an extractive character for domestic or international purposes, the response of capital to the multiple crises (food, energy and financial), climate change imperatives, and the demand for resources from fresher centres of global capital (Ibid). In the Colombian case, the land and commodities rush conjuncture correspond to the period of 2002 and 2018, and their local specificities are derived from the spatial continuities (Berman-Arévalo and Ojeda 2020) and the interconnected trajectories of socio-spatial change (Hart 2004) in the Orinoco-Amazon corridor. Conjunctural analysis and landscape perspective allows the comprehension of the phenomena in these geographical corridor.

Conjunctural analysis and the use of the tools provided by historical analysis enable us to capture in detail the substantial differences that distinguish a conjuncture from other periods in time. Following this, the current land and commodities rush is a specific moment in world history, with local specificities. In Colombian history, there are similar episodes of rush, such as the rubber rush in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Domínguez and Gómez 1994; Mongua Calderón 2018; Sierra 2011), the coffee boom in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ocampo 2015; Palacios 1983), *'la bonanza marimbera'* (marihuana boom) in the 1970s (Ardila Beltrán, Acevedo Merlano, and Martínez González 2013; Palacio-castro 2017), and more recently the gold rush fueling old social conflicts (Romero 2011).

The contemporary episode of rush in Colombia takes place in the middle of five socio-economic and political processes. First, is the peace agreement between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian state with its political contestations. Second, the withdrawal of FARC troops from remote rural areas and the consolidation of new territorial dynamics with new armed actors interested in seeking territorial control. Third, the production flows of illicit crops and the strategies employed to deactivate illicit economies such as forced eradication, the reactivation of glyphosate fumigation and efforts to defund the peace agreement's substitution programme (De los Rios Jaramillo 2020; Salgado Ruiz 2019). Fourth, is the growth of deforestation rates in protected areas (Clerici et al. 2020; Prem et al. 2020). Fifth, the diminished institutional processes to implement the peace agreement in war-affected rural areas. All of these correspond to simultaneous outcomes of market relations side by side with the deployment of extra-economic coercion by the state (Grajales 2015). These five processes might constitute the distinctive features of the current land and commodity rush in the country. However, these processes do not occur even or at the same pace in the country, there are local particularities linked to the history of the development of different agrarian regions (Fajardo Montaña 1993). These local particularities can be explored from a landscape perspective.

The landscape perspective involves the analysis of the social production of the space (Lefebvre 1984), in the Amazon-Orinoco corridor, this considers the socio-historical fluxes in an agrarian region which connects two ecosystems: the plains in the Orinoquia and the Amazon rainforest. Space is disputed by

multiple forces and actors and consequently, land use is negotiated by the interests of these actors. The changes in land use respond to these conflictive processes. The landscape is the result of everyday struggles over the meaning, use and control of land and resources (Ojeda 2018). In consequence, landscapes are “disputed and unfinished political projects that materialize in concrete assemblages of nature and society” (Ojeda 2018:400).

The Colombian case constitutes a particular process within the broad configurations of the land and commodity rush in which, on the one hand, global demands of land are integrated with climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts (Fairhead et al. 2012), the increase in food production to supply the needs of the world's growing population (Scoones et al. 2019) and the processes of global capital accumulation. These processes affect labour dynamics linked with the increased demand for land required for global production and corporate profit, in which the number of people already partly or fully dispossessed looking for jobs, plus the number of recently expelled people because of the land rush, are far too many for the jobs required in emerging capitalist enterprises in land deals that require far too little labour (Li 2011). In terms of state and citizenship relations, the global land rush challenges the nature of governance and government (Wolford et al. 2013). The state performs a political role in land deals, by applying the state's force to the accumulation process (Levien 2013). At the same time, the global land rush affects the dynamics in which the state builds territorial sovereignty and determines the political identities recognised as citizens, shaping how the state claims authority over people and resources (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). Likewise, the dynamics of the global land rush modify the distribution of rural power, influencing the uneven process of rural democratization and the process of the rural citizenry (Fox 1990).

## 5. Conclusion

This piece has presented an integrative approach to address the interconnections of the politics of climate change, labour and state-citizenship dynamics in the contemporary global land and commodities rush. The approach builds upon conjunctural analysis and landscape perspective to address the structural, institutional and political transformations unleashed by the global land rush. Contrary to other analyses on land grabbing, this approach uses as the unit of inquiry on the global land rush. One implication of this approach is to consider unstudied types of land deals and overcome the focus on corporate pursued land deals and examine other types such as abandoned and below-radar land deals. Front and centre in this approach lie the structuring dynamics of capital accumulation resulting from the outcomes of interactions between global and national dynamics, entities and processes (Borras et al. 2018). In other words, the landscape approach and conjunctural analysis seek to determine the defining features of the conjuncture and the differentiated forms that this conjuncture takes in a place, that is the landscape.

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