

Activism as a peasant: The idea of the "peasant" in the national and transnational collective work of Colombian peasant representatives

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Overview

My project aims to better understand the role of activists who are part of agrarian organizations and who are constantly debating and constructing the meaning of the "peasant" as a differentiated population.

Thus, in this study, I resort to peasant representatives who have been at the forefront of the transnational and national activities held by these organizations in global networks. My purpose, then, is to comprehend how their experience in such political spheres influences how they perceive themselves in accordance with what a peasant "should be" and what an activist should do for his/her community.

Research question

How does working jointly with agrarian movements in national and transnational contexts affect how Colombian peasant leaders conceive their life as peasants and their role as activists representing the interests of other peasants?



Methodology

I have participated in a Colombian research group that focuses on land ownership and movements of rural settlers that were prominent during the 20th century, interviewed peasant leaders from movements that are affiliated with organizations with a global scope, and attended meetings, both online and in person, where issues that affect peasant communities in Colombia were discussed.



Findings

- Friction arises from the conflicting goals of different agrarian organizations and peasant leaders but, instead of remaining in the theoretical dichotomy of Old vs New social movements, it enriches the idea of the "peasant" leading to comprehensive views of the term which include both identity and socioeconomic motivations.
- Peasant leaders both broaden and fix the idea of the "peasant" based on their own life as peasants living in rural contexts and on the ideas they have constructed whilst working as representatives. This determines what they expect from their fellow peasants and from agrarian movements.