

Review of: "Theorizing the Normalization of Plantation Agriculture in Colombia"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I am puzzled about the invitation to review this paper. I have very little familiarity with critical realism, the morphogenetic approach and normalization as concepts or analytical tools. I looked quickly at a couple references and hone in on the ideas of stability and change and structure versus agency. I have some familiarity with innovation theory which could certainly be an alternative framework to analyze the establishment and advance of export avocados in Colombia. I am not sure that I should attempt a review but since I have some notions of land use change in coffee zones, I will provide some comments the degree to which the study captures the extent of avocado expansion.

The author treats avocados as the first evidence of plantationocene, although it is not clear what exactly is a plantation. The traditional landscape of Caldas is already highly intervened with coffee, plantains and livestock. Avocados are a new monocrop, but not necessarily the first monocrop. They represent foreign capital and apparently a greater use of water resources. However, coffee can also be a high input crop and coffee processing plants are a potential source of contamination.

The switch to avocados certainly merits study, but the framework of normalization does not seem to offer many insights. I would like to know which prior land use was converted to avocado. Does this represent a shift from pastures or coffee? What is labor use for avocado production and packing for export? Does this come from urban or rural households? What is labor use for production versus other land uses? Does Hass avocado enter into the national consumption channels? What is the price differential with local avocado varieties which apparently declined? The author provides quotes as evidence, but it would be good to have magnitudes. Are coffee area and production declining? How has technology and productivity been evolving in these more traditional crops?

The water conflicts are mentioned. Could this be that urban areas are growing with an increasing demand for water which enters into conflict with a new land use that needs water quantity and quality.

The expansion of avocado from 0 to 2500 hectares in less than 10 years seems impressive, but what area does this represent of total land area in the municipality? What is the land use dynamic in the other crops?

I guess it is quite clear from my comments that I am more interested in the case study than in the hybrid theory that the author seeks.

In my scoring I am stuck between two and three. The paper marshals extensive literature and multiple conceptual frameworks. I found the diagrams a bit simplistic, but perhaps because I am not versed in the theoretical fields. The

description of the evolution of the Hass plantations as a general introduction covers lots of dimensions. However, the new normal does not cover anything but Hass plantations. In fact the future of Hass plantations may depend on neighboring land uses which do not change. Land uses are of low productivity may provide the sources of labor for plantation management, harvesting or packing.