

Turning Land into Capital. Historical Conjunctures of the (Re-)Production of Wealth in Latin America from the 19th to the 21st Century

Initiative: Perspektiven auf Reichtum: (Aus-)Wirkungen von Reichtum

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In recent decades, wealth inequality has risen considerably around the world. This can especially be observed in Latin America, a region whose post-colonial background manifests in structures of extreme inequality to the present day and where land ownership remains a crucial vector for the (re)production of wealth. This project aims to conceptualize the importance of land-concentration for the reproduction of wealth in a historical perspective by asking what role land has played in different epochs for the generation and maintenance of wealth in Latin America. The project focuses on the two most important historical conjunctions of the concentration of land in the hands of wealthy elites which have created the basis for today's unequal (re-)production of wealth: the period from the 1860s to the World Economic Crisis of 1929 and the period from the 1980s to the 2020s, often referred to as the second and third conquest, respectively. This allows the project in a synthetic way (a) to identify general mechanisms as well as types of practices, discourses, and social patterns, (b) to carve out regional and historical differences, and (c) to highlight transformations, ruptures, and sometimes contradictory developments, in order to understand how land is turned into different forms of capital in social, cultural, and politically legitimized ways. The project looks beyond the mere economic dimension of land-concentration to explore its political, social, and cultural aspects by: analysing (1) the socio-cultural values attached to land (ownership) (cultures of wealth), (2) the entanglements between landowners and the political sphere (political constellations), and (3) the forms and perceptions of the ecological transformation of landscapes associated with extreme concentration of land ownership. With this approach, the project highlights the importance of land-grabbing and landownership for the genealogy and the reproduction of wealth, respectively, in Latin America and beyond.

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