

Chapter 7

Dispossession of Land Cultures: Women and Property Tenure Among Lowcountry Heirs in the Gullah Geechee Corridor

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examined and presents the results of a heuristic and arts-based research and ongoing critical review of the Lowcountry heirs' property ownership and the recurrent generational challenges, governmental influences, and tourism impact on land dispossession and retention along the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. In critically investigating this phenomenon of land dispossession, this study relied on Leavy's concept of coherence as it assessed the paucity of contemporaneous narratives of voices of women landowners. Land tenure, voice and land dispossession, freedom as ownership, and the culture of home/place are also explored as the legacy of the African diaspora, specifically among women landowners.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5079-2.ch007

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of the African diaspora specific to contemporary heirs' property owners across the Lowcountry and specifically among the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) remains a complex sociocultural and sociopolitical inheritance. Challenges to the culture have been expounded further by contemporary power dynamics from the tourism economy, past and present imperialist viewpoints, revisionist histories, land-water relationships, forestry cultivation and retention, past and present cotton economy, and indigenous land dispossession. Distinctions have been drawn between the aggregated Gullah/Geechee (GG) culture as unique cultural aspects of groups that parallel West African origins for the pre- and post-emancipated as well as for contemporary Sea islanders and those within state inland areas along the GGCHC (Boley & Gaither, 2016; Gaither, 2016; Huggins, Sun, & Davidson, 2018; Throne, 2016). Interest in heritage tourism has also increased exponentially among the Sea Islands especially due to water views and access to urban homes (Moore, 2017) expounding challenges among heirs' property owners and preservation of land-based culture and value systems.

The current scholarship surrounding the ongoing legacy of land and voice dispossession among these descendants and heirs' property ownership, including the study findings presented in this chapter, were reviewed with a lens of feminist theory, fidelity of researcher positionality, and ancillary gendered perspectives (Blakely, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Explication of the current research into women Lowcountry landowners is also presented among the broader context of the ongoing Lowcountry heirs' property challenges along the GGCHC. While the GGCHC Commission has noted gender equity, specifically the equitable reference for the vision of both women and men, is an area of scholarly analysis (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, 2012). Nonetheless, studies with respect to gender and the lived experiences of GG women specific to voice and land dispossession among islanders remain incomplete (Troutman & Johnson, 2018).

In this chapter, a comparison/contrast is offered for two forms of data representation that resulted from a critical inquiry and heuristic examination of the contemporaneous archival narratives gathered during the Port Royal Experiment: a scholarly journal article and an arts-based research (ABR) allegorical novella. The chapter offers a discussion of the use of the concepts of allegory, metaphor, and coherence to appraise a paucity of female perspectives for Lowcountry heirs' property tenure and challenges, land dispossession, and the resulting voice dispossession of descendants of those former slaves, specifically those brought to the Sea Islands from West Africa and subsequently emancipated in the first year of the United States Civil War under the Port Royal Experiment (Rose, 1964; Ochiai, 2001)¹.

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