



## **TABULA RASA N° 41 (DECEMBER, 2021)**

### **The Colombian Pacific and Black Communities after the signing of the Peace Agreement: contributions to the field of Afro-Colombian studies**

#### **Guest Editor:**

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The importance of analytical categories, such as territoriality and identity to understand the dynamics around cultural creation among Black, rural and riparian communities in Colombia's Pacific region has been highlighted in the field of Afro-Colombian studies. In this field, the historiographic approach to the study of the Pacific has delved into the historic-demographic dynamics of dwelling and mobility in Black communities and territories in the colonial and republican eras. However, beginning in the 1990s, studies, particularly from the field of anthropology, have driven a significant debate around the varied forms of political and organizational mobilization black communities have exerted in the Pacific—a part of the territorial exercise of gaining recognition as an ethnic group with well-defined territories and cultures. In this context, the relationship between territoriality and Black communities is not conceived as a harmonic one. On the contrary, we intend to show through

analysis how natural settings —rivers, mangroves, forests, and shores, which is a constituent element in these communities’ identities and territories— are also contributing to shape spaces of representation and/or resistance, where communities fight past and ongoing violence looming all over the region, including social inequalities, exclusion and structural racism.

In the last two decades, studies on the Colombian Pacific region have been seen a shift toward the construction of analytical, political and theoretical categories revolving around social and cultural changes in the Pacific, as a consequence of armed conflict. Such categories as ‘forced displacement,’ ‘looting,’ ‘resistance,’ ‘armed violence,’ and ‘exile’ are now a part of the theoretical and methodological discussion in the study of Black communities and territories. Strategically located and socially vulnerable, the Pacific region is increasingly seeing the presence of armed groups such as the FARC-EP guerrillas, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and criminal groups, who wage an armed dispute over territorial dominance and control of coca-growing areas, as well as land and sea routes for drug trafficking. This dominance results in forced displacement of people and entire communities fleeing their territories to save their lives. Hundreds of thousands of displaced people have arrived in other cities in the country looking for refuge, while others have crossed national borders fleeing to Ecuador or Panamá. In this way, the spatiality of the Pacific region —a region that has been organized by Black communities at geographical, social, political and economic levels as collective territories of ethnic identities— has progressively become what Ulrich Olsender has called a “geography of terror.”

In 2016 the Final Peace Agreement was signed between the government of former president Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP. This agreement was seemingly

opening a new era that would have put an end to more than 50 years of armed conflict. However, the country is witnessing persisting violence associated to the strengthening of armed groups, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), drug cartels, criminal gangs, neo-paramilitary groups, FARC dissidents (guerrilla fighters who did not accept the Peace Agreement) and groups of ex-commanders who recently announced their decision to resume armed struggle. This escalation of armed conflict particularly is catastrophic not only for Black communities' social-territorial fabric, but also for their political mobilization agendas, as there is a constant threat to their territorial and cultural rights as an ethnic group. After the signing of the Agreements, this region has endured distinct types of violence (land and territorial dispossession, intensive exploitation of natural resources, socio-environmental conflicts) that are linked to the extractive and agro-industrial economies in various Pacific territories, including gold mining, African palm growing, logging, and extensive stock-farming.

The growing presence of organized crime in this region is not only involved in the productive chain of drug trafficking (coca growing and cocaine processing and trafficking), but also in the exploitation of natural resources, such as gold, silver, and platinum deposits, and hydrocarbons sources (oil and coal). These economies are used as a means of financing illicit activities and as a means to increase power and to further exacerbate the dispute over the control of land, territories and populations. On the other hand, the government returning to aerial fumigation with glyphosate, as part of their policy to tackle drug trade, has been received with rejection from Black communities in the Pacific, as spraying over homes and territories has affected health, the environment and agricultural goods in these communities.

Add to this the targeted murders of social leaders promoting crop substitution and land claims, socio-environmental conflicts, new waves of internal forced

displacement and migration beyond national borders (Ecuador and Chile are the top host countries for population displaced from the Pacific), forced recruitment of children and teenagers by old and emerging illegal armed groups in the aftermath of the Peace Agreement interrogate current studies on the Pacific, demanding to rethink and put forward new theoretical and methodological approaches with and near Black communities and territories.

This thematic issue aims to open critical theoretical debate to contribute to the understanding of armed conflict, displacements, forced migrations, as well as the emergence of armed and economic and socio-environmental violence that looms over Black communities and territories in the Pacific after the signing of the peace agreement. Considering the new waves of forced displacements, such as the ones that have occurred in the municipality of Tumaco, we invite scholars to reflect on the transit and destination routes of displaced Black people and communities, as well as possible ramifications between the displacements produced by war and displacements coexisting with economic development policies implemented in the region. What would be their logic of articulation and how do they favor accumulation in capitalism by dispossession? It will be important to analyze how those displacements move to give rise to new territorialities in precarious geographies that are deeply imbricated in historic dynamics of marginality and disposability produced by the Colombian nation-state.

A central issue will be the reflection upon how turning shores and rivers into mere routes for drug trafficking, and land and territories into mere targets for natural resource mining. How do drug trafficking and extractive economies appropriate Black communities' spatiality, turning them into instrumental spaces for capital development? A nodal point in the Final Peace Agreement is land peace. What are the implications of this concept in the Pacific? How is the implementation of peace

prioritized in the context of escalating war? What types of individual and collective agencies are Black communities building in their claims for the implementation of the Peace Agreement? What are the theoretical and methodological challenges when studying Black communities' territories, identities and social and organizational movements in a post-conflict scenario?

**Topics of interest:**

1. Peace agreements, transitional justice and territorial peace
2. Forced displacement and transnational migrations
3. Region, borders, exodus and refuge
4. Youth and childhood in armed conflict
5. Dispossession, coloniality and capital
6. Human rights, activism and social organization
7. Social leaders and defenders of land, territory and environment
8. Geographies of dispossession, confinements and new territorialities
9. Geographical landscapes and socio-environmental conflicts
10. Substitution of illicit crops
11. Forced eradication of illicit crops and fumigation with glyphosate
12. Old and new actors of armed conflict
13. Racial violence, humanitarian crisis and land securitization
14. Control regimes and processes for legalization and illegalization of displaced persons and migrants
15. Methods for fieldwork in violent contexts

For further information or to submit your complete manuscript, including the abstract (in English or Spanish), please contact Angela Yesenia Olaya Requene ([yesenia-olaya@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:yesenia-olaya@fas.harvard.edu))

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