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INTRODUCTION



Land, justice, and memory: challenges for peace in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

In this introduction, the editors present the seven articles that constitute this special issue on Colombia. They explain the context of the war that has wracked the country for more than 50 years and highlight the central themes that connect the articles. This essay also analyzes how the 2016 accord between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) aims to address the causes of the conflict so as to establish a durable peace with justice. The essay then looks at the challenges ahead for the implementation of the agreement. Issues of rural inequality, displacement, impunity, the illegal drug economy, the military, private armed groups, new social demands, innovative memory projects, and the changing role of the state are discussed. The bibliography provides a guide to some of the best Colombian literature on the armed conflict, its impact, and possible outcomes of the peace process.

RESUMEN

En esta introducción, los editores presentan los siete artículos que hacen parte de este número especial sobre Colombia. Los editores explican el contexto de la guerra que ha devastado este país durante más de 50 años y subrayan temas comunes que conectan los artículos. El ensayo también analiza cómo el acuerdo de paz logrado en 2016 busca reconocer las causas del conflicto con el fin de establecer una paz duradera con justicia. El ensayo también examina los desafíos que supone la implementación del acuerdo. Conflictos de desigualdad rural, desplazamiento, impunidad, la economía de las drogas, el aspecto militar, los grupos armados privados, nuevas demandas sociales, innovadores proyectos de memoria y el cambiante rol del estado son todos temas discutidos en este texto. La bibliografía proporciona una guía a la mejor literatura colombiana sobre el conflicto armado, sus impactos y los posibles resultados del acuerdo de paz.

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Colombia. Fifty years of war: 260,000 dead, more than 60,000 disappeared, 7 million people displaced.¹ After decades of fighting, a peace accord between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government signed in late September 2016 and two weeks later rejected in a plebiscite when 50.2% of voters voted

against it. Great shock on all sides at this result; a scurry of renegotiating taking into account the “No” vote’s objections, and finally a revised peace accord approved by Colombia’s Congress on 24 November 2016. Two weeks later President Juan Manuel Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. By March 2017, more than 7000 FARC guerrillas had moved from their bases of support in 242 municipalities across 11 regions of the country to 26 rural “zones of concentration” where they began to disarm under United Nations supervision. On 27 June 2017, the FARC completed the process of disarmament. The oldest and largest of the Latin American guerrilla movements no longer exists: the FARC has turned itself into a new political party.² And the weapons destroyed will be soldered into three massive monuments in memory of the war, one to be placed in Bogotá, one in Havana, where the 4 years of peace negotiations took place, and one in New York City, before the United Nations.

The articles in this special issue help us to understand major, longstanding challenges around land, justice and memory facing Colombians today. Those working for the implementation of the peace accord continue to confront inequality, dispossession, impunity, and the stigmatization of social mobilizing. These problems have of course been present throughout the Colombian armed conflict. Broader peacemaking and democratization efforts on the part of Black, Indigenous, peasant, women and other popular movements across Colombia are imperiled by the expansion of illegal economies and the advance of new forms of paramilitary violence that paradoxically occurred simultaneously with the negotiation process.

Underlying issues in Colombia’s peace accord

International reporting on the Colombian peace accord tends to focus on the FARC guerrillas and the terms under which they will demobilize, disarm, and turn themselves into a political party with full rights to participate in elections and, more broadly, in civilian politics. The peace accord, though, is meant to do much more: it intends to address the basic socio-economic and political causes of the conflict. At the outset of negotiations with the FARC in 2012, the Colombian government stated categorically that it would not negotiate the country’s economic or social model. But the final peace accord advocates important reforms to address the underlying reasons for the conflict. Here we emphasize those aspects of the accord meant to address inequality in land distribution, the persistence of the illegal economy, and threats to social and political participation.

Colombians continue to experience extreme inequality in terms of land and income insecurity, linked to pervasive practices of dispossession, and tensions between peasants and cattle ranchers and, in more recent years, mining corporations and agribusinesses. The central government has displayed a bias against small producers in its development plans and policies, favoring large landowners. The articles in this special issue highlight not only how the state views the peasantry, but also how poor rural people experience and perceive the state. The first chapter of the Colombian peace accord, titled “Integral Rural Reform”, aims to address the above issues: indeed, the Colombian accord is unusual in its explicit focus on rural poverty and social tension. The peace accord seeks to strengthen the state’s role as guarantor of property rights for both small and large producers and to provide security and higher living standards for peasant farmers. The

Colombian government has never before undertaken genuine land reform, nor had a clear picture of who owns what rural land and which land is part of the public domain. The stated goal now is to carry out the first agrarian census in 50 years, to actualize the land registry, to recognize the holdings of the 50% of Colombian peasants who have no titles to their fields, and to create a “land fund” for the free redistribution of at least 3 million hectares to poor peasants and agricultural workers over a 10-year period. Colombia has also promised to provide roads, schools, health clinics, credit and agricultural extension to rural communities.³ Also, the prior program of land restitution meant to redress victims’ experiences of dispossession, as laid out by the *Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras* of 2011, will continue through 2020.

A second issue highlighted by these articles is the persistence and the mutability of the illegal drug economy. Since the aerial fumigation of coca fields ended in October 2015, the area devoted to the cultivation of coca in Colombia has continued to expand. In February 2017, reports from the United Nations indicated that the number of acres devoted to coca more than doubled from 2012 through 2016.⁴ Current estimates put the amount of land dedicated to coca production at 188,000 hectares.⁵ Chapter Four of the accord on “Illicit Drugs” stipulates that coca plantations in former FARC-held zones are to be eradicated manually and that the government will implement major crop substitution programs to enable peasants to transition out of coca production. The government is to provide support and aid with marketing the new, legal crops to ensure that former *cocaleros* do not lose their livelihoods. Once the coca is eradicated, settlers in these regions are supposed to receive land titles. Furthermore, in the oral depositions of FARC commanders mandated by the Special Peace Jurisdiction (JEP) established by the peace accord, the guerrilla have agreed to provide the government with all the information they have on drug processing and trafficking in their regions and beyond.

A third issue highlighted by these articles is that of stigmatization and criminalization of whole sectors of the Colombian population, a feature of the war that is deeply tied to the elevated figures of impunity in the country (CNMH [Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica] 2014). Because, from the 1980s on, coca cultivation and the guerrilla presence coincided in many areas, entire regions of Colombia were stigmatized by the government, the elites and many urban residents as illegal, threatening, outlaw spaces. This played into historical racist imaginaries of the lowlands – that is places of Indigenous or Afro-Colombian or mixed-race people – as wild, dangerous regions as compared with the modern, civilized Colombian coffee society centered in the highlands and temperate zones (UNDP 2003; Serje 2011). To understand stigmatization in Colombia, it is important to take into account the workings of the Colombian political party system and its relation to social movements. Formed in the 19th century, the Conservatives and Liberals, multi-class formations led by elites, endured as virtually the only political parties until the 1990s. New social groups that emerged in the 1960s and after had difficulty finding political channels of expression for their concerns; indeed in Colombia there was a long-standing tradition of defining social contestation as a violation of public order and essentially criminal (LeGrand 2013; González Jácome 2015; van Isschot 2015).

Left-wing parties and new civil society organizations that took form during the time of conflict were often stigmatized by the military and even national political leaders and

local elites as guerrilla supporters. Women's, peasant, Indigenous, Afro-Colombian, human rights organizations and labor unions were frequently threatened and attacked by the paramilitaries (Tate 2007; van Isschot 2015). Illegal violence against activists by members of the Armed Forces included arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances and selective assassinations, as well as providing support for paramilitary actions. This was particularly the tendency during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–2010), who equated protest with armed subversion. So it was practically impossible to develop a vital legal left in Colombia that could spearhead social change in dialogue with the rest of Colombian society, capable of bringing about the reforms necessary for an enduring peace. The oft-frustrated struggle to construct a more equal society characteristic of Latin America is, in the case of Colombia, deeply entangled with political and institutional crisis and conflict (Segura and Bejarano 2004).

The persistence of stigmatization and massive violations of human rights are intimately tied to impunity and the inefficacy of the justice system. In 2013, the final report of Colombia's *Grupo de Memoria Histórica* titled *¡Basta Ya!* cited rates of impunity of nearly 95% for reported homicides between 2005 and 2009 and associated this impunity with the massive numbers of violent crimes during the previous two decades.⁶ Impunity, the report highlighted, had been one of the major factors in the escalation of the war and one of the major grievances in the memory of the victims (GMH 2013). This pattern of impunity starkly reveals the precariousness of the justice system, manifested too in intimidation and multiple attacks against judicial officials investigating violations of human rights.⁷

The Colombian peace accord explicitly addresses stigmatization, exclusion and the weakness of judicial institutions. Chapter Five of the accord on "Victims and Justice" creates a comprehensive system of judicial and extrajudicial mechanisms to address victims' rights to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition. According to the *Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y No Repetición*, FARC members and military officers accused of crimes against humanity will not receive amnesty or pardon. Those who have committed serious crimes and acknowledge responsibility can be sentenced to periods of "restriction of liberty" of between 5 and 8 years. Those who do not acknowledge their responsibility will be investigated and prosecuted in criminal proceedings. If found guilty, they will receive ordinary sanctions and prison terms of 15–20 years. Furthermore, Chapter Two of the accord, which focuses on political participation, commits Congress to pass a special statute that will assure all political parties and social organizations of their right to exist, to stand in opposition, and to enjoy security. This chapter also provides such organizations with funding and access to communication media to enable them to compete with established parties. The aim is that this will help end the marginalization of progressive organizations and parties, that it will create an opening for civic interaction, competition and dialogue in a more pluralistic and inclusive political system.

What of the outlying regions that have historically been considered peripheries of the country, and have had no political voice? How is political, social and economic participation to be assured for stigmatized regions, for former *cocaleros*, Afro-Colombians and Indigenous people, and other peasants living there? The process of popular mobilization for citizenship and political autonomy that is going on in many places in Colombia today, notably in the case of the *paro cívico* lasting more than three

weeks in mid 2017 in and around the Pacific port city of Buenaventura, is crucial to the construction of peace, participation and democracy “*desde los territorios*”, a major theme of the new peace accord (Planeta Paz 2017). Historic and current regional social movements raise the issue of building channels of communication – and a new institutionality – to connect distant, poor rural areas to the state in ways that provide political voice and socio-economic benefits. It often has been said that the Colombian state is weak and has no effective justice presence, only a repressive one, in the outlying regions of the country that in recent years have been the most conflictive.⁸ These are mainly regions of the expansion of the agrarian frontier where resource development (such as oil, oil palm and wood exploitation, cattle ranching and all forms of mining) is occurring and where local elites, neo-paramilitaries and, until recently, guerrillas exercised greater power than the central government.

In recent years, Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and mestizo peasants have increased demands for recognition of their collective territories and the dispossession suffered,⁹ for economic and cultural rights and for a measure of self-government that may help them in their negotiations with the Colombian government and other sectors of society.¹⁰ This is part of the *reordenamiento territorial* or re-ordering of national space that began with the progressive Colombian Constitution of 1991 and that is occurring through the interaction of legal initiatives and popular movements. The Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) was legally constituted in 1993 at the time of the passing of Law 70 “In Recognition of the Right of Black Colombians to Collectively Own and Occupy their Ancestral Lands”. It is precisely these movements for land claims and recuperation that suffered during the war: land theft, displacement and dispossession, and assassination and forced disappearances of their leaders. The peace accord recognizes the victims of the war, many of whom now live as displaced people in urban areas and others of whom still reside in the peripheral zones, in addition to the more than one million who have taken refuge in other countries. Colombia has stated its intention to bring the outlying areas into the nation by focusing state investment for change in such regions, and by guaranteeing these regions seats in Congress for 8 years, from 2018 until 2026.

Another issue of central importance in Colombia highlighted by the editors of this special issue is historical memory and the role it has played for many different groups, at the local and national levels, in endeavoring to make sense of the conflict and to bring justice and reconciliation. In their struggles for recognition and justice and against impunity, survivors and grassroots movements have sought historical clarification on the responsibility and repertoires of violence used against them and their communities. One of the most important points raised by the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH)¹¹ is the fact that Colombians have undertaken many non-official and community-based memory projects in the midst of armed conflict. They have engaged with the past as a means of transforming and resolving conflict and as a way to defy silence and indifference about the impacts and the legacies of the war. Memory work in Colombia became a way to confront oppression and serious violations of human rights through the numerous initiatives that began to emerge around the 1970s to document violent events, honor the victims, and call for truth-telling and the attribution of responsibility for the atrocities committed.¹²

Intellectuals have also contributed to historical memory projects since the creation, in 1958, of a governmental commission to study the causes and dynamics of the internal civil war known as *La Violencia* (1948–1958) and, later, with the 1987 Comisión de Estudios sobre la Violencia. The Colombian historians and social scientists who participated in the latter government-initiated study became known as “*violentólogos*”. More recently, the creation of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica in 2008, its successor the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica in 2011, and later, in 2015, the Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico, appointed as part of the peace negotiations, further produced historical memory accounts and analyses of the war in the country.¹³

Current social tensions and debates around the peace accord are shaped by social memory, and vice versa. One feature of highly divided and fractured societies is the dispute over the past itself. Memory does not simply emerge after the violence has been perpetrated or after a violent period, but is a critical social expression that informs how the conflicts themselves unfold. Memory is embedded in the ways in which various institutions and social groups consider how they can live together again and the possibilities and obstacles for reconciliation. This has become evident in Colombia in the past decades with the explosion of autobiographical retellings of kidnapping and violence and in the diverse memory projects advanced by institutions and social groups as diverse as Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio,¹⁴ the Proceso de Comunidades Negras,¹⁵ military and police museums,¹⁶ and even the memory books of the cattle ranchers’ association.¹⁷

Chapter Five of the peace accord on “Victims and Justice” acknowledges the centrality of memory and historical clarification by creating an independent and impartial mechanism for truth-telling – the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission – which should begin to function in 2018. The binary between conflict and post-conflict and the questions of reconciliation and forgiveness are at the heart of the dilemma facing Colombians today, in light of a recent uptick in violence against social activists and leaders of land restitution, by most counts in 2016–17 the highest levels in decades (ORDPA 2017).

The “challenges for peace” conference and this special issue

As the war ground on in January 2015, but as advances in the peace negotiations gave reason for optimism, and a year after the Grupo de Memoria Histórica published its comprehensive final report *¡Basta Ya!* on the causes of the war, the protagonists and the impact of the conflict, four Colombianists teaching in Canada convened a conference on “Land, Memory and Justice: Challenges for Peace in Colombia” at the University of Toronto.¹⁸ We (Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, Ana María Bejarano, Luis van Isschot and Catherine LeGrand) wanted to bring together social scientists and historians concerned with Colombia from universities in Canada and the USA and some of the top observers on Colombia from Washington DC to share their understandings. We also invited two leading researchers from the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica in Bogotá to present the 400-page *¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memories of War and Dignity* in Canada. The public meeting to launch *¡Basta Ya!*, which drew more than 200 people, featured a critical and moving presentation by wayuu anthropologist and community leader

Weidler Guerra who spoke on Indigenous perspectives on peace-making, which is a practice of wayuu ancestral knowledge.

This special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* is composed of seven articles that come out of this conference. The articles are based on research conceptualized and carried out by a diverse group of senior and emerging scholars, all of whom have worked in the academic, activist and public policy spheres in the years immediately preceding the peace accord. The articles address the inter-related questions of land, justice, memory, the impacts of war, and prospects for peace in Colombia. They offer a multi-disciplinary analysis of some of the complexities of these questions in the recent past and the present, and thus contribute to the understanding of difficult issues Colombia faces in the effort to bring peace with social justice

The articles

The first article, by leading development economist **Albert Berry**, is an essay reflecting on how violence, injustice and inequality limit economic growth in rural Colombia. Berry defines the problem of inequitable agrarian structures in Colombia as a major root cause of the past decades of violence and therefore at the heart of any solution. The FARC was a peasant guerrilla movement strong in frontier regions, which have been wracked by conflicts over public lands (*tierras baldías*) between settlers without titles and large landowners (Saffón Sanín 2015; LeGrand 2016; CNMH 2016). Since the mid-1960s the FARC defended a peasant path to development. In the 1980s, anti-guerrilla, right-wing paramilitaries were formed with the support of local elites, narco-traffickers, cattle ranchers and members of the Armed Forces in Antioquia and the Caribbean coastal department of Córdoba, who sought to expropriate peasants and consolidate large landholdings. What ensued in many areas of the country where paramilitary groups sought to establish territorial control was a kind of counter-agrarian reform.

In analyzing the impact of land expropriation on violence and peasant livelihoods, Berry is concerned with the weakness of civilian state institutions' responses to the rural poor. Colombian researchers have detailed the mechanisms of expropriation through violence, as well as various underhanded legal ploys carried out by regional elites in cahoots with corrupt notaries (Reyes Posada 2016a; *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 2016; Gutiérrez Sanín and Vargas Reina 2016). This is the phenomenon Berry refers to as "land theft": it occurred on a large scale and was one of the most important factors in the massive displacement of the rural poor. The result, Berry argues, was, on the one hand, the expansion of cattle ranches and agribusinesses devoted to oil palm, and, on the other, peasant insecurity, loss of income, a crisis in food production, and increasing inequality in the countryside from the 1990s on. In endeavoring to explain chronic violence in the countryside and its impact, Albert Berry emphasizes the centrality of distributional issues. Berry thus provides an essential overview for understanding the next articles.

Historian **Robert Karl**'s article about government policy towards the displaced and dispossessed raises the question of continuities and changes between *La Violencia* (1948–1958) and the second period of internal war (which some date to 1964 and others to the 1980s). From what we know, during *La Violencia*, 180,000 people died, mostly in rural

areas, and 2 million were displaced from their land. In the second period, as noted above, the figures are at least 260,000 dead and 7 million displaced. Robert Karl's article proposes that we see *La Violencia* of the 1950s not simply as a conflict between the Conservative and Liberal parties, but as a struggle over property and dispossession. A major contribution of Karl's work is to silhouette the important interlude of the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Conservative and Liberal parties came to the National Front agreement to end the war between them (Karl 2017). Whereas this agreement usually has been viewed critically for creating a restricted democracy that inhibited the political expression of new social groups, Karl takes a different perspective. Through a regional study of peace-making in coffee-producing areas at the end of *La Violencia*, Karl encourages us to think about the possibilities of land restitution as a mechanism of transitional justice and of "conciliation" (the word was used in the 1960s; it is also used today).

The assessment of land restitution efforts during the 1960s is of current relevance in light of the fact that at the beginning of the Santos presidency, Colombia's Congress passed the *Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras* (Law 1448 of 2011). This law articulates the right of those victimized by the violence of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries or state forces to receive restitution from the state. Displaced peasants have the right to receive their land back, and the law mandated the creation of a new set of institutions to be located in the regions to examine property claims and ensure displaced people's rights (Reyes Posada 2016a, 379–92). This law was important in bringing the FARC to Havana: it helped convince the guerrilla leadership that the Santos government was serious in recognizing the reality of the war and in seeking a negotiated peace. Robert Karl's article, which makes use of legal and judicial records to write socio-political history, reveals how the state's brief effort to bring justice to people who had lost land during *La Violencia* by creating *Tribunales de Conciliación y Equidad* may have created new positive rural perceptions of the state. Karl also shows the debility of the state's effort when, in 1961, after only 18 months in operation, the Conciliation and Equity Tribunals suddenly were terminated.

The articles by Berry and Karl together facilitate an understanding of the interweaving of land dispossession and impunity as key factors in maintaining and escalating a long-standing conflict. Other articles in this special issue detail the proliferation of coercive, informal and illegal mechanisms that maintain impunity over serious violations of human rights and how this has been a historical feature of the violence in Colombia going back to the 1950s.

Political scientist **Philippe Dufort**'s article explains changes over time in Colombian military leaders' ideologies and counter-insurgency strategies and how they understood the causes of war, through the 20th century. Dufort's findings are based on extensive interviews with military commanders and fieldwork at the Superior School of War. In Colombia, in contrast to the Southern Cone, the Cold War did not precipitate military dictatorship, but the issue of national security was central for the military, particularly because Colombia's Armed Forces were in fact fighting left-wing guerrillas for more than five decades. Dufort raises as a key issue the influence of the US military in Colombian counter-insurgency thinking, and relations between the military as an institution and Colombia's civilian government. In the wake of *La Violencia* and the Cuban Revolution, the United States became directly involved in Latin American counter-insurgency. John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress promoted aid programs

in Colombia and across the region, rooted in European and liberal-capitalist ideas of progress that were supposed to improve the lives of rural people and thus forestall the spread of revolution. These influences encouraged the emergence in Colombia of a new group of reformist military officers who saw the root causes of internal war in socio-economic inequality; they advocated civic-military action to bring roads, schools, and hospitals to rural areas and even espoused agrarian reform. Sidelined in a dispute with the nation's president, the reformers were replaced by officers Dufort labels "the hardliners" who were determined to win the war "against the communist insurgents", and pushed for a different kind of military-civilian cooperation: the arming of civilians in "self-defense" groups to inform on and attack guerrillas and their collaborators in their areas. Thus Dufort's article sheds important light on the pre-history and history of paramilitaries in Colombia as one of the counter-insurgency strategies that emerged out of both the Colombian military and local constellations of power in the regions.¹⁹

Anthropologist **María Clemencia Ramírez** studies peasants who openly assert their identity as coca producers and who, at present, are trying to negotiate a new relationship with the state. Her article highlights the consequences for peasant communities of security strategies developed in cooperation with the United States under the rubric of counternarcotics. In the regions of Putumayo and Catatumbo, where more than 35 years ago the FARC was already established and mestizo settlers became coca growers, Ramírez focuses on the social movements of *cocaleros* who are taking a proactive role in seeking state and societal recognition as "victims" of the war, as citizens, and as autonomous political actors. Well-known for her study of the Colombian *cocalero* movement of the 1990s (Ramírez 2011), in this article María Clemencia Ramírez brings her study of coca-producing smallholders to the present, shedding light on recent initiatives of the *cocaleros* of Putumayo and Catatumbo, and, beyond this, on the nature and logic of peasant movements in Colombia today, and the ways that movements such as the *cocaleros* redefine citizenship and political participation.

Ramírez sheds light on changes in peasant forms of organization, strategies, and discourses that came out of changes in the political context. She shows how peasants in marginalized, stigmatized rural zones actively are seeking a new relationship with the Colombian state, recognition as political actors with visibility and voice, and influence on the formulation of local sustainable development policies, including what to do about drug crops. These peasants seek an end to their exclusion and criminalization, acknowledgment that they are not pawns of the FARC, recognition as Colombian citizens with the right to shape the conditions in which they live and as victims of the war and the drug economy and therefore legitimate subjects of reparation. According to Ramírez, three state initiatives – President Álvaro Uribe's negotiations with and demobilization of the paramilitaries (2003–2006), the Victims' Law of 2011, and the subsequent 4 years of negotiations with the FARC (2012–2016) – opened political space that made possible the resurgence of local and regional peasant organizations. Beginning in the 1990s such social movements had been repressed by the militarization (and paramilitarization) of the countryside reinforced by Plan Colombia, and escalated by President Uribe, that labeled progressive political parties and social and human rights organizations as guerrilla sympathizers and "terrorists".

The opening of the demobilization process with the paramilitaries and peace negotiations with the guerrillas and the long struggle for justice amongst social movements promoted a new emphasis on the “victims” of conflict.²⁰ A new political language of “truth”, “justice”, “reparation”, and “reconciliation” came to the fore, which undergirded new interpretations of the war and of possible paths to peace. Peasants in outlying regions adopted these themes and this discourse in seeking government recognition and inclusion. The *cocaleros* argued they were not delinquents, but instead victims: victims of the war, the violence of aerial fumigation, and government abandonment. Peasant organizations succeeded in bringing government representatives to regional *mesas de negociación* where the peasants demanded a say in determining what to do about illegal coca production and also in what large-scale projects or foreign investments could be enacted on their lands (the right of *consulta previa*). Peasant groups have protested the encroachment of illegal mining, but also sought government aid in building roads, marketing legal crops, and building schools and health clinics. The government often did not fulfill the terms of the regional accords that came out of these talks, but the peasants have continued pressuring.

In seeking to assert a *campesino* identity, with social, cultural, and political rights, mestizo peasants looked to their Indigenous and Afro-Colombian compatriots: the right not just to land, but to collective “territories” with social and cultural rights and a certain self-governance independent of the *municipios* in which they are located, has become part of the language of redress and rights in Colombia. For mestizo peasants, this involved the formation of “*zonas de reserva campesina*” (ZRCs), first defined by Law 160 of 1994. Regional peasant associations also came together in larger groupings: the Congreso de los Pueblos and the Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular, among the most important, and to hold national protests such as the Marchas Campesinas of 2013, 2014, and 2016 (Celis 2016). Challenges associated with living together and sustaining peace make necessary learning from other experiences and worldviews. A first consideration, as articulated in the demands for recognition, autonomy, and participation of Indigenous, Black, peasant, and women’s social movements in the negotiation of the peace agreement with the FARC, is the acknowledgment that there is a history of grassroots-led peace initiatives and an accumulated knowledge and wisdom on peace-making.

Geographer **Alex Huezo** leads us to focus on the War on Drugs from the point of view of the mainly Afro-Colombian peasants of the Pacific region. As it played out from 1999 until 2015 in the form of the US-supported Plan Colombia, the War on Drugs was also a counter-insurgency program. Initially negotiated by Colombian president Andrés Pastrana and Bill Clinton in the United States, Plan Colombia pumped nearly \$10 billion into the country over a decade and a half, making Colombia the third most important recipient of US military assistance, after Israel and Egypt (Tate 2015). As part of the War on Drugs, Plan Colombia targeted the producers of coca, who, in the main, were smallholding peasants. This massive influx of foreign military aid coincided with President Álvaro Uribe’s determination to expand the Colombian Armed Forces so as to defeat the FARC guerrillas. Meanwhile peasant producers of coca were doubly stigmatized as criminals for growing illegal crops and for supposedly sympathizing with the guerrillas. FARC’s bases of support included coca-producing *colonos* in frontier regions in the southwest lowlands and other peripheral areas of the country. The two

municipios Alex Huezo studies on the Pacific coast are more recent areas of coca production.²¹ here the coca was introduced after the organization of a Black social movement in the early 1990s known as the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN).

Alex Huezo studies the contradictory understandings of security and environmental conservation articulated, on the one hand, by the Colombian and US agencies charged with the design and implementation of the aerial spraying of coca crops, and, on the other, by Afro-Colombian social organizations and local people living on the Pacific coast. Huezo's fieldwork produces detailed and nuanced insight into peasant experiences of the War on Drugs. The author's informants describe how aerial spraying destroyed food crops, made people sick, and displaced some families. From the viewpoint of people in the target zones, it created insecurity and environmental devastation. Although they endeavored to make these problems known to the state, Afro-Colombian peasants were unable to have their complaints heard or believed: they felt invisible to the policy-makers, and that the state was punishing them. Huezo's work provides yet another perspective on displacement (we have seen it in the Liberal-Conservative conflicts of *La Violencia*; in paramilitary endeavors to control territory; here because of anti-drug policies). Huezo's study also provides additional insight into peasant relations with the state. Because local livelihoods and local knowledge were not respected by the agencies responsible for implementing Plan Colombia and the War on Drugs, peasants in these regions perceived the state as repressive and exclusionary.

Huezo's contribution to our understanding of the lived experience of fumigation focuses on why Afro-Colombian communities have such very different perspectives on fumigation from those of government officials in Bogotá. The political terrain over which they fight is the definition of security and environmental conservation. The subjects of this regional study stand in opposition to the War on Drugs, but also to the drug traffickers to whom they sell their raw product. Of special note here is the fact that Huezo's study is concerned with the perspective of a racialized population. Huezo is writing about communities of African descendants whose struggle for land access is framed in terms of the recognition of their ancestral and territorial rights as Black Colombians, against a history of racism and inequality in the country.

Political theorist **John Jairo Bedoya** turns our attention to the city of Medellín, long considered the drug-trafficking capital of the world, now celebrated as a model of urban renewal (Moncada 2016). Bedoya turns the idea of the new Medellín inside out to enquire as to how criminal groups have reorganized and revitalized themselves in the last decade since the official demobilization of known national paramilitaries began during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe (see García-Godos and Lid 2010; CNMH 2017). Medellín was the scenario of the first paramilitary demobilization in 2003, an act that caused much controversy because of the strong suspicions (later confirmed) that among the demobilized fighters were members of local youth gangs working for organized crime networks. Bedoya's study is particularly important because of the unique trajectory of the history of Medellín, as both center of drug-trafficking and center of culture, and back again. This article by the long-time member of Medellín's Instituto Popular de Capacitación provides a much-needed understanding of the deep entanglements between organized crime, the drug economy, and the war in Colombia and the way security discourses and extortion are a feature of everyday life in the second largest city of the country. This more complex

view of Medellín is desperately needed because of the fact that the movement opposed to the recent peace process is centered in the hometown of its spokesperson, former president Álvaro Uribe.

The city of Medellín has been presented as a model of progress by Colombian right-wing political forces, proof that the war against the guerrilla is winnable. Bedoya unveils a much darker reality: Medellín is a city ordered by extortion, a practice and *modus operandi* with a long history of armed groups in the city that goes back to the 1970s. At that time, Bedoya explains, the city became a reference point for drug dealers and also for a growing business of merchants of private and illegal security that over the years turned into a profitable business of violent protection. Armed groups operating in the downtown and in the poor outlying neighborhoods demand a “*vacuna*” (vaccine) to inoculate their victims from harm while circulating a discourse on citizen protection. Despite the fact that the practice of running protection rackets is well known across Colombia, utilized by guerrillas, paramilitaries, neo-paramilitaries, and a variety of organized criminal gangs, little serious attention has been paid to understanding it, and how protection interacts with state security policy. One important aspect of this phenomenon is its highly organized nature, well captured by Bedoya in this original and necessary analysis.

Completing the special issue is an essay by **Weildler Guerra Curvelo**, a renowned wayuu anthropologist from the Guajira peninsula in northeastern Colombia, who sheds light on Indigenous perspectives on the ethics and aesthetics of peace-building and conflict resolution.²² Peace, Guerra tells us, is more than negotiating: it is also about the rituals and emotional processes that help a collective develop a commitment to peace. Describing the ancestral justice and conflict-resolution practices of the wayuu, Guerra calls upon non-Indigenous scholars, civil society, and policy-makers to learn from the knowledge and experience of Indigenous peoples on matters of peace and reconciliation. From an Indigenous worldview, a peace process does not begin with the signing of an agreement, but it requires that we inhabit it. Throughout the peace negotiations with the FARC, Indigenous and Black communities demanded of the negotiating parties the introduction of an ethnic perspective into the five core issues of the agreement. This demand was incorporated in the very last day of the negotiations as Chapter Six of the agreement (Sánchez-Garzoli and Córdoba 2017). Later, when Colombians grappled with the results of the plebiscite of October 2016, 5000 Indigenous people, campesinos, and students marched to Bogotá calling for a speedy resolution to the political impasse impeding the ratification of the accord. Indigenous peoples are committed to sharing their knowledge on peace-building and, as Guerra reminds us, they have thousands of years of experience in peace-making and can make a substantive contribution in addressing the legacies of colonialism, dispossession, and inequity. In this scholarly reflection, Guerra calls us to consider the decolonizing of discourses on peace, justice, and memory by recognizing the impacts of violence on humans and also on the landscape and many sentient beings that inhabit the land. This movement, Guerra says, requires moving away from the discourses of modernization and development that justify dispossession and extraction.

Opening space for social change

Millions of Colombians have seen their rights violated and their lives devastated by violence. Much of the violence in Colombia has historically been related to the issue of land distribution. One of Colombia's major challenges – and an indispensable requirement for achieving a lasting peace – is to address the country's highly unequal land tenure pattern and the long history of land dispossession and displacement.

Major questions remain regarding the redistribution of land, the administration of justice, and ways to remember the past, as well as the persistence of narco-trafficking and other illegal economic activities. Can the basic problem of inequality be addressed despite the continued presence of armed groups and a deeply stratified society? Will peace bring opportunity for large investors ahead of small producers? Can the lands that were stolen from the millions of displaced poor farmers be returned to them without further violence? Will guerrilla, paramilitary, and army commanders who committed atrocities during this terrible civil war be held accountable? What are the mechanisms and processes that can trigger shifts in a highly polarized society around the benefits of peace in addressing historical inequities? How can economic alternatives and revitalization objectives for the rural poor be sustained when drug economies and narco-trafficking routes remain active? Is the current trend of violence against social leaders evidence of the impossibility of constructing a democratic and inclusive civil society? The reaching and signing of a peace agreement is certainly not the end of conflict nor does it signal the achievement of peace. It rather marks the opening of a space for working toward social change, attending to social repair and social reconstruction. It is a time and space that also demands an awareness of the historical issues that sustain violence and dispossession. We hope that the articles in this issue make a contribution to inform this awareness.

Afterword

This issue is dedicated to the memory of our dear colleague and friend Ana María Bejarano, whose work on the state and constitutionalism in Latin America made outstanding contributions to understanding the complexities of democracy and violence in the region. Ana María led us in the organizing of the workshop and public lectures that resulted in this issue and she died as we worked on this introduction. We honor in this special issue her commitment to rigorous, engaged scholarship and to examining the ways to strengthen democratic institutions and mechanisms. *Brillas aquí y allá Ana María, descansa amiga.*

As we entered in the final stage of editing this issue, Virginia M. Bouvier, another dear colleague and participant in the workshop in Toronto, passed away. Ginny's work in Colombia as the United States Institute of Peace's senior advisor on peace processes made substantive contributions to the peace process and social movements we have described here. We also dedicate this special issue to Ginny and honor her commitment and insightful analyses on participation, women's issues, and peace processes in Colombia.

Notes

1. According to figures compiled by the Colombian government's Registro Único de Víctimas. See <https://rni.unidadvictimas.gov.co/RUV>.
2. Among the best studies of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) authored by Colombians are Ferro and Uribe Ramón (2002), Bolívar (2005), Pizarro Leongómez (2011), Centro de Memoria Histórica (2014), and Arjona (2016). Two Canadian scholars have written on the FARC: Rochlin (2003) and Brittain (2010). The FARC itself is beginning to write its own history: see, for example, Comisión de Historia FARC-EP (2015).
3. Useful books on contemporary agrarian problems as they relate to the peace process are Restrepo and Bernal Morales (2014) and Reyes Posada (2016b). The first Minister of Agriculture in the Santos government in 2012, Juan Manuel Restrepo was named in 2016 head negotiator for the ongoing Colombian government negotiations with the guerrillas of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).
4. Nick Miroff, "A Side Effect of Peace in Colombia? A Cocaine Boom in the U.S." *Washington Post*, 8 May 2017.
5. "Colombia's coca production soars to highest level in two decades, US says." *The Guardian*, 14 March 2017.
6. The *¡Basta Ya!* report draws on the research and information gathered by the Comisión Asesora de Política Criminal (2012) in their final report.
7. For a review of the numbers and characteristics of violence against judicial officials, see GMH (2009, 2013, chapter 3).
8. The characterization of the Colombian state as weak is associated with its fragmented and often ineffective presence in the national territory, as well as its tolerance and at times support of powerful paramilitary groups and forms of violence such as displacement. See Bejarano and Pizarro Leongómez (2002) and GMH (2013).
9. These movements date back to the 1980s when Black and Indigenous communities grouped around associations of Black peasants or regional Indigenous organizations seeking self-determination, control over natural resources, and collective titles of their territories. See Escobar (2008).
10. On the concept of "territory" in Colombia, see Rincón García (2012).
11. Created in 2011 under the Law of Victims and Land Restitution, the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH) has the mission of collecting and recovering written, testimonial, and any other materials that document the war and violations of human rights. The CNMH has also been mandated to create a National Museum of Historical Memory and the National Archive of Human Rights.
12. In 1974, the Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners published *El libro negro de la represión: Frente Nacional 1958–1974*, which documented state repressive practices during the period of the National Front. According to González Jácome (2016), this was the first comprehensive effort by a social organization to document and collect testimonies from victims and witnesses.
13. Useful publications on these commissions and research initiatives include Karl (2017), Rodríguez Idárraga (2017), Jaramillo Marín (2014, 2015), Riaño Alcalá and Uribe (2016), and Alto Comisionado para la Paz (2015). Historian Gonzalo Sánchez G., director of the 1987 commission to study the violence and now head of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, wrote pioneering studies on war and memory in Colombia (2003) and on the role of intellectuals in politics (Sánchez G., Pécaut, and Uricoechea 2003).
14. *Hijos e Hijas por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* use a variety of formats and methods to reconstruct memory and fight against forgetting and impunity: performances, graffiti, galleries, art, and music. See <http://hijoscol.blogspot.ca/>.
15. The Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN) has conducted workshops in the reconstruction of cartographies of violence against Black communities on the Pacific coast and the

formulation of justice and reparation proposals. They have also organized a series of visits to river communities to witness and document their situations.

16. In 2016 the Colombian military opened a park museum of memory in the town of Tocancipá near Bogotá that aims to commemorate soldier-victims and, in the words of one general, to be the “center *par excellence*” of historical memory. In April 2017, a government decree mandated that a representative of the Ministry of Defense sit on the board of directors of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica. This decision caused much controversy and concern. For social movements and victim organizations, intellectuals and members of civil society and for the CNMH, the presence of the military in the Center may compromise the commitment to plurality of voices and to truth-seeking and impose an official memory. On the other side, the Armed Forces have demanded that they be consulted as a source of information and maintain that they should not be portrayed solely as perpetrators. See <https://colombiaplural.com/quiere-gobierno-entregar-la-memoria-los-victimarios-estatales/>.
17. In 2013, the Federación Colombiana de Ganaderos (FEDEGAN) released two books, *No nacimos ayer. Institucionalidad ganadera 1900–1990* and *Acabar con el olvido*, with the aim of reconstructing the memory of cattle ranching and the creation of producer lobbying institutions such as FEDEGAN and to commemorate the victims in the cattle ranching sector. FEDEGAN has been accused by activists, communities, and in the oral depositions of demobilized paramilitaries as an organization that supported the creation and activity of the paramilitary.
18. Funding for this workshop was provided by a Connections grant of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, a Knowledge Mobilization Grant of the University of British Columbia, and additional support from University of Toronto-Mississauga, the History Departments at McGill University and the University of Toronto, and University of Toronto’s Latin American Studies program.
19. For regional and national-level analyses of the emergence of paramilitary organizations, see Medina (1990), Romero (2003), and Duncan (2007).
20. On the concept of “victim” in Colombia in relation to the violence and how it has evolved over time, see Rettberg (2015) and Rodríguez Idárraga (2017).
21. The *municipio* is an administrative division of Colombia: the entire land area of the country is divided into 1122 *municipios* (municipalities or counties).
22. The wayuu of the Guajira peninsula in Colombia number more than 150,000 people, 20% of Colombia’s Indigenous population.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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