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**Spaces of Contestations: *Comunas Negras* and Extractive Industries in Esmeraldas, Ecuador** (Tentative Title)

In 1994, by virtue of the Law of Agrarian Development (*Ley de Desarrollo Agrario*), 37 Afro-Ecuadorian farm communities were granted collective land titles. Consequently, the Ecuadorian state authorized 127,279 hectares of land for the *Comunas Negras* ('Black' Communes) in the north-western part of Esmeraldas province. But, in the two decades since, these communes have lost around 30,000 hectares of land to the mining industry, palm oil cultivators, and shrimp farming industry. Meandering mangroves are divided into monotonous plots for shrimp farming, and large swathes of tropical forests are being cleared for logging activities and palm oil plantations. Thereby, leaving the rural Afro-Ecuadorian groups in a vortex of conflict with the transnational corporations, Ecuadorian state, and other local actors from which no easy escape seems to be in sight.

The key question underlying my project is: how racial inequality is (re)organized spatially and temporally in an economy that fosters the expansion of extractive frontiers? By directing my attention towards the territorial dispossession caused by the expansion of extractive activities in the province of Esmeraldas I investigate the links between race and space/place. Also, by investigating the reluctance of the Ecuadorian state to understand other forms of territoriality, Afro-descendants' in this case, I probe the coloniality and racism that underpins the logic of the state territorial order. Lastly, by linking race and space/place explicitly, my attempt is to understand how the fluid and historical nature of racial formation plays out around ongoing negotiations over the meanings and uses of space/place.