

Introduction

Mosquitoes and other insects buzzed around while I tried to pretend it was not affecting me. I swatted them away haphazardly while taking pictures and recording video with my iPhone. I am pretty sure that my eyeballs were sweating from the humidity. Moments earlier I had sunk thigh-deep into soft ground, even though I had been warned to only step on roots to avoid that predicament. It happened so fast that I felt like I was being swallowed whole by planet Earth. Thankfully, the guys pulled me out of the mud *and then* made fun of me. *They do this on a regular basis just to get to their farm plot?!?* I could not even imagine how much time and effort . . . how much sweat . . . how much money . . . to lose it suddenly.

My misstep provided some comic relief in an otherwise somber occasion. I was visiting a farm plot fumigated with the chemical glyphosate. This herbicide, the key component of Monsanto's Roundup, is commonly used to eliminate weeds in everything from personal gardens to large agro-industrial farm plots. It is a chemical that is gradually being banned throughout the world because it is linked to cancer in human beings as well as the loss of flora and fauna (e.g., insects such as bees). However, intentionally spraying one's garden or crop dusting an agro-industrial farm plot to eliminate weeds is quite different from having your food crops sprayed without your permission, under the premise that you were harvesting coca leaves to be processed into cocaine.

Both the market for cocaine and the pressure to limit the supply of the drug are driven by US demands that imperil socio-ecological communities south of its border. The vast majority of the cocaine seized in the United States, and in the world in general, is processed in Colombia.¹ Colombia is also a major supplier of the coca leaves processed into cocaine. This was not always the case. The cultivation of



MAP 1. Physical map of Colombia with comunidades negras (created by Author).

coca bushes, the processing of coca leaves, and the trafficking of cocaine gravitate toward spaces out of reach of drug eradication authorities. However, counternarcotic measures enforced in one part of the world will likely shift those activities to another part of the world because those measures do not impact the demand.

Aerial eradication, or the spraying of illicit crops with aircraft, has been a US War on Drugs strategy in Latin America since the marijuana boom of the 1970s.² It is a controversial practice because of the harmful chemicals that have been used in the past as well as the fact that the spray can drift with the wind and affect much more than what was initially targeted. Colombia is the only country where it has been conducted recently. US efforts to limit coca leaf cultivation in Bolivia and Peru in the 1980s and 1990s shifted coca leaf cultivation into southern central Colombia and then into the Colombian Amazon.³ In the 2000s, aerial eradication campaigns intensified in those areas as part of the Plan Colombia agreement that Colombia signed with the United States.⁴ In response, coca cultivation has shifted toward more remote locations, not connected to roads (i.e., not easily accessible to manual eradication crews who can pull the plants out of the ground) and not easily detectable via satellite imaging, because of dense tropical vegetation and shifting cloud cover. However, these newer areas of coca cultivation often overlap with spaces supposedly protected by Colombian law, such as national parks, *resguardos indígenas*⁵ (Indigenous reserves), and *comunidades negras*⁶ (Black communities).⁷

When looking at a map of Colombia, you can see that the Pacific region—west of the mountain ranges and spanning the border between Panama and Ecuador—is largely granted to *comunidades negras* (shaded in map 1). The southwestern Pacific area is currently the largest coca-growing region in Colombia. Its network of rivers is a popular transport route for cocaine shipped to the United States through Central America and Mexico.

The guys who pulled me out of the mud that day were farmers in the *comunidad negra* of Temuey, on the Guapi River in southwestern Colombia. They worked a farm plot together, and I was there to interview them and document what their plot looked like a week after an aerial eradication plane had sprayed their licit crops (yucca, white taro root, peach palm, mango, plantains, guava, etc.) with glyphosate. They did not grow coca plants and had no idea why their plot had been sprayed. I asked them if there were farm plots nearby that *did* grow coca.⁸

Toño: “No, not here.”⁹

Jorge: “There was before on that side, in the communities of El Penitente and Juan Pérez.”

Toño: “Here we are at least 5–6 kilometers away.”

Later, on the boat on the way back from their farm, I asked how coca arrived in the region (described in figure 1):



FIGURE 1. Outsiders arrive to the region (illustrated by Jose E. Arboleda).

Jorge: “It arrived from Cali, from Nariño, Antioquia, with people from Medellín.”

Adolfo: “All of them *paisas*¹⁰ . . .”

Tadeo: “. . . who come to our region.”

Toño: “Imagine this—you have your plot of crops, and they begin to harvest coca. And you cannot say anything because they threaten you. They took your land, and you just have to shut up.”

Tadeo: “They look for the weakest, least wise person in the community. They offer them money to rent the land . . . then they start taking our land.”

Jorge: “One does not want to create problems by speaking out.”

Toño: “Something could happen to you. We cannot say anything.”¹¹

After decades of struggling to be granted territorial rights similar to those of Indigenous communities, Black social movements achieved recognition of “comunidades negras” in the 1990s. The Colombian state, articulated as a pluriethnic nation under a new constitution in 1991, recognizes these collectively titled communities on the basis of the following: (a) the lands they inhabit are *tierras baldías* (“empty lands,” not settled by other peoples),¹² (b) they possess a culture distinct from the Spanish and mestizo populations that settled in the Andean highlands,¹³ (c) this distinct culture persists in the traditions that comunidades negras practice today in the Pacific lowlands,¹⁴ and (d) an important part of this distinct culture involves environmental stewardship or the responsibility of preserving the ecosystems they inhabit.¹⁵

The grander objective of my trip that day was to investigate the disconnect between US and Colombian drug eradication authorities, who framed aerial eradication as a necessary but harmless tactic, and people in comunidades negras, who consider this strategy environmental racism. Coca cultivation is illegal in Colombia, except in Indigenous communities who grow coca for traditional purposes.¹⁶ When cultivated at a large scale for the purpose of producing cocaine, coca is considered a threat to Colombia’s national security and biodiversity. It is



MAP 2. Comunidades negras in southwestern Colombia (created by Author).

considered a threat to national security because numerous armed groups throughout Colombian history—including drug cartels, guerilla forces, paramilitary units, and newly emergent criminal bands—have financed their operations and profited from the cocaine trade. It is considered a threat to biodiversity because large-scale cultivation involves clearing tropical forest to plant coca bushes and applying numerous chemicals to limit pests and weeds. These plots are often accompanied by makeshift laboratories where coca leaves are processed into coca paste, which employ an even longer list of toxic chemicals.¹⁷ Ironically, US and Colombian drug eradication authorities have described aerial eradication as a form of environmental conservation that limits deforestation and pollution. In stark contrast, comunidades negras have described it as “biochemical warfare of the Colombian government against its own territory.”¹⁸

There are only two roads that connect the entire Pacific region to the Andean highlands, and both are located in southwestern Colombia (see map 2). The primary means of transportation in the Pacific region is via river. Every time I visit Guapi, I must fly in a small commercial propeller plane from Cali or take the long and choppy boat ride from the Pacific port of Buenaventura. I then travel by river to reach the comunidades negras in the surrounding area. The farmers who brought me to their lot that day would row an hour in one direction from their homes and then hike 20 minutes, hacking through vegetation with a machete, just



FIGURE 2. El Duende disappears (illustrated by Jose E. Arboleda).

to reach their farm plot. I was exhausted by the time we reached it. I could not imagine laboring in that heat and humidity, only to find out one day that the crops had been ruined. I understand why Toño cried upon seeing their crops burnt by the chemical. This lot was a significant financial investment for him and his fellow farmers. They had families to feed. He said he grabbed an armful of dead crops and marched to the mayor's office to show local officials what had happened. They looked at him like he was crazy.

Exactly four years later, in July of 2019, I revisited the same farm lot to see how things were going. Adolfo had moved to a distant community. Jorge still lived in the community but had taken up another occupation. Toño had died from natural causes. His son and a friend were now farming the lot.

On the return from visiting the farm lot, I again asked questions while recording on my iPhone as Tadeo (the same boat captain as my first trip) maneuvered the boat out of the shallow waters of the mangroves. Since aerial eradication had been suspended shortly after my original visit in 2015, this visit was largely about understanding the residual impacts of the spraying. We then discussed the potential for the aerial eradication suspension to be lifted, which seemed eminent as Colombia experienced a coca boom.¹⁹ The conversation tailed off into silence. Maybe the thought of being sprayed again became too depressing to talk about anymore.

The boat stayed on course, but the conversation took a major detour. The guys started telling stories about the supernatural visions of the region (illustrated in figure 2):

Tadeo: “*El Duende* (the Troll) is the one who knows how to play the guitar. And guitar music is what he uses to get the girls that had not been deflowered yet. And he is the one who is going to deflower them.”

Josué: “A scoundrel, that’s a real scoundrel!”

Gabriel: “Nowadays . . . approaching minors like that, that would land you in jail.”

Everyone: (Laughter)

Gabriel: “A pretentious type, this guy . . . very pretentious.”

Tadeo: “And this guy who was fond of music would come, he would listen to him play. El Duende said that he was going to lend the guitar to him when he finished. But he had another tune he wanted to play. He never finished that song.”

Gabriel: “You don’t hear about El Duende anymore. Much less *La Tunda* (a vision about a supernatural female being that seduces young men). Has anyone heard about *La Tunda* lately?”

I was all ears. Even though this conversation had seemingly nothing to do with aerial eradication, it had everything to do with my first research project in Colombia, which documented the experiences of people forcibly displaced from the countryside and their beliefs in supernatural visions. Stories about supernatural visions are common throughout the Americas. The visions are sometimes described as sentient beings but often dismissed as the fiction of active imaginations. Such entities are much less common in North America, where the closest comparison—in terms of mysteriousness but not supernatural qualities—is probably Sasquatch (aka Bigfoot). As explained on the National Cultural Information System (SINIC) website, “these entities can be evil, vengeful, and frightening, or alternatively, playful (in a bothersome way), inoffensive, or worthy of sympathy.”²⁰ *La Llorona* (the Crying Woman), the apparition of a woman who murdered her children to be with the man she loved, is a popular example of this type of entity. Her story is often interpreted as both a lesson about unfulfilled love (the man does not love her back) and a warning for children not to wander too far from their parents (lest they fall under her spell).

Talk of visions in the Pacific region of Colombia is common in the *veredas* (small villages or hamlets) of the countryside. Older generations tell the younger generations about these entities, and neighbors chat about them on occasion. Most people I interviewed about this subject witnessed visions outside of the *veredas*, in the woodlands, the hills, plantation fields, rivers, or ocean—predominately the domain of men logging, fishing, harvesting, or hunting. It is much less common to hear such stories in urban settings that are more densely populated, well lit at night, and bustling with human activity. It is in these remote areas—such as the stretch of mangroves I traveled through with the farmers—that visions make their presence known and become part of local lore. As local Afro-Colombian scholar and poet Alfredo Vanín Romero explains, “water is water, but it hides secrets; the jungle is not only full of trees, but the myths also tell us it contains more beings than is believed.”²¹

There exists a wide variety of terms to describe this set of entities in the Spanish-speaking world—*mitos* (myths), *leyendas* (legends), *fantasmagorías* (illusions), *ánimas* (souls), *espíritus* (spirits), *espantos* (entities that frighten), and *fantasmas*

(ghosts)—but this book will mostly refer to them as “visions” (*visiones*) or “supernatural visions.” Though some of these other terms will be employed at times, the term *visions* encompasses a wide spectrum of these entities without judgment about what was witnessed or whether they actually exist. US anthropologist Norman Whitten, who conducted ethnographic fieldwork along the Pacific coast of Ecuador and Colombia, uses the term frequently: “there are a number of fear creatures in the wet littoral called *visiones*.”²² For Whitten these stories are a communication of a “fear of the unknown” and a way of discussing the “means of combating manifestations of the unknown.”²³

Roughly fifteen years ago, when I originally conducted research on visions, I wanted to know whether Colombians displaced to cities brought these stories with them or left them behind in the countryside. I also wanted to know whether people adapted older visions to process the violence that drove them from their homes and whether they invented new visions to prevent their loved ones from succumbing to the violence of their new urban surroundings (specifically in the city of Cali). However, I had never considered whether the arrival of new visions to Cali could have anything to do with the disappearance of visions or other elements of the supernatural from the Pacific region.

In hindsight, this second conversation about supernatural visions, which took place in the same exact stretch of mangroves but four years later, was a detour that completed a loop. For multiple reasons, including the suggestion that I might be exoticizing the plight of rural Colombians displaced to cities, I felt discouraged to continue my investigation on violence and supernatural visions. I never tried to publish any of it. I eventually shifted to a completely new line of research, a political ecology of the US War on Drugs in Colombia, thinking that I should do something more proactive for the displaced people I had interviewed. It occurred to me that both the demand for drugs and the War on Drugs are causes of displacement. As a US citizen, I felt a responsibility to ask drug policy officials questions that people impacted by aerial eradication would not be able to get answered for themselves.

However, despite that decision, supernatural visions continued to be part of my experience in Colombia and Latin America in general. Sometimes people would tell me stories when I explained why I originally started conducting research in Colombia. Other times, people would just start telling stories about supernatural experiences that happened to them or visions that they had heard about. In the case of that second conversation on the boat, about the disappearance of visions, I was there to document environmental injustice and the conversation organically transitioned to supernatural visions. It forced me to think about how the arrival of coca impacted the foundation of the community itself. Has El Duende disappeared because he wants to stay out of the way of the violence associated with drug production and trade? Does he get talked about less because many of the original residents of the community have moved on? Or do people talk about El



FIGURE 3. Visions of global environmental justice (illustrated by Jose E. Arboleda).

Duende less often because they do not tell stories anymore and are less connected than they used to be? I view these questions as an invitation to finally share some of those stories and even create and reinterpret some visions to explain different aspects of environmental racism and justice. *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* explains how those two very different conversations—one about environmental justice and the other about supernatural visions—are interrelated. More specifically, this book will employ supernatural visions as a narrative framework to theorize the global and non/human (both human and nonhuman) dimensions of environmental justice.

By “global” dimensions of environmental justice, I refer to the way that the US foreign policy, specifically War on Drugs policy, impacts ecologies outside of the United States and across rural and urban geographies in Colombia. Both the demand for drugs and the War on Drugs are forms of transnational environmental racism. In this case, global environmental justice is accomplished through the grassroots efforts of comunidades negras who expand their environmental justice networks to include scholars, activists, legal professionals, and environmentalist organizations with global reach.

The “supernatural” dimensions of environmental justice signify the power of visions and other elements of more-than-humans on socio-environmental justice outcomes. Colombia, the site of decades of armed conflict, with the largest population of internally displaced persons in the Americas, is a unique place to explore these impacts.

Figure 3 is a visual amalgamation of those two conversations and this dual intent. The perspective in this drawing is mine.²⁴ The artist drew the foreground based on a photograph I took while sitting on a boat behind two of the farmers on the Guapi River. On the left side of the image, there is an aerial eradication plane flying over their community, spraying the glyphosate mixture. On the right side of the image is La Tunda, hovering over the horizon, and El Duende, flowing out of the boat beneath her. While the spray is descending upon the community, the visions are emanating from the boat (i.e., from the storytellers) and outward (i.e., into the social realm). La Tunda’s face is partially covered, but her expression is subject to interpretation. Is she frightening, or is she frightened by the prospect of her own disappearance?

MAIN ARGUMENT AND CONTRIBUTIONS: ENVISIONING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Visions of Global Environmental Justice deconstructs the transnational myths that perpetuate the violence and environmental racism of the War on Drugs. Conversely, it argues that non/humans rendered expendable by violence and pollution are indispensable to both *the conceptualization* and *the realization* of environmental justice globally. In doing so, this book makes important contributions to the field of environmental justice studies and its emerging subfield, global environmental justice studies.

Though some people interviewed or quoted for this book may describe the supernatural visions as “myths,” I intentionally utilize the terms *myth* and *myth-making* when discussing the geopolitical discourses that rationalize environmental racism. In this way I am subverting the use of a term that often connotes skepticism, if not outright disbelief. *Myth* often signifies the fantastical or not believable, and it is frequently applied by knowledge authorities such as anthropologists interpreting other cultures from a Euro-American perspective. For instance, in chapter 3 I document an interview with the US Embassy staff in which they describe misperceptions of aerial eradication as “myths” created by ill-informed Colombian peasants. This book, in turn, questions the geopolitical myths or myth-making that justify aerial eradication as a “legal” War on Drugs strategy despite its very controversial history.

Visions in the book’s title, as well as in the main argument, has multiple meanings. For the most part, it specifically refers to the set of supernatural entities that provide a narrative structure to the book. In the last two chapters, however, the term is also employed as a synonym for different ways of perceiving environmental justice. In that latter context, *visions* also refers to the perspectives of communities struggling for survival in the Anthropocene. This book largely focuses on the perspectives of *comunidades negras* and, to a lesser extent, *resguardos indígenas* in the Colombian Pacific region. Historically these respective groups have not described themselves as environmental justice communities, but *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* argues that these groups, the most impacted by decades of violence and environmental racism in Colombia, *should be* considered environmental justice communities.

Environmental justice (EJ) movements and studies emerged from civil rights activism in the US South. In sharp contrast to mainstream environmentalist movements intent on saving an animal or plant or the planet, EJ movements originate in communities attempting to save themselves. Benjamin Chavis, former head of the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice, is credited with coining the term *environmental racism* after participating in protests against hazardous waste siting in a predominately African American community in Warren County, North Carolina. Chavis stated: “Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement.”²⁵

Environmental justice scholars²⁶ broadened the scope of that original definition, drawing into question the kinds of actions that could be construed as environmental racism and the intentionality behind those actions. For example, Robert Bullard, often considered the father of environmental justice, defines environmental racism as “any environmental policy, practice or directive that

differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups or communities based on race or colour.”²⁷ Sociologist David Pellow explains, “The EJ movement is largely comprised of people from communities of color, indigenous communities, and working-class communities who are focused on combating environmental injustice, racism, and gender and class inequalities that are most visibly manifested in the disproportionate burden of environmental harm facing these populations.”²⁸ Bullard, therefore, defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.”²⁹ In other words, environmental justice movements are grassroots and community driven with the underlying conviction that *no one should have to suffer pollution*, period.

EJ movements arise where pollution is typically not identified, acknowledged, or prioritized by government agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency.³⁰ In fact, EJ movements often materialize because the structural racism of governance—in the form of overt segregation (e.g., Jim Crow laws), de facto segregation (e.g., redlining, racial covenants), disinvestment in urban sectors, unjust laws, nonresponsive bureaucratic agencies, lack of political representation, etc.—has been *implicit* to the formation and marginalization of communities of color.³¹ Therefore, because EJ communities are often marginalized through the structural racism of governance, EJ movements often seek solutions that may look beyond, challenge, oppose, or seek to transform mechanisms of governance.³²

The field of environmental justice studies (EJS) originated with scholarship on African American communities resisting toxic pollution in the 1980s but, as Pellow explains, has expanded to include “a small but growing group of researchers . . . focused on the ways that gender, sexuality, citizenship, indigeneity, and nation shape the terrain of ecological inequalities.”³³ Historians and social scientists have also produced scholarship on the “long Environmental Justice movement,” which considers environmental struggles that predate the beginnings of the EJ movement.³⁴

As a leading scholar in the field of EJS, David Pellow has articulated the need for *critical* environmental justice studies to address the limitations of earlier generations of EJS. His call for a critical EJS centers around the following four concerns: (1) paying more attention to the intersectionality inherent to environmental justice struggles beyond focusing on singular categories such as race (i.e., also accounting for class, gender, sexuality, species, etc.); (2) taking a multi-scalar approach to EJS that spans the cellular to the global scale; (3) acknowledging the extent to which socio-environmental inequalities are embedded in societies, especially state power, and must be confronted; and (4) the need for theorizing the notion of “expendability” across human and nonhuman populations in the face of socio-ecological threats.³⁵

Visions of Global Environmental Justice responds to all those concerns, especially contributing to the understanding of “spaces of conflict and collaboration that are not always typically defined as ‘environmental,’”³⁶ through a narrative structured around supernatural visions. More specifically, it employs these visions to theorize the intersectional and global dimensions of environmental justice struggles.

Global environmental justice in the book’s title is both descriptive and aspirational. It is descriptive because the primary focus of the book is to describe how comunidades negras leverage transnational networks to challenge physical violence, epistemic violence, and the silent violence of environmental racism. In the process, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* emphasizes an important point made by EJ scholars such as Pellow and Julie Sze, which is that those forms of violence are interwoven and should not be treated as unrelated phenomena.³⁷ *Global environmental justice* is aspirational in the book’s title because global environmental justice studies (global EJS) is gradually cohering into a subfield of EJS.

In my review of the literature that could potentially constitute or contribute to global EJS, I have noticed four major themes:

1. The study of globalized EJ movements
2. The study of transnational forms of environmental racism and resistance
3. The framing of the Anthropocene / climate change as a global EJ issue
4. The theorization of the spatial dimensions of EJ

The study of globalized EJ movements includes scholarship on movements with obvious connections to environmentalism that read such movements—the Zapatistas,³⁸ La Vía Campesina,³⁹ the Chipko,⁴⁰ Standing Rock,⁴¹ etc.—through EJ lenses, even if some of those movements do not employ the term themselves. Likewise, it includes scholars calling attention to the interconnectedness of environmental justice struggles across the Global South, such as the commonalities between communities impacted by coal mining in the Guajira Peninsula of Colombia and communities impacted coal burning near Jobos Bay, Puerto Rico.⁴² It also includes the reading of popular movements with strong elements of environmentalism, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), through EJ lenses.⁴³ *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* conceptualizes the comunidades negras of the south-western Pacific region of Colombia as a globalized EJ movement, even though *justicia ambiental* (environmental justice) has only recently emerged in their discourses. It also draws from EJ literature on BLM to underscore the importance of not abstracting the effects of environmental racism from the disproportionate amount of physical violence experienced by Afro-descendants in Colombia.

The study of transnational forms of environmental racism and resistance consists of scholarship on pollution that crosses political borders. For instance, the exportation of garbage and hazardous waste from countries of the Global North to the Global South not only has transferred contamination across the globe,⁴⁴ but also has polluted the oceans in the process.⁴⁵ Another example is

the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which prompted the construction of *maquiladoras* (tariff-free factories) across the United States–Mexico border. These factories were constructed, in part, because Mexico had fewer environmental restrictions than the United States, which facilitated cheaper production. The relocation of these factories from one side of the border to the other created a situation where former factory locations in the United States are less polluted and US–Mexico-border communities are now more polluted, prompting the formation of binational EJ communities.⁴⁶ It also created a situation in which Mexican industries are blamed for polluting across the border (explained in the next section). On the surface, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* does not appear to pertain to this category of global EJS, but it is important to note that the US military industrial complex is the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world.⁴⁷ Though the US Department of Defense can state that Colombia has been largely responsible for the finance and operation of aerial eradication in recent years, chapter 3 details the history of US intervention and influence on drug policies in Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. It also explains why many people of *comunidades negras* understand aerial eradication as a form of environmental racism fomented by US imperialism in Colombia.

The framing of the Anthropocene / climate change as a global EJ issue is an increasingly popular approach in academic scholarship. Studies on the impacts of sea level rise conceptualize EJ communities in both islands and continental cities⁴⁸ and have prompted a recent wave of literature on climate justice.⁴⁹ Likewise, there is increasingly more scholarship on the prevalence of forest fires and hurricanes as life-threatening environmental phenomena that materialize because certain economically privileged populations do not live sustainably, with disproportionate ramifications for communities of color across the planet.⁵⁰ The disproportionate consumption habits of economically privileged populations across the world are by no means limited to the carbon footprint of automobiles, hamburgers, and unrecyclable trash. For example, the international demand for crops such as palm oil, coffee, bananas, and grapes radically transform local sustainable ecologies into export cash crop economies.⁵¹ Unless these crops are grown organically, massive amounts of herbicides and pesticides are introduced, chemical runoff poisons water and soil, insects migrate, and animals (including humans) are subject to birth defects as well as other health issues. If the economically privileged also possess the environmental privilege of being able to eat bananas any time of year but not having to work in the plantations where pesticides are sprayed, then *is that not also a form of environmental racism?* Though the main themes of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* are not explicitly related to the Anthropocene or climate change, chapter 3 conceptualizes the demand for coca (for the sake of cocaine production) as an unsustainable cash crop. The last two chapters of the book specifically address the importance of global EJS scholars championing pluriversal thinking (i.e., acknowledging there are other ways to exist in this world beyond the

modern Western version) for EJ communities such as *comunidades negras*, who are subject to both physical and epistemological violence. Such violence not only threatens these communities rendered “expendable,”⁵² but also affects the entire planet, especially since many of these populations live sustainably in ways that consumption-driven societies of the Global North could learn from. Thus, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* echoes the sentiments of EJ scholars who argue that mainstream environmentalists should pay more attention to the ongoing legacies of Indigenous peoples, whose struggles are key to living sustainably on the planet.⁵³ It should also resonate with EJ scholars who emphasize the importance of engaging communities harmed by climate catastrophes as a decolonial approach to climate change.⁵⁴

The theorization of the spatial dimensions of EJ is vital because, stemming from its origins in scholarship on local struggles in the United States, EJS often overlooks the extent to which the elimination of pollution in one part of the world may result in the pollution of another part of the world. As the harm done by environmental racism is most often discussed in conjunction with the active resistance of associated environmental justice communities, for the most part environmental racism has been theorized within the domain of those specific struggles. This limited geographic emphasis makes sense, given the grassroots history of environmental justice movements and the history of mainstream environmentalists overlooking communities of color engaged in such struggles.⁵⁵ A number of scholars dating back to the mid 1990s, however, have emphasized the need to either theorize the geographic scale of EJ issues and/or articulate the tensions between environmentally privileged communities of the Global North and less privileged communities of the Global South.⁵⁶ For instance, consider the case against Exide Technologies LLC, a corporation that manufactures and recycles automotive and industrial batteries. EJS scholarship has largely focused on the circumstances of EJ communities in the United States. The EJ movements that prompted the closures of the Exide plants in Vernon, California, and Frisco, Texas, factored into Exide’s declaration of bankruptcy as well as its attempt to avoid the cost of cleaning up the contamination in those and other sites throughout the country. In the wake of these closures and the rising cost of operating under stricter environmental regulations in the United States in general, Exide has sold its domestic operations and is expanding its international operations,⁵⁷ which follows a worldwide trend in the relocation of battery recycling facilities to the Global South.⁵⁸ It is therefore important to note the extent to which both the materialization of environmental racism and environmental justice movements themselves defy political and geographic boundaries. The Exide case is just one example of the ways environmental justice struggles are connected across the planet. If environmental justice movements and scholars are intent on guaranteeing “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin,”⁵⁹ then an environmental justice victory in one part of the world should not result in another case of environmental

racism elsewhere. *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* underscores the extent to which resistance to the US War on Drugs strategies in Bolivia and Peru eventually prompted the expansion of coca cultivation in Colombia. It also explains how successful protests of aerial eradication in the Colombian Amazon eventually prompted the spread of coca cultivation and aerial eradication to the Pacific region of the country.

Inspired by these four major themes of literature listed above and my training in the interdisciplinary field of global studies, this book *thinks toward* the development of global EJS. In doing so, I am not claiming to define this subfield, as that would merit an entire book or anthology dedicated to that topic. Rather, the first half of the book draws insights from a wide range of academic fields across the Americas to conceptualize environmental racism in a novel way (i.e., thinking about the more-than-human dimensions of ecological violence), regarding a unique topic (i.e., the impacts of the War on Drugs on a rural ethnic population in Latin America). The latter chapters of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* raise critical questions about trends in environmentalism, both movements and studies, that are relevant to development of global EJS. And the next section addresses three questions that inspired the book, which will highlight other contributions of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*.

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

- Why is environmentalism so white?
- What do visions and other elements of the supernatural have to do with environmental racism and justice?
- Why are *non/human* and *more-than-human* relevant to environmental justice studies?

Why is environmentalism so white? This is a question that I get asked a lot, especially since I teach courses on environmental racism and justice. I usually preface my answer by stating, “Why isn’t environmentalism or environmental studies more diverse?” might be a more productive framing of the question.” I then point out the obvious, that besides fields such as ethnic studies, most academic fields lack diversity. Nevertheless, my students—who are predominately from communities of color impacted by environmental racism—find this disheartening because environmental studies scholars and environmentalist organizations have the power to determine what environmental issues are worth addressing, who is involved in addressing those issues, and how those issues are framed. While the specific question of why environmentalism is so white has been addressed in environmental studies literature⁶⁰ and elsewhere,⁶¹ my students have been very enthused to learn about EJ movements and studies as alternative approaches to mainstream environmentalism.

EJ movements historically have had little to do with mainstream environmentalist organizations such as the Sierra Club or Greenpeace because the health and well-being of poor communities of color is almost never a priority for environmentalists focused on saving the whales, saving the bees, saving the trees, or saving the planet. This lack of consideration can be at least partially attributed to “environmental privilege,” which Park and Pellow define as “the exercise of economic, political, and cultural power that some groups enjoy, which enables them exclusive access to coveted environmental amenities such as forests, parks, mountains, rivers, coastal property, open lands, and elite neighborhoods. Environmental privilege is embodied in the fact that some groups can access spaces and resources, which are protected from the kinds of ecological harm that other groups are forced to contend with everyday.”⁶²

In other words, environmental privilege can be understood as an extension of settler colonialism as well as white privilege. It can also be useful to understanding why mainstream environmentalist movements often implicate communities of color (in both the Global North and Global South) in the degradation of Earth and the extinction of species that they are attempting to save. Chapter 3 explains how this logic has ironically been employed by US and Colombia drug eradication authorities who argue that aerial eradication is a form of environmental conservation. In the process they blame poor rural Latin Americans for the “major” harms associated with the cultivation of coca and production of cocaine.

Another example of the Global North obscuring accountability for pollution emanating from the Global South is at the United States–Mexico border. I currently reside in San Diego, California, where the pollution of beaches, especially the coastline closest to Mexico, is blamed on the sewage, garbage, and toxic factory runoff flowing through the Tijuana River. Both environmentalist organizations such as the Surfrider Foundation and the State of California have websites detailing the source and magnitude of the pollution. The Surfrider Foundation website⁶³ provides more historical context than the State of California website,⁶⁴ explaining that the implementation of NAFTA in the 1990s prompted a manufacturing and population boom that has overwhelmed the infrastructure of the city of Tijuana. Nevertheless, both websites, similar to San Diego press coverage of this issue,⁶⁵ frame the pollution as an environmental hazard that originates in Mexico and crosses the border. This framing is problematic because it perpetuates the perception of Mexico, the gateway to the Global South, as a backward place where sewage is not properly treated, garbage is not sufficiently collected, and factory waste is not regulated. A more critical framing of this environmental issue would highlight the extent to which the production of the pollution itself is transnational, a byproduct of US businesses seeking to relocate across the border because of lower operational costs made possible by cheaper rents, lower wages, weaker labor codes, and fewer environmental restrictions. Not only did NAFTA eliminate jobs from the Mexican agricultural sector to limit competition with US

agricultural goods, but it also drew millions of people to border towns to work in maquiladoras.⁶⁶ In the uncritical discourse of mainstream environmentalism, environmental privilege is not acknowledged. Mexico (i.e., Mexicans), and not the unequal socioeconomic relationship between the United States and Mexico, is to blame for the contamination of San Diego beaches, which is contextualized as a historical continuity of Baja California (the Mexican state) polluting (Alta) California (the US state).

The transformation and exploitation of ecologies of the Global South are normally the domains of political ecologists, who sometimes—but not always—center the knowledge production of communities most impacted by environmental problems. Nevertheless, political ecology can provide insights on the hierarchies of knowledge production that facilitate and perpetuate environmental racism. To outline the parameters of political ecology, it is first necessary to present a definition of *ecology*, which may be understood as “the matrix of relations that binds living entities with the complex infrastructure of their environment.”⁶⁷ For the purposes of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*, that complex infrastructure includes nonhuman beings and beings that are not considered to be “living” per the definition of natural sciences (discussed in the next two sections). Political ecology is an interdisciplinary field useful for revealing the ontological and epistemological disagreements that factor into conflicts over land, resources, livelihoods, and ways of being. Eric Wolf, an anthropologist known for his research on peasants in Latin America,⁶⁸ is credited as the first academic to popularize the term *political ecology*,⁶⁹ although other academics as well as journalists also used the term to stress the politicization of the environment in the 1970s.⁷⁰ Blaikie and Brookfield, however, are the first credited with attempting a methodology and theoretical basis for the field,⁷¹ and they are frequently cited for their succinct definition of political ecology as “the concerns of ecology and a broadly defined political economy.”⁷² Following this initial effort, political ecology has been the subject of continual debates about the basis for its theory and methodology. On the topic of theory, Peet and Watts state, “From its inception, political ecology was never a coherent theoretical position for the very good reason that the meanings of ecology and political economy and indeed politics, were often in question.”⁷³ With regard to methodology, Robbins writes, “In short, there are very few techniques, technologies, or analytics not used in political ecology, again suggesting the elusiveness of coherence in the field.”⁷⁴ The most probable reason for this lack of coherence can be attributed to the diversity of scholarship that political ecology originated from, which includes critical development research, peasant studies, environmental history, cultural ecology, and postcolonial theory.⁷⁵ Of particular relevance to this book is a literature, sometimes labeled “political ecologies of difference”⁷⁶ or “contested ecologies”⁷⁷ or “ecologies of practice,”⁷⁸ that problematizes the nature-culture divide of contemporary social science and demonstrates the ways that academics, lawyers, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)

of the Global North are auxiliary to environmental justice movements of the Global South.

This book puts those two different sets of literature—environmental justice studies with a transnational focus and political ecologies of the Global South—in conversation with one another through analysis of the War on Drugs in Colombia. More specifically, it conceptualizes the War on Drugs as a transnational form of environmental racism that is resisted by environmental justice movements that leverage global agreements and networks. In doing so, this book underscores the importance of environmental studies engaging voices traditionally ignored in mainstream environmentalism as well as centering the knowledge production of environmental justice communities in these struggles. This approach, therefore, also responds to the call to “decolonize environmental justice studies”⁷⁹ by integrating decolonial theory into the analysis of environmental justice communities and supernatural visions. It also affirms EJ scholar Julie Sze’s conceptualization of EJ as something that cannot be explicitly fixed in time or space because “the process and politics of meaning-making is what makes environmental justice continually relevant.”⁸⁰

Furthermore, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* argues that the War on Drugs in Colombia is a form of “necropolitical ecology,” consisting of the overt violence of extractivism and the silent violence of pollution, resisted by comunidades negras that refuse expendability through a defense of “the territory.” The phrase *the overt violence of extractivism* refers to the multiple forms of harm associated with the imposition of extractive economic activities (e.g., drilling for oil or gas, mining for minerals, agriculture, or aquaculture purely for export, etc.) against the will of local populations. Those multiple forms of harm include, but are certainly not limited to, the following: massacres of humans and other animal beings, the destruction of the physical landscape (often understood as the “desecration” of Earth or territory for many Indigenous communities throughout the Americas),⁸¹ deforestation, and the contamination of soil as well as waterways. Additionally, this book pays attention to an important postcolonial critique of Eurocentric scholars interpreting other cultures; environmental scholar Catalina de Onís cautions, “Ethnographic work seeking to make sense of and record something or someone ‘there’ to bring back ‘here’ for different audiences has at least some component of extractivism.”⁸² To that point, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* attempts to present the actual words of those in the struggle for environmental justice as often as possible. Conversely, as detailed later in this introduction, I have sought to be transparent in my active role as the storyteller interpreting/inventing supernatural visions featured in the book. My engagement in environmental justice includes the activism summarized in the next section and detailed more specifically in chapter 4. I consider this activism, or scholar-activism, which includes activities that “exceed the pages of this book,”⁸³ a direct contribution to a global environmental justice struggle imperiled by necropolitical ecologies.

Necropolitical ecology was originally coined to describe how the surplus value extracted from Indigenous land and resources during Uganda's colonization by the British is now being used to marginalize those populations under modern-day institutions of governance.⁸⁴ Political ecologists Cavanagh and Himmelfarb explain, "Fusing the perspectives of necropolitics and political ecology—a field that seeks to understand the ways in which the political dimensions of both the symbolic and the material are articulated within socio-environmental relations,"⁸⁵ we argue that a necropolitical ecology provides a fuller account of both the social meanings of colonial processes as well as their material outcomes for colonised populations."⁸⁶ Whereas political ecology could be considered "a field" that is gradually cohering, necropolitical ecology is a distinctive political ecology inquiry that has not gained much traction as a conceptual tool or framework aside from that initial publication. This book will conduct "a necropolitical ecology" of the War on Drugs following the approach outlined by Cavanagh and Himmelfarb, as well as frame the War on Drugs as a form of environmental racism. In doing so, it expands on that original conceptualization of necropolitical ecology to situate the War on Drugs within the framework of state-driven economic development models that give rise to necropolitical ecologies and transnational environmental justice communities.

Cavanagh and Himmelfarb explain that the task of necropolitical ecology is "to illuminate coercive reconfigurations of social and ecological relations, hidden as though they might be under the symbolic violence meted out by the state."⁸⁷ They build upon one of Mbembé's main critiques of Foucault, which is that his conceptualization of "biopolitics" is limited and Eurocentric. In other words, biopolitics, the administration of human populations "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order,"⁸⁸ mostly refers to the development of law and order in modern European history. It has much less to do with the brutal conditions of colonization, the histories and historical continuities of violence waged by European colonial powers on their colonial subjects throughout the rest of the world. Rather, colonial states have maintained a necropolitical relationship with their colonial subjects and employ violence "to override and reconfigure the socio-environmental relations" of populations largely practicing subsistence-based ways of life. Cavanagh and Himmelfarb thus define "the state at the height of its power as a dominant spatial performance, which is undertaken by an assemblage of political and economic actors with the common objective of annexing territory."⁸⁹ In the context of their study in Uganda, the British state employed both "physical and legal violence" to establish an export-oriented cash crop economy (coffee and cotton) and to deter subsistence livelihoods by restricting access to common property areas cordoned off for the sake of forest conservation.⁹⁰ "This nexus of conservation, state formation and primitive accumulation comprises what we have called a *necropolitical ecology*, in which land, resources and the surplus value arising therefrom were

systematically extracted from indigenous populations and utilised to support their further subjugation under imperial rule.”⁹¹

Likewise in the Americas, Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples have been subject to necropolitics since the settlement of Europeans in this region of the world. Many regions of Colombia, such as the Pacific region, are largely disconnected from the infrastructure of the Colombian state and therefore have been treated as internal frontier spaces since colonial times.⁹² Since the late 1900s, Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have sought collective land titles for their respective communities in rural spaces where they have established historical connections and situated themselves as environmental stewards. The collective titling of *resguardos indígenas* (Indigenous reserves)⁹³ and later *comunidades negras*, thanks to the struggles of their respective social movements, has inspired a mix of optimism and pessimism for the possibilities/gains and limitations/implications of rural ethnic territorial sovereignty. A primary concern of the pessimist outlook on collective land titling is that it has made these populations more “legible” and therefore more vulnerable to outsiders seeking to exploit these lands.⁹⁴ Similar to Cavanagh and Himmelfarb’s theorization of the violence against Indigenous peoples in Uganda, “the Colombian state” is understood in *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* as “an assemblage of political and economic actors with the common objective of annexing territory.”⁹⁵ Whether it be a paramilitary unit employed by a mining company or a criminal band seeking to plant coca or another paramilitary group working for a palm oil company or a real estate firm seeking to build hotels, these actors can now more easily target members of respective communities with bribes, threats, and violence. The unprecedented number of community council leaders and social activists assassinated in the wake of the Colombian peace agreement is testimony to this vulnerability.⁹⁶ While it is certainly true that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is responsible for countless atrocities of the decades-long civil war, it also operated as the *de facto* government in many parts of the country and in many instances provided protection for civilians against other armed groups.⁹⁷ Therefore, despite the outside perception that Colombia had resolved one of its biggest problems with the ratification of the 2016 peace accord, rural peasants, especially Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, continue to be displaced from their lands as new armed actors seek control of areas dis-occupied by the FARC.

Borrowing from Cavanagh and Himmelfarb’s Marxian analysis, the surplus value extracted from *resguardos indígenas* and *comunidades negras* has facilitated the displacement of their peoples from their respective lands. The more land and natural resources that outside actors acquire through primitive accumulation, the more capital they acquire for the violent expansion of their operations. Furthermore, the forcible displacement of rural Colombians from their communities, which is part of “the process of divorcing the producer from the subsistence-based

means of production,”⁹⁸ provides a cheap labor pool to exploit. What sets Colombia apart from the case of Uganda is the way the War on Drugs intersects with the many “overlapping territorialities”⁹⁹ seeking to extract value from *resguardos indígenas* and *comunidades negras*. This intersection has birthed Killer Plants and the Two-Headed Monster representative of another kind of necropolitical ecology (discussed in chapter 3).

What do supernatural visions have to do with environmental racism and justice? Visions are fundamental to the worlds we define and the worlds we seek to create. In this book, the term *visions* refers to both the supernatural entities described in stories and the ontologies that shape our understandings of what we consider reality.

In the first place, supernatural visions provide a narrative structure to this book about environmental justice. Visions are prominently featured in the titles of the chapters, in the artwork at the beginning of each chapter, and in the graphic-novel-inspired vignettes within each chapter. These visions provide geo-historical context, figure prominently as characters within the narrative, and ultimately highlight the ontological contours of the worlds in which environmental racism and justice are taking place. In highlighting those contours, this book cites anthropological literature on the interpretation of supernatural visions in the Colombian Afro-Pacific¹⁰⁰ to theorize their ecological relevance. It also draws upon an emergent category of literature known as monster theory¹⁰¹ and some of the scholars who are foundational to this literature¹⁰² to reflect on the identity intersections (e.g., sex, gender, disabilities) represented in ecological visions.

Second, *visions* refers to ways of seeing and existing in the world. The supernatural visions discussed in this book are recounted and interpreted differently across time, geographic space, and cultural contexts. This book emphasizes the importance of recounting supernatural visions as an active process that shapes ecological relations, therefore also shaping understandings of environmental racism and justice. It takes a very novel approach to the interpretation of ecological visions, applying Michel Foucault’s ideas about biopolitics and biopower¹⁰³ to the supernatural visions that discipline human beings to respect the ecosystems that they belong to. It also considers supernatural visions and powers as means to challenge socio-environmental injustices.¹⁰⁴

Last, this book actively participates in the deconstruction of “modernizing” visions that perpetuate environmental injustices, particularly discourses that pertain to the imagination of Latin American economic development¹⁰⁵ and nation-states.¹⁰⁶ This book employs Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembé’s “necropolitics” to describe how the elimination of certain lives—especially Black lives—is a constitutive element of many modern states.¹⁰⁷ It extends necropolitics into the realm of EJS by conceptualizing the War on Drugs as a “necropolitical ecology”¹⁰⁸ forcibly displacing Colombian peasants into urban “necropolises.”¹⁰⁹ This displacement is made possible through “racial capitalism,” or the devaluation

of certain people who serve little importance to capitalist markets when their labor is not in demand. Viewed through an EJ lens, racial capitalism reveals the logic through which Black and Brown communities become expendable because of their surplus status in society.¹¹⁰

Why are nonhumans or more-than-humans relevant to environmental justice studies? “Nonhuman agency” or more-than-human agencies are a very popular subject in the social sciences nowadays but do not necessarily mean the same thing across different fields and disciplines. This book connects ecological discourses about the agency of flora, fauna, landforms (e.g., mountains, valleys, rock formations, etc.), aquaforms (i.e., bodies of water), and sacred spirits to the theorization of supernatural visions. In *Biopolitics of the More-than-Human: Forensic Ecologies of Violence*, social justice scholar Joseph Pugliese defines *more-than-human* in the following manner: “The category of the more-than-human refers to that which is other to the human without reproducing an attendant positive/negative hierarchy. The adjective *more* affirms the way more-than-human entities exceed human qualities and conceptual parameters, while the phrase itself visibly marks, through its hyphenated formation, the relational ecologies that constitute the very conditions of possibility for both human and more-than-human entities.”¹¹¹

Pugliese’s intent is to decenter the human being, or the anthropocentrism of Eurocentric ecologies, to level the playing field for the consideration of other kinds of victims of war. In *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*, I alternate between discussing “more-than-humans” and “non/humans.” For Pugliese, *nonhuman* connotes a categorical separation between humans and other beings that compromises his theoretical framework. I often employ the term *non/human* in place of *more-than-human* simply because it includes both humans and nonhumans (by virtue of the forward slash). I prefer *non/humans* to emphasize the collectivity of beings that constitute EJ communities and avoid using the term *more-than-humans* in that context for fear that it may confuse the reader.

The term *incommensurability* is important to bridging these conversations. It is also important to understanding why nonhuman and more-than-human agencies are a difficult subject to address within environmental studies and related fields such as environmental justice studies and political ecology. Originally a mathematical term in Ancient Greece, *incommensurable* means “no common measure between magnitudes.”¹¹² *Incommensurability* was famously employed by philosopher Thomas Kuhn¹¹³ to argue that there can be no objective standards for comparing theories in different scientific paradigms (e.g., Cartesian vs. Newtonian paradigms). Within the field of political ecology, *incommensurability* signals that there is no common unit of measurement when it comes to determining the value of ecological entities such as flora, fauna, bodies of water, and landforms.¹¹⁴ However, for some political ecologists, *incommensurability* should be viewed as an opportunity because it “opens a broad political space for environmental movements.”¹¹⁵ *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* takes advantage of that opportunity

to theorize the relationship between supernatural visions and environmental justice communities.

In *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, French philosopher Bruno Latour argues that the conceptual divide between humans and nonhumans in Western societies is foundational to mainstream environmentalism, which seeks to conquer, control, and manage “nature” through hegemonic sciences. He frames the change in this fundamental attitude as the new task of political ecology if the planet wishes to avoid environmental disaster: “We shall indeed have to involve ourselves still more intimately with the existence of a still larger multitude of human and nonhuman beings, whose demands will be still more incommensurable with those of the past, and we shall nevertheless have to become capable of sheltering them in a common dwelling.”¹¹⁶

In other words, political ecologists must conceptualize the relationships between human and nonhuman beings differently, which involves thinking about how environmental crises impact *all* beings. The phrase *whose demands will be still more incommensurable with those of the past* signifies that the imagination of humans and nonhumans as a collective has simply not been possible under the current scientific paradigm of conquering, controlling, and managing “nature” through hegemonic sciences. Latour’s argument, similar to those of other scholars in other fields incorporating actor-network theory into ecological discourses, marks a transition to a new scientific paradigm where nonhuman agencies are relevant to environmental studies.

In *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?* Pellow makes a somewhat parallel but distinct argument in his call for *critical* environmental justice studies:

Excluded, marginalized, and othered populations, beings, and things—both human and more-than-human—must be viewed as indispensable to our collective futures. This is what I term *racial indispensability* (when referring to people of color) and *socioecological indispensability* (when referring to broader communities within and across the human/more-than-human spectrum). Racial indispensability is intended to challenge the logic of racial expendability, and is the idea that institutions, policies, and practices that support and perpetrate anti-black racism intended to destroy African-American bodies suffer from the flawed assumption that the future of African-Americans is somehow de-linked from the future of white communities.¹¹⁷

Though the two are not in dialogue with each other, Pellow’s argument resonates with Latour’s call for a more inclusive political ecology—incommensurable with past scientific paradigms—and states that excluded, marginalized, and othered populations are *indispensable* to our collective futures. Importantly, Pellow is more direct in identifying people of color, specifically African Americans, as part of that collective. Thus, he extends the EJ mantra that *no one should have to suffer pollution* (a phrase originally intended to highlight the importance of including people of color in environmentalist discourses, struggles, and studies) across

“the human/more-than-human spectrum” that Latour is attempting to deconstruct (i.e., the divide between humans and nonhumans).

Visions of Global Environmental Justice answers both Latour’s and Pellow’s respective calls for inclusivity in environmental studies in two major ways. The first is a consideration of a recent trend in transnational environmentalism, the process of granting rights for natural entities (e.g., forests, rivers, lakes), which is of great importance to rural ethnic communities with collectively titled lands.¹¹⁸ If a river is granted rights similar to those of a human being, then what are the implications for communities that have positioned themselves as environmental stewards as the basis for their land claims? This is a tremendously important question throughout the globe, and especially in the Western Hemisphere where Indigenous reservations and *comunidades negras*¹¹⁹ have been established in mostly rural, isolated spaces that are increasingly more desirable to outsiders. Second, discussion of supernatural visions or agencies is very rarely a subject of analysis in any form of environmental studies,¹²⁰ though it is slowly gaining traction within environmental justice studies. If *critical* environmental justice studies seeks to be as inclusive as possible in its framing of who/what is impacted by environmental racism and justice, then isn’t it worth exploring whether supernatural visions also merit consideration?

Of course, many scholars will scoff at this last question because discussion of supernatural visions or entities could stray into the realm of “pseudoscience” or the simply “not scientific.” In contrast, *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* argues that analysis of supernatural visions, entities, and powers is not just relevant, but critically important to understanding the more-than-human dimensions of socio-environmental struggles. As the principal storyteller of this book, my intent is not to prove that the supernatural exists, but to convey how these floating signifiers signal expendability and indispensability within socio-environmental struggles.

SITUATING THE STORYTELLER(S)

Visions of Global Environmental Justice takes a creative approach to relating stories people have been afraid to tell as well as stories that people have been told and do not believe. As Donna Haraway explains: “Understanding the world is about living inside stories. There’s no place to be in the world outside of stories.”¹²¹

Situating knowledge is about placing knowledge production in context and revealing the biases of the storyteller.¹²² It also entails using the vantage point of the subjugated to argue against “unlocatable” and “irresponsible” knowledge claims made by “objective science.”¹²³ I have approached this book in a similar manner, sharing the stories of environmental justice communities challenging the “scientific” knowledge claims that justify environmental racism. I have done so in the spirit of Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, who aims “to demystify theory that ignores subaltern experiences and knowledge of the local economy,

environment, and culture *in order to relocate their politics of place as a key to our understanding of globalization.*"¹²⁴

When I first started conducting research on the relationship between violence and supernatural visions in 2009, there were several important methodological questions that gave me pause. How would I present myself and the intent of my research to the people I intended to interview? How was I going to verify that the violent experiences people recounted in interviews had happened? Did it matter whether they actually believe in the stories they tell about supernatural phenomena? How do I situate my own biases as the storyteller of these findings?

I interviewed displaced persons in Colombia's third-most-populated city, Santiago de Cali, about their personal histories of displacement and their experiences with supernatural phenomena. I specifically chose Cali because I read that the influx of migrants displaced to the city in the 1990s had caused a "revival" in supernatural visions.¹²⁵ I had studied the history and folklore of the Pacific region and knew that Cali, though separated from the Pacific lowlands by mountains, was sometimes described as the capital of the Colombian Pacific because of its large Afro-descendant population.

I conducted my initial interviews at a workshop for displaced women sponsored by the local branch of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). I also interviewed people in the offices of NGOs and in their homes, located in some of Cali's most dangerous neighborhoods. I interviewed thirty women and five men, ranging in age from nineteen to sixty-seven, the vast majority of whom were from rural southwestern Colombia. I interviewed an additional seven people—NGO workers, sociologists, and lawyers—about their perceptions of working with the displaced population.

I presented myself as a researcher from the United States intent on documenting their experiences because people outside of Colombia needed to hear their stories. Racially, I identify as *mestizo* (mix of European and Indigenous ancestry), which means most Colombians would ask a follow-up question when I introduced myself as a foreigner (e.g., But you are Latino, right?). My last name is an ice-breaker of sorts, prompting me to explain my heritage and upbringing as a *gringo latino*.¹²⁶ Throughout most of Latin America, *gringo* is the derogatory term for a foreigner with privilege (i.e., from the Global North). This is a label often rejected by US Latinos, including myself in the past, because gringos in the United States are normally associated with mainstream white American culture, devoid of any connection to Latin America and often looking out of place within it. I referred to myself as a *gringo latino* or *el investigador de gringolandia* (the researcher from Gringoland).

I led with questions about where the people I interviewed had grown up and transitioned to questions about why they were displaced and what their lives were like now. I concluded with questions about supernatural visions of the countryside and whether they had heard or experienced anything comparable in their new

neighborhoods in Cali. Aside from a few academic presentations, very few people have heard these stories until now.

I used the Conflict Analysis Resource Center (CERAC), which compiles and analyzes data on violent conflicts in Colombia, to verify and find out more information about the violent incidents the interviewees described.¹²⁷ A lot of the people I interviewed were vague about certain details of their displacement, especially who was responsible. I learned that a lot of the armed groups engaged in violent conflicts in the countryside were active in the neighborhoods I visited for these interviews.

I read folklore anthologies, history books, journal articles, children's books, and websites for more information on the supernatural visions that people shared with me. I paid particular attention to popular culture platforms—tabloid news outlets, radio shows, and internet blog sites—that circulate such stories. Combing through these sources was helpful for discerning the difference between interviewees' personal experiences and what they had heard elsewhere.

After that initial investigation, I returned to Colombia multiple times to conduct more research, to visit friends, and to see other parts of the country. I am not Colombian but always feel welcome. I have spent a lot of time in many Latin American countries but have spent more time in Colombia than anywhere else, including El Salvador where my father is from. I have had some hair-raising adventures, some of which will be discussed in the chapters ahead.

I recognize that I am privileged to have had such experiences. My US passport not only allows me entry into Colombia, but also decreases the chances that my research will result in my disappearance because I am asking too many questions. I speak Spanish and can blend into most crowds without looking like a tourist. Colombians do not discourage me from doing certain activities because I am a non-disabled man. On the other hand, my being a foreigner can also be a burden for friends and research contacts who feel responsible for my safety. Though I have traveled quite a bit and can generally pass for Colombian (until my accent is detected or someone asks for my documents), I have received ample warnings about traveling alone. I kept these privileges in mind when I conducted my next major investigation on the effects of aerial eradication in *comunidades negras*.

Leading up to that investigation, I conducted a series of smaller research tasks that prepared me for fieldwork: quantitative analysis on the relationship between violence, the presence of armed groups, and coca cultivation in Colombia; interviews with military officers involved in the implementation of Plan Colombia at US Southern Command; an interview with Francisco Thoumi, an expert on drug policy and Colombia's representative on the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board; and participation in meetings with prominent US officials—Carmen Lomellin, US ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS), as well as William Brownfield, assistant secretary of the Bureau of International

Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and former US ambassador to Colombia—about US drug policy.

During fieldwork in 2015, I employed my privilege as a US citizen and visiting researcher at La Universidad de los Andes to gain access to some very important figures in US-Colombian drug policy. For instance, I interviewed the ex-director of Colombian drug policy in the National Council on Narcotics (CNE), high-ranking officials in both the Colombian Department of the Interior and the Department of Justice, the Colombian police official in charge of detecting illicit crops, and the US Embassy department in charge of overseeing aerial eradication. I also observed the process of identifying and mapping coca cultivation in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Bogotá.

I supplemented those interviews, many more interviews, and observations with cartographic data provided by the UNODC and the national Geographic Institute Agustín Codazzi (IGAC). Using that data and quantitative datasets collected in prior research studies, I created maps to demonstrate how certain variables—coca cultivation, coca eradication, comunidades negras, transportation networks, armed group violence, and environmental conservation policies—interact with one another. Those maps inform many insights discussed in this book but are more prominently featured in policy-oriented articles I have published on the subject.

In the Pacific region, I interviewed leadership of important Afro-descendant organizations such as the national Association of Displaced Afro Colombians (AFRODES), the national Maroon movement (CIMARRÓN), Association Manos Negra (ASOMANOSNEGRA), and the Afro Cultural Activities Foundation (ACUA). Most importantly, I conducted most of my interviews through my connections with the Process of Black Communities (PCN), an organization that was fundamental to the establishment of comunidades negras. This relationship was vitally important, not only for the access the PCN provided, but also because of the organization's reputation for networking with NGOs and scholars not from comunidades negras (e.g., Arturo Escobar, Kiran Asher, and Ulrich Oslender). The presence of a non-Afro-descendant person and an unfamiliar face is attention worthy in these smaller communities where outsiders, especially of a lighter complexion, could be associated with a wide range of possibilities including government projects, ecotourism, and drug trafficking (e.g., the paisas mentioned at the beginning of this introduction). Therefore, being invited to PCN events early in my fieldwork signaled the positive intentions of a “white”¹²⁸ outsider and afforded me the possibility of visiting on my own later on once I had cultivated relationships outside of the organization. I visited several comunidades negras in the areas surrounding Guapi and Buenaventura, where I attended PCN meetings, workshops, and special events. This allowed me to interview local residents, *consejo* (council) members, clergy, and city officials. I later visited people's farm plots and homes.

I also interviewed several people whose efforts support comunidades negras, such as lawyers and NGO workers.

I initially had no idea whether people were being honest about whether they did or did not grow coca or whether the spraying occurred as they described it or whether the spraying caused the problems they attributed to it. I could verify areas that might be targeted for aerial eradication through the cartographic data provided by the UNODC and read scholarly articles for more information on the effects of the spraying. Given some of these uncertainties, as well as a wide range of theories about why aerial eradication is conducted in comunidades negras and what it has impacted, my greater focus has been how people have resisted this War on Drugs strategy.

I was eventually invited to make a direct contribution to that resistance and become part of the struggle for environmental justice. I joined a collective action court case in which 27,000 people are suing the Colombian Counternarcotics Police (DIRAN) for damages caused by aerial eradication. The comunidades negras surrounding Guapi are part of this suit, and I was asked to join the case because of my expertise on the guidelines and protocols that supposedly protect comunidades negras from wrongful spraying. My participation has granted me access to the boxes and boxes of evidence compiled by both the plaintiff and the defense. Through analysis of that evidence as well as everything else I gathered through fieldwork, I have documented how environmental racism is masked through maps and protocols. I have also demonstrated how environmental justice is thwarted by bureaucratic paperwork and the discrediting of local knowledge. Ultimately, in outlining my participation in this environmental justice case, I hope to prompt you, the reader, to think about how environmental privilege and justice are relevant to you.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER? WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?
WHY SHOULD YOU READ THE REST OF THIS BOOK?

This introduction has merely outlined the context for *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*. There has been some theorization of why supernatural visions are relevant to environmental justice, but the stories throughout the rest of the book will provoke you to think differently about how you engage being(s) in your surroundings.

The chapters ahead illustrate how supernatural identities such as monsters, “witches,” and “devils” materialize with real consequences for all kinds of beings. These identities demarcate relations of power, determining who is accepted, rejected, or outright eliminated from socio-ecological communities of different scales. Why was the farm lot at the beginning of this introduction fumigated? What does that have to do with the disappearance of supernatural beings from

mangroves? Do these beings migrate or disappear? What impact do these outcomes have on environmental justice?

The migration and disappearance of all kinds of beings on the planet is certainly relevant to the impending doom spelled out by the science of climate change. The irony of climate change science is that it is largely produced within societies doing the bulk of the damage to the planet, societies that then attempt to dictate how the rest of the world should go about saving the planet. As an academic field, EJS importantly questions the uneven relations of power that determine environmentalist agendas and those non/humans disregarded in the process. As a form of environmental activism, EJ struggles empower those most disadvantaged by environmental hazards to determine what justice looks like and how to attain it.

My self-appointed task as the storyteller of this book is to put accounts of the supernatural in conversation with environmental justice studies. In the process I am taking an oral tradition, the recounting of visions, out of its original context (i.e., shared exchange among community members, in this case, in the *comunidades negras* of the southwestern Pacific region of Colombia). I am employing these narratives—translated and transcribed into the context of academic writing—in the service of theorizing new terrain in environmental justice studies (more-than-human agencies and non/human collectives). In doing so, I have attempted to take an active role in expanding the reach of EJS, with an eye toward the development of global EJS.

The stories told in this book and the questions that they prompt are ultimately an invitation to situate your own privilege and your relation to non/human collectives engaged in environmental struggles worldwide.

THE CHAPTERS AHEAD

Chapter 1 presents a set of visions that are recounted in oral histories of the Pacific region. These visions are categorized according to those associated with playfulness (tricksters), deviousness (seductresses), and respect for the environs (ecological monsters). The greater purpose of this discussion is to introduce the “Afro-Pacific” and its communities, highlighting this geography within the greater struggles of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations throughout the Americas. In Colombia, these struggles have been muted by decades of violent conflict, resulting in Afro-descendants’ disproportionate representation in one of the largest populations of internally displaced people on the planet. This introduction argues that this violence is a form of necropolitics—the elimination of certain lives, especially Black and Brown lives—as a constitutive element of the creation of modern states. It also argues that racial capitalism, the devaluation of certain people who serve little importance to capitalist markets when their labor is not in demand, is fundamental to necropolitics. In the case of the Colombian Pacific

region, rural Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples are *disposed in, displaced from, and dispossessed of* their respective territories.

Chapter 2 shifts from the rural Afro-Pacific to the urban Afro-Pacific, specifically Santiago de Cali, Colombia's third-largest city and a major recipient of Afro-descendants displaced from the countryside. Following the model established in the previous chapter, the supernatural visions are organized according to categorizations: those associated with counter-Christian morals (devils), supernatural powers (witches), and necropower (narco-monsters). This chapter highlights the struggle for survival in neighborhoods "where it is the live ones, not the dead ones, that you should worry about at night" (*de noche, son los vivos los más bravos*). Drawing from necropolitics, it theorizes that the persistence of discrimination in Cali—especially in the forms of anti-Blackness and anti-immigrant sentiment—has transformed part of the city into a necropolis. This chapter ultimately argues that this necropolis is both the product of and the rationalization of violence and environmental racism.

Chapter 3 frames the War on Drugs as a transnational environmental justice issue. It first analyzes a set of public service announcements created by the Colombian government to discourage the cultivation of coca plants (killer plants). These video advertisements, narrated by a child's voice and animated in the style of a Sunday cartoon, bear an uncanny resemblance to the visions found in children's books throughout Colombia. The second half of the chapter describes the Two-Headed Monster, a monster I invented to describe the US demand for cocaine and its imperative to stop the Colombian supply of it. This chapter argues that this Two-Headed Monster is the product of "necropolitical ecologies," a term that describes how the surplus value extracted from Indigenous land and resources during colonization is now being used to marginalize those populations under modern-day institutions of governance. This Two-Headed Monster, the manifestation of transnational pressure to modernize Colombia in a global economic system, is presented as the genetic mutation of related extractivist ecologies in the Colombian Pacific (e.g., oil, gold, biogenetic material).

Chapter 4 theorizes *comunidades negras* as "global" environmental justice communities, employing visions to outline the ways that these communities' struggles traverse political boundaries and ontologies. Though other chapters touch upon International Labour Organization Convention 169, chapter 4 provides greater historical context for "prior consultation" as a legal instrument for collectively titled Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Then, grounding this discussion in the context of post-peace-agreement violence in Colombia, it connects this explanation to a strategy gaining steam in environmentalist movements across the globe, which is the designation of waterways, landforms, and ecosystems as entities with "natural rights." Does this strategy benefit EJ communities such as *comunidades negras*? Or is "nature with rights" the perpetuation

of the nature-city binary problematized in critical social science theory? How does the conceptualization of earth spirits, such as Mother Earth, inform these debates?

Chapter 5 summarizes the main themes and arguments of the book and then transitions to some additional observations on the implications of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice* for global EJS. It reflects on how the book has employed supernatural visions, necropolitical theory, political ecology, and the lessons of comunidades negras in the service of EJS. It also provides some basic guidelines for global EJS and suggests different areas of need for future scholarship.