

Tricksters, Seductresses, and Eco-Monsters

This chapter theorizes the human and more-than-human relations of socio-ecological communities communicated through the oral tradition of stories about supernatural visions. Afro-Colombian scholar and poet Alfredo Vanín Romero eloquently outlines the spatial dimensions of life and the supernatural in the Pacific region, in the following quote:

Two spaces compete for and complement the life of the Pacific: the shamanic, non-cultured space (the jungle, the depths of the water), enabler of the creatures of the underworld, of the visions, souls, monstrosities, shadows and powers of witchcraft; and the cultured space, where man's chores, fishing, agriculture take place, and where man recognizes himself with his fellow beings. It is the underworld where terrible beings spring from, but at the same time create limits so that man does not transgress the laws of nature and be destroyed. Myths and legends carry these prohibitions and at the same time prolong the spirituality of shamanism.¹

This chapter is about how those two spaces of the Pacific region, the difficult-to-describe space of the supernatural and the more recognizable space of human relations/activities, are impacted by the multiple conflicts that fall under the umbrella term *the Colombian conflict*. The visions presented in this chapter are emblematic of both attitudes about socio-ecological relations and the violence of war inscribed in the rural landscape. These visions also figuratively transport the reader to a specific cultural context, the *comunidades negras* of southwestern Colombia, where oral traditions are highly valued. Such traditions are constantly being shaped by changing circumstances, including socio-environmental injustices. The recounting of visions is therefore emblematic of multiple aspects of the push for “critical environmental justice studies”: (1) the importance of recognizing the



FIGURE 4. The cultured and non-cultured spaces of the Pacific region (illustrated by Jose E. Arboleda).

knowledge production of environmental justice communities as these stories transmit knowledge about socio-ecological relations and injustices across generations and geographic spaces; (2) the importance of continuing that tradition as a means of community building because unity and open dialogue are fundamental to the mobilization against injustice; and (3) the importance of acknowledging the more-than-human dimensions of environmental justice communities, which are articulated in these stories through the agency of the visions and other nonhumans.²

Figure 4 illustrates Vanín Romero's quote, with the realm of cultured space or human activities depicted above and the underworld below. Symbols of the cultured space include bananas (a sustenance food crop), a rosary (symbol of Christianity), a snake (a wild animal also sometimes associated with Christian sin), an AK-47 rifle (a symbol of death and war), a home (a symbol of community), and vegetation (life). Symbols of the underworld include skulls (death) mixed with roots (the beginnings of life) and fire (a symbol of destruction within the context of war or, alternatively, a metaphor for the oral tradition that must be fed fuel to persist). Supernatural visions notably bridge these two worlds, emphasizing that there is not always a clear divide between these spaces. There is also a shaman bridging these two worlds, holding an insect (likely for a potion) and demonstrating a unique relationship with the natural world (the frog perched upon his head). The full moon on the horizon is frequently associated with the manifestation of supernatural phenomena, such as the witches flying into the foreground. Do people really see such things?

ORAL TRADITIONS AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Pablo,³ a sixty-four-year-old gentleman who now lives in Cali, had not personally witnessed any visions in his lifetime. He associated the visions with the tales his grandmother shared with him when he was growing up in Charco, Nariño. Pablo described the visions as "the old stories."⁴ I asked him if he had heard about any visions lately and he explained, "The youth no longer believe in such stories."⁵ I asked him if he was sad about that- and to my confusion, he said he was not. He associated the visions with the loss of other folkloric traditions of the Afro-Pacific such as *cantos y arrullos* (songs and lullabies), *currulao* (a musical genre), and *décimas* (poetry recited orally). While I thought that Pablo would be sad that these traditions were fading, he thought I was implying that these traditions make people sad. Pablo then started reciting lines of a *décima* from memory: "I come from the other world . . ."⁶ He completed the *décima* by emphatically stating, "It is an honor to know these traditions."⁷ His pride stemmed from the fact that he was actively keeping these traditions alive, serving as a memory bank and resource for the next generations.

In her book on the oral traditions of the Afro-Pacific, Colombian anthropologist Nancy Motta González makes the following observations:

Oral narration has existed on the Pacific Coast since its Black population settled in these American lands and its heritage is magical and ancestral. Orality as an

expressive source and form of direct communication, refers to a set of cultural manifestations, to the daily acts of each moment of life and death, to traumas, uprooting and ethnic anguish, to proposals and answers about events and future becomings.

... the meaning of what is told or referred to, and the contrast with what is simply spoken or commented, allow ordinary possibilities to be surpassed and grant access to a semantics of enchantment, which of course goes beyond linguistics and language itself.

Consequently, in the historical process of the formation of Black communities in the different ecosystems of the Pacific Region, the narrator has occupied an important place in the heart of the communities.⁸

In other words, the storyteller is powerful because they establish ancestral connections, communicate ideas, process traumatic events, and generally make sense of the world. Furthermore, the words they utter possess magical or transformative qualities unto themselves.

Chapter 1 will make three interrelated arguments about supernatural visions and violence: (1) as supernatural tales, visions discipline people to ensure the survival of their socio-ecological communities, operating as a kind of biopower; (2) as supernatural entities, visions and ghosts remind peasants of their expendability, which is a necropolitical continuity that began with the colonization of Latin America; (3) as subjects of environmental justice studies, visions and ghosts remind scholars that violence against communities of color is inextricable from environmental racism, affecting all beings within socio-ecological communities. However, to understand how visions have come to represent these different aspects of socio-ecological relations, it is important to consider their origins.

DIABOLIC ORIGINS

José was raised in the comunidad negra of Zacarías Río Dagua near Buenaventura. Growing up he had heard stories about visions such as *La Mano Peluda* (the Furry Hand), *La Viuda* (the Widow), and *El Hombre Sin Cabeza* (the Headless Man), but he claimed to have seen three other visions in person, specifically *El Duende* (a seductive trickster goblin), *La Tunda* (a seductive forest spirit), and *El Diablo* (the Devil). As a child José spotted the Devil near a brook that bordered his family's farm plot. I asked him what the Devil looked like, whether it had any features of a goat. "No, it was human form, a Black man with gold teeth." José's account surprised me in two regards. In the first place, every other account of the Devil I had come across in Colombia painted the picture of an entity that was half human and half beast, usually with at least some characteristics of a goat (e.g., horns, tail, hooves). I was so caught off guard by his response that I failed to ask José how he knew that this person was the Devil. Second, I found it odd that José had mentioned this devil in the context of the other visions he had heard about or

seen. I was curious about how anthropologists and folklorists would view the devil mentioned in this context.

In his article about a legendary conflict between a priest, a marimba player, and the devil in the Pacific coast of Colombia, French anthropologist Michel Agier specifically explains how the visions came to be associated with the devil:

Unlike in Cuba, Haiti or Bahia, there was in Colombia no pantheon of African or syncretic origin that organized beliefs, rites and dances into a whole system, but the devil first and foremost occupied a symbolic mediating role. . . . Starting from his intermediate position, the devil became a paradigm that facilitated the revival and, in a way, the organization of a set of pagan figures (the *visiones*, whose most ancient origins are themselves extremely heterogeneous: Spanish, Amerindian and African) to which were added “paganized” Christian entities. The devil was in this way considerably multiplied in form.¹⁰

The “paganized” Christian entities” identified in the article are Catholic saints. In other words, both devils and saints are the subjects of oral storytelling, which means that their attributes are sometimes adapted to serve the purposes of the storyteller. It is believed that *the* devil and his minions, the visions, roam the earth during Holy Week when Jesus Christ is not on earth, especially Good Friday and Holy Saturday, the days preceding Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday. Many people will recite prayers in the name of God or invoke Catholic saints to protect themselves from these entities.

For example, José also mentioned La Tunda, a vision associated with the comunidades negras of the Pacific coast of Colombia and Ecuador. She is frequently described as an ugly woman with one foot in the shape of a *molinillo* (whisk or grinder) and a pungent body odor. La Tunda takes the form of loved ones or ex-lovers to deceive her victims, which include unbaptized infants, disobedient children, and unfaithful partners, both men and women. While taking the shape of that trusted person, she convinces her victims to follow her into the forest, where she feeds them a shrimp concoction and puts them under her spell by releasing her strong odor. Those under her spell, *los entundados*, fall in love with her and abandon their relationships with everyone they know. Search parties comprised of the person’s godparents, a priest, relatives, and friends enter the forest banging drums, igniting gunpowder, and shooting guns to scare off La Tunda.¹¹ They sprinkle holy water and recite verses of prayer such as this one:

Santo Dios (Holy God),
Santo Fuerte (Powerful God),
Santo Dios imortal (holy immortal God),
Libráanos, Señor (deliver us, Lord),
de todo mal . . . (from everything evil . . .)¹²

It is worth noting that such prayer verses are uttered not just to appeal to God, but also for the animals and spirits of the forest to conduct God's will (i.e., break La Tunda's spell by contributing to the commotion caused by the search party).¹³ Yet, to describe these visions as overtly evil or scary would be misleading. For instance, Miguel described El Duende as relatively harmless. He told me the story of the time he was fishing with a friend and thought that El Duende was playing tricks on him. He saw a light in the water and felt something pulling. Yet when he pulled the line out of the water, there was nothing there. Miguel and his friend ran, but the shrieks of El Duende followed them. On a separate occasion he was walking home alone and crossing a bridge when he spotted El Duende. It was dark but he made out the figure of a white-skinned man with hunched posture, wearing a large sombrero. He called to the man, but the man did not respond. Miguel walked to the place he had seen the man, but he had disappeared. He then heard the shrieking of El Duende and began to run. "He scares you but does not do any harm."¹⁴

While the origins and descriptions of El Duende vary regionally throughout Latin America, many explanations identify this vision as an angel expelled from heaven:

God preserved the Luzbelline angels who played the *tiple* [small acoustic guitar]. Those angel-musicians could leave and enter heaven with complete freedom and took the opportunity to come to earth to party. They took longer and longer to return, until one day they found the heavenly gates closed. God did not want to let them in anymore and the wandering angels returned to earth. Here they became duendes, small beings dressed in colors that wear a large hat, linked to music, in particular to the *tiple*. The divinity or evil of these enchanted beings is connected to the attitudes people have with their fellow human beings or with the natural environment, of which they are guardians, causing hunters not to be able to see their prey despite having them in front or surrounding them or enveloping them in the forest so that they cannot harm the vegetation and the beings that live there.¹⁵

This excerpt explains why duendes, fallen angels who got stuck on earth because they were having fun, are sometimes described, or perceived, as harmless creatures.

It also may explain why Miguel never caught that fish. Perhaps El Duende was protecting the fish's life and wanted to scare Miguel away. Stories about duendes and other visions not only communicate ideas about morals but also about biological control.

ECO-MONSTERS

I did not ask Daniel, from Buenaventura, anything about visions or other elements of the supernatural, but the subject came up anyway. I was interviewing him about how the aerial eradication of coca was impacting the food supply of the southwestern Pacific region of Colombia. Daniel worked for the Association of Food Producers and Marketers of the Pacific (ASPROPACÍFICO) and listed

several impacts of aerial eradication (discussed in later chapters). During the interview, he made sure to emphasize the importance of social gatherings for his organization:

We not only focus on this issue of food, income generation, and the social component, but here we have some community meetings, rather neighborhood meetings, where we begin to share experiences. So, if I have this banana plant and X plague is attacking it, like the screw worm, then these families begin to tell what it would be like to control it. Biological control without using the chemical because not everyone has the money to buy a kilo of it to control that screw worm. So we begin among the same farmer, the neighbor, to talk about how to control this pest. . . . We begin to talk about La Tunda, La Patasola, La Madre de Agua, El Duende. . . . So, we begin to tell those stories precisely in those moments. That is the social importance of this organizational component. To have these conversations we need to empower the people in our territories with a prior knowledge of our history. And this is carried on from generation to generation.

While Daniel raised the subject of social gathering in the context of the importance of his organization, his commentary clearly speaks to the importance of oral traditions as a form of producing and conserving knowledge. The fact that he mentioned both agricultural techniques to manage pests and the oral tradition of telling stories about visions in the same response is noteworthy. Both represent forms of “biological control.”

French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) theorized that techniques of biological control underwent a major shift when European societies transitioned from monarchies to the modern state system. Kings and queens had the power to take life for the sake of the order of the people. In contrast, governments and organizations of the modern state system maintain order through the management of human bodies, social bodies, and the reproductive capacities of those bodies.¹⁶ Foucault explains, “Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.”¹⁷ Foucault termed this form of control “biopolitics,” which he defined as a political rationality “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order” and to guarantee the survival of human species and societies.¹⁸ He theorized that biopolitics operates through “biopower”—“power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulation.”¹⁹ Biopower operates through different channels or networks of administration and ultimately organizes how people live.

By conceptualizing these terms, Foucault challenged mechanisms or technologies of biological control that are taken for granted because they are thought to be objectively neutral and/or beneficial to greater society. He paid particular

attention to the articulation, regulation, criminalization, and incarceration of “insane” persons displaying “deviant” behaviors.²⁰ In tracing the lineage of terms such as *lunatic* or *homosexual*, Foucault called into question both the language and the institutions that discipline human bodies, corporally as well as psychologically. His underlying point was not that biopower is inherently bad, rather that biopolitics can be dangerous if a society is not vigilant about the power it surrenders when a paradigm shift facilitates new forms of biological control.²¹

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic exemplified modern-day biopolitics and biopower. Each nation-state made decisions about how it would handle the pandemic according to its own biopolitics (i.e., whose lives were prioritized and what was the best way to ensure survival of those lives). Travel restrictions, mask mandates, and vaccination requirements are examples of the exercise of biopower through different channels, some government-related and others that are not but follow the biopolitics of state institutions. Biopower circulates through the administration of government agencies and laws as well as through people disciplining themselves to follow certain rules and to adhere to certain patterns of behavior, which become normalized over time. In the United States, there were some federal government regulations to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, but individual state governments, city governments, businesses, and communities were the primary conduits of biopower. For instance, some businesses discontinued the employment of people who refused to get vaccinated. Likewise, in places where there was no mandate to wear a mask in public, the pressure to get vaccinated, wear a mask, or distance oneself from others stemmed from social ostracism. In other words, biopower materializes through a multiplicity of channels including organizations, laws, and norms of social behavior. While it is not possible to ask Foucault what he thinks of the biopolitics of the COVID-19 pandemic, he did describe how the spread of the plague was managed in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century. Towns were closed, people were quarantined inside their homes, authorities registered the status of residents, and people who violated those rules were subject to death. The plague and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, provided opportunities for governments to exercise new forms of human surveillance and biological control.²²

Returning to the context of *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*, the terms *biopolitics* and *biopower* are useful for contrasting the mechanisms of biological control employed by comunidades negras with those articulated through national security politics and transnational drug policy. In other words, in this book these terms identify the ways that biological control operates through socio-ecological communities defined at different scales (i.e., comunidades negras, the nation-state of Colombia, the global community defined by transnational drug policy, etc.). Extending this analogy further, the oral tradition of recounting visions operates as a form of local biopolitics in comunidades negras (i.e., a type of rural socio-ecological community). El Duende and La Tunda enforce social norms through

fear. Raise your daughter to be virtuous or she might succumb to the charms of El Duende. Don't let your kids wander into the forest or they may be kidnapped by La Tunda. As Vanín Romero notes, these stories "reinforce norms of conduct in the face of nature, for example that children respect water and do not take risks until they acquire skills. The internalization of the norm guarantees individual and ethnic survival."²³ While the visions themselves may be considered harmful or threatening to people who witness them, the stories about visions are representative of the biopolitics or "political rationality" intended to maximize life and relationships between people.

Drawing this analogy out further, the visions told within these stories possess biopowers that impact not only human bodies, but also other species as well. For instance, *La Patasola* (the One-Legged Woman) has just one leg because, according to the legend, her husband chopped off one of her legs with an axe when he found her cheating with another man. Left for dead in the wild, this spirit appears in the form of a beautiful woman to seduce men and, once she has captured her prey, transforms into her actual self, a one-legged woman with red eyes and fangs. In some descriptions, she also has extremely long arms, which propel her forward as if they were crutches. As with La Tunda, her story discourages infidelity (i.e., cheat on your significant other and you might be chopped to pieces).²⁴ However, *La Patasola* also serves an important ecological role: "She is the mother of the animals of the forest, in charge of erasing the tracks or traces of the animals pursued by others, but for this operation to be carried out, she must walk backwards. *La Patasola* is therefore a unipedal being. Her only leg is joined by the two thighs. It is said that she is a friend of almost all wild animals, which she defends tooth and nail from other animals and humans, especially hunters, walkers, and settlers."²⁵

Similar to El Duende, *La Patasola* defends wild animals from being hunted. Conversely, domesticated dogs warn their human owners that she is near and are sometimes employed to hunt her down.²⁶ Thus, *La Patasola* discourages humans and animals aligned with humans from encroaching on the territory of wild animals.

Furthermore, many communities, especially those rooted in ecologies of difference, such as the *comunidades negras* of the Pacific region, include visions that exercise biopower *through* the forces of nature. This is especially evident with *La Madremonte* (the Mother of Wilderness), whose appearance is often described as a fusion of woman, forest, and wetland.

Her mission is to take care of forests, jungles, and nature in general. It is because of her that ferocious winds, storms, and floods destroy crops and seedlings. Likewise, she lets out shrill, infernal screams, preceded by furious moans when tree cutters and hunters invade her grounds. It is said that she easily attracts wood collectors who seek their livelihood on trails and roads; while they listen to her deafening screams, it seems that a hypnotic force orders them to follow her footsteps into the wild, which takes them off course for days, weeks, months. There she

dismembers them and, finally, eats them, leaving only a pile of misshapen bones as a residue.²⁷

La Madremonte literally thwarts the spread of agriculture through extreme winds and rain. She disorients and dismembers men whose livelihoods involve the destruction of forests. La Madremonte exercises biopower in the defense of the flora and fauna that belong to those ecosystems, thus promoting the survival of the *entire* socio-ecological community.

When conceptualized as fictional stories, these supernatural visions have much in common with other legendary monsters such as werewolves and vampires. The emergent literature of “monster theory” signals that so many of the monstrous entities that frighten are simply misunderstood.²⁸ The werewolf, for example, incites fears about hybrid bodies (half human and half beast) and can be interpreted as a monster that elicits fear of nonconforming sexual identities. “It oscillates between the city—with the sociopolitical recognition that comes with it—and the forest, which represents lawlessness, chaos, bestiality. This relates to the fact that the monster exists as a kind of criminal, the banished ‘other’ that refuses to conform.”²⁹ Likewise, the vampire is traditionally portrayed as a being who has transgressed the bounds of life and death, a repressed human soul with an insatiable appetite running amok in civil society.³⁰

Through the lens of monster theory, tales of visions such as La Tunda and La Patasola could be conceived as a category of “eco-monsters” whose hybrid feminine bodies invoke fear and respect for socio-ecological norms and boundaries. Vanín Romero explains that these stories have “enforced prohibitions of transgression of nature (excessive felling of trees, fishing beyond consumption capacity) so as not to overload ecosystems.”³¹ In the case of La Patasola, her transgression of social norms in the human realm (i.e., infidelity) factored into her transformation into a frightening spirit aligned with undomesticated (i.e., free-spirited) animals. La Madremonte, whose feminine body is literally fused with elements of the forest, disrupts, disorients, and/or devours men who advance the frontiers of human settlement. These eco-monsters exercise their biopowers to define the spatial limits of ecosystems, what beings belong to those ecosystems, and who survives in those ecosystems.

Whether the stories of these visions are shared with others, especially subsequent generations, is a matter of preference, rooted in personal experience and informed by desired outcomes. Zenón, a fifty-nine-year-old man, mentioned that El Duende, La Tunda, La Patasola, and La Madremonte were the visions that most people told stories about in Zabaletas, Buenaventura. He said it was normal for people from his region (i.e., the Pacific lowlands), and from the Colombian countryside in general, to engage in this form of storytelling. Zenón thought that it was strange that he never saw any visions, because he started working at the age of seven and had the kinds of jobs—namely, tree cutting and agriculture—where one would expect to encounter such things. I asked him if he

was going to share those stories with his grandchildren who were being raised in cities. "Yes, I will tell them those stories and, ideally, tell them about my life in the countryside. They know nothing about the countryside."³²

Angélica, a twenty-eight-year-old woman originally from Puerto Tejada, Cauca, did not know much about visions until she moved to Sidón, Nariño, which she described as "a little town of ghosts."³³ She encountered *La Bruja* (the Witch), El Duende, and La Madremonte in Sidón and stated, "Those things I believe in because I lived them. . . . I am not going to tell my children about those things because, for me, it was very traumatic. I am someone who gets scared easily. It would be traumatic for them."³⁴ I asked Angélica why there were more visions in Sidón than in Puerto Tejada, and she replied, "It is the evil of the past."³⁵

CONFLICT, COCAINE, AND DISPLACEMENT

In the most general terms, "the evil of the past" refers to a problem endemic to much of Latin America and the Caribbean, the precarity of rural peasants who do not possess title to the land they occupy nor the means to defend themselves from armed groups. The monopolization of land and resources by Latin American elites and foreign capitalists has been the root cause of devastating civil conflicts such as the Mexican Revolution, the Guatemalan Civil War, the Cuban Revolution, and the Salvadoran Civil War. The United States has interfered in these and so many other conflicts throughout the region because the redistribution of land and resources sought through these popular uprisings has been perceived as a threat to private business interests and "democratic" ideals (i.e., fears of socialism and communism).

The peasants I interviewed about their displacement shared similar details about their lives in *el campo* (the countryside) before armed groups arrived in their communities, no matter which part of Colombia they came from. For instance, almost every person I interviewed lamented that they used to be able to provide for themselves in ways that they cannot now. Zenón complained, "You have to pay for everything in the city!"³⁶ They also lamented the fact that their interpersonal relationships used to be more meaningful. Mirabel from Cajibío, Cauca, commented, "People in the countryside are more connected."³⁷ Lucía from San Juan, Chocó, stated, "Coexistence is different . . . the truth is, before the armed groups arrived . . . life was very good. I am sixty-nine years old with three grandchildren and I cannot find work. I do not have worth in Buenaventura like I did in the countryside."³⁸ While it is often natural to idealize a place and time where/when everything was better, the people I interviewed were definitive that their lives were relatively peaceful until armed groups arrived.

In Colombia, most historians signpost *la Violencia* (1946–1960), a period of violent disorder that began with the presidential election of 1946, as the catalyst for the conflicts still happening today. In the 1946 election, the Liberal Party split

its support among two candidates and the Conservatives claimed the presidency. One of these Liberal candidates, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, embodied the marginalized working class's best hope for popular reforms in the 1950 election.³⁹ That is, until he was murdered campaigning in 1948, triggering a wave of urban violence that would not subside until the 1960s.⁴⁰ Colombian legal scholar Rodrigo Uprimny Yepes notes, "More than anything else, the Violence symbolizes in many ways the failure of collective action in Colombia. For it resulted in . . . the failure, in sum, of politics as the collective construction of a democratic order and a modern state."⁴¹

In the 1960s guerilla groups, rooted in histories of agrarian struggle and catalyzed by the shock waves of a Cuban Revolution felt throughout the Americas, emerged to declare their opposition to the Colombian state.⁴² The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) originated from a tradition of peasant self-defense movements that preceded la Violencia.⁴³ The National Liberation Army (ELN) developed from a mix of disenchanted university students and college graduates active in la Violencia.⁴⁴ While these movements had ideological differences, both advocated for the rights of the rural poor by opposing the privatization of Colombia's natural resources and the dispossession of peasant lands.⁴⁵ The guerillas originally predominated in the peripheral regions of Colombia's colonization, where they became de facto regional governments, asserting social control over the regulation of property and production. Later their presence expanded to cattle lands and oil regions, where they extracted income through the use and threat of violence.⁴⁶ Because most of the displaced people I interviewed were from the countryside, *la guerrilla* almost always referred to the FARC.

In the 1970s, emerald traders, contraband traffickers, and the first drug cartel bosses purchased massive haciendas throughout the country.⁴⁷ These new wealthy landowners were particularly vulnerable to the FARC. Though still a relatively marginal armed group, the FARC was financing its insurgency through extortion, kidnappings, and threats to local authorities and civilians.⁴⁸ Government peace negotiations with the guerillas in the 1980s handcuffed the military's capacity to wage an anti-subversive campaign and rankled military leadership. In response, the Colombian military secretly sponsored the formation of private regional peasant armies that sought to physically exterminate guerilla leaders and their political supporters.⁴⁹

In 1982 the drug cartels sponsored the creation of Death to the Kidnappers (MAS), a death squad that specifically targeted guerilla fighters and their families and later converted into a private security force contracted by large landowners. Similar paramilitary organizations appeared elsewhere throughout the country where the cartels conducted their business.⁵⁰ Meanwhile as part of the negotiated peace plan with the Colombian government, the FARC had formed the Patriotic Union (UP), a political party consisting of demobilized soldiers. Though the party made some gains in the ensuing years, Colombian historians LaRosa and Mejia

explain it was “systematically eliminated by a number of webs of mysterious forces including the military, hired murderers/paramilitary forces, members of leftist organizations, and, increasingly, powerful drug cartels.”⁵¹ Eventually this violence extinguished any hope for a negotiated settlement and fostered a general sense of distrust in government authority and its military backing.⁵²

The cartels’ rise to prominence in the 1980s coincided with the national government turning a blind eye to these extrajudicial killings. As the cartels became wealthier and more violent, they transformed the State itself, as evidenced when Pablo Escobar—head of the powerful Medellín cartel—was appointed an “alternate” member of congress in 1982. The assassination of numerous government leaders, including Colombian Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in 1984 and presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán in 1989, factored into a growing resistance against the cartels.⁵³

Through a combination of internal rivalry, domestic pressure, and US insistence, the two major cartels—Medellín and Cali—were dismantled by the mid-1990s. The vertical drug-trafficking structure, in which the big cartels controlled the entire process, from cultivation to international distribution, was replaced by a more horizontal formation in which hundreds of smaller operators specialized in different phases of drug production and distribution.⁵⁴ Guerilla and paramilitary groups seized the opportunity to get involved in the trafficking business, forming alliances with Mexican and Brazilian organizations facilitating exportation.⁵⁵

Prior to the 1990s Colombia drug traffickers mostly purchased coca paste from Bolivia and Peru. However, a combination of circumstances—the collapse of the Cali cartel (that bought paste from Peruvians), a Peruvian fungus infestation known as *el gringo*, and Peruvian President Fujimori’s increased interdiction efforts against illegal flights leaving Peru and Bolivia for Colombia—factored into Colombia becoming the world’s largest coca cultivator by the end of the 1990s.⁵⁶ In 1990 Colombia cultivated 19 percent of all Andean coca, whereas by 2000 Colombia cultivated 72 percent of all Andean coca.⁵⁷

Guerilla groups—historically active in areas neglected by the Colombian government—taxed the production and distribution of illicit drugs. These taxes were initially collected from traffickers and middlemen and later collected from peasant farmers themselves.⁵⁸ This included taxes on the following: the weight of goods cultivated or processed, the laboratories where the ingredients were processed, the airstrips where planes landed and took off, and drug shipments.⁵⁹ One study estimates that between 1991 and 1996, the FARC and ELN generated \$2.4 billion in earnings, roughly 44 percent of which was derived from drug trafficking.⁶⁰ This income allowed the FARC to significantly expand its operations in Colombia, especially in what became known as the coca belt of southern Colombia, which contained 80 percent of all coca grown in the country by 1999.⁶¹ In 1986 the FARC numbered 32 battalions and approximately 3,600 soldiers, and by 1995 their forces had essentially doubled with 60 battalions and 7,000 soldiers.⁶²

In the 1990s paramilitary groups began challenging the guerillas' dominion over coca-producing regions and drug-trafficking corridors to finance the purchase of black market weapons. These groups terrorized, massacred, and forcibly displaced rural peasants throughout the country from regions controlled or thought to be controlled by guerilla forces. In 1996, seven regional paramilitary groups formed a federation known as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), which expanded the paramilitary offensive in regions controlled by guerillas.⁶³ In the face of domestic and international pressure, the AUC's coalition of thirty-seven groups was eventually demobilized by 2006 under President Uribe's administration.⁶⁴

The Colombian government refused to label the successor groups that followed the AUC as "paramilitary" or "neo-paramilitary" groups even though many of these groups are composed of the same individuals, have conducted the same activities as the AUC, and are equally violent against the civilian population. Nevertheless, Human Rights Watch has noted, "Some are more closely linked to the conflict between the Colombian security forces and FARC and ELN guerillas than others," and the government has deemed these groups "newly emergent criminal bands," or BACRIM.⁶⁵

Most of the people I interviewed described the soldiers who arrived in their communities as *grupos armados* (armed groups), which could mean any combination of the FARC, paramilitary soldiers,⁶⁶ and the national military. Lucía fled San Juan, Chocó, with her three grandchildren because the FARC and a paramilitary group had arrived in her community. José had to flee his community near Buenaventura because he was threatened by both FARC and paramilitary soldiers. Pablo, who was the president of his community council in Charco, Nariño, was also threatened by both groups. Five members of his family were killed, including his son, his brothers, and an uncle.

Some of the people I interviewed were part of *desplazamiento masivos* (mass displacements) in which many people abandoned their homes at the same time. For instance, Mirabel fled Cajibío, Cauca, with people from four *veredas* (small villages or hamlets) in 2000. She described the cause of this displacement as "the scourge of everything"⁶⁷ and was not sure which groups were responsible. Both her brother and her uncle were killed. Zenón explained that the FARC arrived in his community of Zabaletas near Buenaventura in 1993, and paramilitary forces arrived seven years later in 2000. The paramilitary soldiers wanted to know who had been collaborating with the FARC and had the entire hamlet of 200 people line up outside. They picked out 12 people they accused of working with the FARC and executed them in front of everyone. I asked Zenón what kind of collaboration with the FARC merited death, and he described what sounded like a no-win situation: "They paid people in town for services or stuff like gasoline . . . very difficult to say no to that when you do not have money and the guy has a rifle."⁶⁸ The entire vereda left for the city of Buenaventura the next day.

Multiple people I interviewed fled violence between the FARC and the Colombian military. For instance, Mónica from the community of Rio Tapaje near Charco, Nariño, asked me, "Do you know why the armed groups entered town?"

Because of injustice!”⁶⁹ She distrusted Colombian soldiers the same as any other armed group: “They can kill you and then claim afterwards that you were a guerilla fighter. They did that to an older lady.”⁷⁰

THE NECROPOLITICS OF THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT

The concept of “necropolitics” is useful to understanding modern warfare and why many nation-states wage violence against their own populations. It is also useful to connecting many conflicts happening throughout the world to historical continuities and disrupting the notion that certain conflicts are isolated events of violence. Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembé articulated the concepts of necropolitics and necropower as critiques of biopolitics and biopower. He asked, “Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective?”⁷¹ Mbembé argues that Foucault’s theorization of biopolitics and biopower was so focused on European history that it overlooked the extent to which death and destruction became normalized through European colonization of the Global South. For instance, Mbembé states, “Any historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation.”⁷² Furthermore, he notes that many of the mechanisms that protected Europeans in their respective homelands did not apply to colonized peoples, “the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of judicial order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization.’”⁷³ Mbembé argues that the colonial occupation of Palestine is emblematic of modern necropower, “subjugation of life to the power of death,”⁷⁴ because not only does the Israeli state dominate through violence and destruction, but it also legitimizes its presence through a narrative that establishes that Israel has “a divine right to exist.”⁷⁵

The murder, torture, and forcible displacement of Colombian peasants also fits the description of modern necropower, while the necropolitics of the Colombian conflict is the rationalization of that violence through transnational aid and geopolitical discourses. The regions that have endured the brunt of this violence exist at the margins of the country’s transportation network and other aspects of infrastructure such as electricity grids, schools, and hospitals. In many of these places, armed groups tax the local populations for those services. These areas can be understood as frontier spaces that were never successfully colonized by the Spanish or their successors who primarily settled in the more temperate climates of the Andes mountains.⁷⁶ Extending Mbembé’s theory to this geo-historical imagination of Colombia, these spaces are subject to necropower because they exist beyond the limits of a modern state.

The Pacific region is particularly subject to necropower for three major reasons. In the first place, the state no longer holds a monopoly over the right to kill, because

“war machines” have emerged in places where the postcolonial state’s authority does not exist: “The extraction and looting of natural resources by war machines goes hand in hand with brutal attempts to immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people or, paradoxically, to unleash them, to force them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of a territorial state.”⁷⁷

While Mbembé specifically referenced the “war machines” of Africa in his theorization, there are strong parallels in the Pacific region and Colombia in general. Armed groups finance themselves through the control of extractive industries such as oil and gold as well as plantation economies such as African palm and coca. The brutal attempts at the immobilization and spatialization of peasant populations have resulted in Colombia having one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons in the world, at 9 million people according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.⁷⁸

Second, the Colombian state’s war against insurgents (i.e., the FARC and ELN) and narcotics (i.e., the various groups involved in the production and traffic of illegal drugs) implicates everyday people in huge swaths of the country not under the control of the Colombian military. Similar to prolonged civil conflicts such as the Vietnam War, peasants could easily be implicated as guerilla fighters or supporters without judge or jury. Peasant death, suffering, or displacement has been rationalized under military objectives—such as “counterinsurgency,” “counternarcotics,” or, after 9/11, “counterterrorism”—financially and technically supported by the Plan Colombia agreement with the United States.⁷⁹

Finally, the modern-day terror experienced by *comunidades negras* today cannot be abstracted from the historical context of slavery in the Pacific region. Distrust of the military, of the police, and of the state in general did not originate with the Colombian conflict and is not a unique perspective among other Afro-descendant populations of the Americas.⁸⁰ *Comunidades negras* and their counterparts throughout the Americas are concrete reminders that human beings did not want to be subjugated, tortured, mutilated, raped, and murdered while laboring for long hours without pay. *Palenques*,⁸¹ *quilombos*,⁸² and other maroon societies throughout the hemisphere proliferated during the colonial period because they offered an escape from that inhumane treatment. Those societies persist in the present, under a variety of terms, such as *comunidades negras*, because they continue to offer what geographer Bledsoe terms “spaces free from assumptions of black inhumanity and the varied concrete manifestations of these assumptions.”⁸³ Implicit to that spatial imagination is a desire to protect *comunidades negras* from necropower and to reject the necropolitics that rationalizes harm against Black bodies. So, while a Colombian government official or military officer might lament an incident of violence or pollution in the Pacific region as an unfortunate turn of events, many prominent Afro-descendant leaders I spoke to might view the same incident as an intentional means to fracture, eliminate, or displace their communities.⁸⁴



FIGURE 5. The evil of the past (illustrated by Jose E. Arboleda).

HAUNTED BY THE EVIL OF THE PAST

This necropolitical history of the Pacific region is fundamental to understanding why Angélica stated that Sidón, Nariño, was haunted by “the evil of the past.” While she was not exactly certain when this evil transpired, Angélica did believe that the town was haunted because it was in a *zona coquero* (an area where coca is cultivated). Figure 5 depicts how her father-in-law, who was a city government official in the town, and others were murdered. The FARC had been present in the area for a long time when the Colombian military arrived to drive them out (image on the left). Military officers asked for help from city officials to find accommodations and other necessities in town. Once the military left town, the FARC murdered Angélica’s father-in-law for his role in assisting their enemy (middle image). She explained, “People from there told me . . . that they were chopping people down with machetes. Heads were rolling because of machetes. In other words, blood was flowing from the hills. You understand what I am saying? Massacres, the guerilla would toss their bodies into the river” (image on the right).⁸⁵

For Mbembé, the massacre represents an instrument of modern-day warfare in the era of globalization and the ultimate expression of necropower: “If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the ‘massacre.’”⁸⁶

Extending Mbembé’s analysis to Angélica’s description of Sidón, the ghosts that haunt the town are the inscription of this ultimate expression of necropower on the collective psyche of those left behind. In other words, the ghosts remind the living that peasants are expendable in the necropolitical order of the Colombian conflict.

Miguel of Cajibío, Cauca, experienced a similar haunting while traveling to different parts of the Colombian countryside as part of his job. He remembered how he could never sleep while working in the mountainous southern area of the Bolívar *departamento* (“department,” which translates to state or province). Miguel slept in a tent located near a *quebrada* (ravine), and every night he would

hear people—whom he described as soldiers, policemen, and civilians—right outside of his tent. “I heard screams and saw shadows, but when I got out of the tent there was no one there.”⁸⁷ He later found out that he was camping in a site where numerous murders had taken place, and he refused to go back. Southern Bolívar is exceptional in that regard, as it has been a site of struggle between guerillas and paramilitary groups vying for control of gold mines, coca cultivation, and most recently, African palm plantations.⁸⁸ US anthropologist Mary Crain, who conducted research on encounters with death and the spirit world in the Ecuadorian Andes, writes, “In folk cosmology, geography has an important moral dimension, and many places that form part of the natural landscape are believed to be endowed with both positive and negative qualities.”⁸⁹ Perhaps it is merely coincidence, but Crain notes that Ecuadorian peasants avoid sites such as “ravines, irrigation canals, waterfalls, lakes, high mountain plains, and places where rainbows appear” late at night when alone because they could be inhabited by evil spirits.⁹⁰

Miguel’s cousin Mirabel told me that she was haunted by the ghost of one of her friends who was murdered on their farm in Cajibío, Cauca. She said she knew it was him because she would see shadows and feel a cold sensation. “I would ask him what he wanted.”⁹¹ Mirabel would shut her curtains to block him out of the house, but he would continue bothering her, hiding her things and laughing. She expressed a sensitivity to the spirit world and said, “I am now accustomed to such things, it has become routine.”⁹²

Hearing those stories reminded Gabriela, Mirabel’s teenage daughter, of the tale of a soldier that no one could kill in Cajibío. In exchange for his immortality, he was said to have sold his soul to the devil. This story appears to be an adaptation of the vision *El Ayudado* or *El Ayudao* (the Assisted One): “He is a mysterious character who seems to have a pact with the devil to come out of fights undefeated. He does not get hit by a bullet, nor a machete, and he disappears from key places, as if by magic, before the astonished gaze of those present. It is said that he becomes invisible when he wants, reduces his body size when he wants to and can disappear through the smallest crack in a door or a room.”⁹³

In his description of the animism of “old African cognitive worlds,” Mbembé comments, “Human beings were never satisfied with simply being human beings. . . . One was always transacting with some other force or some other entity just as one was always trying to capture some of the power invested in those entities.”⁹⁴ Following that logic, *El Ayudado* “prolongs the spirituality of shamanism”⁹⁵ in a manner that also prolongs his own life.

Although Gabriela did not go into detail about the exploits of this vision, this tale bears some resemblance to devil pacts elsewhere in Colombia and Latin America.⁹⁶ Another possible interpretation is that the armed groups vying for control of the countryside (i.e., the Colombian military, the FARC, or a paramilitary group) are diabolic. The soldier makes a living through violence, and nothing good will ever come of his line of work. Furthermore, these devil pacts only reap

short-lived profits for the person willing to sell their soul: “El Ayudado, according to the experts, can obtain or possess whatever they want, as long as they sell their soul to the devil. The money they get, for example, they double, triple or quadruple as many times as they want, under the condition that they have to spend it the same day or if not they are turned to stone or dry leaves and the devil rips out their souls with a trident.”⁹⁷

Gabriela said nothing about this supernatural figure financially profiting from the devil pact, but it is worth noting this detail because these armed groups profit from controlling access to natural resources.

I interviewed a few other people who mentioned El Ayudado over the years, and I also met someone who escaped a violent death more than once. It was 2019 and I was vacationing on the coast of the Chocó, the largest department of the Pacific region, which lies north of where I conducted my fieldwork. I searched the internet for different activities to do there and came across a turtle conservation farm with my grandmother’s name. My grandmother had passed away a few years before, and all my life I had never known of another person with her name. It seemed like a sign that I should go to this place. I met the owner’s son, Danilo, in the nearby town and reluctantly got on the back of his motorcycle for the journey down the beach to the farm. About thirty seconds into the trip, he made a right turn and we both fell off the motorcycle. The front tire jammed and would not rotate anymore. Dismayed, Danilo got on the phone and called a friend, “Hey, can you take a client to the farm? This fat gringo who weighs like 240 pounds made us crash the bike.”⁹⁸ I was amused that he thought that I weighed that much and thankful that we were not hurt. His friend arrived shortly and took us all on another bigger motorcycle. I eventually got to learn about their efforts to conserve sea turtles by collecting the eggs from the beach, incubating them, and then releasing them into the sea. Danilo had lined the fence surrounding the farm with rubber sandals (almost all Crocs) that had washed ashore. He wore a mismatched pair himself as part of his efforts to repurpose the huge amounts of plastic garbage on the beach. I asked him where it came from, and he said that the trash mostly fell off shipping boats leaving the port of Buenaventura. I did not get back on a motorcycle to return from the farm, because it was high tide and there was too much driftwood on the beach for a motorcycle to make it through. Danilo and I walked back to the town with the midday sun beating on us for the next forty-five minutes. I told him about my research in Colombia, and he began to tell me stories about his life.

Danilo was an ex-soldier and ex-police officer who, by his account, had escaped death on multiple occasions. He mentioned seeing visions such as *El Riviel* (a malicious spirit that attacks fishermen and travelers lost in the wilderness), but those stories paled in comparison to other events in his life. I had interviewed both Colombian police officers and soldiers during different phases of my research, but I had never spoken with an Afro-Colombian police officer or soldier. Many people

I interviewed from comunidades negras did not trust the police nor the military, so I was very curious about how Danilo ended up on that career path.

He told me that he joined the military because service is mandatory for males in Colombia, with exceptions for those fortunate enough. Danilo was trained in counterintelligence tactics and was part of an operation to collect information about how the FARC extorted money from civilians they stopped on buses. He was stationed in Quibdó, the capital of the Chocó, and operated undercover (in civilian clothes). One day he was traveling on a bus that was halted by FARC soldiers on the road. A FARC soldier announced that they knew there was a military soldier on board and threatened to start killing passengers unless that person turned himself in. Everyone got off the bus and lined up. It just so happened that there was another soldier on board who decided to run once they got outside of the bus. He was immediately gunned down. Danilo thought he had evaded danger until a female FARC soldier noticed him and suspected he had “the look of Colombian military.”⁹⁹ He was tied, blindfolded, and transported to a remote location. Danilo was under the supervision of this female FARC soldier, who gave him a limited timeline to confess what he knew before she would execute him. When she was not paying attention, he managed to escape and jumped into a nearby river. Danilo said he let the current of the river carry him for several hours before he went ashore.

He eventually completed his duty with the military and became a police officer stationed in Buenaventura. Danilo and his partner were part of a covert operation in Buenaventura that involved the collection of very confidential data on drug trafficking. He made it a point to state that he reported to only one superior officer who knew the objective of their operation. They were scheduled to meet with this officer at Danilo’s residence, which he noted was unusual, very early one morning. He went outside right before the meeting was to take place, and a grenade exploded in his residence. His partner was killed in the explosion. Danilo showed me a scar from where shrapnel from the explosion penetrated his own body. Convinced that the police were complicit in the destruction of evidence, the murder of his partner, and the attempt on his life, he quit the force. It was surreal to find out that the person I had just seen gently handling baby turtles had narrowly escaped becoming a ghost himself.

MEMORYSCAPES OF THE ECOGENOETHNOCIDAL MATRIX

The recounting of supernatural visions is an oral tradition that is fundamental to how beings connect to each other, to the world(s) they inhabit, and to the world(s) they seek to create. As Franz Fanon reflects in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The atmosphere of myth and magic frightens me and so takes on an undoubted reality. By terrifying me, it integrates me in the traditions and the history of my district or of my tribe, and at the same time it reassures me, it gives me a status, as it were an identification paper. In underdeveloped countries the occult sphere is a sphere

belonging to the community which is entirely under magical jurisdiction. By entangling myself in this inextricable network where actions are repeated with crystalline inevitability, I find the everlasting world which belongs to me, and the perennality which is thereby affirmed of the world belonging to us.¹⁰⁰

This chapter has transitioned from conceptualizing the oral tradition of visions as a form of local biopolitics to theorizing visions and ghosts as inscriptions of the necropolitics of Latin American land conflicts. It is important to remember that the stories told in this chapter were specifically selected to elucidate those arguments. The beauty of the oral traditions approximated in writing in this book is that they are by no means static. If you were to ask about some of these visions in the Pacific region of Colombia, elsewhere in Colombia, or elsewhere in Latin America, there is a good probability that specific details would vary or that you might hear about some of the hundreds of other visions not discussed in *Visions of Global Environmental Justice*. The adaptability of this oral tradition is testament to the fact that the culture of the Pacific lowlands itself is, as Colombian ethnohistorian Motta González describes, “a communion, between the real and the spiritual, between the practical and the fantastic, between thought and spoken word, between the sacred and the profane; in sum, it is a living culture with a sense of identity that is manifested orally.”¹⁰¹

While many of the visions or elements of the visions discussed in the chapter can be traced to Indigenous or European visions, *comunidades negras* explicitly draw from their African heritage to articulate ancestry, settlement in the Americas, resistance to slavery, and the importance of defending *el territorio* (the territory of *comunidades negras*)¹⁰² against modern forms of anti-Black terror. *El Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (the Process of Black Communities, also known as the PCN) is an organization that has been fundamental to the establishment of *comunidades negras* and the affirmation of those ancestral ties. It promotes those connections through the following: using the iconography of Africa (see figure 6) as a demonstration of solidarity between various *comunidades negras*; organizing the different branches of the PCN through regional *palenques* (maroon societies);¹⁰³ conceptualizing *palenques* as the first truly democratic societies of the Americas because they not only escaped and resisted slavery but also allowed the free expression of African culture;¹⁰⁴ and discursively connecting the violence of slavery to the current destruction, dispossession, and displacement of *comunidades negras* by the market-driven demands of state development.¹⁰⁵

It is important to note that the genocidal violence of the transatlantic slave trade impacted not only human bodies but also how Africans related to supernatural spirits. Rosalind Shaw, anthropologist and author of *Memories of the Slave Trade*, describes how this shift in perception transpired in Sierra Leone. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a relatively peaceful time period, “ubiquitous neighborly spirits” were a presence in everyday village life. Over the next few centuries, as the slave trade commenced and villages were being raided for captives to be sold

her friend what he wanted so that he would leave her alone. For Danilo, the ex-soldier and ex-police officer from the Chocó, his memoryscape of violence includes the site where he was taken prisoner by the FARC and the apartment where his police partner died in an explosion. The fact that he is now teaching turtle conservation to overweight tourists like me instead of working as a soldier or police officer (i.e., the careers he trained for) suggests that he still fears the necropower of armed groups in Colombia, including the police itself.

"The evil of the past" is also by no means limited to the experiences of people who have been threatened, kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and massacred. This violence transcends the boundaries between human beings and their environs. For this reason, Afro-Colombian anthropologist Santiago Arboleda Quiñonez invented the term *ecogenoethnocide* to better describe the implications of this violence and the implications of not viewing this violence holistically:

Considered as a whole, internal displacement, refuge, selective assassinations, massacres with their spectacle of cruelty, poisoning of rivers, lagoons contaminated by mercury from gold mining, and destruction of food sources and sociocultural fabric together constitute an ecogenoethnocidal matrix, with its respective social practices and comprehensive effects of death and elimination. But they have been carried out and have been presented as if they were isolated strategies and actions, veiling the complementarity of these fronts of expulsion and cultural destruction, which reduce the "others" to the formulas of the capitalist market, to folkloric specters.¹⁰⁷

In the first place, Arboleda Quiñonez emphasizes that the violence suffered by *comunidades negras* is inseparable from the environmental damages caused by the exploitation of their territories. Second, and very important for environmental justice studies scholars, *to think of or attempt to address* these issues as if they were unrelated is irresponsible. These problems are inextricable from one another, but government agencies, social scientists, nongovernmental organizations, and human rights lawyers are conditioned to view these problems and work toward resolving these problems as if they were unrelated. Arboleda Quiñonez argues that this framing is especially problematic because it is transpiring in the context of the "post-civil conflict" of the 2016 negotiated peace settlement between the Colombian government and the FARC. He contends that the reconstruction of the collective memory of the Colombian conflict is subject to "a single canon of neocolonial truth imposed from the whitewashed elites."¹⁰⁸ To situate these problems within the ecogenoethnocidal matrix is to prevent the invisibilization of the traumas endured by Afro-descendants during the civil conflict *and* to call attention to the need for reparations for slavery *as well as* the need to decolonize Colombian history.¹⁰⁹ To proceed as many of these well-intentioned actors have been doing, in his opinion, is to maintain the status quo of following state-centric models of development that conceptualize *comunidades negras* as ghosts of a traditional past.

This argument has some parallels in what David Pellow argues for in *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?*—that we cannot view the police brutality that the Black Lives Matter movement has addressed as something separate from the contamination of Black communities. Both issues stem from the fact that Black people have largely been expendable since the foundation of the United States. Pellow rejects this expendability as the product of white supremacy and explains that this mentality is counterproductive: “The destruction of people of color is as illogical and self-defeating as a vision of an economy and a nation state premised on the destruction of ecosystems. In a sense, this observation reflects a reality of social systems as ecosystems, and vice versa: that everything in the universe is hitched to everything else, so that what affects one member or element affects all of them.”¹¹⁰

A critical approach to environmental justice considers the extent to which environmental racism is an extension of violence against communities of color, especially Black populations, versus an unrelated environmental issue to be solved by environmental scientists, lawyers, and government officials.¹¹¹ It also considers the extent to which violence impacts all members of socio-ecological communities, conceptualized at different scales. Environmental justice studies has theorized environmental racism in a variety of forms such as historical segregation,¹¹² toxic labor conditions,¹¹³ environmental privilege,¹¹⁴ inadequate disaster preparedness,¹¹⁵ and wastelands.¹¹⁶ Critical environmental justice studies should also take into account how state-sanctioned violence, narcopolitics, and modern-day war machines constitute transnational forms of environmental racism that devastate entire socio-ecological communities.

The next chapter focuses on how people displaced from the countryside, especially Afro-descendants, adjust to the violence and environmental racism of a major “necropolitan” center, the city of Cali.