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ALTERNATIVE FOOD PRODUCTION IN CAUCA, COLOMBIA: THE VALUE OF
AGROECOLOGICAL FOOD SYSTEMS FOR LOCAL SMALL PRODUCERS AND
CONSUMERS.

by

ANDREA NEGRET

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Alternative food production in Cauca, Colombia: The value of agroecological food systems for local small producers and consumers.

by

Andrea Negret

Advisor: Tomoaki Imamichi

This thesis intends to offer an integral view of the reality of food production and distribution in the Cauca Department in Colombia, observing the different practices that have caused deep social and environmental struggles including systemic violence, displacement and environmental degradation. The first two chapters will offer a global and national context of food production to better understand the many challenges that rural populations endure in rural Cauca. Chapters four and five will explore some resistance strategies and movements that rural communities in Cauca and other Colombian regions have developed to fight against corporate agro-industrial dominance so they can protect their identity and territories through agroecological principles. The values that surround food production and consumption among Indigenous, Afro-descendant and farmer communities have maintained a legacy of cultural identity and food sovereignty that still provides food security among rural and urban populations, making these practices an essential part of Colombia's social structure.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since most of my research during my time as a MALS student has been focused on environmental justice matters in Colombia I was naturally brought to write about one of the most conflicted regions of my country; the Cauca department. As I grew up in Colombia, I understood, since I was very young, that the most vulnerable populations in rural areas endured most of the violence caused by the armed conflict. However, it took me longer to understand the many social dimensions, both national and global, that were behind such vulnerabilities such as the role that natural resources played in this conflict. Agriculture and food distribution has been central to the lives of rural populations since colonial times. By contrast, with the emergence of capitalist modernity in the Colombian Andes, industrialized agriculture has increasingly taken over territories that had usually belonged to Indigenous farmers and Afro-descendant communities. The reality of food practices and values in my country has become increasingly uncertain.

As someone who has a personal connection to this region due to my family and professional history, I have witnessed first-hand the vast complexity of the many social conflicts that Cauca's population has faced during the past two decades. In 2014, I participated in a research project, organized by the Universidad del Cauca and Ministerio de Agricultura about forced displacement and the impact this had on Indigenous populations. During this project, a team of approximately twenty anthropologists and geographers, including me, travelled throughout the whole Cauca region collecting testimonies from Indigenous leaders to identify the exact locations that were affected and modified due to violence and displacement. The project

also intended to collect oral history of the armed conflict and contribute to enrich the historical memory, which is essential to claim justice and reparations to the victims.

Among shocking numerous testimonies of violence and land dispossession, you can also find episodes of resistance and courage led by the native population. For years, they had negotiated with and expelled guerrilla squads from their territories to prevent their land from being used for illicit crops. They also opposed the forced recruitment of their youth to legal and illegal armed forces. Indigenous leaders have constantly confronted the government and the military to defend their territorial rights and cultural sovereignty. In more recent years, hundreds of Indigenous leaders and environmentalists have been killed by drug cartels and paramilitary groups for getting in the way of their commercial interests which include crops used as raw material to produce illegal drugs; dangerous and harmful mining practices and ways of raising livestock which are devastating to the environment. While this project is different since it's focusing on food production and food sovereignty within local communities in the Cauca region, I have found inspiration from my previous work in this region since forced displacement and violence are connected with the transformation of food systems in Colombia especially among Indigenous, Afro-Colombian and farmers who have been detrimental to maintain food security and sovereignty for many generations.

Working and living along the Panamerica Highway, which connects the Cauca Department with the Valle del Cauca region and Cali, I have also witnessed how fragile the food distribution system in our country is. Whenever there are social disturbances, violent confrontations or protests in the region, the Panamericana Highway becomes a main target since blocking it creates major disturbances nationwide, especially when it comes to food accessibility and distribution. This was especially noticeable during the 2021 Colombian National Strike when

protests caused the blockage of several roads including the Panamericana. This crisis caused the food prices to rise and nationwide and food scarcity, especially of fresh produce like fruits and vegetables. As a result, the fragility of food distribution in large cities became evident.

When it comes to my personal experience with food itself, I observed from my childhood to the last couple of years how food values and habits changed in the big cities I lived in. When I was about 8 years old in Bogota, my mother took me to the farmer's market every Sunday, just a couple of blocks away from home, there you could find all kinds of fresh produce, including fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy, you could also find a rare variety of fruits such as guamas, zapayos and mamoncillos, fruits that are rarely seen today and when found in supermarkets, they have inaccessible prices. About ten years later, the farmer's market was discontinued, and a big metallic bus station was placed in the street, where the market used to be located. After this, the supermarket became the main source of food for our family. I remember noticing this transition in other cities; the fresh produce that could be purchased directly from small producers in the region became scarce as supermarkets became bigger and more attractive to the average citizen. I can't remember if my parents complained about these changes, but they seemed excited to find foreign products in new fancy supermarkets and it felt like a lot of people felt the same way. All of the sudden, buying vegetables in the local farmer's market to prepare a healthy meal became an old fashioned habit; while buying microwave pop-corn and frozen chicken nuggets was the way to become part of the modern world. From my teenage years through college, I could see how fast food restaurants became more popular and accessible for young people, back in the day this seemed positive, since spending too much money in a meal while hanging out with your friends wasn't an option and, since my parents were busy professionals preparing elaborate meals at home was a rare occurrence. It was only when I visited my grandparents or other family

members who lived in smaller towns, where I could remember the beauty and joy of a homemade meal prepared with fresh products and enjoy a wide variety of fruits. Although I was not aware of the complicated nature of food systems back then, I could feel a void in my life when it came to food, a void that was never filled with fast food or fancy foreign products. As an adult, I have observed how the Cauca region has experienced the same transformations in the cities, but in the countryside, farmers and Indigenous communities still fight to protect their territories and food systems that still allow many Colombians to access a fresh and high-quality food product.

The importance of Cauca region, in terms of cultural diversity, biodiversity and its potential for sustainable practices like ecological agriculture, empowered small producers, Indigenous and Black communities to create sustainable businesses and further agency over their territories. Being aware of these facts, I decided to focus my thesis on this region, and, in this manner, I will expand my knowledge about what Cauca has to offer in terms of social and environmental justice, despite its history of violence and conflict, and it would also expand my previous research on this region.

I will be focusing my research on the Cauca Department, because this region combines a wide diversity of agricultural production and practices, but it has also been the focus of the Colombian armed conflict and violence toward the rural population over the last decades. Due to its location, geographical characteristics and abundance of natural resources that are constantly exploited by legal and illegal entities, this region has experienced, in many ways, internal migration, from rural areas to big cities like Popayán and Cali (Luque-Rebuelto, 2016).

Despite the undeniable harmful effects, these population displacements have created new opportunities for organic food distribution such as the "Organic Markets' Harvest Festival" in,

allowing local organic farmers to commercialize their produce without intermediaries (Abella, 2018). These kinds of markets have opened new opportunities for new urban residents and rural populations that surround urban centers to commercialize their own products creating an alternative to the agro industrial products found in supermarkets. This initiative, supported by the CRC (Autonomous Regional Cooperative) from Cauca, is also connected with the Organic Agriculture Network in Cauca. This organization has supported the development of organic farms such as the Miraflores farm situated in Silvia Cauca, a municipality known for its strong indigenous cultural heritage, the Nasa and Misak communities, long before the Spanish conquest during the 16th Century, had inhabited the Tierradentro territory. Despite the commercial benefits brought by organic farms such as Miraflores, it is worth noting that it is the first farm with an organic certification in the municipality (CRC, November, 2018, 28). I intend to examine how the certification process has affected and even excluded small producers for not following national and global regulations that don't consider local contexts and traditional practices.

When it comes to the last stage of the process: food consumption in urban areas, the seemingly disconnected relationship between consumer and food reflects how accessibility to food it's deeply connected to its source and all of the social values that surround it. As Luz Elena Santa Coloma (2015) explains, local food production by farmers in Colombia exists outside the scope of the global capitalists system allowing a flexible relationship with consumers, since it doesn't necessarily depend on extensive networks of distribution. This local production supported by local farmers and indigenous communities represents an act of resistance through food sovereignty and sustainable ancestral practices. In this context the value of nature, to some degree, escapes the constant pressure of capitalist forces and it's able to preserve the intrinsic value of food, which goes beyond a price tag.

During my time in the MALS program, I broadened and deepened my knowledge about environmental justice. I learned and understood deeply the following premise: to protect the environment, it is imperative to seek social justice. The social/nature dichotomy has turned the mainstream environmental discourse into a media machine that floats above human realities, we are shown images of melting icebergs and starving polar bears, but not the incessant violence against communities whose resources and territories are taken away by corporations and irresponsible governments, purposely ignoring the fact that those same communities have found ways of transforming their ecosystems and live in harmony with them for generations, sustaining ways of life that are important, not only because of their inherent cultural value, but because they preserve life in all levels.

Chapter 2

The Global Context of Food Production and Agroecology

2.1 The emergence of agroecology

Global production of organic food has been on the rise for the last decades, opening a new market for big and small producers all over the world to meet the increasing demand of high-quality food, especially in more developed and wealthy countries. Just like with industrialized methods of food production, a large percentage of organic products are exported from less developed areas of the world, such as Latin America, Asia and Africa, to more developed countries in North America and Europe, where 96% of sales are made. The most important export products from Latin America are tropical fruits, sugar, cacao, meat and cereals (Martinez, 2012). Local consumption of certified organic food in Latin America has been limited due to a lack of cultural awareness about these products but especially because of the high prices, which are inaccessible to most Latin American consumers. These facts show how the process of certification and regulation from global entities have created strict boundaries which can be difficult to navigate for independent local producers who don't have the knowledge or resources to get certified. Despite maintaining sustainable agricultural practices that might not be recognized by the Global North as "certifiable" because they are not based on Western scientific knowledge, many small producers and Indigenous communities, which are essential to provide good quality food to surrounding populations, are dismissed as unofficial or informal producers who skip the many regulations that the agroindustry and supermarkets are subjected to. This approach can isolate small producers from important market networks in urban centers.

Even more concerning is the fact that, as to 2012, just 0.5% of producers in the world control a third of global production but small producers are the ones who feed most of the world's population (Martínez, 2012). The global market for agricultural products has placed a lot of pressure over local farmers around the world, especially in countries with poor or inexistent policies to protect the local market from excessive imports that compete and devalue local production. For example, in Colombia food prices can fluctuate making both local producers and consumers more vulnerable. Such practices implemented by the World Trade Organization still have a lot of power and influence over global policies that support agro-exportation which intend to fight food insecurity with the pretext that higher productivity and a competitive market can make food more accessible to vulnerable populations. But these logic leaves behind specific local needs and social realities despite the increasing awareness of the importance of food sovereignty. Regardless mixed attitudes towards food sovereignty and indigenous autonomy, representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO] in Colombia, acknowledge the importance of these local demands to accomplish integral solutions to food insecurity that incorporate territorial governance, recognition of cultural values and environmental protection:

Construction of food autonomy among farmers, includes agroecosystem management that works towards its regeneration, natural or assisted, therefore it is also possible to say that food autonomy is when agroecosystems produce food crops, surplus for local markets with a work cycle and rest that allows them to reproduce and sustain biodiversity. (FAO in Colombia, 2015, p. 10)

Despite the limited production of certified organic food in Latin America, sustainable local practices have been part of rural communities for generations, even before the Green Revolution took over and industrialized agricultural practices became the norm. Due to limited institutional support and the lack of a powerful political voice of rural communities, these local sustainable practices were ignored by the scientific community, until agroecology movements started to point out at the social and cultural dimensions of agricultural practices as a new path to transform unsustainable food systems.

The term agroecology emerged in the 1920's to define a scientific discipline that studied the ecology of food systems; it wasn't until the 1980's when the term was used to describe a movement which entailed a set of sustainable practices which were variable and functional depending on each specific local context (Wezel et al, 2009). Agroecology emerged as a movement and as a practice, partly in Latin American countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Nicaragua, where local communities used agroecology principles such as the protection of biodiversity and the refusal to use pesticides and agrochemicals to complement their local knowledge and improve their production methods, so they could challenge the dominant agro industrial system (Wezel et al, 2009). The movement that surrounds agroecology has highlighted the value of local agricultural practices and promoted a debate about the need to redefine and transform current food systems to fight food insecurity and climate change through technical innovations, but also through collaboration with local communities.

In Colombia, agroecology as a social movement emerged in the 1970's and 1980's as a response to the social and environmental consequences of the Green Revolution. This new global environmental awareness fueled academic debates and the formation of non-profit organizations with the purpose of creating alternative food systems that empowered local community's

facilitated collaboration between academics, community leaders and farmers who exchanged traditional and new knowledge. But the new movement also emerged as a response to the new global market of organic food, which drove the Colombian government to recognize certain alternative food production practices categorized as “ecological”, “biological” or “organic” as legitimate and appropriate for national and international commerce (T. Leon-Sicard et al, 2015).

But even with this recognition by the local government of the legitimate value of alternative food production, there has been little institutional support to small producers so they can sustain and grow their businesses leaving them with little protection against predatory competition from certified organic big producers and the agro business. Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities haven’t received proper recognition for their role in protecting the environment and maintaining sustainable agricultural practices. These social dimensions are what differentiate agroecology as a practice from agroecology as a movement, and so far, the latter still lacks the proper institutional support, both from global and national entities, mainly because it doesn’t necessarily benefit corporate interests.

It is important to point out that capitalism and industrialization have increasingly pushed out populations from the countryside to cities, since less industrialized agricultural practices have become less profitable and often farms that practice organic or alternative food production have tremendous pressure to become profitable. Therefore, it is urgent to establish clear and effective policies that protect local agroecology movements and the communities that surround them, but without international recognition these goals are much harder to reach. The most immediate kind of resistance against globalization and corporate dominance comes in the form of local self-sustaining ways of production and the territories that allow these practices. Communities have

been fighting for many years to claim their independence from a globalized world and, yet paradoxically, the only gain some success is through global alliances.

This is the case of many native Indigenous communities around the world. In the case of the Amazon Forest, some communities don't even use the concept of nature since they conceive themselves and their practices as an integral part of all existence. However, they have built strategic alliances with environmental protection institutions and strong political campaigns to claim their right to protect their territories and to remain independent from capitalist interests. Of course, this has been a never-ending battle and these global alliances have often Westernized their fight by portraying them as eco-heroes prioritizing what they consider to be "natural resources", over the social conflicts and abuses Indigenous communities endure. Many of these social movements have missed what these communities are truly fighting for, that is: to protect their right to maintain their own identity, which is embedded in their lands. Their territories contain and integrate their belief systems, their own production and kinship practices have worked outside capitalism for many generations and this is precisely why they represent such an obstacle for an industrial production scale.

2.2 Gender and Agroecology

It is essential to also consider the gender dimension of agroecology. The role of women in agricultural practices and nutrition has always been universally important. Hence, in many Latin American countries the resistance against the agro-industry has been led by women from different fields. The Alliance of Women in Agroecology (AMA-AWA) has created a network of researchers, farmers and activists from all America and Spain who collaborate to work on movements that give women farmers the necessary tools to sustain successful agroecological practices. Furthermore, AMA-AWA gives visibility to female collectives and organizations

which have been fighting for the wellbeing of their communities by maintaining nutritional values and the diversity of local foods (Asociación Ecología, Tecnología y Cultura en los Andes, [ETC] 2020). In Veracruz Mexico, the Flor de Mayo collective has brought together female educators and farmers to create communal gardens to share knowledge about agroecological practices that allow the preservation of local plants, including wild species of tomatoes and avocado, which are endangered due to the use of chemicals and pesticides (Ambrosio et al., 2020). In Monte Carmelo Venezuela, women have been organizing for decades to build cooperatives that promote entrepreneurship through agroecological practices and have also protecting local seeds to diversify and improve food security and health (Domene-Painenao et al., 2020). In Colombia, there are also cases of women collaborative efforts that help to rescue traditional agroecological practices in their local communities. This is the case of Marialabaja, a rural region in the Colombian Caribbean. Despite the dramatic impacts of violence, forced displacement and predatory agroindustrial practices like the incorporation of the palm oil monocultures, which have invaded most of the territory, there has been resistance from local communities, especially from women collectives that lead the development of communal gardens where local native plants are cultivated and protected. These collectives have also established food networks to fight food insecurity, where families interchange food and provide nutrition to the most vulnerable members of their community (Restrepo & Zuluaga, 2020). These cases exemplify how women are first responders to the different dimensions of the social and environmental conflicts caused by agro industrial practices and represent the main mission of agroecology; they respond to food insecurity by cultivating nutritional values and creating support networks, they fight social injustice through political activism and protect the environment by preserving local plants and seeds.

2.3 UN Food Systems Summit

The science–policy interface of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and its High Level Panel of Experts for Food Security and Nutrition [HLPE] have defined agroecology as a:

Transdisciplinary science, combining different scientific disciplines to seek solutions to real world problems, working in partnership with multiple stakeholders, considering their local knowledge and cultural values, in a reflective and iterative way that fosters co-learning among researchers and practitioners, as well as the horizontal spread of knowledge from farmer to farmer or among other actors along the food chain. Initially the science was focused on understanding field-level farming practices that use few external inputs but high agrobiodiversity, emphasize recycling and maintenance of soil and animal health, including managing interactions among components and economic diversification. The focus has since expanded to include landscape-scale processes, encompassing landscape ecology and, more recently, social science and political ecology related to the development of equitable and sustainable food systems. (High Level Panel of Experts for Food Security and Nutrition [HLPE], 2019, p. 13)

Agroecology can't be labeled as a single defined practice, but as a set of different methods of sustainable agriculture which have emerged or been re-invented by local communities around the world. These practices and knowledge, collected by scientists and held by small producers and Indigenous communities, follow the specific needs of their local territories, allowing sufficient food production without exhausting or harming the environment. However, beyond the technical and environmental benefits of agroecology, food sovereignty is what makes these practices truly aligned with social justice, since they empower local communities and allow them to define their

own strategies and make their own decisions to protect their wellbeing and territories. This is why “organic agriculture” and “organic food” can be problematic terms, since the practices behind them have been standardized and defined by the Global North and, for the most part, by the same corporate powers that dominate food production worldwide. Despite the environmental benefits of organic agriculture, its international standardization and commercialization have driven away the social benefits that agroecology offers, since it can jeopardize food sovereignty through practices such as certification. But the differences described here between different terms can vary depending on the country or organization that uses them. For example, in many contexts the terms “organic” “ecological” or even “biological”, in Latin American countries and more specifically in Colombia might refer to the same set of practices:

Since 2002 in Colombia, the term "ecological production system" was established, although in general the terms ecological, organic or biological are synonymous.

According to the regulations of the European Union (Regulation 2092/91), the terminology determined at the international level for the Spanish language corresponds to "ecological" the equivalents "organic", in English, and "biological" in French. (Sánchez Castañeda, 2017, p.158)

Despite growing awareness about the social and environmental unsustainability of global agro-business, upcoming debates about this issue are still controlled by agro-industrial corporations. For many, the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 was supposed to bring attention to the growing inequalities and environmental consequences caused by current food systems. These unequal differences became more visible during the Covid-19 pandemic, along this period the most fragile sectors of society were hit the hardest. To resolve this critical situation and promote solutions for malnutrition and food scarcity, it was necessary to consider paradigms

derived from human rights and environmental justice. The participation of the local communities was decisive, since they knew the causes of the problems that affected their neighbors.

Environmental concerns related to food justice in the Food Systems Summit, as pointed out by the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures report (2021), some important omissions were pointed out as follows:

1. The document didn't pay enough attention to the effects of Covid-19 pandemic overcurrent food systems and increasing food scarcity in the global population, especially among the most vulnerable,
2. The recommendations did not take into account the root causes of malnutrition and food scarcity, including deficient governance and human rights violations. Instead, they focused on new technologies to boost food production and ignoring efforts and advancements made by agro ecology,
3. The summit ignored corporate accumulation of power and its role in human rights violations, malnutrition, and loss of biodiversity and climate change,
4. Despite implementing a multistakeholder approach, the summit didn't allow significant participation from Indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers, grassroots movements, and human rights advocacy groups (United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, 2021, pp. 3-4).

The Food Systems Summit also ignored that 2/3 of the food that is produced worldwide comes from small farmers, many of whom have used traditional sustainable agricultural practices that consider the cultural and environmental local context to ensure production.

Although, the multigenerational experience and accumulated knowledge from these communities, corporations and investors ignore these approaches, because they are not profit driven, but socially and environmentally driven. This way of reasoning explains why the FSS has tried to reach a compromise between agro-industrial technological innovation and agroecology, despite its incompatibility, due to the massive differences in terms of social and economic interests. There cannot be a true compromise if local communities, small producers and indigenous communities are not involved in every single step of decision making. When it comes to finding effective networks of sustainable food production systems that tackle food insecurity and environmental degradation, these local communities not only hold the necessary knowledge to reach that goal, but also belong to those same communities that the FFS claims to be helping. Sharing knowledge is key to building those networks. Therefore, these conversations need to be truly inclusive.

One of the most concerning aspects of the FSS is that it has delegitimize the UN Committee on World Food Security's High Level Panel of experts, a science-policy interface which has worked in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders which include the private sector and the civil society, creating an inclusive and open network to produce integral scientific knowledge and policy proposals which legitimizes and considers a variety of concerns and social realities across different regions of the world. Sofia Monsalve, The Food First Information and Action Network FIAN's General Secretary, has denounced the FSS for failing to include the voices of small producers and the civil society and local communities who have developed real solutions through agroecology (Lag, 2021). Instead, this organization worked on behalf of the status quo, which intends to keep the power of decision making in the hands of corporations that ignore the needs of local communities, and only focus on increasing profits. Moreover, she has

described the new “sustainable” food production approach “Nature Based Solutions”, proposed by the FSS, as a new variation of “green economy”, which essentially intends to be more politically and commercially appealing through green washing, instead of developing real solutions to environmental and social justice problems.

The global food market that traditionally has pursued the same goals and rhetoric of the FSS, has led Latin American Countries to adopt policies and commercial practices that tend to take away the possibility of food sovereignty among the rural population, pressuring them into unsustainable agricultural practices, even when their own knowledge and production practices had worked for generations. The lack of institutional support at the national and local level to sustain local and alternative food production means that the most effective way of making agroecology economically viable in Latin America is through global organic food certification and exportation.

The FSS position on food production which prioritizes technical development to fight world hunger, instead of acknowledging the systemic inequalities and social injustice that surrounds food production and consumption, is just an extension of the development discourse that the Global North has pushed for decades to fix the world's “undeveloped” nations. In his book *The invention of the Third World*, Arturo Escobar (2007) narrates the history of the development discourse, born after World War II, when the Global North with the rising hegemony of the United States as the first world power, started the ambitious task of accelerating the technical and economic development of the Global South, to bring prosperity to the most disadvantaged nations. Escobar argues how this discourse justified the colonization of the very notion of development as an unquestionable need: “The omnipresent reality and repetitive development was everywhere: governments that designed and executed ambitious development

plans, institutions that carried out similar development programs in cities and fields, experts of all kinds studying "underdevelopment" and producing theories ad nauseam" (Escobar, 2007, p.22). This urge to develop the Global South was extended to every aspect of the social order, including food production, which was heavily industrialized through the green revolution.

2.4 Agrarian reforms in Colombia

Despite the limited support to local production and consumption of organic food in Latin America, small producers and family agriculture are still important for the local economy. Countries such as Brazil and Argentina have implemented policies to protect this kind of production from larger agro industrial companies (Sabourin et al., 2015). Unfortunately, in Colombia the history of agrarian reforms and public land distribution, which has been designed to benefit the rich, has created major challenges for local governments and community leaders to advocate for policies that protect farmers and indigenous communities from predatory agro-industrial practices. There have been some successful policy efforts to recognize alternative food production methods as legitimate and recognized by the Colombian Agriculture Ministry such as the 0187 Resolution of 2006 (Leon-Sicard et al, 2015), but such efforts have been mostly motivated by corporate interest to increase profit by exporting products with an ecological certificate, in many cases benefiting foreign businesses over the local producers.

Only in the 1940's, the Colombian government started implementing agrarian reforms to regulate land ownership. Since politicians' mainly copied foreign models and followed recommendations by The World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization by the United Nations, most policies during the 20th century focused on production, ignoring local social realities and conflicts (Meynard, 2015). In Colombia nonprofit organizations have worked with farmers to switch from more conventional production methods to more sustainable ones by

avoiding pesticides and chemicals, in this way adding value to the food and becoming more competitive in the market, but these kinds of initiatives are still few and localized due to lack of institutional support and collaboration (Sabourin et al., 2015).

Considering these circumstances, it is urgent to analyze what are the consequences for small local production and land distribution in countries like Colombia when global markets and corporate interest are the major forces behind local policies. Although, it is evident that increasing global awareness about the environmental degradation and social justice conflicts that are caused by unsustainable food systems, have fueled an intensive debate about the urgency of agroecological practices and movements, as demonstrated by the Food Systems Summit, there, is still a long journey before the world leading nations and institutions give the necessary attention to local producers, social leaders and indigenous communities to create real democratic solutions to the food global crisis.

Chapter 3

Violence and Land appropriation in Colombia and Cauca region

“Land grabbing is a phenomenon through which, what was essentially communal and was out of the market, is rapidly becoming a commodity through a violent process.” (Restrepo & Zuluaga, 2020, p. 25).

3.1 National context of violence and land appropriation

As has been explained in the previous chapter, global dynamics of food production and land exploitation have shaped in many ways how Latin American countries have transitioned from traditional methods and small production to more industrialized agriculture, creating a conflict between global market pressures and territorial sovereignty. In Colombia, until the 1980's, 60 to 70% of basic agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, cereals, meats, and dairy products, offered and consumed within the country, came from local farms. This situation has progressively changed, since imported products have taken over a good portion of the market weakening local family agriculture and rising food prices (Acevedo, 2019). But, beyond these very influential factors, violence plays a central role in Colombian history, especially when it comes to land appropriation and exploitation.

Violence has been a constant shadow over Colombia's history, for over a century, different conflicts from territory disputes, bipartisan confrontations, drug cartels and the armed conflict between different armed groups, has left deep wounds in Colombian society. Of course, the main victims have been the most vulnerable: farmers, Indigenous and Black communities, mostly rural populations that depend on their land for survival. It is estimated that the armed conflict caused 220,000 deaths between 1958 and 2012 (GMH General Report, 2013, p. 20)

The armed conflict, as it has been historically portrayed, started in the 1940's and 50's, during the period known as "the violence", that was a bipartisan violent conflict between conservatives and liberals who disputed over political and military control of the national territory. Nevertheless, once these traditional forces decided to share power, the political parties signed in 1957, a peace pact called The National Pact. Then, the armed conflict shifted from a violent struggle between political parties, to an armed conflict between illegal armed groups and the military forces that started in the 60's, this new conflict was due to clashing political interests and resistance to state oppression and inequality. This period extended through several decades, during which human rights were violated. For example, massacres, disappearances, kidnappings, and displacements occurred almost every day (Historical Memory Group [GMH] General Report, 2013, p. 20).

Las FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) And ELN (National Liberation Army) were organized during the 60's as illegal armed groups that claimed to support socialist ideals inspired by the social revolution that took place in other parts of Latin America, most notably Cuba, 1959. These insurgent groups were a violent response against a government dominated by elites that did not allow the participation of the popular sectors. Besides, the upper classes only worked for its own interests ignoring the deep inequalities endured by the marginal sectors of society. As a response to these insurgent armed groups, and the limitations of the military forces to control them, landowners recruited and formed private armed security forces to protect their lands. These groups were later known as paramilitary organizations, the AUC (United Self-defense of Colombia) being the largest one (GMH General Report, 2013).

As indicated in the General Report from the GMH (Historical Memory Group), the entire armed conflict has revolved around the domination and use of land, specifically in rural areas.

The different uses that the participants in the armed conflict gave to disputed and dominated territories resulted in systematic violence against the civil population:

The appropriation, use and tenure of the land have been engines of the origin and the enduring of the armed conflict. All the reports illustrate the gradual convergence between the war and the agrarian problem (violent dispossession, idle concentration of land, inappropriate uses, colonization and failed titles). (GMH General Report 2013, p.21)

Historically, Colombia has been one of the countries with more internally displaced population in the world, just a decade ago the country was still going through one of the most serious crises it had ever faced.

Colombia suffers from the largest humanitarian crisis in its history, the largest in the Western hemisphere and one of the three deepest on the planet, because of the internal conflict. The country has positioned itself in recent years among the four nations in the world with the highest number of internally displaced persons, with Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan (United Nations Program for development [PNUD], 2011).

Since the armed conflict has taken place mostly in the countryside it has affected agriculture in general, but especially small farms mostly owned by family units. Government measures such as the URT the Land Restitution Unit have partially helped families to recover lost lands. Other programs have provided technical assistance to help small producers, but such initiatives have been insufficient to truly protect small producers, despite their importance for the local economy since the Colombian Government policies tend to mostly benefit big agriculture companies (Meynard, 2015).

3.2 Cauca Region

Because of its geographical characteristics, Cauca Department is one of the most diverse regions in Colombia. Cauca is in the Colombian southwest facing the Pacific Ocean to the west of Colombia. (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, 2016). Cauca's extension is 29,308 km² and it has 1,366,984 inhabitants as of 2014. It has great cultural and biological diversity, is the birthplace of some of the major rivers in the county among them the Magdalena and Cauca rivers. The region is part of the Andean system. Most of Cauca's rural residents live on agriculture and mining. Because of its strategic location and diverse geography, this territory has been one of the most affected by violence, natural disasters, and intensive natural resources exploitation (Luque-Rebuelto, 2016, p. 183). The Cauca department is also characterized by its ethnic diversity but despite this, the geographical divisions between White/mixed commonly referred as "Mestizos" and Indigenous or Afro-descendant populations is evident from demographic data, these seems to be an urban/rural division between these populations:

White and mestizo population occupy the central area of the department and the capital, they account for 56% of the population. Towards the east, in Tierradentro, the indigenous communities that constitute 21% are located. Finally, on the Pacific coast, is the Afro-descendant population that makes up 23% of the population. 541,406 inhabitants reside in the departmental capital and 825,578 distributed in the rest of the municipalities. Most of the population lives in the Cauca River valley, between the Central and Western mountain ranges. Popayán, the capital, located in this valley, concentrates more than half of the population of Cauca and, within the department, only the city of Santander de Quilichao exceeds fifty thousand inhabitants, the rest is divided into small population

centers and rural villages. parties for the 38 municipalities and 99 townships that comprise the department. (Luque-Rebuelto, 2016,p. 183)

The population’s vulnerability in Cauca is determined by converging factors associated with natural disasters and different kinds of violence against the civil population. Despite declining incidence of violence in most of the country and the Peace Process, initiated in 2012 by President Juan Manuel Santos between the Government and FARC, the armed conflict is still active in Cauca, maintained by organized crime mostly related to drug production and trafficking and armed groups that did not participate in the peace process (GMH General Report, 2013). These issues have profoundly impacted the statistics of mortality and displacement on top of the national average, the number of victims of armed violence between 2008 and 2015 in Cauca was 46,490 (Total population: 1,366,984), and the total in the whole country was 471,007 (Colombia’s population: 48,258,494) during the same period. Natural disasters also increase the population vulnerability in municipalities where violence is constant in Cauca region (Luque-Revuerto, 2016, p. 183).

Table 1: Natural disaster victims 2008-2015, in Cauca:

Flooding	101,149 victims
Landslides	59,278 victims
Avalanches	24,662 Victims
Droughts	23,463 Victims

Gales	18,860 Victims
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(Luque Revuerto, 2016, p. 183)

Flow chart of causes and effects of forced displacement and increased migration in Cauca

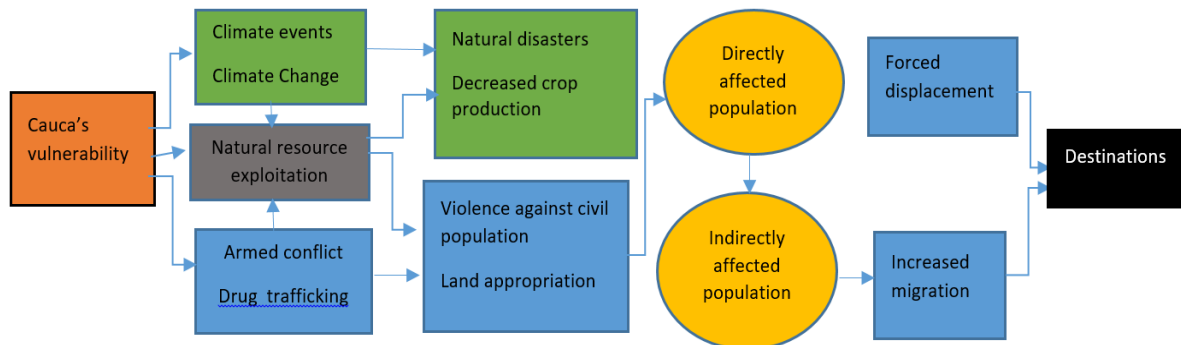


Figure 1. Flow chart of causes and effects of forced displacement and increased migration in Cauca.

This flowchart shows the connections between the different factors that increase Cauca's vulnerability, which leads to mass displacement and migration. All of these factors have a stronger impact on rural populations and their capacity to maintain their livelihoods through agriculture.

Illegal armed groups and other organized crime have located a lot of their drug production in this region, since it has an adequate climate for illicit crop production. As a consequence of the above factors, a large vulnerable rural population of farmers, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been massively displaced over the years. Traditional crops such potatoes, carrots, onions, bananas, cultivated in northern Cauca communal lands, known as “resguardos”, have been replaced by poppy crops controlled by armed groups and drug cartels especially in the central mountain range, destabilizing these territories and weakening indigenous authority (Osorio et al., 2018).

Despite these massive displacements, El Valle del Cauca, which connects with Cauca from the south, has the third largest city in Colombia, Cali (2.228 million inhabitants). Because of the proximity between the two departments, a lot of the rural population that is displaced from El Cauca ends up in the Cali metropolitan area or in Popayán (318,059 inhabitants), the largest city in Cauca. Even so, the socio-political causes for massive migration are immersed in a context where environmental degradation, due to deforestation, mining, agriculture and climate change, puts large rural populations under pressure increasing their vulnerability (Sevillano et al., 2020, p. 310). Regardless of increased urbanization, due to rural-urban migration, until recently Colombia’s agricultural sector still contributed between 10 and 14% of the countries’ GDP, representing the livelihoods of approximately 3.7 million people as for 2011 (Ramirez et al., 2012).

In the Ramírez, et al. study about the effects of climate change over Colombian agriculture, they forecast that increases in temperature and precipitation by the 2050’s will severely affect crop production leaving small producers of non-exportable goods especially vulnerable due to increased droughts, pests and disease:

Small-scale producers of maize, upland rice, beans, cassava, potatoes, and non-export plantains (all using “traditional” technologies) also play an important role in national food and nutritional security. Such production is less technologically developed, less capable of responding to climate variability and progressive climate change without proper governmental support, and hence (under current socio-economic conditions) more sensitive to climate change overall (Ramírez et al, 2012, p.615).

Considering the importance of agriculture for rural population livelihoods in Colombia and Cauca, it is reasonable to expect that climate change alone will intensify migration and urbanization, without adequate adaptation strategies and governmental intervention. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the many constraints that exist for poorer households to migrate. The 2018 World Bank Report on climate change projects that slow-onset effects of climate change, such as decreases in crop production, might cause up to 17 million people to internally migrate in Latin America (World Bank, 2018, p. 21). Studies that focus on the effect of climate change over migration patterns in the developing world (Grey & Mueller, 2012) (Nawrotzki et al, 2015)(World Bank, 2018) identify that climate change effects over crop production is the main reason for rural migration both locally and internationally, especially when it comes to increases in temperature. Yet, these migration flows largely depend on the household’s capacity to either adapt to local circumstances or migrate as an adaptive measure.

Historically, in peripheral regions far from urban centers, the Colombian state has had little presence; the Cauca region has been inhabited by many Indigenous communities and even communities of freed African slaves who established their own practices and traditions with little colonial influence (Osorio et al., 2018). More recently, the Colombian government and corporations have shown interest in the region due to its natural resources, bringing unwanted

“development” such as mining and agro-industrial practices. Because of Colombia’s government economic agenda, which benefits corporate interests, land productivity and profitability has been the main objective when implementing policies, which supposedly benefit the general population, but in reality tend to increase social inequalities. Indigenous sectors along with Afro-Colombian and environmental groups have tried to show the seriousness of this crisis.

Due to the above, numerous Colombian indigenous leaders, especially those from Cauca (described more below), have been assassinated. This is the situation described by the newspaper *El Espectador* (September, 13, 2021) which reveals how, during the year 2020, 65 environmental leaders were assassinated in Colombia with 20 of the homicides happening in Cauca, most of these leaders were defending their territories from different kinds of exploitation including land disposition, illicit crops, agro industrial and mining (Calle, September, 13, 2021). The previous data shows how different sectors related to the illegal use of the territory consider the indigenous population as an obstacle to their interests, or join them or they will be annihilated.

In contrast, Popayán the largest city and the capital of Cauca Department, traditionally has had a heavy Spanish legacy, especially due to the Catholic Church influence but, despite its increasing diversification, due to urban expansion and the displacement of rural population, the city remains mostly controlled by White elites and centralized political interests (Osorio et al., 2018).

Although Popayán has been affected by the armed conflict in different periods, it remains mostly disconnected from the region’s social reality. Like many smaller urban settlements in Cauca, Popayán has grown along the Panamerican Highway, the most important highway in the region, which connects the region with the rest of the country and mobilizes resources in and out (Osorio et al., 2018). Because of its vital importance to mobilize products, including food, the

Panamericana has also represented a key location for social mobilizations, several times. For example: during the last protests in 2021, Indigenous communities, known as "the Indigenous Minga" mostly composed by the Nasa ethnic group, blocked the highway as a way to claim their lands and rights as independent people.

The northern region, along the Cauca River, is the main stage for conflicts, mainly associated with land use. Besides, agro industrial corporations, such large sugar mills, for instance Incauca (El Ingenio del Cauca), which is owned by The Ardila Lulle Organization, is one of the most powerful business groups in Colombia. These kinds of business projects have increasingly gained access to land in the area, displacing small producers. Furthermore, illicit crops have replaced traditional ones and new urban settlements have also changed the landscape, all factors which have caused social destabilization among Indigenous communities and small farmers (Osorio et al., 2015). This region has also been the focus of governmental intervention, which intends to formalize land ownership through land titles. Recently the PFPR program (Rural Property Formalization Program), as a measure to reduce informal land ownership, intended to help vulnerable land owners to formalize the situation, claiming that such informality prevents progress and slows down land productivity. The program assumes that the main reason why so many land owners don't seek formal land titles is because of lack of knowledge and resources, when in fact, there are traditional land tenure practices such as collective ownership, which are not recognized by governmental institutions, and could be dissolved by land regulation measures. A case aside is the native "resguardos", the indigenous reservations, which are an important part of the Cauca region. According to the Secretary of Internal Affairs (Ministerio del Interior):

The indigenous reserves are the collective property of the indigenous communities in favor of which they are constituted and according to articles 63 and 329 of the Political

Constitution, they are inalienable, imprescriptible and unseizable. The indigenous reserves are a legal and socio-political institution of special character, formed by one or more indigenous communities, which with a collective property title that enjoys the guarantees of private property, possess their territory and are governed for the management of it and its internal life by an autonomous organization protected by the indigenous jurisdiction and its own normative (Artículo 21, decree 2164 of 1995).

(Mininterior, 2013, April, 13).

The previous legal status has allowed Indigenous organizations, especially those of the Department of Cauca, to have enormous convening power, such as “the Minga”, a native and powerful system of native socio-political organization. In spite of the native resilience, Abril-Bonilla et al. (2020) argues that some of the government measures actually promote generalizations about land ownership and use that don’t reflect the cultural diversity of the region. This is why local communities must intervene and negotiate through hybridization as a way to resist post-colonialism and claim policies that actually protect their communities against land appropriation and exploitation (Abril-Bonilla et al., 2020).

The increasing presence of agro-industrial production has caused loss of diversity in terms of products and traditional agricultural practices. For instance, in the northern Cauca region, sugar cane crops have displaced many small farmers, who can’t compete with their massive production, so they have to sell their lands to compensate for their losses.

Food distribution is another factor that can increase isolated population’s vulnerability and conflicts between different regions. The Panamericana Highway, which connects different regions such as Cauca with El Valle and connects Colombia with Ecuador, is an important route to transport essential goods such as food and gasoline. Indigenous communities in Cauca

recognize the importance of the Panamericana Highway, which is why they have blocked it several times to claim their territorial and cultural rights; when this happens the food distribution from Cauca to El Valle and Cali gets interrupted creating real distress in the City's commerce.

The Cauca is a department of the Republic of Colombia. Divided into 41 municipalities and into 5 provinces: Center, North, West, East and South. The department of Cauca is crossed by the Pan-American Highway from north to south and communicates with the departments of Valle del Cauca and Nariño, through the Popayá - La Plata highway it communicates with the department of Huila. All of the municipalities with the exception of Guapi and Timbiquí are connected by road to each other and to Popayán, which in turn is connected to the main cities of the country. (Instituto Nacional de Vias [Invias], 2021)

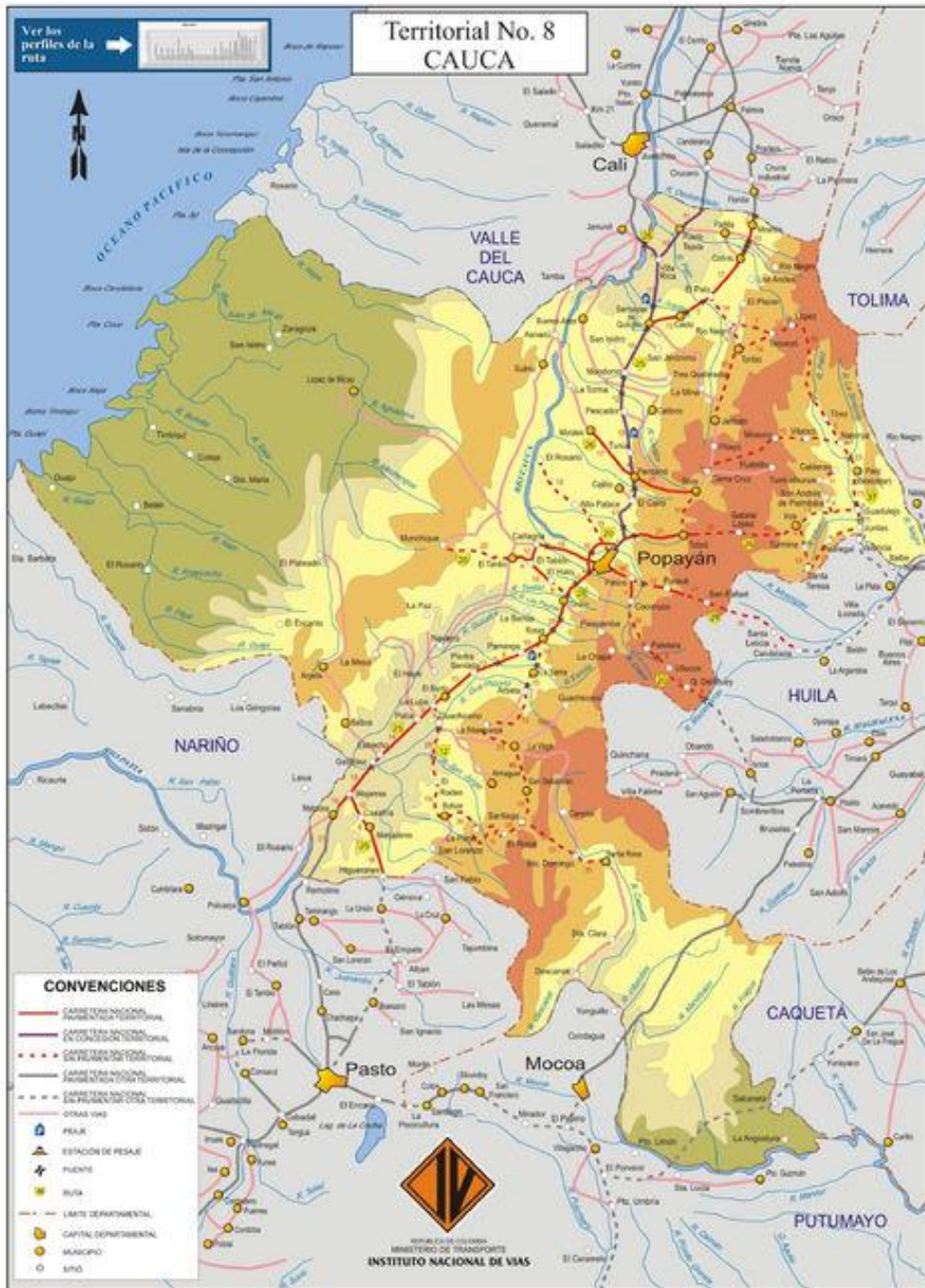





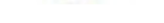


Figure 2. Road map of Cauca Department (Invias, 2021)

Table 2. Highway conventions table, extracted from road map of Cauca Department (Invias, 2021)

Conventions	
	Territorial Paved National Highway
	National Highway In Territorial Concession
	Territorial Unpaved National Highway
	Paved National Highway Other Territorial
	Paved National Highway Other Territorial
	Other Highways

The Panamericana Highway showed in purple in Cauca’s road map as a National Highway in Territorial Concession, crosses through the department from the north where the Valle del Cauca’s department ends and it reaches the department’s capital Popayan. After crossing through Popayan the highway is marked as Territorial Paved National Highway in red until it reaches the Nariño department in the south. As observed in the map, most of the highways that reach other spreading municipalities are connected to the Panamericana Highway and are marked as Unpaved National Highways, meaning that the conditions of the roads might not allow timely and sufficient food distribution.

Because of the great proximity between Cauca and a large city such as Cali, the social turbulence has a direct impact on the cities' residents. During the blockages in May of 2019, Cali's biggest wholesale central lost more than 4.500 tons of food that couldn't reach the city. (El Pais, 2020, April, 11). But, despite the visibility offered by the media about the consequences caused by the blockages in big cities like Cali, there is little to no coverage about the deficient food distribution systems in isolated regions of the country. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization in Colombia, there are systemic problems that make food less accessible to certain populations. The combination of poor infrastructure and lack governmental policies that regulate effective and equitable food distribution, creates unstable food systems around the country, especially among rural populations:

Currently, one of the major causes of food insecurity in Colombia lies not so much in food shortages, but in the inability to access it. Part of the explanation is due to the low income level of vulnerable populations, which is exacerbated by the dysfunctions of the agro-food systems related to the supply and distribution of food, which on many occasions generates notable and unjustified increases in prices. (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] in Colombia. 2015). (Mi traduccion)

This also demonstrates that small local producers, which include family agriculture, agroecological movements and Indigenous communities, are fundamental to fill the gaps that the current agro industrial food system leaves behind to increase profits. As explained above, it is fundamental to involve local communities when implementing policies that could jeopardize their needs and way of life. Even, when urban growth seems to be inevitable, the rural population still plays a fundamental role in Cauca's economy, environmental protection and food security. Cauca's diversity is not just one of its strengths, it's central to its social and political structure.

Chapter 4:

Forms of resistance and alternative food production

In Colombia, there have been several agro ecological initiatives that work through support networks that in some cases are able to extend through different regions, building new communities and strengthening food sovereignty. Some of them consist of developing educational projects to exchange knowledge, others focus on political action and some of the most prominent initiatives have established food markets where local producers and consumers support each other (Acevedo & Jimenez, 2019).

In this chapter, I will summarize some of the agroecological experiences that have been developed recently in Colombia and in the Cauca region.

4.1 Collaborative learning and food governance

Both the government and independent organizations in Colombia have already worked on strategies to support small farmers, so they can develop their business and break the poverty cycle. One case in Cauca is the Learning Routes Program developed by the Colombian government in alliance with PADEMÉR (Support Project for the Development of Rural Micro enterprise) and PROCASUR. These collaborative enterprises intend to connect successful rural micro entrepreneurs with small producers, in vulnerable rural areas. During several weeks, the more experienced and successful rural entrepreneurs, chosen by the program, carry out workshops in different locations within a region, traveling through an established route (Muñoz, 2008). It is hard to tell whether these kinds of programs have worked since there are not available resources that offer updates.

In her article *Food governance in Territorial Short Food Supply Chains*, Reina-Usuga shows, through her research, how reflective governance allows transparent and democratic discussions about alternative food production, empowering small producers and facilitating collaboration between Territorial Short Supply Chains (TSFSR), (Reina-Usuga, 2020). These local chains of distribution allow local producers to have further control over their commercial decisions and create stronger alliances with other producers in nearby regions.

These two approaches bring some relevant issues such as the value of information and collaboration among farmers. Nonetheless, the first sets an established system, limiting the participant's agency and leading the participants to adopt production strategies that might not be environmentally sustainable or that do not take into account local practices. While reflective governance builds independent communities who have the potential to challenge unsustainable food production by creating strategies that work in accordance with each territories' interests and values (Reina-Usuga, 2020).

4.2 The debate about food security and food sovereignty

During 2020 and 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified already alarming levels of malnutrition and food insecurity in Colombia. In 2015, the Colombian Institute of Family Wellness ICBF and the National Health Institute determined that 54.2% of the Colombian population suffers from food insecurity and among indigenous and black communities the numbers rise to 77% and 68.9% respectively (Fuentes, p. 44, 2021). The food crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has raised new questions and international debates about the effectiveness of current food systems. In Colombia, recent law proposals and the reformulation of previous laws have insisted on bringing more institutional support to small farmers, Indigenous and Black communities to help them build stronger food production and

commercialization, but also to facilitate food sovereignty. Furthermore, these new laws would encourage and support ecological food production implementing a new food political landscape, which covers social and environmental goals (Fuentes, 2021). Indigenous communities have started new debates about the importance of implementing policies and communal projects that allow food sovereignty and autonomy that go beyond paternalistic global approaches that seek to fix food insecurity without considering the needs of local indigenous practices and cultural heritage. Indigenous communities in Colombia and in the Cauca region are constantly working to protect their cultural heritage which has been polluted by external products such as processed canned food, sodas and commercial alcohol, damaging their youth's health and distorting their values around food and its production (FAO, 2016). Furthermore, food sovereignty protects national and local food producers from external global market forces that make prices fluctuate, creating uncertainty and leaving local producers in a constant state of vulnerability. Therefore, implementing policies that not only seek to fight food insecurity, but also protect territorial and food sovereignty is essential to accomplish social justice.

These improved proposals promise to bring a better future to the rural population, but the actual implementation of previous laws, which intended to benefit small farmers, have always been limited. Diverse initiatives, by independent and local institutions, to support small producers through collaboration and training, have appeared in this complex horizon. Such is the case of the Indigenous Nasa community in the Cauca Yaquiwa Reserve, where the local community has implemented the "Plan de Vida", a community tool within Indigenous communities that is used to implement strategies to negotiate with non-indigenous communities and retain their territorial and cultural independence (Franco, 2018). Within the Yaquiwa Reserve, the Plan de Vida has implemented ethnic educational tools to preserve cultural

knowledge about sustainable agricultural practices that work in harmony with the environment, their cosmovision and their territory. Although these communities have become dependent and still work on cash crops such as coffee, sugar cane and banana, they have been able to maintain subsistence crops without the use of chemicals or pesticides and with larger diversity, which includes different varieties of beans, potatoes, onion, cabbage and more. Mostly women and children work on these subsistence crops, which maintain Indigenous traditional agricultural practices, such as crop rotation and burn (Franco, 2018). According to the ICAN, there are 102 Indigenous communities in Colombia, each one with unique food systems and practices, but many of them share agricultural techniques that work in accordance with the local ecosystem and promote commercial self-sufficiency through local markets, but especially through traditional practices such as barter (FAO, 2016). Such initiatives are a good example of how agroecology can work, both as a practice and a social movement, in coherence with real food sovereignty. Indigenous communities understand that food production is inherently linked with territorial governance and cultural preservation. There cannot be real social development among indigenous communities without sustainable practices that protect their environment (FAO, 2016).

4.3 Agroecological markets

The neighbor Department Valle del Cauca has developed several initiatives surrounding agroecology that have impacted communities in the northern region of the Cauca Department. Some initiatives have included educational programs such as the “Tutorial Learning System” SAT which promoted the education of Colombian Afro-descendent youth to incentive rural wellbeing and technical knowledge on sustainable agriculture. The most influential initiative might be Red MAC, the (Agroecological Markets Network from Valle del Cauca). This

outstanding organization has been able to establish several markets in Valle del Cauca and the Cauca Departments offering a space to many local producers that use local agroecological practices to sell good quality products in the region (T. Leon-Sicard et al, 2015). Something that makes Red MAC particularly interesting, beyond the unique network that it has created, is that it also promotes independence from the global certification process through the “Participatory Guarantee System” (SPG), an initiative designed to create solidarity between producers, consumers and entities that support agroecology. The SPG is basically a contract based on trust and credibility between producers and consumers in which the certification process is not necessary to label a product as organic or ecological (Red MAC, 2021). By implementing this system, Red MAC is not only promoting food sovereignty, but helping local producers that might not be able to commercialize their products, because they don’t have the resources or support to go through a certification process. This strategy also allows Indigenous communities, small local farmers and Afro-descendant communities to keep their authenticity without relying on a global market that imposes notions of what is considered “organic” or “ecological” and limits the diversity of products that can be commercialized based on the demand from rich countries.

Another interesting initiative in Cauca has been the Web of Organic Food Producers in Cauca supported by the CRC (Autonomous Regional Corporation of Cauca). This project has allowed more than 80 community leaders to implement organic food production in the region, supported with technical and commercial knowledge (CRC, 2018, 11, 28). The goal is to promote clean and sustainable businesses with organic food production and improve consumption habits among Cauca’s population. It is important to note that the term “organic agriculture” follows certain international standards that might not be in line with other

sustainable local practices. Many organizations and academic articles in Colombia prefer to use the broader term “ecological agriculture” which might or might not follow organic agriculture international standards and practices, these might be more aligned with agroecology in terms of food governance.

In many Colombian articles and academic articles the term “traditional agriculture” mostly refers to more industrialized agriculture, which became dominant after the Green Revolution. Unfortunately, by working closely with the Colombian Agricultural Ministry, the initiatives that seek to support local producers and markets through the CRC are still dependent on national and international regulations including certifications and tend to promote technical innovation that prioritize productivity over social and environmental justice. In the section about “clean production and green markets” the CRC web page proclaims:

In the case of agriculture, it is important to include the concept of Modern, Sustainable, Profitable and High Productivity Agriculture as an operating arm and frame of reference, as an effective way to contribute to the preservation of life and the environment. To improve the environmental performance of productive sectors, various governments around the world promote cleaner production as a complementary strategy to regulatory instruments. (CRC, 2021, November, 28).

4.4 The limits and conflicts of land use

Many of these projects’ success depend on land distribution policies which might put pressure over producers and landowners. According to the Agriculture and rural development Ministry, there are big portions of land in the Cauca region, which cause “usage conflicts”

related either to over-use of land 25% or sub-use of land 5% (Min Agricultura, p. 13, 2013). The Popayán municipality, where the biggest urban center is located, suffers from severe over-use of land 37% on land with usage of vocation for production and protection. However, only 25% of the land is considered to have adequate use or without conflict, this should be an indicator of the effect of urban demand of food over land usage, specifically the demand for industrialized food production. Compared with a municipality with smaller urban areas like Piendamó, which only has 17% of overuse land usage conflict and 53% of land with adequate use or without conflict (Min Agricultura, p. 11, 2013), Popayan has more intensive land usage negatively impacting preservation and sustainability. It would be interesting to see if within the areas which are of “adequate use” or without conflict there can be found sustainable or organic food production.

Land distribution has been problematic for many decades in Colombia, and especially in Cauca. This is due to violent conflicts, drug trafficking and political or commercial interests that go against local community’s interests. Nevertheless, local production from small farmers still has a presence in urban areas such as Cauca’s capital Popayán. Because of the long history of cultural and racial diversity, Indigenous communities in Cauca have a huge influence over the political and cultural landscape in Cauca and protecting traditional food production and land preservation has been a big part of their political agenda.

Small producers or “family agriculture” has also been important for Colombia’s local economies and constitute a large part of the social fabric in the Colombian countryside. Nonetheless, despite their resilience against violent conflicts and dominant large producers, State policies have failed to effectively protect landowners leaving small producers vulnerable to land grabbing and displacement (Meynard, 2015). The term family agriculture doesn’t have an official definition, but it mainly refers to small scale agriculture and communal labor practices.

Although, it is not always directly related to agroecological practices it is part of its core, since most traditional practices sustained by the rural population exist within family agriculture.

Currently rural social movements are fighting to reverse the process of family agriculture elimination that the Green Revolution set in motion by demanding the proper state measures to protect and support their production. After all, despite the adverse circumstances that the rural population endures, the agrarian 2014 census estimated that 81% agricultural production units are of 10 hectares or less (Acevedo & Jimenez p. 16, 2019).

Even when communities have been able to stay in their territories through resistance and political action, economic pressures have pushed them to rely on unsustainable agricultural practices. This is the case of the high mountain ecosystem in Cauca Puracé, a municipality where the Indigenous community has fought for generations to maintain their Cosmo vision and protect the fragile ecosystem where they live. Despite their efforts to keep sustainable agricultural methods, which have been used since pre-Columbian times to increase the soil resilience, such as rotary crops, intensive agricultural; practices such as monoculture and the use of chemicals and pesticides have deteriorated the soil and endangered the high mountain ecosystem which is essential for the water retention of the region (Ruiz et al., 2015).

Some institutional efforts from the Administrative Unit of National Parks and the Indigenous Council have capacitated the local population in the use of organic food production through the use of organic fertilizers. Such initiatives could greatly benefit these communities, since it would increase their products' value, and would allow a sustainable and clean agriculture (Ruiz et al., 2015). In spite of the clear benefits of organic and ecological agriculture, the sustained dependency of local communities on chemicals, pesticides and the increasing demand of the local and global market, has prevented more sustainable practices from becoming

consolidated. The limited and inconsistent institutional support to make this transition possible has also been a major factor to maintain traditional agriculture as the dominant practice in the region.

4.5 The Colombian Network of Organic Agriculture , Recab

There have been widespread movements to promote ecological agriculture in different regions in Colombia; one of the most relevant projects has been The Colombian Network of Organic Agriculture (Recab). Since 1992 Recab has advocated for the preservation of native seeds and supported small farmers to promote organic food production. Despite many administrative challenges, the network has produced and commercialized native seeds in many Colombian regions and it's looking to expand its efforts to capacitate farmers in seed production, preservation and organic food production (Aguilar, 2020). However, on a larger scale, Recab's main goal is to achieve food sovereignty by giving farmers and local communities the resources and necessary knowledge to produce organic food on a large scale, so they can compete against commercial agro-industry to produce good quality food and employment opportunities for Colombian rural communities (Aguilar, 2020). In Cauca the network is represented by the Organic Association of Organic Producers in Cauca with its main location in Popayán.

It is worth observing that one of Recab's main challenge has been finding farmers with enough technical knowledge to produce and preserve native seeds, this situation that can be compared to the limited capacity for Administrative Unit of National Parks and the Indigenous Council in Cauca, to capacitate Indigenous communities and local farmers to sustain an effective ecological agricultural project that has the capacity to produce sufficient food to commercialize, most of these projects are only effective to feed a household. Since such knowledge and training might not be easy to access, it is important to point out how Colombia's educational system has

failed to offer agricultural education beyond the traditional techniques that most traditional farmers use, despite its damaging social and environmental consequences. Most educational projects aimed to train farmers in alternative food production have been implemented by nonprofit organizations or independent entities within rural or Indigenous communities.

Chapter 5:

Values around Food

It is not a secret that values around food are rapidly changing, cultivating the belief that going to the supermarket is the main or maybe the only effective way of finding good quality food, even when it comes to fresh and “organic “produce. Especially in urban centers, where the average consumer prioritizes convenience over health or sustainable practices, this has built a new market of delivery services that even offer prepackaged ingredients to prepare a fast meal. So, even the supermarket is losing its relevance in some parts of the Global North. For many, these new tendencies might be welcomed as the natural progression of our modern society, but very little thought is given to the structural social and cultural consequences of these new ways of distributing and commercializing food. Starting with the values that are cultivated around the process of picking, purchasing and consuming food. In this chapter, I will focus on these inquiries, starting with some global tendencies and transitioning into the different conflicting values around food that exist in Colombia and particularly in the Cauca Department.

5.1 Global perspective on food values

It seems like globalization and urbanization have played central roles in the way cultural values around food have been drastically transformed in recent history. Especially when it comes to the kind of food that is consumed and the way in which it is consumed. In a fast paced environment, where time is equivalent to money and money is equivalent to subsistence, food becomes a mechanical necessity most of the time. Even when families try to sustain traditional family meals as a sacred space to communicate and nourish family bonds, when children grow and face the many uncertainties and challenges of the modern world, having food rituals turn into

rare occasional social events. This is also the case of most working class and low income families in cities where parents don't have the time to cultivate traditional knowledge or rituals around food, leaving children with limited social practices or knowledge surrounding food.

These transitions have progressed hand in hand with colonizing development discourses that target traditional values as obstacles to progress. The proliferation of fast food restaurants and delivery services mark the way of progress globally transforming family/cultural food customs into pleasurable commodities. In this global food consumption market societies and communities have disattached themselves from the process of food production, most of us only relate with food through the last stages of purchasing, cooking and consuming food, limiting the cultural or territorial identity that the food might contain. In local communities, where the transition from traditional food production practices to the consumption of processed food happens drastically, the absence of cultural identity is felt on very deep level, this is the case of the rural community in Marialabaja, in the Colombian Caribbean, where violence, displacement and the rapid spreading of palm oil production, in the last couple of decades, has irreversibly damaged the local cultural identity. Palm oil production has wiped away the region's diversity including fruits and vegetables that were traditionally consumed by the local communities. For example, coconut, which was used to produce coconut oil, an important ingredient for the local gastronomy, almost disappeared. In the present, the local women complain about having to buy industrialized oil, since coconut oil has become so scarce: "it's so sad that we have to buy the oil that took everything from us" (Restrepo & Zuluaga p. 25, 2020)

But, despite the progressive transformation of traditional values around food, the social structure and signifiers that are behind food consumption habits are still very complex, especially when there is a whole industry of advertising and brand competition behind each product.

According to Roland Barthes, food in itself constitutes a system of social signifiers that go beyond the price, since the price doesn't necessarily represent the food's value in particular social scenarios. An example is how in many Western societies brown or whole wheat bread is now associated with refinement, while white bread is considered more ordinary, thus the value of food is also associated with its preparation and cultural signifiers (Barthes, 2012).

5.2 Traditional food values in Cauca Colombia

Some native communities have maintained ritualistic experiences around food and traditional knowledge that intend to protect their communities' health and strengthen their unity with each other and their territories. The food systems that these Indigenous communities have managed to sustain exist in harmony with their belief system, but also with their immediate and surrounding environments such as urban centers to commercialize surplus production:

The different configurations of indigenous food systems are determined by land tenure, biological supply of thermal floors, exchange possibilities with other communities and the proximity to urban centers. These food systems were formed for their self-sufficiency by various societies using balanced relationship strategies with biodiversity, surplus production for exchange and sale in local markets, barter being the essential model of exchange for the provision of food. (FAO in Colombia, p. 45, 2015)

Many practices that allowed the process and preservation of food, such as sun dehydration techniques or the use of salt to preserve meats, have been endangered by the introduction of technologies and products.

However, it is not possible to talk about traditional agroecological practices and food values in the Cauca region without talking about the Nasa community. The Nasa forms the most politically active and organized community, their cultural influence over the territory is notable, especially in Tierradentro, a region mainly occupied by the Nasa Community located in the Paez and Inza municipalities that have 21 reserves. Because of their cultural and territorial autonomy, the Nasa community has been able to preserve traditional agroecological practices that are intimately related to their food and territorial sovereignty, moreover their cosmovision and cultural heritage is also present in the way corn, tubers and rhizomes are grown creating a agro-ecosystem (Sanabria, 2001).

Olga Lucia Sanabria Diago, a biologist from the Cauca University, worked with Tierradentro's Nasa Indigenous communities during the 1990's, to understand how these communities work on agro-ecosystems. She collected information about traditional agricultural practices through oral history within the community and evaluated how their social movement for territorial and cultural autonomy has been built through their relationship with their land, which includes agriculture, traditional medicine and a cosmovision that includes their territory as a living force. (Sanabria, 2001):

We start from the recognition of Tierradentro, as a geographical, ecological and cultural unit, -locally called kiwe or territory-, as a place of settlement and defense of the Nasa people. In the territory, the spatial and cosmological relationships that order, distribute and govern the forms of access to the cultural attributes of plant resources are brought together. (Sanabria, p. 25, 2001) (Mi traduccion)

Because of the geographical diversity of Tierradentro, the Nasa use the different altitudes to cultivate associated crops, according to the thermal levels, allowing greater diversification and appropriate land use considering the different characteristics of each ecosystem. The crops are distributed according to the different altitudes of the territory, some of the most common crop associations are: potatoes, beans, casaba, corn and vegetables. These associations allow a more efficient use of land and, since its characteristics blend in with the local ecosystem, it minimizes the disruption of natural cycles of water, soil, vegetable, and animal life. Such practices are ancestral, meaning that they have existed and evolved for centuries, successfully adapting to the territory, and strengthening the Nasa's identity.

But these agroecological practices are also intertwined with spiritual beliefs and practices, which are associated with the territory and the community's relationship with non-human life. The production and consumption of food goes beyond a mere subsistence process, but it connects the body with the rest of life that grows in the territory, and this connection is sacred. Franco and Sánchez explain how, for the Nasa community, their cultural resistance has meant that they have managed to maintain, not only food sovereignty, but food dignity. This means that by keeping a close connection with traditional practices and cherishing the knowledge that comes with food production, they can truly value their food because it's connected with their whole identity:

For food autonomy, the residents of the reservation state that “he who knows what he sows decides what he eats”; in addition, they say that “food is produced to eat first and, if there is something left over, it can be used to barter or to sell”. Food dignity is understood as “mutual respect between all beings to produce food in harmony”, with a more spiritual concept (Franco & Sánchez, 2018, p.149).

Another traditional practice related to food among Indigenous communities in Cauca has been bartering, this ancestral practice which used to connect different societies in Latin America through complex interchange networks is still practiced today in Cauca and the leading community in this practice has been the Kokonuco Indigenous community that occupies three central municipalities in Cauca including Popayan (Tocancipá-Falla, 2008). Because of the rich geographical diversity in the region, for centuries, populations from higher latitudes or “cold regions” have been able to exchange products such as potatoes and onions for sugar cane and plantains with populations from lower attitudes or “hot” regions. In the last few decades bartering has not only encouraged Indigenous communities to sustain their cultural identity and values but it has been used as a political strategy that aims to resist global commercial trading such as the Free Trade Agreement TLC which has threaten to destabilize local commerce and food sovereignty in the region (Tocancipá-Falla, 2008).

5.3 Hybrid practices

In Colombia, traditional food survives mostly through the gastronomic diversity that has found a strong refuge in the restaurant industry and street food markets. Even with fast food chains and an increasing international food offer, good quality traditional Colombian food has a strong grip on the average Colombian consumer. Nevertheless, when it comes to what is consumed at home or the cultural values that surround food, the experience of most Colombians, living in urban centers, it's far from enriching in terms of tradition. In rural areas, the food experience is mixed and it's difficult to define what is considered traditional food values and practices, since there have been many structural changes and interventions in rural food systems.

Such is the case of El Rosal, rural locality in Cauca, where a departmental program has implemented agricultural interventions in the production of quinoa to help the local population fight food insecurity and malnutrition. According to Perafán and Martínez, who carry out research on this program, using Foucault's theories of biopower and biopolitics, they argue that the institutional intervention that was implemented on this population, represented an extension of biopolitical power that intends to control bodies by enforcing health standards through nutritional goals, backed up by scientific knowledge. In this case, the program used inclusive knowledge that insisted on the importance of including local knowledge and traditional practices to run the program, but in practice the program "re-invented" these traditional practices by replacing the local quinoa seed that was traditionally used, with a different variety that was commercially more suitable according to the program's technical team (Perafán & Martínez, 2016).

Despite the clear distrust that many local communities feel towards "mixed approaches" to agroecology or sustainable practices, there have been social movements that have contributed valuable connections between producers and consumers that not necessarily use purely traditional practices but still benefit local communities in different levels, such is the case of farmer market networks and exporting organizations that help local farmers and small business owners to increase their profits by distributing their products in international markets, such is the case of high quality organic coffee production in Cauca which has recently increase their commercial presence in international markets through alliances between small farms and international programs such as Nespresso AAA, FLO, Rainforest Alliance and 4C (Fernandez, p. 5, 2019). Despite being vulnerable to fluctuations in prices due to changes in demand/offer tendencies, these alliances offer new commercial opportunities for rural populations.

As mentioned in chapter 3, initiatives such as Red MAC, which connects the Department of El Valle del Cauca with the Cauca region, have allowed local agro ecological producers including farmers, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities to commercialize their products in rural and urban areas, such commercial interactions are not only commercial, they also create an alliance between producers and consumers from different cultural and economic backgrounds. Because consumers are aware of the cultural value of the products they purchased and, besides, they can meet in person those who produce their food, personal connections are established among them and extend that connection to the way they perceive and value the food they purchase. There is a deeper meaning to each action from the purchase to the consumption of food. Moreover, farmers who have participated in Red Mac have expressed how their family unity has benefited from the work in the markets and women have found a place to empower themselves and create valuable connections with other women (Ardila, 2016).

In summary, values around food in the Cauca region historically have been rich and diverse, evolving within agro industrial pressures and building resilience through social networks that fight to protect their cultural identity and strengthen local communities. When there are strong connections between producers and consumers, there is further transparency and the food can be valued beyond its cost. When there are strong connections with the territory like in the case of the Nasa, food production and consumption requires a balance with local ecosystems so the main goal is not overproduction, but sustainability.

Conclusions

Our being has become contaminated with materialism and dehumanized, with a loss of all transcendence that feeds the spirit. The spirit, in its original sense, from which the word spirituality derives, is in every being that breathes. Therefore, it is in every being that lives, such as human beings, animals and plants. However, Earth and the universe live as bearers of spirit because life comes from them, and they provide all the elements for life and maintain the creative movement. (Franco & Sánchez, 2018 p.146)

By acknowledging the many factors that intersect in and around agricultural practices in Colombia and the Cauca Department, it becomes clear that the “solutions” offered by the global north to solve food insecurity and hunger have always been bezels of corporate domination and modern colonialism. The technical advances of food production have definitely increased the amount of food that is produced, processed and distributed around the world. This kind of approach has many benefits such as: making certain products more accessible and affordable to low income and middle class families and new opportunities for entrepreneurship by exporting local products around the world. These achievements should be recognized, but the cost of wiping out local traditional food systems needs urgent recognition as well. The problems with the current dominant food systems are not easily visible to the populations who benefit from it the most: high and middle class populations that live in urban and suburban regions of the Global North. For these groups, it is difficult to argue with the benefits of having thousands of products to choose from ready to order online or bought at the closest supermarket.

The solutions to food insecurity and hunger become more complex the closer we look at the local populations in rural Colombia, even the term food insecurity becomes problematic when we consider the many social and cultural aspects that lay behind traditional food systems. Having developed sustainable food systems, which have fed their communities with high quality food for centuries, makes Western capitalist notions of food security meaningless. As it has been discussed in previous chapters, food sovereignty is crucial for farmers, Indigenous and Black communities to maintain control over their territories and protect their cultural identity. The above implies recognizing as a unit their cultural practices and the ecosystems that surround them. From this perspective, human and non-human life function in harmony as a way to keep its connection with the spiritual realm. Local knowledge of food production and the protection of local seeds have also been crucial in sustaining intersecting aspects of social justice that include gender, race and ethnicity.

Without food sovereignty, the social inequalities that continue to grow at a national and global scale will take over even the most remote regions of rural societies. Therefore, those populations who considered themselves rich in cultural knowledge and lived in harmony with their environment will become the most impoverished and vulnerable city dwellers. Sadly, the increasing migration of rural populations to urban centers, due to violence and land disposition, is a social reality that has brought real food insecurity to the cities. On the outskirts of large cities, rural migrants have very little options and no space to plant their own crops, as a consequence: for them good quality food becomes inaccessible.

Over the course of several decades, this grim social reality, easy to witness in Colombian cities, has encouraged many social movements to create new and better opportunities for Colombian youth, but also to make the government accountable for their part in neglecting and

dispossessing the most vulnerable populations from their most basic rights. Political movements led by the youth and indigenous communities fight every day to make these realities more visible and claim social justice. However, these goals are difficult to reach without questioning every aspect of our current system. To take actions that are consistent with those goals brings real risks, when dealing with violent actors.

The proposals of the agroecological movements insist on the need to support actions such as the following: the creation of food market networks, the protection of local plants and seeds, and educational initiatives concerning these perspectives, among others. These considerations are essential parts of the resistance and resilience that rural and urban communities have recently demonstrated. The social movements, led by these groups, have had shedding light over the path that is already there, but these claims have been obscured by the overwhelming presence of globalized food markets and consumerism culture. There are initial steps, on different scales, which are necessary to accomplish social justice and create sustainable food systems. World leaders and corporations, as well as consumers, should take over a particularly important task: to analyze our food values and habits, and then reflect on which actions are possible, here and now, to make a difference.

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