

*Inclusive vitality: human-bee journeys in the tropical countryside*

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Behind every cup of coffee and fruit salad, there are thousands of tropical bees collaborating with traditional smallholders to produce a great proportion of the food humans consume worldwide. But bees have declined dramatically and traditional farming systems, greatly known for hosting high levels of biodiversity, are also fading. Drivers of loss are complex—ecological, economic, political—, and their effects are typically understood in terms of bee population sizes and socio-economic indicators. However, discussions about bee loss and restoration seldom consider deep drivers of anthropogenic disturbance and their influence on bee daily performances, or how bees impact the intimacy of human everyday experiences. More intimate and inclusive understandings of multispecies relationships may help us inspire ethics of inclusion that could counteract biodiversity loss and restore alliances required to sustain regenerative futures. During my stay at the RCC, I will write a multispecies ethnography about bee-human relationships in Anolaima, a tropical rural region undergoing agrarian and socio-cultural change, which aims to bridge the affective and material aspects of bee declines, make visible opportunities for multispecies coexistence, and help reimagine compassionate and collaborative worlds.

Anolaima is a coffee-producing municipality, formerly known as the fruit capital of Colombia, that exemplifies the multiple shades of agrarian transformations in the rural Andes. Global forces such as climate and topography have shaped the configuration of more-than-human assemblages and human livelihoods in these mountains. Other forces including colonization, coffee trade, and sociopolitical upheavals have induced human inequality and influenced transformations in the aesthetics of landscapes and relationships with biodiversity. Both long-durée dynamics and sudden events driving trajectories of change were woven through intimate encounters and the performativity of entangled difference: Humans, plants and bees have coordinated their living cycles and ways of making sense of the world into the construction of local agri-food territories. In such assemblages, each species offers a unique contribution and arises in dependence on everyone else. Despite the pressing context of agricultural industrialization and political marginalization, traditional smallholders, beekeepers, and the bees still enact ecologies of hope and care that may hold the key for brighter futures. I will describe bee/human relationships in three parts: Environmental history- human-bee relationships are nested in history, ecology, and place; Noticing- journeys through the sensorial encounters between farmers and bees; and Interbeing- stories of identity, cohabitation, and reconciliation bonding humans, plants, and bees.

Facing the increasing uncertainty of our world requires unity, courage and creativity. During crises, life has aggregated, coordinated and then created sophisticated forms and functions that helped resolve the problem of survival. Such synergies require understanding, accepting and embracing diversity. This project aims to make visible some challenges to overcome difference, expose seeds of coexistence, and bring inspiration to act towards the creation of worlds for inclusive renewal.