

PEACE IS MORE THAN
THE SILENCE
OF GUNS

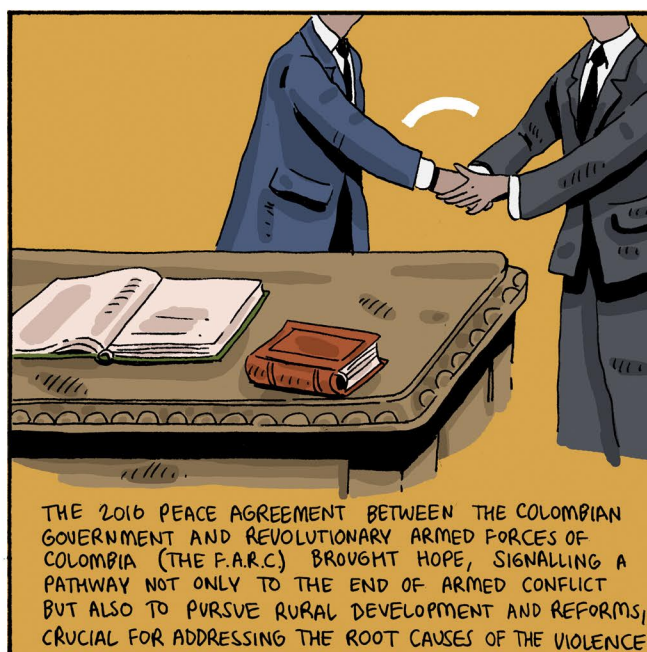
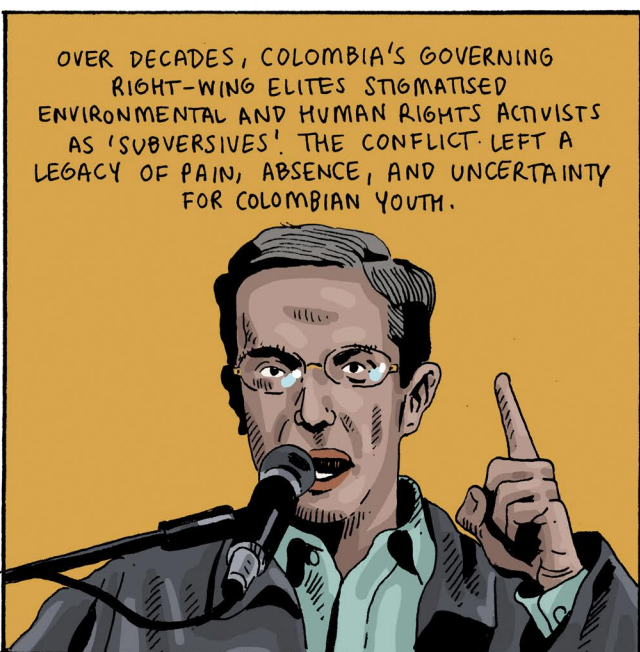
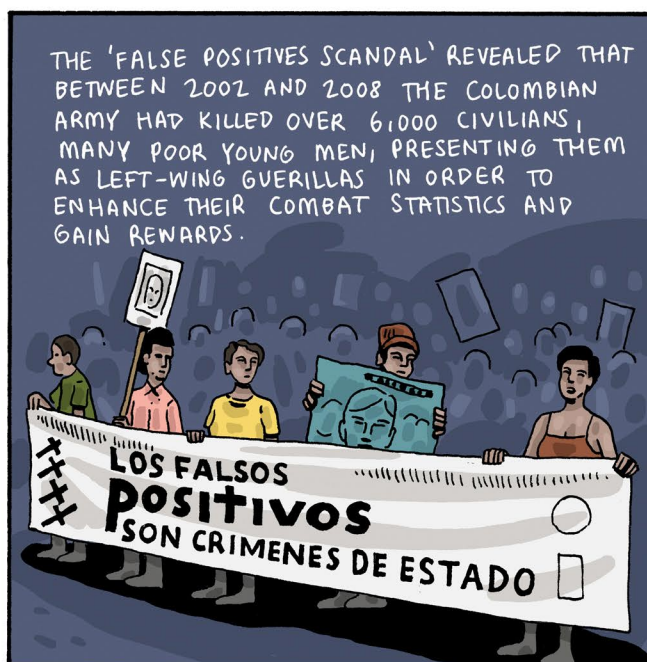
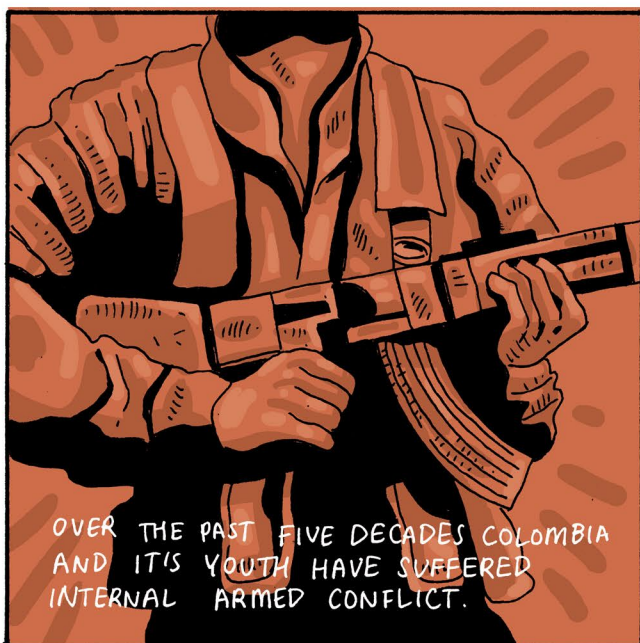


Colombia

This case study examines how young people have been able to participate in building peace in the country following the historic signing of the Peace Accord in 2016. Working with the Youth Observatory at the Javeriana University in Bogota, the project has interviewed youth peace activists about their experiences, and hopes, of building peace in 2019-2020, as well as holding a series of roundtables and focus groups with young people in 2022.

Colombian youth have been at the forefront of efforts to build peaceful futures, even though they have often faced persecution for their work in this regard. Young people have engaged at every level of society to advocate for peace. As the country continues to struggle with the legacy of decades of violence, and the challenges of building a long-term peace which addresses the root causes of conflict, this research has asked how young people contribute to this, and what kind of peace they hope to build.





THE 2021 NATIONAL STRIKE PROTESTS MADE VISIBLE THE HISTORICAL CLAIMS OF MARGINALISED POPULATIONS IN THE COUNTRY. INITIALLY CONTESTING A REGRESSIVE TAX, THESE PROTESTS QUICKLY EVOLVED INTO A BROADER MOVEMENT AGAINST CORRUPTION, INEQUALITY, SLOW PEACE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST SOCIAL LEADERS.



THE PROTESTS WERE MET WITH EXCESSIVE FORCE BY E.S.M.A.D. POLICE (MOBILE ANTI-ROIT SQUAD) WHO PARTICULARLY TARGETED YOUNG PEOPLE.



ACROSS CITIES, YOUNG PEOPLE ORGANISED IN VARIOUS WAYS. THEY PROTECTED PROTESTORS FROM POLICE VIOLENCE AS THE PRIMERA LÍNEA. THEY CREATED SPACES FOR RESPIRE AND COLLECTIVE CARE.



THE STRIKE BECAME A CATALYST FOR CHANGE, LEADING COLOMBIANS TO RE-EXAMINE THEIR PAST AND IMAGINE A NEW FUTURE. YOUTH MOBILISATION DURING THE STRIKE WAS ESSENTIAL TO PRESIDENT GUSTAVO PETRO'S ELECTION IN 2022.



GARETH SELLA, A YOUTH ACTIVIST WHOSE EYE WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED, BECAME THE VICE-MINISTER FOR YOUTH IN THE PETRO GOVERNMENT.



"PEACE IS MORE THAN THE SILENCE OF GUNS. IT MEANS LIVING WITH DIGNITY- DECENT HOUSING, JOBS, QUALITY EDUCATION, AND ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE. IT'S ABOUT PROTECTING OUR NATURE, OUR FORESTS, MOUNTAINS, RIVERS, AND SEAS, AND CREATING A SPACE WHERE EVERYONE CAN SPEAK UP WITHOUT FEAR OF STIGMA."

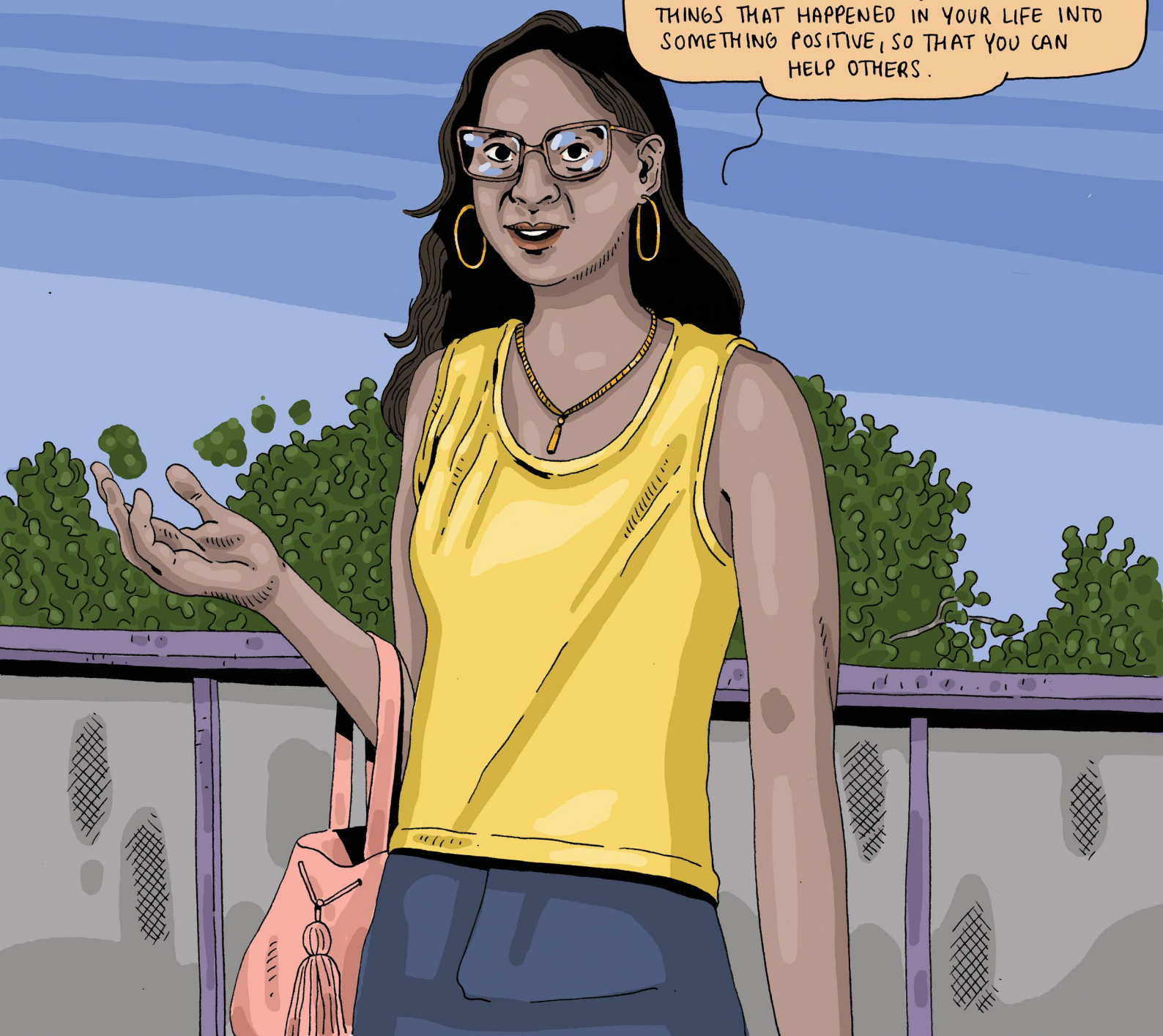


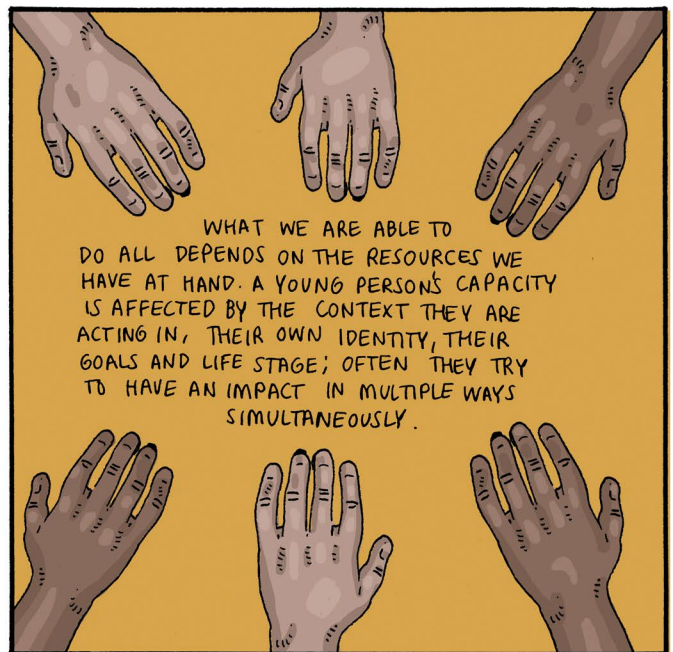
AS A CHILD, I WAS DISPLACED BY ARMED CONFLICT. I WAS CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF WAR, WHEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE ARMY ENTERED MY FARM AND STARTED SHOOTING.

ONCE EVERYTHING HAD CALMED DOWN, WHEN MY FATHER RETURNED, HE WOULD HUG ME AND SAY, "EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT!" AND I WOULD FEEL AT PEACE.

BUILDING PEACE CAN BE GIVING SOMEONE A HUG: IT CAN BE GIVING SOMEONE A KISS WHEN THEY FEEL LIKE THEY CAN'T GO ON ANYMORE AND ARE FALLING APART.

BUILDING PEACE IS TURNING ALL THE NEGATIVE THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFE INTO SOMETHING POSITIVE, SO THAT YOU CAN HELP OTHERS.

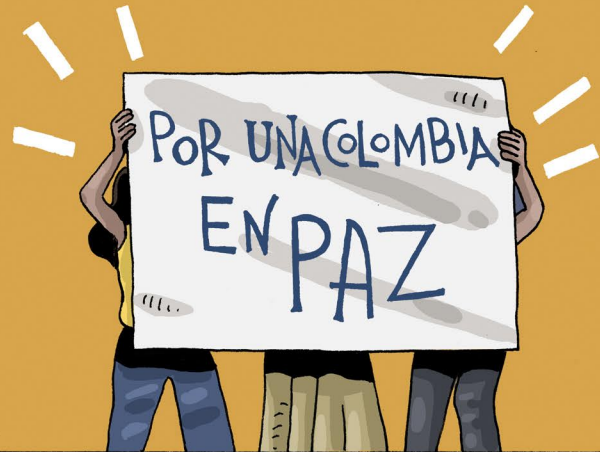




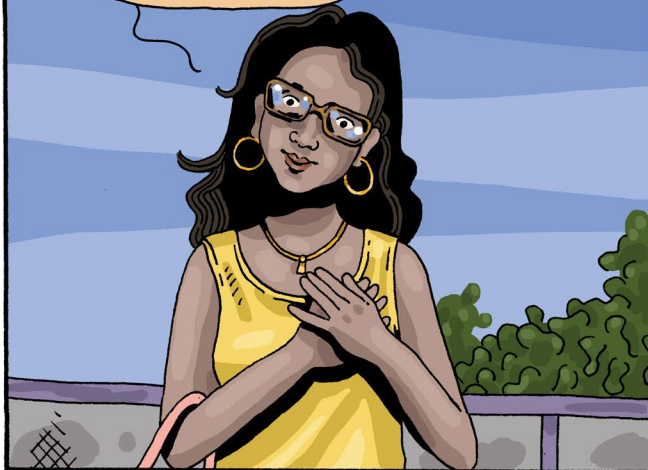
WE HAVE BEEN WORKING THROUGH MANY ACTIVITIES IN DEFENCE OF THE 2016 HAVANA PEACE AGREEMENTS WITH THE F.A.R.C., WHICH PROVIDED AN AMBITIOUS PEACE BUILDING AGENDA.



WE HAVE DEMANDED, BOTH FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY THAT THEY SIT DOWN FOR NEGOTIATIONS.



I HAVE ALSO TAKEN ON THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT OF A MUNICIPAL LEVEL YOUTH PLATFORM, AND BEEN THE LEADER OF A PROJECT ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.



IT FEELS EMPOWERING TO BE PART OF THESE IMPORTANT PROJECTS.

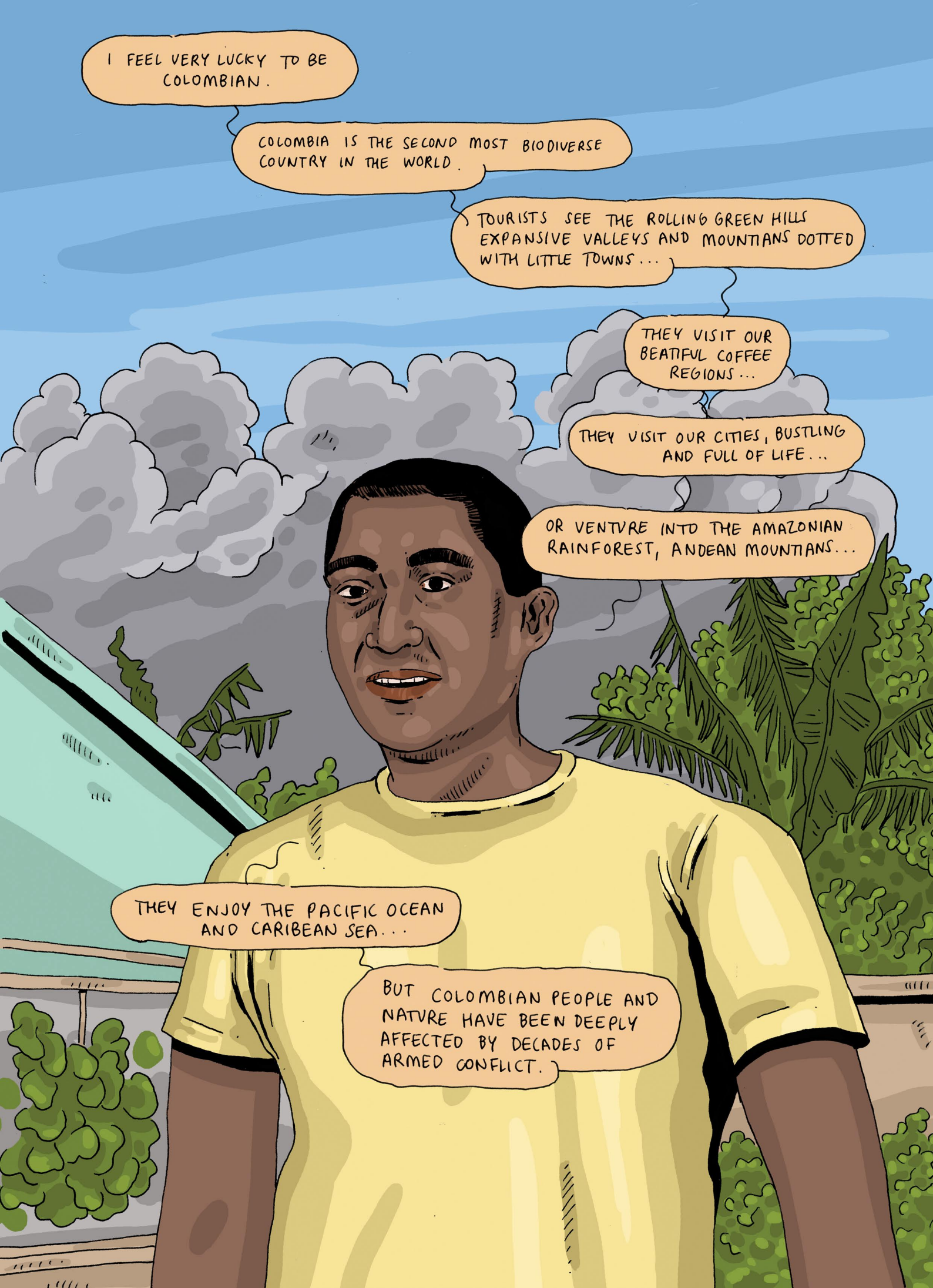


FRIENDS OF MINE HAVE ALSO BEEN SUPPORTING OTHER LOCAL PEACE BUILDING INITIATIVES, MAKING SURE THERE IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN SPACES PROVIDED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES.



I WOULD LOVE TO CONTINUE TO WORK IN THIS WAY, EVEN COLLABORATE WITH EXTERNAL OR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES LIKE THE UNITED NATIONS. I WANT TO HELP SHAPE COLOMBIA'S FUTURE.





I FEEL VERY LUCKY TO BE
COLOMBIAN.

COLOMBIA IS THE SECOND MOST BIODIVERSE
COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.

TOURISTS SEE THE ROLLING GREEN HILLS
EXPANSIVE VALLEYS AND MOUNTAINS DOTTED
WITH LITTLE TOWNS...

THEY VISIT OUR
BEAUTIFUL COFFEE
REGIONS...

THEY VISIT OUR CITIES, BUSTLING
AND FULL OF LIFE...

OR VENTURE INTO THE AMAZONIAN
RAINFOREST, ANDEAN MOUNTAINS...

THEY ENJOY THE PACIFIC OCEAN
AND CARIBBEAN SEA...

BUT COLOMBIAN PEOPLE AND
NATURE HAVE BEEN DEEPLY
AFFECTED BY DECADES OF
ARMED CONFLICT.

WHEN I FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL I CHOOSE TO STUDY LAW AND POLITICAL SCIENCE AT UNIVERSITY IN BOGOTÁ, WHICH I REALLY ENJOYED. BUT I COULDN'T FINISH MY STUDIES BECAUSE OF A LACK OF RESOURCES, AND I HAD TO COME HOME.



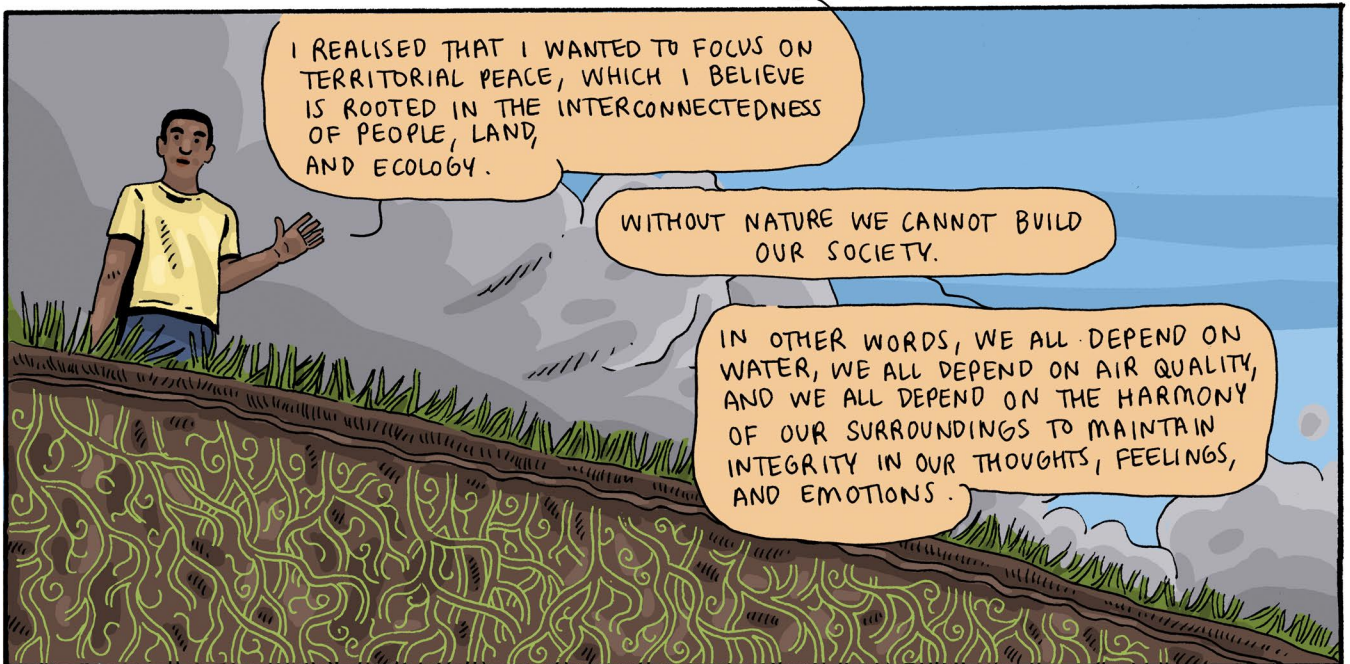
IT FELT THAT THE DOORS HAD CLOSED ON MY DREAM OF BECOMING A LAWYER. BUT BEING BACK IN THIS LANDSCAPE I REALISED NATURE TRULY PROVIDES PEACE AND CLARITY.



I REALISED THAT I WANTED TO FOCUS ON TERRITORIAL PEACE, WHICH I BELIEVE IS ROOTED IN THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF PEOPLE, LAND, AND ECOLOGY.

WITHOUT NATURE WE CANNOT BUILD OUR SOCIETY.

IN OTHER WORDS, WE ALL DEPEND ON WATER, WE ALL DEPEND ON AIR QUALITY, AND WE ALL DEPEND ON THE HARMONY OF OUR SURROUNDINGS TO MAINTAIN INTEGRITY IN OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EMOTIONS.



A BIG PART OF THIS IS ABOUT RESTORING RELATIONS OF CARE AND PRESERVING CAMPESINO, INDIGENOUS, AFRO-COLOMBIAN AUTONOMY AND IDENTITY, ALL OF WHICH ARE INTRINSICALLY LINKED TO THE LAND AND TERRITORY.

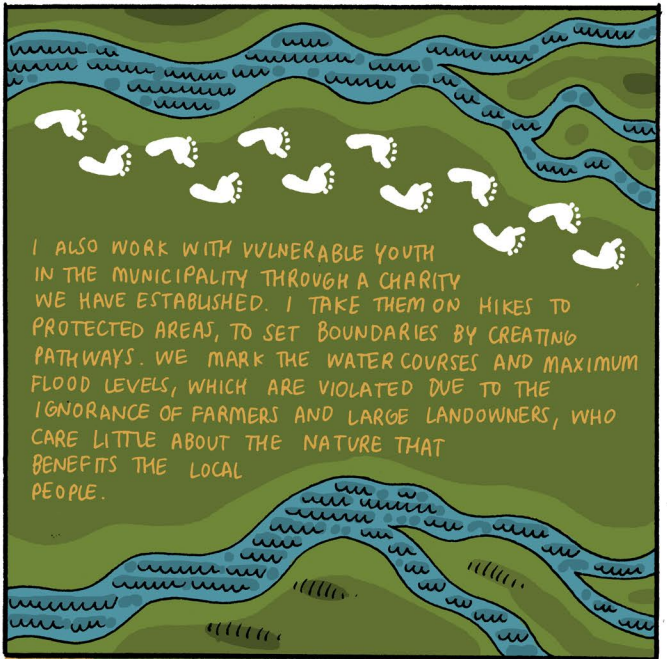


THIS HAS LED ME TO WORK WITH DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO HELP SUPPORT THESE COMMUNITIES.

WE SEEK TO BUILD PEACE THROUGH CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION, EMPHASISING THE IMPORTANCE OF NURTURING THE LAND, CARING FOR CROPS AND LOCAL SPECIES, AND REPAIRING THE SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL FABRIC DAMAGED BY CONFLICT.



I ALSO WORK WITH VULNERABLE YOUTH IN THE MUNICIPALITY THROUGH A CHARITY WE HAVE ESTABLISHED. I TAKE THEM ON HIKES TO PROTECTED AREAS, TO SET BOUNDARIES BY CREATING PATHWAYS. WE MARK THE WATER COURSES AND MAXIMUM FLOOD LEVELS, WHICH ARE VIOLATED DUE TO THE IGNORANCE OF FARMERS AND LARGE LANDOWNERS, WHO CARE LITTLE ABOUT THE NATURE THAT BENEFITS THE LOCAL PEOPLE.



IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO INTERACT DIRECTLY WITH NATURE BECAUSE OF ALL THAT ANGER, ALL THAT DISCONTENT, DUE TO THE GREAT INEQUALITY AND FRUSTRATIONS THEY FEEL.



BEING IN NATURE IS RESTORATIVE. TO WALK FREELY THROUGH ANY TERRITORY, WHATEVER IT MAY BE, MAKES YOU FEEL FREE. NOT ENCOUNTERING SOMEONE WHO THREATENS YOUR SAFETY IS ONE OF THE MAIN CONDITIONS FOR PEACE.



WE ALL NEED TO FEEL THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT...



...AND THE CONTINUITY AND RENEWAL FOUND WITHIN THE CYCLES OF NATURE.



I'M A STUDENT AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITY,
BUT IN MY SPARE TIME I USED TO
PARTICIPATE IN AN URBAN GARDEN
PROJECT WITH MY SISTER, IN MY
NEIGHBOURHOOD IN BOGOTÁ.

I LOVE WATCHING THINGS GROW.

IT MAKES ME FEEL HAPPY.



IN BOGOTÁ THERE IS A LOT OF INEQUALITY
AND POVERTY, A LOT OF CRIME AND STRESS.



WE CREATED SPACES AROUND
THE GARDENS FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE TO FEEL CALM
AND SAFE.

WE WANTED TO BUILD A POSITIVE AND
PEACEFUL COMMUNITY. IT FELT GOOD TO
BE PART OF A COLLECTIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD
PROJECT.



WE HAD NO SPECIFIC LEADERS. WE
ENCOURAGED COLLABORATION,
COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY. BUT WE HAD
VERY LIMITED MATERIALS TO
WORK WITH.



OUR TOOLS WERE LENT TO US BY THE
OLD MEN OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.
THEY ALSO SHARED THEIR KNOWLEDGE
AND GUIDED OUR WORK.



WE WERE REALLY PROUD OF OUR GARDEN
AND THE INTERGENERATIONAL LINKS WE
MADE THERE. OFTEN DISCOURSE AROUND
BOGOTÁ'S TROUBLES CAN BE VERY
POLARISED BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS.



THE COMMUNITY GARDEN AIM IS TO ENCOURAGE ORGANISATION AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY. REAL HAPPINESS DOESN'T COME FROM CONSUMING THINGS - IT GROWS IN THE SHARED SOIL OF OUR COMMUNITY.



I BELIEVE IT IS ABOUT EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS; OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE DIRECT ACTION, HEAL RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD PEACE AT ANY SCALE.



I BELIEVE THAT BUILDING PEACE IS ABOUT QUESTIONING OURSELVES AND OUR BEHAVIOURS, IT IS LEARNING FROM THE MISTAKES WE HAVE MADE. BUILDING PEACE IS ALLOWING US TO LEARN, AND LETTING OURSELVES BE SURPRISED BY THE OTHER.



THE URBAN GARDENING PROJECT STARTED AS A RESPONSE TO OUR FOOD INSECURITY, BUT IT BECAME MORE THAN THAT, IT BECAME A SANCTUARY. WHAT WAS HARVESTED WAS SHARED AMONG THOSE WORKING ON THE PROJECT.



NOT EVERYONE JOINED IN WITH THE GARDENING, BUT LOTS PARTICIPATED BY TAKING ORGANIC WASTE TO THE COMPOSTER. WE PLANTED VEGETABLES, BLACKBERRY, LULO, AND LEGUMES.



IT WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY, BUT WE TRIED TO PERSEVERE. OUR GARDEN FELT LIKE AN IMPORTANT STEP IN MODELLING ANOTHER WAY OF BEING AS A COMMUNITY, AND TACKLING CONFLICT IN A HEALTHY WAY.



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