

CYB'NER

comics as eyewitness

March 2022



Uganda

Nepal

Peru

front line defenders

cypher

/ˈsaɪfər/

The dictionary definition of cypher is 'a secret or disguised way of writing'. In many ways, this is the essence of comics storytelling – the image, rather than the word, is a disguise for many words, that can convey meaning, emotion, and can re/frame an entire narrative.

Rap and hip hop culture has taken the word and ascribed a new meaning: 'an informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers and/or breakdancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together.' This, too, we find relevant to this project, in that we are bringing together artists and HRDs in freestyle collaboration of activism and art with the aim of informing, elevating and inspiring.

For us, this captures the spirit of why we are working in comics and guides how we facilitate the process of creative production.

Edited and published by:
Beldan Sezen and Adam Shapiro

Cover art by Christian Mugarura Mafigiri

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frontlinedefenders.org/cypher





adam shapiro

In [Cypher 08](#) (April 2021), we published stories of human rights defenders challenging mining companies in Mongolia, Zambia, Morocco and Turkey. HRDs challenging corporations and governments pursuing resource extraction are those most at risk of extreme violence, including murder, around the world – as was recently [reported by the HRD Memorial](#) in conjunction with Front Line Defenders [2021 Global Analysis](#).

One story we omitted from Cypher 08 was from Peru, which we have included here, as there have been new developments in the story, and new risks posed by the companies exploiting the Cajamarca region for gold. The other two stories – from Uganda and Nepal – also cover HRDs confronting ‘development’ related projects that devastate the land and environment, and harm local populations.

With the world focused on war in Ukraine, and devastation being wrought on that country and its people, it is easy to forget that days after the invasion, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its most damning [report](#) to date about the irreversible effects of climate change. And yet, those who work to protect the land and its resources are being killed at extraordinary rates, including indigenous peoples. Their stories demand our attention...and action!

Editorial



beldan sezen

Three month into the new year and we are confronted yet again with war. Big fish wants to swallow small fish. This time though big fish is poking the waters of another big fish, hence the magnitude of this head-butting could be immense and for European countries 'too close to home'. "War" is a word we hear day in day out. War on terror, war on a virus, war on drugs, war on women, on gays, war on poverty and actual wars (plural!) in countries deemed too unimportant to care for. Yet people are dying, quick or slowly, depending if hit by a bullet or the socio-economical and psychological aftermath of destruction by war.

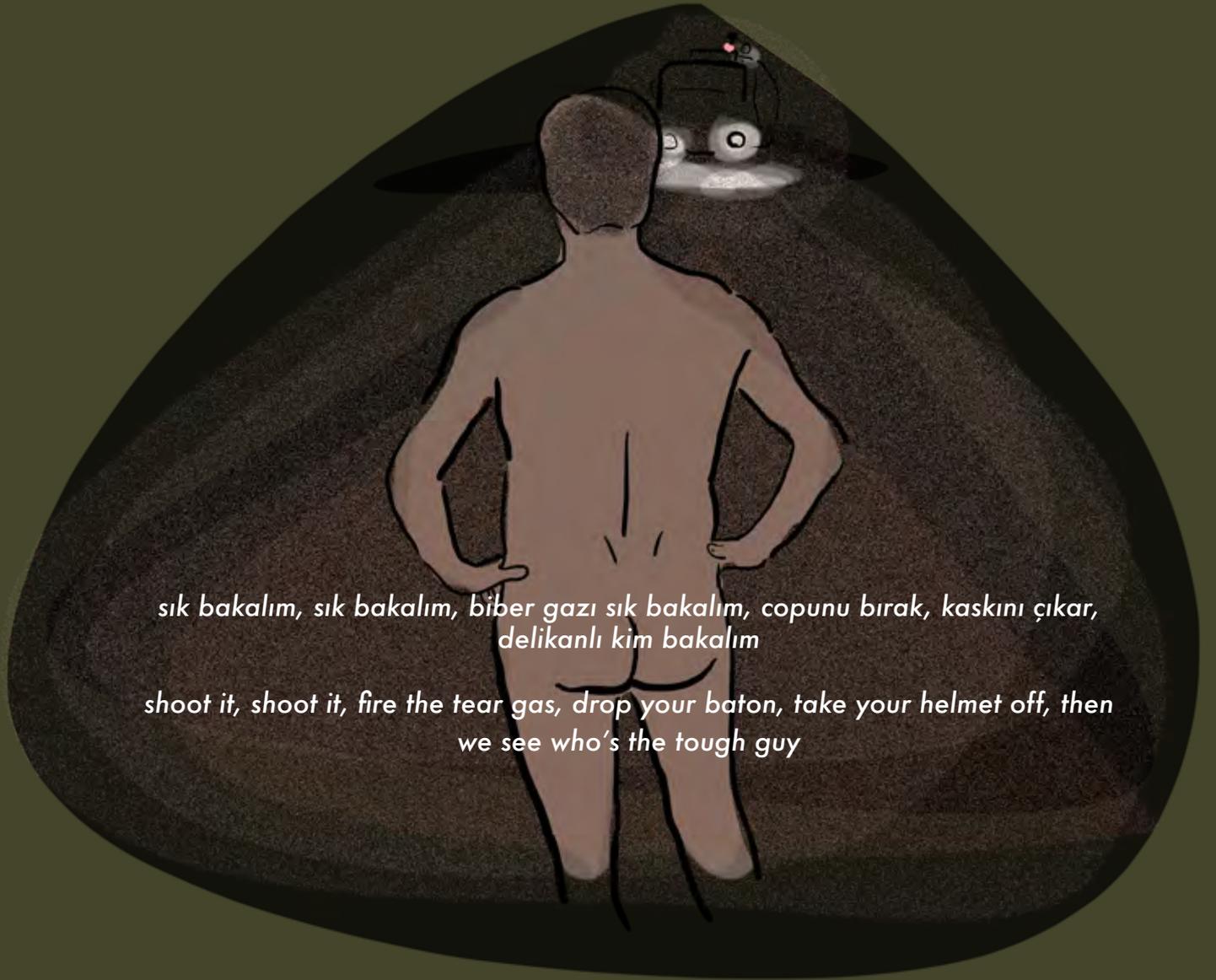
In all this I am reminded that fighting also can be done by civil disobedience. To solve conflicts without the instruments of war. "Pulling a trigger" turns anger and pain into rage and destruction. War does not solve a conflict nor stabilizes a society. Political disobedience chooses dialogue and unarmed confrontation to "face the enemy", and thus turns anger and pain into hope. Human Rights Defenders do just that. Three of those courageous activists are potrayed in this edition.

It takes courage to stand without weapons in front of a tank; to face police and military with nothing more than your body.

"Die Waffen nieder! Sagt es vielen, vielen."¹
Bertha von Suttner

March 2022

1 "Down with the weapons! Tell many, many."



*sık bakalım, sık bakalım, biber gazı sık bakalım, copunu bırak, kaskını çıkar,
delikanlı kim bakalım*

*shoot it, shoot it, fire the tear gas, drop your baton, take your helmet off, then
we see who's the tough guy*

In 2013 demonstrators stood in front of police tanks singing the words above during the Gezi Park uprising in Turkey.

Uganda

Artist: Christian Mugarura Mafigiri
<https://twitter.com/christianmafi1>



THE GOLDEN LIE



THE GOLDEN LIE

LIFE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE EASIER FOR CHRISTOPHER OPIO AND HIS FAMILY WHEN THEY ACCEPTED TO TAKE THE RELOCATION SETTLEMENT THE GOVERNMENT HAD OFFERED—BUT.

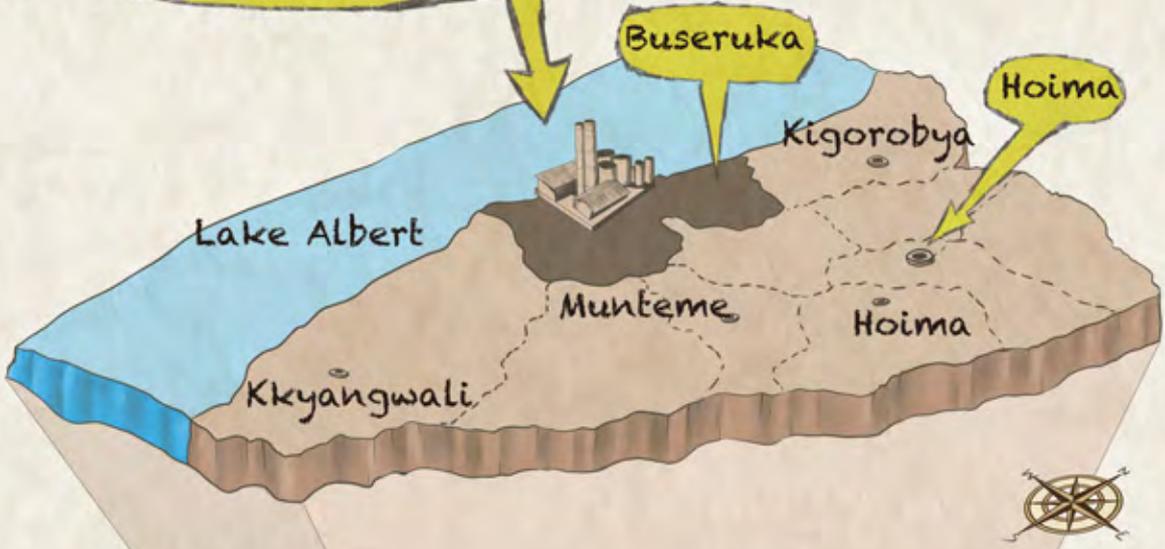
GRAPHIC NOVEL;

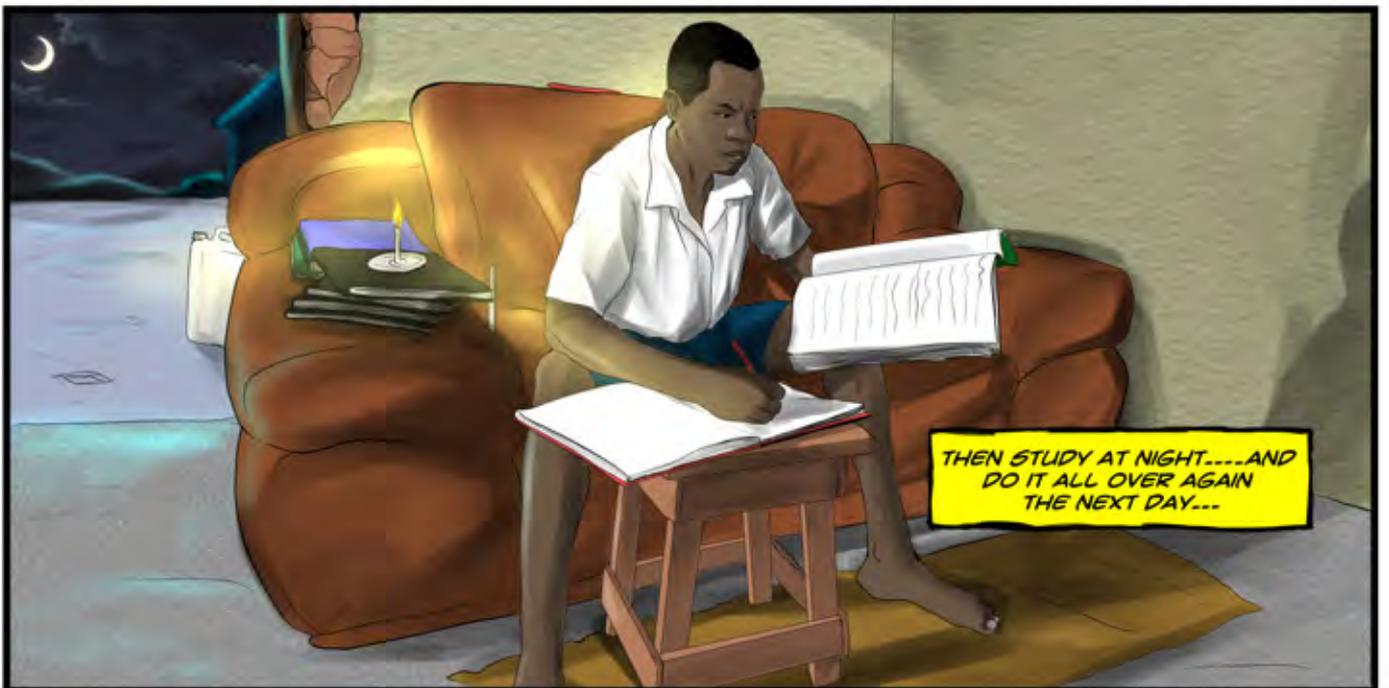
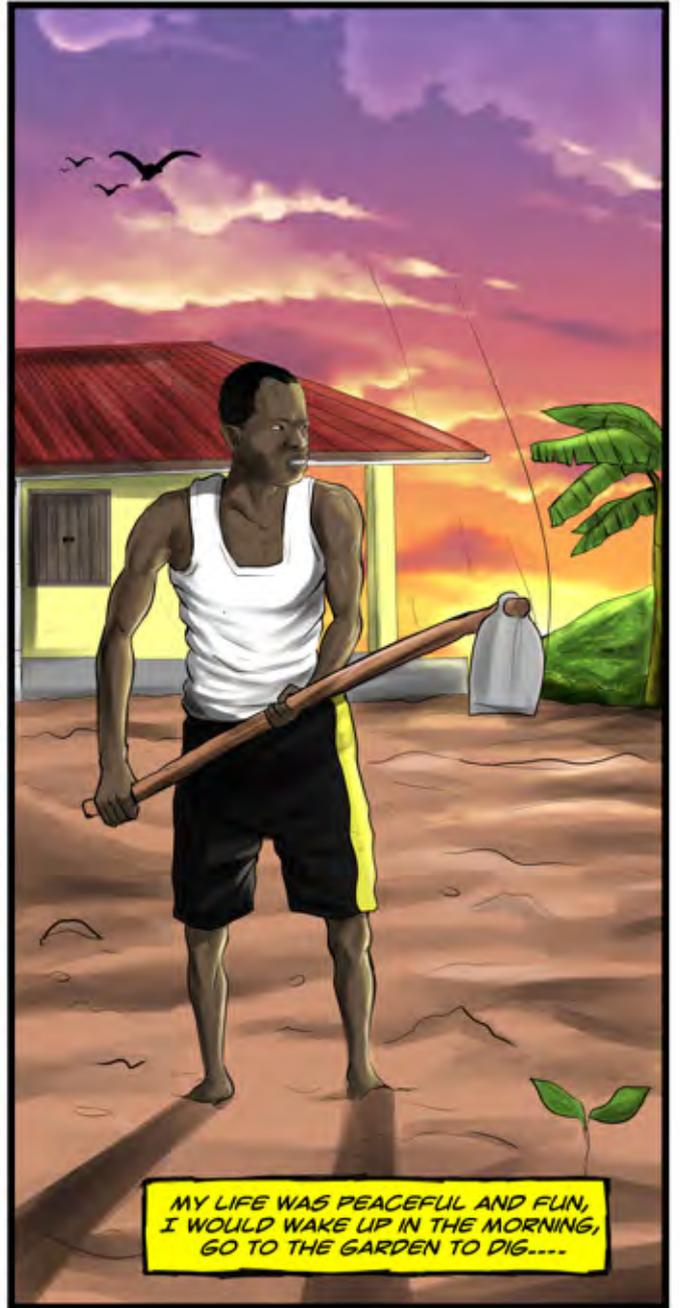
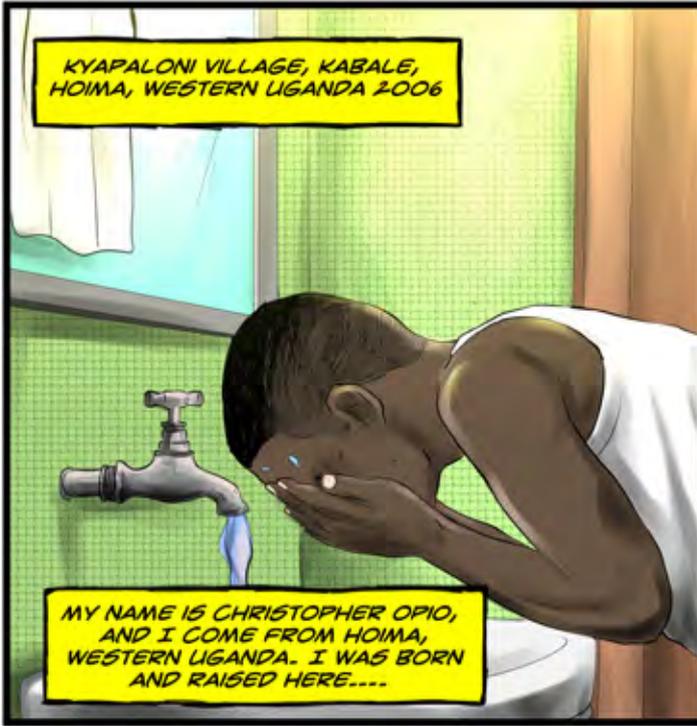
THERE IS A NOTION THAT COMIC BOOKS ARE A REALM ONLY FOR FICTIONAL CHARACTERS WITH SUPER HUMAN POWERS, BEDECKED WITH CAPE AND COLOURFUL COSTUME. BUT WHILE THERE'S AN ABSENCE OF ARCHETYPAL SUPER HEROES, IN THIS COMIC BOOK IS A TALE OF A BRAVE YOUNG MAN NAMED CHRISTOPHER, STRUGGLING TO DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF HIS PEOPLE AGAINST CRIMINAL INJUSTICES, AND WHO IS A HERO IN HIS OWN RIGHT. THE FORMAT DESCRIBES THE MAN, ALLOWING HIM TO TELL HIS OWN STORY ALONGSIDE THE EDITORS AND ARTISTS INTERPRETATIONS WHILE TRANSCENDING TIME.

THE DISCOVERY OF OIL IS ONLY HALF THE STORY.

CHRISTOPHER OPIO WAS BORN AND RAISED IN HOIMA, WESTERN UGANDA. IN 2006 WHEN CHRIS WAS 17, THE GOVERNMENT OF UGANDA DISCOVERED OIL. SINCE THIS DISCOVERY, CHRIS AND A GROUP OF A FEW EDUCATED YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN FROM HIS VILLAGE MUST NOW FACE A DAY TO DAY BATTLE OF POVERTY, VIOLENCE, BLACKMAIL AND STIGMATIZATION IN THE FACE OF A CORRUPT GOVERNMENT SYSTEM.

The oil refinery construction affected 13 villages including kyapaloni







BUT ONE DAY THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD DISCOVERED OIL IN THE ALBERTINE REGION OF THE COUNTRY..., THIS CONSISTED OF A WIDE AREA INCLUDING OUR VILLAGE.



IN 2012, THE GOVERNMENT ACQUIRED 2.9 SQUARE KILOMETRES OF LAND TO CONSTRUCT AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT IN KABALE, HOIMA, THIS IS WHERE I WAS BORN AND OUR FAMILY WAS DISPLACED.

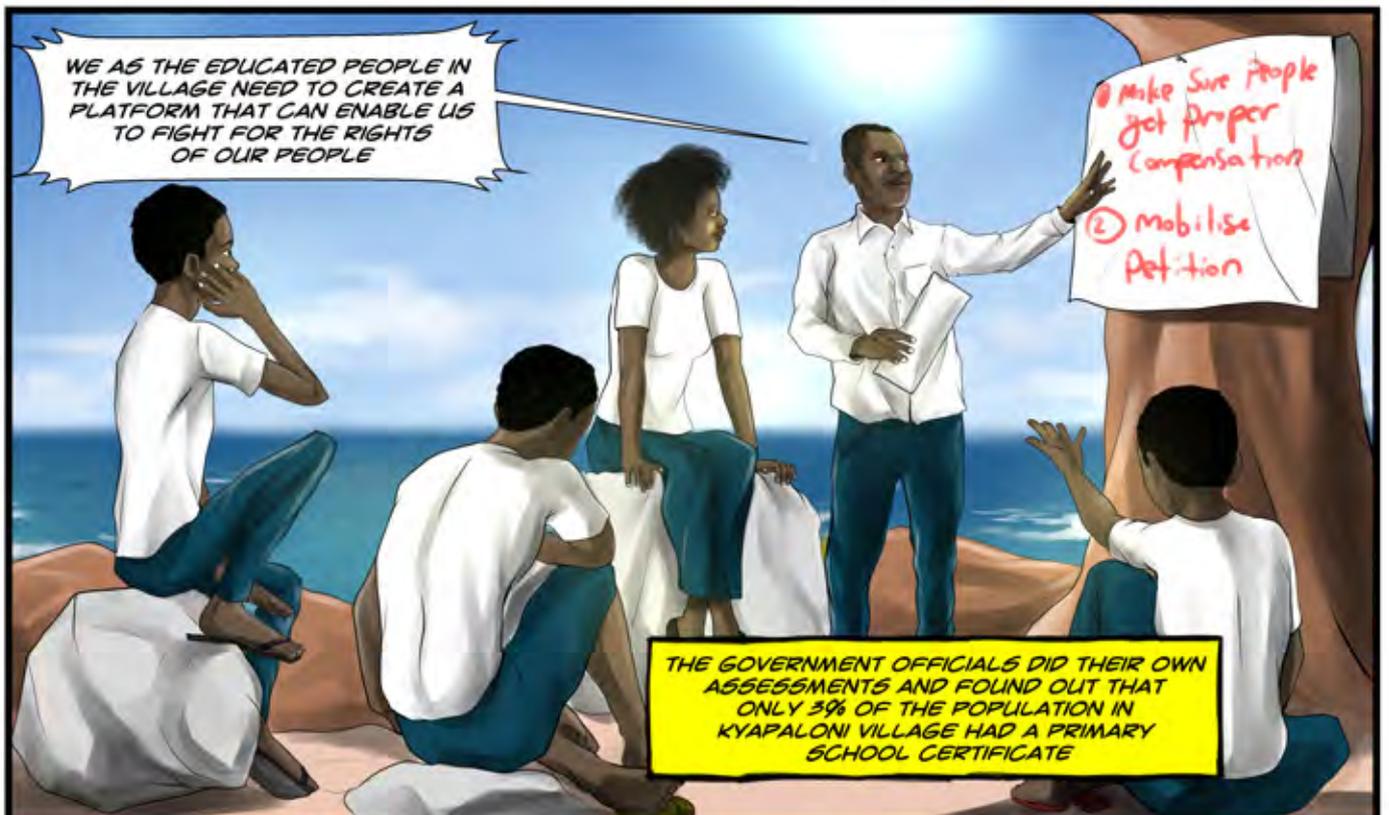


THE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES PROMISED COMPENSATION



WE WERE GIVEN TWO OPTIONS, EITHER A CASH COMPENSATION OR A PHYSICAL RELOCATION, AND WE CHOSE THE LATTER...

ONE DAY THE ASSESSMENT REPORT WAS PUT FOR EVERYONE TO SEE







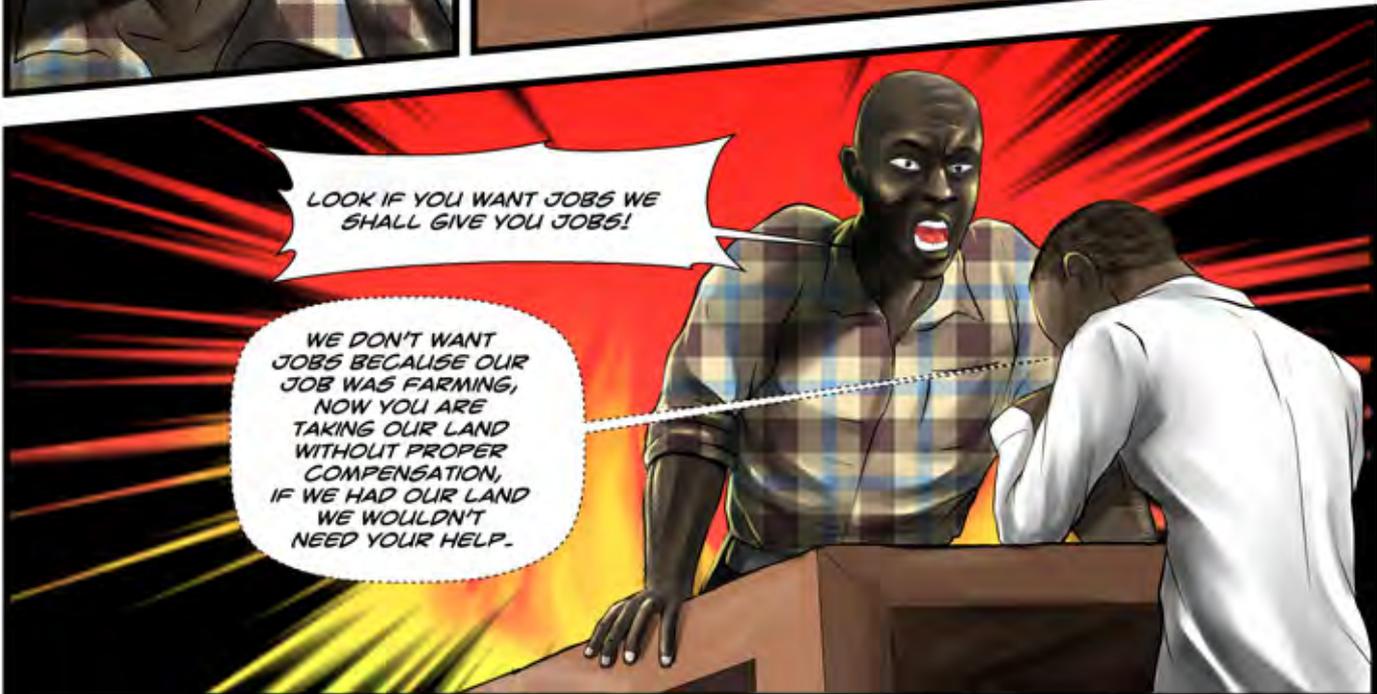


WHY ARE YOU SABOTAGING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS?



LOOK, YOU'RE THE SAME PEOPLE THAT TOLD US THAT IF WE HAVE ISSUES WE SHOULD RAISE THEM UP, BUT WHEN WE DID, NOTHING WAS DONE?

PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR LAND, THEIR LIVELIHOOD, YOU SURVEYED OUR LAND, AND PROPERTY - WE WERE VERY COOPERATIVE, NOW THAT WE SPEAK, YOU DON'T WANT US TO SPEAK, WHY?



LOOK IF YOU WANT JOBS WE SHALL GIVE YOU JOBS!

WE DON'T WANT JOBS BECAUSE OUR JOB WAS FARMING, NOW YOU ARE TAKING OUR LAND WITHOUT PROPER COMPENSATION, IF WE HAD OUR LAND WE WOULDN'T NEED YOUR HELP.



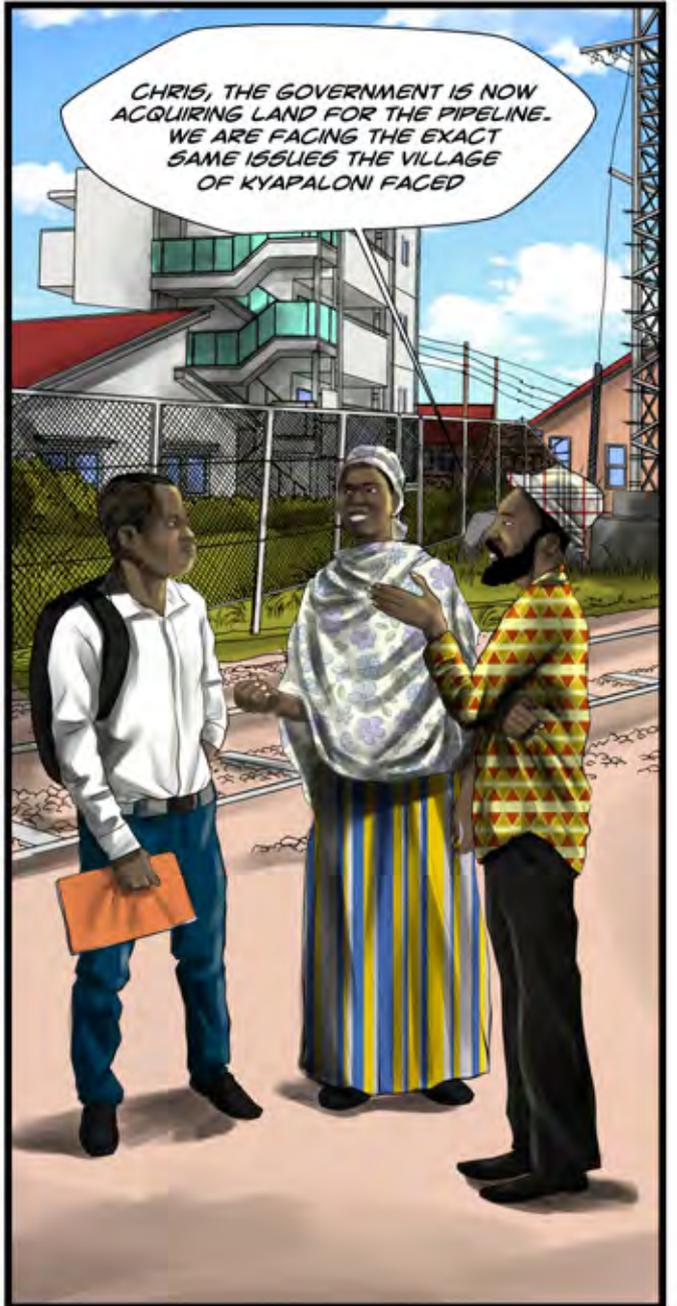
EVEN THE COMPENSATION RATES YOU ARE USING ARE WRONG! THIS IS A NATIONAL PROJECT WE NEED THE RIGHT MARKET VALUE!

THE RESETTLEMENT TOOK SIX YEARS AND NO ONE WAS ALLOWED TO CARRY OUT ANY DEVELOPMENT OR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY ON THE LAND. MOST PEOPLE DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL---

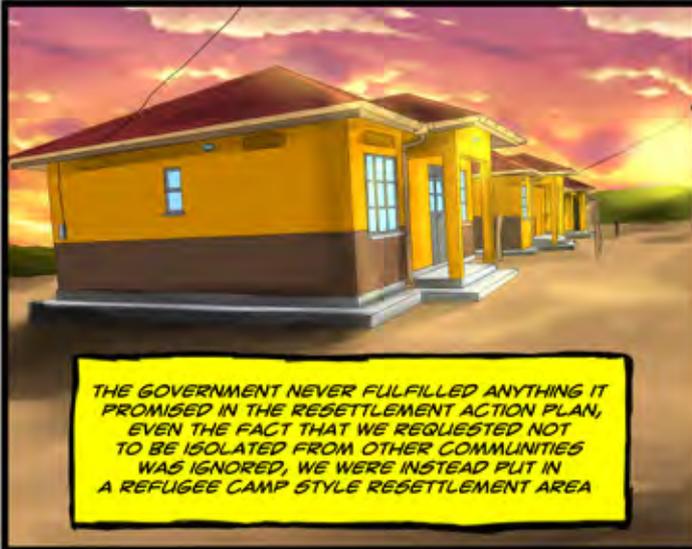
EVEN THOUGH WE WERE RELEASED WE CONTINUED TO BE ASSAULTED BY THE SECURITY OPERATIVES KNOWN AS THE OIL AND GAS POLICE



CHRIS, THE GOVERNMENT IS NOW ACQUIRING LAND FOR THE PIPELINE. WE ARE FACING THE EXACT SAME ISSUES THE VILLAGE OF KYAPALONI FACED



THE GOVERNMENT NEVER FULFILLED ANYTHING IT PROMISED IN THE RESETTLEMENT ACTION PLAN, EVEN THE FACT THAT WE REQUESTED NOT TO BE ISOLATED FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES WAS IGNORED, WE WERE INSTEAD PUT IN A REFUGEE CAMP STYLE RESETTLEMENT AREA



HOW READY ARE WE AS COMMUNITIES TO DEAL WITH THIS ISSUE?



SO WE STARTED TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES ---WHICH IS WHAT WE CONTINUE TO DO TO THIS DAY UNDER THE UMBRELLA ORGANISATION "OIL REFINERY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION"

WE AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE NOT AN ENEMY TO ANYONE,

WE ARE WELL WITHIN THE MANDATE OF THE LAW TO FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS.

THE OFFICIALS CREATING "GHOST RESIDENTS", ALLOCATING LESS LAND IN COMPENSATION THAN ORIGINALLY ALLOCATED

SOMEONE SEEKING COMPENSATION FOR HIS OWN PROPERTY SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS AN ENEMY AND TREATED AS A CRIMINAL. THE ORGANISATION DEFENDING THESE RIGHTS SHOULD NOT BE SEEN AS THE ENEMY BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT TO DO RIGHT BY ITS PEOPLE,

NOT BEING TRANSPARENT ABOUT THE WHOLE RELOCATION PROCESS ARE GIVING THE GOVERNMENT A BAD NAME, WHICH IN TURN GIVES GOVERNMENT A BAD NAME

OF COURSE WE NEED THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND THIS IS A RESOURCE THAT WILL BENEFIT THE NATION AS A WHOLE, WE JUST NEED TO DO IT THE RIGHT WAY...

THE END

Nepal

[Bidya Shrestha Maharjan](#) is a teacher and human rights defender from the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. She is the women's president of the World Newa Guthi, an indigenous community organization that works to protect the rights of the Newa Guthi people. An indigenous woman herself, Bidya Shrestha Maharjan has long been leading the movement to stop the illegal road expansion in the valley inhabited by the Newa Guthi people, which has already seen the displacement of thousands who have not been compensated and/or have been left landless.

Nepal has a history of targetting and discrimination against indigenous communities and using laws to prevent and suppress dissent. Activists advocating peacefully for the rights of the most marginalized have been targetted under regressive legislation, especially related to freedom of expression. Those protesting against state policy, including against 'development' related displacement and the illegal acquisition of land, especially among indigenous communities, have faced a violent response, including excessive use of force. The Covid-19 pandemic increased vulnerability among defenders whose mobility and ability to assemble and express dissent were severely curtailed under the guise of Covid-19 measures while abuses continued with impunity.

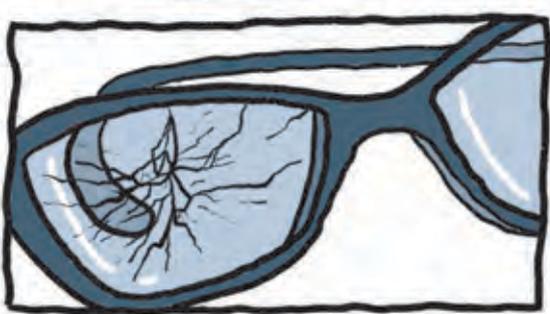
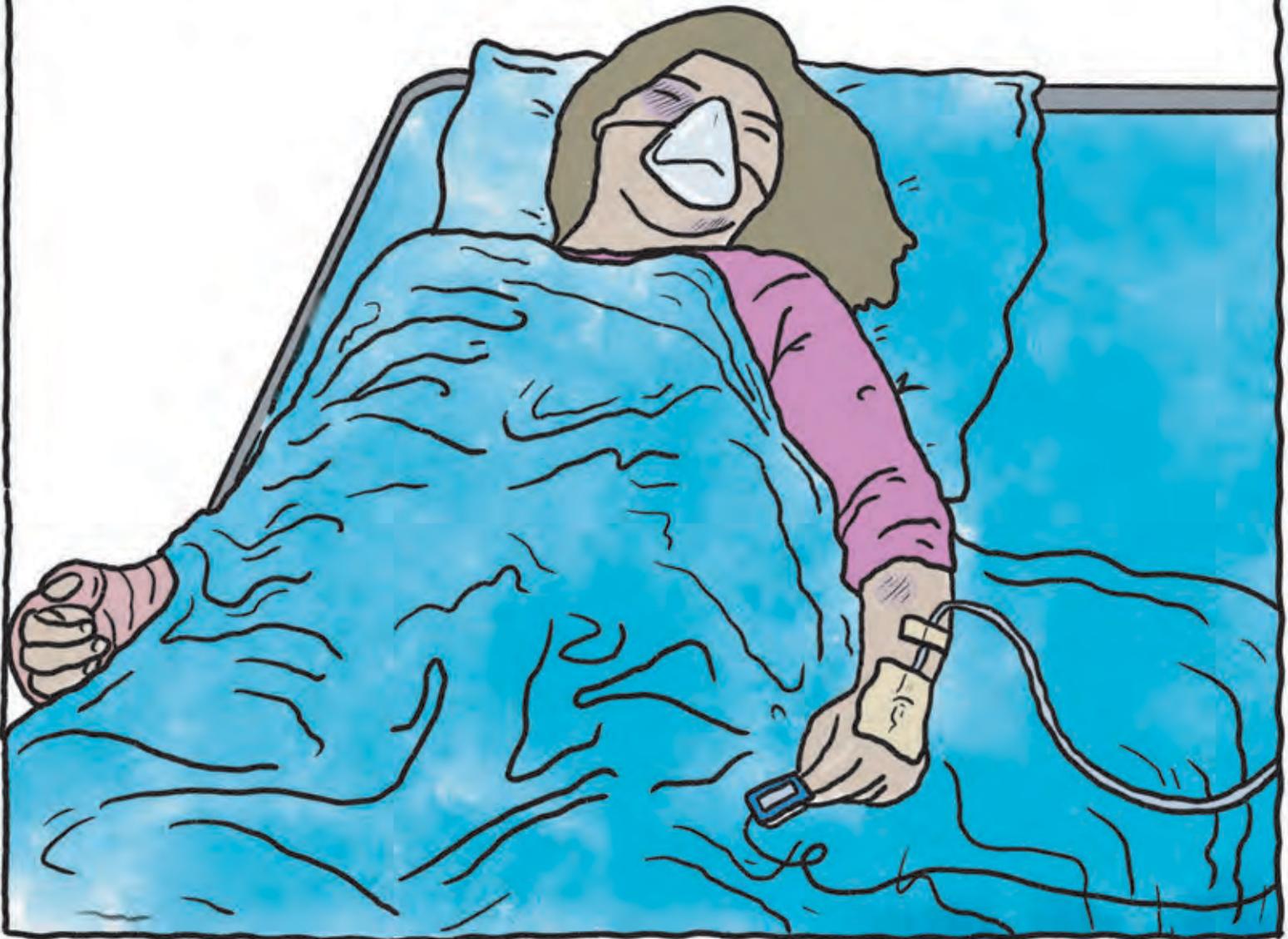
Artist: Promina

(Lakheni), illustrator, comics artist and researcher in the field of visual arts, is currently focusing on her own projects while farming somewhere in Nepal. She is the co-founder of Virangana Comics, is passionate about identity politics, mental health and working with children.

You can find her on Instagram [@lakheni.ms](#)

I woke up with excruciating sharp pain in my wrist. I slowly opened my eyes and found myself in a hospital bed. My mind was hazy, my hand in a cast and saline solution was slowly dripping through a pipe.

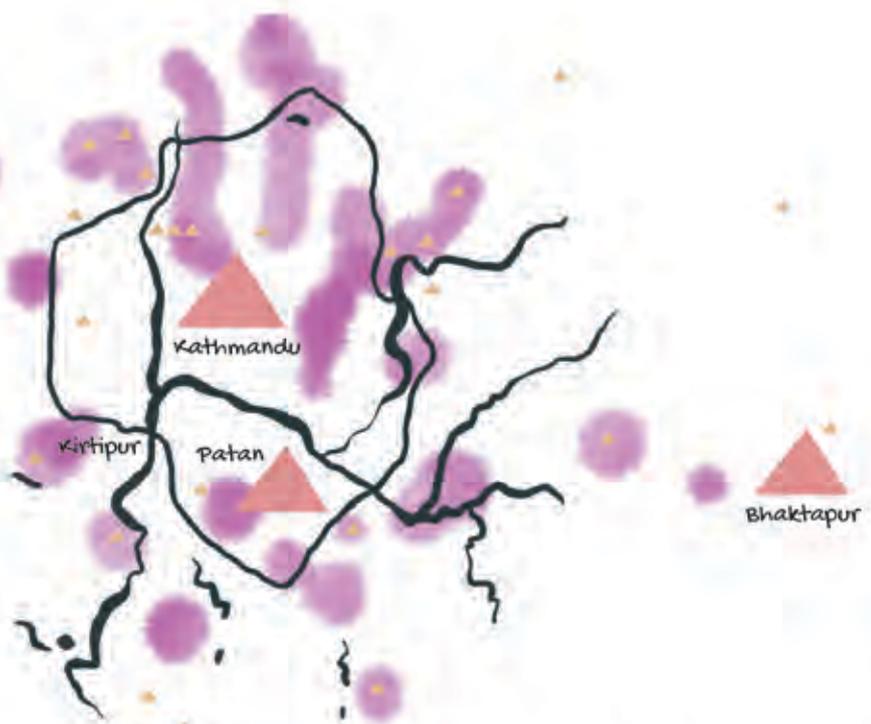
I slowly started remembering how I ended up here



Our lands — public, private and guthi owned lands — have always been occupied and distributed amongst different governmental bodies, since the time of the Shahs and Ranas.

We have been unknowingly disappearing.

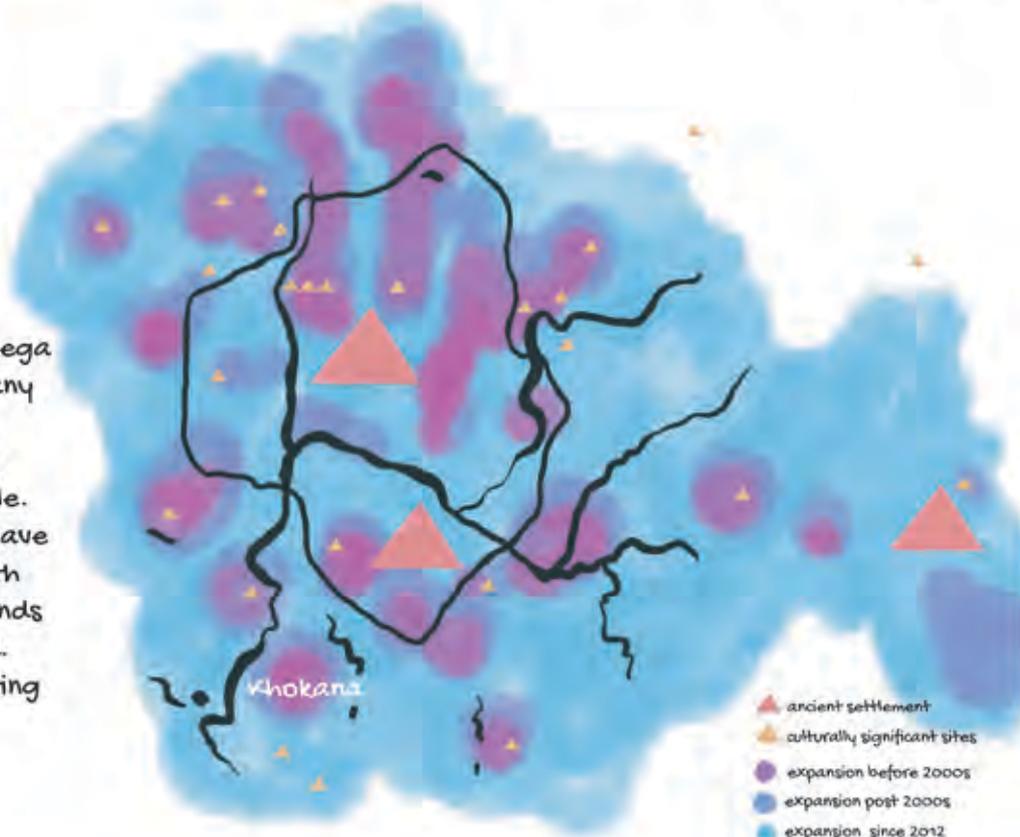
In the last decade however, the government has been actively demolishing houses of Newars in the name of development, displacing and forcing people out of their homes and their farm lands.



We had filed several cases against the states rampant road expansion drive and won. Though legal battles have been won — making it illegal for both road expansion and any other form of land occupation by the government or for privatization by seizing land belonging to indigenous Newars from Kathmandu valley — the atrocity continues. At least more than 2,00,000 people have been displaced by this road expansion.

Since the earthquake of 2015, and perhaps even before that, Khokana has become a very tasty piece of real estate for predatory eyes.

Khokana is where there are several mega projects planned by the state. Like many other places within the valley, these threaten to completely annihilate the Newa culture, civilization and its people. Part of the farm lands have already been occupied by the Nepali army, with little or no compensation, and more lands is in the process of being appropriated. Farmers have been banned from planting crops on their own land.



- ▲ ancient settlement
- ▲ culturally significant sites
- expansion before 2000s
- expansion post 2000s
- expansion since 2012



Do you think there will be a riot?

We are just planting rice. Why should there be a fight?



We organized a big movement of paddy plantation on 4th June 2020.

We were armed with paddy.

The police with batons.

With Paddy in our hands, we were demanding our rights to exist and not be obliterated.

We were not looking for a physical confrontation. We wanted to be heard, we wanted to stand our ground.

We hoped, that unlike all the other protests we had conducted, this one would be peaceful and bring a positive resolution.





I don't know if a stone was thrown, but suddenly the police started firing at us. The place suddenly became a battle field.

It was chaos!

I was in the front line, I had suffered previous protest injuries, and had barely recovered from a surgery.

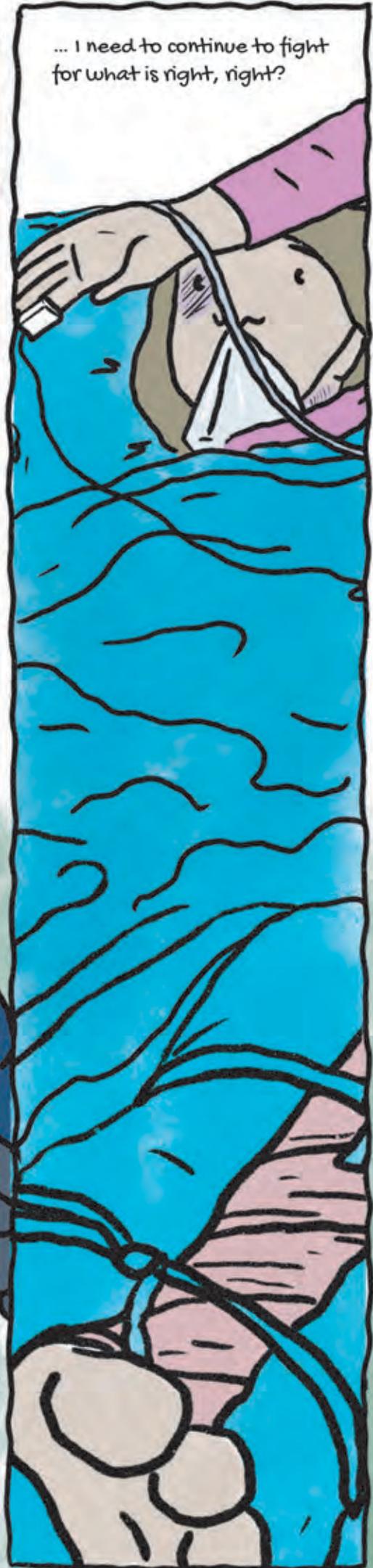
I ran.

I fell.

The AFP were beating me senseless.

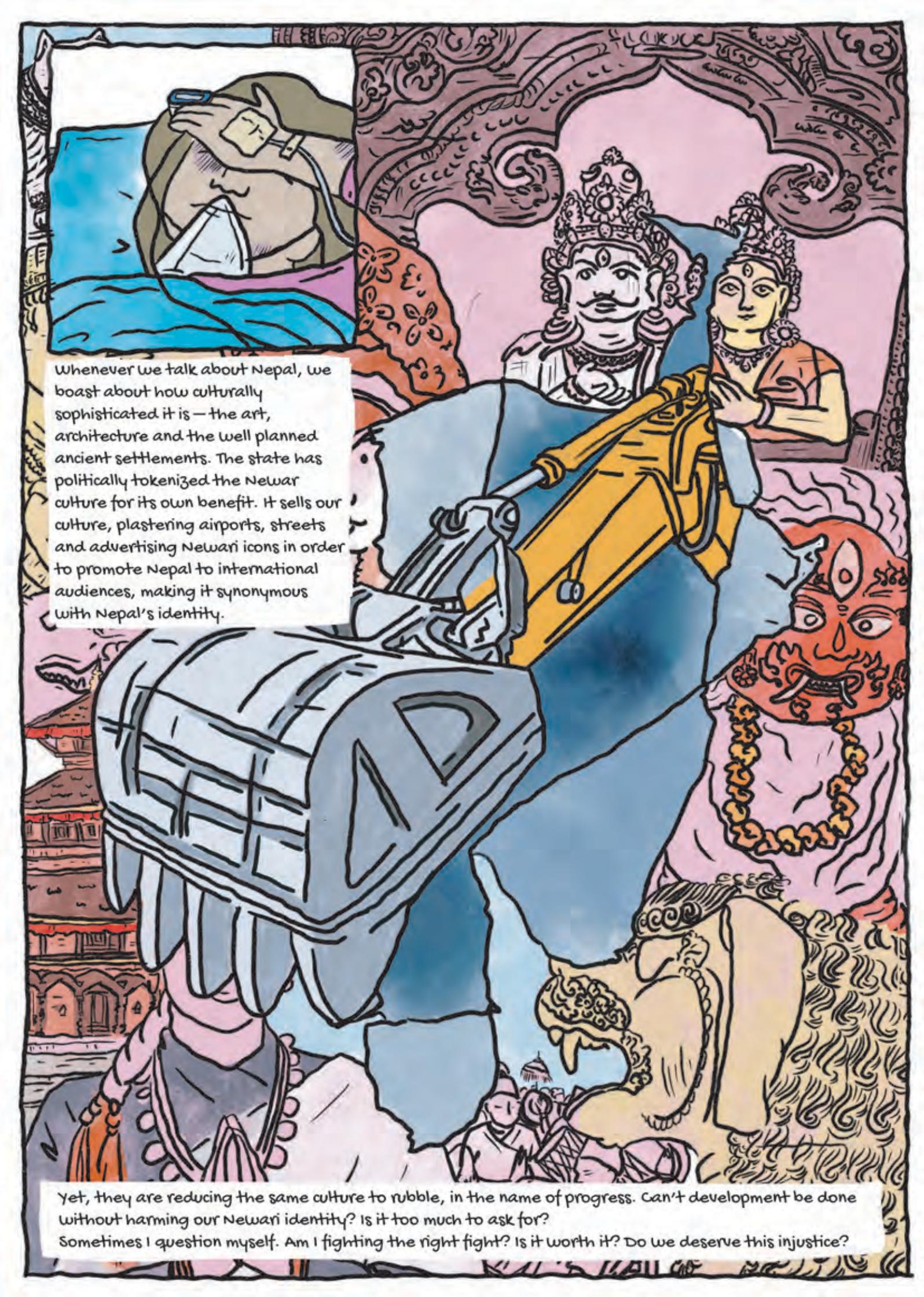


This movement has been rather difficult. Despite my poor health, minimum support from my family and the many clashes with authorities



... I need to continue to fight for what is right, right?





Whenever we talk about Nepal, we boast about how culturally sophisticated it is – the art, architecture and the well planned ancient settlements. The state has politically tokenized the Newar culture for its own benefit. It sells our culture, plastering airports, streets and advertising Newari icons in order to promote Nepal to international audiences, making it synonymous with Nepal's identity.

Yet, they are reducing the same culture to rubble, in the name of progress. Can't development be done without harming our Newari identity? Is it too much to ask for? Sometimes I question myself. Am I fighting the right fight? Is it worth it? Do we deserve this injustice?



We have
no where to go.
They compensated
us with pennies.
What do we
do now?



It has been 7 years since I have been actively fighting for this cause. Being a woman activist is not easy in this patriarchal country and society. Everyday is a tussle with my family. Despite participating in numerus peace rallies, protests, hunger strikes and more, my own struggle seems so insignificant compared to the people who have lost and are losing their homes. An old couple comes to mind, who were crying and pleading with the authorities to stop the demolition of their home. After all, it was all their hard earned land and right. Thinking of their pain , the injustice and the inhumane conduct shown by the state, I hold my tears back, and I promise myself and silently to them, and people like them, that I will never give up this fight. After all, if not now then when, if not me than who?

Peru

Front Line Defenders went to Peru in 2016 to document the struggle of Máxima Acuña de Chaupe to protect her land from Newmont Corporation, a US-based company that operates the world's second largest gold mine in the world – the Conga Mine. This was shortly before she won the 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize.

The Conga Mine is a gold and copper producing mine, a project of Minera Yanacocha, a company owned primarily by Newmont Corporation. At the time of our visit, the company operated checkpoints on the road on either side of Máxima's land, and operated regular patrols to surveil her and her family. The harassment and attacks, including physical attacks, judicial harassment, etc. were intense and perpetrated constantly.

Later in 2016, Newmont announced it was halting the exploitation of the Conga Mine, out of environmental concerns related to water, but everyone knew it was because of the resistance that Máxima sustained.

However, latest reports from Peru indicate that the company is once again planning to operate the mine, and Máxima has been facing increased harassment again. With Minera Yanacocha planning to spend \$4.8 billion in the Mine, Máxima is once again facing a huge challenge.

Artist: Jon Sack
jonsack.com

ABOUT A MONTH AFTER RETURNING FROM CAJAMARCA, PERU, I RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING EMAIL:



Search Messages

Contacts Settings

Compose



Reply ReplyAll Forward

Inbox

☆ Fwd: RE: Frontline Defenders

Drafts

AND AS I READ IT, I WONDERED- IS THIS WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE?

adam shapiro
jon sack

April 18 2016 12:19 PM

Spam

Trash

FYI, this is pretty big... but i don't trust it - as it might simply be a manoeuver for the sake of shareholder meeting and financial issues

OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE...

Peruvian farmer wins 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize for fighting world's 2nd largest gold miner to a standstill

Newmont removes Conga proposal from list of reserves in SEC filing

IT'S ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE...

Cajamarca, Peru & San Francisco, CA--Peruvian farmer Maxima Acuña de Chaupe today won the prestigious

REWIND ONE MONTH EARLIER... LIMA, PERU. INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY. WE'RE TRYING TO FIND A LARGE MARCH TWISTING ITS WAY THROUGH THE CITY.



WE SOON FIND IT...

AS WE WATCH HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE MARCH PAST US, I NOTICE TWO FAMILIAR FACES ON A COUPLE OF BANNERS—

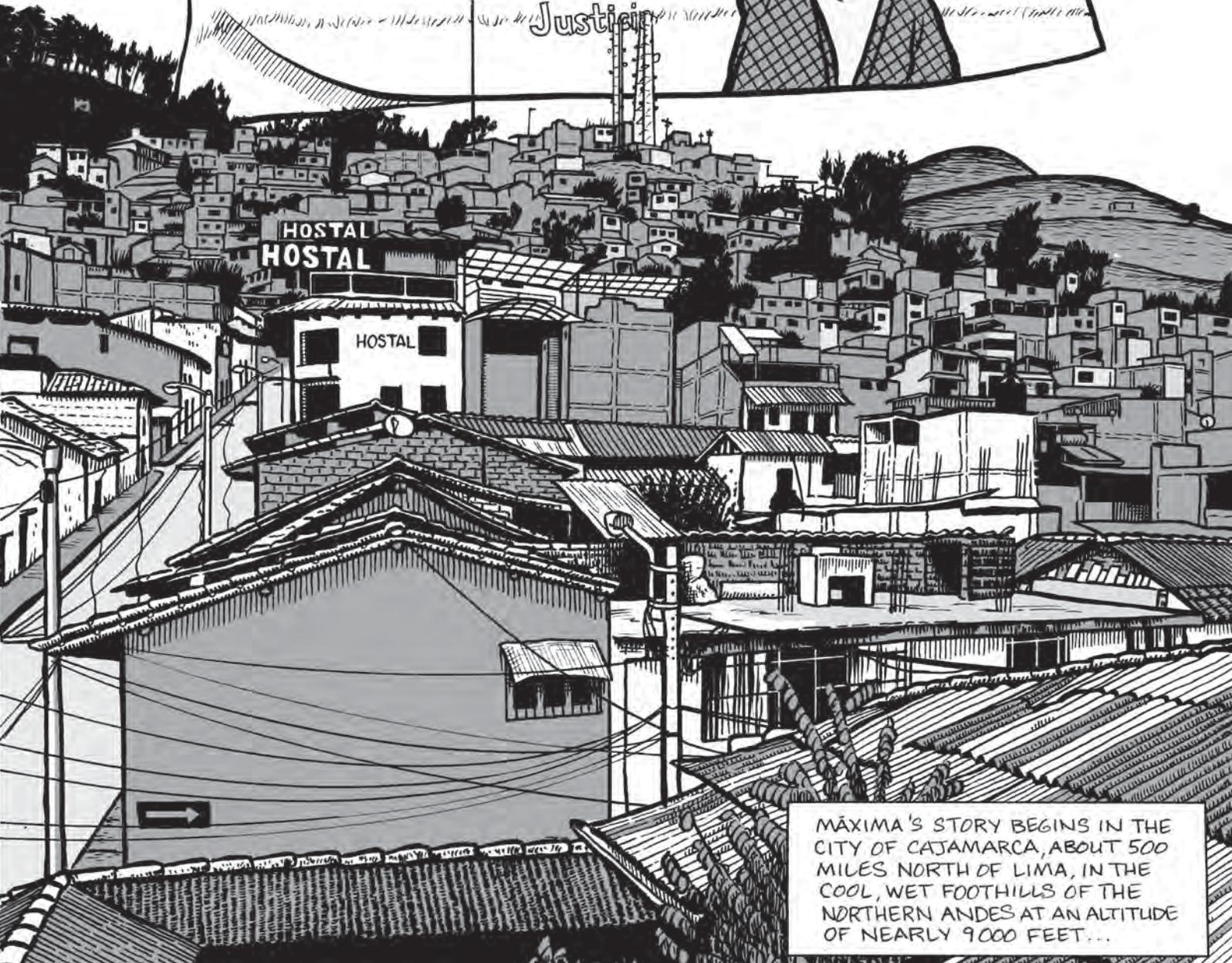


¡BASTA DE VIOLENCIA CONTRA LAS MUJER DEFENSORAS!

BERTA CÁCERES, THE HONDURAN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST WHO HAD BEEN MURDERED JUST DAYS EARLIER.



... AND MÁXIMA ACUÑA, WHO WE ARE IN PERU TO MEET.



MÁXIMA'S STORY BEGINS IN THE CITY OF CAJAMARCA, ABOUT 500 MILES NORTH OF LIMA, IN THE COOL, WET FOOTHILLS OF THE NORTHERN ANDES AT AN ALTITUDE OF NEARLY 9000 FEET...

AS WE HAD BEEN TOLD IN A MEETING THE DAY BEFORE IN LIMA, THE STRUGGLE OF MÁXIMA AND HER FAMILY IS TWOFOLD: FIRSTLY, A PERSONAL STRUGGLE FOR DIGNITY AGAINST THE LARGEST OPEN PIT GOLD MINE IN SOUTH AMERICA AND ITS EFFORTS TO ROB THEM OF THEIR LAND.

SECONDLY, AS REPRESENTING THE WIDER STRUGGLE OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES EVERYWHERE IN PERU, RESISTING MINING ACTIVITIES AND STATE REPRESSION.

THIS IS THE MAIN SQUARE IN CAJAMARCA...

... AND THIS WAS THE SCENE HERE IN 2011.



WHY ARE YOU TREATING US LIKE THIS?

BECAUSE YOU'RE FUCKING DOGS!



HERE IN CAJAMARCA AND IN NEIGHBORING TOWNS, THOUSANDS OF MOSTLY INDIGENOUS FARMERS HAVE BEEN PROTESTING AGAINST A PLANNED EXTENSION OF THE NEARBY YANACOCCHA MINE, ALREADY THE LARGEST OPEN PIT MINE IN SOUTH AMERICA. AT LEAST 61 ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE LAST TEN YEARS, MOST OF THEM RESISTING MINING. THE EXTENSION, CALLED 'CONGA', WOULD ENSURE ANOTHER 20 YEARS OF MINING OF GOLD AND COPPER.

WITH A \$4.5 BILLION INVESTMENT BACKED BY U.S BASED NEWMONT MINING, PERUVIAN BUENAVENTURA AND THE WORLD BANK, CONGA IS THE SINGLE LARGEST INVESTMENT IN PERU'S HISTORY IN AN INDUSTRY THAT IS THE COUNTRY'S MAIN ECONOMIC ENGINE. YANACOCCHA CLAIMS IT OWNS MÁXIMA'S LAND, WHICH THE CONGA PROJECT WOULD ENGULF, TURNING NEARBY LAGUNA AZUL INTO A TAILING POND OF TOXIC WASTE. MÁXIMA MAINTAINS SHE HAS NEVER SOLD HER LAND TO ANYONE.



CAJAMARCA

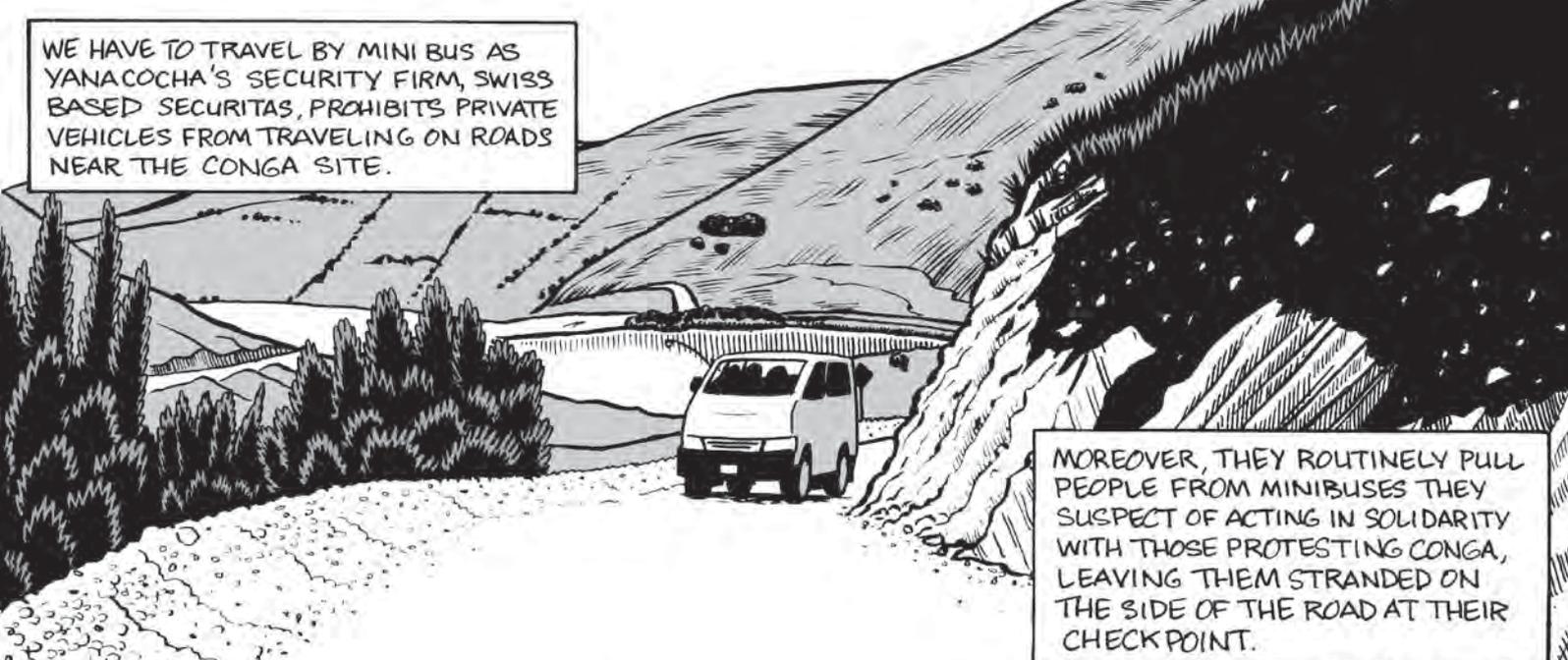


TO MEET MÁXIMA, WE HAVE TO TRAVEL TO THE HIGHLANDS ABOUT 3 HOURS NORTH OF CAJAMARCA ON UNPAVED ROADS.

IT'S ILLEGAL FOR THE FAMILY TO GROW FOOD ON THEIR OWN LAND.

THE AFTERNOON BEFORE LEAVING OUR TRANSLATOR EMMA AND I STOCK UP ON FOOD AT THE TOWN MARKET TO BRING TO MÁXIMA'S HOUSE.

WE HAVE TO TRAVEL BY MINI BUS AS YANACOCHA'S SECURITY FIRM, SWISS BASED SECURITAS, PROHIBITS PRIVATE VEHICLES FROM TRAVELING ON ROADS NEAR THE CONGA SITE.

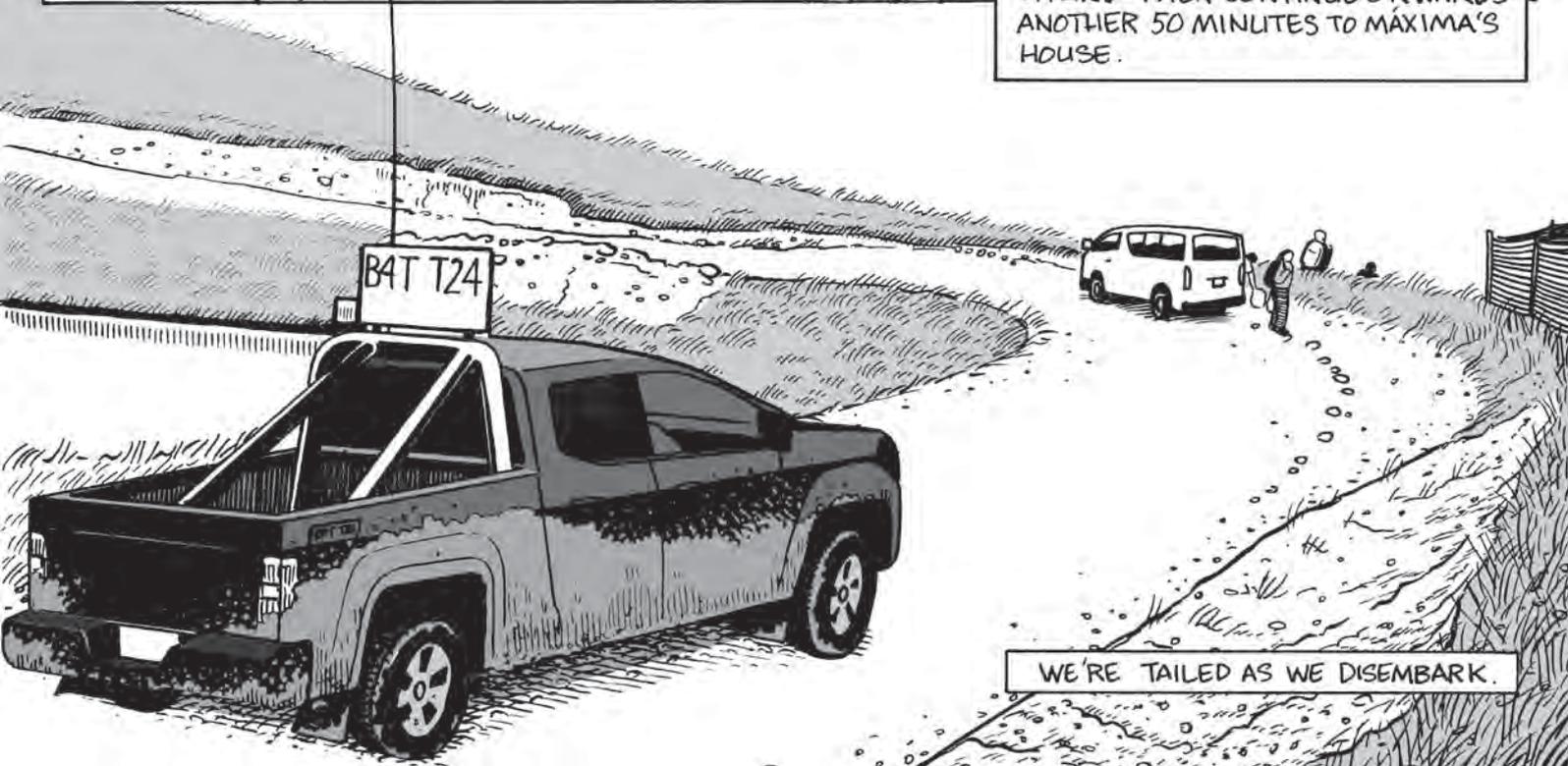


MOREOVER, THEY ROUTINELY PULL PEOPLE FROM MINIBUSES THEY SUSPECT OF ACTING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE PROTESTING CONGA, LEAVING THEM STRANDED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AT THEIR CHECK POINT.

SO, ABOUT 2 HOURS INTO OUR JOURNEY, WE DUCK OUR HEADS INTO OUR BAGS AS WE'RE STOPPED AT THE CHECKPOINT...

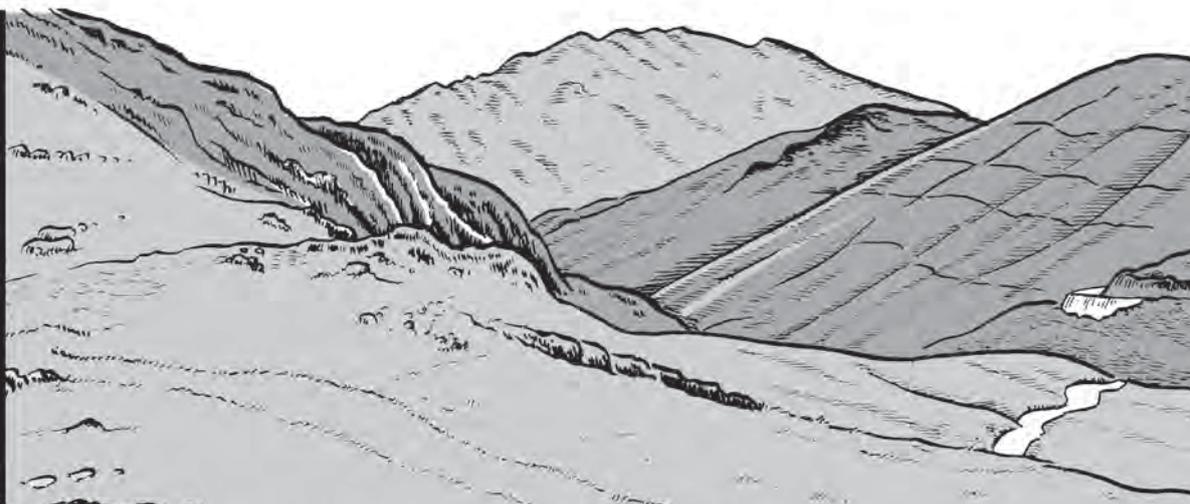


... AND THEN CONTINUE ONWARDS ANOTHER 50 MINUTES TO MÁXIMA'S HOUSE.

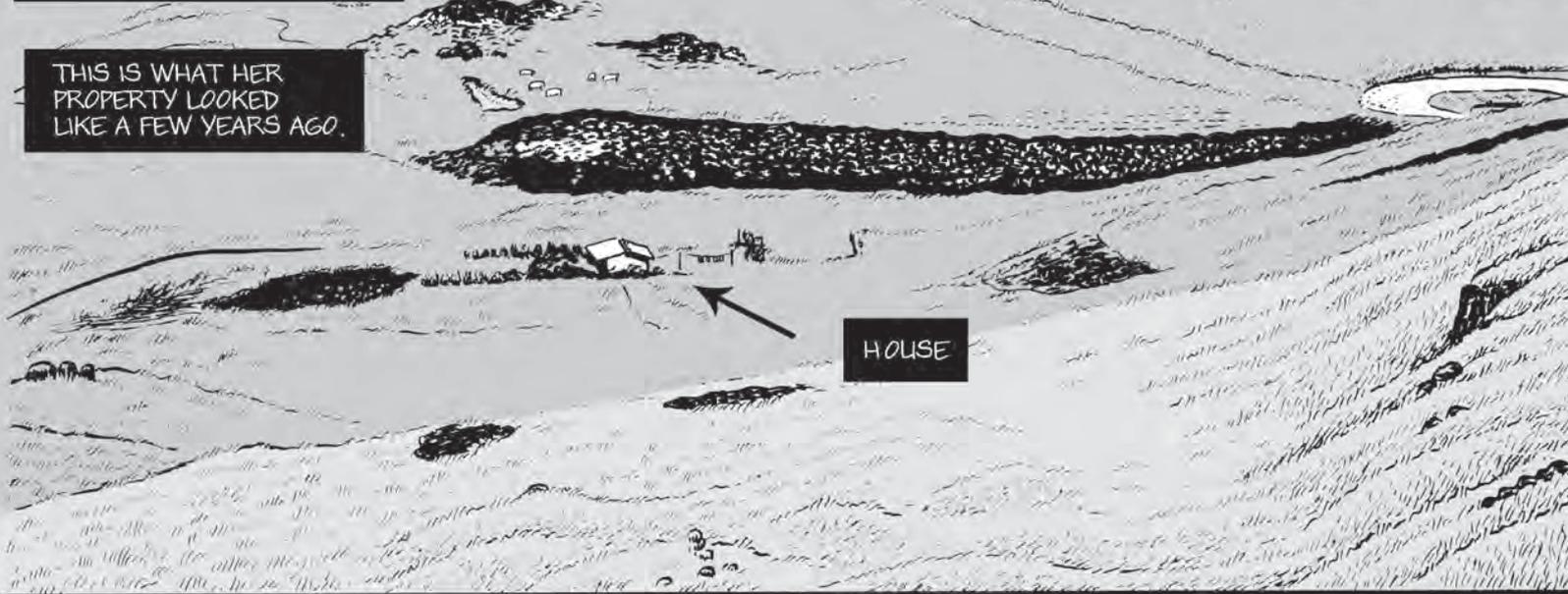


WE'RE TAILED AS WE DISEMBARK.

MÁXIMA DOES NOT LIVE HERE ANYMORE. THE STRESS FROM YEARS OF HARRASSMENT AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE FROM THE SECURITY GUARDS AND POLICE ACTING ON BEHALF OF YANACOCHA HAVE FORCED HER TO MOVE TO A LESS VULNERABLE LOCATION. HER SON, DANIEL, IS CURRENTLY LIVING AT THE HOUSE, AND IS TENDING TO THE PROPERTY THE FAMILY PURCHASED 20 YEARS AGO.

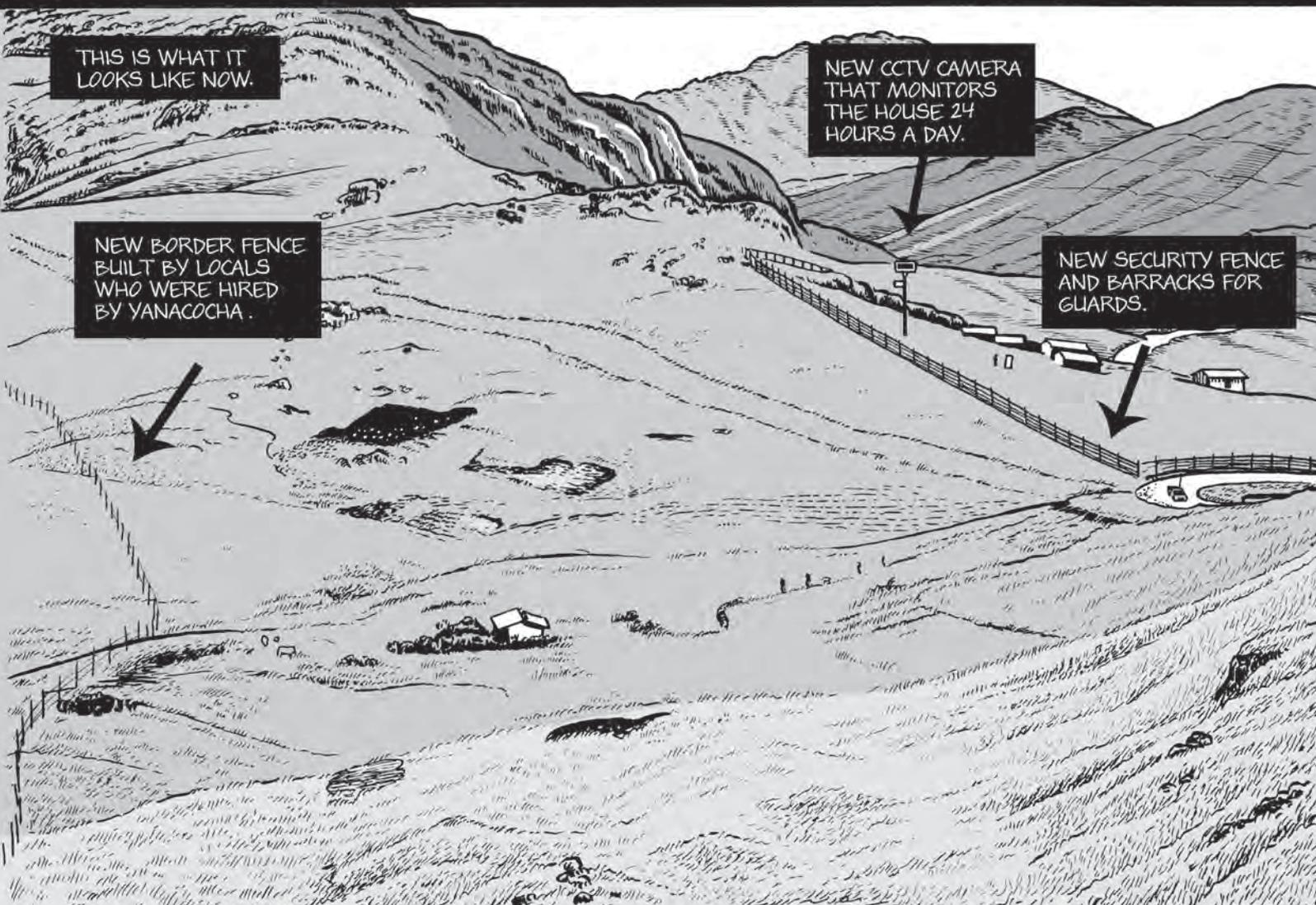


THIS IS WHAT HER PROPERTY LOOKED LIKE A FEW YEARS AGO.



HOUSE

THIS IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE NOW.

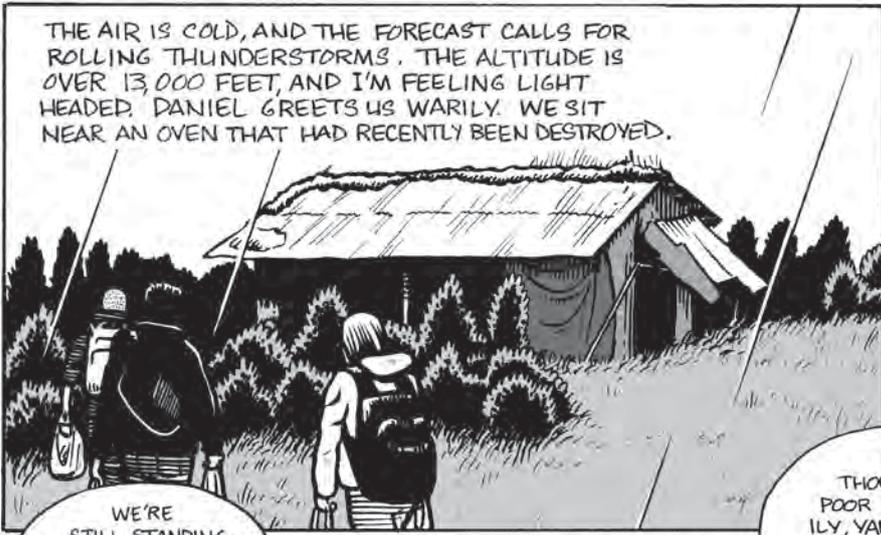


NEW CCTV CAMERA THAT MONITORS THE HOUSE 24 HOURS A DAY.

NEW BORDER FENCE BUILT BY LOCALS WHO WERE HIRED BY YANACOCHA.

NEW SECURITY FENCE AND BARRACKS FOR GUARDS.

THE AIR IS COLD, AND THE FORECAST CALLS FOR ROLLING THUNDERSTORMS. THE ALTITUDE IS OVER 13,000 FEET, AND I'M FEELING LIGHT HEADED. DANIEL GREET'S US WARILY. WE SIT NEAR AN OVEN THAT HAD RECENTLY BEEN DESTROYED.



MY NAME IS DANIEL CHAUPE ACUÑA- I'M MÁXIMA'S SON.

WE'RE STILL STANDING UP AND FIGHTING HERE, EVEN THOUGH WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING FOR MORE THAN 5 YEARS.



EVEN THOUGH WE'RE A POOR FARMING FAMILY, VANACOCCHA HAS COMMITTED MANY ABUSES AGAINST US. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY FENCED US IN...

OUR ONLY ACCESS TO THE MAIN, PUBLIC ROAD IS CONTROLLED BY THEIR GATES.



THE SAME WITH OUR HOUSE- THEY KNOCKED IT DOWN. THEY'VE DAMAGED OUR CROPS, STABBED MY DOG, KILLED MY SHEEP, MY GUINEA PIGS AND RABBITS.



BECAUSE WHERE DOES DEVELOPMENT COME FROM? IT COMES FROM THE FIELDS, IT COMES FROM AGRICULTURE.



SO THINK- IF THEY MINE HERE, THERE'LL BE WORK FOR ONE OR TWO MONTHS. AND THEN WHERE WILL ALL THESE PEOPLE GO?



THEY'LL CROWD INTO THE CITY- AND WHAT DEVELOPMENT WILL THEY HAVE THERE?

THERE WILL BE MORE CRIME, MORE PROSTITUTION, MORE CORRUPTION. AND THAT'S NOT DEVELOPMENT, BECAUSE IF THERE'S NO WATER, WHAT WILL YOUR MONEY DO FOR YOU?



OR YOUR GOLD OR DOLLARS? GO AHEAD AND EAT THEM AND SEE IF THEY SATISFY YOUR HUNGER...

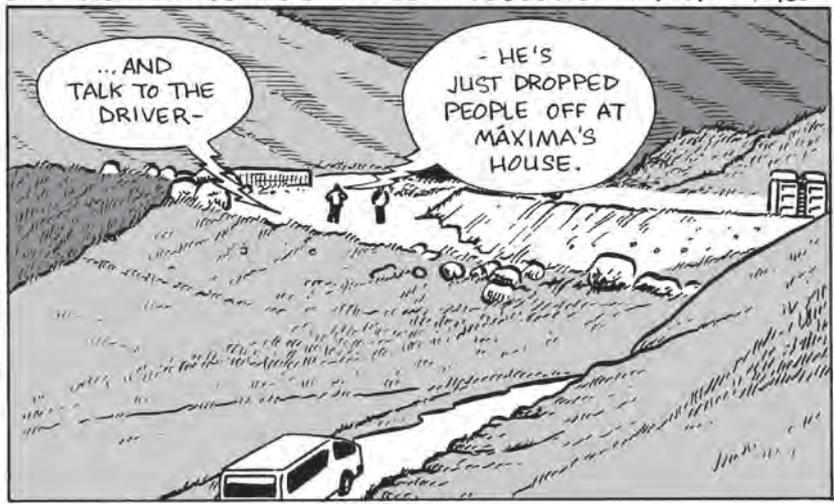
OUR PLAN THE NEXT MORNING IS TO GET A RIDE WITH THE SAME DRIVER WHO DROPPED US OFF...

BUT WE DISCOVER WE HAD BEEN FOLLOWED AND REPORTED.



STOP THE NEXT WHITE VAN...

... AND IF YOU EVER DROP PEOPLE OFF BACK THERE AGAIN, WE'LL NEVER LET YOU PASS THROUGH HERE.



... AND TALK TO THE DRIVER-

- HE'S JUST DROPPED PEOPLE OFF AT MÁXIMA'S HOUSE.



WE ARRANGE ANOTHER RIDE FROM A FRIEND OF MÁXIMA'S WHO HAS TO TAKE A 6 HOUR DETOUR TO AVOID YANACOCHA'S CHECKPOINTS...

WE HAVE TO HIKE OUT OF THE AREA TO AVOID THE NEXT CHECKPOINT, AND AGREE TO MEET AT A LAGUNA, BUT -



HE'S NOT HERE... LET'S KEEP WALKING.

WE WALK FOR 3 HOURS. WHEN WE NEXT HAVE A PHONE SIGNAL-



ARE YOU AT THE LAGUNA?

NO, WE KEPT WALKING, WE'RE NEAR A VILLAGE-

YOU SHOULD HAVE STAYED AT THE LAGUNA! THERE ARE MANY PRO-MINING VILLAGERS WHO WILL QUESTION YOU IF THEY SEE YOU-

HI!



JUST DOWN THE ROAD.

WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM?

WHO ARE YOU?

WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?

WHO ARE THEY?



WE KEEP MOVING, AND EVENTUALLY GET PICKED UP AS THE SUN SETS.

WE DRIVE FOR ABOUT AN HOUR
TO MEET MAXIMA IN A DIMLY
LIT HAMLET CALLED SALACAT.

¡HOLA!

MAS MAS MAS





MY NAME IS MÁXIMA ACUÑA.

I'M FROM SOROCHILICO, IN THE PROVINCE OF CELEDIN.



FOR ME, LAND IS BEAUTIFUL AND VERY PRECIOUS.

IT'S OUR LAND - IT GIVES US OUR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE. WE RAISE OUR ANIMALS THERE.

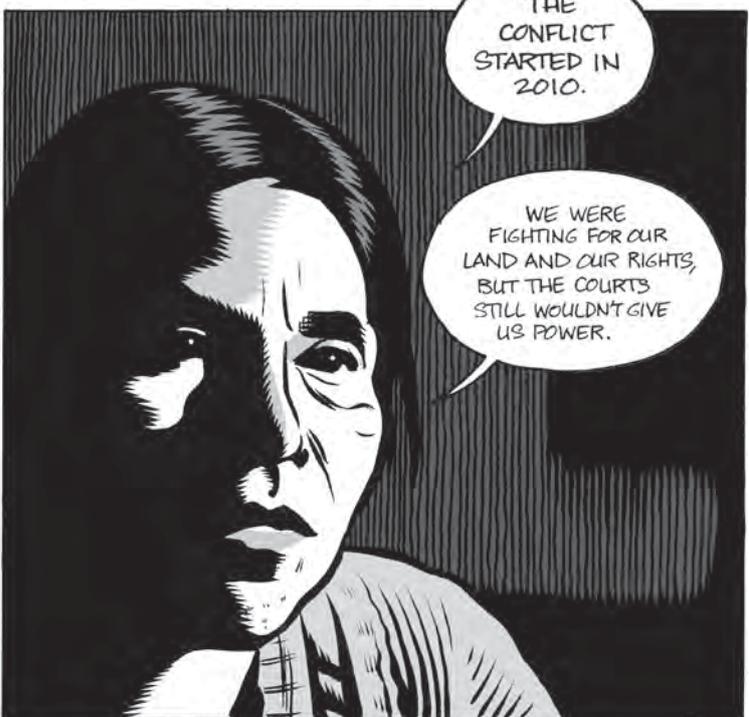


AND NOW CONGA WANTS TO TAKE AWAY OUR WATER, DRY UP OUR LAKES AND DESTROY OUR LAND.



AND WE WON'T HAVE ANY PLACE TO WORK ANY MORE.

THAT'S WHY WE'RE FIGHTING - TO DEFEND OUR LAND.



THE CONFLICT STARTED IN 2010.

WE WERE FIGHTING FOR OUR LAND AND OUR RIGHTS, BUT THE COURTS STILL WOULDN'T GIVE US POWER.



SO THEY STARTED TO DESTROY OUR LIVES ON AUGUST 9TH AND 11TH 2011.

THAT'S WHEN THEY REALLY STARTED TO ATTACK US.

"THEY EVICTED US ON AUGUST 9TH, 2011. THEY TOOK OUR FOOD AND CLOTHES...



... AND THEY BURNED DOWN OUR HOUSE. ON AUGUST 11, AT 6:30 PM, THE COMPANY RETURNED WITH ITS SPECIAL OPERATIONS POLICE -



- ITS ENGINEERS, ITS SECURITY GUARDS AND FOREMEN...

... THAT WAS WHEN THEY TRIED TO KILL OUR WHOLE FAMILY.



WHEN THEY CAME, OUR WHOLE FAMILY WAS BEATEN. SIX POLICE OFFICERS GRABBED ME AND HIT ME WITH THOSE BLACK STICKS.





DON'T DO THAT TO MY FAMILY!

"THEY HIT MY DAUGHTER GILDA IN THE HEAD - I COULDN'T WALK, I COULDN'T GET UP..."



... I WAS SHOCKED - I THOUGHT THEY HAD KILLED HER...

THEY GRABBED MY OTHER DAUGHTER'S CELL PHONE..."



THEY HAD NO COMPASSION.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN THINK, "WE'RE HUMAN BEINGS, THIS WOMAN HAS EVERY RIGHT TO BE HERE—



- BECAUSE SHE NEVER SOLD HER LAND."

"BUT AT THE LAST MOMENT, MY DAUGHTER FOUND HER COURAGE AND KNEELED DOWN IN FRONT OF THOSE...WHO WERE ABOUT TO KILL US..."



I CRIED WHEN I SAW THAT AND I PRAYED TO GOD..."

" I HAVE BEEN VERY AFFECTED BY THIS. I'M OUTRAGED. I RISK LOSING MY LIFE JUST FOR DEFENDING MY OWN RIGHTS. I KNOW I HAVE THESE RIGHTS. I'M NOT A CRIMINAL, I'M NOT A THIEF. I TREAT MY FAMILY AND NEIGHBORS RIGHT...



NOW I'M THREATENED BY EVERYONE: THE COURTS, AND AUTHORITIES SLANDER ME JUST FOR DEFENDING MY RIGHTS, MY KIDS AND OUR LAND AND WATER - BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT GIVES US LIFE...



" I WON'T LEAVE MY LAND."





BECAUSE
I DON'T WANT TO!
IT'S MY LAND!
BECAUSE I REALLY
LOVE IT!

WITHOUT
MY LAND, I DON'T
KNOW WHERE TO LIVE.
WITHOUT WATER, I DON'T
HAVE BLOOD, AND
NEITHER DO MY
PEOPLE.

I WANT
TO GIVE THIS
MESSAGE TO
THE MINE:

YOU'VE
DONE SO MUCH
TO ME, BUT DON'T DO
THE SAME TO OTHER
POOR PEOPLE. HAVE A
HEART, JUST HAVE
COMPASSION.

THEY HAVE
KIDS TOO - WHAT
FUTURE WILL THEY
LEAVE THEM? WHAT
LAND WILL THEY
LEAVE THEM?

FOR THE MINE, IT
MIGHT BE DEVELOP-
MENT. THEY'RE EXCITED
AND EAGER FOR MONEY AND
GOLD. BUT WHAT KIND OF
DEVELOPMENT DOES THE
COMPANY SAY WE'LL HAVE?
BECAUSE WHEN IT
COMES, IT DESTROYS
OUR LAND.

AS A RESULT OF THIS INCIDENT, IN 2012 A COURT IN CELENDIN SENTENCED MÁXIMA AND HER FAMILY TO A 3 YEAR SUSPENDED SENTENCE AND FINED THEM FOR THE CRIME OF 'USURPING THE PROPERTY' OF YANACOCHA.



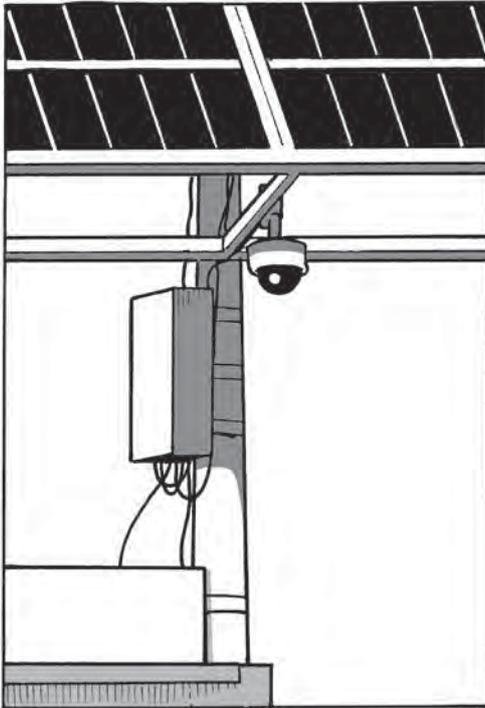
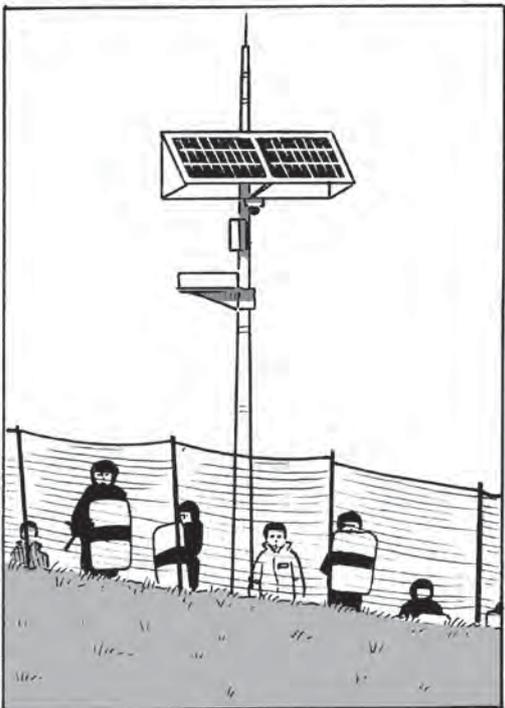
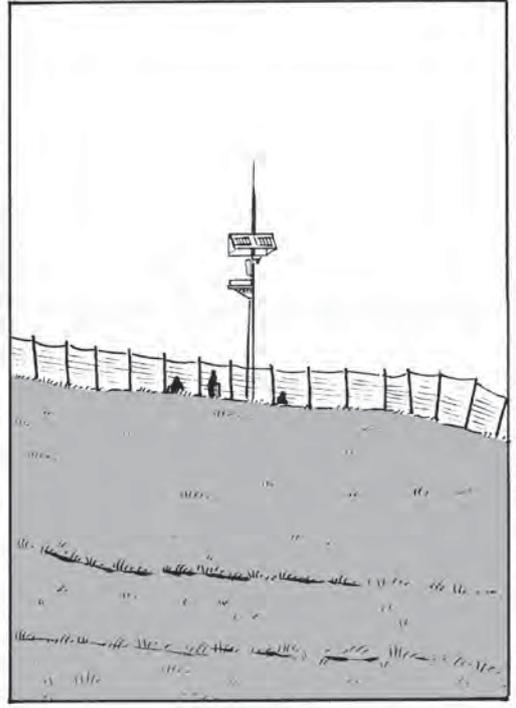
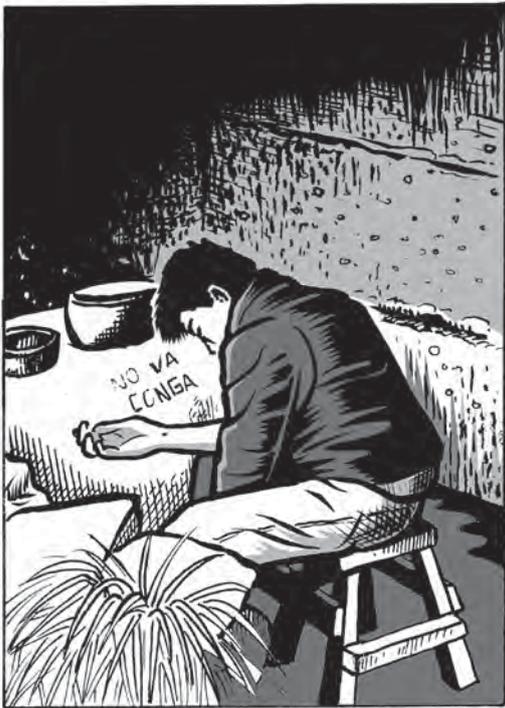
WE DRIVE THAT NIGHT ANOTHER HOUR TO CELENDIN, A TOWN OF ABOUT 15,000 THAT HAS BEEN A CENTER OF RESISTANCE AGAINST CONGA. IN 2012, 5 PROTESTERS WERE SHOT DEAD BY THE ARMY, AND A STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED BY THEN PRIME MINISTER OSCAR VALDES. 2 YEARS LATER, THE GOVERNMENT PASSED LAW 30151, EXEMPTING THE MILITARY AND POLICE FROM ANY LEGAL REPERCUSSIONS IF THEY INJURE OR KILL PROTESTERS.



IN EFFECT, IT'S A LICENSE TO KILL.



THE NEXT MORNING, WE LEARN THAT THE FOLLOWING HAPPENED TO DANIEL AS SOON AS WE HAD LEFT HIM . . .



YANACOCHA OFFICIALS, THEIR SECURITY APPARATUS AND LOCALS THEY HIRED STORMED THE PROPERTY, LOOKING FOR FOOD TO UPROOT.



ON THIS OCCASION, THEY DIDN'T FIND ANYTHING AND RESORTED TO SPRAY PAINTING ARBITRARY BOUNDARIES BEFORE LEAVING.



DANIEL ALSO LEARNED THAT HE'S BEING FRESHLY SUED BY YANACOCHA, AND MUST APPEAR IN COURT IN CAJAMARCA THE NEXT MORNING...

... TO DO THIS HE MUST CATCH A BUS AT 3AM TO APPEAR IN COURT AT 8AM.



FORTUNATELY, THIS TIME A FRIEND IS STAYING AT THE HOUSE TO WATCH OVER IT.

WALKING THROUGH THE STREETS OF CELENDIN, WE PASS MURAL AFTER MURAL OF SCENES OF PROTEST AND RESISTANCE.



HEY- HERE'S THE ONE WITH MILTON ON A HORSE.



Nos hemos levantado en la mano final,
 para vivir este largo día en que lo dejemos
 todo
 En defensa de la vida y por nuestros hijos

 Nos hemos levantado en la montaña,
 Bendecidos por la sangre de
 nuestros hermanos
 Para enfrentar a los sucesos
 que nos mataron

and etc

MILTON SANCHEZ CUBAS IS A MEMBER OF THE COLLECTIVE "GUARDIANS OF THE LAGOON" AND HAS BEEN AN OUTSPOKEN OPPONENT OF YANACOCHA SINCE 2009.



MILTON?

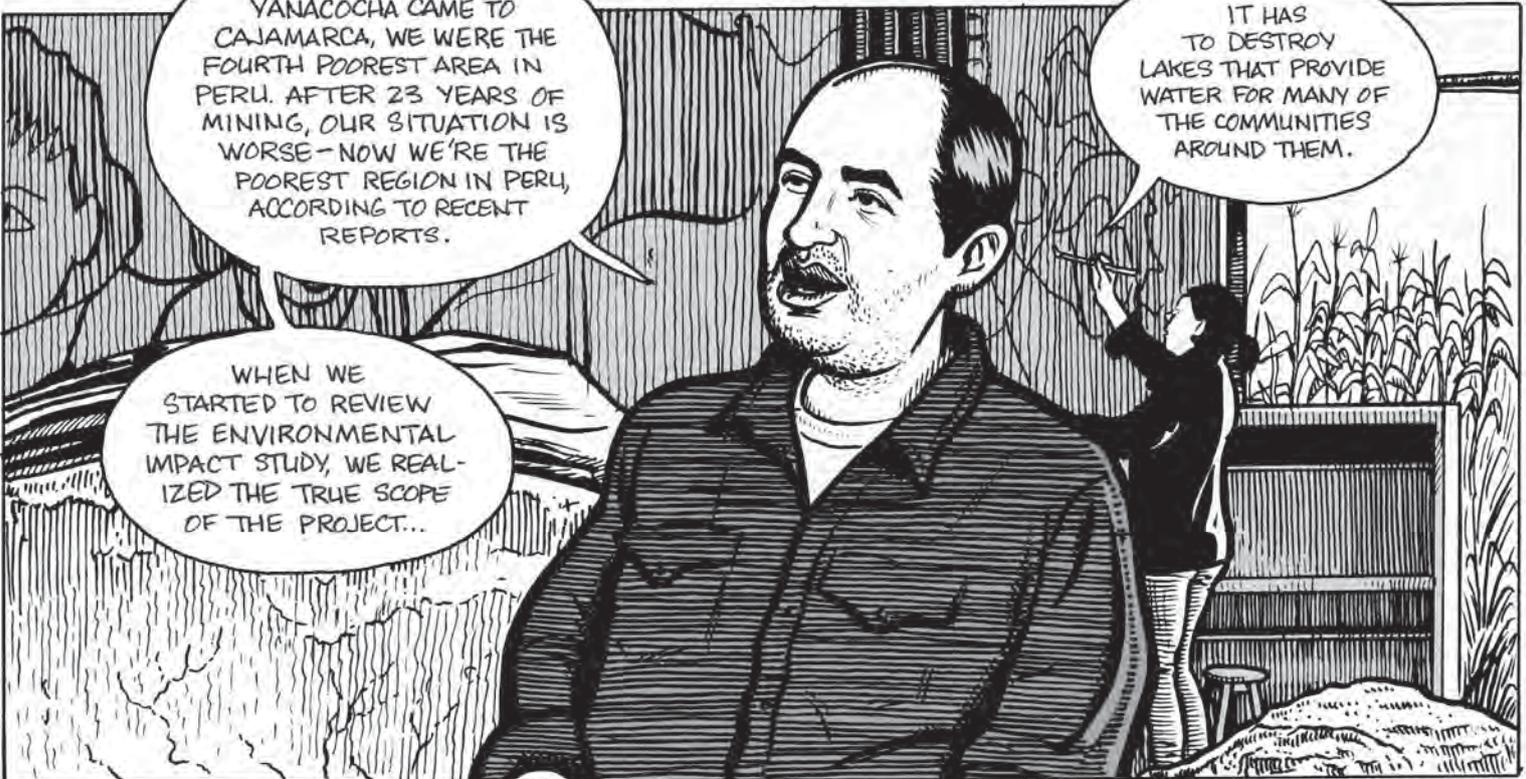


OUT
BACK...
BY THE
MURAL!



I GOT VERY INVOLVED IN 2009. I WORKED WITH AN ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES, AND I SAW HOW YANACOCHA HAD PAID OFF THE AUTHORITIES AND MAYORS TO CARRY OUT ITS PROJECT.

THEY CAME TO CELEDIN AND PROMISED US JOBS, BETTER EDUCATION, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT. BUT PEOPLE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT MINING WOULD REALLY BE LIKE...



WHEN YANACOCHA CAME TO CAJAMARCA, WE WERE THE FOURTH POOREST AREA IN PERU. AFTER 23 YEARS OF MINING, OUR SITUATION IS WORSE - NOW WE'RE THE POOREST REGION IN PERU, ACCORDING TO RECENT REPORTS.

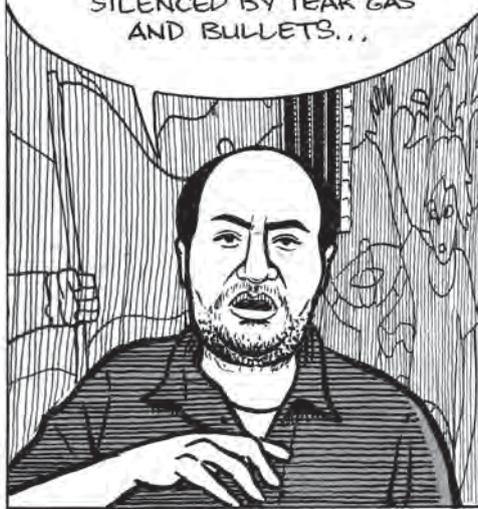
WHEN WE STARTED TO REVIEW THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY, WE REALIZED THE TRUE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT...

IT HAS TO DESTROY LAKES THAT PROVIDE WATER FOR MANY OF THE COMMUNITIES AROUND THEM.

IN 2011, WHEN NEARLY 10,000 PEOPLE WENT UP TO THE LAKES TO STOP YANACOCHA FROM COMING IN, WE WERE BRUTALLY REPPRESSED BY THE POLICE.



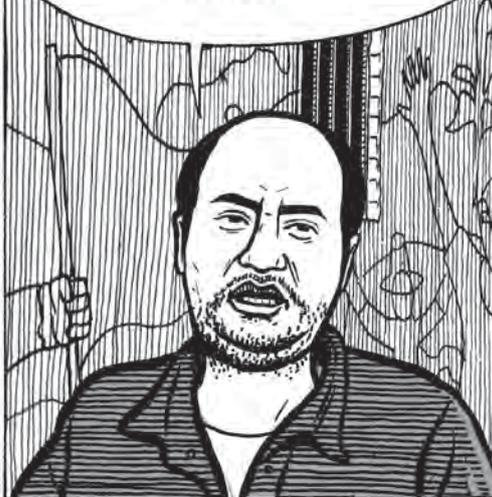
THE PROTESTS CONTINUED AND IN JULY 2012, THERE WERE PRACTICALLY SCENES FROM A WAR HERE. AGAIN, PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS WERE SILENCED BY TEAR GAS AND BULLETS...



... THESE BULLETS KILLED FIVE OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.



THAT'S WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING, YANACOCHA, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA - LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL - HAVE COLLUDED TO FORCE THIS PROJECT ON US.



BECAUSE THEY SEND MESSAGES VIA THE MEDIA SAYING THOSE WHO OPPOSE THESE PROJECTS ARE TERRORISTS, ARE ANTI-DEVELOPMENT AND ANGRY AT SOCIETY.



THERE ARE A LOT OF STRATEGIES TO FORCE THIS PROJECT ON US, FOR INSTANCE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTEST...



I HAVE MORE THAN 50 LEGAL CASES AGAINST ME. WE'VE BEEN CHARGED WITH JUSTIFYING REBELLION,

KIDNAPPING

DAMAGE OF PUBLIC PROPERTY

AGGRAVATED COERCION

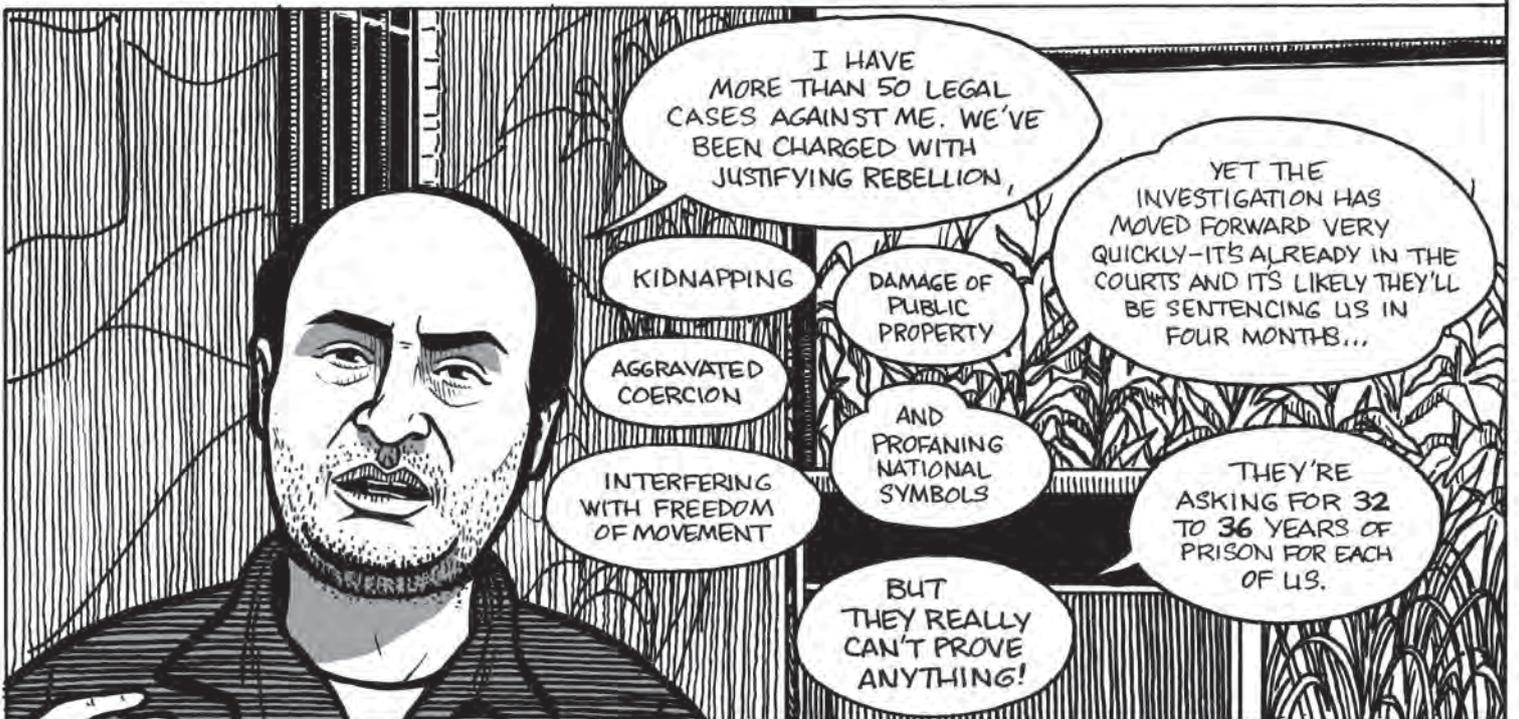
AND PROFANING NATIONAL SYMBOLS

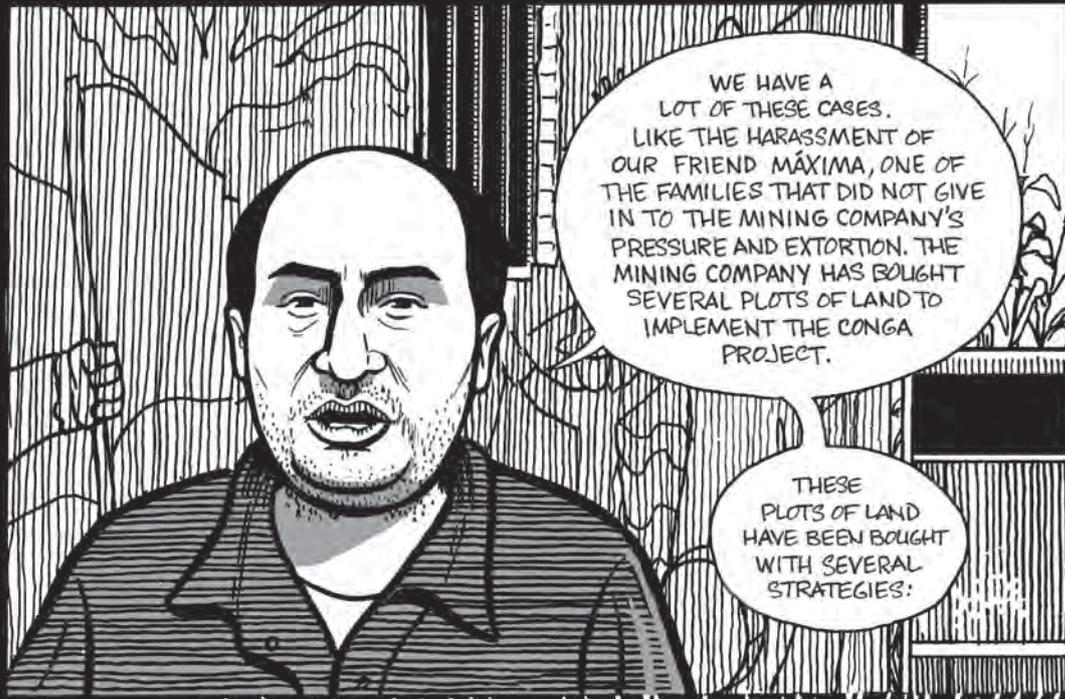
INTERFERING WITH FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

BUT THEY REALLY CAN'T PROVE ANYTHING!

YET THE INVESTIGATION HAS MOVED FORWARD VERY QUICKLY-IT'S ALREADY IN THE COURTS AND IT'S LIKELY THEY'LL BE SENTENCING US IN FOUR MONTHS...

THEY'RE ASKING FOR 32 TO 36 YEARS OF PRISON FOR EACH OF US.





WE HAVE A LOT OF THESE CASES. LIKE THE HARASSMENT OF OUR FRIEND MÁXIMA, ONE OF THE FAMILIES THAT DID NOT GIVE IN TO THE MINING COMPANY'S PRESSURE AND EXTORTION. THE MINING COMPANY HAS BOUGHT SEVERAL PLOTS OF LAND TO IMPLEMENT THE CONGA PROJECT.

THESE PLOTS OF LAND HAVE BEEN BOUGHT WITH SEVERAL STRATEGIES:

" LIKE LAND TRAFFICKING, OR PAYING OFF AUTHORITIES TO GET THE SIGNATURES NEEDED TO SELL THE LAND, SINCE IT'S IN THE INDIGENOUS AND FARMING COMMUNITY OF SORUCHUCO. BUT THE CHAUPE FAMILY DIDN'T GIVE IN TO THIS PRESSURE AND THAT'S WHY THEY'VE BEEN SUFFERING THROUGH SO MUCH ABUSE AND HARASSMENT. THE FAMILY'S SMALL HOUSE HAS BEEN BURNED DOWN; THEIR BLANKETS, POTS AND FOOD HAVE BEEN STOLEN. THEY HAVE HAD TO SLEEP OUT SIDE IN THE COLD FOR SEVERAL DAYS, AT 4100 METERS ABOVE SEA LEVEL THEIR SHEEP AND THEIR DOG HAVE BEEN KILLED."

NOW THEY'RE BEING WATCHED BY DRONES! IT'S JUST REALLY UNBEARABLE FOR THE FAMILY NOW. AND THE AUTHORITIES DON'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT! THEY STAY SILENT BECAUSE THEY'RE CLOSELY CONNECTED TO THE MINING COMPANY. TO GIVE SOME FIGURES - THE CONGA PROJECT WOULD HAVE TO REMOVE ABOUT 150,000 TONS OF ROCK. ITS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT SHOWS IT WOULD PRODUCE



96,000 TONS OF TOXIC MINING TAILINGS EVERY DAY FOR 17 YEARS! AND THEY WON'T TAKE THOSE TAILINGS TO THE U.S...

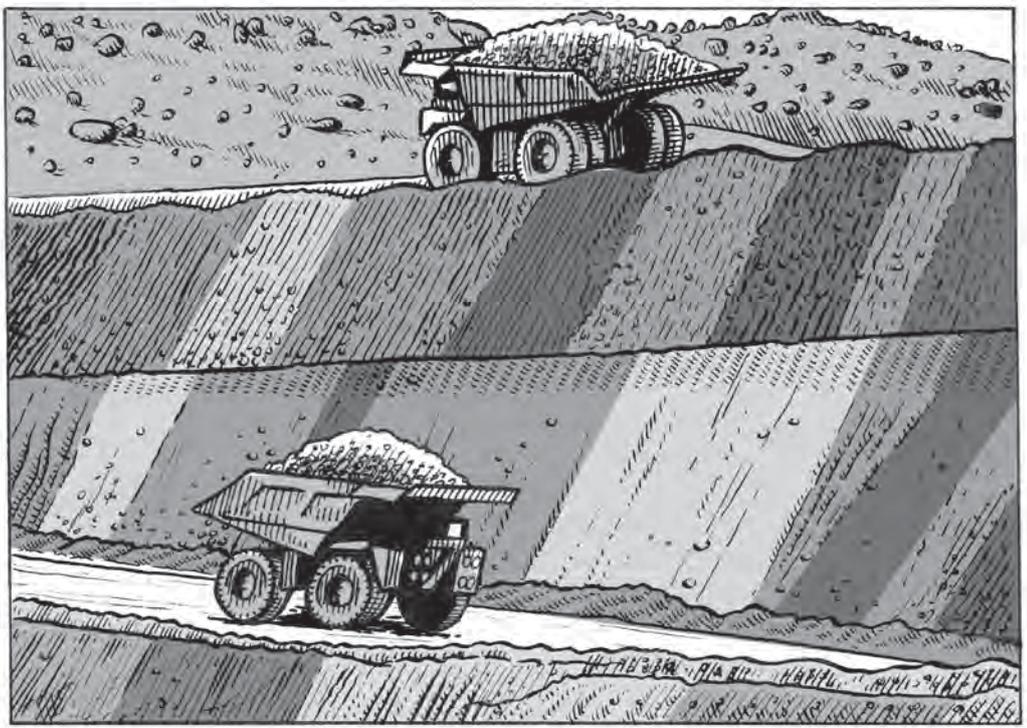
THEY'LL DEPOSIT THEM AT THE SOURCE OF OUR RIVERS

THAT'S WHAT THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY SAYS: 96,000 TONS OF MINING TAILINGS EVERY DAY FOR 17 YEARS. AND IT ALSO SAYS THOSE TAILINGS WILL BE DRAINED AND THEY'LL PURIFY THE WATER AND GIVE IT TO THE COMMUNITIES! DO THEY THINK WE'RE IDIOTS?

THEY CAN'T FOOL US!!



THE NEXT DAY WE DRIVE THROUGH YANACCOCHA TO GET A SENSE OF HOW BIG IT IS.



ON OUR WAY BACK TO CAJAMARCA, I NOTICE MORE ANTI-MINING GRAFFITI THAN I HAD BEFORE.

AGUA SI
MINAS NO



BACK IN CAJAMARCA, WE MEET MÁXIMA'S LAWYER.



MY NAME IS MIRTHA VASQUEZ. I WORK FOR THE ORGANIZATION GRUFIDES. GRUFIDES HAS WORKED TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR 16 YEARS, BUT WE'VE WORKED ESPECIALLY HARD TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CASE OF VIOLATIONS BY EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES.

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS LARGE SCALE MINING BRINGS ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, AND THAT'S TRUE. BUT IT'S ALSO HAD A SEVERE IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS...

* "MAN IS THE ONLY GUARDIAN OF NATURE. WE LOOK AFTER OUR WORLD"



BUT IN 2001, THE CHALPE FAMILY-MÁXIMA AND HER FAMILY, CAME TO US TO ASK FOR HELP..

THEY GOT OUR ATTENTION WHEN THEY TOLD US HOW THE COMPANY WANTED TO TAKE THEIR LAND AWAY, AND HOW THEY'D BEEN BEATEN TO ACHIEVE THIS...

AND WE QUICKLY REALIZED THAT THERE REALLY WERE ABUSES BY THE COMPANY.



CERTIFICADO DE POSESION
COMUNIDAD DE INDIGENAS DE SORU
Reconocida oficialmente el 13 de Febrero
Por Resolución Suprema No. 28
DISTRITO DE SORU
PROVINCIA DE
DEPARTAMENT
Por tanto:
El Señor: Jaime Chalpe Izano y Máxima Acuña
el Padrón General de la Comunidad
terreno ubicada en el sector
con una extensión de Dios Ocho
los linderos siguientes
Castañaris separados. P
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THE FAMILY HAD DOCUMENTS AND DEEDS, PROVING THEY'RE NOT INVADERS BUT ARE THE OWNERS AND HAVE BEEN ON THAT LAND FOR A LONG TIME.

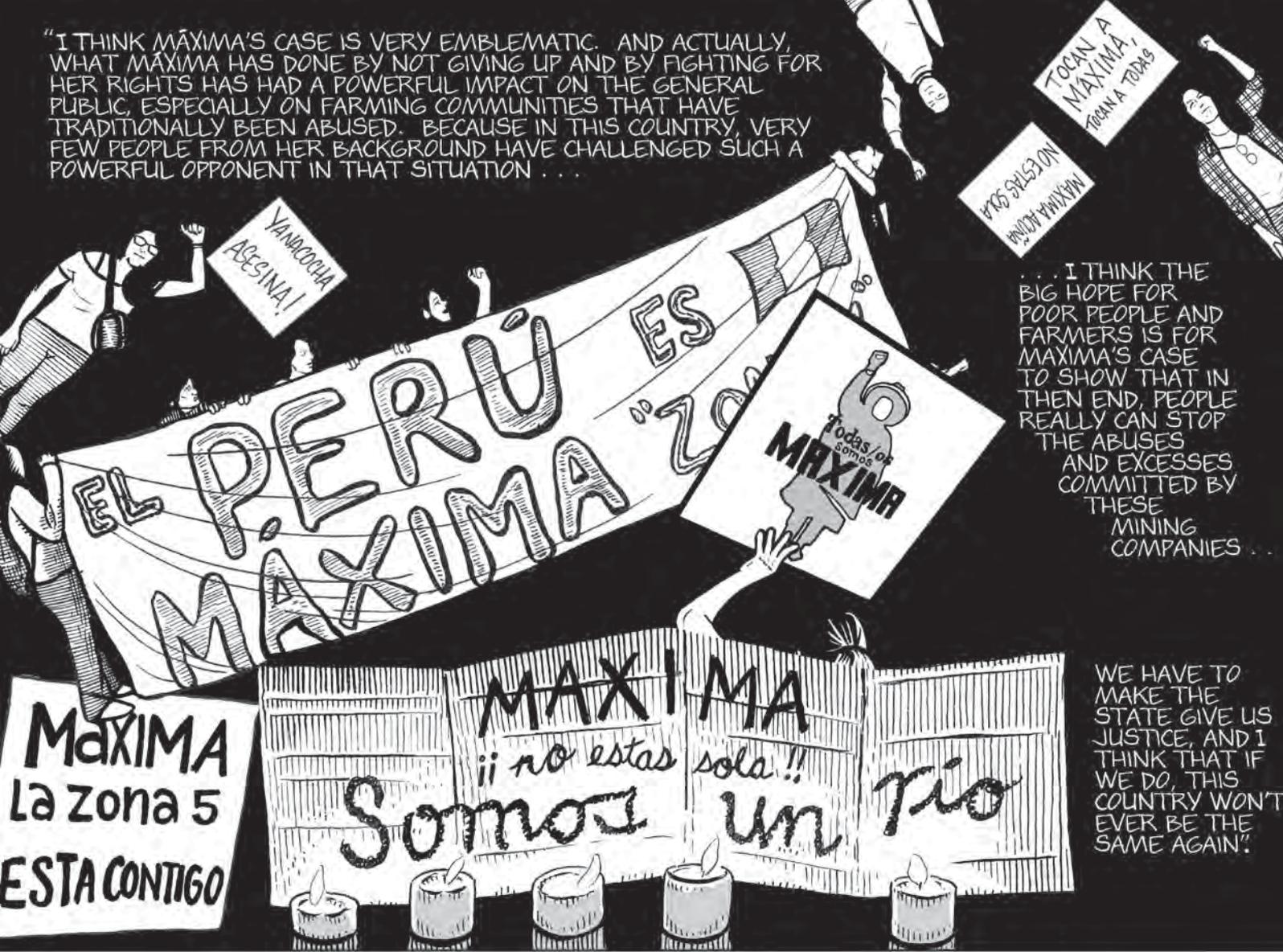
BUT THE COMPANY STILL ACCUSED THE FAMILY OF HAVING INVADDED THE LAND...



"THAT TRIAL TOOK NEARLY 4 YEARS, AND WE PROVED THEY'RE THE LEGITIMATE OWNERS. THAT WAS THE MAIN TRIAL WE WON BACK IN 2014. SINCE THEN, THE COMPANY HASN'T ACCEPTED THAT RULING, SO IT'S STARTED OTHER CIVIL AND CRIMINAL CASES AGAINST MÁXIMA AND HER FAMILY"

ABOVE: SUPPORTERS OF MÁXIMA GATHER OUTSIDE THE COURTHOUSE IN CAJAMARCA, 2014

"I THINK MÁXIMA'S CASE IS VERY EMBLEMATIC. AND ACTUALLY, WHAT MÁXIMA HAS DONE BY NOT GIVING UP AND BY FIGHTING FOR HER RIGHTS HAS HAD A POWERFUL IMPACT ON THE GENERAL PUBLIC, ESPECIALLY ON FARMING COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN ABUSED. BECAUSE IN THIS COUNTRY, VERY FEW PEOPLE FROM HER BACKGROUND HAVE CHALLENGED SUCH A POWERFUL OPPONENT IN THAT SITUATION . . .



... I THINK THE BIG HOPE FOR POOR PEOPLE AND FARMERS IS FOR MÁXIMA'S CASE TO SHOW THAT IN THE END, PEOPLE REALLY CAN STOP THE ABUSES AND EXCESSES COMMITTED BY THESE MINING COMPANIES . . .

WE HAVE TO MAKE THE STATE GIVE US JUSTICE, AND I THINK THAT IF WE DO, THIS COUNTRY WON'T EVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!"



THEY EVEN TRIED TO CONVINCE US TO WORK WITH THEM; THEY MADE A SERIES OF PROPOSALS FOR US TO BECOME AN ORGANIZATION WORKING ON THEIR SIDE. WHEN WE DIDN'T ACCEPT, THE ATTACKS AND THREATS STARTED.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2007, I RECEIVED A SERIES OF THREATS BY PHONE WHERE THEY LITERALLY TOLD ME HOW THEY WERE GOING TO KILL ME AND THROW MY BODY IN THE DUMP FOR THE DOGS TO EAT. THEY SAID A LOT OF THINGS THAT STARTED TO REALLY UPSET ME.



"THEN A SHOCKING SPYING OPERATION AGAINST OUR ORGANIZATION WAS DISCOVERED. IT WAS INCREDIBLE TO SEE HOW THEY CARRIED OUT SUCH CLOSE SURVEILLANCE ON EACH OF US, FROM THE MOMENT WE WOKE AND LEFT THE HOUSE EVERY MORNING. THEY KNEW OUR ROUTINES AND WHO WE TALKED TO..."



IN 2010, IT WAS ALSO DISCOVERED THAT A PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANY SOLELY FOCUSED ON WIRETAPPING OUR PERSONAL PHONES FOR 3 YEARS..."

"BUT THEN YOU CALM DOWN AND SAY, 'WE'LL KEEP GOING.' BECAUSE THEY WANT US TO GIVE UP ON THIS AND LEAVE. I DO FEEL RISK—I DEFINITELY FEAR FOR MYSELF, MY CHILDREN AND MY FAMILY, BUT I THINK IT'S WORTH IT..."



BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE THE BIGGEST RISK—IT'S THE PEOPLE I DEFEND, THE PEOPLE WHO ARE FIGHTING EVERY DAY AND ARE SUFFERING THE ABUSE. AND THOSE PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE VULNERABLE THAN US."

THINKING BACK TO THAT EMAIL I RECEIVED THAT APRIL, IT SEEMS MY HOPE THAT NEWMONT'S DECISION TO PULL OUT OF THE CONGA PROJECT WOULD MEAN A CHANGE IN MÁXIMA'S SITUATION WAS PREMATURE. THE ATTACKS CONTINUE. AS RECENT AS OCTOBER 4TH, 2016, VANACOCCHA SECURITY AGAIN INVADDED MÁXIMA'S PROPERTY TO DIG UP CROPS AND THEN PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED MÁXIMA AND HER HUSBAND JAIME. THEY DID NOT HAVE A FUNCTIONING PHONE TO CALL FOR HELP.



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