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Peace, Agroecology & Gastronomy: A case study on how Colombia can build a sustainable future.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores alternative pathways for post-conflict reconstruction in Colombia by examining how locally grounded practices—specifically agroecology and gastronomy—can enhance peacebuilding processes. Framed within the broader literature on transitional justice, everyday peace, and ecological peacebuilding, the research responds to the central question: How can agroecology and gastronomy function as mechanisms for peacebuilding? Anchored in grassroots perspectives, the study demonstrates how food systems can generate enabling conditions for sustainable development and peace, while identifying the conditions required for them to equitably benefit all stakeholders. It further examines how this connection is strengthened through a gendered lens that enhances resilience to climate-related shocks. Finally, it analyzes how organic, trust-based alliances among citizens foster civic trust and recognition, contributing to the repair of the social fabric in post-conflict settings.

Fieldwork was conducted in both rural and urban contexts in Colombia. First, semi-structured interviews were carried out with internationally acclaimed chefs, researchers, and public sector actors. Then, further research was conducted with ASOCOMAN, a *campesino* association in Montes de María, which transitioned from monoculture farming to agroecological production and has since emerged as a key supplier to some of the country's top restaurants. Data was analyzed through a mixed-methods approach combining traditional qualitative techniques with Natural Language Processing (NLP). The findings offer insights into how recognizing the value of marginalized communities' work enhances their self-perception and fosters more horizontal, reciprocal interactions among citizens. These dynamics enable the collective stewardship of cultural and natural resources toward a more inclusive and sustainable future. In deeply divided societies like Colombia, such exchanges serve as powerful entry points for reimagining shared common ground. This research proposes a framework for NGOs, international organizations, and policymakers to integrate gastronomy and agroecology as combined tools for conflict transformation, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive peacebuilding.

Keywords

Transitional Justice, Peacebuilding, Food Systems Transformation, Agroecology, Gastronomy.

Summary for Lay Audience

What can food teach us about peace? This dissertation explores how everyday practices related to food and agriculture can help rebuild trust and foster peaceful coexistence in Colombia, a country marked by decades of armed conflict. Rather than focusing only on institutions or legal mechanisms, it highlights the power of grassroots initiatives—like agroecology and gastronomy—to heal relationships, restore dignity, and promote sustainable development.

The research brings together voices from across Colombia's food landscape: from renowned chefs in major cities to small-scale farmers in rural areas like Montes de María. In particular, it follows the story of ASOCOMAN, a *campesino* association that moved away from conventional agriculture to embrace agroecological farming. Today, they not only protect their land and biodiversity but also supply high-end restaurants, building new bridges between rural and urban communities.

Through interviews and computational analysis of language, the study shows how food can serve as a connector—between people, places, and traditions. It uncovers how relationships built around food can promote civic trust, help people recognize one another across differences, and create more equal and resilient communities. These local actions may seem small, but they play a critical role in imagining and practicing peace in everyday life.

The dissertation offers practical insights for NGOs, international organizations, and public institutions working on peacebuilding, development, and climate adaptation. It proposes that by supporting community-led food initiatives, it is possible to strengthen the social fabric and move toward a more inclusive, just, and sustainable future. In Colombia and beyond, food is more than sustenance—it is a powerful ingredient for peace.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

It was sometime in May 2014. I was on my way to my first participatory research project, traveling with a group of classmates to work with a community on the northern outskirts of Cartagena, Colombia. At the time, I was still an undergraduate student. We had spent months designing the methodology and developing data collection tools for our workshops. Our primary objective was to build trust with the community—a small village facing displacement. We came from a private university in Bogotá; they lived in conditions of deep inequality. Our research tools were well designed, and the community engaged. Yet the divide between “us” and “them” was palpable. The social distance—marked by race, class, and geography—remained intact. Until it was time to eat.

To distribute the income from meals among community members, we tasted the *sazón*—the unique seasoning—of as many women as possible. These were the moments when barriers began to dissolve. The women were relaxed, confident—proud. Their food told stories, and finishing a plate became a quiet act of recognition and respect. Sharing a meal bridged the gap that the workshop tools could not. Years later, after working with many minority and conflict-affected communities across Colombia, I would return to this lesson: food unites. It balances. It opens hearts.

Working in peacebuilding in a country marked by decades of armed conflict demands a rare blend of resilience and humility. The victories are few but meaningful. The frustrations are constant: entrenched inequality, historical abandonment, normalized injustice—and perhaps most corrosive of all, indifference. Armed groups are not the only actors perpetuating harm; structural violence, too, erodes the social fabric.

Food is a basic human need. Paradoxically, many of those who produce it—*campesinos*¹—struggle to feed their own families. I can hardly think of anything more absurd. Food has been weaponized around the world: used to control territory, punish communities, and dismantle social cohesion. But if food can be weaponized during conflict, surely it can also be harnessed to build peace.

This dissertation explores the everyday practices of eating, cooking, and sourcing food as contributions to peacebuilding in Colombia. It marks a shift in how we approach post-conflict reconstruction: not by focusing only on institutional processes or formal negotiations, but by turning toward the overlooked possibilities embedded in everyday life. Rather than theorizing around the challenges, this study focuses on opportunities, on what people are already doing—what I call *windows of opportunity*—to resist, reimagine, and rebuild. It proposes that underexplored fields like agroecology and gastronomy can become powerful sites of transformation—reweaving trust and recognition, restoring dignity, and placing life at the center.

Rethinking Peacebuilding: From Recurrence to Everyday Action

Over the past century, the world has witnessed more than ten major famines—including those in Bengal (1943), China (1959–1961), and Ethiopia (1983–1985)—as well as ongoing crises of severe food insecurity in places such as Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and Gaza². These are compounded by numerous episodes linked to political turmoil due to

¹ *Campesino* refers to a smallholder farmer, but the term encompasses more than agricultural labor. As noted by Lederach (2017), it reflects a profound connection to the *campo* (countryside), understood not merely as a productive space but as a lived territory imbued with meaning (see also (Lederach, 2023); (Ruiz Serna, 2017)). Similar to Indigenous and Afro-Colombian worldviews, this conception of *territory* acknowledges it as a living entity, where non-human life forms are integral to its identity. I will use the term *campesino* throughout this dissertation with this broader ontological and relational nuance

² When referring to Gaza, I write regarding the current specific context of the conflict in 2025, using it as an example of the weaponization of food. While Palestine has faced catastrophic food insecurity, scholars emphasize

scarcity and other food-related crises in Brazil, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe, among other countries (Hossain & Oosterom, 2021). Contrary to common assumptions, research since the 1990s—most notably by Sen (2000)—has emphasized that such crises are rarely caused by food shortages alone. Rather, they stem from systemic barriers to access, shaped by inequality, governance failures, and conflict.

In recent decades, both scholarship and policy have deepened their understanding of food insecurity as a multidimensional issue. Food is now widely recognized as being interconnected with nearly all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time, peace and conflict studies have increasingly engaged with the food–conflict nexus, acknowledging how food insecurity can exacerbate instability—and vice versa (Kemmerling et al., 2022; Shemyakina, 2022). Climate change has added another layer of complexity, acting as a threat multiplier in already fragile settings. It intensifies pressure on food systems which, according to the EAT–Lancet Commission, are among the world’s most significant contributors to environmental degradation and are fundamentally unsustainable under current trajectories (Willett et al., 2019). In response, multilateral and international organizations have begun exploring transitions toward more sustainable agricultural models that enhance climate resilience. However, this shift introduces new tensions into an already overburdened system—one still grappling with the persistence of food insecurity, the double burden of malnutrition, and calls for greater equity and justice across the food chain.

Within this context, Bunse and Delgado (2024) propose a humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus framework that underscores the need for integrated and complementary approaches to complex, interrelated challenges—especially those involving food security, climate-related crises, and violent conflict. One of the most visible consequences within

that this crisis is linked to the deliberate restriction of food access as a tool of war, rather than the administrative, ecological, or natural causes typically associated with famine (see Whyte, 2024).st

this nexus is forced displacement and migration, often driven either by direct violence or the gradual erosion of sustainable living conditions due to environmental stress. Food systems occupy a central role in this equation. The destruction of ecosystems, declining agricultural productivity, and the deliberate weaponization of food form a vicious cycle that disproportionately harms already vulnerable populations. These dynamics not only deepen human suffering, but also erode the foundations for long-lasting peace.

Armed conflict remains one of the primary drivers of food insecurity: approximately 60% of the world's undernourished population lives in conflict-affected countries (FAO, 2015). At the same time, conflict recurrence poses a profound challenge to peacebuilding. According to the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 60% of armed conflicts re-emerge. Of the 259 conflicts identified by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), 159 recurred, while the remaining 100 involved new actors or incompatibilities (Gates et al., 2016). These cases encompass a wide range of political and institutional settings—some shaped by a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and differing levels of international involvement and local state capacity.

Despite these variations, the overall recurrence rate reveals a worrying trend: more than half of peace processes fail to result in sustained peace. As Walter (2010) observes, this pattern reflects three broader dynamics. First, it confirms the “conflict trap” described by Collier and Sambanis (2002), whereby countries that experience one civil war are significantly more likely to fall into recurrent violence. Second, since 2003, every new civil war has occurred in a country with a prior history of armed conflict. Third, the majority of these cases are concentrated in a few global regions—most notably Sub-Saharan Africa, but also Latin America (Walter, 2010, pp. 1–2).

The drivers of conflict vary widely across contexts—ranging from competition over natural resources (Koubi et al., 2014; Le Billon, 2001), to ethnic and religious divisions (Nilsson

& Svensson, 2018), to ideological and political grievances (Leader Maynard, 2019). In response, the fields of conflict resolution and peace studies have developed a range of tools to prevent and transform violent conflict (Höglund & Orjuela, 2011; Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

While the number of casualties, massacres, and episodes of brutality might suggest that violence is intrinsic to human nature, peace scholars have long argued otherwise. What is inherent to human societies is *conflict*—not violence. Conflict can be expressed and transformed nonviolently (Kriesberg, 2007; Peters, 2021), and it can even serve as a catalyst for innovation and change when addressed constructively. Violence, by contrast, is avoidable—and it is precisely where efforts must concentrate in order to uphold human dignity and guarantee the full enjoyment of rights.

The challenge, then, lies not only in signing peace agreements or preventing the outbreak of new wars, but in transforming the relationships, institutions, and everyday practices that allowed violence to take root in the first place. Ending war is not enough; what matters is addressing its underlying causes and reshaping the social habits and narratives that made violence a means of coping or survival. This reinforces the urgency of exploring additional alternative, complementary strategies for peacebuilding—approaches that move beyond formal negotiations and institutional reform to engage with the everyday dimensions of human life. There is still room—and indeed, a critical need—to seek grounded, imaginative, and culturally resonant pathways to build more sustainable and inclusive peace.

Colombia: A Living Laboratory for Everyday Peace

After over six decades of armed confrontation involving guerrillas, paramilitaries, and state forces, the Colombian conflict has been described in various ways: as armed social conflict, civil war, or irregular war (Pécaut, 2005). Most commonly, it is classified as a non-international, protracted armed conflict, characterized by its duration, complexity, and widespread human rights violations (Cárdenas Díaz et al., 2018). Adding to the intricacy, national and transnational drug-trafficking organizations have exacerbated violence, outsourcing power to local armed groups and advancing territorial control—often with links to political elites and electoral corruption (Ardila, 2023; Espejo, 2021).

The country operates under a longstanding center–periphery dynamic, reinforcing deep urban–rural divides (Laengle et al., 2020). Many Colombians remain unaware of the everyday impacts of conflict, particularly in rural and peripheral regions. As in other Latin American contexts, Colombia’s conflict is rooted in historical land disputes, exclusionary political systems, and sectarian divisions—worsened by entrenched poverty and the influence of illegal actors. These dynamics have eroded public trust in institutions and disproportionately affected *campesinos*, Afro-Colombians, and Indigenous communities who face chronic poverty and limited state presence (E. Gordon et al., 2020; Pizarro Leongómez, 2015).

This context offers two key insights: first, Colombia has generated a wide spectrum of peace initiatives—ranging from top-down constitutional reforms to grassroots mobilizations (Espejo et al., 2025; Guzmán Campos et al., 2005); and second, violence has shifted in both form and actors, revealing multiple and evolving entry points for peacebuilding. In efforts to further address the root causes of conflict, a growing body of scholarship has begun to examine the relationship between food systems and violence (Bunse & Delgado, 2024; Segovia, 2017). This emerging field builds on decades of international cooperation and sustained local experimentation (Firchow, 2018), while also intersecting with new layers of complexity brought about by climate-related insecurity (Andersen et al., 2024).

The most recent attempt at structural peace came with the 2016 Havana Peace Accord, signed between the FARC-EP and the government of Juan Manuel Santos. Despite its ambition—addressing issues from rural reform to victims’ justice—the agreement was narrowly rejected in a national plebiscite, even as it received strong support in the most conflict-affected regions (CNN, 2016). The plebiscite campaign was marked by misinformation, including accusations of a so-called “gender ideology” (Bohórquez Oviedo, 2021; Matanock & García-Sánchez, 2017). Nevertheless, widespread citizen mobilization pressured for the accord’s ratification, which included six thematic chapters³ targeting root causes and structural change.

At the center of this effort was land reform—long identified as essential for lasting peace. Land concentration, dispossession, and weak records have shaped Colombia’s unequal rural landscape (Restrepo & Bernal, 2014), tying peace not only to direct violence but to structural and cultural injustices. However, implementation has been uneven: the Santos administration was followed by the hostile leadership of Iván Duque (2018–2022), and the further polarizing administration of the Petro government (2022–2026). As a result, despite ongoing efforts to implement the accord, violence persists, with both old and emerging armed actors still threatening communities (IDMC, 2024; JEP, 2022).

³ The six chapters in the Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace are: 1. Integral rural reform, 2. Political participation, 3. End of conflict, 4. Solution to the problem of illicit drugs, 5. Justice for victims, and 6. Ratification, implementation and monitoring. See Gobierno de Colombia & FARC-EP. (2016). *Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera*. Teatro Colón, Bogotá. <https://www.jep.gov.co/Normativa/acuerdo-final.pdf>

Rather than dwell on this ongoing diagnosis, this dissertation turns toward the alternatives—toward the everyday acts that can also contribute to peacebuilding. Colombia’s extraordinary ecological and cultural richness offers fertile ground for this inquiry. Geographically, it is one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, with access to two oceans, high-altitude Andean ranges, and both the Amazon and Chocó biogeographic zones (Cárdenas, 2022). Its varied ecosystems support a year-round local pantry and deeply rooted culinary traditions.

Culturally, Colombia reflects a complex history of transculturation among Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and European colonizers. This blend is evident in music, spiritual practices, and foodways (Echeverri et al., 2024; Glaser, 2024). In many regions, food practices are closely tied to memory, identity, and territory—forming part of what Maysels et al. (2023) describe as living worldviews encoded through kitchens, gardens, and shared meals. Concepts such as “palate memory” and matrilineal gardening practices sustain these cultural bonds across generations (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Turner et al., 1995). These practices are now internationally recognized, with four Indigenous knowledge systems from Colombia inscribed on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list (UNESCO, 2022).

Colombia thus offers not only a site of entrenched conflict but also one of profound cultural resilience. It provides grounded lessons and possibilities for reimagining peace—not only through legal and institutional reforms but also through farming, cooking, eating, and everyday interactions. While this dissertation is not a case study of Colombia *per se*, the country serves as an invaluable testing ground for bridging peace, agroecology, and gastronomy—one that can inform future research in other post-conflict contexts and that will be key to grounding the analyses and reflections explored herein. This dissertation is also, at its core, a study about gender. Women—especially rural women—are central to the analysis, not only as contributors to agroecology and gastronomy, but as leaders,

knowledge-holders, and political actors whose roles shape both everyday peacebuilding and broader transformations.

1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

In *Peace, Agroecology & Gastronomy*, I investigate how food systems—particularly through the practices of gastronomy and agroecology—can function as mechanisms for everyday peace in post-conflict contexts, using Colombia as a case study. This inquiry engages with critical peace studies, feminist political ecology, and decolonial development theory to examine how recognition, civic trust, and relational repair can emerge from below—through quotidian interactions often overlooked by formal peacebuilding frameworks. I also explore how these practices might contribute to transitional justice goals, advancing a vision of peacebuilding that includes horizontal strategies rooted in everyday life. The guiding research question that anchors this study is: How can gastronomy and agroecology serve as everyday mechanisms of peacebuilding, particularly by contributing to the objectives of transitional justice in post-conflict contexts like Colombia?

To address this overarching question, the dissertation advances one general and four specific objectives, each corresponding to a key analytical dimension explored in the empirical chapters. The general objective is to investigate how interdisciplinary connections and analysis of practices rooted in everyday life—such as gastronomy and agroecology—can contribute to inclusive peacebuilding and the advancement of transitional justice’s intermediate objectives. The specific objectives are the following:

1. Chapter 2: To critically engage with transitional justice and peacebuilding literatures, identifying conceptual and practical limitations of mainstream

approaches while introducing everyday practices—particularly food-related—as underexplored sites of peacebuilding.

2. Chapter 3: To examine how food systems can create enabling conditions for peacebuilding and development by integrating agroecology, sustainable development, and everyday peace as guiding frameworks for more creative peace alternatives.
3. Chapter 4: To examine the gendered dimensions of agroecological transitions, with a focus on the roles of rural women in sustaining care practices, fostering biodiversity, and enacting environmental peacebuilding as change-markers and leaders.
4. Chapter 5: To analyze gastronomic collaborations between rural producers and urban chefs as mechanisms that foster civic trust, recognition, and moral repair—contributing to everyday peace and economic inclusion in post-conflict.

These objectives are pursued through a qualitative and fieldwork-based methodology, grounded in interpretivist, feminist, and decolonial epistemologies—ensuring coherence between the research aims and the ethical commitments that guide the dissertation. Ultimately, the dissertation contributes both empirical insights and a transferable approach for exploring peacebuilding in other post-conflict contexts from other disciplines and fields of knowledge. By situating food practices as relational, symbolic, and material acts, the dissertation highlights their potential to support more inclusive, just, and sustainable futures, driven not only by institutions but by ordinary people engaged in everyday acts of care and resistance.

1.2 Chapters Description

The analytical approach of this dissertation emerged through a gradual, grounded process—rooted in fieldwork, critical reflection, and an enduring commitment to everyday

peacebuilding. What began as an exploration of food and gastronomy—as spaces of nourishment, connection, celebration, and resistance—evolved into a broader inquiry into how daily practices contribute to rebuilding trust and reweaving the social fabric in post-conflict settings.

Throughout the research, it became clear that peace cannot be built through institutional reforms alone. It requires contributions from multiple spheres and the engagement of diverse actors. Small, everyday actions accumulate over time, helping to restore dignity and social cohesion. Structural change demands attention to relationships, environments, and livelihoods—dimensions often overlooked in formal peacebuilding processes. Rather than organizing the dissertation around abstract categories, it is structured around a set of interrelated concerns that emerged organically from empirical work and theoretical conversations in peace and development studies.

Although focused on a hyper-local case study, the dissertation aims to offer a comprehensive analysis that considers broader global challenges such as climate change, gender equity, and social inclusion. The intention is to inform not only academic debates but also policy and practice. While this research explores the connections between peace, agroecology, and gastronomy, it also gestures toward the many other sectors that—though often considered distant from peacebuilding—can play a meaningful role in post-conflict reconstruction.

Due to the novel connection between peace, agroecology, and gastronomy, each chapter engages with distinct debates and analytical concerns. As will be detailed in the methodology section, Chapter 2 presents the literature review and conceptual foundation for the dissertation, positioning agroecology and gastronomy as additional avenues for peacebuilding in post-conflict settings. Each subsequent chapter builds on this foundation, offering tailored theoretical frameworks to support the analysis of fieldwork data. The

interdisciplinary nature of the research reflects both my own research interests and the lived experiences of participants, with the aim of expanding—not standardizing—the range of approaches available for fostering more peaceful societies.

Chapter 3 explores how food systems—particularly agroecology—can support more just and sustainable development in post-conflict territories. It links peacebuilding and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), frameworks that represent both international commitments and collective aspirations to address structural violence and the root causes of conflict. This chapter positions agroecology within broader efforts to transform food systems, not to rank it above other alternatives, but because it reflects the pathway chosen by the participants involved in this research.

Chapter 4 examines the deeply gendered nature of both violence and care. It highlights how rural women play a central role in sustaining biodiversity, preserving ancestral knowledge, and fostering community resilience—often in the face of intersecting social and environmental risks. This chapter extends the notion of care beyond human relationships, engaging with feminist and climate justice perspectives to argue that gender and intersectionality should be central to any meaningful peacebuilding strategy. This reflects not only an analytical commitment but also a personal conviction about the ethical responsibility to bring a gender lens to the study of social transformations.

Finally, Chapter 5 turns to the role of gastronomy and culinary spaces in forging new alliances across rural and urban divides. Collaborations between chefs and *campesino* producers demonstrate how recognition and civic trust can be rebuilt through shared meals, storytelling, and economic exchange. These partnerships provide concrete examples of how peace can be lived, felt, and constructed in everyday life. This chapter directly addresses the central goal of the research, builds on the cumulative insights of the previous

chapters, and offers a framework for understanding the relational and symbolic power of food to revitalize relationships between fellow citizens in post-conflict contexts.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions of the dissertation. It synthesizes the key insights from the empirical chapters and reflects on the broader implications of the study for peacebuilding theory and practice. The chapter revisits the contributions of food systems, gender equity, climate-adaptation and everyday interactions to post-conflict reconstruction, while also outlining potential avenues for future research and practical engagement. Rather than offering a universal model, it explores an alternative approach to add to existing efforts to build peace from the everyday level.

Each chapter contributes to a layered and evolving exploration of how food and everyday life intersect with peace. Taken together, they reflect a commitment to grounded analysis and the belief that social transformation begins not only with policy, but also with the everyday gestures that bring people back into relation—with one another, with the land, and with the possibility of a more dignified future. Rather than offering a definitive solution, this dissertation proposes another angle from which to approach peacebuilding—one that centers life and wellbeing as foundations for more inclusive and lasting peace.

1.3 Cultivating Our Collective Imagination

This introduction has laid out the ethical foundations, analytical architecture, and conceptual commitments that shape this dissertation. At its heart, *Peace, Agroecology & Gastronomy* is about reimagining peacebuilding through everyday practices that are often rendered invisible in dominant policy or academic frameworks. It seeks to elevate the value of small victories—the seemingly minor acts that, together, weave the fabric of social transformation. By turning to food systems as sites of both material sustenance and

symbolic, economic, and civic repair, this study proposes a way of thinking about peace that is grounded, generative, and approachable.

Throughout the chapters, different angles are presented for navigating complexity while remaining open to innovation and participation. It also gestures toward future pathways: inviting researchers, practitioners, and citizens to approach peacebuilding from new angles, disciplines, and sectors. The hope is to expand the circle of those who feel not only the burden, but the possibility of contributing to more inclusive, cohesive, and sustainable societies. Social change is generational. It moves slowly. But it begins somewhere—and it grows through the accumulation of everyday gestures that challenge the normalization of violence and reorient our habits toward empathy, recognition, and nonviolence. Above all, this study seeks to confront indifference—especially among those untouched by war. For indifference, too, is an obstacle to peace.

What follows is not a catalogue of solutions, but an invitation to ask better questions. Each chapter engages with different tools and debates tracing how everyday acts—cooking, farming, eating together—can become powerful vehicles for rebuilding trust, restoring relationships, and redrafting collective narratives in ways that include the voices and experiences of those who have long been silenced. If violence can be taught and normalized, so can respect. This dissertation is one small step toward cultivating our collective imagination—guided by the conviction that, just as food, which can be weaponized, can also be reimagined as a tool for peace.

Chapter 2

2 Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological foundations of the *Peace, Agroecology, and Gastronomy* research project. It traces the study's evolution, the logic behind its design, and the frameworks that guided each phase of inquiry. It also presents the composition of the participant base, the data collection process, and the methodological tools applied across two stages of fieldwork. Together, these elements form the scaffolding that supports the research questions, analytical and discussion chapters that follow.

2.1 Methodological Approach

This research is grounded in a feminist, decolonial, and interpretivist epistemology that views knowledge not as disembodied or universal, but as situated, relational, and ethically entangled. As Donna Haraway (1988) writes, “feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges”—a view that disrupts the god trick of detached observation and invites the researcher to become accountable for their own position within the matrix of power, meaning, and method.

My own positionality is shaped by a hybrid position. I am a Colombian woman, raised in Bogotá and educated within urban institutions of privilege, yet I have worked alongside women, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities whose realities differ profoundly from my own. I also inhabit a transnational identity, navigating institutional frameworks in both Colombia and Canada, as a scholar trained in peacebuilding and transitional justice and a practitioner working in international development. This complex location—as insider and outsider to many of the systems I interact with—has shaped the ethical and methodological architecture of this dissertation.

Rather than seeking neutrality, I align myself with epistemologies that recognize research as a political and ethical act. Following Rita Laura Segato (2018), I reject the fantasy of universality that sustains patriarchal knowledge systems. As she argues, the modern state is founded on a public/private binary that relegates women and the domestic sphere to marginality—an order in which “the state has patriarchy in its DNA” (p. 201). This binary logic persists in the ways institutions continue to treat community knowledges as peripheral to technical expertise. My methodological stance seeks to question these hierarchies—not by speaking for others, but by creating space for others to speak *with* and *to* the research process itself.

This meant, for instance, giving agroecology a central place in the dissertation—not as a thematic choice driven by theory, but because it emerged organically from participants’ practices and reflections. When ASOCOMAN members framed agroecology as their path toward gastronomy, food sovereignty, and cultural continuity, I pivoted accordingly. Rather than fitting their experience into a pre-existing analytical framework, I allowed their knowledge to reorient my inquiry.

This epistemological commitment aligns closely with Participatory Action Research (PAR), particularly as developed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda. PAR challenges extractive research paradigms by valuing local knowledge, storytelling, and the cultural expressions of the communities involved. As Fals-Borda (1987) argued, storytelling is not only a mode of transmitting memory and values, but a political act of cultural continuity. In his view, storytelling will always exist so long as the practice is kept alive. Incorporating PAR into this study was a methodological choice and a decolonial stance—one that honors oral tradition and centers community narratives as valid and valuable sources of theory. That said, the application of PAR in this project was necessarily partial. Due to time and funding constraints, and the structural realities of conducting doctoral research within institutional frameworks, the study has limitations. I do not claim to have conducted a perfect or fully decolonial process. Rather, I see this approach as an

ongoing ethical and political commitment—imperfect, but intentional—guided by the desire to center participants' knowledges and practices with care and accountability.

Inspired by Segato's call for "a politics in a feminine key," I sought to uphold a politics of proximity and recognition—what she describes as a "management of intimacy, of nearnesses and not of the distances of protocol and bureaucratic abstraction" (Segato, 2018, p. 205). My aim was not to extract data, but to cultivate dialogical relationships rooted in trust, reciprocity, and mutual care. The idea of research as a "pedagogy of cruelty," where subjects are turned into objects for knowledge production, runs counter to the ethos of this work. Instead, I treat participants' narratives as co-produced forms of knowledge—rich with theory, memory, and imagination.

I employed methodological triangulations—semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, participatory workshops, and Natural Language Processing (NLP)—to remain accountable to these principles. NLP was not intended to mechanize meaning-making, but to surface patterns in discourse that might otherwise be overshadowed by my interpretive lens. It acted as a methodological mirror, challenging my assumptions and sharpening the analysis.

My commitment to feminist and decolonial ethics also shaped how I interpreted silences, navigated disagreement, and understood my own role within global hierarchies of knowledge production. To return again to Haraway, "the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular." This dissertation is anchored in that specificity: of a Colombian woman navigating research across borders, refusing to separate theory from care, and insisting that the lived knowledges of rural communities belong at the center of scholarly inquiry. In sum, my positionality is not a footnote to the research—it is a methodology in itself. It reflects an effort to hold together the intellectual and the ethical, recognizing that research is not only analytical but also relational. In line with Segato's vision of a "historical project of bonds," this work approaches care, territory, memory, and

justice not merely as objects of study, but as guiding principles that shape how knowledge is produced, interpreted, and shared.

2.2 Research Design

The structure of this dissertation reflects its interdisciplinary and exploratory nature. Each chapter combines a tailored theoretical framework with a methodological tool or set of tools selected to support the analysis of that theme. While each chapter explains its specific analytical choices in detail, the overall approach follows a qualitative, mixed-methods logic grounded in the Colombian context, which is used here as a case study⁴ to situate the analysis and trace broader patterns. The tools are not applied uniformly across chapters; instead, they are flexibly adapted to the thematic and empirical focus of each section, with an emphasis on methodological complementarity.

Rather than applying the case study method in a strict procedural sense, the project uses Colombia's post-accord context—and the work of ASOCOMAN—as an anchor point for place-based analysis. In complex, fragmented settings like post-conflict Colombia, this type of grounded inquiry allows for an in-depth understanding of actors' experiences, institutional arrangements, and social transformations. Following Quinn (2006) and Höglund and Öberg (2011), localized approaches like this one help surface dynamics that broader national frameworks can obscure. The purpose is not to generalize or test theory, but to illuminate how food systems and peacebuilding intersect in one specific, relational context.

⁴ I do not use “case study” here to refer to a formal research method, but rather as a means to situate the analysis within a specific national and community context. The Colombian case provides a concrete lens through which to examine broader questions addressed throughout the dissertation.

The interpretive core of this project is supported by hermeneutics, understood not only as the art of interpreting texts but as a broader method for understanding meaning in context. Following Ricoeur (1999) and Pérez-Vargas et al. (2020), this study adopts a triadic lens that considers the *text* (what is said or produced), the *context* (where and how it is situated), and the *pretext* (its intentionality and becoming). This expanded hermeneutic perspective is especially important when engaging with fields like gastronomy and agroecology, where oral traditions, recipes, materials, and embodied practices often fall outside conventional academic forms of knowledge production around texts. The analysis acknowledges a “triple semantic autonomy”—respecting the distance between authorial intent, audience reception, and the social conditions of knowledge creation (Pérez-Vargas et al., 2020, p. 143).

The core qualitative tool used across the empirical chapters is the semi-structured interview, valued in peace research for its capacity to reveal deep insights into how individuals understand conflict, recovery, and transformation (Brounéus, 2011). These interviews allow participants to guide the conversation, while also enabling the researcher to pose follow-up questions and explore emergent themes. The narratives gathered through interviews are treated as situated accounts—at once personal and collective, grounded in memory and aspiration.

To identify participants, I employed snowball sampling (Cohen & Arieli, 2011), a method particularly suited to research fields where networks are informal or still taking shape. Because the link between gastronomy and peacebuilding is relatively underexplored, I began with a baseline of chefs whose restaurants were featured in *Latin America’s 50 Best Restaurants*⁵ list. Through these initial interviews, I was introduced to researchers and

⁵ The list was selected because its audited voting process helped minimize my own bias. The list has also earned legitimacy over the past 20 years as a compass for global gastronomic trends, aiming to foster collaboration, inclusivity, diversity, and discovery across the hospitality sector.

policy actors working in related areas, and eventually to ASOCOMAN—a *campesino* association identified by one of the chefs as an allied partner in her sourcing and food education work. This chain-referral approach allowed the study to evolve organically, following relational pathways that reflected existing alliances and forms of collaboration across the gastronomy and food sovereignty sectors.

In addition to interviews and fieldnotes, the study integrates a computational component through Natural Language Processing (NLP). Used in an exploratory capacity, NLP offered an additional lens to identify recurring discursive patterns and thematic clusters across the interview transcripts. Rather than replacing qualitative interpretation, it expanded the analytical scope—providing another layer of insight that enhanced the depth and reflexivity of the process.

Taken together, these methods support the analytical direction of the dissertation, enabling a multi-dimensional examination of how food systems, agroecology, and peacebuilding intersect in everyday practice. Rather than proposing a fixed model, the study offers grounded insights into rural–urban alliances, gendered agroecological practices, and community-defined understandings of peace. This methodological strategy contributes to ongoing work in peacebuilding, food systems, and participatory research—providing tools and reflections that may inform future comparative studies, policy engagement, and program design.

2.3 Data Collection

This section outlines the core components of data collection for the *Peace, Agroecology, and Gastronomy* research project. It begins with a brief timeline to clarify how the study evolved over two distinct stages—before and after receiving a research award from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)—and how each stage shaped the

composition of the participant base. This context is crucial for understanding the logic of selection, the type of data generated, and the tools used to ensure ethical and interpretive rigor throughout. I emphasize that all interviews, fieldwork materials, and participatory workshops included⁶ in the analysis are based on original data I collected directly or in collaboration with a research assistant. The section then details the use of semi-structured interviews, including a chart of participants, followed by a description of the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) workshop and fieldnotes taken during my time with ASOCOMAN in Montes de María, Colombia. Together, these methods form the empirical backbone of the dissertation.

Research Timeline

The *Peace, Agroecology, and Gastronomy* project unfolded in two stages between 2021 and 2023. The first phase (2021–2022) focused on chefs whose restaurants appeared in the *Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants* list—a transparent and externally validated sample beyond my personal networks. Chefs at this level are typically connected to global discourses on sustainability and innovation, increasingly linked to producer relations and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁷. They also have visibility to amplify narratives and the means to conduct research trips across Colombia.

⁶ In addition to the data analyzed in this dissertation, I also collected a historical timeline, a social cartography map, and 50 community surveys focused on food security and agricultural practices. These materials provided valuable background and contextual insight into ASOCOMAN's organizational trajectory and the broader socio-territorial landscape of Montes de María. While not analyzed in detail here in order to maintain thematic focus, they significantly informed my interpretation of the interviews and field interactions, and will serve as the basis for future research and publications. See Appendix A. Social Cartography Macaján for a visual reference of the geographic location.

⁷ See, for example, *La contribución de la gastronomía a la consecución de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible* (Basque Culinary Center & UNWTO, 2019), which outlines how gastronomy can support multiple SDG targets—from biodiversity and equity to inclusive economies. Available at: <https://www.segib.org/?document=la-contribucion-de-la-gastronomia-a-la-consecucion-de-los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible>

While these restaurants represent elite culinary spaces, often inaccessible to rural communities, their distance from *campesino* realities made them a compelling site to examine symbolic and commercial bridges between urban consumers and rural producers. Exploring this from the perspective of *cocinas tradicionales*⁸ or local eateries would have been equally valuable, but was not feasible due to time and funding constraints.

As shown in Table 1, I conducted 21 interviews during this first stage with chefs and researchers⁹ based in several cities around Colombia, mainly Bogotá and Medellín. In 2023, I was selected as the Research Awardee for the Climate-Resilient Food Systems program at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), which provided funding and made it possible to conduct a second round of fieldwork, which expanded the scope of the study toward a community-based case study. Through referrals—particularly from chefs—I was introduced to ASOCOMAN, a *campesino* association in Macaján, Montes de María, a region severely impacted by the armed conflict, and now engaged in agroecological reconstruction and that has become increasingly connected to the regional gastronomic scene. In total, I interviewed 21 ASOCOMAN members, 11 chefs and 13 researchers.

Table 1: Peace, Agroecology and Gastronomy Data Collection Timeline

PHASE	PERIOD	INTERVIEWS DATA
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⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, this dissertation adopts an inclusive definition of gastronomy that encompasses both high-end restaurants and *cocinas tradicionales*. However, I recognize that the term “gastronomy” may carry elitist connotations in some contexts, and that cooks and communities rooted in traditional foodways may not always feel represented by it. This tension is part of the broader politics of recognition and cultural authority within the field and remains a critical point of reflection throughout the dissertation.

⁹ While I refer to this group as “researchers,” they include not only academic scholars but also actors working in civil society, food policy, and gastronomy-sector innovation, working on social change through food.

		<i>Total</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>In-text Citation Code</i>
Stage 1	2021-2022	10	1	9	Chef	C#
		11	6	6	Researcher	R#
IDRC Award	2023-2024					
Stage 2	2023	1	0	1	Chef	C#
		2	1	1	Researcher	R#
		21	11	10	ASOCOMAN	A#
Subtotal			19	27		
TOTAL		45				

Semi-structured Interviews

After conducting the interviews myself¹⁰, I hired a research assistant to produce verbatim transcriptions, with clear instructions not to correct grammar or adjust participants' vocabulary. All transcripts were anonymized to protect confidentiality, with names and identifiable information removed. Each interview was assigned a unique identifier and tagged with basic metadata: gender, role (chef, ASOCOMAN member, or researcher), and transcript text.

I then carried out a qualitative coding process grounded in interpretive methodology (Khan, 2014), identifying thematic clusters and conceptual tensions across the dataset. This included both what was said and how it was communicated—such as rhetorical strategies, metaphors, and narrative patterns. Based on this dual lens, I developed the thematic structure used for deeper analysis across chapters (See Table 2).

Table 2: Interview themes and keywords

THEMES	KEYWORDS & TOPICS
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¹⁰ See Appendix B. Chefs. Interview Guide, Appendix C. Researchers. Interview Guide., and Appendix D. ASOCOMAN. Interview Guide.

Gastronomy & Peace	Peace, trust, reconciliation, democracy, community Colombia's advantage, social impact gastronomy, gastronomy peacebuilding / to build peace
	Relationship with the government, institutions, support, policies, aid.
	Positive changes that the connection between Gastronomy and Peace can generate
Sustainable Food Systems	Food, food security and sovereignty, nutrition, diet, Colombia
	Advantages of working with native, heirloom seeds
	Connection between gastronomy and climate change, climate change, seeds, biodiversity, native products, heirloom, native, criolla/o
Gender Roles	Role of women
	Role of men
	Women, social change
	Women, climate, environment, nature, planet, future
Restaurants	Restaurants, working with farmers/producers, restaurant, work, community, peasants, territory, motivation to work hand-in-hand
	Restaurants, cooking, peace, Colombia, country, gastronomy, restaurants, Colombia, evolution, countryside, sector, future, country
	Restaurant, chef, kitchen, cooking, climate change, environment, change
	Restaurants, innovation, new, novel, country, process, peace

Everyday Peace Indicators Workshop

To ground peacebuilding analysis in participants' own experiences, I facilitated an Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) workshop with ASOCOMAN members during fieldwork in Macaján, prior to the interviews. Together, participants generated 94 indicators that captured how peace is lived and felt at the local level—especially in contrast to past periods of armed conflict. These included practical and emotional markers of well-being, agency, and recovery, from everyday freedoms to collective rituals and access to land. Participation was voluntary and open to all ASOCOMAN members. In line with Firchow's (2018) EPI methodology, this exercise offered a bottom-up approach to peace evaluation, prioritizing local definitions over externally imposed criteria. It also reflected the project's broader commitment to placing rural knowledge at the center of analysis.

Fieldnotes

As part of the ethnographic component of this study, I kept a detailed field journal during my time with ASOCOMAN in Montes de María, as well as while visiting restaurants and conducting interviews with chefs and researchers in urban settings. These notes captured informal conversations, observations, and everyday interactions—often taking place in relational environments such as homes, kitchens, or cafés—where hospitality, trust, and social dynamics unfolded naturally. Although not formally analyzed, the fieldnotes played an essential interpretive role. They helped contextualize interviews, reveal affective and relational cues, and enrich the overall understanding of participant experiences. Due to the presence of personally identifiable information, these materials are not included in the annexes.

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

In addition to traditional qualitative methods, I integrated Natural Language Processing (NLP) as a complementary layer of analysis. I used NLP to support classification and thematic extraction from the 45 interview transcripts, enabling systematic triangulation and reinforcing interpretive rigor. The goal was not to automate meaning-making, but to enhance precision and reproducibility in identifying narrative patterns and thematic variables. This computational layer functioned as a reflexive checkpoint—helping ensure that my interpretations remained grounded in the data. The analysis was conducted in Python using Jupyter Notebooks, with the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) and spaCy libraries. Tasks included tokenization, part-of-speech tagging, named entity recognition, and syntactic parsing. These tools supported both structural and semantic analysis while preserving the discursive texture of participants' language.

Beyond extraction, NLP enabled exploratory tasks such as word co-occurrence mapping, which revealed how key concepts were embedded in relational language. For example, in Chapter 4, I analyzed how participants framed gender through terms like *woman*, *mother*,

care, and *partner*, and how agroecology appeared alongside *biodiversity*, *memory*, and *resilience*. These insights refined the thematic architecture of the dissertation and supported coherence between interpretive and data-driven approaches.

2.4 Methodology by Chapter

This dissertation is structured around three core analytical chapters, each applying a specific methodological tool aligned with its thematic focus. While the overall design is qualitative and case-based, the chapters function semi-independently and reflect the project's interdisciplinary nature. All chapters draw from the shared dataset described earlier, and each method—such as EPI and AFAT—is explained in more detail within its chapter. Though distinct, the chapters build on one another, offering a cumulative analysis of how food systems, gender, and peacebuilding intersect in practice.

- Chapter 3 uses the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) methodology for its ability to surface community-defined understandings of peace in post-conflict settings. The chapter lays the groundwork for the dissertation's broader discussion by exploring how food systems, sustainable development, and peace are interrelated in the case of ASOCOMAN. It uses EPI to identify the concrete elements that community members associate with everyday peace, drawing from interviews to construct a dialogue among participants and triangulate connections between agroecology, food security and health, and economic stability.
- Chapter 4 examines the role of rural women in agroecology, climate adaptation, and social cohesion. It draws on interviews with ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers, as well as ethnographic fieldnotes. The Agroecology Finance Assessment Tool (AFAT) is used to organize findings into four dimensions—social values and diets, economic diversification, ecological connectivity, and

biodiversity—offering a practical lens to analyze women’s leadership and care work as foundations of sustainable peace in everyday life.

- Chapter 5 explores how gastronomy can foster recognition and civic trust in contexts of post-conflict reconstruction, through rural–urban alliances and pathways to markets for agroecological products. Drawing on the cumulative findings of the previous chapters, this chapter examines how relationships between producers, chefs, and diners—mediated through food—help revitalize key relational dimensions of peacebuilding. It focuses on recognition and civic trust as intermediate goals of transitional justice, analyzing how culinary exchange, storytelling, and collaboration contribute to repairing social bonds.

2.5 Limitations

This study is shaped by three main limitations. First, its context-specific focus limits the generalizability of its findings beyond Montes de María. While the case offers valuable depth, broader applicability will require future comparative research. Second, although grounded in participatory principles, time and funding constraints curtailed longer-term engagement, follow-up conversations, and collaborative analysis with participants. As a result, the findings were not formally co-validated—an omission I acknowledge as a practical constraint rather than a methodological failure. Third, while the dissertation offers grounded insights drawn from triangulated data—including interviews, participatory tools, and computational analysis—its conclusions remain exploratory in nature and would benefit from further testing in other regions or contexts.

Participants’ lived experiences directly shaped the analytical direction of the study—for example, the centrality of agroecology emerged from their reflections, not from a pre-defined framework. However, it was not feasible to involve participants in interpreting or

writing the results. I remain committed to sharing the findings with ASOCOMAN and other participants, with the aim of building future collaboration and more co-produced research and knowledge translation products. Although the study's scope is limited, this local grounding is also a key strength. It offers relational, place-based insights into how rural actors are reimagining food systems and contributing to everyday peace. The project is not intended as a blueprint, but as a foundation for further research and dialogue—rooted in trust, reciprocity, and creative forms of peacebuilding.

2.6 Ethics Approval and Community Engagement

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical protocols approved by Western University's Research Ethics Board¹¹ and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. These approvals included informed consent, data protection, anonymity provisions, and country clearance. From the outset, the study prioritized long-term trust and reciprocity over extractive or transactional research practices.

In line with these commitments, I am making research findings accessible to participants for their own learning and advocacy. However, the full set of interview transcripts cannot be publicly shared, as they contain personally identifiable information. The use of indirect quotations—unattributed to specific individuals—was approved by both ethics boards and consented to by participants, who were also informed that some excerpts might be recognizable to others within their networks.

¹¹ See Appendix E for the WREM Letter of Approval regarding to the first data collection stage, Appendix F for the WREM Letter of Approval – Extension concerning the extension for the second stage of data collection, and Appendix G for the WREM Letter of Study Closure confirming the termination of data collection per the board's regulations.

ASOCOMAN members expressed a strong desire to be acknowledged by name. While I have honored this wish in spirit, I chose not to include identifiable information in the dissertation to remain consistent with the guidelines approved by the ethics boards. Those interested in learning more about ASOCOMAN's work are encouraged to consult their publicly available social media platforms, where they actively share updates on ongoing projects.

Looking forward, I remain committed to continued engagement with ASOCOMAN and participating chefs. I hope this research will contribute to future collaborative initiatives, strengthening the rural–urban alliances and trust-based relationships at the heart of the project.

Chapter 3

3 From Offices to Kitchens: Rethinking Peacebuilding Through Transitional Justice and Everyday Acts

Understanding the conceptual frameworks of transitional justice and peacebuilding is essential for analyzing how societies respond to the legacies of violence and conflict. These fields have developed multiple schools of thought, shaped by specific historical moments and cultural contexts, which influence how we interpret the past, navigate the present, and envision more just futures. While a universal consensus on these concepts may be neither attainable nor necessary, engaging critically with their theoretical debates and practical applications is fundamental to building a more nuanced and context-sensitive analysis.

This literature review examines how transitional justice and peacebuilding have been theorized and practiced, identifying conceptual and operational gaps that leave out everyday actions and nontraditional actors. By situating *everyday peacebuilding* within these larger frameworks, this chapter argues that grassroots practices—often invisible to formal mechanisms—can serve as meaningful sites of resistance, relational repair, and civic agency. These everyday actions not only complement transitional and peacebuilding processes but can also challenge and expand their scope by rooting transformation in the textures of daily life.

The chapter unfolds across five sections, each deepening the understanding of how peace is built, imagined, and enacted. It begins with a discussion of transitional justice, tracing its evolution from a legalistic and institutionally driven model to one that increasingly attends to local realities, historical depth, and structural inequality. It then moves into the field of peacebuilding, with a particular focus on the liberal peacebuilding model and its critiques, including calls for more localized, relational, and participatory approaches. The third section explores the concept of peace itself, reflecting on its definitional challenges, contextual variability, and moral significance. This leads into the fourth section, which centers creative and everyday peacebuilding, particularly through the lens of *moral imagination* (Lederach, 2005), to foreground alternative spaces of resistance—such as art, ritual, and memory work—as pathways for relational transformation.

The final section turns to gastronomy and food systems as powerful and undertheorized domains of peacebuilding. Here, I introduce gastronomy not only as a cultural expression but as a relational and political practice that intersects with identity, land, memory, and care. Drawing from the concept of creative peacebuilding developed in this dissertation, this section highlights how food—when situated within broader debates around agroecology, food sovereignty, and environmental justice—can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and transitional processes.

Taken together, these five sections argue for a broader and more inclusive vision of peace—one that does not rely solely on formal institutions but recognizes the transformative potential of everyday actions. Whether through food, art, or daily encounters, ordinary people engage in practices of care, solidarity, and resistance that quietly shape the conditions for peace. This chapter makes the case for expanding the analytical lens to include these creative and relational forms of agency—not as peripheral, but as vital to building peace that is inclusive, just, and sustainable.

3.1 Transitional Justice as a Framework for Peacebuilding

In this section, I present the theoretical framework of transitional justice in order to establish its connection with the broader literature on peacebuilding. I begin by tracing the concept's evolution over the past three decades, analyzing how its definition has shifted over time. I then highlight the key takeaways that will serve as a foundation for the next section. As a crosscutting concept throughout the dissertation, the theoretical frameworks in the following chapters will build upon and refer back to this one.

Defining Transitional Justice

In the aftermath of the Cold War, and in the context of the civil wars, dictatorships, and genocides of the late 20th century, the international community began to reevaluate how mass human rights violations could be addressed and what was required to rebuild peaceful

and stable societies. In 1992, United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the *Agenda for Peace*, which outlined measures and goals to mitigate the risk of conflict recurrence by strengthening national capacities to address shocks and crises. This included various levels of crisis management aimed at laying solid foundations for peace and development (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). In 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 60/147 (van Boven, 2000), commonly known as the Van Boven Principles, which set forth guidelines for the reparation of victims after widespread violations of international humanitarian law.

Following a series of significant developments – such as the creation of the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission and subsequent commissions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and elsewhere; the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda; the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia; and the International Criminal Court - the 2004 UN Secretary-General's Report, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies* (UN General Assembly, 2004) provided a comprehensive definition. The report describes transitional justice as the "full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's efforts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation." Emphasizing the importance of adopting a holistic approach, it ensures attention to various dimensions of justice, including "prosecutions, reparations, truth-seeking, institutional reform, vetting, and dismissals." Each post-conflict society is thus expected to adopt these measures at different scales, according to its specific needs and capacities.

Over the past three decades, the field of transitional justice has evolved, broadening its research focus and strengthening its theoretical framework. Scholars such as Van Zyl (1999) emphasized democratization and concentrated on defining the field through addressing victims' suffering via the promotion of peace, reconciliation, and democracy. Teitel (2003) underscored the necessity of confronting past human rights violations,

highlighting the need for legal systems to adapt to the exceptional conditions of transitional periods. Hayner (2010) presented a comprehensive approach, advocating for trials, truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reforms as mechanisms to address past violations.

De Greiff (2012) further developed the concept, defining transitional justice as a set of complementary judicial and non-judicial measures aimed at redressing the legacies of mass human rights abuses and laying the foundation for stable societies. He proposed two intermediate goals—recognition and civic trust—and two final goals—reconciliation and democracy—as essential outcomes of the process (Greiff, 2009). These objectives will serve as key reference points throughout the dissertation, particularly in Chapter 5, where I explore the intermediate goals in greater depth. More recently, Duthie (2017) introduced a broader interpretation, incorporating social reconstruction as a critical dimension. They examined how states with diverse cultural contexts navigate transitions from conflict and repression to more just societies. The African Union (2019) further expanded the definition by adding the need to address the root causes of violence as a key step towards preventing its recurrence.

Through academic inquiry and real-world applications, the field has reached a consensus around four key pillars of transitional justice: justice, truth, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence (Nagy, 2008; Nesiha, 2012; Skaar et al., 2017). These are essential for confronting the past and fostering a peaceful future. While these four pillars serve as the mainstays of transitional justice, scholars have added nuance and complexity to these pillars by adding recognition, civic trust, reconciliation, democracy, social reconstruction, and addressing root causes as further considerations.

Takeaways from the Evolution of Transitional Justice

As the previous section illustrates, transitional justice has evolved significantly in scope, approach, and conceptual complexity. Initially focused on accountability and legal mechanisms, it has grown to encompass more victim-centered and culturally sensitive approaches, recognizing the need for nuanced and context-specific strategies. There are four key takeaways from the evolution of the field and the transformation of the concept of transitional justice.

First is the recognition of non-linearity inherent in peace and transition processes. Due to their fragility, many countries experience repeated relapses into conflict before attaining long-term stability (Sharp, 2013) – a dynamic that will be further explored in Chapter 3. As a result, there is no universal strategy that guarantees success across all contexts; each post-conflict setting requires a context-specific approach that accounts for its distinct conditions, networks, and needs.

Second is the growing re-evaluation of the hierarchical structure and presumed impartiality of externally led transitional justice processes, particularly in relation to the tension between local and international approaches. Early definitions tended to prioritize legal frameworks as the primary means of delivering justice. However, there has been a notable shift toward incorporating traditional and community-based mechanisms that are more attuned to the cultural and societal contexts of affected regions (Madlingozi, 2010; Mutua, 2015). This evolution reflects a recognition of the importance of local capacities and culturally relevant practices in shaping transitional processes. It also acknowledges that transitions must be context-sensitive and locally adapted, as uniform measures may not function effectively even within the same national territory (Quinn, 2006). Furthermore, this shift has opened space for the broader inclusion of diverse actors—such as civil society, victims’ organizations, and public sector representatives—who contribute meaningfully at various stages of the process.

Third, the evolution of transitional justice has increasingly been shaped by intersectionality and a commitment to inclusivity, drawing from developments in related social fields. Greater attention is now paid to how different groups—particularly women, children, and minorities—experience violence and face unique vulnerabilities before, during, and after conflict (C. Bell & O’Rourke, 2007; Durbach & Chappell, 2014; Ni Aolain et al., 2011). This is especially evident in the case of women, who are disproportionately affected by the weaponization of sexual violence in conflict settings (D. K. Cohen & Nordås, 2014). In response, transitional justice frameworks have sought to integrate these differentiated experiences, not only to prevent the recurrence of violence but also to address the structural conditions that rendered these groups vulnerable in the first place. This includes a growing emphasis on prioritizing reparations and redress for these communities in the aftermath of violence.

Finally, the question of temporal scope has emerged as a critical consideration, prompting important debates about how far back in history transitional justice efforts should extend (Collins, 2010; Miller, 2008). Some scholars have examined the intersections between transitional justice and decolonization, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial legacies on stability and peace in many post-colonial contexts (Miller, 2021). While externally driven transitional justice mechanisms—often shaped by Western legal and normative frameworks—have played a key role in responding to immediate crises and preventing further escalation, they have frequently fallen short in addressing deeper, structural causes of conflict. These approaches tend to overlook historical injustices, such as land dispossession, institutionalized inequality, and continued economic dependence, which remain central to the lived realities of many communities in the Global South. Therefore, a more transformative and historically grounded approach can help prioritize local autonomy, address challenges rooted in power asymmetries, and support transitions that are not only reactive but also generative of long-term structural change.

In sum, over the past three decades, the field of transitional justice has developed a wide array of mechanisms, approaches, and objectives aimed at supporting war-torn societies in improving social conditions and advancing human rights despite enduring legacies of violence and repression. While there is no definitive formula for success, the field has evolved into a flexible and multidimensional framework capable of responding to the complexities of conflict-affected contexts.

Nevertheless, key limitations remain—particularly the uneven availability of political will, financial resources, and strategic partnerships necessary to avoid stagnation and prevent a return to violence. Building a transition from war to peace continues to be a deeply multifaceted challenge, requiring the engagement of diverse societal actors and grounded in the construction of shared, long-term goals. Transitional justice unfolds across interrelated political, social, and economic spheres, reflecting its inherently cross-sectoral nature.

As a field, it increasingly embraces change, collaboration, and innovation—yet it cannot meet its goals in isolation. Achieving justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace demands complementary efforts, including those rooted in peacebuilding. These efforts—whether formal or informal, top-down or grassroots—play a critical role at every stage of the process, expanding the possibilities for meaningful and lasting transformation.

3.2 An Overview of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a central component in the transition from war to peace, playing a critical role in the reconstruction of societies and in complementing transitional justice efforts. In this section, I present the theoretical framework of liberal peacebuilding, tracing its evolution from a predominantly top-down, institutional approach to one that is increasingly

inclusive and engaged with other sectors. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the need for more localized and context-sensitive strategies to achieve sustainable peace.

The discussion then turns to the concept of moral imagination, which invites contributions from diverse disciplines to expand the scope of peace efforts. Moral imagination also underpins creative peacebuilding, as an approach to peacebuilding that emphasizes the potential of arts, literature, gastronomy, and other cultural fields to inspire and innovate within peace processes. This opens the path toward everyday peacebuilding, which highlights the agency of ordinary people in their daily lives. By centering grassroots initiatives and relational practices, everyday peacebuilding reveals how small, cumulative actions can contribute to broader societal transformation.

The Evolution of Liberal Peacebuilding

The traditional understanding of peace, and therefore peacebuilding, within the international community is that of suspending violence between warring parties (Aron, 1985). However, this understanding has shifted significantly over the past three decades. Initially conceptualized through a linear, cause-effect lens, peacebuilding is now understood as a more multi-level and process-driven framework, particularly after notable critiques and failures in post-conflict interventions, such as in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Rwanda (Chandler, 2010; Richmond, 2006). This shift also aligns with debates around the international *Responsibility to Protect* (Evans & Sahnoun, 2002).

In the 1990s, liberal peace theory dominated both academic and practical approaches to peacebuilding, promoting state-building through democracy and economic growth as paths to sustainable peace (Paffenholz, 2021). This theory addressed the structural causes of conflict (Nakagawa, 2018), intending to move from a peace agreement through a transitional period to long-term stability under liberal democratic values, human rights, and

market economies (2005). Proponents like Paris (1997) and Caplan (2004) argued that international interventions were essential to establish institutions that could ensure rule of law, security, justice, and economic stability in post-conflict societies.

However, critiques of liberal peace theory highlight two primary deficiencies: (1) the reliance on a cause-effect logic that often fails to capture the complexities of real-world peacebuilding, and (2) the imposition of Western political and economic models on diverse societies without accounting for historical and socio-cultural contexts. The linearity assumed in this approach is more the exception than the rule (Aboueldahab, 2021; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018), as evidenced by the failures and relapses observed in various peace agreements¹².

Furthermore, liberal peace theory has been widely critiqued for overlooking the enduring impact of colonial legacies. Colonialism reconfigured precolonial socio-political systems, embedding structural inequalities and social divisions that continue to shape—and often obstruct—peacebuilding efforts (Nakagawa, 2018, p. 255). When Western models of peacebuilding are transplanted into postcolonial contexts without sufficient adaptation, they often reinforce existing power imbalances and fail to address the socio-political complexities rooted in histories of dispossession, forced assimilation, and state violence (Dallmayr, 1996). In such contexts, the marginalization of diverse ethnic and cultural groups from formal political processes remains a persistent challenge. Recognizing the role of traditional leaders, customary institutions, and community structures becomes essential for navigating these layered realities (Habermas, 1995; Rawls, 1993).

¹² University of Edinburgh Pa-X Analytics <https://pax.peaceagreements.org/agreements/search/> is a database containing 2055 peace agreements in more than 150 peace processes between 1990 and 2024. The tool allows to navigate the complexity and non-linearity of peace processes and co-existing transitional phases.

By the early 2000s, scholars began to push back against rigid, top-down approaches to liberal peacebuilding. Authors such as Richmond (2011) and Mac Ginty (2011) emphasized the importance of local agency, cultural relevance, and everyday practices, arguing that effective peacebuilding requires flexible, adaptive frameworks rather than one-size-fits-all models – similarly to transitional justice. They underscored that peace processes must involve the continuous negotiation and re-negotiation of the social and political contract—paying close attention to how intersecting factors such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity shape both conflict and its resolution.

In contrast to conventional liberal peacebuilding theorists, Lederach (Lederach, 1997), proposed a more dynamic and relational understanding of peacebuilding, grounded in long-term engagement and transformation. His approach centers on addressing the personal, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict by fostering relationships rooted in empathy, dignity, and local knowledge. Rather than imposing external solutions, this perspective foregrounds the lived experiences of communities and the importance of building trust and resilience from within. Since then, peacebuilding has increasingly come to be seen as a complex, non-linear, and evolving process—one that demands creativity, humility, and meaningful collaboration among a broad range of actors.

Creative Peacebuilding and Moral Imagination

Recent reinterpretations of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2011; Paffenholz, 2021) have expanded this more nuanced understanding even further by introducing creative and inclusive approaches at various stages of conflict. These approaches recognize that peace is not a linear path but a process filled with negotiations, resistance, and opportunities for transformation (Zartman, 1985). Comprehensive peacebuilding strategies now call for interdisciplinary collaboration, innovation, and a deep engagement with local actors to ensure that peace processes are sustainable and responsive to the unique needs of each society. These comprehensive strategies recognize how smaller political units such as

family and community undertake everyday acts that become sites of resistance and contributing factors to national reconciliation processes or transitions from war to peace.

Comprehensive peacebuilding strategies increasingly incorporate two interrelated elements: creativity and moral imagination. Creativity can be understood as any act, idea, or product that introduces or reconfigures a domain in meaningful ways (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28). It is often defined as the capacity to generate work that is both novel and contextually appropriate, marked by an adaptive ability to overcome constraints (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Sternberg & Lubart, 1998). In this dissertation, creativity is not limited to the artistic realm—it also refers to the potential of unconventional pairings, such as linking gastronomy to peacebuilding, to open new avenues for dialogue, reflection, and repair. Creativity is thus positioned as a generative force in peacebuilding, one that enables actors to engage with complex, often sensitive issues through approaches that connect, communicate, and resonate.

In *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Lederach (Lederach, 2005) offers a powerful conceptual bridge between creativity and peace work. He outlines four essential capacities—relationships, paradoxical curiosity, creativity, and risk—that constitute the moral imagination. These enable individuals and communities to transcend cycles of violence by cultivating “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” (Lederach, 2005, p. 29). This orientation not only affirms possibility, but also extends an inclusive invitation: peacebuilding is not the domain of experts alone, but a collaborative endeavor shaped by diverse contributions from every corner of society.

In this spirit, I propose the notion of creative peacebuilding as an imaginative and experimental approach to peace that draws from underexplored or unexpected fields—such as gastronomy, fashion, literature, or agriculture. While creativity has been acknowledged

in peacebuilding literature, especially in the arts and education, this dissertation extends the concept into new domains, positioning it as a framework that values the everyday, horizontal contributions of ordinary people. Creative peacebuilding, as developed here, is grounded in the relational ethos of moral imagination and emphasizes small, cumulative acts, rooted in lived experience and oriented toward long-term transformation. By connecting creativity and moral imagination, this framework opens space for inclusive, context-sensitive, and sustainable approaches to peace.

Taken together, creativity and moral imagination open space for rethinking how peace can be imagined, practiced, and sustained across diverse contexts. They invite us to look beyond conventional institutional frameworks and recognize how peace emerges from the margins—from places and practices not traditionally associated with peacebuilding. This orientation naturally leads to the notion of *everyday peacebuilding*, where ordinary people, through small acts and daily negotiations, contribute to building peace in ways that are quiet but deeply transformative. The next section explores this perspective in more detail.

3.3 Peace and Everyday Peacebuilding

This section deepens the exploration of peace—its meanings, motivations, and feasibility as a societal goal in contexts affected by conflict. As Hannah Arendt reflects in *On Violence*, “the end of war is peace or victory; but to the question ‘What is the end of peace?’ there is no answer. Peace is an absolute, an end in itself” (Arendt, 1970, p. 41). While this may appear self-evident, in practice, peace is far more elusive and multifaceted. One often overlooked dimension of peace is the role played by ordinary people in their daily lives. Everyday actions—whether through care, cooperation, resistance, or memory—can make vital contributions to the construction of sustainable peace. Recognizing these acts not as peripheral, but as central to post-conflict transitions, allows for a more expansive understanding of how peace is built from the ground up.

Everyday peacebuilding is not simply a complement to formal, top-down interventions; it is also an expression of agency and self-determination for those who have endured violence. This approach highlights the power of daily practices to foster long-term stability and shape alternative spaces of resistance and renewal beyond institutional frameworks. To develop this argument, I begin by unpacking key conceptualizations of peace and how these have informed both peacebuilding and transitional justice efforts. I then turn to the notion of *everyday peacebuilding* (Mac Ginty, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2021) which enhances the effectiveness of post-conflict processes by recognizing the cumulative, relational actions that help achieve both the intermediate and final goals of transitional justice, moving societies incrementally toward sustainable peace.

Understanding Peace and its Nuances

The concept of peace is often discussed in relation to violence and conflict. In peace studies, a common approach is to distinguish between negative peace and positive peace. Johan Galtung's (1969) *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* remains one of the most frequently cited works in the discipline, offering a foundational framework to explore peace and violence and their implications for society and individuals. Galtung outlines three types of violence—direct, structural, and cultural (p. 173). He links negative peace with the absence of direct violence and positive peace with eliminating structural violence. For some, this is vague because the concepts are mainly defined by the absence of, instead of giving it a comprehensive meaning.

Many scholars have dedicated much of their work to understanding peace, beginning by examining war or violence (Aron, 1985; Bobbio, 1992; Galtung, 1969; Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Ruiz, 1996). The debate between war and peace, or violence and peace, has become central to discussions of positive and negative peace, which remain the two most prominent approaches to understanding the concept (Aggestam, 2014; Diehl, 2016; Essien Umoh & Godwin Udoh, 2011; Klein et al., 2008). Peace has been a subject of interest for

philosophers and scholars across several periods and disciplines. To better comprehend peace and its evolution over time, it is essential to consider scholars who focus on peace as a concept in its own right rather than simply as the opposite of violence, including those who emphasize the nuances in diverse contexts (Davenport et al., 2018; Gleditsch et al., 2014; Mac Ginty, 2008; Wallensteen, 2015)

As a result of the passive definitions for peace, numerous scholarly works have sought to enrich the concept of positive peace by linking it to ideas such as coexistence, social justice, harmony and reconciliation, among others (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Boulding & Goodman, 2001; Fraser, 2005; Tutu, 1999) —all of which are particularly relevant in transitional contexts. However, when peace is accompanied by qualifiers such as coexistence or social justice, these terms risk becoming synonymous with peace itself, further complicating efforts to achieve a shared understanding and consensus on its meaning. These concepts often carry distinct meanings, traditions and functions. Hence, when used to define peace, they can lead to circular definitions that, rather than describing it as the absence of violence, frame it through the [pre]conditions for peace to emerge – that is still not a definition for peace-. This strengthens the belief that peace is an unattainable utopia and adds to the challenges of pursuing it in real-life efforts.

Three main takeaways emerge from the literature. First, peace can take multiple forms. As far back as the Roman Empire, Saint Augustine (1998) distinguished between types of peace, such as domestic, earthly, peace with God, and political peace—the latter being central to modern discussions. Similarly, Thomas Aquinas (1959) referred to "the peace from man to man"—the kind of peace relevant to transitional justice and contemporary peace processes.

Second, peace is deeply contextual. It not only takes on different meanings in various cultural contexts but also evolves within a given culture over time (Dietrich, 2012; Van

Tongeren, 2000). The geographical element further complicates this, as theories developed in academic settings often differ from the lived experiences of those in war-torn societies (J. Giraldo, 2015, p. 39). Scholars from the Global North and Global South may approach the concept of peace with different priorities and perspectives, making it challenging to adopt a universal definition capable of encapsulating and staying true to peoples' needs and beliefs.

Third, moral and practical considerations shape our understanding of peace. Peace is often seen as a prerequisite for justice and freedom, regardless of what those concepts may entail (J. Giraldo, 2015, p. 46). More fundamentally, life itself is the condition upon which justice and freedom depend. Without life, any notion of justice loses its meaning. War, by contrast, is defined by its denial of life and its potential to kill on a massive scale. Therefore, peace must exclude war if the goal is to protect life and uphold its intrinsic value (Benjamin, 1991). Agnes Heller argues that freedom and equal opportunities are the two universal principles of justice, and she affirms that peace is the highest political good (Heller, 1987). Therefore, achieving a consensus on what peace means in a positive sense is essential for determining broad societal outcomes goals.

A comprehensive study by Jarstad et al. (2019) classifies how peace has been defined in peace studies over the last five decades. They identify three primary ways to understand peace. First is *situational peace* (Davenport et al., 2018; Maddison & Diprose, 2018; Mehler, 2009), a condition in a given locality where people experience security and institutions and norms manage conflicts without resorting to violence. People participate on equal and just terms in decision-making, and the approach is frequently linked to security and political order. The second is *relational peace* (Goertz et al., 2016; Kriesberg, 2007; Söderström et al., 2021), which focuses on the quality of relationships. It is characterized by non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation. Here, peace involves behavioral interactions, mutual recognition, and trust between actors who view their relationship as legitimate and trustful. This approach emphasizes the interaction between

individual attitudes, group identities, and larger societal structures. Finally, *ideational peace* (Autesserre, 2010; Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Klem, 2018) takes a cultural approach, studying peace through the lens of cultural biases. This perspective explores how ideas about peace shape policy, build institutions, and inform political decisions. Drawing from anthropology and psychology, it seeks to understand how everyday actions and strategies are motivated by particular ideas of peace.

Jarstad and colleagues argue that situational, relational, and ideational approaches to peace offer a more comprehensive analytical framework—particularly in transitional and post-conflict contexts—by acknowledging the layered and evolving nature of peace itself. Their work, alongside broader debates in the literature, underscores that *stability* is a crucial dimension of sustainable peace. Understanding how societies adapt and negotiate change during transitional periods is therefore essential. This adaptability is closely tied to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm that gained traction in the late 20th century and the subsequent critiques that called for more context-sensitive, inclusive approaches.

In summary, peace—while described by Arendt as an end in itself—is also a dynamic, situated process shaped by historical, geographical, and cultural forces. Its meaning and practice vary across contexts and scales, from the local to the national and regional. Given this complexity, the pursuit of a single, universal definition of peace is both analytically limiting and conceptually problematic. Yet, for the purposes of this dissertation—and in recognition of the need for some definitional clarity—I adopt Giraldo’s (2015) concept of *minimum peace*, which places life at the center: life as a fundamental good that must be protected, preserved, and lived with dignity and fullness. This minimalist definition offers a baseline that can be enriched and redefined by the contextual realities, needs, and aspirations of those directly engaged in peace and transitional processes.

Everyday Peacebuilding. Why Do Everyday Actions Count?

As explored in the previous section, the meaning of peace varies across cultures, histories, and communities. Despite its many forms, peace ultimately centers on improving people's lives and upholding human dignity. In light of the complexities outlined in the transitional justice and peacebuilding frameworks, it becomes clear that imposing a singular definition of peace on any group is both reductive and potentially harmful—particularly when the goal is to foster reconciliation and democracy in the wake of mass human rights violations. Inclusive processes that value diverse voices and lived experiences are therefore essential to achieving meaningful and lasting peace.

This recognition calls for an approach that is both theoretically grounded and flexible in practice. In the following pages, I explore the concept of *everyday peacebuilding* (Mac Ginty, 2021), which sheds light on how ordinary people navigate the challenges of conflict, violence, and their aftermath through daily acts of care, negotiation, and resistance. These everyday practices, though often overlooked, can scale from the personal to the societal, offering vital contributions to broader peacebuilding processes and becoming sites of resilience and transformation.

Everyday peacebuilding refers to a series of actions and modes of thinking rooted in emotional intelligence that operate at both intra- and inter-group levels, with the potential to scale through the interconnectedness of ordinary people's experiences. Ordinary people are everyday citizens who are not directly engaged in peace-building, or peace-making, but are those who make up public opinion and interact in public spaces in daily life. Three primary actions summarize this approach: tactical agency, socially learned behavior, and reasoning (Mac Ginty, 2021). The conceptual foundations of everyday peacebuilding draw from sociology and anthropology, exploring under-studied sites of peacebuilding and resistance, such as the individual, family, and relationships among neighbors and colleagues, as well as other levels below civil society organizations and formal pro-peace

collectives. Mac Ginty's proposal emerges from critiques of the liberal peacebuilding framework to challenge Western-centric visions and male-dominated perspectives of reality. It represents the maturation of the concept previously introduced by the author in *Hybrid Peace* (Mac Ginty, 2011), where he examined the coexistence of top-down and bottom-up practices.

Scholarly work on the everyday can be categorized into three main topics: informal practices, cultural dynamics, and social norms. The first area delves into how ordinary people navigate the power structures surrounding them, including strategies for maintaining cohesion, resisting domination, and disrupting conflict, which may be linked to tactics of nonviolent disobedience (Holloway & Thomas-Pellicer, 2003; Nilsson & Svensson, 2023; G. Sharp, 1973). This topic investigates how subtle forms of resistance in everyday life can provide a sense of autonomy and agency (Scott, 1985) and how such tactics serve as adaptations to resist oppression through creative in-group actions meaningful to community members (de Certeau, 2005). Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977) introduced the concept of "habitus" to describe the ingrained habits and dispositions individuals develop within social contexts. He explains how repetitive, everyday actions are shaped by individual agency and social conditions, contributing to our understanding of how peace can be constructed through the repetition and adoption of actions that form routine cultural practices.

Similarly, rituals can serve as mechanisms for social change, shaping socially accepted behavior; these informal practices can foster solidarity even in the absence of formal structures (Turner et al., 1995). The subtle ways individuals and groups cope with violence and uncertainty often manifest in everyday interactions, informing how the conditions for conflict or peace are cultivated (Nordstrom, 2004). In summary, social practices provide a foundation for everyday peace, analyzing how the sum of ordinary actions – by ordinary people- shapes social processes of resistance, coping, resilience, and survival in conflict and peacebuilding scenarios.

The second topic, cultural dynamics, examines how cultural practices, identity construction, and storytelling shape everyday life. This area focuses on understanding how individuals and their groups perceive themselves, how they narrate their stories, and how these elements impact their identities. Geertz (2008) argues that comprehending culture based on context is essential to achieving a “thick description” that interprets the motives and rationale behind social actions. Cultural narratives and identities are influenced by the interactions and impact of power structures; thus, understanding cultural dimensions necessitates a focus on local narratives, which play a crucial role in grasping the root causes of conflict (Said, 1994), attitudes toward transitional mechanisms, and the ultimate goals of reconciliation and democracy, particularly in post-colonial contexts. For example, Bhabha (2012) discusses cultural hybridity and the fluidity of identity in post-colonial societies as key to unpacking the interplay of multiple cultural narratives and practices, particularly relevant in multicultural societies undergoing transitional justice processes involving various ethnic groups with different belief and organization systems.

Hence, narrative and storytelling emerge as transformative actions that shape relationships, foster empathy and understanding, and preserve a group’s history (Jackson, 2002), culture and, thus, behavior. In transitional contexts, storytelling can serve as a powerful tool for recognition, reconciliation, and memory processes (Bryson, 2016) to heal, repair and resist, which can lead to recognition and civic trust – transitional justice’s intermediate goals. How we tell our stories contributes not only to a sense of agency but also to feelings of respect, acknowledgement, and pride. Ricoeur (1984) analyzes how narratives structure the human experience and highlights the significance of storytelling in shaping identity and social realities. This dynamic can influence not only the individual experience of peace and conflict but also the outcomes of non-recurrence strategies. In synthesis, how we narrate our story is tightly linked to how we perceive ourselves and would like to be perceived by others.

Lastly, examining social norms addresses the social structures and standards that maintain social order and stability. These constructs can either regulate conflict and promote cohesion or reinforce vulnerabilities and violence. How individuals present themselves in everyday life matters; unspoken rules and norms uphold the social order, becoming customary routines, social practices, and behaviors (Goffman, 2023) towards fellow citizens. Understanding social taboos and informal norms is crucial for regulating behavior and guiding it toward contributions to peace and stability (Douglas, 2002). Through his structuration theory, Giddens (2005) explains how the interplay of individual agency and social structures shapes social practices, central to everyday peace. Lefebvre (2014) contends that everyday life is the arena in which relations and social structures are produced and challenged, framing the potential to scale up everyday actions and their impact on broader levels.

Ultimately, power operates through everyday actions, practices, and routines, using institutions to regulate individual behaviors (Foucault, 2008). Lastly, feminist sociology has examined how these power dynamics affect marginalized groups, particularly in terms of gender, as performed in everyday life (Butler, 2015; D. E. Smith, 1993) where cultural violence is rooted. These concepts and theories shape the everyday peacebuilding proposal, providing it with elements to uphold or subvert existing power structures. Hence, if the goal is to overcome violent cycles and build more peaceful societies, understanding and impacting the everyday level is pivotal for any successful structural and cultural change to ensure sustainability over time. For example, strengthening societal capacities to address conflicts non-violently and have a healthy relationship with fellow citizens based on respect, recognition and trust is a good place to start.

In summary, everyday peace is grounded in the interconnectedness of daily life with the informal practices, social norms, and cultural dynamics that individuals draw upon to cope with and respond to conflict. It highlights the agency of ordinary people—those often perceived as having limited influence—who, in reality, constitute the social fabric and

actively shape national narratives from the bottom up. The potential of everyday peacebuilding lies in its capacity to scale through the relational constellations each person inhabits, influencing perceptions, behaviors, and interactions across social, cultural, and institutional boundaries.

This approach reinforces the importance of examining how multiple fields and everyday activities—including those not traditionally associated with peacebuilding—can contribute meaningfully to post-conflict transitions. Ordinary actions, carried out by individuals in their homes, workplaces, and communities, affect how members of different social groups—across class, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation, or profession—perceive one another. Beyond the reach of formal national or international initiatives, the lived experience of peace is not solely measured by the absence of violence, but by whether people feel safe, valued, and able to coexist with others. In this sense, peace is also about perception, trust, and relational security.

Therefore, it is essential to investigate the kinds of everyday actions that organically contribute to peace—not necessarily because they are explicitly intended as peacebuilding interventions, but because they foster interactions across social divides. These actions, rooted in everyday life, can quietly but powerfully enhance civic trust and help reshape the social contract. As the following chapters will show, fields such as gastronomy and agroecology can serve as important entry points for these forms of everyday peacebuilding.

3.4 Opportunities for Creative Peacebuilding

Building on the previous sections on transitional justice, peacebuilding, and the meanings of peace and everyday peace, this section explores how these frameworks can be translated into practice through creative and context-sensitive approaches. Earlier, I discussed sites of resistance and everyday acts that contribute to peacebuilding from the ground up. With

the theoretical foundations now established, it becomes possible to connect these ideas and examine how such everyday actions can serve as fertile ground for peacebuilding processes. In this dissertation, I focus particularly on gastronomy as a site embedded within food systems where these dynamics unfold. However, similar opportunities emerge in other cultural expressions such as the arts, sports, and other forms of cultural expression—each offering potential to build connections and foster dialogue across knowledges, practices, traditions, and disciplines. This is not presented as a singular path, but rather as one among many complementary approaches to reimagining peace from below.

One compelling entry point into everyday peacebuilding is the realm of cultural expression. These practices—whether culinary, artistic, or sporting—do more than reflect peace: they create spaces for what can be called *creative peacebuilding*—an imaginative, grounded, and often informal form of peace work carried out by ordinary people, frequently beyond the reach of formal institutions or structured interventions. Such actions contribute to social repair, coexistence, and trust-building, even when those participating may not frame their efforts in terms of peacebuilding explicitly.

These everyday sites of resistance are embedded in the spaces we already inhabit—as family kitchens, community gatherings, or local cultural celebrations. They do not necessarily require institutional change or sweeping transformation, but rather a deliberate engagement with the relationships we cultivate, the practices we sustain, and the meanings we assign to them. As explored throughout this dissertation, creative peacebuilding can manifest across multiple domains—gastronomy, storytelling, arts, and sports, among many others—each offering additional context-sensitive possibilities for reweaving the social fabric in meaningful and enduring ways.

Gastronomy and Peacebuilding

Gastronomy represents a powerful yet undertheorized site of resistance and transformation within the field of peacebuilding. Although explicit connections between gastronomy and peace remain limited in the academic literature, a growing body of research has begun to explore the role of food in social change and its embeddedness in political, cultural, and historical processes. As this field evolves, it opens promising avenues for rethinking how everyday practices—such as cooking, eating, and sharing food—can contribute to peacebuilding and transitional justice. Food, after all, is inherently political (Allen, 2010; McMichael & Schneider, 2011). It has been weaponized during conflicts (Lander & Richards, 2019; Messer & Uvin, 1996), and food security remains a critical determinant of health, dignity and social stability (Leroy et al., 2015; Manikas et al., 2023; Poudel & Gopinath, 2021).

At the same time, the meaning of *gastronomy* has expanded—from being associated with elite culinary traditions to encompassing broader understandings of food systems that stretch from farm to table and include cultural, ecological, and economic dimensions (Liebig et al., 2022). This shift allows for a more comprehensive view of how food intersects with both everyday life and systemic transformation. Examining gastronomy as a form of everyday peacebuilding—and as an integral part of food systems—broadens the scope for targeted, context-sensitive interventions aimed at fostering peaceful, equitable, and sustainable societies. Building on this foundation, the remainder of this section outlines the interconnections between gastronomy and agroecology within food systems and situates their relevance in relation to everyday peacebuilding—connections that will be further developed in the empirical chapters that follow.

Gastronomy and Everyday Peace

Gastronomy is often defined as “the science that studies the connection between food, tradition, and culture of a certain region or area. It looks at different ways on how food is

prepared and how cooking styles differ from region to region” (Naumov & Costandachi, 2021). More broadly, gastronomy examines the value and meaning of food within cultural practices and traditions. In this sense, it links time, culture, and place in a context-sensitive manner. It also engages with universally shared activities—gathering food, cooking, and eating—which are necessary for survival and shared across race, gender, age, and belief systems. Precisely because of its ubiquity and multisensory nature, gastronomy offers a powerful entry point to exchange, acknowledge, recognize, and [re]build social capital. Scholars have explored the role of gastronomy in relation to identity, gender, heritage, and memory (Arnott, 2011; Crowther, 2018; Fieldhouse, 2013), yet its potential as a peacebuilding mechanism remains underexplored—despite some emerging research linking food to memory, displacement, and reconciliation (Duque et al., 2021; Duran Fonseca et al., 2019; Pratley, 2025).

Food’s symbolic and cultural dimensions are increasingly acknowledged in critical scholarship. Parasecoli (2022), for example, introduces the concept of *gastronativism* to describe the ideological use of food to affirm or contest ideas of belonging and national identity. Culinary diplomacy, or *gastrodiplomacy*, similarly engages food as a soft power tool to foster multicultural dialogue and cultural understanding, often in high-level or institutional contexts. As Rockower (2014) argues, “you do not win hearts and minds through rational information, but rather through indirect emotional connections” (p. 13). While these interventions are often associated with international relations, their underlying logic—that food builds trust through emotion, ritual, and symbolic meaning—applies equally to the everyday.

Gastronomy, in this broader cultural sense, is inherently relational and deeply embedded in daily life. Food-based memories, as Shutek (2017) notes, evoke powerful emotional responses—what she calls *gustatory markers*—linked to holidays, life transitions, and communal gatherings. Even disliked foods carry multisensory cues that reflect personal histories, socialization processes, and cultural identities. Gastronomy, then, is not merely

the preparation or enjoyment of food, but a sensorial and cultural language through which we experience identity, belonging, and memory. It operates simultaneously at intimate and collective levels, reflecting values, belief systems, and relational practices. As a practice embedded in the everyday, gastronomy—particularly through cooking and sharing—exists at the intersection of symbolic expression and political economy. These are key spaces where recognition and civic trust are continuously negotiated. As will be further explored in Chapter 5, these negotiations take place both inwardly, through self-identification, and outwardly, through the recognition of others across difference.

Several emerging concepts help illustrate how ordinary acts such as eating or cooking can become vehicles for resisting structural and cultural violence. *Gastronativism* shows how food traditions—including specific ingredients, dishes, and preparation methods—are tied to religion, migration, globalization, and political belonging (Parasecoli, 2022). Culinary diplomacy likewise positions shared meals as approachable platforms for dialogue and connection across divides (Taher & Elshahed, 2020). While these frameworks have not always been applied directly to peacebuilding, they point to the social, affective, and political relationships fostered around food—relationships that align closely with the tenets of everyday peace.

Food also serves as a vehicle for identity recovery and intergenerational resilience. The preservation of heritage cuisines, especially those tied to Indigenous knowledge and traditions targeted by state violence or cultural erasure, offers a way to reconnect with land, history, and community (Thomé-Ortiz, 2018). These culinary practices can bridge rural and urban spaces, linking displaced populations with their territories of origin. In transitional contexts, gastronomy can also offer economic pathways and cultural affirmation, particularly for youth. In Peru, for example, the national gastronomy movement has encouraged young people to pursue culinary careers, revitalizing interest in local ingredients and food traditions while strengthening national pride (Fan, 2013) and in

Canada, Indigenous gastronomy in Canada serves as means reclaiming and reasserting culture (Levi, 2020).

In recent years, chefs have emerged as unexpected yet influential social actors in the broader landscape of cultural and political transformation. Beyond their growing visibility in media and entertainment, many chefs are engaging deeply with issues of sustainability, food justice, and memory work—highlighting forgotten ingredients, reviving ancestral techniques, and cultivating meaningful relationships with local producers. Their kitchens and restaurants increasingly serve as platforms for inclusive storytelling, cultural recovery, and micro-level reconciliation. Figures such as Gastón Acurio in Peru (EFE, 2019) and Jaime Rodríguez in Colombia (El Tiempo, 2025) exemplify this shift: through culinary innovation, field-based research, and advocacy, they have elevated native species and championed the recognition of *campesinos* and smallholder farmers as stewards of biodiversity and cultural heritage.

In this sense, gastronomy becomes a means of territorial reconfiguration—inviting urban consumers to reconnect with rural landscapes, and offering displaced or marginalized communities a vehicle to express identity, dignity, and continuity. This bridging function reflects the broader aim of peacebuilding: to repair what Lederach (2005) describes as the “web of relationships” frayed by conflict, exclusion, and systemic neglect. These examples show that gastronomy holds peacebuilding potential comparable to other artistic and social mechanisms. As a sensory and symbolic experience, food can foster immediate emotional connections across divides. Rooted in local land and community, it offers both economic opportunity and cultural reparation. At the local level, gastronomy provides livelihoods for vulnerable populations; at the national level, it becomes a space to rediscover territory, build trust across difference, and cultivate shared narratives outside of ideological conflict. In this way, gastronomy quietly but powerfully contributes to the everyday work of peace.

Gastronomy as part of Food Systems.

Having established the relationship between gastronomy and everyday peace, this subsection situates gastronomy within the broader context of food systems and explores why these systems matter for peacebuilding. As peace and development agendas increasingly seek to address the structural and root causes of conflict, food emerges as a vital yet often overlooked entry point. As Pratley (2025) suggests, food carries a dual power—material and social. It is both a condition for survival and a marker of identity, cohesion, and belonging. The material dimension has received considerable attention in conflict literature, particularly in relation to food insecurity and its role in exacerbating violence and social unrest.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food insecurity refers to the limited availability of, and access to, food that meets an individual's nutritional and energy requirements (FAO et al., 2021, p. 190). Crucially, food insecurity is not always a matter of scarcity. As I will explore further in Chapter 3, hunger and malnutrition have occurred in contexts of food abundance due to systemic failures in distribution, access, and entitlement. For instance, Amartya Sen (2000), in his analysis of the Bengal famine of 1943, argues that “the problem was not a lack of food in Bengal, but rather the ability of people to command food through the market” (p. 162). Even in times of high agricultural productivity, food can be exported rather than distributed locally if driven by market incentives. During armed conflict, food insecurity is also exacerbated through crop destruction, attacks on food infrastructure, and military strategies that block humanitarian aid (Koren & Bagozzi, 2017). Moreover, humanitarian food aid itself has been instrumentalized to pursue geopolitical aims or reinforce global capitalist interests (Delgado, 2021; Giles, 2021).

Beyond its material significance, food also wields symbolic and social power. As Pratley (2025) notes, food is instrumentalized in everyday practices to build trust, reinforce

belonging, and create moments of connection across social divides. Acts of food sharing, especially in post-conflict settings, can introduce subtle but meaningful shifts from competition to cooperation, offering pathways for social repair and reconciliation. Feminist peace researchers have also drawn attention to the centrality of food production and preparation—often considered private or domestic spheres—as essential practices in preventing social breakdown and sustaining everyday peace (Vaittinen et al., 2019). Despite their relative absence in mainstream peacebuilding frameworks, these activities merit deeper exploration as key sites of both survival and transformation.

Understanding gastronomy as part of a broader food system reinforces its political, economic, and ecological dimensions. The OECD defines food systems as encompassing all elements and activities involved in the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food—including their economic, social, and environmental effects. These systems are often treated as technical or developmental in nature, but they are in fact deeply political and conflict-sensitive. Food systems connect rural and urban communities, reflect global patterns of inequality and dependence, and frequently reproduce structural injustices related to land access, labor conditions, gender hierarchies, and environmental degradation (M. A. Altieri & Toledo, 2011).

It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of conventional food systems—particularly those resulting from Green Revolution technologies and global trade. In many cases, these models have improved productivity, reduced famine, and enabled economic development, including in post-conflict recovery settings. However, they have also produced considerable harms, such as environmental degradation, loss of agrobiodiversity, dependency on global markets, and the concentration of land and food-related decision-making. These challenges echo the very dynamics that transitional justice seeks to address: structural violence, exclusion, and exploitation.

Food systems are also deeply entangled with the planet's ecological boundaries. The *EAT–Lancet Commission on Food in the Anthropocene* warns that current models of food production are among the most significant drivers of environmental degradation. Agriculture accounts for up to 70% of global freshwater withdrawals, occupies approximately 40% of global land, and is responsible for up to 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions (Willett et al., 2019, p. 8). It also contributes heavily to biodiversity loss, disruption of the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, and land-system change. These ecological impacts threaten to undermine not only food security but also the long-term conditions necessary for sustaining peace and human life in the planet in the long run.

From this perspective, food systems must be understood not only as development challenges but as key sites of climate-sensitive and justice-oriented peacebuilding. The *EAT–Lancet Commission* calls for a “Great Food Transformation” that would reorient global diets, reduce environmental harm, and improve equity and health outcomes by 2050 (Willett et al., 2019). This vision aligns closely with transformative peacebuilding approaches that aim to address both the immediate triggers and the structural drivers of conflict.

However, like all social transformations, rethinking food systems is a long-term, iterative process that requires political will, economic resources, and institutional capacity. There are no perfect measures. The global transition toward more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive systems unfolds within a complex landscape of competing interests, market pressures, and varying capacities across sectors and states. Tensions between economic growth, energy transitions, and environmental imperatives reveal the difficulty of designing solutions that are both effective and feasible—especially without exacerbating existing inequalities or disrupting livelihoods.

These transformations are deeply contextual and must be adapted to each society's ecological, political, and institutional realities. As discussed earlier in relation to everyday peacebuilding, there is no one-size-fits-all model. What proves effective in one region may be unsuitable or insufficient in another, particularly when local governance structures vary widely in strength, legitimacy, and accountability. Within food systems, a range of alternatives have been proposed for advancing this transformation (Aguilar & Paulino, 2025)—including regenerative agriculture, traditional ecological knowledge, and circular bioeconomy models. In this dissertation, I focus specifically on agroecology, as it is the framework that resonates most strongly with the *campesino* participants in my case study. As detailed in the methodology chapter, their experiences, practices, and narratives are grounded in agroecological principles, which they have embraced as both a practical strategy and a political identity.

Agroecology has emerged as one of the most promising frameworks for food systems transformation, particularly in the Global South. Defined as both a scientific approach and a social movement, agroecology integrates ecological principles with traditional knowledge, political autonomy, and community-based innovation. It emphasizes resilience, biodiversity, and local control over resources—values that align with broader goals of justice, sustainability, and recognition in peacebuilding efforts (M. Á. Altieri & Nicholls, 2021). Central to this vision is the concept of food sovereignty, as articulated by La Vía Campesina, which reframes food not merely as a commodity to be secured, but as a political right to be exercised. In contrast to food security—which focuses on ensuring access to sufficient calories—food sovereignty, as defined by FAO, is the right of peoples “to define their own food and agriculture systems, encompassing the right to produce, distribute, and consume food in a way that is culturally appropriate, ecologically sound, and sustainable” (AFSA, 2011, p. 4). It shifts the conversation from feeding populations to enabling communities to produce food on their own terms, with cultural relevance and ecological stewardship.

This distinction is particularly important in post-conflict contexts, where the challenge is not only to meet basic needs but to repair systemic injustices. In places like Latin America—and in Colombia specifically—land, food, and production have long been contested terrains. Food sovereignty becomes especially significant as communities seek to reclaim agency over territory, rebuild autonomy, and challenge extractive models of development that have historically fueled conflict and inequality (Patel, 2012).

Moreover, agroecology offers a pathway for confronting interconnected global challenges. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, those most affected by food insecurity are often also the most vulnerable to climate-related shocks. The climate crisis disproportionately impacts rural and historically marginalized populations, exacerbating pre-existing human rights violations and deepening social cleavages. In this context, agroecology—alongside food sovereignty, gastronomy, and everyday peacebuilding—presents an integrated, context-sensitive approach that not only strengthens food systems, but also contributes to climate adaptation, gender equity, and the reconstruction of relational trust in fractured societies.

These paradigms also align with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Together, they affirm that food systems are not peripheral to peace—they are central to the reconstruction of livelihoods, the repair of social trust, and the pursuit of just, inclusive, and sustainable futures.

In this context, gastronomy offers a compelling entry point into everyday peacebuilding. As an embodied, relational practice, it fosters interconnectedness across social groups and provides a platform for building shared narratives rooted in dignity and care. Unlike formal mechanisms that often involve difficult institutional decisions—such as which crimes to prosecute or which victims to prioritize in reparations—gastronomy invites citizens to

engage in peacebuilding through simple, meaningful exchanges. Cooking, eating, and sharing food become everyday acts of recognition and trust.

If transitional justice begins with moral repair, then gastronomy—frequently dismissed as apolitical or secondary—emerges as an unexpected yet fertile site for such work. Although scholarship explicitly linking food and peace is still emerging, it is a growing field to which this dissertation contributes. Beyond meeting basic needs or serving as a weapon in conflict, food also operates as a form of *soft power*—a cultural and emotional force capable of fostering cooperation and deepening civic trust (Nye, 2004). When practiced at the everyday level by ordinary citizens, gastronomy enables relational encounters that build bridges across difference. It affirms the relevance of small steps and quiet gestures—those seemingly modest actions that, over time, chip away at structural divides and contribute to broader processes of transformation.

3.5 Conclusion

This literature review has examined how everyday actions—including those rooted in non-traditional fields—can serve as vital mechanisms for peacebuilding, extending the boundaries of peace beyond the formal processes typically emphasized in transitional justice and liberal peacebuilding frameworks. By exploring the role of gastronomy and food systems as everyday practices and as sites of resistance, this chapter has demonstrated that contributions to peace can emerge organically from daily life—contributions that are often overlooked due to their informal character and their distance from official decision-making arenas. The interdisciplinary approach adopted here underscores that peacebuilding is not confined to legal or institutional efforts, nor is it exclusively top-down or externally driven. On the contrary, ordinary people can enact peace from the grassroots, and this form of peacebuilding is often deeply effective due to its embeddedness in routines, creativity, and shared cultural experiences.

The theoretical review of transitional justice and peacebuilding provided a foundation for understanding how conventional mechanisms—such as courts and truth commissions—have evolved toward more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches. This exploration led to a critique of one-size-fits-all models and a call for greater attention to cultural diversity, historical injustice, and everyday experience. Grounding peace in life and human dignity emerged as a conceptual thread that supports alternative models such as everyday peacebuilding. These approaches emphasize relational trust, social cohesion, and nonviolent transformation from within the daily practices and spaces of ordinary citizens.

The chapter then examined creative and organic forms of peacebuilding—those that arise not from institutional blueprints but from the expressive, relational power of everyday practices. Gastronomy was explored as a central example of how underrecognized domains can contribute to healing, collective memory, and post-conflict dialogue. This opened space for a broader reflection on cultural practices—often overlooked in peacebuilding scholarship—that build bridges across difference and invite diverse forms of participation. While this dissertation focuses specifically on food systems, future research could further examine how other fields—such as fashion, literature, sports, or wellness—might also contribute to reimagining what peacebuilding entails and how it is practiced.

The sections on gastronomy and peacebuilding offered a focused contribution to this emerging area. It demonstrated how food, as both a material necessity and a symbolic practice, can generate social connection, rebuild trust, and support territorial recognition and sustainability. When situated within broader food systems debates, gastronomy reveals its potential to contribute to agroecological transitions, food sovereignty, and local development. This perspective opens new paths for interdisciplinary research and practical collaboration, inviting peacebuilding actors to engage with chefs, farmers, community kitchens, and other food-based initiatives in ways that resonate with local identities and promote long-term resilience.

The theoretical implications of this review lie in its shift from a purely institutional and legalist understanding of peacebuilding to one that centers everyday, creative, and culturally grounded forms of agency. It does not reject the value of formal mechanisms, but it recognizes that these alone are insufficient for achieving sustainable peace. A balanced mix of top-down, bottom-up, and horizontal approaches is necessary—one that respects institutional frameworks while also embracing the role of community actors, cultural producers, and relational infrastructures.

From a practical perspective, this interdisciplinary analysis aims to support the development of more holistic and inclusive peace interventions capable of reaching broader segments of society. It provides a foundation for engaging with artists, chefs, designers, and other cultural actors whose work can facilitate trust-building, recognition, and healing in conflict-affected communities. These efforts can be tailored to specific cultural and territorial contexts, ensuring that peacebuilding is not only more effective but also more meaningful to the people it intends to serve.

Despite its promise, several challenges and limitations remain. A key limitation is the relative scarcity of academic literature explicitly linking non-traditional fields—such as gastronomy—with peacebuilding. While the field of arts-based peacebuilding is growing, many other disciplines remain underexplored. Moreover, while everyday peace practices have powerful impacts at the local level, scaling these interventions and integrating them into formal peacebuilding agendas remains difficult. Their informal nature, reliance on trust and participation, and resistance to quantification make them less likely to be prioritized in institutional frameworks focused on metrics and policy targets.

In sum, this chapter has made the case for situating everyday peacebuilding within the broader theoretical traditions of transitional justice and peacebuilding. It has identified conceptual blind spots in existing models and argued for a more inclusive and culturally responsive approach to post-conflict transformation. Specifically, it has shown how acts of everyday peacebuilding—particularly when expressed through food as a relational practice—can function as powerful a site of resistance, recognition, and social repair. These contributions extend not only the scope of peacebuilding interventions but also their meaning and legitimacy. The insights developed in this review inform the analytical lens applied in the empirical chapters that follow, where I explore how gastronomy and agroecology are mobilized by communities in Colombia as tools for peacebuilding, recognition, and social transformation.

Ultimately, this literature review challenges the field to rethink peacebuilding as a multifaceted, inclusive process deeply rooted in the ordinary actions of everyday life. It calls on scholars and practitioners alike to bridge the gap between institutional frameworks and grassroots realities, ensuring that peace is built not just *for* the people, but *by* them. Anchored in life and human dignity, everyday peacebuilding emerges not as an accessory to formal mechanisms, but as a necessary and transformative force in the long and layered journey from conflict to peace.

Chapter 4

4 From Seed to Table: Connecting Agroecology and Gastronomy for Everyday Peace

Solving complex problems requires more than good intentions—it demands the alignment of needs, capacities, and available resources. This alignment can either limit or unlock opportunities for transformation. There is another essential factor at play: prioritization. Needs are not static; they span a wide spectrum, and in daily life, we constantly make decisions about which ones to address first. Some needs, like food, water, and sleep, are non-negotiable because they underpin human survival. And while most people make choices based on their perceived priorities, not everyone has the conditions to meet even the most basic ones. Structural barriers—poverty, inequality, violence—continue to prevent many from accessing their most fundamental rights.

In a world marked by overlapping crises and constrained resources, it is strategic to frame responses through approaches that are both ethically grounded and politically relevant. While peace is undoubtedly desirable, expecting communities to engage in peacebuilding without addressing their basic needs is both unrealistic and unsustainable. This chapter situates the discussion within broader global efforts and academic debates—particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the evolving peacebuilding agenda—with the aim of drawing insights that can inform public policy and complement the work of diverse actors striving to achieve these goals.

Building on the literature review presented earlier, this chapter explores how global development and peacebuilding agendas converge in the transformation of food systems—specifically through agroecology and gastronomy. All frameworks in these fields are shaped by competing priorities. Some, like the COVID-19 pandemic, demand urgent responses; others, like climate change, pose intergenerational challenges with slow but relentless consequences. Anchoring this chapter in global agendas is not only strategic—it

also reflects a commitment to situate the peacebuilding alternatives explored in this dissertation within both present and future challenges. Doing so increases the potential for alliance-building, enhances visibility, and strengthens connections with broader public policy debates.

This chapter asks: How can food systems—through the practices of agroecology and gastronomy—contribute to post-conflict reconstruction? Its primary objective is to examine how food systems can create enabling conditions for peacebuilding and development by integrating agroecology, sustainable development, and everyday peace as guiding frameworks. More specifically, it seeks to: (1) analyze how this intersection fosters rural–urban linkages and enhances interconnectedness, and (2) identify the elements that participants associate with everyday peace in their lived experiences to determine moves forward.

Global Agendas: Peacebuilding and Development

After the Second World War, countries began working toward the creation of international standards as part of a global system capable of mediating international affairs without compromising state sovereignty. Following the dissolution of the League of Nations in 1946, the newly established United Nations assumed the responsibility of promoting international peace and security (Goodrich, 1947; Yurtsever & Hmaidan, 2019). The Cold War soon emerged as the most significant challenge to this vision—yet it also underscored the urgent need to strengthen and expand mechanisms for the protection of human rights. This period gave rise to an architecture of peace strategies that included peace enforcement (peacekeeping), peacebuilding, peace-making, and conflict prevention. Over time, these pillars evolved into operational fields with overlapping mandates, and today there is broad consensus—in both literature and practice—that these approaches are interdependent and mutually reinforcing across the continuum from conflict to transition and peace.

In 1992, then-Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the *Agenda for Peace*, defining peacebuilding as “a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). This definition continues to guide United Nations policy, while academic scholarship has expanded its theoretical depth and practical implications (Lekha Sriram, 2007; Lemay-Hébert, 2013; Paris, 2010; Tanabe, 2017). Through extensive case study analysis, peacebuilding is now understood as a context-sensitive process that takes diverse forms depending on local dynamics (Goetze, 2017). It has also become increasingly intertwined with broader global agendas, most notably development—and, more recently, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, articulated through the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Hák & Moldan, 2016).

Global investment in peacebuilding and the broader maintenance of peace represents a significant allocation of financial resources within the international institutional system. Most developed countries contribute through diverse mechanisms, including international trust funds, multilateral development banks, bilateral cooperation agencies, and budget allocations to the United Nations system. Given the variety of funding sources, there is no single, universally agreed figure that captures total global expenditure on peacebuilding. However, the 2021 report by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) estimated that the economic impact of violence and conflict on the global economy in 2019 reached \$14.4 trillion, measured in constant purchasing power parity terms (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2021). The report further suggests that if all countries improved their levels of peacefulness to the top quartile, global savings could amount to \$3.6 trillion over the next decade—roughly 25% of the 2019 figure, or 2.5% annually for ten years (p. 2).

Although the IEP’s measurement of violence encompasses more than armed conflict—including indicators such as crime, incarceration, and internal security—the report does disaggregate expenditures: \$5.9 trillion in military spending, \$51.5 billion allocated to

peacebuilding, and \$14.2 billion to peacekeeping operations (2021: 9). In parallel, the UN Secretary-General proposed a \$3.12 billion system-wide budget for 2022, emphasizing development and human rights in support of the 2030 SDG agenda (United Nations, 2021). These figures reflect the substantial efforts and resources channeled into peacebuilding and development, as well as the increasingly visible convergence between them. This alignment has spurred interdisciplinary research (Mac Ginty & Sanghera, 2012; Miklian & Schouten, 2014; Uvin, 2002) and generated in-field strategies aimed at addressing structural, cultural, and direct violence—particularly in contexts affected by armed conflict—and at tackling poverty through development-oriented interventions.

Peters et al. (2021) revise the relationship between peacebuilding, sustainable peace, and disaster risk, offering insights from the field of disaster risk management. They argue that effective disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding strategies have the potential to foster positive human–environment relationships that, in turn, catalyze sustainable development across disciplines and sectors (Nygard, 2017; Peters, 2021, p. 1173). Importantly, the link between peacebuilding and risk management is not only conceptual but also operational. Peacebuilding strategies frequently incorporate Early Warning Systems designed to assess the risk of systematic human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law. These systems often rely on variables similar to those used in disaster risk assessment—namely, hazard, exposure, vulnerability, and capacity (or the lack thereof) (Peters, 2021: 1175). These shared analytical frameworks help practitioners track contextual evolution, identify risk-generating actors, understand the structural vulnerabilities that heighten exposure, and assess local capacities for response. This underscores the importance of building long-term, endogenous capacities that strengthen agency and reduce dependence on external aid—especially among the most vulnerable populations.

Scholars have emphasized that reducing the risk of conflict relapse requires addressing its root causes (Doucey, 2009) and tackling all forms of violence—structural, cultural, and

direct (Laplante, 2008; McGill, 2017; Sharp, 2019; Tabak, 2011). Vulnerable populations, particularly marginalized and minority communities, are disproportionately affected by indirect violence, which in turn heightens their exposure to direct violence at the hands of armed groups. As Lederach (2005) notes, peace and war unfold at different rhythms, and the rise of climate-related threats is introducing new and compounding layers of risk. This context demands urgent, integrated responses that bridge peacebuilding, sustainability, and development in ways that are both anticipatory and transformative.

As noted in the previous chapter, the EAT–Lancet Commission (Willet et al., 2019) highlights the deep entanglement of food systems with planetary boundaries and their significant contribution to climate change. In this chapter, however, that framing is reinterpreted to emphasize context-specific pathways for transformation rather than calls for wholesale replacement. While I acknowledge the urgency of these ecological threats, I also recognize the importance of complementary perspectives—such as that of Vaclav Smil (2022), who offers a data-driven view that underscores the productive achievements of modern agriculture. Smil reminds us that “numbers are the antidote to wishful thinking,” noting that global food systems currently produce approximately 3,000 calories per person per day—yet a third of this is lost to waste, and access remains highly uneven. Rather than demonizing existing systems, his approach advocates for pragmatic, incremental improvements: reducing food waste, enhancing mechanization in under-resourced contexts, and optimizing distribution¹³.

My dissertation adopts a transitional justice lens, emphasizing that food system transformation—like peacebuilding—is a long-term, cumulative process shaped by context, possibility, and constraint. Rather than offering a critique of the entire global

¹³ Caloric intake alone is not a marker of good health. Consider the double burden of malnutrition, and the relation between empty calories and ultra-processed food with non-communicable diseases, which are one of the leading causes of death globally.

system, I focus on how the lived experiences of participants in Colombia—where agriculture and land have long been at the center of conflict—shed light on local pathways of resilience and repair. In these settings, agroecological and gastronomic initiatives have helped alleviate some of the most harmful effects of dominant food systems, including dispossession, exploitative labor conditions, and the erosion of dignity. This grounded approach affirms both the limitations and the contributions of existing agricultural models, while illustrating how alternative practices can support justice and restore meaning in territories marked by historical dispute. It does so at a local scale, without aiming to prescribe how Colombia's national food system process should unfold.

In line with this growing international recognition, gastronomy is increasingly viewed as a strategic domain for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Far beyond its cultural or aesthetic value, gastronomy operates at the intersection of food systems, local economies, and social equity, intersecting with at least 14 of the 17 SDGs (SEGIB & BCC, 2022). From ending hunger and promoting healthy diets (SDGs 2 and 3), to empowering rural women (SDG 5), fostering decent work and local economies (SDG 8), advancing education for sustainable development (SDG 4), and protecting biodiversity (SDGs 13 and 15), culinary practices offer a powerful vehicle for sustainable transformation. Recognizing gastronomy as a novel and underexplored field of innovation not only expands the scope of food systems thinking but also strengthens international agendas for climate resilience, food justice, and culturally rooted development.

Within this broader discussion, gastronomy emerges as a powerful and underutilized tool for peacebuilding—particularly in communities affected by poverty, inequality, and conflict. Food systems, understood as complex socio-ecological networks, influence equity, health, and environmental sustainability while acting as catalysts for broader social transformation (Andersen et al., 2024; Ruben et al., 2021). Scholars have emphasized that cooking and shared meals—along with the cultural and ritualistic practices surrounding them—are foundational to the transition from nature to culture (Lee, 2023; Lévi-Strauss,

1983; Sutton, 2001) and to the formation of social systems (Douglas, 2017; L. J. Gordon et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2009). Beyond its symbolic dimension, gastronomy is increasingly embedded in food systems literature as a strategic entry point for sustainable development. It intersects with key domains including food security, nutrition, biodiversity, climate adaptation, and social justice (Caron et al., 2018), positioning it as a mechanism for systemic and inclusive social change.

In parallel to these discussions, peacebuilding scholars such as Lederach (2005) and Mac Ginty (2014) have increasingly emphasized locally driven approaches that respond to community needs, constraints, and agency. Central to this shift is the concept of *everyday peace*—the strategies that ordinary people use to navigate and disrupt violence, fostering pro-social relationships in conflict-affected settings (Mac Ginty, 2014). This perspective is inherently multidimensional, context-sensitive, and participatory, positioning communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries (Firchow, 2018). It also reconfigures relationships between communities and external actors—such as NGOs and state institutions pursuing peacebuilding or development agendas—while attending to intra-community dynamics and the lived complexities of local life.

This chapter explores how gastronomy and agroecology, as integral components of food systems, intersect with peacebuilding and development to advance the idea of *minimum peace* (Giraldo, 2015)—a concept that places life, dignity, and collective resilience at the center of social transformation, as introduced in the previous chapter. This approach aims to foster social cohesion, territorial resilience, and the capacity of communities to mitigate vulnerabilities to both structural and direct violence. To do so, I begin by outlining the theoretical framework guiding the analysis, followed by a contextual overview of Colombia and a focused examination of Montes de María, the site of fieldwork. I then introduce the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) methodology and present the analysis of data collected with ASOCOMAN. The final section synthesizes key findings, offers policy recommendations, and reflects on the chapter's limitations and its role within the broader

Peace, Agroecology & Gastronomy project.

In this chapter, I lay the foundation for understanding how agroecology and everyday peace can strengthen rural–urban linkages within food systems and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction. The findings highlight the interdependence between food, health, and economic stability, and point to public policy opportunities that prioritize rural agency, protect food and biological diversity, and ensure access to diverse and nutritious meals. By probing the transformative potential of gastronomy, this work challenges traditional rural–urban binaries and calls for a reimagining of territorial interdependence as fundamental to equitable development and sustainable peacebuilding—rooted in the everyday, and built through acts of connection, care, and recognition.

The following section develops the theoretical framework for this chapter by examining how agroecology can be integrated within the sustainable development and peacebuilding agendas, aiming to connect it to the concept of everyday peace. This integrated perspective helps illuminate how food systems function as a field from which to build coordinated efforts through interdisciplinary analysis, forging new connections that can challenge structural inequalities while nurturing the foundations for long-term peace. Together, these frameworks provide the conceptual lens through which the empirical findings will be interpreted.

4.1 Transforming Food Systems for Peace: From Development to Agroecology

To frame the analysis of the data that follows, this section unpacks the key concepts that guide the chapter’s theoretical orientation. I begin by examining the notion of development, followed by a discussion of agroecology, analyzing both through the lens of their contributions to everyday peace. In doing so, I explore how critiques of capital-centered development models and extractive, dependency-based food systems align with alternative frameworks such as *Buen Vivir* and agroecology. While it is essential to acknowledge that

current food systems—despite their flaws—have enabled the unprecedented feeding of large segments of the global population, this recognition does not preclude a critical examination of the structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and power asymmetries they continue to reproduce.

The aim is to highlight the potential for cross-field knowledge exchange between climate-resilient food systems and everyday peacebuilding, and to explore approaches that seek to foster a more inclusive and sustainable world—one grounded in the reduction of inequality and systemic vulnerability. In this context, I focus specifically on agroecology, the practice most organically adopted by the *campesino*¹⁴ participants in this study. I recognize that other approaches to alternative food systems—such as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) (Altmann, 2020; Erazo Acosta, 2022) and regenerative agriculture (Gammage et al., 2024)—also offer valuable insights. However, for the sake of analytical focus and thematic coherence, agroecology serves as the primary lens through which the chapter engages with questions of social justice, sustainability, and peace.

Development: From Economic Growth to Intrinsic Value

The concept of development has evolved significantly over time, shaped by historical events and shifting global challenges, particularly following the formal establishment of the international community. While its origins can be traced to early colonial theories—where modernization and economic growth were understood through the lenses of capital accumulation, wealth distribution, and modes of production (Marx, 2009; A. Smith, 1776;

¹⁴ In Colombia, different populations are governed by distinct legal and political frameworks. Law 70 of 1993 and Law 21 of 1991 apply specifically to Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities, respectively, including collective land rights and political participation mechanisms. This study focuses on *campesino* communities, who are not recognized as an ethnic group and therefore fall under different legal and institutional conditions.

Weber, 2001)—this section focuses on more recent developments in the past century. My aim is to illustrate how the scope of development has progressively expanded to incorporate an increasing number of social phenomena, while largely preserving the same underlying economic model, one that prioritizes profit maximization and overall growth at the expense of broader social, political, and environmental considerations.

Following the Second World War, the international community shifted its focus to post-war reconstruction, navigating the new global order shaped by shifting alliances and geopolitical restructuring. A pivotal moment in this process was the Bretton Woods Conference (1944) (World Bank, n.d.), where representatives from forty-four countries convened to establish a new international economic and financial system. The conference led to the creation of two major financial institutions: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). These institutions aimed to facilitate global economic recovery and foster long-term growth, reinforcing a development framework aligned with the strategic interests of the dominant world powers.

In parallel, the United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, formalizing the political structures that would guide international cooperation. In essence, Bretton Woods provided the financial infrastructure to support the UN's political objectives. However, the underlying power imbalances within this system soon became evident, as disparities between countries deepened and economic dependencies reinforced hierarchical global relationships. This led to growing dissatisfaction, particularly among developing nations, culminating in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, where Global South countries challenged the economic model that sustained their marginalization. Scholars such as Raúl Prebisch (1950) and Cardoso & Faletto (1979) introduced dependency theory, arguing that neocolonial economic structures perpetuated the underdevelopment of the Global South by maintaining its structural reliance on Northern economies.

A significant shift in the development discourse emerged with Sen (Sen, 1999, 2000)(1999, 2000), who redefined development by prioritizing human well-being over economic growth. Sen argued that development should be assessed by an individual's capabilities and freedoms, rather than GDP or income levels. His work profoundly influenced the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and led to the creation of the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, which incorporated life expectancy, education, and income as indicators of progress. This shift aligns with a vision of intrinsic value to human life and the right to life with dignity.

Human Rights, Environmental Sustainability, and Global Development Goals

In the late 20th century, human rights and political stability were increasingly recognized as integral to development. The genocides in Guatemala (1978–1983), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), and Rwanda (1994)—among others—underscored the necessity of peace and governance as prerequisites for sustainable development. However, rather than interrogating the global economic model that contributed to structural inequalities and violent conflicts, much of the international discourse focused on reforming the credibility and effectiveness of the UN system and the international cooperation North-South agenda.

Simultaneously, environmental sustainability gained prominence as a relevant component of development. The depletion of the ozone layer, caused by the use of ozone-depleting substances, prompted urgent international action, culminating in the Montreal Protocol (1987)—one of the most successful examples of global environmental cooperation (Skjærseth, 1992). This marked a turning point, reinforcing the idea that economic growth alone was insufficient for development and that ecological considerations needed to be prioritized.

Entering the 21st century, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 formalized a new global development agenda. The MDGs consisted of eight targets, focusing primarily on poverty reduction, education, gender equality, and health in developing countries. However, this framework was largely top-down, positioning the Global South as a subject of intervention dictated by global powers. In contrast, the SDGs emerged in a more globalized and interconnected world, where Southern critiques of development were increasingly visible (de Sousa Santos, 2007; Escobar, 2012). Scholars such as Jason Hickel (Hickel, 2018) problematized the unequal power relations in global development, arguing that mainstream approaches failed to address the historical and structural causes of poverty. Decoloniality scholars called for alternative paradigms that embraced Indigenous knowledge, environmental justice, and local sustainability models.

In response to these critiques and demands, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) broadened their scope to encompass 17 universal objectives, addressing urgent global challenges such as climate change, economic justice, infrastructure, peace, and governance. While power asymmetries between the Global North and Global South persist, the emergence of alternative development paradigms signals a gradual shift toward more inclusive and intersectional approaches. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain in advancing social justice, particularly as the prevailing global economic model continues to prioritize the accumulation and concentration of wealth and resources over equitable redistribution.

Despite increasing efforts and growing scholarship on decoloniality, power dynamics between the Global North and South largely persist. Although calls for more equitable and inclusive partnerships have gained some traction, they remain exceptions rather than the norm. Economic dependency, resource scarcity, and long-standing social obligations—

compounded by armed conflict and climate-related crises—continue to hinder countries in the Global South from fully implementing their own agendas or advancing alternative development visions that are genuinely responsive to their contextual needs. Nevertheless, local initiatives have gradually gained strength, particularly within academic and research spaces. Over the past few decades, new proposals and social movements with critical perspectives on development and external intervention have emerged and solidified, offering grounded alternatives from the margins.

For example, *Buen Vivir*, an Andean Indigenous concept, rejects development as an extension of coloniality, prioritizing social and ecological harmony over economic growth (Phenicie, 2021). Unlike mainstream models, it values nature intrinsically, emphasizing collective well-being and relational ethics (Gudynas, 2014). Some Indigenous movements in Latin America have advocated for *Buen Vivir*¹⁵ as a means of self-determination and resistance to neoliberal extractivism, influencing national policies, notably in Ecuador and Bolivia, where constitutions recognize nature as a legal entity with rights (Aparicio Wilhelmi, 2013; Gregor Barié, 2014), similarly to Special Justice Jurisdiction (JEP) acknowledging nature as a victim of the Colombian armed conflict. This framework finds tangible expression in agroecology, which aligns with its principles of sustainability, reciprocity, and community resilience. In a way, agroecology operationalizes *Buen Vivir* by fostering local autonomy over food systems, resisting extractive economies, and strengthening social cohesion through land-based livelihoods and self-determination.

¹⁵ *Buen Vivir* is a concept that explicitly resists and rejects conventional development discourses. Closely linked to agroecological practices, it also functions as a broader socio-political movement. I include it here due to its relevance in Latin American debates on alternatives to development; however, I do not elaborate on it in detail, as it was not referenced by participants in the case study. For this reason, I prioritize the agroecology framework and related scholarship in the analysis.

Agroecology: A Shift from Quantity to Quality

Agroecology is a fundamental concept in understanding the intersection between food systems, gastronomy, and peacebuilding. While its origins date back to the 1950s, agroecology has undergone significant evolution over the past two decades—driven by the urgent need to transform food systems in response to challenges such as hunger, malnutrition, unsustainable agricultural livelihoods, and the ecological consequences of industrialized agriculture (HLPE, 2019; Wezel et al., 2020). These concerns align with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Agenda, further reinforcing agroecology’s relevance in contemporary global discourse.

As an alternative paradigm, agroecology calls for a fundamental shift in our relationship with land, ecosystems, and food systems. It advocates a holistic and harmonious approach that integrates ecological sustainability, social justice, and economic resilience (Altieri & Nicholls, 2005; S. Gliessman, 2016). This section provides an overview of agroecology’s conceptual trajectory, core principles, and role in shaping contemporary food sovereignty, sustainability, and inclusive development debates.

The Evolution and Scientific Foundations of Agroecology

Like many concepts gaining widespread recognition, agroecology has been subject to multiple interpretations by institutions and governments, each adapting its definition to align with specific interests and priorities (Francis et al., 2003; S. Gliessman, 2006, 2018; Wezel et al., 2020). However, this diversity of definitions is not a weakness but rather a testament to agroecology’s adaptability across different socio-ecological contexts. Far from being an exact recipe, it serves as a map for transformation.

At its core, agroecology is an inherently cross-field systems-based approach to food production and consumption. It integrates scientific knowledge with traditional and

Indigenous wisdom, reshaping the approach to agri-food systems—from agricultural production to food distribution, consumption, and waste management, to mention a few (Agroecology Europe, n.d.; Francis et al., 2003; Méndez et al., 2013; Wezel et al., 2020). Agroecology as a scientific field emerged at the intersection of ecology and agriculture, with its early conceptualization outlined by Stephen Gliessman (2000). Since then, the framework has expanded considerably, incorporating new research on climate resilience, biodiversity, and social equity. The 13 principles of agroecology developed by the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE, 2019) reflect this expanded understanding, recognizing the interconnected nature of agriculture, climate adaptation, and social justice.

A defining feature of agroecology is its emphasis on food sovereignty. According to Altieri & Toledo (Altieri & Toledo, 2011) in their study on agroecology in Latin America, food sovereignty refers to people's right to produce, distribute, and consume healthy food within their own territories ecologically and sustainably. This framework prioritizes local autonomy, decentralized food networks, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange, fostering community self-determination and resilience against external dependencies. Agroecology thus serves as both a scientific methodology and a political movement, advocating for greater agency, equity, and sustainability in food systems that lead to greater security and less economic and social vulnerability.

Agroecology as Movement Through the Lens of the International Agenda

The 1980s marked a turning point in the evolution of agroecology, coinciding with major global shifts in economic policy. The implementation of the Washington Consensus—a set of neoliberal economic policies promoting market liberalization, privatization, and structural adjustments—accelerated the commodification of natural resources, knowledge, and means of agricultural production (Mateus Moreno, 2016; Toro Perez, 2006). Concurrently, the negative consequences of the Green Revolution—including soil degradation, environmental contamination, and rural impoverishment—became

increasingly evident (Pinstrup-Andersen, 1993). Meanwhile, during this period, development discourse also began shifting toward human-centered approaches, expanding beyond traditional GDP-centric models to incorporate measures of human well-being and individual freedoms. Agroecology emerged then as a counterpoint to industrialized agriculture, advocating for alternative models of production and consumption based on ecological sustainability, smallholder empowerment, and traditional knowledge systems (Mateus Moreno, 2016). It has also been recognized for its accessibility and adaptability to the needs of marginalized rural populations, including those most affected by conflict and environmental degradation.

By the 1990s, international discussions on sustainable development gained momentum. The Earth Summit (1992) in Rio de Janeiro resulted in the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which emphasized biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use, and equitable benefit-sharing (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011). However, the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and the proliferation of bilateral trade agreements between developing countries and global powers further consolidated the influence of transnational agribusiness corporations in food production and distribution (GRAIN, 2010; Mateus Moreno, 2016). These agreements exacerbated wealth inequality, deepened rural-urban disparities, and reinforced agricultural dependency on multinational corporations, undermining smallholder autonomy and competitiveness in the market.

The 2000s saw renewed global attention on the right to food, with the UN appointing Jean Ziegler as the first Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Major international conferences reinforced the connection between agroecology, hunger eradication, and sustainable development. Particularly in response to the late twentieth-century famines worldwide caused by food scarcity and systemic failures in food accessibility and distribution (Sen, 1999; Tezanos-Vázquez, 2024). This highlights the friction between

human rights and the ongoing development agenda that prioritizes market profits over human well-being and a fairer distribution of resources.

Toward the end of the 2000s, the world was navigating the 2008 financial crisis, which added a shift to international programs. For example, a key milestone includes the 2009 World Summit on Food Security in Rome, where governments committed to eradicating hunger and promoting alternative agricultural practices. By then, it was well-known famines do not necessarily respond to food scarcity but to affordability (Sen, 2000). The FAO's 2014 International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition, followed by regional meetings in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, further explored the agroecology alternative within international policy frameworks (FAO, 2015). By 2015, the United Nations formally adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, tackling diverse elements for development such as hunger, equity, poverty, climate and peace, among many others. The new agenda widened the space for agroecology as a viable approach (De Shutter, 2023; Wezel et al., 2020), increasing the interest and research production in the field.

In 2018, the FAO hosted a second symposium, "Scaling Up Agroecology to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals," marking a significant milestone in the global policy landscape around sustainable food systems. This was followed by the 2019 report *Agroecology and Other Innovative Approaches*, which, as discussed earlier, outlined the 13 guiding principles of agroecology. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020—which exposed the fragility and inequality embedded in globalized food systems—agroecology gained further traction as a promising, resilience-oriented pathway. While it is not the only approach under consideration, agroecology has become one of the most extensively researched and institutionally supported alternatives in recent years, offering a holistic framework that integrates environmental sustainability, social equity, and food sovereignty.

Furthermore, with increasing natural disasters and climate variability around the world (Shivanna, 2022; G. S. Smith et al., 2022) over the last decades, the research agenda on agroecology has become more comprehensive, integrating multi-scalar interactions between ecosystems, farmers, and consumers. One of the most critical is its direct link to climate resilience, positioning it as a potential strategy for a sustainable and inclusive future.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that farms with high genetic diversity exhibit greater ecological stability, enabling farmers to leverage microclimates for enhanced nutritional diversity and dietary resilience (Chang, 1977; Clawson, 1985; Leippert et al., 2020). Moreover, agroecological farms have consistently demonstrated superior recovery rates from natural disasters compared to monoculture systems, reinforcing their role in building adaptive capacity against climate change (M. A. Altieri & Toledo, 2011; Sinclair et al., 2019).

In sum, agroecology has emerged as both a scientific framework and a sociopolitical movement advocating for the holistic, inclusive, and sustainable transformation of food systems. Grounded in ecology, traditional knowledge, and food sovereignty, it offers a transformative approach to addressing climate resilience, biodiversity loss, and rural livelihoods. Its practical outcomes are deeply interconnected with health, development, and peace, as it tackles the structural drivers of conflict and promotes the human rights of *campesino*, Indigenous, and other farming communities by fostering autonomy and self-determination. As such, agroecology functions as both a restorative mechanism and a guarantee of non-repetition, enabling communities to remain in or return to their territories.

Agroecology also constitutes a pathway to everyday peace, offering an alternative development model that addresses historical injustices, reduces vulnerability, and strengthens communal ties. Like transitional justice, which seeks to restore dignity and rebuild trust, agroecology provides a nonviolent, community-led approach to land restoration, self-sufficiency, and reconciliation. By centering human well-being, local agency, and ecological sustainability, it challenges market-oriented paradigms and advances food systems rooted in justice, dignity, and peace.

4.2 Capitalizing Agroecology and Development for Everyday Peace

As discussed earlier, the evolution of development has been shaped by shifting priorities, global crises, and ideological debates. While economic growth dominated post-war development frameworks, subsequent decades saw the integration of human rights, environmental sustainability, and alternative paradigms. The emergence of *Buen Vivir* and other decolonial approaches challenges the orthodox development model, offering new ways of organizing economies, societies, and human-environment relations.

However, beyond the economic and environmental dimensions, I will now explore the socio-political linkages that connect sustainable development, food systems, and peacebuilding. This brings us to the concept of *everyday peace*, which offers a bottom-up, relational lens for understanding social transformation and serves as an analytical bridge between agroecology and peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict settings. Framing these connections within the context of transitional justice allows for a deeper examination of how food practices—such as agroecology and gastronomy—can contribute to repairing social relations and rebuilding trust in societies emerging from armed conflict. As established in Chapter 2, transitional justice encompasses the period extending from the final stages of conflict to more stable conditions, along with the processes and mechanisms necessary to support this transition. It proposes two intermediate outcomes—recognition

and civic trust—and two final outcomes—reconciliation and democracy. These are pursued through four holistic, interconnected mechanisms: justice, reparation, truth, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Everyday Peace: A Framework for Local and Relational Transformation

The concept of everyday peace, central to my proposal, was first introduced by Roger Mac Ginty (Mac Ginty, 2014) to describe how ordinary people disrupt violent conflict and cultivate pro-social relationships in conflict-affected societies. While everyday peace may manifest in isolated moments of empathy, it also refers to structural, collective practices embedded in the hyperlocal, everyday spaces that shape how individuals and communities interact. It shifts the focus away from formal institutions, elite negotiations, and state-centric models of peace, looking instead at localized, less visible forms of power that create opportunities for alternative peacebuilding mechanisms (Mac Ginty, 2021, p. 13).

The effectiveness of everyday peace rests on two interrelated principles: circuitry and scalability. The first, circuitry, draws from network theory, biological and engineering models. Mac Ginty (Mac Ginty, 2021, p. 39) conceptualizes circuits as analytical devices that capture the messy interconnectedness of top-down, bottom-up, local, and international dynamics in peacebuilding, including the everyday, the exceptional and everything in between. These circuits facilitate movement—of people, ideas, power, goods, and capital—within and across different scales, providing pathways for social transformation and conflict disruption. The latter, scalability, borrowed from development, agriculture, and ecology fields, refers to the process of expanding the impact of local initiatives either vertically (scaling up) or horizontally (scaling out) (Getnet & MacAlister, 2012). Scaling up involves institutional adoption of successful practices, influencing policy and decision-making. Scaling out, in contrast, refers to diffusion across communities, resonating with Lederach's (Lederach, 1997) notion of "middle-out" approaches, where grassroots actors

drive change through flexible, decentralized networks (Mac Ginty, 2021, p. 48), and more in line with the everyday peace spirit.

In post-conflict settings, everyday practices create the social conditions necessary for either long-term reconciliation and stability or conflict relapse. By disrupting the logics of violence and exclusion, these practices help communities rebuild trust, address root causes of conflict, and foster resilience to build capacities during transitional periods. In doing so, they help promote the intermediate objectives of transitional justices' intermediate objectives (Greiff, 2012), recognition and civic trust as preconditions for reconciliation

Everyday Peace and Agroecology: A Dynamic Model for Sustainable Development

The intersection of everyday peace, agroecology, and sustainable development challenges conventional peacebuilding paradigms by emphasizing not just the absence of violence, but the active presence of justice, dignity, and well-being. Agroecology and other alternative development models advocate for autonomy, resilience, and community-led solutions—principles that align closely with the hyperlocal, relational ethos of everyday peacebuilding, and foreground the importance of localized experiences, actors, and lessons.

Agroecology also offers a potential pathway toward food security and peace. Food insecurity and land disputes have historically been major drivers of conflict in Latin America (Altieri & Toledo, 2011), particularly in regions where inequitable land distribution, forced displacement, and extractivist policies have widened the gap between rural and urban populations. Under the dominant neoliberal development model, such inequalities have deepened, exacerbating vulnerabilities and marginalization—especially among smallholder farmers (Kaufman, 2010; Vidal, 2011). In this context, agroecology emerges as a holistic alternative capable of enhancing food production, strengthening local economies, promoting environmental stewardship, and fostering social cohesion.

However, agroecology is not without limitations. Its integration into market systems remains challenging, as it often relies on precarious forms of commercialization and demands additional, frequently unpaid labor—particularly from women, as discussed in Chapter 4. Questions of scalability also persist: feeding large populations through agroecological models would require significant restructuring of food distribution circuits, transportation infrastructure, and trade policies, many of which are constrained by existing legal agreements and global supply chains. These tensions do not invalidate agroecology’s potential, but rather underscore the need for coordinated, mixed, and long-term efforts. Like peacebuilding, transforming food systems through agroecology entails a gradual, transitional process—one that must be context-responsive and built collaboratively over time.

By emphasizing scalability, agroecology has the potential to generate widespread impact at the local and national levels. Scaling out agroecological practices enhances community stability and resilience by creating self-sufficient, decentralized food networks. Scaling up, on the other hand, these initiatives can influence policy frameworks, push for land tenure reforms, equitable and nutritious food governance models, and food systems transformation that elevate the value of the local. By reducing dependence on industrial food systems, agroecology strengthens rural communities’ capacity to navigate economic, environmental, and social uncertainties, fostering peace through resilience and self-sufficiency.

That said, the extent to which a country can reduce its reliance on industrial food systems while still ensuring food security for its entire population remains a complex and ongoing question. Current research continues to explore the pathways and conditions under which agroecology can be scaled effectively and equitably. As argued throughout this dissertation, agroecological transformation must be understood as a long-term, transitional

process—one that requires context-responsive policies, participatory approaches, and sustained commitment across sectors. My aim is not to prescribe how national food systems should be transformed, but rather to extract grounded insights from local experiences that may help illuminate how these kinds of transformations can also contribute to peacebuilding.

Challenging Top-Down Development and Peacebuilding Models

A significant benefit of linking agroecology and everyday peace is that it challenges top-down, externally imposed models of development and peacebuilding. Dependency theory (Cardoso et al., 1979; Prebisch, 1950) and critiques of liberal peacebuilding (Nakagawa, 2018; Paffenholz, 2021; Richmond, 2006) argue that interventions in the Global South often reinforce systemic inequalities rather than address the root causes of conflict. These interventions tend to be externally driven, shaped by Global North agendas, and perpetuate asymmetries in power, knowledge, and resources (Firchow, 2018). While it is true that both *agroecology* and *everyday peace* can be mobilized as external or academic frameworks—and are not always rooted organically in local discourse—their emphasis on context, participation, and relationality opens space for greater recognition of situated knowledge and alternative epistemologies. In this sense, their integration offers a step forward: they shift the focus away from institutional templates and toward locally embedded, culturally grounded processes. This bottom-up orientation is: (1) Locally rooted, recognizing the knowledge, agency, and sovereignty of *campesino*, and other smallholder communities; (2) Culturally resonant, strengthening identity, land-based traditions, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing; and (3) Systemically transformative, engaging both historical injustices and contemporary socio-political challenges.

In post-conflict societies, rebuilding trust, restoring dignity, and fostering reconciliation are central to ensuring non-recurrence. At the same time, these communities face escalating climate risks, which disproportionately impact rural populations with limited adaptive

capacities. Agroecology offers what can be understood as *tri-resilience*—resilience to the structural legacies of violence, to the inequalities embedded in hegemonic economic models, and to the mounting pressures of climate change. In contexts like Colombia, where *campesino* communities have been among the principal victims of armed conflict—or remain at risk of further victimization—agroecological practices provide an entry point to engage with their priorities in socially, economically, and politically meaningful ways. While not designed exclusively for post-conflict settings, agroecology creates space for addressing critical issues—such as land access, autonomy, and sustainability—that intersect with the broader aims of peacebuilding by tackling root causes and helping translate abstract principles into lived experience.

In summary, agroecology and everyday peace can be profoundly interconnected, providing a pathway to resilience, autonomy, and justice in post-conflict and climate-vulnerable societies. Unlike top-down peacebuilding models that emphasize institutional reforms, everyday peace functions at the grassroots level, fostering trust, reconciliation, and local agency. Similarly, agroecology transcends mere technical agricultural reforms, serving as a political, environmental, and economic tool for decolonizing food systems and empowering local actors. By incorporating agroecology into peacebuilding strategies, communities secure food sovereignty and economic stability while disrupting cycles of violence, displacement, and ecological degradation. Together, they offer a grounded, interdisciplinary pathway toward sustainable and inclusive peace—one rooted not in institutions alone, but in the everyday capacities of communities to rebuild, resist, and reimagine

4.3 Colombia: Poor Distributed Wealth

Colombia is one of the world's megadiverse countries, hosting nearly 10% of the planet's biodiversity (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, n.d.). The country is rich in both cultural and natural wealth, featuring diverse ecosystems, ethnic communities,

and vibrant cultural traditions—elements that are central to this research project. To contextualize the case study in Montes de María, this section provides an overview of the Colombian socio-political landscape, emphasizing the historical inequalities, conflict dynamics, and ongoing peacebuilding efforts that are shaping the nation before diving into a brief presentation of the subregion that hosted the fieldwork.

The Two Colombias: An Inequality Spectrum

Colombia is a country where citizens experience vastly different realities depending on their geographic and socioeconomic positioning. While it is the fourth-largest economy in Latin America, with consistent GDP growth reaching \$363 billion USD in 2023, many Colombians remain excluded from the benefits of economic expansion as the disparity between rural and urban territories persists (Suárez Roldan et al., 2023). The country participates in over 15 international trade agreements, including Mercosur, CAN, EFTA, and the Pacific Alliance (Statista, n.d.). Colombia became a member of the OECD in 2020 and a global partner of NATO in 2017. However, despite these economic and diplomatic advancements, vast segments of the population continue to endure poverty, marginalization, and armed violence.

As in many Latin American conflicts, Colombia's long-standing violence is rooted in land tenure inequalities and restricted political participation, leading to violence prone societies and increased vulnerabilities for minorities (de Jong et al., 2021; L. J. Gordon et al., 2017). Rural areas are characterized by limited state presence, high poverty rates, and inadequate access to essential services, all of which undermine citizens' trust in institutions (Escallón, 2021). According to the World Bank, Colombia's GINI coefficient for 2022 stood at 54.8, one of the highest levels of income inequality in the region (World Bank, n.d.-b). This disparity disproportionately affects Afro-Colombians, Indigenous communities, and *campesinos*, who are among the most vulnerable populations (Pizarro Leongómez, 2015, p. 5). The concentration of land ownership further exacerbates rural inequities—nearly

62% of the country's best farmland is controlled by just 0.4% of the population (Restrepo, 2014), illustrating the structural factors underpinning violence and displacement.

The Ministry of Agriculture (2023) reports that farmers represent nearly 30% of Colombia's population, with the majority living in rural areas. According to Bogotá's Chamber of Commerce (CCB), the agricultural sector contributes close to 4% of the national GDP. These figures underscore the sector's significance—not only in demographic terms but also as an economic force, particularly in regions with the lowest levels of state presence. However, despite their economic and social relevance, smallholder farmers continue to face systemic exclusion from the benefits of national development, further reinforcing rural inequality and weakening pathways to territorial peace.

Hernández & Zuluaga (2022) highlight the precarious conditions of rural communities, noting that 39% of the rural population lives in poverty, with 87% at risk of falling into poverty in the future. Even among non-poor rural inhabitants, there is a 59% probability of descending into poverty, compared to just 11% for urban residents (Hernández & Zuluaga, 2022). These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by forced displacement, a defining characteristic of the Colombian armed conflict. Schultz et al. (Shultz et al., 2014) identify land seizures from smallholder farmers as a key driver of displacement, reinforcing a rural-to-urban migration flow that deepens urban inequalities. Furthermore, many of these citizens experience multiple displacements throughout their lifetimes, heightening their exposure to economic hardship, violence, and marginalization.

In line with the broader dynamics of dependency and marginalization affecting rural Colombia, trade and agricultural policy interventions have further entrenched *campesino* vulnerability. While Plan Colombia focused largely on militarized drug eradication, it contributed to rural precarity through the widespread aerial spraying of glyphosate—an herbicide produced by Monsanto—as part of coca eradication campaigns. These

fumigations affected legal crops and ecosystems, leading to food insecurity and displacement in many communities (Nayar, 2020). Separately, the introduction of genetically modified (GM) seeds into Colombia's agricultural system was facilitated by national regulations such as Resolution 970¹⁶ (Wattnem, 2016), which restricted the use of unregistered seeds and criminalized traditional seed saving practices. This policy favored multinational corporations like Monsanto by granting them exclusive licensing rights and intellectual property protections over GM seeds, which farmers were required to purchase each season rather than save and replant.

As Maysels et al. (2023) document, “the widespread use of transgenic and hybrid seeds” contributed to ecological degradation and cultural loss, leading some farmers to describe their land as “contaminated and destroyed” (p. 8). These seed regimes, compounded by the 2012 U.S.–Colombia Free Trade Agreement, further destabilized local agriculture by allowing the import of staple crops like maize and rice at prices lower than those offered by domestic producers—even when grown within Colombia. As a result, many *campesinos* are forced to sell at negative or unsustainable margins, often through intermediaries who absorb a disproportionate share of profits.

These dynamics not only undermine local food systems but also erode producer agency, making it difficult for farmers to compete in formal markets or scale agroecological alternatives without significant state support. They illustrate how food sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and rural peace remain fundamentally constrained by

¹⁶ Resolution 970 was issued by Colombia's Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA) in 2010 to regulate the production, commercialization, and exchange of seeds. The resolution prohibited the use of non-certified seeds and criminalized traditional practices such as seed saving, exchange, and replanting. Though officially aimed at protecting seed quality, the law disproportionately affected smallholder farmers and Indigenous communities, favoring transnational corporations by enforcing seed registration protocols aligned with intellectual property regimes. See: Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA). (2010). Resolución No. 970 de 2010. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/col93414.pdf>

external economic structures that prioritize market liberalization over community resilience.

Colombia's Path Toward Peace and Transitional Justice

Colombia's armed conflict, classified as a non-international, protracted conflict, has shaped the country's socio-political landscape for more than six decades. In 2016, a historic Peace Agreement was signed between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), marking the country's most formalized transitional justice¹⁷ process to date (Segura, 2017). This agreement, negotiated in Havana, Cuba (2012–2016), established key institutions, including the Truth Commission, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), and the Unit for Forcibly Disappeared Persons, all of which complement existing mechanisms like the National System of Attention and Reparation for Victims (NSARV) and Law 1448 of 2011 (Victims and Land Restitution Law).

Land tenure is central to Colombia's peacebuilding efforts, as reflected in the first chapter of the 2016 agreement, which outlines a Comprehensive Rural Reform to address historical injustices in land distribution (Acuerdo Final Para La Terminación Del Conflicto y La Construcción de Una Paz Estable y Duradera, 2016; Berman-Arévalo, 2021). Despite these commitments, land restitution remains fraught with challenges, including ongoing violence, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and resistance from powerful landowning elites. Unfortunately, the country has witnessed further displacement and systematic human rights

¹⁷ Transitional justice represents the period between violence and peace, encompassing a holistic framework comprising four mechanisms: justice, truth, reparation, and non-recurrence. It is not an exact recipe, and each country is expected to seek its own balance without disregarding any of these elements, as they complement one another. Some of the most commonly used measures and mechanisms include Truth Commissions and special tribunals designed to address systemic human rights violations and mass abuses. The intermediate objectives are civic trust and recognition, while the ultimate goals are reconciliation and democracy.

violations (González Posso, 2019), with the delay in the implementation and new armed groups emerging following the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes of FARC in 2016 and paramilitaries in 2005.

Joint efforts by the Truth Commission and JEP reveal that Colombia's conflict has produced nearly nine million victims, with over four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022; Rojas Morales, 2023). Forced displacement and land dispossession represent some of the most pervasive human rights violations, with more than eight million hectares of land stolen or abandoned (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). The Truth Commission's final report (2022) indicates that 62% of land restitution cases have resulted in victims abandoning their territories once again, citing legal, material, and productive dispossession¹⁸ as key barriers to returning. Many victims have also suffered homicides of family members, torture, forced recruitment, and sexual violence, illustrating the multi-dimensional nature of conflict-related harm.

Montes de María: Resistance and Resilience

To understand the everyday dimensions of peacebuilding explored in this chapter, I have decided to explain and situate the case of ASOCOMAN within Colombia's broader conflict history and the regional dynamics. Montes de María is a subregion nestled between the departments of Sucre and Bolívar, renowned for its high biodiversity, including a tropical dry forest, fertile land, and a rich cultural connection to agriculture. The region comprises fifteen municipalities that showcase diverse landscapes, featuring mountains, valleys,

¹⁸ According to the final report, there are three types of dispossession: material, which refers to the threat of violence that leads victims to leave everything behind to save their lives; legal, which involves coercion and includes some form of legal process, typically with the complicity of public servants; and productive, where land grabs occur and the use of land is altered, often for extensive cattle ranching and the establishment of large-scale monoculture agribusiness and extractive mining and energy projects (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022:439) – frequently justified by development and the greater good of the nation.

rivers, and access to the Caribbean Sea. The main economic activities in Montes de María encompass small-scale farming, palm oil production, and wood-based industries (FUNCICAR, 2015). However, while agriculture remains central to local livelihoods, the region has suffered severely due to armed conflict, which has disrupted generational farming traditions and jeopardized rural economies (Aguilera-Díaz, 2013).

Montes de María has one of the lowest human development indices in the country, marked by high illiteracy rates and wages insufficient to meet basic needs (Moro, 2010). The region's population has endured decades of paramilitary and guerrilla violence, with widespread forced disappearances, sexual violence, and child recruitment. Between 1990 and 2015, Montes de María recorded 158,000 victims of forced displacement, 4,000 homicides, and 800 kidnappings (Pardo García et al., 2018; Phenicie, 2021). The early 2000s saw a wave of paramilitary-led massacres, displacing approximately 82,600 hectares of land (Moro, 2010). In response, Montes de María became a focal point of Colombia's transitional justice efforts, being granted priority in both the Justice and Peace Law (Law 975 of 2005) and the 2016 Peace Agreement.

The region was prioritized under the Comprehensive Rural Reform and designated a Development Program with a Territorial-Based Approach (PDET in Spanish). Despite these initiatives, Montes de María continues to grapple with institutional mistrust, land restitution barriers, and ongoing security threats from armed groups. Over the past decade, survivors have begun returning to Montes de María, making it a demographically young, with 53% of the population under 24 years old (Pardo García et al., 2018). Montes de María offers a compelling case for examining peacebuilding and rural development, exemplifying grassroots adaptation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and resilience in the aftermath of conflict.

ASOCOMAN, lead participants of this research project, was established in 2005 in response to a government initiative aimed at supporting rural communities around the time of the enactment of the Justice and Peace Law. *Campesinos* in the municipality of Macaján organized to participate in the program, yet the anticipated benefits never materialized. This failure deepened institutional mistrust toward public institutions and officials.

However, it was not until 2020, during the virtual training sessions held amid the COVID-19 pandemic, that ASOCOMAN took the form it has today. A pivotal moment in its development was its participation in the CaribeLab project, led by chef Jaime Rodríguez (Restaurant Celele in Cartagena)¹⁹, which sought to rediscover the natural pantry of the dry forest and ecosystems of the Colombian Caribbean for his restaurant in Cartagena. Under the guidance of local agronomist Miguel Durango, ASOCOMAN transitioned from monoculture dependency to a more diverse and sustainable agroecological approach, embracing the richness of their small farms and territorial heritage. Today, the association offers over twenty-five products, ranging from fresh produce to value-added items such as flours, cheeses, oils, and creams. Through the revival of ancestral recipes and knowledge exchange with chefs across Colombia, ASOCOMAN now hosts gastronomic experiences in their own community spaces, attracting international visitors and some of Colombia's most renowned chefs.

ASOCOMAN exemplifies resilience, ecological stewardship, and grassroots innovation. Its members have diversified their diets, incorporating alternative protein sources and deriving nutritional, social, and economic benefits from the region's biodiversity. Women

¹⁹ Another important ally for ASOCOMAN is Jean Trinh, founder of Alquímico Bar in Cartagena. Although Alquímico is not included in the primary analysis—given its classification as a bar rather than a restaurant—Trinh's support has been meaningful in advancing visibility, partnerships, and sustainability efforts for ASOCOMAN and its members.

are increasingly assuming leadership roles, contributing to more collaborative and equitable organizational dynamics. Distinct from conventional rural markets where buyers set the terms, ASOCOMAN determines its own prices and aligns production with natural cycles, reinforcing both economic autonomy and principles of food sovereignty.

The preceding analysis illustrates how food systems—through the practice of agroecology—are deeply intertwined with peacebuilding and sustainable development in Colombia. Montes de María’s rich biodiversity and agrarian history further enhance the relevance of this case for examining the role of agroecology and gastronomy in post-conflict reconstruction, particularly through the lens of ASOCOMAN’s agroecological process. However, persistent poverty, limited political participation, and the continued presence of armed actors pose ongoing challenges. ASOCOMAN’s experience should therefore be understood not as a static success story, but as a dynamic and evolving process—shaped by both progress and vulnerability, innovation and precarity. It is precisely this tension that makes their journey so critical to understanding the contours of peace from the grassroots.

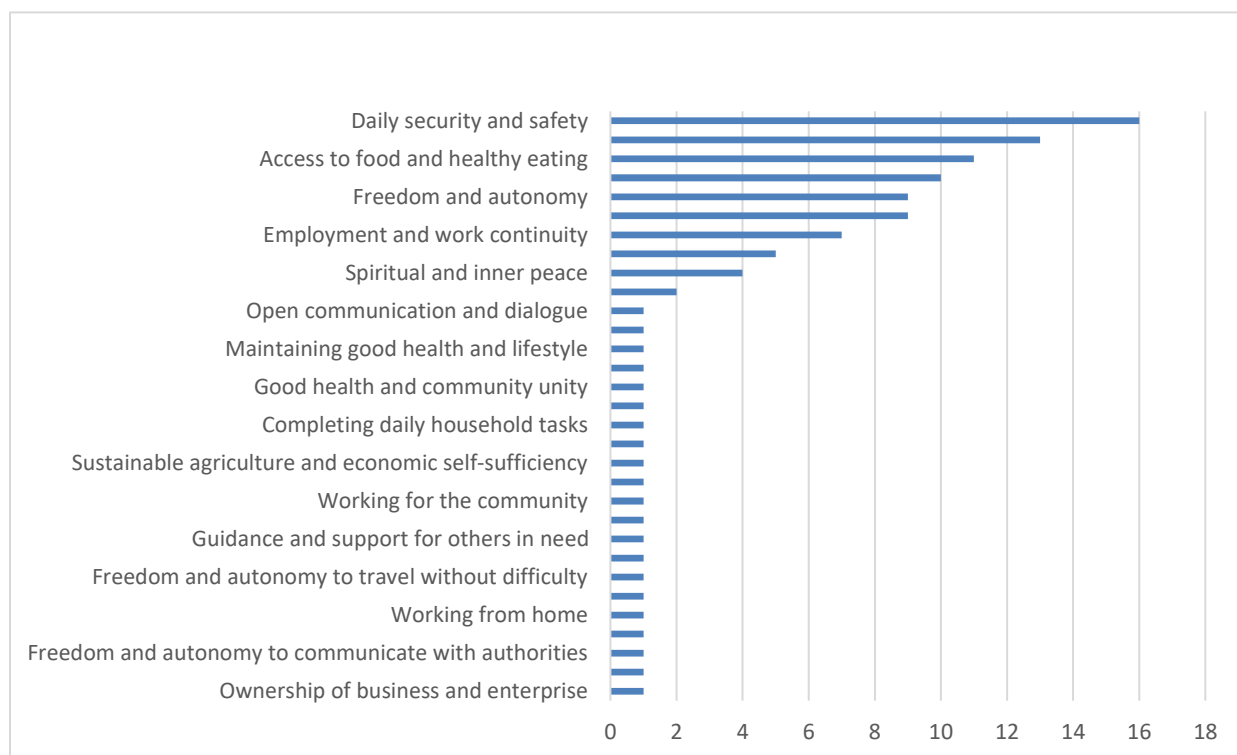
Now that the connections between global peacebuilding and sustainable development agendas have been established, and the Colombian case has been situated within its broader socio-political and historical context, I turn to the discussion and analysis of results. In the next section, I engage directly with the experience of ASOCOMAN in Montes de María, as well as with the perspectives of chefs and researchers. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks and contextual groundwork laid out thus far, I explore how everyday peacebuilding may find additional avenues through agroecology and gastronomy. This case offers a grounded lens to consider how alternative food systems and community-led innovation can contribute to transitional justice from a horizontal, everyday perspective.

4.4 Rebuilding from the Ground Up: Everyday Peace and the Transformative Power of Agroecology

As emphasized throughout this dissertation, *Peace, Agroecology & Gastronomy* is a research project grounded in the horizontal, everyday level. For this reason, the community's own definition of peace—how participants understand and experience everyday peace—is pivotal to guiding not only the analysis in this chapter, but also the foundation for the chapters that follow. In this first analytical delivery, I begin by presenting the findings from the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) workshop, which identifies the key categories ASOCOMAN members associate with peace in their daily lives. Once the interconnections between these categories are established, I incorporate the voices of participants to deepen and ground the analysis, drawing on the perspectives of ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers. This is followed by complementary survey data that expands on themes relevant to this chapter while setting the stage for subsequent ones.

The EPI workshop yielded ninety-four (94) everyday actions classified under the twelve categories of the EPI framework²⁰ (Firchow, 2018), and further grouped into four dimensions: Security, Development, Social and Human Rights. This approach aligns the research with the growing body of literature employing the EPI methodology, allowing for comparability with other studies, including previous EPI applications in Montes de María. Importantly, several of the actions identified by participants intersected across multiple categories, highlighting thematic overlaps between health, food & agriculture, and economy. Participants were invited to reflect on the actions they associate with peace in their everyday lives, including those they had been unable to perform during periods of armed conflict and those they now engage in as part of their post-conflict realities. Table 1 presents an aggregated overview of these actions and their thematic distribution.

²⁰ According to Firchow (2018) the peace perceptions in categories are freedom, routine and social practices, food & agriculture, health, education, cohesion and interdependence, security forces, leadership, economy, discrimination, transitional justice and human rights, conflict resolution, crime, daily security.

Table 3: EPI ASOCOMAN - List of indicators aggregated by topic and occurrence

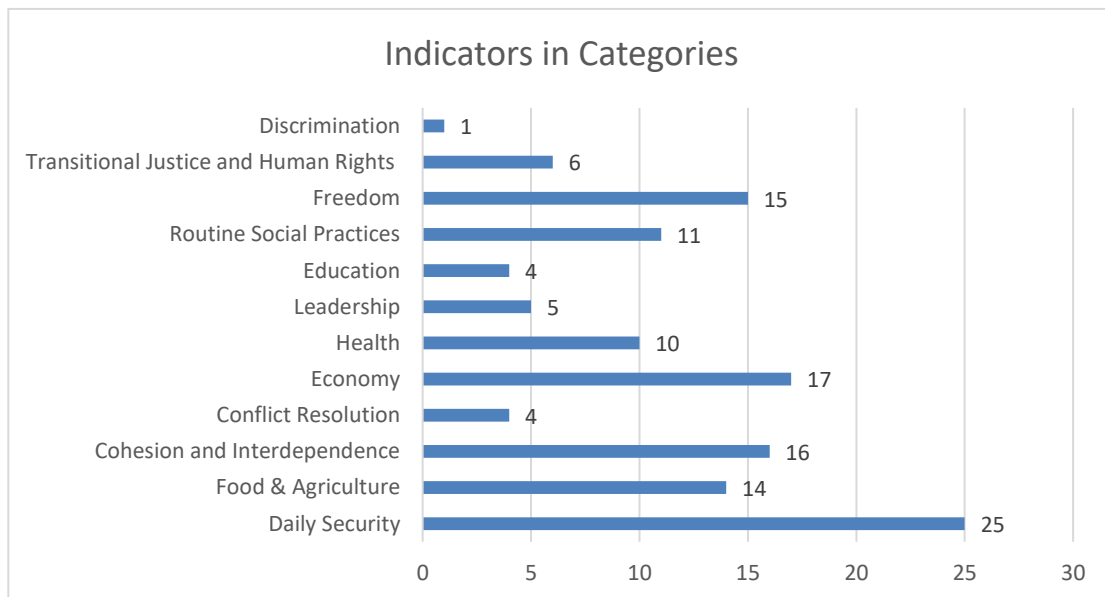
At this stage of analysis, *daily security and safety* emerged as the most frequently mentioned indicator. Within peace and transitional justice studies, this aligns with Johan Galtung's (1969) foundational concepts of negative peace—the absence of direct violence—and positive peace, defined by proactive efforts to build social well-being and structural harmony. In conflict-affected contexts, security is often perceived as a fundamental precondition for broader societal recovery. Given the violent history of Montes de María, it is unsurprising that participants emphasized safety as central to their current experience of peace.

However, the overlaps between indicators reveal a more nuanced understanding of post-conflict life, one that transcends the absence of violence to incorporate socio-economic and

environmental well-being. This reflects Giraldo’s (2015) notion of *minimum peace*, introduced in Chapter 2, where basic conditions for life in the *territory* are also pertinent, not just security, as in the absence of violence. In the subsequent phase, indicators were grouped under the twelve EPI categories (see Table 2).

Three key findings emerged. First, *daily security* remained the most frequently cited indicator, reinforcing its foundational role in peacebuilding. Without a baseline of safety, other elements of positive peace—such as economic autonomy, mobility, political participation, and social cohesion—cannot fully materialize. Participants recalled past restrictions during violent periods: curfews, blocked roads, informal taxation, bans on religious and cultural gatherings, and even domestic surveillance by armed groups. These recollections underscore how deeply insecurity shaped daily life—and how profoundly its absence is now experienced as peace.

Table 4: EPI ASOCOMAN - Indicator by category.



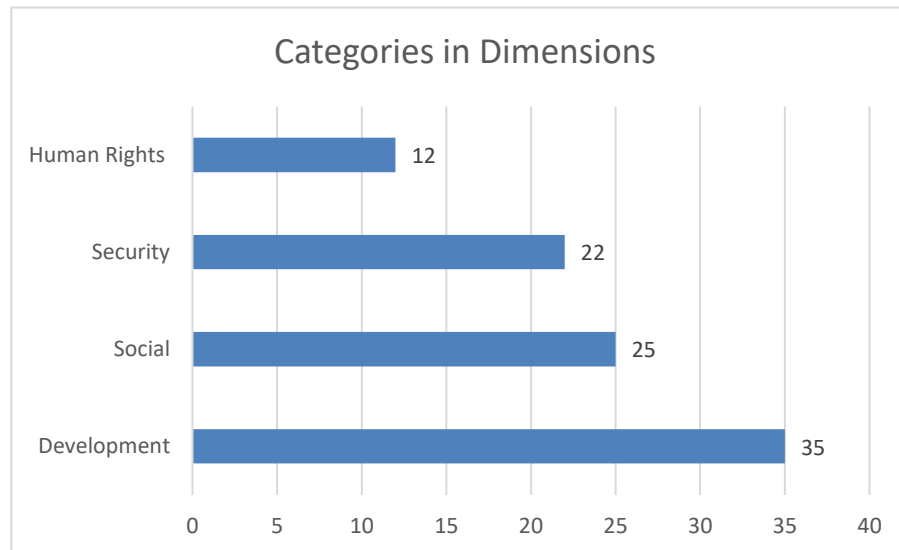
Second, *economic stability, social cohesion, and interdependence* followed security as the most frequently mentioned indicators. This suggests that participants do not primarily associate peace with formal transitional justice mechanisms, but rather with the capacity to sustain a dignified livelihood and exercise autonomy in their everyday lives. While institutional frameworks—such as truth commissions and reparations—are crucial, many participants placed greater value on economic agency and self-sufficiency, or, from another angle, they prioritize meeting basic needs.

This emphasis reflects three interconnected realities. First, transitional justice mechanisms often fail to reach many victims, particularly those in geographically isolated or politically marginalized communities. The state’s limited presence is not always due to neglect, but often to capacity constraints—highlighting the need to recognize the everyday experiences of these “left-behind” populations as crucial sites for building peace. Second, in the absence of strong institutional support, communities often mobilize their own resources, knowledge, and relationships to shape their futures. Strengthening these locally generated pathways—whether through state action, civil society, or other actors—can be more effective than creating new interventions from scratch. Third, as discussed in Chapter 2 through the lens of civic trust (de Greiff, 2011), and further explored in Chapter 5, the legacy of marginalization and distrust in institutions underscores the importance of supporting community-driven processes that restore relationships and reinforce everyday forms of peace. This research seeks to identify the barriers and potentials within these efforts, so that diverse actors, according to their capacities, can better engage with and support them.

Third, a distinct cluster of categories—including *freedom, food & agriculture, routine social practices, and health*—offers further insight into how participants conceptualize peace in post-conflict life. Many attributed this perspective shift to their involvement with ASOCOMAN since 2020. Interviews revealed noticeable transformations in dietary habits, growing health awareness, and increased satisfaction with their work as *campesinos*. Some

participants reported physical improvements tied to agroecological practices and changes in food consumption. As one member shared, transitioning to agroecology and consuming organic, self-produced food helped alleviate arthritis symptoms, enabling her to regain mobility and ride her horse again. Others emphasized the association’s distinct value proposition: producing and selling biodiversity-based, nutritious products while building relationships with chefs and consumers from urban centers. This interconnectedness between food, peace, and development speaks not only to economic and social transformation but also to political agency. In redefining their relationship to land, health, and markets, ASOCOMAN members actively construct peace from below, amid a backdrop of state absence and historical exclusion, even without being fully aware they are turning into pioneers.

Table 5: EPI ASOCOMAN - Categories in Dimensions.



The final stage of analysis grouped the twelve categories into the four overarching EPI dimensions²¹: *Human Rights, Development, Social, and Security* (Table 3). Interestingly, although security ranked highest in previous stages, it emerged as only the third most relevant dimension overall. This reflects how everyday peace is conceptualized beyond the absence of violence. As Mac Ginty (Mac Ginty, 2021) suggests, horizontal, community-driven transformations often hold more significance for local populations than top-down interventions—and are frequently overlooked in institutional approaches. Given the historical exclusion and ongoing institutional mistrust in Montes de María, it is unsurprising that participants prioritized the *Development* and *Social* dimensions, which most closely align with their aspirations for the future and their expectations for non-recurrence guarantees. These dimensions speak to the kind of peace participants are trying to build—one rooted in daily life, future-oriented, and shaped by their own terms. These findings reinforce the importance of positive peacebuilding strategies—those that center dignity, autonomy, and inclusion. In this case, the trust and solidarity fostered among ASOCOMAN members and their partners has become a foundation for well-being, resilience, and agency.

A key aspect of this chapter is the role of the private sector—in this case, restaurants and actors within the food systems chain—in driving local economic and social transformation. By shifting production–consumption dynamics, these partnerships have elevated the value of local biodiversity and *campesino* knowledge while fostering more equitable commercial relationships. Participants described their exchanges with chefs not merely as market interactions, but as cultural and knowledge-based collaborations—experiences of mutual recognition that challenge extractive economic models. These emerging partnerships embody a horizontal approach to food system innovation, which will be further explored

²¹ According to the indicator and categorization codebook for EPI, the dimensions are comprised of the following categories. Security: crime, daily security, security forces; Development: infrastructure, education, economy, health, food and agriculture; Social: cohesion and interdependence, conflict resolution, leadership, routine social practices; Human Rights: discrimination, freedom, transitional justice and human rights. (Firchow, 2018. Pag 117).

in Chapter 4. Looking ahead, ASOCOMAN's experience may offer a blueprint for scaling future agroecological transformations in line with the Integral Rural Reform commitments of the 2016 Peace Agreement.

However, the involvement of the private sector—particularly within gastronomy—is not guaranteed, and further research is needed to assess its long-term impact and replicability beyond ASOCOMAN. The food system includes a wide range of actors across public and private sectors, and gastronomy, as an integral part of food culture, holds a unique potential to bridge urban and rural divides through a shared relationship with food. In contemporary culinary trends, dishes are increasingly used to tell stories, honor ecosystems, and celebrate territorial heritage. This makes gastronomy an ideal medium through which to connect communities that have historically experienced armed conflict in vastly different ways. To fulfill this potential, its role must be envisioned beyond partnerships with high-end restaurants. Local eateries, community food festivals, hotel kitchens, farmers' markets, and informal food networks offer additional sites for collaboration that could advance economic resilience, recognition, and territorial peace in Colombia.

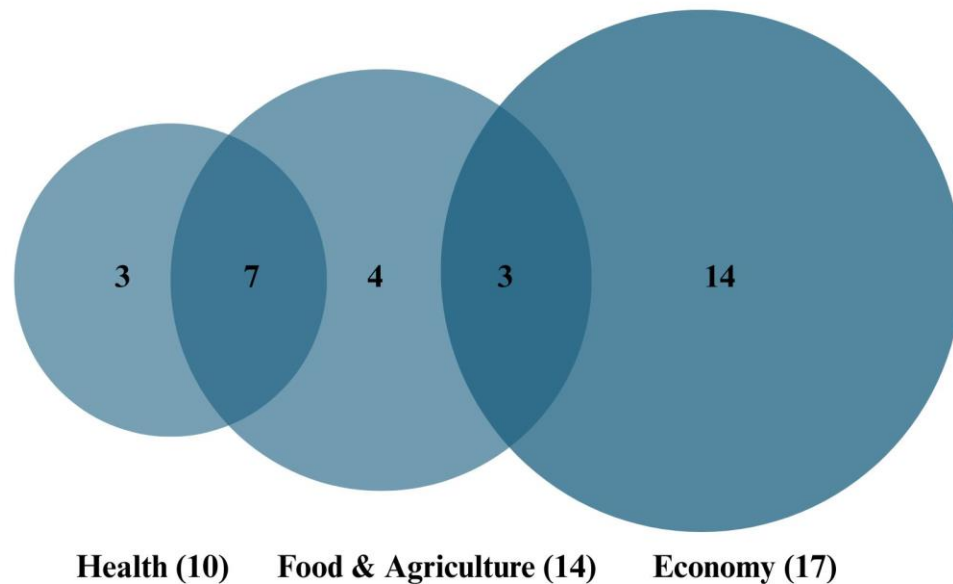


Figure 1: EPI ASOCOMAN - Health – Food & Agriculture – Economy Nexus

Further analysis of the *Health, Food & Agriculture, and Economy* categories (see Table 4) revealed a strong correlation between economic well-being and physical health—connected primarily through agroecological practices. Out of the fourteen times participants mentioned food and agriculture, ten were linked to either health or economy, and only four stood alone. This confirms that participants do not isolate food production from broader well-being, but instead understand their farming and cooking practices as interconnected systems of care, survival, and prosperity. Since 2020, many members have embraced agroecology not only as a means of generating income but also as a food sovereignty strategy to enhance sustainability and nourish themselves and their families, after years of backlash from policies like Resolution 970 of 2010. Although health was not a predefined focus of the research, interviews revealed that participants now consider nutrition and dietary autonomy as vital components of what peace looks and feels like in their daily lives. From cultivating spices and diversifying protein sources to adapting

traditional recipes using native ingredients, participants articulated a sense of pride and ownership over both their food systems and their futures.

These findings reflect the chapter's theoretical framework, which understands agroecology not merely as a farming technique, but as a political and epistemological project that reclaims food systems as spaces for inclusion, resistance, and post-conflict reconstruction. Agroecology can simultaneously address multiple social challenges and contribute to the sustainable development agenda, including hunger, food insecurity, health and nutrition, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of rural knowledge systems. Its potential expands even further when integrated into peacebuilding efforts, as it supports relational and place-based approaches to reconciliation—those that begin not in institutional corridors, but in kitchens, markets, and small plots of land that will later reach fellow citizens as plates telling a story.

Ultimately, what this analysis brings forward is the centrality of interconnectedness—between people, sectors, and territories—as a foundation for sustainable peace. The agroecology–gastronomy–peacebuilding nexus illuminates how everyday practices such as growing, preparing, and sharing food can serve as meaningful interventions in contexts marked by conflict and inequality. These practices hold the power not only to improve livelihoods, but also to reshape relationships between rural and urban actors, and between historically excluded communities and the broader development agenda. Both chefs and ASOCOMAN members are grounded in a shared belief that food connects, carries memory, and tells stories—that it does not belong exclusively to chefs or institutions, but to the everyday and to everyone. This worldview allows gastronomy to become a space for the exchange of knowledge, culture, and practice in ways that foster environmental stewardship, protect biodiversity, and promote collective well-being, regardless of one's location. Rather than being peripheral, these actions—rooted in dignity, creativity, and shared experience—are central to imagining peace not as an abstract goal, but as something lived, grown, and tasted.

4.5 Examining Everyday Peace: A Dialogue of Interconnections

To examine closer the previous interconnection between the interrelated categories of Health, Food & Agriculture and Economy, I will analyze these topics from the voice and experiences shared in interviewees by participants, ASCOMAN members, and contrast them with the chef's and researchers to extract further lessons and have a better understanding of how these topics can relate to everyday peace from sites like food systems, focused on agroecology and gastronomy as practices and occupations.

First connection: Health and Food & Agriculture

As previously shown, this intersection yielded the highest number of co-occurrences for ASOCOMAN participants. In fact, 70% of the times that indicators under the *Health* category were mentioned, they appeared alongside *Food & Agriculture*. This finding illustrates how deeply the notion of health is embedded in members' understanding of everyday peace—and how diverse and multidimensional that understanding has become.

The first layer of this connection is how agroecological practices have directly transformed their everyday lives, especially through the shift from monoculture to diversified agroecological farming. One ASOCOMAN member noted:

“It has been a great achievement to abandon those harmful production practices and adopt good agroecological ones. That has been very, very important, and it has had an impact on our health as well, of course. By producing healthy food and consuming healthy food, our health has improved.” (Interview, A13).

Another member, who previously shared her story about regaining mobility and being able to ride her horse again, emphasized the transformative value of healthy food:

“We are living proof that the healthy food we grow is powerful. That recovery in health—without expensive treatments—I had not found it before. And here, without any of that, I recovered, without even knowing I would. [...] For me, having a national food chain that is healthy, agroecological, nutritious—that is peace for all. For everyone’s well-being and health. Because in the end, all of the products go to the consumer, which is the human being.” (Interview A18).

Rosaura, another ASOCOMAN participant, linked health to the environment and everyday consumption practices: “Environmental conservation, improvements in health... because when you eat healthy, your health improves.” (Interview A17). Food diversity also surfaced as a key theme. Participants shared how rediscovering local species not only restored environmental knowledge but transformed their diets. In this way, they are inadvertently aligning with the EAT-Lancet Commission’s (Willett et al., 2019) call to vary protein sources for planetary and human health. As an ASOCOMAN associate explains “We try not to eat red meat anymore. And we have everything... When we cook beans, for example, we turn them into flour and make meatballs in different forms. We vary.” (Interview 02).

A chef who collaborates with ASOCOMAN members offered a complementary perspective, linking peace to gastronomy’s potential to improve health, challenge extractive models, and build territorial identity:

“Gastronomy can bring about positive changes in society, in nutrition, in health... If I start consuming these local ingredients, learning more about my country, and valuing these

fruits and seeds, then obviously, my diet changes. I'm no longer eating a fumigated apple or a salmon full of antibiotics—something people love-. I'm eating my country's products, from cared-for ecosystems. That improves my health, helps combat obesity, and addresses the diseases that come from eating things we shouldn't." (Interview C11).

From a policy and systemic lens, one researcher emphasized the importance of preserving native seeds as a way to reclaim both biodiversity and nutrition by stepping away from conventional agriculture: "We all benefit from conserving these seeds, these varieties, these plants... because it's that diversity that guarantees future food autonomy. With this trend of conventional agriculture, we've lost the abundance of food that we now need to recover." (Interview R10).

Finally, another researcher with field experience in southern Colombia reflected on how unmet basic needs—including food security—directly undermine peacebuilding. Her insight reaffirms the importance of placing well-being at the center of any sustainable transition:

"I think that to build peace, people need to live in tranquility. They need to feel included, to be able to go to school, to access health care, to meet their basic needs. People need to feel part of a society to live in peace—and you can't feel at peace if you're hungry." (Interview R13).

These reflections demonstrate how ASOCOMAN members and their allies conceive health not as an isolated biomedical condition, but as something deeply rooted in their *territory*, in autonomy over food, and in everyday well-being. Having explored how food and agroecological practices contribute to physical health and environmental balance, the next intersection shifts focus to another cornerstone of everyday peace: economic autonomy.

As the following section shows, participants perceive food not only as sustenance, but also as a source of income, dignity, and economic resilience—especially when they are able to set their own prices, transform biodiversity into value-added goods, and bypass exploitative intermediaries.

Second connection: Food & Agriculture and Economy

In this section, there were primarily two aspects highlighted in this context. The first was the ethic of work within sustainable forms of agriculture, such as agroecology, as implemented by ASOCOMAN. The second aspect was the sources of work linked to this connection that influence the actors involved: producers, cooks, and consumers, both in the restaurant space and the everyday economy.

The first aspect shared by ASOCOMAN members is among the most interesting; they mentioned that they are working with edible and rentable biodiversity, which they consider the added value of their work, aside from selling healthy, agrochemical-free food. As highlighted by one of them:

“It’s about profitable biodiversity, profitable conservation. Colombia has advantages that, with the will to strengthen its rural sector, could really succeed. [...] We’ve managed to build a network of 120–140 commercial allies—imagine what we could do with actual financial muscle.” interview A12).

This shift in their economic strategy can be reflected in decisions like this one shared by another member:

“*Popocho* plantain and *pomarrosa* pear, even mangos—those used to go to waste. The *popocho* was eaten by birds. But now, if we see ripe fruit, we bring it home, peel it, and make flour. We no longer lose it. Same with some fruit trees—people used to cut them down for firewood, but not anymore.” (Interview A08).

Additionally, the restaurants have made a coordinated decision to buy and offer local produce in harmony with nature’s rhythm. In doing so, they are establishing trends of seasonal consumption that do not push natural production, rather than focusing on regular demand. As highlighted by a chef:

“It’s important to buy from producers who are aligned with sustainability. For example, if tuna is in a closed season, we simply don’t offer tuna. We don’t have a fixed menu—the dishes change weekly depending on what’s available. If it’s there, we sell it. If not, we don’t.”. (Interview C09).

From another angle, crop diversity has also translated into forms to alleviate poverty and support fellow community members through farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing to implement these practices in their favour. As shared by an ASOCOMAN associate regarding how their work and rediscovery of their territory has also improved other community members’ lives:

“It’s not just us—other people in the community have also improved their lives with this. Take sesame, for example. It used to be eaten with nothing but yucca and salt. Now we make horchata. And if someone’s poor and has no money for juice, they grind sesame, make horchata—and that’s it, they have a drink.” (Interview A15).

The second aspect, which pertains to sources of work, is linked to the intermediaries that are occasionally necessary, such as when *campesinos* lack the legal permits to sell, distribute, or report taxes for direct sales. Nevertheless, beyond the role of the intermediary, there is the issue of fair economic recognition for agricultural labour. This situation often leaves farmers feeling exploited and exacerbates their poverty. “*Campesinos* can’t compete. You’ll never be able to compete with heirloom maize against high-density industrial maize. They’re two different kinds of production, and two different kinds of food.” (interview A12). This is one of the effects of policies that have favored conventional agriculture, as established in the theoretical framework. As shared by most of ASOCOMAN members, as mentioned by one of them below:

“The buyer used to pay whatever they wanted—five thousand pesos for a sack of squash or cassava, whatever you had, at whatever price they felt like. But now, we sell at a fair price. We’re no longer throwing food away or giving it to people who don’t understand the work behind it.” (Interview A10).

Fortunately, for ASOCOMAN, this situation improved with their partnerships with restaurants, as expressed by one of them: “Before, intermediaries were the ones setting prices. Not anymore. Thanks to the association and our commercial partners, now we say what we sell it for—and that’s the price.” (Interview A08).

On the other hand, two researchers highlighted two additional economic aspects associated with sustainable agricultural practices and their relationship to the economy and gastronomy. The first refers to ecological practices that save money and can enhance their economies: “They’ve created an entire circular economy to manage waste. The women who cook get their supplies from the biofertilizers made with leftover food from the market—what would have otherwise gone to waste.” (Interview A13).

The second point highlights how gastronomy functions not only as a cultural anchor but also as a resilient economic strategy, particularly in the context of displacement. Even in precarious conditions, food serves as a vehicle for survival, continuity, and dignity. As observed by the researcher, displaced people instinctively turn to food as a primary means of livelihood—bringing their seeds, recipes, and culinary memories with them:

“Displaced people arrive in a new place and often their first idea is to start a food-related business. I think that’s a common denominator. They always try to carry something of their own—and that something is gastronomy. They bring their seeds, their knowledge... It’s like carrying what’s deepest in their hearts: food.” (Interview R07).

The intersection between Food & Agriculture and Economy also reveals deeper processes tied to the evolving partnerships between restaurants and *campesino* communities. For agroecology to become a viable pathway, *campesinos* must have both the economic security and the space to unlearn and relearn—to shift from extractive models toward sustainable, territory-rooted practices. Under the current legal frameworks and economic structures, it is nearly impossible to make a dignified living from crops that are also nutritionally adequate, unless strong alliances and support systems are in place. One of the most powerful insights from this research is how *campesinos* have begun to value their own work—not only as labor, but as environmental stewardship. Even when income is urgent, the desire to protect the land remains central. That is why the logic of profitable biodiversity is not just a marketing strategy; it is an ethic, and one of the most powerful ideas to emerge from ASOCOMAN’s experience.

Third: The interconnection: Health, Food & Agriculture and Economy

This final intersection encapsulates the full spectrum of ASOCOMAN’s transformation—one that bridges the three interconnected categories to inform everyday peace for ASOCOMAN. At the heart of this triad lies a shared understanding that food is more than sustenance; it embodies culture, economy, health, and well-being. Below, I shall connect the discussion to gastronomy as part of food systems, as an economic sector, and as a cultural medium.

One of ASOCOMAN’s members, offers a vivid glimpse into how this interconnectedness plays out in practice. She describes how their products reach different types of consumers—whether through restaurants or home kitchens—and emphasizes their commitment to supporting people in preparing and using these goods:

“Not everyone can go to the restaurants where our products are served. But we sell them freely, and if someone needs help cooking with them, we’re here for that. Flours and processed items need recipes, and we’re happy to provide them.” (Interview A18).

What these reveals is not just commercial savvy, but a relational ethic that seeks to democratize access to healthy food and build bridges between rural producers and urban eaters.

Another ASOCOMAN member underscores how the group’s commercial partnerships are rooted in shared values. Conservation, health, and justice are not abstract goals—they are practiced through everyday market transactions:

“Our biggest allies in conservation have been our commercial partners. They saw the value in our work and believed it was worth paying a fair—and even higher—price than in traditional markets. Because we’re conserving, and that benefits both the environment and our own health.” (Interview A09).

On the restaurant side, this partnership model extends beyond simple procurement. It entails a deeper commitment to territory, biodiversity, and food system integrity. Their biggest partner reflects on how his restaurant rethinks sourcing not as a trend, but as a systemic intervention:

“We’re not teaching mass production or chemical-based agriculture. We’re trying to understand our territories. If our potential in the dry tropical forest is seeds—like *orejero*, *waymaro*, *algarrobo*, *moringa*—then that’s what we use. [Restaurant] is a place that consumes biodiversity in volume.” (Interview C11).

This vision aligns with broader reflections from researchers. One of them, emphasizes how food systems intersect with every major global challenge—from climate and gender to water and health—and why they must be understood systemically:

“Food systems touch everything: food production, genetic resources, water, climate change, women, consumers, health. If you take food systems as a central issue and study them systemically and through transdisciplinary research, you can achieve a lot.” (Interview R13).

Food system transformation also demands cultural memory and intergenerational care. One chef, reflecting on the neglect of native fruits like piñuela and pomarroza, notes how

biodiversity loss is not only ecological but emotional: “There are so many beautiful ingredients that people have stopped consuming and forgotten about. Our children won’t even know what they are if we don’t recover them.” (Interview C03).

Another chef ties this to gendered knowledge and survival strategies. He points out how women—whether in rural villages or Bogotá’s Ciudad Bolívar—carry the everyday burden of food sovereignty, often without recognition in policy design:

“Women have always handled food sovereignty, both in rural areas and in cities. I often ended up working with women not because I sought them out, but because they’re holding the line. They run the spaces where it all happens.” (Interview C05).

This interdependence also expands beyond agriculture and culture. As one researcher reflects, the economic relevance of gastronomy is already evident in other countries—and Colombia is no exception: “Just look at Mexico or Peru. Their gastronomy strengthens their economies. In Italy, in Spain—same thing. Gastronomy empowers culture. It can do the same here.” (Interview R05).

Another interviewee emphasizes the untapped market potential of combining nutrition and biodiversity through food innovation: “Highly nutritious foods that mix native ingredients can open new markets—for those who grow them, process them, and consume them. A democratization of what’s ours.” (Interview R06). Finally, this intimate link between food, land, and economic dignity is perhaps best captured by this chef:

“We’ve never been interested in foreign cuisine—because the richness here is astonishing. Using native seeds and local products benefits everyone, not just the customer. There’s a

whole chain of people behind each ingredient. It's all deeply connected: land, health, economy.” (Interview C09).

Together, these voices illustrate that food is not merely a product, but a platform—where health, agriculture, economy, and rural development converge to form strong foundations for a healthy and prosperous daily and peace. Gastronomy, far from being confined to fine dining, becomes a tool for rebuilding identities, economies, and futures in post-conflict Colombia. As this analysis shows, when concepts like peace are not imposed from the outside but instead emerge from the lived experiences of communities, new and unexpected connections come into view. This is one of the many strengths of engaging with everyday peace and the ordinary fabric of life: with close attention, they reveal hidden dynamics already at work—dynamics that can be leveraged for peacebuilding.

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter has explored how food systems—through the interwoven practices of agroecology and gastronomy—can contribute to post-conflict reconstruction by creating the conditions for dignified livelihoods, ecological stewardship, and everyday peace. Grounded in the lived experience of ASOCOMAN members, the findings reveal how communities themselves are developing integrated strategies for social and environmental transformation, often in the absence of institutional support.

Using the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) as both framework and entry point, this analysis has surfaced the everyday elements that participants associate with peace: security, yes, but also autonomy, health, recognition, and the capacity to eat, grow, and share what they produce. Through agroecology, *campesinos* from ASOCOMAN have shifted from extractive, dependency-based models toward diversified food systems that enhance both

economic and nutritional well-being. Their efforts go beyond farming—they build social fabric, reduce vulnerability, and foster a collective sense of purpose anchored in the land.

Equally significant is the role of gastronomy. Far from being confined to elite or urban spaces, it emerges here as a cultural, economic, and political bridge—reconnecting rural and urban territories, amplifying *campesino* knowledge, and opening markets rooted in care and reciprocity rather than competition. Chefs, researchers, and consumers engaged in horizontal partnerships with ASOCOMAN are not only expanding the reach of native ingredients and biodiversity; they are also reshaping narratives of who produces value, who holds expertise, and what forms of exchange matter. Gastronomy, in this sense, becomes both a platform and a practice of post-conflict reconstruction.

Anchoring this discussion within the broader intersection of peacebuilding and sustainable development is not merely a theoretical gesture, but a strategic necessity. Every community-led initiative must navigate and negotiate with overarching policy frameworks—from the 2016 Peace Accord to trade regulations such as Resolution 970. Recognizing how these agendas shape both the possibilities and the constraints of food system transformation is critical for envisioning scalable, long-term peacebuilding strategies. The cross-field nature of food systems—where economy, culture, health, and ecology intersect—offers fertile ground for such work, but only if local voices and practices are placed at the center.

This chapter has also reaffirmed the importance of everyday peace as a lens that not only dignifies lived experience but sharpens our understanding of what makes peace tangible and sustainable. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, this research has sought to trace existing pathways—identifying how communities define, build, and protect peace

from the ground up. In doing so, it challenges academia and policy to value local knowledge as both evidence and method, as both insight and intervention.

The intersections illuminated throughout this chapter—particularly those linking agriculture, economy, health, and biodiversity—speak directly to ongoing global debates in multilateral forums and academic research. These findings are not only locally rooted; they are globally resonant. Less explicit, and equally vital, is the role of gender, which runs through the leadership of women in ASOCOMAN, their knowledge systems, and their daily contributions to food sovereignty. Gender and climate, as underlying dimensions of inequality and transformation, are not optional add-ons—they hold essential keys to a meaningful vision of alternative development. These themes will be further explored in the chapter that follows.

Ultimately, this chapter has explored how agroecology and gastronomy—rooted in local practice and expanded through strategic partnerships—can foster the rural–urban linkages and relational interdependence essential for inclusive peacebuilding. These are not abstract frameworks, but lived strategies—emerging from the hands, kitchens, seeds, and stories of those who have long been excluded from policy design yet remain central to the country’s future. By tracing these processes, this chapter affirms that the path to peace is already being forged—quietly, daily, and creatively—one recipe, one crop, and one community at a time.

Chapter 5

5 Nourishing Futures: Women's Role in Agroecology, Climate-Adaptation and Peacebuilding

Traditionally, women have been associated with the kitchen, with food and cooking. Grandma's recipes are staples of heartwarming meals and family memories. While often recalled fondly, these roles are underpinned by care work—usually unpaid, and frequently unacknowledged. Most of the time, mothers and grandmothers do not attend culinary school; some might not even enjoy cooking, but socially constructed gender roles dictate otherwise. I do not intend to tarnish cherished memories, but to extend an invitation to explore more closely the traditions underlying these roles—the constraints and the possibilities they bring to nurture the future. As I will argue in this chapter, they hold important clues for unlocking women's agency and independence in the context of post-conflict reconstruction and climate-related risks.

This chapter builds on the link established between agroecology and everyday peace as a viable entry point for advancing peacebuilding efforts. Here, I examine the gendered dimensions of agroecological transitions, with a focus on the roles of rural women in sustaining care practices, fostering biodiversity, and enacting environmental peacebuilding as change-markers and leaders. To do so, I employ the Agroecology Finance Assessment Tool (AFAT) to assess how the experience of ASOCOMAN aligns with the thirteen agroecological principles, and analyze the association's trajectory through its AFAT scores. I complement this with insights from interviews with ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers, to examine how their work contributes to a broader transformation in rural Colombia.

Nourishing Futures deepens its analysis of gender and climate resilience as interrelated dimensions of peacebuilding, as promised in Chapter 3. Increasingly, research and policy recognize these dimensions contribute additional pathways to strengthen the analysis, and

in practice, they make up more comprehensive and holistic approaches. Drawing from feminist scholarship and environmental peacebuilding frameworks, I begin by offering a brief overview of care work and its feminist conceptualizations, followed by a review of the literature on the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding, food systems transformation, and climate adaptation. After situating these concepts within the Colombian context, I present my findings and analysis. My aim is to show that women's participation is not only valuable but often catalytic—demonstrating how their engagement in agroecological practices fosters biodiversity, strengthens civic ties, and opens new income-generating pathways for themselves, their families, and their communities in post-conflict settings. In doing so, I argue for the integration of gender equity and ecological sustainability not as afterthoughts, but as foundational design principles in any effort to build sustainable peace.

Care work as a site for transformation

Over the past two centuries, feminist movements have pursued a sustained struggle for gender equality and the recognition of women's dignity. The first wave, emerging in the late 19th century in the Global North, focused on securing political rights through the suffragist movement, alongside demands for access to education and property. The second wave, which gained momentum in the mid-20th century, expanded the agenda to include women's participation in the labor force, reproductive rights, and a critical interrogation of gender roles. The third wave, spanning from the late 20th to early 21st century, introduced intersectionality as a core analytical tool—now foundational to rigorous academic research and policy design aimed at addressing overlapping systems of oppression and power (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2002).

More recently, the fourth wave has mobilized around issues of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and the structural exclusions embedded in patriarchal systems. Through digital activism and transnational organizing, this wave has made visible the pervasive harms endured by women, while demanding meaningful inclusion across all spheres of

society (Gago, 2019; Segato, 2016). While these movements have achieved significant progress, substantial gaps remain—particularly in the Global South—where intersecting inequalities and context-specific challenges, including colonial legacies, continue to undermine women’s autonomy, safety, and participation in sustainable development and peacebuilding processes (Lagarde, 2006).

Although women and girls today enjoy greater access to education, healthcare, and political representation than at any time in history, these advances have not translated into proportional gains in economic opportunities or autonomy (Ferrant et al., 2014; Hanna et al., 2023; Heintz, 2018). Since the second wave, feminist demands for labor rights and equal pay have led to increased participation in market economies. However, women’s inclusion has often been framed through a consumerist lens, rather than accompanied by structural redistribution of care responsibilities or access to resources. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the Global South, where the neoliberal reforms of the Washington Consensus—deregulation, privatization, and capital liberalization—have exacerbated inequality (Chatterjee, 2012; Gamage, 2015; Reinsberg et al., 2021). These reforms have deepened reliance on undervalued and unpaid labor, especially in rural areas, where women shoulder a disproportionate burden (Lindio-McGovern, 2007).

Expected to participate in formal economies while maintaining domestic responsibilities, women often perform what Hochschild and Machung (2012) term a “second shift,” sustaining households before and after wage labor. This care work remains structurally invisible in dominant economic paradigms. Feminist economists have long argued that care is not simply a set of tasks, but a foundational element of economic and social reproduction. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines care work as “non-remunerated work carried out to sustain the well-being, health and maintenance of other individuals in a household or the community,” encompassing both direct and indirect forms of care (ILO, 2018, p. 40). In contrast, Joan Tronto’s feminist approach expands care beyond labor or service, defining it as a “species activity” that includes everything required to “maintain,

continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Fischer & Tronto, 1990, p. 40). This broader definition highlights not only the tasks involved in caregiving, but also the relationships, bodies, environments, and networks that make life possible and meaningful. In this sense, care is not only reproductive or supportive—it is foundational to both human and ecological sustainability, and thus central to any serious project of social and political transformation (Fraser, 2014).

Unpaid care work continues to place a significant burden on women and girls globally. While the number of hours dedicated to care varies across countries, the impact is most pronounced in rural areas, where women often spend considerable time on own-use production—such as collecting water and firewood—as well as indirect forms of care (Charmes, 2019; Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019). The burden of care is shaped not only by geography but also by cultural and institutional factors. Countries with more egalitarian norms and gender-responsive policies tend to exhibit narrower gaps between men and women in the distribution of care work (Campaña et al., 2015; Ferrant et al., 2014), whereas patriarchal institutions, traditional norms, and rigid religious structures often reinforce inequality (Burda et al., 2013). In general terms, this can be observed in tendencies in the Global North versus the Global South.

This unpaid labor not only overlaps with women’s paid working hours, but often limits or entirely prevents their entry into the labor market—restricting autonomy and reinforcing cycles of dependency. According to ILO (ILO, 2024), care responsibilities prevent 1.6 billion women from joining the labor force, compared to 800 million men. Women primarily cite childrearing, elder care, care for persons with disabilities, and domestic upkeep as their reasons for economic exclusion, whereas men most often cite illness or lack of training. These disparities reflect the deeply gendered architecture of care, in which women are structurally positioned as caregivers—often without choice, compensation, or adequate support.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, where this research is situated, women and girls spend an average of 4.2 hours per day on unpaid care work—more than double the 1.8 hours spent by men (Hanna et al., 2023). Viewed through an intersectional lens, this burden is disproportionately borne by rural women and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These disparities are compounded by structural inequalities rooted in the region's multi-ethnic composition and colonial legacy, which continue to shape access to resources, rights, and representation around unequal hierarchical centre-periphery dynamics between urban and rural areas.

Feminist movements in Latin America have long advocated for context-specific strategies that reflect the differentiated realities of rural and urban women (Lagarde, 2006). They have also promoted expanded understandings of care—drawing from Tronto's ecological framing and frameworks such as the care-full approach (Dombroski et al., 2019), which emphasize care as environmental stewardship and collective responsibility. This perspective is especially relevant in today's climate crisis, where environmental degradation and resource scarcity multiply the vulnerabilities of already marginalized populations—particularly racialized women and *campesinas* in the Global South.

Research at the intersection of gender, care, and climate is urgently needed to inform more inclusive, just, and resilient responses. Amplifying women's agency—especially among those historically excluded from formal decision-making—is not only a matter of justice but a strategic imperative for building sustainable futures (Bezner Kerr, 2024). In this sense, care work places women at the heart of how we, as a species, shape future generations—not necessarily through formal power, but through their influence over everyday life. Women shape values, daily routines, and intergenerational practices that underpin behavioral change. Recognizing and redistributing care work, while dismantling the power structures that confine it, holds transformative potential. Supporting women's

knowledge in both public and private life is therefore not only a matter of gender equity—it is a foundation for building more peaceful, inclusive, and ecologically viable societies.

5.1 The Future is Gendered: Intersectional Pathways to Peace, Food Systems, and Climate Change

For years, scholars and practitioners have explored the connections between gender and peacebuilding, as well as between gender and the environment. In this section, I examine the nuances and challenges of incorporating a gender lens into three key areas: transitional justice, food systems transformation, and climate change, approached through the lens of environmental peacebuilding. Mead and Jacobsson (2023) present these intersections as a “triple nexus,” questioning why, despite broad recognition that women’s exclusion undermines the completeness of any peace or development process, their voices continue to be marginalized. Similarly, Bunse & Delgado (2024) present the nexus between peace and climate-resilient food security, confirming a growing interest and scholarship production on the overlap of these topics.

Their research points to legal, political, structural, procedural, and climate-related barriers—some of which will be addressed in the following review. This section serves as the chapter’s theoretical framework, offering a foundation for interpreting ASOCOMAN’s localized case study. By situating this case within broader feminist and intersectional debates, I aim to identify key lessons that may contribute to overcoming the persistent obstacles to gender equity in post-conflict and climate-affected contexts.

Gendering Peace: Women’s Lived Experiences and Structural Change in Peace Processes

Throughout violent conflict and its aftermath, women have often shouldered the responsibility of sustaining life—frequently under precarious and dangerous conditions.

They are not only caretakers of people, but also stewards of land, nature, and community, extending their labor of care into ecological and territorial domains. This dual role sets the stage for a central theme of this chapter: the intersection of environmental peacebuilding and feminist political ecology. These practices are rooted not only in gendered responsibilities but in epistemologies grounded in place, care, and resistance—what Haraway (1988) terms “situated knowledges” and what Cabnal (2010) frames as “body-territory” epistemologies. Both concepts are key to understanding the intrinsic value of the skills women have developed to navigate unjust political, economic, and social systems, as well as the transformative lessons embedded in their lived experiences.

Despite comprising approximately half the population, women’s experiences—and the systematic human rights violations they endure, both due to their own heightened vulnerability and as a means of targeting male relatives or communities—have historically been understudied (Paffenholz, 2015). In recent decades, however, a growing body of feminist and intersectional scholarship (C. Bell & O’Rourke, 2007; Brown & Ni Aolain, 2015; Lemaitre, 2020; Simic, 2016) has demonstrated that applying these analytical lenses not only reveals previously overlooked social dynamics, but also provides critical roadmaps for addressing the structural conditions that underpin violence and conflict.

As discussed in Chapter 2, transitional justice—while imperfect—remains a core framework for post-conflict peacebuilding. Though it is still an evolving field, there is significant room for refining its methodologies and theoretical underpinnings. Feminist critiques—such as those offered by Bell and O’Rourke (2007) in their seminal essay “Where are Women? Where is Gender? Where is Feminism in Transitional Justice?”—have emphasized that the field’s foundations were largely shaped by male experiences and epistemologies. Ní Aoláin (2012) goes further, arguing that transitional justice can operate as a form of discursive colonization, codifying knowledge in ways that exclude women’s experiences and reinforce hierarchies of value during transitions from war to peace (p. 206).

For much of its evolution, transitional justice has homogenized women's experiences—presuming their priorities revolve around truth-telling, memorialization, and reparations—while ignoring broader structural issues. These include entrenched social and economic inequality, restricted access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and land, as well as the erasure of cultural identities. These exclusions perpetuate harm and obstruct justice in highly patriarchal and repressive contexts (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2012; Unruh, 2010), limiting the potential for non-recurrence and sustainable, long-lasting, peace.

This marginalization has further entrenched perceptions of women as passive victims or aid recipients rather than as political actors entitled to full participation in peace negotiations, decision-making processes, and transitional justice mechanisms (Ní Aoláin, 2012, p. 209). Empirical data illustrates this exclusion: between 1992 and 2009, women made up just 2.4% of peace agreement signatories, and none served as chief mediators (UN Development Fund for Women, 2009). Of 585 peace agreements signed globally between 1990 and 2010, only 16% referenced women, and a mere 7% included commitments to gender equality or women's rights (C. Bell & O'Rourke, 2010).

These gaps have delayed recognition of gender-based crimes—such as sexual violence, forced marriage, slavery, and forced abortion—which disproportionately affect women and are often deprioritized in transitional justice frameworks (Ní Aoláin, 2000). Women's experiences are similarly underrepresented not only as passive victims or displaced survivors but also as combatants and girl soldiers, as well as regarding their differentiated needs in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs; hence, sacrificing the overall success.

Moreover, feminist discourse has at times unintentionally reinforced gender essentialism—focusing on the constraints of sexism while neglecting other intersecting dimensions such as race, class, ethnicity, and culture. These intersections profoundly shape women’s lived experiences, producing layered forms of violence and exclusion (Hernández-Truyol, 1997). Transitional justice often fails to address the cultural and structural violence embedded in conflict-affected societies. Socioeconomic transformation—decisive to non-recurrence—is frequently framed as an aspirational goal rather than a binding commitment, leaving key issues like discrimination, healthcare, education, and food security largely unaddressed. These are precisely the conditions that enable violence to persist and reproduce. A gendered approach to transitional justice must engage deeply with these structural conditions—not only because women disproportionately suffer their effects (Gready, 2011; Reilly, 2007), but because women’s meaningful participation is vital to transforming them.

Despite initiatives such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women’s 2002–2006 thematic focus—which emphasized women’s participation in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict recovery—feminist scholars have long critiqued international peacebuilding for its reliance on liberal frameworks shaped predominantly by male actors in the Global North (Bartlett, 1990; Ni Aolain, 2012). These frameworks often marginalize local knowledge systems and community-based traditions that are crucial for rebuilding social cohesion. As explored in Chapter 3, practices of everyday peace—such as those rooted in agroecology—offer compelling alternatives by prioritizing long-term care, local decision-making, and the co-creation of life plans. In this light, women’s roles in everyday life position them uniquely to reshape economies of care, community logic, and social habits in ways that nurture sustainable peace.

The contributions of women—and of gender analysis more broadly—to peacebuilding have been crucial to both theory and practice (Hudson, 2021). Patriarchal gender relations and power imbalances are not only consequences of conflict; they are often drivers of it.

Women's bodies and lives are frequently subordinated within systems of male dominance that intersect with militarization, capitalism, and cultural control (Cockburn, 2010). Historically, women have led anti-war and peace movements from roles associated with caregiving and support (Fuest, 2008). These contributions remain institutionally invisible, constrained by religious, social, and cultural expectations. For women who have lost partners, experienced gender-based violence, or borne the weight of caregiving alone, these roles are further shaped by stigma and systemic barriers to justice.

These caregiving roles—often framed narrowly in terms of motherhood or domesticity—nonetheless reflect the immense emotional, physical, and political labor that women perform in peacebuilding and post-conflict contexts. Movements such as the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina (Abreu Hernandez, 2002), the *Women's Network Against Violence* in Nicaragua (Sudderth, 2020), and the *National Women's Forum* in Guatemala—which mobilized in defense of the 1996 Peace Accord (Nakaya, 2003)—demonstrate how women organize from spaces of grief and dispossession to demand justice, dignity, and structural change.

Women's strength and resilience are undeniable. However, this chapter does not focus on resilience but rather on women's capacity to transform society. It centers on the ways in which their voices, actions, and lived experiences can reimagine futures, reshape histories, and deepen our understanding of peace. Their everyday practices—anchored in relational care, resistance, and territorial defense—forge new relationships between communities, ecosystems, and the sociopolitical structures that govern them.

Cultivating Equity: Feminist Pathways to Food Systems Transformation

As established in the previous section, adopting a gender perspective and incorporating women's situated knowledge is not only necessary in peacebuilding but also profoundly

valuable. Given the interdisciplinary scope of this research, it is equally important to extend this analytical lens to the field of food systems transformation—particularly agroecology—in alignment with the priorities and experiences shared by participants in this case study. This section also builds on the discussion in Chapter 3 regarding the neoliberal development paradigm and its implications for food systems.

The analysis presented here draws on Harvey’s concept of *accumulation by dispossession* (Harvey, 2003), an extension of Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation. It refers to the appropriation of resources without fair compensation to their original holders. Within the context of agroecology and food systems, this concept underscores capitalism’s imperative to absorb production surpluses and assert control over agricultural processes to sustain a logic of accumulation. This includes domination over seeds, agro-biodiversity knowledge, policymaking, and seed monopolies (La Vía Campesina & GRAIN, 2015). Critically, accumulation by dispossession is not an endpoint, but a mechanism through which control over capital and the means of production is consolidated (Bartra et al., 2016). Women—especially in rural areas—are among the most affected by these dynamics, facing compounded challenges in enacting agroecological transitions.

As Giraldo and Rosset (2018) argue, the increasing global recognition of agroecology as a viable solution for food systems transformation has sparked growing interest from multilateral institutions, national governments, corporations, NGOs, and academia. This surge in attention has introduced new tensions—particularly around the co-optation of agroecology by actors wielding disproportionate economic and political power. These actors often frame agroecology in ways that fail to address the root causes of inequality and extractive power relations, while appropriating the contributions of smallholder farmers and expanding control over land and resources. In this context, agroecology becomes a contested terrain—both materially, as a mode of production, and symbolically, as a framework for social transformation (Giraldo & Rosset, 2018, p. 246). These tensions

are especially acute in rural areas, where grassroots movements often find themselves at odds with the interests of the state and private capital (Fernandes, 2009; Rosset & Martínez-Torres, 2012).

A common challenge across both peacebuilding and food systems transformation is the insufficient inclusion of women and the absence of a genuinely intersectional gender perspective. The continued undervaluation of women's labor—in both productive and reproductive spheres—reinforces traditional gender roles and sustains unjust systems of remuneration, or the complete lack thereof, that underpin households, economies, and societies. Acknowledging and integrating women's voices is not simply a matter of inclusion for the sake of inclusion; it is fundamental to imagining sustainable futures and ensuring dignified lives for current and future generations. While agroecology critiques the environmental and social harms of industrial food systems (Dalgaard et al., 2003; Wezel et al., 2011), it has often failed to extend this critique to gendered systems of power and exclusion. Women's central role in food production and social reproduction remains largely overlooked (Van Esterik, 1999).

In recent years, however, feminist scholars have increasingly emphasized the need to embed gender analysis in agroecological theory and practice. Feminism, as outlined earlier, is both a theoretical and political project with transformative implications for social justice. A feminist agroecology must not only address gender-based oppression but also engage with intersecting axes of inequality—class, race, age, and geography (Benhadjoudja, 2018; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021; Viveros, 2016). After all, without women, there can be no genuine agroecological transformation. As many authors argue, agroecology should be seen not only as a shift in scientific paradigms but especially as a social movement (Carrasco, 2009; Pérez-Orozco & Ajenjo, 2018; Trevilla et al., 2021) that actively resists injustices, offers life-affirming alternatives, and truly includes women. As Najjar and Baruah (2024) demonstrate, however, gendered norms and labor expectations often limit

women's ability to adopt or benefit from agricultural innovations—highlighting the need for agroecological frameworks that explicitly confront these structural barriers.

Numerous studies in Latin America have documented how women lead more equitable and ecologically sound agricultural practices, cultivating socio-environmental relationships rooted in care and reciprocity with the land compared to men (Siliprandi & Zuluaga, 2014). These studies also highlight women's horizontal knowledge-sharing practices, which foster innovation, mutual learning, and solidarity (Zuluaga et al., 2018). From a multicultural ecofeminist perspective (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001; Svampa, 2015), researchers have analyzed the impacts of extractivist agri-food systems on women's lives and the strategies Indigenous women have developed to defend the commons (Busconi, 2017). These contributions span multiple domains—from agroforestry (Soto, 2015) and market labor (Pardo García et al., 2018) to care work, which remains a foundational but often invisible pillar of agroecological and peasant economies (ActionAid, 2019; Llanque et al., 2018; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021).

While many rural communities in Latin America have embraced agroecology as a means of securing food sovereignty and resisting extractivism, this has resulted in both empowering and burdensome outcomes for women. On the one hand, agroecology has enabled women to expand networks, build solidarity, and create spaces where their experiences are heard—improving well-being (Zaremba et al., 2021). On the other, many women have assumed additional responsibilities such as securing clients, organizing market spaces, and managing sales—often leading to physical exhaustion, heightened risks, and limited time for rest or nourishment (Deaconu et al., 2019). Two key lessons emerge: first, that even transformative frameworks like agroecology struggle to fully integrate gender analysis; and second, that women remain willing to engage when they see tangible benefits, autonomy, and collective empowerment—even when it comes at the cost of increased labor. I do not present this as a positive outcome, but as a critical observation.

Women respond to environments that recognize their agency, foster stimulation and knowledge exchange, and support mutual cooperation.

Trevilla et al. (2021) propose a matrix of interwoven systems of domination that feminist agroecology must confront: heteropatriarchy (gender), capitalism (class), and colonialism (race) (p. 1034). This framework is particularly relevant in Latin America and the Caribbean—one of the most unequal regions globally—where rural women’s labor force participation has grown by 45% over the last two decades. Colonial legacies continue to shape exclusionary structures in land tenure, labor, and governance. According to the FAO, rural women across the region face compounded vulnerabilities: disproportionate workloads, limited access to land and inputs, barriers to political participation, and low levels of economic and decision-making autonomy (FAO, 2017). These dynamics reinforce deep structural subordination within both patriarchal and capitalist systems.

A key reason for this persistent marginalization lies in how women’s labor is perceived—not as work, but as “help.” Much like how men’s caregiving is often described as assisting with the mother’s duties rather than shared parenting, women’s contributions to caregiving and domestic life are seldom recognized as labor. Unsurprisingly, women in rural areas earn, on average, 40% less than men, despite contributing more than 68 hours per week to unpaid care work, alongside over 44 hours of paid labor (FAO, 2017). Urban women face similarly disproportionate workloads. Globally, the poorest women tend to be rural, racialized, working-class, and located in the Global South (Slocum, 2010). There is an urgent need for policies that formally acknowledge intersectionality, women’s knowledge and women’s labor in food systems, while protecting them from co-optation—whether by male counterparts, community leadership, or external development actors, depending on the context and level (community-based, local, or national).

This disparity is also symptomatic of broader rural–urban inequalities in how work and time are valued. In Latin America, over 60 million people are engaged in family farming, which represents about 81% of farms. This is the principal economic activity in many rural areas, it contributes between 27% and 67% of food production—despite occupying between 12% and 67% of agricultural land (Escobar, 2012; FAO, 2017; Trevilla Espinal et al., 2021). Due to enduring colonial structures, much of this land is still not legally owned by *campesino* or Indigenous communities. Instead, they are subjected to exploitative systems—paying rent, facing predatory contracts, and lacking tenure security.

These exclusionary dynamics are not accidental; they are sustained by a dominant market logic that prioritizes growth, efficiency, and profit over equity, sustainability, and care. As discussed in Chapter 3, this logic renders life outside the market not only undesirable, but increasingly difficult for smallholder farmers—forcing them to accept exploitative conditions as the only viable option for survival. In sum, market logics have rendered life outside the market nearly unimaginable (La Via Campesina et al., 2016; Levidow et al., 2014; Rosset, 2009). Agroecology—especially when grounded in a feminist and intersectional framework—offers compelling alternative. While not a universal solution, it holds significant potential to reconfiguring social relations, ecological stewardship, and systems of value. Building on this, another key aspect that completes the theoretical positioning of this chapter is the role of climate change as a growing threat to both peace and the sustainable development of the most vulnerable communities.

The Climate–Peace Nexus: Women’s Transformative Power in Times of Crisis

In the face of escalating climate-related crises—including pandemics, natural disasters, and agricultural instability due to climate variability—it is increasingly urgent for research and public policy agendas to recognize the importance of non-human life in sustaining human well-being. This recognition is critical not only for understanding the impacts of climate change but also for appreciating the ecological relationships and tools that enable dignified

life. This premise aligns with Chapter 1's discussion of peace, particularly Giraldo's (2015) concept of *minimum peace*, which centers life as its core value. I return to this notion here because, as feminist scholars have long argued, the daily and intergenerational care work required to sustain life and territory is disproportionately carried out by women. These practices must not only be redistributed in pursuit of gender equity—they must also be acknowledged as the foundation for women's leadership and their capacity to drive systemic transformation in the face of ongoing and future crises.

In their white paper on feminist environmental peacebuilding, Zenda et al. (2022) affirm the critical role of women as knowledge-holders and change-makers in both peacebuilding and environmental governance. Drawing on research conducted by Zimbabwe's Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD), they propose a feminist model of environmental peacebuilding that centers accountability for environmental harm across public and private sectors. Such an approach fosters new forms of dialogue and trust—key conditions for sustainable peace (Dunn & Matthew, 2015)—while expanding our understanding of justice to include *slow violence*: the protracted, uneven effects of climate change that compound everyday insecurities, particularly for women and other marginalized communities.

Case studies from diverse geographies offer further evidence of women's critical engagement in environmental peacebuilding. In Colombia, Indigenous women's activism around environmental justice has reshaped notions of victimhood by linking ecological harm to historical and structural violence (Yoshida & Céspedes-Báez, 2021). In the Pacific Islands, women have framed sea-level rise not only as an environmental issue, but as a form of *slow violence* rooted in militarism and colonial legacies (George, 2014). In both cases, women's everyday practices illuminate how structural inequalities and gendered power relations act as multipliers of violence. These grassroots movements show that, even far removed from formal decision-making spaces, women continue to create sustainable

alternatives and mobilize for systemic change (Zenda et al., 2022)—despite limited resources and constrained autonomy.

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, women have historically been excluded from political and economic structures (Boyer et al., 2020), yet they have played pivotal roles in both peacebuilding and climate adaptation (Mead & Jacobsson, 2023). Women’s leadership in local mitigation efforts has generated innovative, context-specific responses to intersecting challenges—benefiting not only their families but also entire communities (Jensen et al., 2013). Critically, research shows that the most transformative initiatives tend to emerge from women’s collective organization. Ensor (2022) underscores the importance of adopting gender-transformative and intersectional approaches to both peacebuilding and humanitarian response, particularly in contexts affected by climate-related crises.

There is now widespread recognition of the climate–security nexus, with climate variability increasingly described as a “silent threat” to peace, aligning closely with the concept of *slow peace* mentioned earlier. A landmark response to the understanding of interconnections was UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), adopted in 2000. The resolution emphasized women’s participation in peace processes and catalyzed a growing body of scholarship demonstrating that women’s involvement improves the negotiation, implementation, and sustainability of peace agreements (Adjei, 2019; Christien & Mukhtarova, 2020; Hudson, 2021; Shair-Rosenfield & Wood, 2017). These agreements will increasingly intersect with climate adaptation and environmental governance in the years to come.

Across areas such as health, education, child welfare, housing, transportation, and natural resource management—each deeply embedded in everyday life—women’s situated knowledge plays a decisive role (Ensor, 2022, p. 291). Through their care work, women

develop a system-wide understanding of social needs and relational dynamics, which informs their holistic approaches to problem-solving and enhances the quality and durability of peace processes. Even in the face of compounded vulnerabilities shaped by gender, race, class, and conflict (Otim, 2018), women continue to sow the seeds of more just and resilient futures.

This underscores the vital importance of environmental governance in post-conflict contexts—not merely as a technical issue but as a foundation for sustainable peace, inclusive public policy, and international cooperation. Governance frameworks that center women can reduce gender inequality, expand women’s autonomy, and strengthen their leadership across all scales—from the household to national institutions (Charlesworth, 2014). As discussed earlier, gender inequality and power asymmetries are key drivers of poverty, food insecurity, and differentiated exposure to violence (Beittel, 2015; Ensor, 2022). With climate-related shocks becoming more frequent and severe, integrating a gender perspective is indispensable to preparing for, mitigating, and responding to these risks.

Looking ahead, as access to natural resources becomes increasingly contested, their scarcity is likely to trigger new cycles of conflict and displacement. We stand at a historical inflection point—one that demands preventive and corrective strategies grounded in cooperation, equity, and ecological sustainability. Women’s leadership in environmental peacebuilding offers one such pathway. It supports more inclusive decision-making, strengthens community resilience, and weaves together the social, ecological, and political fabrics needed to navigate the overlapping crises of our time (Yoshida, 2019). Protecting and amplifying women’s participation in these processes is not only a matter of justice—it is critical to building peace with the planet, and with one another.

These dimensions may not always be formally integrated into peacebuilding frameworks, but they are increasingly recognized as necessary for more holistic and context-sensitive approaches. Far from being isolated challenges, gender inequality and ecological degradation represent compounding risks that intensify pre-existing vulnerabilities. As such, they are not peripheral—they are central drivers of violence and, consequently, direct threats to peace, security, and collective well-being.

5.2 Women at the Crossroads of Peacebuilding and Climate Action in Colombia

After outlining the need for a more comprehensive gendered approach to peacebuilding and food systems transformation, this section contextualizes these ideas in the Colombian case. All the conditions and arguments presented thus far are deeply relevant here. As discussed in previous chapters, the 2016 Peace Agreement placed the transformation of rural relationships and the redistribution of land at the heart of Colombia's transitional agenda. The country's entrenched disparities—particularly between urban and rural areas—continue to present significant challenges to achieving sustainable peace and a more equitable future.

Women in Colombia's Quest for Peace

Two key dimensions define the relevance of gender in Colombia's peacebuilding process. The first is the role women have played—as negotiators, community leaders, and social actors—in sustaining peace during and after the armed conflict. While women have contributed in multiple capacities, this overview focuses specifically on their engagement in peacebuilding, aligning with the scope of this research. The second dimension considers how gender perspectives were (and were not) integrated into the 2016 Peace Agreement, where equity and inclusion became formalized as post-conflict commitments key for a transition from violence to peace. Together, these elements help contextualize the interview data that follows.

As in global peace and development discourses, Colombia has seen growing integration of gender perspectives in recent decades. Women's organizations have mobilized around demands for peace, justice, reparation, access to services, and political inclusion. Across rural and urban contexts, women have responded to multiple forms of violence—gender-based, sexual, political, and structural—while seeking justice for their families and communities. For example, the systematic rape of Wayúu Indigenous women by paramilitary groups in Bahía Portete (Bouvier, 2016) exemplifies targeted, gendered violence. Likewise, the Madres de Soacha, following the extrajudicial killings of their sons, organized to denounce state complicity—mirroring Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayo. Whether supported by national and international allies or acting autonomously, Colombian women have continually asserted leadership in contexts of exclusion. Nonetheless, deeply rooted patriarchy and cultural conservatism still limit women's political participation, particularly in decision-making spaces.

Colombia's long and complex peacebuilding trajectory—including multiple negotiation processes with armed groups—has led scholars to refer to it as a “peace laboratory” (Van Sluijs et al., 2022). As gender gained traction in global and national agendas, more literature and funding became available to support gender-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives. The 2016 Peace Agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP is now internationally recognized as one of the most gender-inclusive accords ever signed, incorporating various intersectional concerns. However, gender was not initially part of the negotiation framework. Early dialogues—described by some as elite-centric negotiations between the state and FARC (Gómez & Montealegre, 2021; Sb, 2024)—remained largely disconnected from grassroots organizations and the situated knowledges of women, Afro-Colombians, and Indigenous peoples.

By 2012, when peace talks began in Havana, only one of twenty official negotiators was a woman. Following pressure from the National Summit of Women and Peace—a coalition of civil society leaders, NGOs, and grassroots organizations—President Juan Manuel Santos appointed two women to the government’s negotiating team (Beittel, 2015; García, 2024). By 2015, women constituted 20% of the government’s delegation and 43% of the FARC’s. While the FARC’s representation mirrored the proportion of women within its ranks, this was not the case for the government’s delegation. Importantly, including women does not automatically ensure a gender perspective (Aggestam, 2014), but their participation can offer distinct viewpoints—particularly in patriarchal societies like Colombia. In this case, sustained feminist and civil society advocacy played a decisive role in shaping a more inclusive peace process (Bouvier, 2016), prompting a more explicit engagement with gender issues²².

Inclusion was crucial because women bore a disproportionate burden during the armed conflict. They represented 92% of reported sexual violence cases—an already underreported crime (García, 2024)—and were among the most vulnerable to forced displacement, accounting for nearly half of all displaced persons, followed closely by minors (Segovia, 2017). Two factors explain this disparity: first, gender-based violence relies on the control and exploitation of women’s bodies; second, war and militarization are deeply entangled with masculinity, reinforcing narratives of men as combatants and women as passive victims. As Cockburn (2010) argues, war-makers are not only capitalists

²² While the 2016 Colombian Peace Accord was internationally celebrated for its gender provisions, the inclusion represented an important but limited step—more symbolic than transformative in many respects. Moreover, the emphasis on gender equity was weaponized by conservative and religious actors, who spread misinformation about “gender ideology” during the plebiscite campaign. This backlash contributed to the narrow victory of the “No” vote, which won by less than 1%. See Bohórquez Oviedo (2021), *Weaponizing Gender: The Campaign against ‘Gender Ideology’ in the Colombian Peace Plebiscite*. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/openview/a7d2a8a863d64b4f702708f54e369632/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

or patriarchs—they are embedded within intersecting systems of domination, including cultural, racial, and religious ones. This makes implementing gender-sensitive peace agreements particularly complex.

Wills Obregón (2022) classifies the killings of women during the conflict into three categories: *transitive* (targeted through male relatives), *transgressor* (targeted for defying traditional gender roles), and *immoral* (victims of social cleansing by armed groups). These categories underscore the risks women face when stepping into leadership roles or asserting autonomy. Lesmes et al. (2019) further observe that the reconfiguration of armed actors in the post-conflict period has heightened these risks. In some communities, women have been forced to adapt to new, imposed norms, leading to the paradoxical perception that FARC's prior control—though violent—was at least predictable (Lesmes et al., 2019, p. 48).

Despite these challenges, Colombian women have persistently advocated for greater political representation, but major gaps remain. As of 2024, women hold only 21% of congressional seats—well below the OECD and Latin American average of 33% (García, 2024). During the 2015–2019 electoral cycle, women comprised just 15.6% of governors, 12.2% of mayors, and 16.7% of deputies (Lesmes, 2019). The momentum that brought gender into the peace negotiations did not translate into equivalent levels of participation or fiscal prioritization during implementation. A gender perspective requires not just policy rhetoric—it demands financial and political commitment. Colombia also exemplifies a stark urban–rural gender divide: while over half of urban women participate in the labor force, only one in four rural women does (World Bank Group, 2019).

The Peace Agreement was a pivotal opportunity to redress both gender and territorial inequalities. By 2021, only 4% of its implementation budget was dedicated to gender-specific measures (Isacson, 2021). Progress on gender markers has remained slow.

Meanwhile, core components of the agreement—land reform, victims’ rights, and drug policy—aimed to tackle the structural roots of conflict. These provided a framework for building a more equitable Colombia and reinforcing its leadership in the region. Still, the country has made only limited progress on gender equality (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies & Peace Accord Matrix (PAM), 2021), mirroring its first incorporation, as an add-on rather than a priority. This context is crucial for understanding both the opportunities and persistent barriers Colombia faces in achieving sustainable peace.

Women, Territory, and Resilience

Colombia’s commitments to environmental protection and redressing historical land dispossession—linked to forced displacement, extractive industries, and illegal economies—are reflected in both the 2016 Peace Agreement and the 2018 Escazú Agreement, which was incorporated into national law in 2024 (Andersen et al., 2024). The Escazú Agreement, ratified by 25 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, focuses on three core rights: access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and access to environmental justice. These frameworks are necessary for addressing the structural causes of violence and for reducing the environmental and social vulnerabilities that persist in conflict-affected regions.

According to the United Nations Population Fund, Colombia has 52.3 million inhabitants, including 6.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the same time, 13 million people experience moderate to severe food insecurity (World Food Programme, 2024). These interlinked crises—displacement, hunger, environmental degradation, and armed conflict—must be analyzed together. Geography and natural resource control have long shaped the strategies of armed groups, including the seizure of rivers, forests, and fertile lands; dominance over resource extraction; and the cultivation of illicit crops. These dynamics have constrained community access to essential resources, undermining livelihoods, autonomy, and safety (Valenzuela & Caicedo, 2018). This pattern of

dispossession disproportionately affects *campesino*, Afro-Colombian, and Indigenous communities, while advancing agro-industrial and extractivist agendas aligned with elite and armed groups' interests. Land restitution mechanisms—such as Law 1448 of 2011²³—have struggled to address these systemic injustices effectively.

Colombia's biodiversity and varied climate make agriculture central to the national economy, contributing about 8% of GDP and employing roughly 15% of the population (World Bank, 2024). This includes both large-scale agribusiness and smallholder farming (Barakat et al., 2017). As established in Chapter 3, conflict, poverty, and limited access to public goods continue to burden rural communities disproportionately. These same populations—particularly displaced women—are also most vulnerable to climate change. Approximately 84% of Colombians live in areas exposed to climate-related hazards (World Bank Group, 2023). From an intersectional perspective, the convergence of geographic, social, and conflict-related vulnerabilities places smallholder farmers—especially women affected by armed conflict—at the center of environmental risk.

While climate change is not a direct driver of conflict, it exacerbates vulnerabilities that heighten exposure to armed group influence. Prolonged droughts, worsened by phenomena such as El Niño, have severely disrupted livelihoods. In 2024 alone, 2.7 million people were affected by drought, and 18.6 million reported insufficient food consumption (Andersen et al., 2024). Climate-related crises also increase internal displacement. As armed actors concentrate in rural zones, people are often displaced multiple times, eventually relocating to informal urban settlements where insecurity and violence persist (Samper & Krause, 2024).

²³ Known as the Victims and Land Restitution Law, enacted to guarantee armed conflict victims' right to truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition.

SIPRI's 2024 country report for Colombia maps a strong geographic overlap between areas of high conflict intensity and those most vulnerable to climate-related risks. These zones not only restrict access to services and mobility but also deepen food insecurity and systemic precarity. The Caribbean and northern regions face high risks of worsening food insecurity; the Pacific region remains critically affected; and the central region is also on a declining trajectory. Conflict hotspots remain concentrated in the Pacific corridor, with others across the country—including in Montes de María.

Taken together, these practices, reflections, and localized innovations reveal a profound shift in how rural women are navigating—and actively reshaping—the intersecting challenges of post-conflict recovery, gender inequality, and ecological degradation. Their stories go beyond isolated acts of resilience; they signal an emerging paradigm of agroecological peacebuilding grounded in care, collectivity, and environmental stewardship. What follows is a deeper reflection on how these findings, when viewed through the theoretical lenses outlined earlier, invite us to reimagine the role of gender, climate, and contextual sensitivity as central pillars of sustainable and just peace. To do so, I draw on data collected through interviews with ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers, analyzed using a methodology rooted in agroecological practice. This approach ensures coherence with the chapter's epistemological commitments and honors ASOCOMAN's process and trajectory on their own terms.

5.3 The Missing Thread: Participation as a Pathway to Gender Justice and Peace

For the analysis and discussion, I draw on the Agroecology Finance Assessment Tool (AFAT), developed by the Agroecology Coalition²⁴, to assess the extent to which

²⁴ While the AFAT was initially designed to assess the alignment of financial flows with agroecological principles, it does not incorporate explicit feminist or peacebuilding frameworks. Its use in this chapter

ASOCOMAN's work aligns with recognized principles of agroecological transformation. The AFAT evaluates individual projects, initiatives, and portfolios on a scale from 0 to 2, measuring their degree of "agroecologicalness" (Agroecology Coalition, 2023). Grounded in the thirteen principles outlined by the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition and further elaborated in Moeller et al. (2023), the tool provides a structured framework for assessing systemic change. My application of the AFAT seeks to demonstrate three key elements: first, to validate that ASOCOMAN is actively advancing a food systems transformation consistent with contemporary agroecological standards. Second, to identify the gaps and limitations in their agroecological transition, particularly in relation to peacebuilding objectives. And third, to explore areas that have been strengthened—either directly or indirectly—through partnerships with the gastronomic sector. For the latter, I draw on insights gathered from interviews with ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers. It is important to note that the interview protocol was designed specifically to explore connections between gastronomy and peace, which shaped the direction and emphasis of participants' reflections.

One of the reasons the AFAT tool is particularly well-suited to this analysis is its inclusion of ten "red flags"—practices that are considered fundamentally incompatible with agroecology. Any initiative displaying one or more of these red flags is automatically disqualified from being considered agroecological. Two red flags are especially relevant to my research: the exclusion or discrimination against women and marginalized groups, and the violation of human rights. The first indicates that projects failing to actively include women and marginalized populations are incompatible with an agroecological transition. The second disqualifies any project that violates human rights, including customary rights,

is therefore analytical and adapted—reinterpreted through a critical lens that centers gender, care, and post-conflict reconstruction. This adaptation reflects the broader commitment of this dissertation to retool existing instruments in order to explore the intersections between agroecology, gastronomy, and peacebuilding.

ignores free, prior, and informed consent, or results in population displacement and land grabbing (Agroecology Coalition, 2023, p. 8).

While these criteria do not, on their own, ensure equity, their presence signals a crucial shift: inclusion and human rights are treated not as optional considerations, but as baseline requirements. This aligns with the ethical and analytical commitments of this research. Although climate adaptation and resilience are not formal AFAT principles, their relevance can be inferred through other criteria—such as biodiversity, soil health, and input reduction. These principles reveal clear intersections with both climate adaptation and food systems transformation, making the tool a valuable lens for assessing synergies with peacebuilding strategies. In particular, the AFAT framework allows for a nuanced exploration of these intersections from a gendered perspective—especially urgent in the face of escalating climate-related shocks and crises in conflicted areas, as discussed in earlier sections of the chapter.

Where AFAT meets post-conflict peacebuilding

To deepen the analysis of ASOCOMAN's initiative, I complement the AFAT assessment with fieldnotes collected during my immersive fieldwork. These notes include contextual observations, informal conversations, and reflections that capture the texture of everyday interactions with ASOCOMAN members. The results were subsequently vetted with a key participant—an agronomist and long-time ally of the community—who has been instrumental in helping them transition from monoculture farming to agroecological systems. As the son of a *campesino* family in the region, he has dedicated himself to developing tools and fostering networks that support territorial transformation. His work spans multiple communities in Montes de María, where he provides technical assistance, facilitates farmer-to-farmer learning, and has helped forge win-win partnerships between rural associations and the gastronomic sector—relationships grounded in mutual respect for the land and its people.

As Figure 1 illustrates, ASOCOMAN's work engages—at varying levels—with all thirteen agroecological principles. This is a remarkable achievement for a community that has undertaken this transition largely on its own, without external funding, relying instead on revenues generated through partnerships and alliances built in recent years. The highest-scoring principles include biodiversity, economic diversification, social values and diets, and connectivity, all of which received the maximum score of 2.0. Synergy, co-creation of knowledge, and fairness follow closely, with scores of 1.8 and 1.7 respectively. These results are consistent with the association's trajectory and its vision of collective, community-driven development. In the next section, I analyze how the four highest scoring principles intersect with their engagement in the gastronomic sector and highlight the pivotal role women have played in advancing this transformation.

What is especially notable is that ASOCOMAN's initiative embodies both dimensions of agroecology: as a scientific method and as a social movement, as discussed in Chapter 3. The radar diagram clearly shows that the human factor is central to their work. The principles most deeply embedded in their process—co-creation of knowledge, connectivity, social values, and fairness—are directly linked to the relationships they have cultivated with one another, with other *campesinos*, and with their urban allies. As with all change, their journey has not occurred in a vacuum. It is deeply grounded in practices of sharing. ASOCOMAN is, in many ways, a story of transformation through connection, generosity, and trust. By fostering relationships based on mutual respect, they are modeling the kind of horizontal, inclusive interactions envisioned in post-conflict societies. Even without framing their actions as peacebuilding, they are enacting everyday peace through their relational practices.

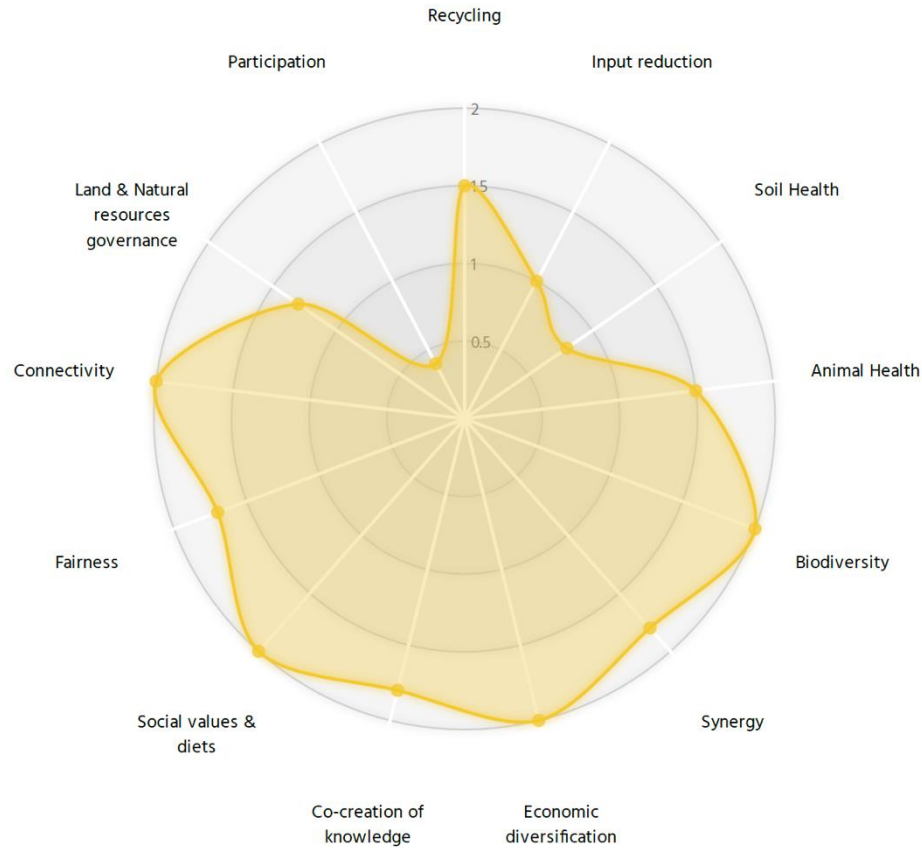


Figure 2: ASOCOMAN AFAT Diagram.

In contrast, the principle with the lowest score—below 0.5—is participation. This result is highly significant for my analysis, as participation is intimately tied to political agency, decision-making, and the broader peacebuilding agenda in Colombia. According to the AFAT Manual (2023), the participation principle is defined as the encouragement of “social organization and greater participation in decision-making by food producers and consumers to support decentralized governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems” (p. 22). In ASOCOMAN’s case, the only indicator selected under this principle was the strengthening of organizational capacity for self-determination and autonomy—such as food sovereignty. Other indicators—including rights awareness, participatory governance over food systems, and the inclusive engagement of women, youth, and marginalized groups in policymaking—were not marked as achieved.

The absence of these indicators points to two things. First, it reveals areas where the initiative could be strengthened, particularly in cultivating participatory structures that extend beyond the internal workings of the association, or the passivity associated with women as suggested by Ni Aoláin (2012). Second, it signals a strategic opportunity to link agroecological practice with Colombia's transitional justice agenda. Given that the research's core goal is to explore the intersections between agroecology, gastronomy, and peace, the principle of participation offers fertile ground for bridging these fields from a gendered perspective, and contributing to addressing the gap signaled by Bell & O'Rourke (2010). Based on the research and theoretical connections explored thus far, I suggest that participation constitutes the most promising point of overlap between agroecology and transitional justice. It has been through participation that women have been systematically excluded, leading to the loss of their situated knowledge.

The final goal of transitional justice—democracy—cannot be achieved without participation. Reconciliation, civic trust, and recognition are its necessary precursors (De Greiff, 2012), but participation is what sustains these outcomes over time. In moving away from liberal, top-down models of peacebuilding—especially those imposed on the Global South—participation must be reimagined not as institutional representation alone, but as the spirit of democratic transformation. In highly localized contexts such as Montes de María, this means recognizing that legitimate authority and knowledge already exist within communities. Building sustainable peace requires validating this situated knowledge and ensuring the inclusion of women and marginalized groups from the design stage—not as an afterthought, but as foundational actors.

Participation also emerges as the strongest thematic bridge between food systems transformation and peacebuilding. Agroecology and transitional justice both challenge the root causes of conflict: inequality, exclusion, and urban-rural disparities. Both emphasize

equity and inclusion. Both recognize the central role of women as change agents. And both depend on the quality of human interaction—especially between people who have been estranged, divided, or unequal. Whether this takes the form of former combatants re-encountering each other as fellow citizens, or as producer and consumer meeting face-to-face at a farmers' market, the potential for transformation lies in these everyday exchanges. Peace and sustainability are co-created not only through institutions, but through shared spaces and social practices that enable recognition, trust, and interdependence.

5.4 Four Important Lessons

In Chapter 3, I discussed the relationship between agroecology and everyday peace. One of the core lessons from that discussion was that for transformation to scale, it must center technical capacity-building for women and marginalized groups—particularly in decision-making spaces. Although women's engagement in ASOCOMAN has not taken the form of formal political participation, they have gradually and significantly increased their influence within the association. To better understand how this engagement has driven ASOCOMAN's growth, I analyze women's role in the process through the interwoven perspectives of the three participant groups: ASOCOMAN members, chefs, and researchers/private sector stakeholders.

Social Values & Diets

Across these groups, perceptions of women's contributions—and gender roles more broadly—varied according to the speaker's positionality. Chefs made the fewest references to women, while researchers offered the most. ASOCOMAN members often limited their reflections to their lived experience within the association. Researchers, by contrast, referred to their work with traditional cooks (*cocineras tradicionales*), women farmers (*campesinas*), and female victims of conflict in various projects across Colombia. Chefs mainly spoke about *campesinas* and *cocineras tradicionales* as producers, as well as about the gender composition of their teams and the culinary sector in general. While some

participants emphasized gender equality and the shared benefits of gastronomy and peace initiatives, others recognized women's distinct contributions. I focus here on the latter: those who acknowledged women's differential added value in food systems transformation and how they relate with the agroecological principle of Social Values & Diets²⁵.

When asked about the difference between men and women within the association, ASOCOMAN members shared that in the early years, most members were men. It was only when their female partners began attending meetings—initially just to understand why the men returned home so late—that they gradually joined and eventually became active members. As one male participant put it: “Here in the association, women who are part of ASOCOMAN have the same vote and the same voice as men. That is equity” (Interview A07). Another echoed this:

“Women in our organization are fundamental pieces, because we in the countryside bring what we grow, and they innovate with it here. They work here, at the heart of the operation, so they are one of the key pillars—and they have both voice and vote, just like the men.” (Interview A14)

Women's integration into the association closely aligns with the agroecological principle of Social Values & Diets, which emphasizes gender equity and the cultural dimensions of food systems. Their participation not only reshaped ASOCOMAN internally but also transformed gender dynamics within their households, such as acknowledging the value of the work they, women, perform for the association as active and contributing members. One female member explained:

²⁵ Definition in AFAT Manual: Build food systems based on the culture, identity, tradition, social and gender equity of local communities that provide healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets (page 18).

“My colleagues, my husband... we all began to build a respectful coexistence, recognizing that just as they have their own space, the right to work and to engage in commerce, so do we, the women. So, for me, I’ve felt that hope has returned, an opportunity that didn’t exist for me before—especially after hearing so many times that I was no longer good for anything.” (Interview A18)

This shift from passive support roles to leadership has been widely recognized by both women and men. During the fieldwork, members recounted how women’s curiosity, innovation, and persistence opened new spaces for the association—such as when they raised funds for ASOCOMAN’s headquarters after participating as guest cooks in a partner restaurant in Cartagena (shared in Interview A08). The event served to emphasized the value of women’s knowledge, abilities and cultural traditions even outside of the community. As one participant proudly noted:

“Today, women are playing a very important role within the association—something that wasn’t the case in the past. Within ASOCOMAN, women have taken on leadership roles that have emerged through the associative process itself, and that fills us with great pride. Because women have assumed truly significant roles.” (Interview A13)

One of the most consistent insights across interviews was the complementary nature of men’s and women’s roles. Members emphasized that while men often work larger plots of land, women cultivate diverse produce in their patios—food that supports everyday nutrition and contributes to the collective harvest sold to restaurant partners. Closely related to the care work literature shared in previous sections, women remain at home to care for children and the elderly, while simultaneously transforming products and adding economic and symbolic value to the association’s offerings – despite extending their hours of labour, a second shift. As one participant shared:

“Let me tell you—women here have more of a say than we do. Yes, because of what I’ve been telling you: these women transform all kinds of things. It’s not that we don’t do it because we can’t—it’s just that we’re out in the fields, clearing land, watering the guava trees. Everything we find, we bring home—and they work with it. That’s the beauty of it. So they’re working hard. That woman over at [participant’s] place, the one you visited—she makes cakes from all sorts of flours: cassava, squash, beans, you name it. They learn from one another. Another one makes plantain buns with all sorts of things—all their own inventions. And everything they make, they sell. That’s the best part: everything they create, they’re able to sell.” (Interview A15)

Researchers working across Colombia echoed this appreciation for women’s leadership in food systems and care economies. They emphasized that many traditional cooks have long operated in the domestic sphere—not by choice, but by social constraint. As one researcher noted:

“Women have been present throughout all generations; they’ve always been the ones in charge of the kitchen. What happens is that—I think—they were confined, kept behind closed doors. What we need to do now is bring them out of there, out of the kitchen, and show them. Show that they hold all the value they truly have.” (Interview R07)

A chef offered a similar observation, calling attention to the systemic exclusion of traditional cooks from policy and decision-making spaces:

“What really surprises me is that, right now, as strategies to combat hunger are being discussed, there aren’t a whole lot of traditional women cooks at those decision-making tables. Because they are the ones who have addressed food sovereignty and food security

in the territories for generations—and in cities too. [...] They have something to say, a way of understanding things that I believe really needs to be included. And overall, in my experience with rural entrepreneurship, I've seen that young women always tend to get things done more effectively.” (Interview C05)

Several chefs underscored how economic necessity—not just cultural pride—drives women's entrepreneurial engagement in food systems. One explained:

“Many of the projects we run are led by women. [...] They are women who have had to move forward because they've lost their husbands, their parents, or other family members—they've had to carry their families forward.” (Interview C03)

This reflects the lived reality of countless displaced women across Colombia. Their resilience is often taken for granted, and it underscores the urgent need to open decision-making and policy spaces to those with firsthand knowledge of care, survival, and transformation. As another researcher insisted, recognition must extend beyond physical labor to the deeper epistemic value women hold:

“Women also hold the knowledge to transform those foods, and we need to start valuing that—not just their physical labor in the transformation process, but also that intrinsic knowledge. It seems really important to start thinking about how we can value it more appropriately.” (Interview R12).

That recognition must be both cultural and economic. Women's experience in kitchens, patios, and caregiving roles—often shaped by violence and exclusion—positions them as strategic actors in shaping inclusive, sustainable futures. Under the gastronomy and peace

framework I propose, economic empowerment is a non-negotiable element for transforming agency and strengthening women's ability to contribute meaningfully to family, community, and society. Economic independence fosters voice, dignity, and power—especially for those navigating post-conflict realities. Then, this is one way to advance without waiting to solve the care work redistribution issue. Having traced these connections through the lens of Social Values & Diets, I now turn to the principle of Economic Diversification to further explore how these dynamics are shifting not only roles but livelihoods.

Economic Diversification

One of the most powerful takeaways from this case study—and one of the core potentials of the agroecology–gastronomy–peacebuilding nexus—is the economic independence it enables, especially for historically marginalized groups such as *campesinos* and victims of Colombia's armed conflict. For women in particular, ASOCOMAN demonstrates how integrating gender equity into organizational values can significantly amplify social, cultural, and economic impact. Though the case is localized, its lessons offer broader insights into how economic diversification can build resilience and autonomy in post-conflict communities.

Economic Diversification²⁶ is among the four highest-scoring principles in ASOCOMAN's AFAT diagram. Much of this success stems from the value-added transformations led by women. These include product innovation, recipe development, and the incorporation of ancestral knowledge—all of which have broadened ASOCOMAN's product offerings and increased household incomes. In parallel, the association's trust,

²⁶ Definition in AFAT Manual: Diversify on-farm incomes by ensuring that smallscale farmers have greater financial independence and value addition opportunities while enabling them to respond to demand from consumers (page16).

horizontal relationships with chefs have fostered mutual learning and opened new spaces for experimentation—ranging from culinary techniques to service design. As one participant explained:

“What has happened with our processes is that they’ve made income-generating activities more inclusive of women. For example, in the projects we work on, women take on roles as food processors, forest or backyard gatherers—and when their backyard becomes their main source of income, they become autonomous in that economy and income generation. That’s when we see a break from the pattern where it’s the man who goes out to work, sometimes taking up to a year to harvest his crop, and likely ends up facing losses due to low prices or other barriers. That creates a disadvantage for both. So when the woman depends solely on the man's income, she often ends up in a vulnerable position, waiting for him to be the one who brings in the money.” (Interview A12)

Women not only confirmed these roles but recognized the responsibility and power they now carry—both within ASOCOMAN and at home. They have been central to the diversification of the association’s income streams, moving beyond farm production and partnerships with restaurants to include processed foods, home-based sales, and other entrepreneurial ventures. As two women shared:

“Men do the heavier, more physically demanding work, but we also have our own responsibilities—and they have their limits too. Because if we’re handling the cooking oil and get distracted and it burns, we fail, of course. So we are responsible—we know what we’re doing. And when we do it well, it means we’re working equally hard.” (Interview A18)

“We do the transforming—we make desserts, we sell them; we cook meals and sell those too. Everything we grow, like scallions in our backyards, we send out and sell. So it’s

become an extra source of support for us—we no longer depend on them. And that has really motivated all of us, because we women were the last to join in, but now even they say that we're surpassing them (laughs)." (Interview A21)

There is a clear awareness of a gendered division of labor, particularly in agriculture. Yet, both men and women perceive women's progress as a collective strength rather than a competition. This mutual recognition reflects the association's ethic of collaboration and their ability to frame different capacities as complementary:

"Look at what we're doing today—we're selling the flour at a good price. But now the women... the women are the ones bringing home the paycheck... we're falling behind! (laughs) Yes, yes—because those women know how to do everything." (Interview A15)

ASOCOMAN's ethic of camaraderie and equity helps counter one of the main risks associated with agroecological transitions: the risk of overburdening women with additional, often invisible labor. As one researcher working with women in southern Colombia emphasized:

"It's also something we learned from women leaders—it's not about adding more work to women, because women already work a lot. So it's not about overburdening them; we need to ease the workload that women carry across different levels, because at every level, you end up feeling overwhelmed." (Interview R13)

Economic recognition has transformed not only the material conditions of women's lives, but also their sense of self-worth and agency. Women shared how, before their active roles in ASOCOMAN, they had to ask their partners for money to purchase clothes, basic

products, or anything for themselves. Now, they earn their own income—and that changes everything:

“It has changed my life—mainly because of the income. I mean, I know money isn’t everything, but still, it matters. What’s beautiful is being able to have your own income and buy what you want, with what’s yours.” (Interview A04)

As women began to recognize the intrinsic value of their time, labor, and knowledge, their engagement deepened. Many became more invested in preserving seeds, promoting short food circuits, improving family nutrition, and protecting ancestral culinary traditions—sometimes without even realizing they were advancing food sovereignty and climate adaptation in the process. One chef described this process of transformation:

“They truly seem much more empowered now. Because at the beginning, when we started working with Asocoman, some of them barely spoke—some didn’t speak at all. [...] Now they speak up, even the young girls talk about these topics. They’ve fully internalized the importance of the tropical dry forest, the ecosystems, and the ingredients...” (Interview C11)

A researcher further emphasized how important it is to recognize not just women’s physical labor but their deeply rooted knowledge systems:

“Women also hold the knowledge to transform food, and we really need to start valuing that—not just their physical labor in the transformation process, but the intrinsic knowledge they carry. [...] We need to showcase the gastronomy that is truly eaten in the regions, with deep respect and by honoring that ancestral knowledge—mostly feminine—that often goes

unnoticed. Many times, even the women themselves don't realize it's something of real value." (Interview R12)

Chefs who work with women producers across Colombia confirmed that once women become involved in these kinds of projects, their commitment and innovation flourish. As one chef noted:

"I can tell you that around seventy or sixty percent of our suppliers are women who are deeply committed to their product and their knowledge... or traditional cooks—because in traditional kitchens, it's almost all women. And there you have it." (Interview C09)

Importantly, the potential of this nexus is not confined to rural settings. Women in urban contexts—especially those in informal economies—also display a strong ethic of collaboration and collective action. Several interviewees pointed to the promise of valuing the knowledge of *cocineras tradicionales* to protect cultural identity and to provide new pathways for economic inclusion, which could indirectly contribute to protect endangered species through regional flavors. She said:

"These women who live in the informal sectors of the cities also hold great potential—perhaps for thinking about kitchens, even hidden kitchens, where they could begin not only to build associativity among themselves, but also to develop their own brand that helps them generate more income." (Interview R11)

Taken together, the principles of Social Values & Diets and Economic Diversification demonstrate how mutually reinforcing dynamics can foster more sustainable, interconnected, and equitable food systems. ASOCOMAN's experience illustrates that

when women are able to meet their basic needs and gain recognition for their work, they step into leadership roles that can drive broader social transformation. What chefs, researchers, and ASOCOMAN members collectively reveal is this: once women stabilize their economic conditions, they begin to multiply impact—within their households, their communities, and beyond. In the next section, I turn to the third high-ranking principle that speaks on those relations with other actors in the social realm and in food systems.

Connectivity

One of the most powerful lessons from the nexus between peacebuilding, agroecology, and gastronomy is the importance of connection—not only to improve efficiency and inclusion but also to ensure long-term sustainability. Connectivity does not only refer to relationships between people; it extends to the environment, the territory, and the species that inhabit it. As an agroecological principle, Connectivity²⁷ refers to the proximity and relationship among actors in the food system. Shortening these connections can help protect native species, promote seasonal diets, and respond more effectively to regional needs.

From a peacebuilding perspective, or through the lens of transitional justice, connectivity can be seen in the relationships between fellow citizens and how the quality of those connections shapes the broader quality of social life. In gastronomy, connection is often experienced on the plate—a meal that binds farmers, cooks, and diners. Whether in fine dining or a local eatery, food is a vehicle of exchange, care, and nourishment. From a gendered perspective, women have always stood at the center of these connections. Through care work, intergenerational teaching, and emotional labor, women sustain

²⁷ Definition in AFAT Manual: Ensure proximity and confidence between producers and consumers through promotion of fair and short distribution networks and by re-embedding food systems into local economies (page 20).

families with or without economic support from a partner. They are also natural networkers—sharing knowledge, leveraging collective skills, and building systems of mutual support. This disposition is not incidental but stems from how traditional gendered responsibilities have shaped women's priorities. As one chef put it:

"When projects are handed over to women, they carry a strong sense of responsibility. If they have a good fishing day, they don't go off drinking for three days—instead, they save and buy clothes for their children." (Interview C04)

One researcher who worked with *campesino* communities across rural Colombia echoed this perspective, describing a consistent pattern in the groups she engaged:

"There were always more women's groups than men's; we were able to identify greater resilience among the women, because in truth, there were very few men we worked with or who stayed engaged in the process." (Interview R04)

A second researcher, reflecting on another set of communities, emphasized the same differentiated commitment:

"Women are the ones who have traditionally cooked, who have traditionally managed the garden or the chagra... so they are deeply connected to food. [...] In my experience working with women's groups in communities, women tend to be much more sharp and proactive." (Interview R11)

ASOCOMAN offers a living example of this. Once women began developing new skills, they shared them. Recipe variations, preservation techniques, and product innovations were not guarded secrets but community resources. This generosity gave rise to gastronomic events, where members showcased their creations to visiting chefs and guests. These shared experiences expanded their knowledge and widened their platform—both economically and socially. As one participant reflected:

"Another experience was at the restaurant Celele in Cartagena. We also went there to prepare a meal—five of us from the Asocoman Group. For me, it was wonderful. It was a truly amazing experience because we had never done anything like that before, and it leaves a mark on you—because these are things you've never lived through. For me, it was just incredible. [...] They've been great achievements, and just look at the headquarters we built thanks to what we accomplished at that restaurant." (Interview A04)

This capacity to uplift others and to multiply opportunity is the essence of connectivity. It also underscores why women's inclusion is transformational. Just like chefs, *campesinos* dream, innovate, and aim high. The relationships forged between ASOCOMAN and Colombia's gastronomic sector show how horizontal, trust-based alliances can align ambitions and extend benefits across the value chain. As one researcher noted:

"When one woman helps another to move forward, that's fantastic. Because if there's something truly important, it's that women have economic independence. That's crucial—it allows them to fulfill their dreams." (Interview R13)

Once women feel empowered and recognize their own worth, everything begins to shift. Based on the interview data, women are clearly natural multipliers. Their curiosity,

inventiveness, and persistence not only change the course of their lives but also open doors for others. A chef summarized it beautifully:

"Many women who in the past probably remained within the domestic space—taking care of the family's meals, or being known as the one who knew how to make sancocho, or things like that—many of those women have now become leaders in their communities."
(Interview C05)

This transformative momentum should inform how we approach the Participation principle, particularly in connection with peacebuilding. These efforts should not be designed from policy bureaus in Bogotá—they are already happening, in practice, on the ground. Communities like ASOCOMAN already hold the tools, knowledge, and networks. Our role as researchers and practitioners is to listen, support, and help expand what they are already doing. As one researcher observed:

"I don't know when the short-circuit happened that made men become the chefs, when traditional kitchens have always been women's spaces—ancestral ones. Machismo went so far that it even disrupted that. I find it wild. But empowerment through agriculture—women were the farmers and the cooks—comes from the territories. The empowerment we achieved, for example, with many men and women, was truly beautiful: with six, seven, even eight women whose recipes we helped share with the world." (Interview R05)

The Connectivity principle adds another layer to the analysis. First, it reinforces the synergies already observed with Social Values & Diets and Economic Diversification. Second, this is not a call to exclude men. It is a call to look with new eyes—curious, grounded, and attentive to the real innovations emerging from below in a complementary manner. It is about enabling *campesino* communities to increase their agency through their

tradition and collective action. For this, women must be part of that process—not as symbolic figures but as leaders, innovators, and co-architects of change. Third, it shows that connectivity is not just about short food circuits—it is also about what armed conflict survivors and farmers are doing to sustain life in the midst of inequality, poverty, and violence.

While not all communities have achieved what ASOCOMAN has, their story illuminates the potential of these pathways and the urgency of supporting them through peacebuilding frameworks and possibilities of exploring the transferability of their lessons to other communities in the country through farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing frameworks. So far, the agroecological principles examined have proven to be just as holistic and integrative as the goals of transitional justice. In the next section, I turn to the final principle in ASOCOMAN’s agroecological journey.

Biodiversity

Within the AFAT framework, Biodiversity²⁸ is the principle most closely linked to climate change adaptation. From a food systems perspective, it entails protecting native species that are better suited to withstand climate shocks. One of ASOCOMAN’s key contributions in this area is its role as seed guardians of the tropical dry forest in Montes de María. Special mention must be made of the agronomist who has guided this process—his work has been instrumental in the transformation underway in several communities across the region. In collaboration with chef allies, he has helped identify edible wild plants and native species previously disregarded—many of which were once cut down or burned as weeds at the end of the harvest season. Today, that knowledge has shifted. Higher biodiversity in farms and

²⁸ Definition in AFAT Manual: Maintain and enhance diversity of species, functional diversity and genetic resources and thereby maintain overall agroecosystem biodiversity in time and space at field, farm and landscape scales (page 13).

landscapes now correlates with improved incomes and greater food security in everyday life.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for ASOCOMAN members, biodiversity is not just an ecological concern—it is a strategic asset. It adds value to their products and plays a key role in their diets. Their diversified production contributes to food security, sovereignty, and nutrition by increasing the availability of nutrient-rich foods. When asked about how to scale agroecology, ASOCOMAN members highlighted two key drivers: a respectful relationship with the environment, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing.

"It's a step-by-step process that requires the involvement of many actors, a lot of humanity—as we say around here—many people who are driven by a sense of environmental care, by the richness we have in Colombia in terms of diversity and biodiversity. And the right path is to make our work known, because if we don't share what we do, how will other communities learn about it? It's about transmitting and sharing knowledge." (Interview A13)

They also expressed a desire to engage the younger generation. While this has been challenging—most members are in their forties or older—they see it as vital for continuity. They want to pass on the knowledge they have recovered, especially regarding seeds. As one woman explained:

"In Asocoman, we're trying to find ways to train ourselves to attract the next generation. We've been thinking and analyzing, but the ideas haven't quite come together yet. There's very little in place for that. Children need to see how things are planted, to know the seeds. We already have a wide diversity of seeds, and they don't know anything about them. We need to look at what we already have—how it should be cared for, why, and for what

purpose. Balanced nutrition is so important, and it shouldn't be that just because there's squash available, we only eat squash—no. It's about embracing that diversity." (Interview A18)

This reflection ties closely with previously discussed principles like Social Values & Diets, Connectivity, and Economic Diversification. At its core, the association seeks to create dignified life plans for young people—not by encouraging migration to cities, but by offering a viable future within the territory. They are advancing an agroecological model that is as much about economic stability as it is about intergenerational continuity. The agronomist coordinating these efforts described it this way:

"It was basically a response to a path I found—a problem that exists across the Colombian countryside, which is the commercialization of farmers' products. No matter the region, every year there tends to be an oversupply of certain products, which causes prices to drop significantly and leads to losses. So what we did was identify a specialized market where producers could access better income opportunities, with a strong emphasis on valuing biodiversity." (Interview A12)

Chefs, too, are aware of biodiversity's economic potential—and the challenges in getting rural products to urban markets. Transportation remains a major barrier, often leading to food waste and lost income. They also see this as an opportunity. As one chef pointed out:

"There are so many products that aren't used here in Colombia, especially in the interior of the country. And if we started using them—and figured out how to transport them, which is the big issue—[because we have an enormous biodiversity in Colombia, but you find a product, and they bring it to you one month, then the next month they don't, it's not consistent...]—it could generate a lot of employment if there were infrastructure to support these families, these communities that can produce these products or raw materials and sell

them here. [...] We need programs to help us better understand our products and our biodiversity, and as I said, to make sure they can be used consistently." (Interview C01)

While ASOCOMAN has resolved many of these challenges through direct alliances with chefs and restaurants, the issue remains urgent for countless other communities. Strengthening regional connections—both physical and economic—represents a promising avenue for future projects within the agroecology–gastronomy–peacebuilding nexus. For chefs, this isn't just a matter of social impact; it's a business necessity. They recognize the legacy of the Green Revolution and are interested in reclaiming biodiversity as part of their culinary identity. As one chef emphasized:

"Some people are very traditional and just stick to what they're used to. But it's also really cool to raise awareness and help people understand that we have more ingredients, more diversity, more options—that it's not just what they see at the supermarket, like carrots, potatoes, and tomatoes. That's what most people think, and that's a very capitalist mindset—it's all the Monsanto logic—when in reality, we have a diversity we should be using, with so many benefits." (Interview C04)

One researcher, drawing on her work across multiple regions in Colombia, highlighted the diversity already being reclaimed—from cassava and native beans in Bolívar, to Andean tubers in Boyacá, to quinoa and amaranth in Cauca, to chontaduro flour and native seafoods:

"I've had the chance to work on value chains for the following products... In Arauca: casabe and mañoco; in Bolívar: native beans and Caribbean fruit pulps like tamarind, corozo, guayaba agria, zapote, and níspero; in Boyacá: native beans and tubers like majuas, ibias, and chuguas; in Cauca: seafoods like piangua, sangara, prawns, and shrimp; in

Chocó: a lot of fish. [...] And there are incredibly sharp producers working with native potatoes and corn." (Interview R11)

Another researcher emphasized that biodiversity protection cannot be approached solely from a technical or environmental lens. It is also cultural—and deeply human. Protecting biodiversity is a way for communities to remain in their territories. In a context where poverty and hunger are worsening under climate change, biodiverse, climate-resilient crops are not just desirable—they are necessary for survival. He noted:

"One part has to do with the use of biodiversity—its knowledge and application; another focuses on sustainable biotrade, meaning how to make use of biodiversity for fairer and more equitable commerce—seeing biodiversity as a business opportunity for local communities. And the third is about appreciation and equity: valuing biodiversity not only economically, but also environmentally and socially, in order to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of the resources derived from its use." (Interview R11)

At this point, it should be clear to the reader—as it is to me—that this is the road ASOCOMAN has chosen. They have built reliable alliances with chefs and restaurants, not just as buyers but as allies, how the associates call them, in a project that leverages biodiversity to improve diets, restructure food systems, foster inclusion, and build fairer economic relationships.

After reviewing the highest-ranking principles in ASOCOMAN's AFAT diagram, it is evident that their agroecological transition is both scientifically grounded and socially driven. Their work reflects a shift not only in agricultural practices but in how relationships are forged within the food system—and across society. What's striking is the convergence between chefs, researchers, and community members. Though they speak from different

vantage points—academia, gastronomy, rural livelihoods—they align around a shared agenda: the need for fairer trade practices that respect *campesino* labor and center gender equity.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, feminist and transitional justice frameworks remind us that women and men prioritize differently and approach challenges from different perspectives. While researchers and chefs emphasized women's empowerment and visibility, ASOCOMAN members described the complementary dynamics that have allowed both men and women to thrive within the organization. Here, gender equity has not led to male withdrawal—on the contrary, it has become a shared source of pride.

These four principles—Social Values & Diets, Economic Diversification, Connectivity, and Biodiversity—reveal the holistic nature of the thirteen agroecological principles. All have played a vital role in ASOCOMAN's transition. And their experience offers valuable lessons for other communities seeking to root agroecology in specific contexts and ecosystems. This case study points to two key areas of future potential: first, the scalability of these practices, particularly through the lens of everyday peace; and second, the need to enhance the Participation principle by linking agroecology more intentionally with peacebuilding agendas. There is a real opportunity here to amplify *campesino* voices, support truth and reparation processes, and advance non-recurrence, not through external imposition, but through the life projects of those who have carried the greatest burdens of violence amidst increasing environmental degradation and climate-related shock.

5.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored how women's leadership in sustaining agroecological practices fosters biodiversity, connects *campesinos*—many of whom are victims of armed conflict—with fellow citizens, and expands revenue opportunities for their families and communities.

I began by situating the burden of care work as one of the structural challenges women face from the outset. Too often, their labor goes not only undercompensated but entirely unrecognized. The central premise throughout this chapter is that a just and dignified future—especially in rural territories—requires reconfiguring power relations in both food systems and peacebuilding. This is not an automatic process; it requires intentional, coordinated efforts across sectors, public and private, to expand women’s political participation, redistribute care burdens, and allocate resources equitably. Because these inequalities are structurally embedded, gender and intersectionality must serve as guiding frameworks—positioning women as leaders and active agents of change.

Although this chapter’s findings emphasize women’s leadership in peacebuilding, climate adaptation, and diversifying ASOCOMAN’s revenue streams, it is crucial to stress that women’s participation cannot be justified solely through instrumental arguments that highlight their contributions to sustainability and care. Their inclusion is, first and foremost, a matter of rights. Women must be at the table not because of what they contribute, but because they are rights-bearers whose presence is equally important and legitimate. What this dissertation underscores is that while processes are undoubtedly enriched when women occupy leadership roles, participation is not something they must “earn” through contributions—gender inclusion is a fundamental question of rights.

While the inclusion of women in policy design has become standard practice, this chapter critically examined how such inclusion remains largely procedural—too often a checkbox exercise rather than a meaningful integration of intersectional analysis (Cockburn, 2013). This proceduralism risks reinforcing reductive narratives of victimhood, positioning women as passive recipients rather than as strategic actors capable of leading long-term social, ecological, and political transformation.

In contexts shaped by transitional justice, women's concerns often center on structural violence and the conditions required for non-recurrence. Despite barriers to education, property, and formal employment, women frequently emerge as frontline peacebuilders. As primary victims of violence, they are also the ones tasked with reconstruction—caring for others while navigating trauma, rebuilding families, and advocating for justice. Their contributions are holistic and system-wide, informed by their everyday responsibilities and lived realities. Contrary to narrow assumptions that women only engage in truth-telling or memorialization, they address a broad spectrum of social vulnerabilities often overlooked by male-dominated approaches (Balogun, 2021; O'Reilly et al., 2015). This underscores why gender must be understood not merely as a category of inclusion but as a practical and analytical tool for transformation.

As climate change becomes an increasingly potent driver of displacement and instability—forcing over 300,000 people per year to migrate in Colombia (Trevilla et al., 2021)—the peacebuilding, food systems, and climate adaptation nexus becomes ever more urgent. Resilience cannot be built on technocratic solutions alone; it requires informed, inclusive, and context-sensitive decision-making that honors the knowledge, labor, and leadership of those who have long navigated compounding vulnerabilities. In this regard, rural women—especially those leading agroecological transitions—are indispensable architects of alternative futures.

Through the case of ASOCOMAN in Montes de María, I showed how rural women—once relegated to invisible labor and precarious livelihoods—are emerging as strategic actors in building new futures. Using the Agroecology Finance Assessment Tool (AFAT) to analyze their practices (and my field notes), I identified four key principles driving their transformation: Social Values & Diets, Economic Diversification, Connectivity, and Biodiversity. These principles reveal not only the technical dimensions of agroecology, but also its ethical and political possibilities when interwoven with feminist and peacebuilding frameworks.

Importantly, this chapter has emphasized context sensitivity—particularly through the intersection of gender and climate resilience—as a critical lens for understanding and advancing peacebuilding. Advancing women’s participation and ecological consciousness in agroecology is not only transformative in itself; it also creates ripple effects across broader agendas of justice, sustainability, and inclusion. Participation, in particular, emerges as the missing thread: the lowest-scoring AFAT principle, yet the one that most powerfully links agroecology to transitional justice and holds the greatest potential to contribute meaningfully to post-conflict peacebuilding through the visibility, voice, and recognition it entails. As I argued, meaningful participation is the mechanism through which dignity, knowledge, and democratic transformation are sustained.

ASOCOMAN’s experience demonstrates that agroecology is more than a model of sustainable production. It is a social project rooted in dignity, care, and collective resilience. The women of ASOCOMAN are not passive beneficiaries; they are producers, innovators, and knowledge multipliers, reshaping economic relationships, reviving biodiversity, and challenging the power structures that have historically excluded them. Their leadership disrupts extractivist paradigms and offers a life-affirming ethic rooted in relationality and justice.

This chapter also highlighted how gastronomy—when embedded in partnerships based on mutual respect—can serve as a bridge between rural and urban realities. The collaborations between chefs and *campesinos* open up avenues for economic opportunity, cultural visibility, and recognition of traditional knowledge often marginalized by industrial food systems. When women’s contributions are socially, politically, and economically recognized, their transformative capacities ripple across households, communities, and regions. Building on this foundation, the next chapter explores how traditionally distant actors—such as chefs and rural farmers—are forging new alliances without institutional

mediation, revealing unexpected pathways for peacebuilding and food systems transformation through the reconstruction of social fabric and civic trust rooted in everyday interactions.

Importantly, the analysis surfaced a range of perspectives on gender roles, with ASOCOMAN standing out for its collaborative and complementary dynamic between men and women. Rather than producing competition or displacement, women's growing leadership within the association has become a source of pride, strengthening the association's internal cohesion and external partnerships. Chefs and researchers echoed the need to elevate women's situated knowledge, reinforcing the idea that community-led, woman-centered initiatives already in motion deserve support—not reinvention.

As Colombia continues to grapple with the legacies of conflict, displacement, and environmental crisis, ASOCOMAN offers a grounded, viable model worth deepening and exploring for its potential to be replicated or adapted in other contexts. It points to the power of women-led, ecologically rooted, and community-based initiatives in transforming not just food systems, but also imaginaries of peace and justice. Supporting these processes requires moving beyond symbolic gestures and investing structurally in grassroots leadership, feminist knowledge, and respectful alliances. In doing so, we are not only nourishing futures—we are making them more just, resilient, and dignified.

Building on this foundation, the next chapter explores how gastronomy becomes a relational space where new alliances are forged to revitalize recognition and civic trust among fellow citizens. Centering collaborations between rural farmers and urban chefs, Chapter 5 examines how food acts as a medium for mutual recognition, shared purpose, and post-conflict repair. It asks how everyday acts of cooking, eating, and storytelling can bridge distances shaped by war, inequality, and exclusion—offering unexpected recipes for coexistence and reweaving the social fabric through shared nourishment.

Chapter 6

6 Recipes for Trust: Gastronomy as a Site for Everyday Peace

One of the most overlooked dimensions of meaningful transformation—whether personal, collective, or societal—is the accumulation of small, sustained actions. Change rarely arrives in the form of sudden breakthroughs; more often, it emerges gradually, through repetition, intention, and relational effort. In the aftermath of armed conflict, these incremental gestures—conversations, shared meals, fair exchanges, or recognition of another’s dignity—can begin to stitch the social fabric back together. This is especially true in contexts like Colombia, where decades of violence have fractured trust and strained the bonds of belonging. From this perspective, peace is not an abstract ideal or a signed agreement—it is a practice forged daily through encounters that resist humiliation and affirm mutual worth.

Two insights are particularly relevant in transitions from war to peace. First, simply desiring a peaceful society does not make it so; peace requires shifts in attitudes, beliefs, and habits, and sustained engagement across individuals, institutions, and sectors. Second, peace cannot depend solely on the motivation or goodwill of governments drafting accords or policies from distant capitals. It must be rooted in everyday behavioral change that complements those formal efforts—how we relate to one another as fellow citizens participating in a collective project. These modest but consistent steps—what this chapter refers to as small victories—can help cultivate the conditions for a more dignified and interdependent public life.

The goal of this chapter is twofold: first, to examine how gastronomic collaborations between rural producers and urban chefs can foster civic trust and recognition—contributing to everyday peace and economic inclusion in post-conflict Colombia. Second, to explore how gastronomy—understood both as a cultural practice embedded in food

systems and as an economic sector—can serve as a site for reweaving social relationships in fragmented societies. The analysis focuses on the conditions and relational dynamics that enable these collaborations to move beyond transactional exchange and become platforms for recognition and trust. Central to this inquiry are the concepts of recognition and civic trust, which are treated here as intermediate objectives within the broader field of transitional justice.

Rather than offering a technical or prescriptive framework, this chapter traces patterns that may inform future research across other fields seeking to understand peacebuilding through everyday practices. These reflections remain grounded in transitional justice literature, as the dissertation is situated within that field. However, the chapter's primary contribution lies in expanding the scope of peacebuilding to include forms of engagement not typically associated with transitional processes—highlighting the role of ordinary citizens, small businesses, and relational practices in shaping public life in post-conflict contexts marked by inequality, diversity, and historical wounds.

Before Reconciliation. Foundational Steps and the Costs of Peace

In previous chapters, I examined the everyday from different angles, arguing that horizontal, relational dynamics are essential complements to both top-down and bottom-up approaches to peace. While state-level mechanisms and grassroots mobilizations are undoubtedly necessary, they remain insufficient on their own. As I will elaborate shortly, the quotidian realm has often been overlooked, yet it holds critical value for long-term societal transformation. Just as an individual seeking change requires time and sustained effort, a society transitioning out of violence demands patience and multi-sectoral engagement—not only from those closest to the transitional justice or peacebuilding apparatus, but from society at large.

The literature on reconciliation is vast—and understandably so, given that it is widely recognized as one of the final objectives of transitional justice (de Greiff, 2011, 2021). Despite its centrality, there is no academic consensus on its meaning. This is partly because reconciliation varies across cultures, and also because it must respond to specific post-conflict contexts, where needs, interests, and capacities differ. At its core, the concept revolves around repairing and rebuilding relationships that have been fractured by actions that unjustly harmed others (Bloomfield, 2006; Firchow & Dixon, 2025; J. P. Lederach, 1997; Wessells, 2009). Various analytical frameworks have been developed to map these meanings, such as the framework proposed by Rettberg and Ugarriza (2016), which outlines how different definitions of reconciliation operate in different fields. However, only a few studies—such as Salehi and Williams (2016)—have explored the long-term effects of transitional justice instruments in post-conflict societies. Similarly, while Fiedler and Mross (2023) have examined how these mechanisms affect trust. The broader question of how reconciliation interacts with civic trust remains underexplored, despite widespread agreement that rebuilding social trust is crucial to overcoming conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000).

As a result, this chapter emphasizes the importance of two often understudied, foundational, steps—recognition and civic trust—as conditions *sine qua non* for reconciliation to take root. These intermediate objectives within transitional justice are not incidental; they are essential to fostering a more peaceful and just society. Without recognition or civic trust, it becomes difficult for individuals to imagine a shared social horizon in which diverse experiences and situated knowledges can coexist, sustained by mutual respect and interdependence. As Avishai Margalit (1998) argues, the foundation of a decent society is not ideal justice, but the moral imperative to avoid humiliation and to treat others with basic dignity—a threshold this proposal takes as its ethical starting point. This is why these two objectives are central to the framework developed in this chapter, and to understanding why gastronomy—and creative peacebuilding more broadly, understood as a culturally rooted and relational approach to peace work developed in Chapter 2—can make meaningful contributions from fields not traditionally associated

with transitional justice, as long as they support these "smaller" but essential steps in the process.

In a similar vein, advancing peacebuilding requires an honest reckoning with its associated costs—financial, institutional, and relational. This reality underscores the need to involve multiple sectors at different levels. Among them are the international donor community, which often provides essential resources for post-conflict reconstruction, and the national private sector, whose long-term presence and investment can help sustain transitional efforts. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2021), the global economic impact of violence was estimated at \$14.76 trillion, or 12.4% of the world's GDP. This figure encompasses military expenditures, internal security costs, and the broader economic disruptions caused by violence. Similarly, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2024) reports that in the most damaging wars, GDP can decline by 40% to 70%, with many countries failing to return to pre-war economic levels even a quarter-century after conflict ends. In contrast, peacebuilding remains severely underfunded. For instance, in 2013, the cost of violent conflict was 120 times greater than the global allocation for peacebuilding and peacekeeping (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021). The same report estimates that every \$1 invested in peacebuilding can yield a \$16 return, primarily through reduced conflict-related losses.

Three key insights emerge from these figures. First, as argued throughout this dissertation, we operate within an economic system that frequently profits from dispossession and inequality—a structural condition that cannot be overlooked. Despite the demonstrated return on investment in peacebuilding, military expenditure continues to dominate global funding priorities, largely due to the influence and lobbying power of elite stakeholders in decision-making spaces, which often prioritize their own interests over an equitable well-being for all. As such, any peacebuilding proposal must contend with this reality; no initiative, however well-designed, can fully escape the systemic forces that shape the allocation of resources or the limits posed by funding availability.

Second, implementing peacebuilding strategies and projects is undeniably costly—particularly when considering the interdisciplinary and multi-scalar approaches involved. This reality creates intense competition for limited resources, and calls for collaborative models that involve both public and private actors, as well as coordinated contributions from international donors and national governments. In response, recent scholarship has emphasized the need to localize both funding and decision-making power, shifting agency away from privileged or powerful stakeholders toward community-based actors at the local level (Firchow & Dixon, 2025; Herrold, 2023; Slim, 2021). This shift—if carried out ethically and with meaningful participation—represents an important step forward. It acknowledges the value of situated knowledges and seeks to restore agency to those who have been most affected by conflict and historically excluded from institutional peacebuilding spaces.

Third, stimulating the economy through nationally rooted, citizen-driven initiatives can yield benefits at multiple levels. Partnerships anchored in shared territorial contexts and mutual interests—less prone to compromise national autonomy—are more likely to endure and evolve sustainably. At the same time, the role of the private sector in fostering peace and stability has historically been underexplored, although emerging research on Business for Peace (B4P) is beginning to address this gap (Henning et al., 2025).

That said, this chapter does not focus on the private sector as an abstract or monolithic force. Rather, it centers on small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs—particularly chefs and restaurant owners—who, while elite within their professional fields, do not wield corporate or political power. Unlike CEOs of financial conglomerates or multinational firms, these actors are often embedded in everyday, relational networks and are therefore better positioned to build meaningful partnerships with rural producers. Their visibility in the public sphere, combined with their ability to engage directly and respectfully with

campesinos, makes them compelling actors in efforts to rebuild civic trust and social cohesion. This is not to downplay the potential contributions of larger private actors, but rather to emphasize that the relationships examined here differ in scale, intent, and structure—requiring distinct analytical and practical approaches given their divergent capacities, influence, and, ultimately, power.

Engaging the private sector, then, requires nuance—not because it is inherently problematic, but because its core logic remains tied to profit. This makes the nature and scale of engagement especially important in contexts of historical inequality. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, campesinos—regardless of whether their working and remuneration conditions are fair—cannot opt out of the market, hardly anyone can. Selling their produce is essential to meeting basic needs and sustaining wellbeing. This is why it matters how commercial relationships are formed and maintained. In the case of ASOCOMAN, their alliances with chefs have gone beyond transactional exchange, offering recognition, visibility, and forms of empowerment that contribute to broader peacebuilding objectives—whether intentionally or not.

To meet this chapter’s goals, I begin by outlining the theoretical foundations of recognition and civic trust within the transitional justice framework, examining their relevance through the lens of gastronomy. I then turn to the role of the economic sector in peacebuilding, arguing that cross-sectoral engagement is essential given the resource-intensive nature of these processes. While not all private sector involvement aligns with the horizontal, trust-based dynamics emphasized here, small-scale actors such as restaurants offer grounded and relational alternatives.

This sets the stage to explore how gastronomy—embedded in broader food systems—can support peacebuilding by revitalizing recognition and civic trust. Rather than proposing a formal model, I draw on fieldwork and earlier methodological tools to identify recurring

patterns of interaction that reveal how everyday alliances, particularly between chefs and *campesinos*, contribute to post-conflict transformation. The chapter closes with reflections on how these findings illuminate the intersections between gastronomy, agroecology, and everyday peacebuilding in Colombia.

6.1 Theoretical Foundations: Recognition, Trust, and Transitional Justice

In the Colombian context, over five decades of armed conflict have eroded institutional trust and fractured everyday social bonds. Despite the 2016 peace accord and the implementation of transitional mechanisms, many citizens remain excluded from political recognition and symbolic repair. Globally, armed conflicts continue to erupt and re-erupt, generating cycles of violence that pose persistent challenges to the consolidation of peace (International Crisis Group, 2025). At the same time, human rights movements have gained momentum, organizing around specific causes and growing increasingly vocal in their demands for guarantees and accountability. This rise in civic mobilization is partly driven by broader access to information, amplified by digital technologies and social media.

These dynamics contribute to what de Greiff (2021) identifies as two simultaneous macro-level trends: on the one hand, a sharp lurch toward populism across both left- and right-wing parties; on the other, a rise in popular mobilizations centered on rights—whether to claim one's own or to contest those of others. They may advocate for progressive or conservative causes, depending on the actors' political orientation. Although seemingly opposed, both trends share a common root: a profound erosion of trust in traditional mechanisms of political representation—rooted in rising inequality and in the persistent failure of institutions to enable meaningful participation in the politics of recognition (de Greiff, 2021, p. 4).

As I elaborate in this section, the fabric of social life depends on the quality of trust-based relationships we build—with individuals, groups, and institutions. This becomes especially critical in the wake of armed conflict or widespread human rights violations. Civic trust, then, is not a peripheral concern but a foundational element of any collective social, economic, or political project. To examine this, I turn to the transitional justice framework—not only as a mechanism of accountability, but as a model of social integration grounded in over four decades of accumulated practice. It also offers a valuable lens to explore how small, everyday actions—what I refer to here as our small victories—can contribute to long-term transformation.

In what follows, I examine the concepts of recognition and civic trust as intermediate goals of transitional justice, as introduced in Chapter 1, and consider how they might be rooted in everyday life. I then briefly contextualize the Colombian case, focusing on literature that analyzes the role of the private sector in peacebuilding. Finally, I explore how gastronomy—both culturally and economically—can engage broader publics in the work of rebuilding trust and revitalizing social relationships.

Theorizing the Moral Foundation of Transitional Justice

In this chapter, I began with a reflection on the value of small steps. While the transitional justice (TJ) framework is holistic and does not prescribe a strict hierarchy among its mechanisms, it does articulate a sequence of objectives—some of which serve as preconditions for others. Final goals such as reconciliation and a strong rule of law are unlikely to be achieved without first advancing intermediate objectives, notably recognition and civic trust.

Within transitional justice, recognition primarily concerns victims—not only through legal acknowledgment of the harms they suffered (e.g., judicial verdicts or reparation programs),

but as part of a broader moral and social process that renders them visible, heard, and valued as members of a shared political community. However, the idea that victims should be “restored” to a pre-conflict status is problematic, as those earlier conditions often involved inequality, exclusion, or structural harm. What is needed, then, is not a return but a forward-looking process of moral repair.

As Margaret Walker (2006) argues, moral repair entails rebuilding the trust, respect, and responsibility that violence has fractured. It extends beyond legal remedies to include acknowledgment, remorse, and shared efforts toward transformation. This aligns with Avishai Margalit’s (1998) concept of a decent society—one where institutions do not humiliate and where human dignity is non-negotiable.

In post-conflict settings, decency becomes a necessary threshold: before reconciliation can flourish, no citizen should be rendered invisible, expendable, or degraded. For both theorists, recognition is not just about being seen—it is about repairing relationships and re-establishing civic belonging. Respect, in this view, is reciprocal: we are all, at different moments, both givers and receivers of recognition. We depend on others to affirm our dignity, just as we are responsible for affirming theirs. These principles align with the definition of peace adopted in this study—minimum peace—which places life in dignity at its core. Peace, then, is not a distant endpoint but a lived condition, shaped by how we treat one another, especially in the wake of harm and persistent inequality.

Recognition in this context often involves institutional reform, public acknowledgment, and memory work, typically operationalized through mechanisms like truth commissions and tribunals. Closely related is the concept of civic trust—the capacity to trust institutions and fellow citizens as co-participants in a legitimate social order. Civic trust is not blind faith; it rests on the expectation that others—including the state—will act fairly, predictably, and accountably, with the public good in mind (Offe, 1999). Together,

recognition and civic trust aim to make victims visible, foster inclusive participation, and support collective reconstruction.

One of transitional justice's enduring limitations is its narrow focus on victims. While ethically necessary—and long overdue—this emphasis can also be socially limiting. Public life extends beyond victims and former combatants; it includes a wider citizenry shaped by the conflict in varied ways. As Fiedler and Mross (2023) argue, mechanisms that move beyond rigid categories of “victim” and “perpetrator” are pivotal to foster social trust. This does not mean sidelining central actors, but rather recognizing that sustainable peace depends on engaging the extended social fabric. Without this, reintegration risks becoming incomplete—isolated from the everyday contexts where coexistence must ultimately take root.

Recognition

As established earlier, recognition is foundational to transitional justice and thus central to analyzing peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts. In this section, I draw on Axel Honneth's (1996) theory of relations-to-self to begin at the smallest unit—the individual—and trace how personal experiences of recognition shape broader social relations and systems of meaning.

Honneth identifies three interrelated spheres of recognition: love, rights, and solidarity (see Table 1). These are not discrete categories but a cumulative process that enables individuals to develop a secure sense of self and participate meaningfully in social life. Each sphere nurtures a different dimension of subjectivity and moral potential. I first outline Honneth's framework and then connect it to the concept of everyday peace, understood—as outlined in Chapter 1 and following Mac Ginty (2014)—as the informal, relational practices through which people navigate and cope with conflict in daily life. Here, I use it to explore how

recognition can emerge through routine, often unremarkable interactions—particularly in societies recovering from violence.

Table 6: Dimensions of Recognition and Moral Development, adapted from Honneth (1996)

Sphere	Medium	Relation-to-self	Potential for Moral Development
Love	Primary relationships (family, close friends, intimate partners)	Self-confidence	Capacity for emotional security and trust others
Rights	Legal and moral norms (citizenship, equal rights)	Self-respect	Sense of personal autonomy and moral responsibility
Solidarity	Social value (community, work, cultural contribution)	Self-esteem	Ability to recognize and value difference; commitment to mutual recognition

Unlike the transitional justice framework—which is holistic but also tailored case by case—Honneth’s theory of recognition is progressive and developmental, offering insight into how individuals grow through different stages of life with varying experiences of affirmation. The first stage, love, refers to the earliest forms of recognition received from caregivers and close relations (Honneth, 1996). It represents the experience of being unconditionally valued, and shapes our capacity to form trusting emotional bonds. This emotional security informs how we build relationships in adulthood and how we manage interpersonal risk.

The second stage, rights, is tied to the moral and legal order. Here, individuals are recognized as rights-bearing agents—equal under the law and responsible moral subjects. This recognition not only affirms one’s legal standing but also implies accountability and

moral responsibility. It underpins the capacity to participate in civic life as an autonomous and morally bound subject (Honneth, 1996). In other words, this aligns our rights as individuals with the rights of others, who are entitled to the same guarantees.

The third stage, solidarity, refers to the experience of being socially esteemed for one's unique contributions. For Honneth (1996), each individual possesses a distinctive constellation of abilities, interests, and traits. Recognition in this sphere affirms that one's difference is valuable, not just one's sameness. Importantly, self-esteem here is relational: it depends not only on how I perceive myself, but on how I am perceived and valued by others outside my intimate circle. This expands the meaning of dignity from the intrinsic value of life to the social value of a life well-lived and socially affirmed. In this way, self-worth becomes partially co-constructed, producing a feedback loop: individuals tend to cultivate and amplify the traits that are most socially recognized.

This dimension is particularly relevant for two reasons. First, while Honneth's model is largely affirmative, he later acknowledges the harm caused by misrecognition. In post-conflict contexts like Colombia, many individuals and communities have never fully experienced these forms of recognition—before, during, or after the conflict. This absence is not incidental, but reflects long-standing patterns of structural and cultural violence, as Galtung (1969) describes. The result is not only interpersonal distrust, but also weakened civic capacities and widespread disillusionment with institutions—barriers that must be addressed for peace to take root. Feminist and decolonial scholars further argue that these exclusions are not merely absences, but outcomes of gendered and racialized structures of domination (Segato, 2003; Téllez, 2021). Recognition, in this view, must confront both interpersonal harm and the systemic reproduction of marginalization.

Second, beyond the absence of prior recognition, many adults in post-conflict settings lack the social capacities that recognition fosters—such as emotional security, moral

responsibility, and mutual esteem. These are not innate traits but learned over time through trust, affirmation, and participation. As Walker (2006) argues, moral repair involves not only acknowledging past wrongs but also rebuilding the relational foundations that allow people to trust, relate, and act ethically together. In societies where both victims and perpetrators have been excluded, stigmatized, or selectively recognized, transitional justice must do more than symbolically reintegrate—it must address the conditions that enabled violence and exclusion in the first place.

These dynamics manifest between individuals, across groups, and through institutions. In Colombia, the Truth Commission and Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) documented collusion between paramilitary groups and state forces, as well as extrajudicial killings by the army (Larratt-Smith, 2020; Olasolo & Cantor, 2019). Here, the issue was not only a lack of recognition, but its distortion into active misrecognition and disrespect. As Fraser (2000) reminds us, misrecognition reinforces material hierarchies, making injustice more durable. Across Honneth's three spheres, harm replaced affirmation: physical and sexual violence eroded self-confidence; denial of rights undermined self-respect; and dehumanization foreclosed self-esteem.

In this context, there is both urgency and opportunity to begin repairing the social fabric. As argued earlier in this chapter, such repair cannot happen quickly or through top-down approaches alone. It requires time, conscious effort, and the cultivation of social habits rooted in mutual respect and a shared rejection of humiliation—toward oneself and others. Consistent with the broader argument of this dissertation, this work must unfold not only within institutions but also in the everyday interactions of ordinary citizens (Mac Ginty, 2014).

Following Mac Ginty's framework, everyday acts—like sharing food, storytelling, or participating in communal rituals—can serve as small-scale “peace formations,” where

norms of recognition are re-learned and practiced. These daily gestures offer context-sensitive pathways for rebuilding relationships that feel organic rather than externally imposed. Engaging both those directly and indirectly affected by conflict can also counter rising polarization (de Greiff, 2021), advancing a vision of a just society—one in which citizens go beyond mere tolerance to recognize each other’s dignity and cultivate the relational capacities to sustain mutual self-worth and civic trust. As Lederach (2005) notes, peace does not require resolving every conflict, but rather imagining a shared future and co-creating the “relational platforms” that make reconciliation possible. While recognition lays the moral foundation for civic repair, civic trust animates the social contract and enables collective re-engagement—an idea I explore further in the next section.

Civic Trust

This section turns to the concept of civic trust—the second intermediate objective of transitional justice—which plays a pivotal role in addressing the central question of this chapter: how can gastronomy contribute to peacebuilding in Colombia? Building on the previous discussion of recognition, I revisit the conceptual foundations of civic trust through Claus Offe’s (1999) framework, exploring how it can be translated into everyday practices. I close with a reflection on the interdependence of recognition and civic trust, and their combined relevance for societies emerging from violence.

Offe (1999) argues that modern social order is maintained through three primary coordination mechanisms: money, authority, and knowledge. These mechanisms operate across markets, legal systems, and bureaucratic or professional networks—and they depend on the quality of interactions between citizens and these structures. As shown in Table 2, Offe distinguishes three types of trust corresponding to these domains. However, from an intersectional perspective, these same mechanisms often reproduce systemic inequality, disproportionately benefiting some groups while excluding or penalizing others. This undermines the assumption of equal access to institutional protections that underpins much

of Offe’s analysis. These tensions are especially salient in fragmented societies like Colombia, where market logics frequently override state regulation, further eroding institutional trust.

Before moving forward, it is useful to examine Offe’s definition of civic trust, as his distinctions inform the forthcoming analysis of partnerships between chefs and campesinos, such as ASOCOMAN. The concept of trust is often considered as a “soft” category—an informal and sub-institutional social phenomenon—which serves as the cognitive premise through which individuals or collectives engage with others (Offe, 1999, p. 45). Trust, in this view, always implies relational orientation. This aligns with broader understandings of trust as a form of “political capital” and a public good essential to democratic resilience (Misztal, 2013; Warren, 1999).

This approach resonates with philosophical accounts of trust as a deeply affective and vulnerable stance. As Baier (1986) and Jones (1996) argue, trust is not mere reliance—it carries the risk of betrayal and the hope that others will act in our interest for the right reasons. In this sense, trust cannot be reduced to institutional safeguards; it must also be emotionally plausible, especially in societies that have experienced betrayal as a collective wound.

Table 7: Typology of Trust, adapted from Offe (1999)

Type of Trust	Basis	Scope	Level	Logic
Strategic	Calculated self-interest	Transactional	Personal	Cost-benefit. Responds to incentives, predictability, and reciprocity.
Moral	Shared values and ethical norms	Relational	Relational	Normative expectations. Assumption that decision-making of self and others is based on shared moral values.

Generalized	Diffuse confidence in others or institutions	Societal	Impersonal	Social disposition. General attitude toward strangers and institutions.
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Much like Honneth's theory of recognition, Offe's types of trust are cumulative and developmental—each informing the next. Strategic trust deepens into moral trust through sustained relationships, and generalized trust emerges when positive expectations extend beyond familiar others. Together, recognition and trust provide the socio-moral resources necessary for public life. Both can be withheld or distorted—by individuals or institutions—and the extent to which people trust one another, and the institutions that govern them, directly shapes the legitimacy of the constitutional order. For this reason, recognition and civic trust must occupy a central place in transitional justice, requiring coordinated efforts across public and private, individual and collective domains.

Daily life plays a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of recognition and trust. For Offe (1999), trust entails the belief that others will contribute to our well-being and refrain from harm—even when doing so may not serve their self-interest. This expectation rests on shared normative commitments and a sense of belonging to a common political community (p. 47). Similarly, Fiedler and Mross (2023) define trust as the belief that others will not exploit one's vulnerability (p. 306). These views emphasize that trust is not merely cognitive but also affective and relational—shaped by how others treat us and by how institutions affirm or deny our moral inclusion.

Recent Latin American scholarship expands this perspective by foregrounding vulnerability, discernment, and asymmetry as core components of trust. Giraldo (2022) identifies three key conditions: dependence, discernment, and positive expectation. Trust, he argues, unfolds under uncertainty and imposes a greater ethical responsibility on actors in positions of power. In this view, cultivating civic trust requires more than reciprocity; it

demands sustained acts of ethical presence—taking risks, being accountable, and remaining meaningfully engaged (p. 29).

Offe's understanding of trust echoes Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative and positive peace. Negatively, trust is the expectation of non-harm; positively, it is the belief that others will act in our shared interest. These expectations vary: from loved ones, we seek care; from strangers, the absence of threat may suffice. In conflict and post-conflict settings, trust becomes high-stakes. Rebuilding it requires more than institutional reform—it demands unlearning fear and betrayal. As Möllering (2006) notes, trust involves “suspension,” a leap beyond past harm—a leap that is especially difficult after violence or injustice.

Such shifts begin with first-hand experience. Cumulative, everyday interactions shape collective levels of civic trust. It is in markets, kitchens, buses, and streets that trust is enacted, affirmed, or eroded. Policies alone cannot rebuild it; trust emerges gradually through positive relational experiences. Offe (1999) identifies symbolic categories—belonging, inviting, acoustic, and ritual—as filters that shape trust. These categories mediate whether we perceive others as familiar or alien. The more categories we share with someone—especially those we perceive positively—the more likely we are to trust them. Belonging is particularly central: when people feel affirmed in their collective identity (e.g., as “Colombians”), they are more inclined to extend trust. But when public narratives fragment identity—portraying only some Colombians as trustworthy—national identity becomes divisive. As Young (2002) cautions, systemic exclusion weakens mutual recognition and erodes civic trust.

While Offe emphasizes institutional trust-building as the key to shared moral norms and a common rule-bound order, building on his framework, I argue that rebuilding civic trust also depends on everyday peer-to-peer relationships. Institutional trust is necessary but not

sufficient; societal trust relies on the accumulation of micro-level exchanges. To map these strategies more clearly, Table 3 synthesizes the two dominant approaches to trust-building: top-down and bottom-up. To these, I add a third: the horizontal. This captures the voluntary, peer-based interactions where trust begins in a strategic form and, over time, may deepen into moral or generalized trust.

This horizontal layer is also central to Francis Fukuyama's (1995) conceptualization of trust as social capital. In his view, high-trust societies rely not only on rules or enforcement, but on intermediate social structures—such as community networks or shared cultural practices—that foster cooperation beyond kinship or transactional logic. These structures are crucial for rebuilding cohesion in contexts like Colombia, where weak institutions and historical exclusion have fractured the moral foundations of public life. Gastronomy, as explored in this chapter, may operate as one such structure: enabling ethical encounter, fostering belonging, and translating cooperation into shared value.

Even if these relationships remain transactional, their repetition fosters positive impressions of belonging and trustworthiness. For instance, a chef and a campesino may start working together for instrumental reasons, but continued cooperation—grounded in fairness and dignity—can reinforce trust and reshape shared identities. Such interactions represent the often-neglected horizontal axis of peacebuilding.

Table 8: Approaches to Rebuilding Trust, adapted from Offe (1999)

	TOP-DOWN (Republican Approach)	BOTTOM-UP (Civic Communitarian Approach)
Logic of Operation	Relies on institutional reform and moral authority	Builds from local identities and networks

Main Actors	Government, state institutions, political elites	Local leaders, community groups
Mechanisms	Transparent governance, legal reforms, impartial procedures, anti-corruption measures, effective public service	Local networks, community initiatives, associative life, cultural tradition, shared rituals

Top-down and bottom-up strategies address different dimensions of harm. Top-down reform ensures accountability and aligns with guarantees of non-repetition (de Greiff, 2011). It fosters institutional legitimacy, potentially shifting public trust rationales. These approaches rely on elites—many of whom have benefitted from past injustices and remain distant from everyday realities. Bottom-up efforts, grounded in lived experience, can rebuild relational trust, but risk insularity or identity entrenchment. Horizontal, everyday trust-building complements both: it is iterative, inclusive, and responsive to daily needs.

In sum, both recognition and civic trust depend on the interplay between personal experience and public interaction. This occurs through both close relationships (Honneth's love sphere or Offe's strategic trust) and broader forms of social participation. These are not abstract ideals but lived practices that accumulate gradually. What links them is a moral aspiration: the rejection of humiliation and the pursuit of mutual respect. Drawing on Margalit's notion of a decent society, I suggest that acting as if we lived in one—rooted in dignity, reciprocity, and solidarity—is part of building it. I will return to these elements in the discussion section, where I analyze how gastronomy can support peacebuilding through everyday, trust-building relationships. For now, I turn to explore the role of the private sector in Colombia's peacebuilding context - a domain where economic interaction brings strangers together and where trust must reach beyond familiar circles. As Offe (1999, p. 79) reminds us, reaching collective goals requires learning to trust beyond those we already know.

6.2 Peacebuilding and the Economic Sector in Colombia

Having established the conceptual underpinnings of civic trust and recognition, the following section considers how these principles operate within Colombia's economic landscape, particularly through the engagement of the private sector in peacebuilding. Social organization has long been shaped by the interplay of sociocultural, political, and economic forces. Today, however, the entanglement of the economic and the social is increasingly pronounced, with digital infrastructures exerting growing influence over political life. Surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2020) and the widespread application of behavioral science in digital ecosystems now shape individual preferences and collective affiliations. Algorithms manufacture echo chambers, amplify polarizing content, and monetize attention and emotion—transforming affect into capital. These infrastructures are far from neutral. As Zuboff warns, they mark a new frontier of power: one that bypasses democratic deliberation through opaque systems of data extraction and behavioral prediction.

Peacebuilding is not immune to these dynamics. On the contrary, the erosion of trust in public institutions and the rise of political polarization are deepened by the logics of surveillance capitalism. As Kwet (2019) notes in the African context, these technologies risk reproducing colonial patterns of dispossession and control in new, data-driven forms. Similar dangers confront post-conflict societies in Latin America, where rebuilding civic trust must contend with digitally mediated forms of misinformation, humiliation, and misrecognition²⁹. These same platforms can also be mobilized to promote values of interdependence and wellbeing—if grounded in relationships of care and trust. Their

²⁹ One example of this is the impact of the “gendered ideology” used by the right parties to advocate for the NO in the 2016 Peace Referendum in Colombia. See Corredor, E. S. (2021). On the Strategic Uses of Women's Rights: Backlash, Rights-based Framing, and Anti-Gender Campaigns in Colombia's 2016 Peace Agreement. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 63(3), 46–68. doi:10.1017/lap.2021.24

potential lies not in the technology itself, but in the social and ethical intentions that guide its use.

At the same time, economic interaction remains one of the few spheres where people regularly engage across sociocultural and class divides. We participate in markets not always by choice, but out of necessity—to buy food, seek employment, or provide services. These transactions bring individuals into contact with difference: a farmer sells to a chef; a client hires a caterer; a community co-manages a restaurant. While often born of necessity, such interactions can, over time, evolve into reciprocal, trusting, and even solidaristic relationships. This is where the economic sphere holds peacebuilding potential: it enables repeated encounters across lines of difference, opening space for mutual recognition. As Oetzel et al. (2009) argue, business actors—particularly small and medium enterprises embedded in local contexts—can foster peace not only by generating employment but also by strengthening institutions and bridging social divides.

This section examines the role certain private sector actors have played in Colombia's peacebuilding context. This focus is relevant for two main reasons. First, to understand how private actors—especially those operating at national or regional levels—can significantly influence the design and implementation of peace initiatives (Rettberg, 2007; Sierra Rincon, 2021). Second, because focusing on small and medium-sized businesses—such as those in the restaurant and gastronomy sector, which are central to this dissertation—offers concrete pathways to values-driven, fair market access that can enhance the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. While this chapter centers on gastronomy, as argued throughout previous chapters, this logic could also apply to other sectors—such as textiles, design, or the arts—as long as they foster fair economic inclusion and strengthen participants' agency, particularly in post-conflict settings marked by precarity and structural dependency.

To substantiate this proposition, I begin by reviewing literature and data on private sector engagement in peacebuilding in Colombia. As Miklian and Rettberg (2019) observe, businesses in conflict settings are typically motivated by three logics: stability, philanthropy, and profit. Rettberg (2019) refines these into need, creed, and greed. *Need*-based engagement is reactive—driven by the imperative to safeguard infrastructure, logistics, or supply chains. *Creed* reflects genuine commitments to social progress, where business leaders leverage their platforms to support peace and inclusion. *Greed* entails a strategic calculus: supporting peace to enable future investment, reputational gains, or market expansion. These motivations often overlap and interact in complex ways.

In Colombia, private sector engagement fluctuates with the degree to which conflict disrupts business operations. Comparative analyses of the Caguán (1998–2002) and Havana (2012–2016) peace processes show that support from high-profile businesses—particularly sector leaders—tend to decline when economic activity is largely unaffected by violence (Rettberg, 2019). This suggests that private sector engagement is often instrumental rather than normative. Within capitalist systems, businesses enjoy privileged status due to their perceived role in maintaining economic “health” and societal wellbeing (Lindblom, 1977).

Nonetheless, not all businesses wield the same power. Large corporations are more likely to exert economic veto power and maintain close ties to political elites—raising concerns over disproportionate influence on public decision-making. In Latin America and Africa, such proximity has been linked to increased corruption and weakened institutional accountability (Rettberg, 2019, p. 262). At the same time, large firms often play a key role in employment and infrastructure, and their operations can also be disrupted by conflict. Some adopt more transparent or socially responsive practices, especially when under regulatory or public pressure. Others may simply cope better due to their scale and resources. These contributions matter, but they do not eliminate the need for critical

scrutiny—particularly in post-conflict contexts where structural advantages often persist under the guise of collaboration.

By contrast, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are more susceptible to collective action dilemmas, as their ability to influence public policy or peace processes depends on organizing collectively and amplifying their voice through scale (Olson, 2003). In Colombia, some initiatives have aimed to reduce this disparity by incentivizing private sector participation in post-conflict development. A notable example is public works for taxes (*Obras por Impuestos*), a mechanism that allows companies to invest directly in infrastructure projects in conflict-affected regions in exchange for tax credits. However, analyses by Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) indicate that uptake has been limited and that the initiative has yet to generate significant structural change in the regions most impacted by violence (FIP, 2019). Moreover, FIP and others note that such programs tend to attract medium-sized enterprises rather than the largest national or multinational firms—raising questions about the depth and durability of the private sector’s commitment to peace (FIP, 2019; Guaqueta, 2006).

There are mixed perceptions in Colombia regarding the legitimacy of private sector participation in peacebuilding. These tensions are rooted in the well-documented complicity of certain business actors in systematic human rights violations during the armed conflict. Several private entities are currently under review by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) as *terceros civiles*³⁰, accused of facilitating and profiting from paramilitary violence through financing, logistical support, and land appropriation (FIP, 2021; Wesche, 2019). These were not isolated incidents, but part of broader macro-criminal

³⁰ “Civil third parties” were included in the design of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) to address one of Colombia’s persistent impunity gaps: the role played by those who either enabled or benefited from atrocities committed during the armed conflict. See Jiménez Ospina (2022), La importancia de los terceros civiles ante la JEP. Available at: <https://www.dejusticia.org/column/la-importancia-de-los-terceros-civiles-ante-la-jep/>

structures involving corporate, political, and military actors (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016; Michalowski, 2013; Wilson, 2024). While this history does not implicate the entire private sector, it does raise serious ethical and political questions about the conditions under which business involvement in peacebuilding becomes credible—and about the safeguards needed to prevent the reproduction of harm in new forms.

This precedent complicates any attempt to frame the private sector as a neutral partner in post-conflict reconstruction. For instance, during the 2016 peace agreement plebiscite, some firms reportedly supported both the Yes and No campaigns—fueling long-standing public skepticism about elite double-dealing and the “open secrets” of economic complicity in war (Vanyó Vicedo, 2024). This is not a call to exclude the private sector from peacebuilding, but rather a call for cautious, context-sensitive engagement and attention to the who, and how in a scale basis.

As FIP (2021) argues, corporate involvement must move beyond risk management and reputational interests to meaningfully contribute to non-repetition and social repair. As discussed earlier, business motivations—whether driven by need, creed, or greed—are not mutually exclusive (Miklian & Rettberg, 2019). Profit-seeking is a constant; the ethical question is whether it coexists with genuine commitments to justice, recognition, and dignity. That distinction is central to building trust. Unlike public institutions, businesses are not legally bound by transitional justice mandates, but they carry moral and historical responsibilities that cannot be ignored.

To return to the everyday—the focus of this study—I close this section with a distinction. While the economic sector holds significant power, this chapter does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of all actors. It focuses instead on small-scale businesses that shape daily life and can foster horizontal, trust-based relationships. This does not imply they are exempt from the pressures of profit-driven systems, nor does it ignore the need to examine

power dynamics. Rather, it reflects a deliberate choice to explore how certain forms of private sector engagement—rooted in proximity, reciprocity, and visibility—may offer more context-sensitive pathways to peacebuilding. The following analysis considers both the possibilities and the limits of these dynamics.

Medium and small enterprise actors—like the restaurants featured in this study—are uniquely positioned. They possess the ability to reach beyond local markets, conduct research, and engage communities that are often excluded from formal supply chains. They also have platforms: cultural influence, visibility, and access to audiences beyond the peacebuilding field. Through sourcing practices, menus, and storytelling, they can highlight biodiversity, rural heritage, and collective memory—not as symbolic gestures, but as vehicles of recognition.

These partnerships open fair market channels for *campesinos* and create new spaces for reciprocal exchange. They do not depend on policy mandates but on everyday decisions—who they partner with, how they tell stories, and what they value. In doing so, they help to reweave the social fabric, revitalize civic trust and recognition (particularly self-esteem), and contribute to expanding the collective imagination. These are not grand gestures, but small, relational acts that over time shift and reshape habits of solidarity and respect. In a society emerging from mass atrocity, these incremental steps may be the most meaningful path toward peace as a new normal.

6.3 Gastronomy as a Site of Cultural Transformation

Building on the concepts introduced in the literature review—such as gastronativism, gustatory memory, and gastrodiploacy—this section explores how gastronomy operates as a space of everyday peacebuilding in Colombia. Moving beyond elite culinary spheres

and high-level diplomacy, I focus on small-scale actors whose practices challenge extractivist dynamics and generate forms of recognition, cohesion, and cultural repair.

Gastronomy, particularly through cooking and agroecological farming, operates at the intersection of symbolic expression and political economy. These are key sites where recognition and trust are negotiated: inwardly, through self-identification, and outwardly, through the acknowledgement of others. Through narratives of *campesinos*, the rhythms of agroecology, and emerging rural–urban culinary alliances, I trace how food practices embody peacebuilding from below. This section builds on the previous discussion by examining gastronomy not only as an economic sector, but as a relational and symbolic space—one that shapes identities, fosters recognition, and creates new civic imaginaries.

Over the past decade, social media has amplified interest in local food cultures and lesser-known destinations, positioning gastronomy as a driver of tourism and cultural pride across Latin America. Governments have responded with branding campaigns to promote national identity and sustainable development—such as Mexico’s 2010 UNESCO recognition of its traditional cuisine (Camacho, 2014; Hryciuk, 2019). Similar efforts in Peru and Colombia, however, have drawn criticism for commodifying and tokenizing marginalized communities (Babb, 2011; Matta, 2016), particularly through the exploitation of women and ethnic minorities. These concerns echo Chapter 4’s discussion of cultural expression, where women’s situated knowledges and care practices were explored as tools for reshaping relationships.

While these extractivist dynamics are real, alternative models are possible—ones grounded in reciprocity and respect. Gastronomy does not belong exclusively to chefs or restaurants. Valuing the knowledge of *cocineras tradicionales* on equal terms with professional chefs is essential to reimagining the field more inclusively. A study by Carmona et al. (2023) in Montes de María underscores this potential: interviews with *cocineras tradicionales*

revealed that kitchens—*all* kitchens—serve as repositories of memory and collective identity. Recipes transmit intergenerational knowledge of territory, culture, and lived experience (Del Campo & Navarro, 2013). Because food is meant to be shared, it becomes a powerful medium for shaping social imaginaries—many of which are embedded in the peace narratives these women live and pass down through their cooking.

Gastronomy's performative nature offers a platform for reclaiming ancestral knowledge and enacting cultural resilience. As Bonnekesen (2010) and Axelson (1986) argue, food habits are socially learned and deeply embedded in identity. In Colombia, traditional culinary practices have enabled women to assert presence, rebuild social ties, and embody values of care, memory, and mutual recognition through activities such as cooking and farming. The cultural significance of these practices has also been acknowledged institutionally: in 2012, the Ministry of Culture implemented the Public Policy for the Knowledge, Safeguarding, and Promotion of Food and Traditional Cuisines in Colombia. This policy affirms the relevance of food and its associated culinary knowledge as a vital component of national heritage.

Crucially, this performance begins not in the kitchen but in the field—with seed planting, cultivation, and harvest. The contrast between agroecological and conventional farming highlights that food is embedded in a broader web of ecological, social, and political relations between human and non-human life. From a systems perspective, gastronomy both shapes and is shaped by food systems. Culinary traditions influence agricultural practices, biodiversity, and land use, while also responding to market pressures and distribution structures. While not all culinary models operate in the same way, traditional cuisines rooted in agroecological knowledge often promote more locally embedded and ecologically attuned relationships with the environment. As Mateus Moreno (2016) notes, agroecology—particularly in its community-led forms—can offer a political and territorial alternative to more industrialized models of food production. In Colombia, agroecological farmers and *cocineras* from various regions (Gómez Fuentes, 2025), including Montes de

María, are reimagining development from the ground up—anchoring transformation in everyday life, cultural continuity, and collective agency.

This intersects with discussions in Chapter 3 around biodiversity, health, and everyday peace. Colombia's biological and agricultural diversity has been drastically reduced since the spread of conventional agriculture and the Green Revolution (Corporación Semillas, 2019). Globally, the concentration of seed production and ownership has led to a 90% loss in agrobiodiversity across the Global South, prompting widespread protests and the emergence of seed sovereignty movements (Maysels et al., 2023). This erosion of biodiversity has direct links to the gastronomic sector. Culinary trends that embrace local and heirloom ingredients can help restore the use of native seeds, diversify local diets, and stimulate rural economies. In this sense, gastronomy becomes not only a space of cultural expression but also a potential lever for ecological regeneration and food justice.

Gastronomy in Colombia is not only a cultural practice but also a key sector within the national economy. In 2023, restaurants, hotels, and cafés represented 3.9% of the country's GDP according to the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI), with food service sales reaching USD 14 billion—a 7% increase from 2022 (La Barra, n.d.; USDA, 2024). Despite this growth, 2024 has seen a slowdown driven by inflation, regulatory changes, and declining household spending on non-essentials. While major chains have gained visibility through standardization, independent restaurants—comprising 95% of the market—stand out for their local innovation and cultural value.

Culinary education in Colombia has expanded alongside broader gastronomic trends, as a new generation of chefs engages critically with local ingredients, traditional recipes, and questions of sustainability and inclusion. This implies the sector's growing professionalization and its potential to contribute not only to economic recovery but also to more equitable and culturally grounded development. Data from Colombia's National

Information System for Graduate Education (SNIES) reveal a marked center–periphery dynamic in the geographic distribution of graduates from professional and technical gastronomy programs (see Figure 1). Between 2001 and 2023, a total of 14,350 graduates were recorded. Coincidentally, a significant increase followed the launch of *MasterChef Colombia* in 2015, while numbers dipped during the COVID-19 pandemic, and quickly recovered after.

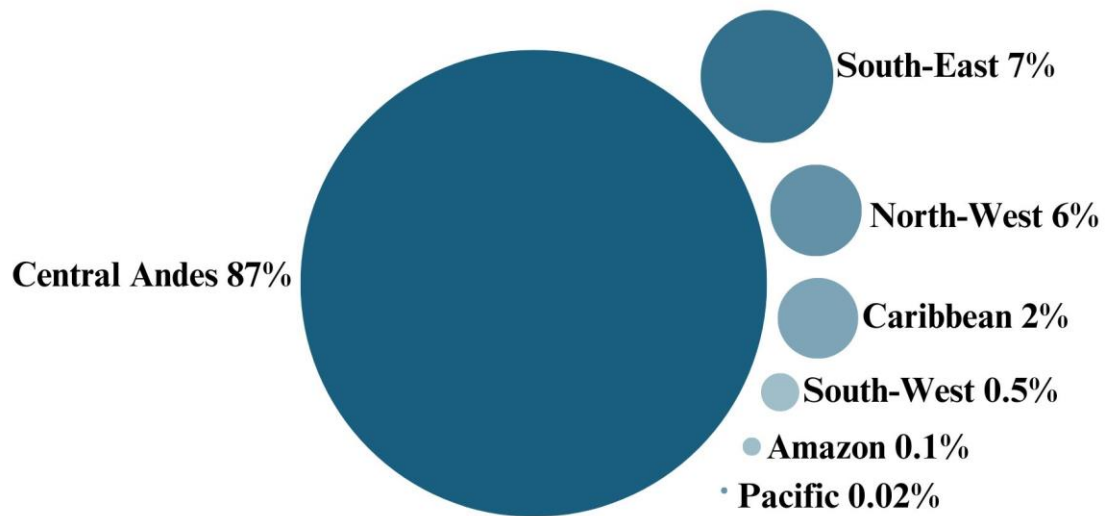


Figure 3: Graduate Students from Gastronomy & Culinary programs in Colombia (2001-2023). Elaborated by the author with information from SNIES.

Unsurprisingly, the Central Andes region accounts for the vast majority of graduates—87%—due to geographic distribution in the country, patterns of internal migration for education, economic opportunity, and forced displacement. This concentration also reflects the geographic clustering of gastronomic initiatives focused on local ingredients and culinary heritage. However, when the Central Andes are excluded and population size across regions is considered, the data point to a growing interest in culinary education

across peripheral regions—indicating a broader generational shift and increasing territorial diversification in the sector.

This growth has created new pathways for economic inclusion, particularly for populations historically excluded from formal education and urban labor markets. As Sundqvist (2023) reminds us, gastronomic experiences are shaped not only by technical skill but also by memory, pleasure, and affect. Culinary education, therefore, must go beyond training kitchens to incorporate ethics, cultural sensitivity, and historical consciousness. Moreover, this expansion presents an opportunity to further invest in regional education initiatives—especially given Colombia’s rich diversity of cuisines and flavors, which remain unevenly represented in formal culinary curricula.

At the same time, the professionalization of gastronomy risks reinforcing hierarchies of taste, access, and representation. Scholars such as Bell and Valentine (2013) and Long (2004) have shown that distinctions between “high” and “popular” cuisines often map onto classed, racialized, and gendered lines. In Colombia, as discussed earlier, this can result in the symbolic appropriation of traditional cuisines without adequate recognition or compensation for the communities who sustain them. Peacebuilding efforts that engage gastronomy must therefore remain critically attuned to these dynamics, ensuring that economic valorization does not come at the expense of cultural extraction.

In post-conflict regions, culinary initiatives that blend farm-to-table practices, storytelling, and community participation can serve as grassroots forms of peacebuilding. These projects generate income while cultivating shared narratives grounded in situated knowledges. Their transformative potential is most evident when chefs engage in horizontal exchanges with *campesinos*, forging relationships rooted in mutual respect. Such encounters help mend the social fabric torn by conflict, restoring trust and visibility to rural actors too often marginalized or erased.

In this sense, gastronomy becomes more than cultural celebration—it becomes a vehicle for transformation. A growing niche within Colombia’s culinary scene is working to connect with rural communities and celebrate the country’s cultural and biological diversity. Though often emerging from the cultural sphere, these efforts hold untapped potential for peacebuilding. Here, gastronomy ceases to be ornamental and becomes foundational—offering rituals, relationships, and resources that nourish both the body and the social fabric. Realizing this potential, however, depends on the quality of the relationships formed among actors—relationships I now explore through the study’s data.

6.4 Relational Dynamics: *Campesinos*, Chefs, and Diners

This final section turns to the empirical heart of the chapter: the relational dynamics between *campesinos*, chefs, and diners. Building on the conceptual groundwork laid earlier—particularly the role of recognition and civic trust as intermediate objectives of transitional justice—I explore how these dynamics unfold in practice. Rather than proposing a formal analytical model, the discussion traces how gastronomic partnerships can contribute to everyday peacebuilding by reshaping relationships across structural divides. In this case, everyday practices of agroecology and cooking—performed by *campesinos* and chefs, respectively—converge in the plate, which mediates a third relationship with diners.

As noted in previous chapters, this analysis builds cumulatively. Chapter 3 examined how agroecology fosters everyday peace through biodiversity, health, and economic stability to environmental and social wellbeing. Chapter 4 extended this by highlighting how women, through labor and situated knowledge, create spaces of recognition and resilience in the face of climate-related and structural violence. This chapter brings those threads together through food—both as nourishment and symbolic language—to explore how small,

sustained gestures can help repair the social fabric. In particular, I focus on trust and recognition as “small victories”: foundational steps toward post-conflict reconstruction and meaningful civic life.

What emerges is a multilayered view of gastronomy as a relational field where cooperation, dignity, and shared meaning are cultivated. The discussion that follows centers on three relational nexuses: campesinos and chefs, chefs and diners, and the mediating role of the plate that brings them together. These encounters—though marked by structural asymmetries—reveal how horizontal, trust-based relationships can take root and offer everyday pathways for social repair and demonstrate how gastronomy mediates not just as material exchange, but also as symbolic and civic transformation. They serve as examples of creative peacebuilding, where ordinary actions performed in daily life can become acts of transformation toward peace.

First nexus: Campesinos-Chefs

The first part of the connection between *campesinos* and chef’s links two distinct sectors of the food system: agricultural production and consumption. As discussed earlier, exchanges in everyday life can evolve into mutually beneficial relationships. One ASOCOMAN member reflected, “Gastronomy goes hand in hand with agriculture” (Interview A04), underscoring the link between culinary practice and agricultural experience and demonstrating a natural relationship among the actors. But the question remains, what makes these relationships mutually beneficial?

There are five factors worth looking into: 1. Mutual exchange, 2. Reciprocal impact, 3. Empowerment, 4. Storytelling, and 5. Food sovereignty and climate resilience. These elements emerged as central to campesino agency in Chapter 3, especially in relation to

biodiversity protection, economic diversification, and health. They also resonate with the insights in Chapter 4 regarding how women build recognition through situated knowledge and caregiving labor in food systems. First, they must involve a mutual exchange of more than just products and money. Respect, curiosity, and the sharing of lived experience are crucial. Second, despite inevitable power asymmetries, chefs must not exploit the vulnerability of *campesino* producers—whether by appropriating their recipes or underpaying them. Instead, in the partnerships I observed, recognition and reciprocity are central. As an ASOCOMAN member shared:

“[Our allies] have been people who have supported us, they’ve come directly here to ASOCOMAN, they’ve seen the process—all that we do—and everything is natural. We’re preserving—one of our priorities—the tropical dry forest. So that motivates us to keep going.” (Interview A02).

This is not a passive transaction; it is a form of relational acknowledgment that recognizes *campesino* knowledge and ecological care as part of the value exchanged. This dynamic also contributes to a shift in ASOCOMAN’s self-perception: as they receive more recognition from chefs and other visitors, they continue to expand and build their self-esteem. For example, as one participant shared:

“Thanks to God, and through allies who make those purchases, we obtain some income, and those resources encourage us each day to show them our gastronomy and everything we also do.” (Interview A16).

Second, these relationships have a reciprocal positive impact; without mutual impact, there can be no genuine development or transformation. For ASOCOMAN, their allies are not merely buyers but co-builders of a shared journey. They describe the relationship in terms of mutual respect, responsibility, and continuity—words that reflect how they see

themselves and their future. Being recognized and valued has strengthened their self-confidence and encouraged ongoing innovation: from diversifying income to improving diets, food sovereignty, and environmental care. Their work has begun to inspire others in the municipality, inviting them to transform their patios and adopt agroecological practices. As an ASOCOMAN member points out: “A mutual relationship, where there is a lot of respect. It’s about responsibility, because when they ask us for a product, we figure out how to make it happen” (Interview A07).

This shift is about more than revenue—it reflects a change in their role and recognition. As shared by another member: “We started, actually, with just one or two restaurants here [...] we’re building alliances with other associations [...] we now have a lot of demand from several restaurants.” (Interview A22).

These examples illustrate how economic recognition can lead to social ripple effects, activating pride, agency, and expanded relationships. In turn, chefs are also transformed—not only gaining access to unique products, but being invited into new territories and ways of knowing. This deepening mutuality and pride lay the foundation for the third factor: ensuring that recognition does not turn into dependency, but instead supports empowerment and autonomy.

On the other hand, restaurants are also being transformed by these alliances. Many chefs feel a responsibility to keep up with regional peers and showcase Colombian gastronomy in creative, respectful, and original ways. The sector is increasingly competitive and full of new voices—many of them younger chefs—who are committed to local sourcing and the visibility of diverse regional cuisines. As one chef remarked:

“I think in recent years, Colombian gastronomy has improved a lot. There are people who, just as they’ve gone abroad to learn techniques from other countries, have also gone deep into the country to seek out ancestral techniques. There are so many places, so many new chefs, many new restaurants doing really interesting work. So I think, in Colombia, we’re growing more and more... I think gastronomy and everything around it is in a really good moment, and I believe it’s only going to get better.” (Interview C01).

This quote captures how gastronomy has become a space not only for innovation, but also for reclaiming Colombia’s culinary heritage—positioning chefs as cultural curators and amplifiers of local traditions.

Third, these relationships must foster empowerment. Campesinos who were once excluded from formal markets now gain visibility and pride in the value of what they offer. As emphasized on Chapter 4, empowerment cannot come at the cost of appropriation or exploitation. Exchanges that strip campesinos of authorship or cultural agency do not revitalize recognition or civic trust—they reproduce misrecognition and deepen historical disrespect. In the present case study, having tasted the dishes prepared by ASOCOMAN women and visited the participating restaurants myself, I can affirm that their culinary contributions are not appropriated or diluted. Instead, they are honored—named, credited, and made visible in both presentation and menus. As discussed in Chapter 4, this empowerment is particularly significant for women, whose culinary and caregiving work—often undervalued—becomes a source of pride and public affirmation in these partnerships. As one chef reflected on a collaboration with a community that transitioned from coca cultivation to *palmito* farming:

“The first time we went to see the crop, the farmer wouldn’t look me in the eye. Obviously, because he had something to hide. But when he saw where his product was going, and they

told him who we were and where we were from, by the next visit, not only did he look me in the eye, but he looked at me with pride.” (Interview C03).

This moment of recognition illustrates the transformative potential of these relationships—not only economically, but in restoring dignity and revaluing campesino contributions. It marks a shift from invisibility to meaningful inclusion, echoing Offe’s (1999) notion of civic trust as mutual acknowledgment and non-exploitative engagement among citizens. This kind of trust involves recognizing self-worth as something that is not only felt internally but affirmed by others.

As trust and pride take root, the stories behind these collaborations become more than anecdotes—they become bridges. In a context shaped by social media and the rise of culinary storytelling, these relationships allow narratives to travel far beyond the point of exchange. Chefs in this study appear to have embraced the unspoken challenge of telling these stories through their dishes. All of them acknowledged the added value of building direct relationships with campesinos—not only for their restaurants and teams, but for a broader social purpose. As Chef C03 reflected:

“Each dish we put on the table has a story to tell. A story to be shared. Where the *palmito* comes from—Putumayo. That it’s from a crop linked to coca substitution. That a particular family lives off of it. That the coffee we’re serving comes from a specific farm, and the name of the grower is so-and-so. Every time we put something on the table, we can tell a story.” (Interview C03).

From another perspective, focused on mass media, chefs and the gastronomic sector have found a platform and an audience to share stories, in one of the chef’s words:

“I believe that cooking tells beautiful stories, and there’s something that might sound a little silly, but let’s talk about MasterChef: MasterChef is a show with a huge audience, and it doesn’t rely on sensationalism or violence to get ratings like other shows do. That means people are indeed interested in gastronomy and the messages it conveys, so the messages we, as chefs, can share with the public are very well received. What I mean is, cooking really *is* a tool to change things.” (Interview C02).

At the same time, these connections bring joy and pride to ASOCOMAN members, especially when welcoming restaurant teams and their guests to their territory. They take pride in sharing their food, culture, traditions, and innovations—each one a reflection of their labor and the collective process they’ve nurtured. As one ASOCOMAN member shared: “Everyone has taken interest. The restaurants, when come, the one who come to visit us, they don’t want to leave” (Interview A22).

These encounters also allow for women’s stories to be told—making their work visible and valued. As explored in Chapter 4, gendered situated knowledge is essential for this proposal to be truly modest but meaningful. In this context, cooking becomes a form of recognition, legacy, and intergenerational transmission. For some women, their cooking is also a mean of communication, as raised by one researcher:

“I think that identity can be generated through gastronomy. Right now, I’m working with some Arhuaco communities, and the women told me: ‘People only know us for our *mochilas*, but we would also like to be known—and to have more economic alternatives—through our cooking.’” (Interview R10).

While visibility and storytelling are powerful forms of recognition, they must also be grounded in material transformations that safeguard the future. Fifth, these relationships

must include, beyond gender considerations, a direct contribution—from awareness to action—regarding environmental stewardship, climate-resilient practices, and the pursuit of food sovereignty. This is not only about economy or culture, but also about securing the conditions for a livable future. Strengthening *campesino* agency means enabling them to make autonomous decisions and resist exploitative partnerships over time. This reflects the ecological consciousness explored in Chapter 3, where agroecological practices were shown to embody both food sovereignty and climate adaptation strategies. As one chef explained to me, a producer he worked with had native corn seeds but chose not to plant them because no one was buying them, he shared:

“When we went to her house, she told us: ‘Look, I have these little seeds that still exist, but they’re just sitting there. No one would buy this because it’s a kind of corn that’s almost black. They might think it’s spoiled, so I don’t grow it. I prefer to plant yellow corn because it’s what sells the most.’ And we said, ‘But why don’t you plant it, and we’ll buy it from you?’ She said, ‘Alright.’ And they started to plant and bring back those seeds. It’s the most beautiful thing in the end! Like, you go: Wow! That’s where it all starts.” (Interview C09).

Taken together, these five elements demonstrate that the relationship between *campesinos* and chefs is bidirectional. Both parties give and receive—sometimes materially, sometimes symbolically, and sometimes emotionally. The most important outcome may not be economic gain, but the reconfiguration of how each actor understands themselves and the other. In Offe’s (1999) terms, what begins as strategic trust—based on economic exchange—can evolve into moral trust, grounded in shared values and mutual respect. When chefs name *campesinos* on their menus, and when they feel proud to host them in their territories, what’s happening is more than collaboration. It is a quiet act of civic repair. In that space—between the dish and the soil—civic trust is revitalized, not by decree, but by daily acts of relational dignity.

Second nexus: Chefs – Diner

This relationship is the most visible of all. Regardless of where chefs source their ingredients, they are ultimately the creators, interpreters, and presenters of each dish. The plate is their medium—an edible canvas where technique, memory, and intention converge. Diners, in turn, come to eat, celebrate, and spend quality time with their social circles. In this section, I focus on how this relationship can become a vessel for civic trust and recognition when grounded in the alliances outlined earlier. When it builds upon the preceding *campesino*–chef relationship, three key contributions emerge: (1) the promotion of biodiversity, (2) restaurants as social innovation hubs, and (3) the ability to move beyond flavor toward social storytelling.

The first, biodiversity, was among the most frequently mentioned themes across all participant groups when discussing Colombia’s gastronomic potential. Many noted the country’s vast ecological richness as a foundational resource—not only for cuisine but for peacebuilding. As one chef reflected: “Colombia’s greatest strength is its biodiversity, its incredibly varied territory [...] In the end, what surprises people most when they travel to Colombia is going to the local markets and seeing... I don’t know, 200 types of fruit.” (Interview C11). Beyond this biodiversity, there were also several mentions to the cultural diversity, like this one: “The greatest strength is biological diversity. It’s like the matrix of everything. The foundation of the country is its biological diversity, and layered on top of that is an entire cultural diversity” (Interview R09).

Frequently, interviewees compared Colombia’s gastronomy with Peru’s or Mexico’s. The overall reflection was that rather than positioning Colombia as needing to emulate them—both commonly referenced as regional gastronomic leaders—they argued that Colombia’s “signature” is precisely its diversity. As one researcher asserted:

"There can't be a single national dish here! We are too diverse and too vast—what would you even choose? Of course, we have our strengths: ancestrally, we have stews and long, beautiful preparations, we have many kinds of *amasijos*³¹... but we cannot reduce all of this to just one *arepa*, or a *bandeja paisa*, or a *sancocho*, or a *tamal*. That would erase the rest of our diversity! So, what are we? —Diversity. What are we? —A pantry. And what kind of pantry? —One as long and wide as this country itself." (Interview R01).

This emphasis on biodiversity extends beyond just raw ingredients; it encompasses culinary techniques, ancestral knowledge, and regional identities. Numerous restaurants studied purposefully design their dishes to highlight lesser-known ingredients and revive underutilised species such as *maíces nativos*, *pipilongo*, *balú*, and *piñuela*. These choices are not merely aesthetic or gastronomic—they carry political significance. By incorporating these elements into their menus, chefs aid in agrobiodiversity conservation and counter the homogenising pressures of industrial food systems. Owing to the absence of many of these products from supermarket shelves, restaurants transform into spaces where diners not only experience the country's diversity but also exchange information that fosters new demand for local and sustainable produce.

A second key dimension is the role of restaurants as hubs of social innovation. These are not just spaces for food consumption—they are spaces that inspire, connect, and unify. Many of the restaurants in this study integrate other artistic and cultural elements—such as music, ceramics, and locally crafted tableware—transforming the dining experience into an ode to Colombian identity. In doing so, they elevate national talent and reframe what it means to showcase "Colombianness" through gastronomy.

³¹ Traditional dough-based preparations.

Moreover, the chefs behind these restaurants are increasingly seen as educators and cultural figures. Several interviewees described the evolving public role of chefs—not only as artisans or entrepreneurs, but as role models who influence how Colombia’s food culture is understood and valued. This educational role plays out not only in their menus and service, but also in how they mentor new generations of cooks. “We try to instill in [the young cooks] the work philosophy we follow—one that is rooted in respect for the product and for the person who brings it to us.” (Interview C01). Contrastingly, one European expert in the international gastronomy field, reflecting on a recent trip to Bogotá, noted: “I believe that even the last time I was in Bogotá there were quite a few restaurants, including ones led by young chefs that didn’t exist before, focused on valuing the pantry, biodiversity, and small-scale producers” (Interview R03).

In this context, the plate becomes a pedagogical tool—not only for culinary apprentices, but also for the broader public. It embodies a philosophy, a lineage, and a commitment to certain values. The dish teaches not just through its flavor, but through its story. More often than before, this has become the trend, as highlighted by a researcher:

“The wonderful stubbornness of the young people in this country, who are no longer willing to sell their soul to the final customer—so they’ve stuck with their small restaurants and, even if they sell less, they refuse to stop working with local producers.” (Interview R01).

This brings us to the third point: the plate’s capacity to go beyond flavor. While technique and taste remain essential, several chefs emphasized the importance of narrative. Diners are increasingly drawn to restaurants that offer more than a culinary experience; they are motivated by the added value of meaningful storytelling. Indeed, many of the most transformative accounts shared during this research were not sparked by ingredients alone, but by the stories chefs chose to tell through them:

"When we understand the origin—where the fish comes from, how it reaches us, and who is safeguarding not just species but territory and ancestral techniques—then a dish becomes much more than just something tasty. There's a story behind it, a cultural and social context. Today, gastronomy helps tell those stories." (Interview C07).

This narrative function transforms the plate into what we might call a site of translation within these hubs—where rural histories are made legible to urban publics, where ancestral knowledge travels into contemporary kitchens, and where the invisible becomes acknowledged. Importantly, these stories are not fictional. This reminiscence the co-construction of knowledge described in Chapter 3 and the moral imagination mobilized by women in Chapter 4—where the transformation of relationships often begins with recognizing the humanity and history behind a product or practice. They are rooted in genuine relationships and real people:

"We work with products; we bring them to the table and explain who sells them to us, the name of the business, and how we use them in the dish. [...] We want people to know them. In fact, my idea is to publish all of my suppliers—all of them. They're not mine—they belong to everyone." (Interview C10).

This approach resonates with Offe's (1999) distinction between moral and generalized trust. While diners may not personally know the *campesino* who grew the corn or harvested the *grosella*, the story embedded in the plate can begin to close that distance. Moments of recognition—when a diner pauses, listens, and tastes with heightened awareness—mark subtle but meaningful shifts in the social fabric. When the *campesino*–chef relationship is followed by the chef's conscious intention to tell a story and nourish beyond the palate, the

plate becomes a conduit for broader connection—linking gastronomy with the diverse worlds their diners inhabit.

In this way, the chef–plate relationship becomes a hinge: bridging rural producers and urban publics, values and practices, recognition and action. The plate thus emerges as a pedagogical tool—one that brings Colombia’s cultural and biological diversity into closer reach. This transformation is not automatic; it must be cultivated. But when chefs design their dishes not merely as culinary products, but as platforms for dialogue and recognition, they offer a powerful vision of civic trust.

Third nexus: Campesinos-Chefs-Diners connected by the Plate

The final relationship is mediated by the plate itself—the cultural artifact that connects all three actors, directly or indirectly. This relationship does not stand alone; it emerges only when built upon the foundations of the *campesino*–chef and chef–diner dynamics. The kind of plate I refer to here is not just any dish—it is layered with intention, context, and storytelling. To unpack this, I begin with the elements embedded in the plate and the meanings they carry. The plate becomes an overarching connector—one that holds the potential to foster a peacebuilding alternative through gastronomy by creating shared narratives that bridge geographic, cultural, and social distances. Grounded in the broader framework introduced in this chapter, the plate functions as a vessel for collective recognition—a common thread capable of weaving together historically disconnected groups.

More than a site of physical or chemical transformation, the plate holds multiple layers of meaning. Gastronomically, it carries food, utensils, recipes, knowledge, and time. But it also contains Colombia’s cultural and biological diversity, the labor of *campesinos*

working and surviving unequal systems, and a living narrative that connects people, places, and histories. Whether served in restaurants or *cocinas tradicionales*, the plate becomes a medium through which these layered relationships are made visible and they can be extended by the receptor as far as they wish.

In this way, the plate becomes a site of recognition. It restores dignity by illuminating the labor and knowledge of rural communities often erased from dominant food narratives. It informs diners—implicitly or explicitly—about ecosystems, cultures, and inequalities, encouraging more conscious consumption and deeper social awareness. The communicative potential of the plate—its ability to carry stories from person to person, from memory to conversation—creates moments of connection around a shared table. It does not simply promote local products; it honors the people who produce them. As one ASOCOMAN member beautifully put it:

“A plate without a story is just a plate—it might be tasty, it might look appealing—but what really makes you connect, what transports you through flavor, is the story behind it. I remember when I first started working with restaurants, I heard people say: ‘we don’t sell food, we sell experiences.’ And we replied: ‘we don’t sell products—we sell life stories.’” (Interview A12).

This act of sharing stories through food echoes Honneth’s (1996) notion of solidarity, in which recognition stems not from abstract rights, but from the social value accorded to one’s contributions within a shared lifeworld. In this sense, the plate becomes a site of moral affirmation—one that honors rural producers, traditions, and territories not as vestiges of the past, but as co-authors of Colombia’s present and future.

At the same time, it cultivates civic trust, as Offe (1999) conceptualizes it: the ability to recognize strangers as co-stewards of a shared society. Though diners may not personally

know the *campesinos* or cooks behind each dish, the mediated connection established through the plate fosters recognition beyond anonymity. Restaurants do not source ingredients from an abstract “*campesino*” figure, but from [first name], or ASOCOMAN, in Montes de María, or from [first name], a Wayúu indigenous in Guajira. Diners depart not with the image of these regions as conflict zones, but with a renewed perception of them for their role in preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Through these seemingly modest but deeply relational acts, processes of social repair and peacebuilding quietly take root. *Campesinos* are no longer framed as passive victims, but as rights-bearing partners shaping a collective future, as discussed in Chapter 4. Even if this shift begins with a small percentage of diners, it opens the door to a broader narrative—one rooted not in paternalism, but in dignity, reciprocity, and mutual recognition.

This is also a matter of solidarity: recognizing that others care just as deeply about their loved ones as we do. That we all share the desire to protect and nourish our most intimate circles. As one chef expressed:

“Peace comes from within. I know there are political and governmental structures that need to be strengthened. But peace also begins with the human being, with their inner self—and that comes from their environment, from their ability to create well-being for themselves and for their family.” (Interview C07).

To begin weaving a new peacebuilding ground through gastronomy, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, means constructing a narrative that unites Colombians across difference. A narrative that celebrates diversity as an asset, rather than an obstacle. Few things bring Colombians together as powerfully as football, and one chef used this reference:

“I believe Colombia needs to be a country that is more open, more proud of what is its own—not just when the national football team plays [and everyone wears the jersey], which I think is what unites the country the most. I believe gastronomy also has that power. And I think the kinds of restaurants we’ve seen emerge over the last six to eight years are showing that Colombia has truly interesting potential.” (Interview C08).

The underscored the cultural centrality of food in Colombia adds nuance to the claim that gastronomy can help repair the social fabric by revitalizing recognition and civic trust in post-conflict Colombia:

“That pride in local gastronomy, the pride in regional variation... [My husband is Colombian, and his family—it's impressive how much they talk about food! You sit down with them and it's like: ‘Oh yes, we went to San Andrés and ate this, and that, and the other...’ Talking about travel always means talking about what they ate.” (Interview R02).

Food, in this sense, is already a national language—one that Colombians speak fluently across class, region, and political divides. It is not an imported tool for peacebuilding, but a culturally rooted practice with the power to nourish both memory and imagination. These layered relationships—between *campesinos*, chefs, and diners—are what one of the researchers was referring to when asked about the connection between peacebuilding and gastronomy and food systems:

“It’s Colombia’s social and economic development. Honestly, I believe this is the path to transform the country. This is the path to create social equality, gender equality, food security, environmental protection, and security itself.” (Interview R01).

Bringing these threads together, what emerges is not merely a model for gastronomy and peace, but a profoundly relational and culturally embedded approach to rebuilding civic trust and recognition. It draws on the environmental ethics explored in Chapter 3 and the gendered practices of recognition and care described in Chapter 4, weaving them into a holistic peacebuilding perspective. Through the interwoven relationships between producers, cooks, and eaters—and through the plate as both medium and message—gastronomy transforms into a site of connection, dignity, and possibility. It encourages Colombians to recognize one another not through abstract categories or political slogans, but through shared tastes, stories, and values. In doing so, it presents a powerful and locally resonant alternative for peacebuilding and advancing the agenda of transitional justice from a robust foundation—one that does not erase difference, but weaves it into a common fabric. One bite, one story, one plate at a time.

In the end, this model beyond answering any sort of question around the how to build peace with a definite answer, helps to raise the right questions. To identify the gaps that must be filled, the gaps that need to be covered to move forward and support what communities are already doing, what they are already working on, or envision and wish to work on. As one of the researchers put it:

“Peace processes shouldn’t be thought of as: ‘How am I going to invent peace?’ It’s not about ‘How am I going to deliver peace trainings so that we all live in harmony?’ It’s about asking instead: ‘How do I build networks that create more equal—or better—conditions?’”
(Interview R04).

Together with the previous chapters, this discussion underscores the cumulative argument of this dissertation: that everyday practices—when grounded in dignity, reciprocity, and

mutual recognition—can lay the foundation for lasting peace. It is not about finding a magic recipe, but about asking the right questions—coordinating top-down, bottom-up, and horizontal efforts in a way that allows them to complement one another. This kind of alignment can contribute cumulative small victories towards meaningful change—gradual, but perceptible, and ultimately shared. Such change is only possible when peacebuilding strategies are inclusive: open to everyone’s participation and responsive to the diverse places, practices, and identities from which individuals engage. Of course, not everyone dines at these kinds of restaurants, and not everyone is interested in gastronomy as a social tool—but some are. And sometimes, *some* is enough to start something. That is, precisely, how a snowball effect begins.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore how gastronomy can contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict Colombia. To address this question, the analysis was grounded in two foundational objectives of transitional justice: recognition and civic trust. These were framed as essential to any meaningful process of societal repair—particularly when examined through the lens of everyday life, where small, sustained actions can generate transformative change. The chapter then situated gastronomy both as an economic sector and as a knowledge field embedded in broader food systems—especially agroecology—highlighting its potential to foster relational practices rooted in inclusion, dignity, and collective well-being.

As developed throughout the dissertation, this argument builds on earlier insights. Chapter 3 traced how agroecological practices have the potential to advance not only food sovereignty and environmental resilience, but also everyday peace through health, biodiversity, and economic autonomy. Chapter 4 showed how women, through situated knowledge and caregiving labor, generate forms of recognition that are often undervalued yet essential to sustaining social cohesion amid climate change. This chapter brought these threads together by focusing on food as both nourishment and symbolic language, offering

a grounded response to how gastronomy can revitalize trust and recognition in post-conflict settings.

A critical component of the analysis involved examining private sector engagement in peacebuilding. While most literature focuses on large corporations, this study emphasized the role of small actors—independent restaurants and chefs—whose relational proximity to producers allows for more reciprocal, humanized forms of engagement. These smaller actors are not removed from the communities they source from; they build trust directly, often over time, and in ways that resist extractive or performative models. Although large enterprises were beyond the scope of this study, future research could explore how their involvement might alter these dynamics, particularly around risks of appropriation and inequity.

The chapter identified key contributions across three interconnected domains: economic, social, and cultural. Economically, partnerships between chefs and ASOCOMAN members have enabled *campesinos* to diversify their livelihoods—not only as farmers, but as cooks, hosts, and knowledge-holders—thus increasing autonomy and organizational strength. Socially, the rise of gastronomy as a professional and cultural field has broadened public interest in Colombia's diverse foodways, opening space for more equitable representation of rural actors. These dynamics resonate with Chapter 3's focus on agroecological innovation and Chapter 4's emphasis on women's leadership as builders of peace. Culturally, what emerges is a new narrative—one in which Colombians are not defined by conflict or division, but by the richness of their territories, the depth of their traditions, and the possibility of solidarity across difference.

Through the layered relationships among *campesinos*, chefs, and diners, the chapter showed how food can become a vehicle for recognition—both affective and political. These relationships are not linear or uniform; they evolve over time, sometimes beginning

in strategic exchange but deepening into moral bonds. In this sense, eating together—or even eating with awareness—becomes an entry point for civic trust. The chefs featured in this study are increasingly conscious of their role not just as culinary innovators, but as storytellers, mentors, and bridges between worlds. The *campesinos*, in turn, find in these collaborations a chance to affirm their knowledge and dignity. Diners, when invited into this web of meaning, experience not only pleasure, but also perspective.

Recognition here does not begin with policy—it begins with practice. When everyday interactions are infused with respect and curiosity, they open the possibility for relational repair. The chapter argued that peace cannot be built solely by the state, victims, or demobilized actors. It must also be nurtured by citizens—by those whose everyday choices can either reinforce distance or cultivate solidarity. In this way, restaurants can become more than places of consumption: they become social innovation hubs—spaces where narratives are reshaped, and futures are imagined differently.

The growing popularity of gastronomy—fueled by media platforms, food festivals, and programs like *MasterChef*—has broadened the reach of these dynamics. Chefs increasingly use their visibility to highlight not only ingredients, but the ecosystems and communities behind them. This storytelling dimension expands the impact of relational trust and places gastronomy within broader movements for cultural and ecological justice.

The study, of course, has limitations. Its local and sectoral focus limits generalizability, and the economic inaccessibility of these restaurants may constrain their direct social impact. Yet many of the chefs profiled are involved in educational or territorial initiatives that extend beyond the restaurant. Moreover, the lessons drawn here can inform broader efforts—particularly those led by *cocineras tradicionales*, Indigenous communities, and Afro-Colombian foodways—whose knowledge and solidarity networks are equally vital, even if less resourced or recognized.

In sum, this chapter suggests that peacebuilding must not overlook the everyday. It must be attentive to where people eat, who cooks, who is named, and whose labor is made visible. Food is not only a necessity—it is a language, a memory, and a terrain of encounter. It teaches us that trust and recognition are not abstract goals; they are practices that can be cultivated—sometimes quietly, but always meaningfully. And while gastronomy alone cannot deliver peace, it can nourish the social conditions that make it possible.

Chapter 7

7 Conclusion

This dissertation began with a simple, enduring realization: food unites. It is a feeling I first encountered early in my academic journey—one that would later be affirmed time and again through professional, academic, and personal experience. That intuition led me to look more closely at the everyday, ordinary spaces where the threads of peace are quietly woven, particularly in a fractured and unequal society like Colombia. The path traced here does not end with this dissertation; rather, it lays the groundwork for future research and inquiry—work that can inform not only peacebuilding, transitional justice, and development studies, but also decision-makers for the design of public policy and programming.

Throughout the chapters, I explored how everyday practices around food can contribute to peacebuilding. This inquiry was grounded in the premise that if food is so central to human life that it can be weaponized, then it can also be harnessed as a tool for peace. In this final chapter, I revisit the key insights of the research, articulate its theoretical and methodological contributions, reflect on its limitations, and outline future directions for scholarship and practice. In doing so, I reaffirm one last time that peace is not achieved through institutional action alone. It also depends on the quality of the relationships we cultivate—with institutions, yes, but also with each other, as fellow citizens navigating everyday life.

7.1 Key Findings

Peace, Agroecology, and Gastronomy investigates how food systems—particularly through the practices of gastronomy and agroecology—can serve as everyday mechanisms for peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts such as Colombia. Drawing on transitional justice theory, feminist political ecology, and critical development studies, the research

explores how recognition, civic trust, and relational repair can emerge through ordinary food-related practices. It examines how these quotidian actions might contribute to the goals of transitional justice, complementing more formal institutional and grassroots efforts advanced by state and civil society actors working toward peace and human rights.

Chapter 2 provided the conceptual foundation by critically engaging with transitional justice and liberal peacebuilding literatures. It highlighted the limitations of state-centric and trauma-focused approaches and proposed an alternative framework—*creative peacebuilding*—centered on everyday action, cultural relevance, and relational ethics. Agroecology and gastronomy were introduced as promising yet underexplored avenues within peace and development studies, capable of fostering interconnections across diverse sectors. The chapter also emphasized the relevance of food systems in addressing both the root causes of conflict and the vulnerabilities exacerbated by climate change.

Chapter 3 examined how food system transformations, through agroecology, can create enabling conditions for peacebuilding and sustainable development in post-conflict territories. It argued that agroecology is not merely a technical alternative to industrial agriculture, but an ethical and political commitment to sustainability, autonomy, and care. Drawing on interviews and local initiatives, the chapter demonstrated how agroecology can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), restore relationships with land and community, and support everyday peace through ecological belonging and food sovereignty. Participants identified strong links between health, agriculture, and economic stability as essential to their experience of peace. Food diversity emerged as a central theme—both in terms of nutrition and as a strategy to care for biodiversity while enhancing economic independence. ASOCOMAN’s agroecological approach adds cultural and ecological value to their products, allowing them to reduce reliance on intermediaries and sell at fair prices.

Chapter 4 examined the gendered dimensions of agroecological transitions, highlighting the central role of rural women in sustaining biodiversity, preserving ancestral knowledge, and fostering environmental peacebuilding. The analysis expanded the notion of care to include multispecies and territorial interdependence, arguing that any meaningful peacebuilding strategy must recognize women not only as caregivers, but as political actors and knowledge holders. ASOCOMAN's experience revealed how women's leadership—often overlooked in other contexts—is actively valued, especially in partnerships with restaurants that ensure fair market access. Women have led product transformation, culinary innovation, and the design of dining experiences rooted in territory and memory. These collaborations foster knowledge-sharing beyond economic exchange. Biodiversity emerged as a shared ethical commitment, and interviews with chefs and researchers across Colombia confirmed women's leadership in connecting agriculture and gastronomy. Although no tensions were observed in ASOCOMAN's case, literature on care, inclusive economies, and grassroots peacebuilding shows that conflicts sometimes arise in similar contexts, for example when women's visibility or revenues increase. This temporal dimension suggests that dynamics may evolve over time.

Chapter 5 examined gastronomy as a site for fostering civic trust and recognition. Through collaborations between rural producers and urban chefs, it showed how food can serve as a medium for ethical encounter, economic inclusion, and symbolic repair. Though modest in scale, these partnerships demonstrate how relational practices in cultural and economic spaces can contribute to peacebuilding. Civic trust and recognition—intermediate goals of transitional justice—were shown to emerge not from formal mechanisms, but from everyday interactions that resist humiliation and affirm dignity. The chapter also highlighted how the restaurants featured in this study actively cultivate civic trust by connecting diners with the stories behind each ingredient. In doing so, they elevate native and heirloom produce, promote biodiversity, and indirectly protect *campesino* territories. Gastronomy, it argues, can serve as a quiet form of resistance to polarization, bridging citizens across deep social and cultural divides. Through shared meals and sensory

storytelling, these collaborations offer a more inclusive vision of national identity—rooted in mutual respect, dignity, and the intrinsic value of life.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that food is not peripheral to peacebuilding—it is central. Not only as a material necessity, but as a relational and symbolic practice. Agroecology and gastronomy, when grounded in social justice and collective wellbeing, can support new forms of social contract—ones based not in abstraction, but in shared nourishment, ethical interdependence, and respect. This research does not claim that food can, on its own, reshape society—but it affirms that *small victories accumulate*. These victories might include popularizing native ingredients, motivating *campesinos* to sow heirloom seeds, keep fruit trees instead of cutting them for wood, or helping consumers recognize that purple maize or black corn is not “rotten” but culturally and biologically rich. By bringing Colombia’s biodiversity to the plate, these practices contribute to recognition—making visible the value of difference, and turning diversity into a source of collective pride rather than polarization.

In sum, the accumulated findings of this dissertation affirm that food—through gastronomy and agroecology—can indeed serve as a pathway toward a more peaceful and dignified society. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that peacebuilding is rarely linear. Real life entails tensions, contradictions, and messy human relationships. While the dynamics observed in this study reflected collaboration and mutual trust at the time of research, literature in the field reminds us that such dynamics may shift as political, economic, and social conditions evolve. These findings should therefore be read as a snapshot within a specific temporal and relational context, with the recognition that peacebuilding practices are never static but embedded in changing realities at multiple levels.

7.2 Contributions

This dissertation offers original contributions to peace and conflict studies, transitional justice, and development theory—spanning theoretical, methodological, and practical domains. It draws connections across these fields to generate insights that can inform not only academic debates but also programming and public policy. What follows is an overview of its core theoretical contributions.

Theoretical

Among the theoretical contributions is the proposal of a more relational and horizontal understanding of transitional justice—one that moves beyond legalism and the binary framing of victim and perpetrator. It centers recognition and civic trust as foundational goals and explores how these can emerge organically through everyday actions and interactions. Rather than positioning ordinary people as implementers of institutional agendas, this perspective foregrounds the informal, often unrecognized ways in which individuals and communities contribute to peace through their daily lives—whether by sharing food, preserving native seeds, or fostering intergenerational knowledge. These contributions, while subtle, play a critical role in sustaining the social fabric. They do not substitute formal justice processes, but enrich them by extending the geography of peacebuilding into the realm of everyday experience.

Building on this, this dissertation proposes the advancement of *creative peacebuilding*, a concept grounded in feminist, decolonial, and relational epistemologies. This framework reorients the field toward culturally resonant, locally grounded practices that resist rigid normative prescriptions and allow for contextual experimentation. It does not oppose formal transitional justice mechanisms, but rather complements them by expanding the range of culturally meaningful strategies available in complex post-conflict settings. In doing so, it opens space for interdisciplinary inquiry and cross-field collaboration, particularly with sectors not traditionally associated with peacebuilding—such as

gastronomy, agroecology, or the arts. This approach also gestures toward the potential of creative practices to support long-term transformation and prevention efforts in marginalized or climate-vulnerable territories.

In parallel, *Peace, Agroecology and Gastronomy* bridges peacebuilding and political ecology by integrating environmental and food justice into post-conflict recovery debates. It reinforces the notion that sustainable peace is inseparable from ecological care, territorial autonomy, and adaptation to climate-related risks. By positioning agroecology and gastronomy within this broader framework, the research contributes to the growing nexus between food systems, security, and climate change—particularly relevant in regions facing slow-onset crises and environmental degradation. This perspective invites peace and development practitioners to recognize ecological resilience and food sovereignty not merely as environmental or developmental goals, but as integral components of long-term peacebuilding.

Additionally, the dissertation reframes food systems as peacebuilding mechanisms in their own right. By treating agroecology and gastronomy as more than livelihood strategies or cultural expressions, it highlights their potential to foster recognition, civic trust, and moral repair—core elements of transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction. While these practices do not “solve” conflict or guarantee peace, they create conditions that enable communities to take meaningful steps forward. In a context like Colombia, where land tenure and agriculture remain among the root causes of violence, food becomes not only a basic need but a strategic entry point for reweaving relationships and promoting territorial justice.

Finally, this dissertation establishes gender as a *sine qua non* condition for sustainable and dignified transformation. Gender equity and intersectionality are not optional lenses; they are crucial for reimagining more inclusive, just, and peaceful societies. Inequality not only

reproduces violence but also limits the transformative potential of peacebuilding efforts. Challenging patriarchal systems is therefore not a separate struggle; it is deeply intertwined with the broader project of peace. Like peace itself, gender justice is built through incremental, everyday shifts—small victories that reveal how power relations shape both the problems we face and the pathways we can envision. Using a gender lens is thus not only about inclusion but also about making visible the structural constraints that define what change is possible and for whom. This signposts the need for better policies, improved programmes, and more effective engagement from different actors to advance gender equity and inclusion.

Taken together, these theoretical contributions invite a broader and more grounded understanding of what peacebuilding entails—one that expands the epistemological and practical boundaries of the field. By weaving together relational justice, ecological ethics, gender equity, and cultural practices, this dissertation challenges narrow interpretations of transitional justice and opens space for more situated, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approaches. It argues that peace is not merely the absence of conflict or the product of institutional design, but a dynamic process sustained through everyday practices, ethical commitments, and the affirmation of dignity across difference that can benefit and leverage tools from multiple fields and knowledges.

Methodological

This dissertation demonstrates the value of combining critical epistemologies with grounded, flexible tools of inquiry to study peace from a horizontal, everyday perspective. Guided by feminist, interpretivist, and decolonial commitments, the research employed a mixed-methods approach that integrated participatory workshops and semi-structured interviews with community members, chefs, and researchers across rural and urban contexts. It also adapted two existing frameworks—the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) and the Agroecology Finance Assessment Tool (AFAT)—to better account for gendered

experiences and post-conflict dynamics. Additionally, the use of natural language processing (NLP) provided a complementary analytical layer, offering insights into discursive patterns and narrative trends often overlooked in traditional qualitative coding.

This methodological pluralism enabled a more nuanced understanding of how peace is practiced, narrated, and imagined in everyday life. By retooling established instruments through feminist and peacebuilding lenses, the research not only generated rich empirical insights, but also illustrated how research design itself can serve as a site of ethical and epistemological innovation. Furthermore, it demonstrated that tools from other fields—such as agroecology and computational linguistics—can complement in-field ones, such as EPI, and offer valuable contributions to peacebuilding and transitional justice, particularly when adapted to local contexts and informed by gender-sensitive analysis. The retooling of these instruments stands as the dissertation’s central methodological contribution and signals the importance of continuing to develop cross-field methodologies to address root causes of conflict and better anticipate future risks.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this dissertation offer several implications for policy and practice in post-conflict contexts, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Peace Accord in Colombia. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, the research provides a framework for asking more grounded and generative questions—ones that can guide public, private, and civil society actors in strengthening peacebuilding efforts from the bottom up. By focusing on a concrete experience like ASOCOMAN and fostering dialogue across sectors—rural producers, chefs, and researchers—this dissertation surfaces key challenges faced by communities that operate outside formal programs or public policies, yet whose everyday practices offer critical insights for intervention.

One such issue is the role of intermediaries in the food supply chain. Without seeking to generalize their figure, the research highlights the need to ensure that these actors facilitate fair and transparent exchanges between producers and markets. Another key lesson is the importance of supporting existing community initiatives. In territories where state presence is minimal, the most effective policy contribution may be to strengthen and scale what is already underway. For example, ASOCOMAN members face bureaucratic obstacles in navigating formalization processes—such as transportation, tax reporting, acquiring sanitary permits, or setting up accounting systems—which could be more effectively supported through tailored, context-sensitive public programs. Many also struggle to promote their work on digital platforms, limiting their market reach and visibility.

Beyond ASOCOMAN, the research offers a model of economic partnership between *campesino* producers and small or medium-sized enterprises—particularly restaurants—that could serve as a basis for future programming. These partnerships have the potential to be strengthened and adapted in other contexts, including with Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, through public support that does not impose top-down models but rather facilitates what is already in motion.

The dissertation also identifies other potential contributions to public policy. Given the centrality of food systems to health, culture, and local economies, programs such as school meal initiatives (e.g., Colombia's PAE) could incorporate native and biodiverse produce, improving nutritional outcomes while strengthening local markets and employment—particularly for women, who often serve as cooks. Participants also emphasized the importance of *cocinas tradicionales* and *plazas de mercado* as spaces of cultural memory and exchange, which could be reimagined as key nodes in sustainable food policy. Moreover, connecting food, agriculture, health, and economic stability presents a valuable framework for youth-oriented recruitment prevention strategies.

Supporting dignified rural livelihoods can offer viable alternatives to migration or recruitment into armed groups, helping to retain younger generations in their territories with long-term life plans. Finally, the cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach of this research points to the need for further investment in areas such as food waste reduction and agroecological transitions—issues touched upon through the use of tools like AFAT, but which require deeper development. In short, the intersection of peace, agroecology, and gastronomy offers a fertile ground for public action. While it does not promise definitive solutions, it reveals a wide range of entry points to design more responsive, context-aware, and inclusive programs that recognize the knowledge and potential already held within communities.

7.3 Limitations

No research is without its limitations. This dissertation was carried out within the constraints of a doctoral project, with limited time, scope, and funding. While the study was grounded in fieldwork and benefited from the insight of participants, it did not follow a fully participatory action research design, as participants were not involved beyond the data collection stage. Nonetheless, their engagement significantly shaped the research design and topic focus. Preliminary findings have been shared with ASOCOMAN, and once the dissertation is published, a final report in Spanish will be submitted to the community along with access to the full document.

It is important to acknowledge that peacebuilding is not a linear or conclusive process. Many of the practices described here remain ongoing, tentative, or fragile—but they matter. They represent possibilities: glimpses into alternative modes of coexistence that are already in motion. At the same time, the highly localized nature of the case study—focused on Macaján in Montes de María—limits the generalizability of the findings. While the analysis may offer insights for similar contexts, it is not intended to speak for Afro-Colombian or

Indigenous communities, whose food systems and cultural practices differ significantly across regions. In Colombia, for instance, Indigenous communities in Guajira do not share the same foodways as those in the Amazon, nor do Afro-Colombian communities along the Pacific coast mirror those in the Caribbean. Any future application of this framework should be adapted with careful attention to local context and specificity.

The study also recognizes the complexity of engaging the private sector in peacebuilding. While small-scale collaborations can be deeply ethical and relational, they nonetheless operate within broader systems shaped by extractivism, inequality, and profit imperatives. Navigating these tensions demands humility, discernment, and continuous ethical reflection. Although no instances of cultural appropriation were identified during fieldwork, this does not guarantee the absence of such dynamics. Additionally, the sample of restaurants analyzed was shaped by time and resource constraints, relying on an existing list. As a result, the study focuses primarily on middle- and upper-tier establishments, which may limit the sense of representation among broader publics. The gap between *campesino* producers and higher-income diners, while analytically valuable, also reflects a longer social and economic bridge—one that merits further exploration with a more diverse range of food spaces and publics.

Finally, the feasibility of implementing the policy-oriented recommendations presented here depends on baseline conditions of security and stability. Colombia's current political tensions and recent increases in violence may undermine the potential for these measures to be applied, particularly in rural zones. As such, this research should be read as a post-conflict exploration, one that may inspire approaches in other contexts—but that would require substantial adaptation during periods of active conflict or heightened instability. Although, now more than ever, there is a need to offer cohesive narratives that counter the increasingly polarizing discourses of opposing political leaders.

7.4 Future Research

Building on this dissertation’s interdisciplinary and cross-field approach, several promising pathways for future research emerge. Grounded in the Colombian context, one of the most recurrent topics raised by chefs and researchers during interviews was the potential of the coca leaf. Beyond its historical association with the illicit drug economy, coca possesses notable nutritional and cultural value. Many actors in the gastronomic sector have begun to reclaim the narrative around coca under the premise that “coca is not cocaine.” Given its connection to rural livelihoods, national stigma, and peace agreement implementation, this subject warrant dedicated inquiry—particularly as it intersects with transitional justice, economic alternatives, and symbolic reparation.

In line with the food system reflections presented in Chapter 3, future research could also examine the role of soil health and its relationship to human health, as suggested by several research participants. This could be deepened through targeted investigations into Indigenous and Afro-Colombian foodways, which would not only expand the cultural scope of this work but also bring greater attention to underexplored epistemologies around land, nutrition, and care. These inquiries could further integrate questions around food loss and waste, adding a climate resilience dimension to the study of agroecological transitions and sustainable food systems.

Another line of inquiry involves examining how creative fields beyond gastronomy—such as the arts, fashion, architecture, design, and sports—can contribute to peacebuilding and support urban–rural connections. Many of these sectors are already engaging in socially meaningful ways, and future studies could explore how their work intersects with territorial development and post-conflict reconstruction. Expanding the study of creative peacebuilding to include these domains would further illuminate the potential of unconventional actors and practices in sustaining peace from everyday life.

Lastly, future research could explore the replicability of the ASOCOMAN experience. Mapping its core components and identifying the conditions under which similar partnerships might emerge could help shape a model for replication³². Such an effort would require coordinated, long-term engagement and would inevitably face constraints related to funding and security. However, its outcomes could offer valuable insights for designing context-sensitive public policies and supporting scalable peacebuilding strategies in other regions.

7.5 Final Reflection

Ultimately, this dissertation has been a journey of connecting the everyday with the structural, the intimate with the political. By weaving together stories from across Colombia—a country I have walked, studied, and loved for years—it set out not to offer solutions, but to spark curiosity. It invites readers to ask better, deeper questions about peace: not only as a political achievement, but as a daily practice grounded in respect, relationality, and the value of diversity—cultural, biological, and ideological. Peace is not built solely through treaties, which can falter; it is also forged in the ordinary gestures we extend to one another, in how we choose to coexist, and in the minimums we defend—minimum respect, minimum peace.

While the scope of this research was necessarily focused, the questions it raises remain expansive: How might we take seriously the knowledge embedded in everyday life? What does it truly mean to center life in our decisions—and why is it so often easier said than done? How can dignity—so often eroded in the aftermath of violence—be restored through shared acts of nourishment? And perhaps most urgently: What is our role, individually and

³² It is worth acknowledging the potential discrepancy between how campesino communities describe, value, and approach food practices and how chefs narrate these same practices for urban or international audiences. These different discourses highlight both tensions and opportunities for future research.

collectively, in shaping a society that embraces both those we love and those we do not yet understand?

The goal is not perfection—it is resistance. Resistance to the normalization of violence, to indifference, to the idea that things must remain as they are. In a time of rising polarization—in Colombia and beyond—it is imperative to reclaim spaces of connection. *Peace, Agroecology, and Gastronomy* offers one such space, grounded in something as universal as it is intimate: food. Not simply because we all need it, but because we can share it. And in that sharing, however modest, we may begin to remember what it means to belong to each other.

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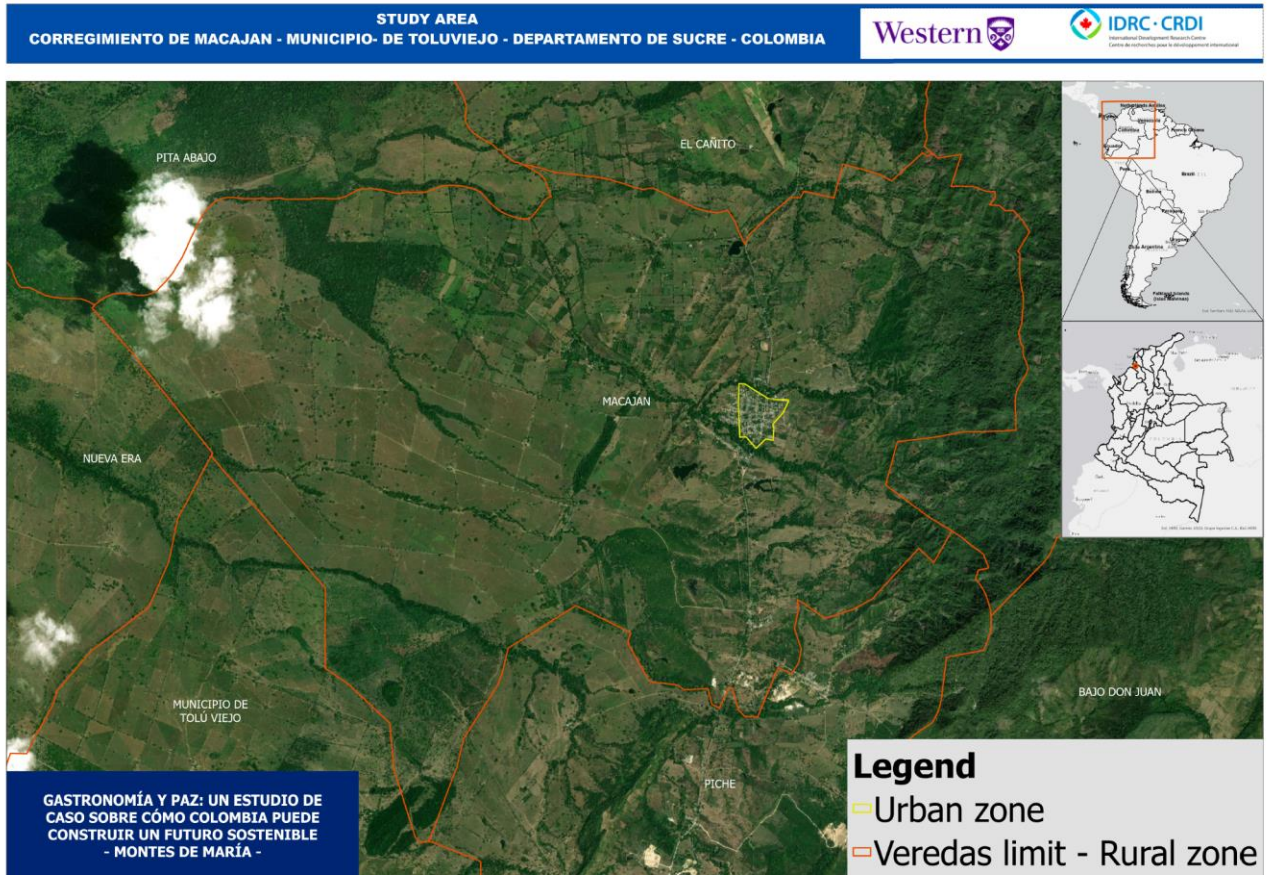
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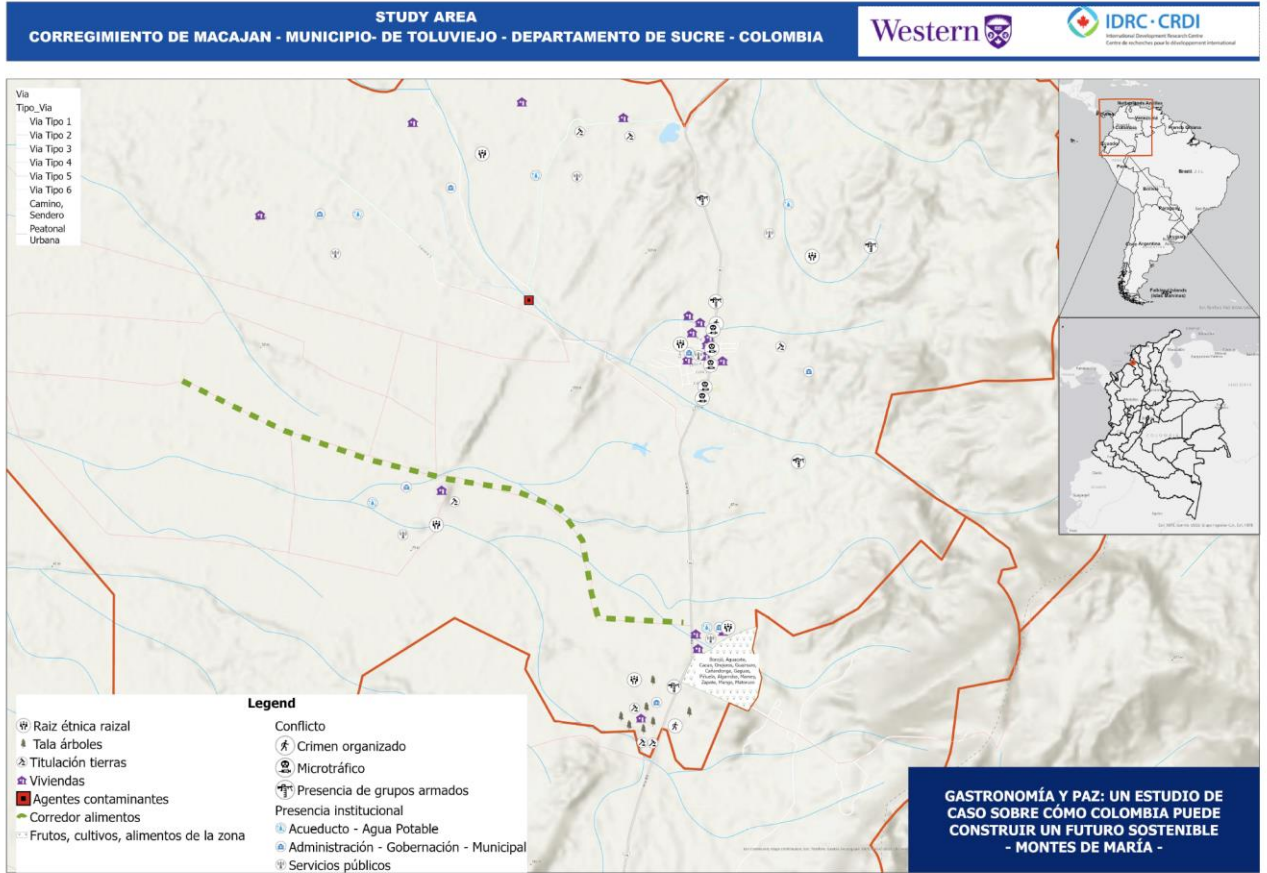
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Appendices

Appendix A: Social Cartography Macaján





Appendix B: Chefs. Interview Guide

PILLARS OF THE RESEARCH	QUESTIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	What is your role at [Restaurant]?	
	What do you think makes [Restaurant]'s work unique?	
Gastronomy and Peace (5 questions - 25 mins)	Do you think that social changes can be generated from gastronomy? What is the biggest challenge?	What is the biggest challenge?
	For you, what is the greatest advantage that gastronomy has to influence social change?	What key elements do you think should be included in a proposal with that objective?
	In your career you have highlighted the importance of working hand in hand with farmers/communities. What motivated you to do so? What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?	What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?
		Have you been able to transmit these lessons to your diners? How?
	Being a pioneer in the country and the region, if you had to highlight Colombia's main strength to impact the social agenda from gastronomy, what would it be?	What do you consider to have been the greatest achievements so far?
		What do you think is the next step?
	Do you think gastronomy can serve as a mechanism to build peace?	Do you think women in particular could benefit from this approach? Why?
Sustainable Food Systems (4 questions - 20 mins)	What is your opinion on basing Colombia's food security on domestic agricultural production and native products?	What benefits or benefits do you perceive?
		What products, and where would you highlight those local/native products?
	What are your reflections on working with native species?	What do you consider to be the main social gain of this work?
		Who do you think benefits from this effort?
	Who do you think is responsible for taking these actions?	

	What role do you think gastronomy can play in slowing down climate change?	Do you think this is an achievable goal in the next 10 years?
	From your research, which areas have you identified as areas where we can strengthen the work to preserve native species and consume local products in a responsible manner?	Where do you think the agenda in Colombia and Latin America should go?
		Who do you think may be the main allies and/or opponents?
Links with other actors of the Cultural Network (3 questions - 15 min)	Do you see yourself as a meeting point between the products you use, the farmers you work with, and the diners who visit [Restaurant]?	Why?
	From the work you do, which of all the lessons learned do you think you pass on to [Restaurant] diners?	Any others you would like to pass on?
	Do you think that a Gastronomy & Peace project based on responsible and sustainable consumption can generate positive changes?	How receptive do you think people are at the table?
		How / Which ones / Why?
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	What has been your greatest learning experience?	
	Any comments you would like to add?	Optional.

Appendix C: Researchers. Interview Guide

PILLARS OF THE RESEARCH	QUESTIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	What led you to research/involve yourself in gastronomy and social change?	
Gastronomy and Peace (5 questions - 25 mins)	Do you think that social changes can be generated from gastronomy? What is the biggest challenge?	What is the biggest challenge?
	For you, what is the greatest advantage that gastronomy has to influence social change?	What key elements do you think should be included in a proposal with that objective?
	In your career you have highlighted the importance of working hand in hand with farmers/communities. What motivated you to do so? What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?	What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?
		Have you been able to transmit these lessons to your diners? How?
	If you had to highlight Colombia's main strength to impact the social agenda from gastronomy, what would it be?	What do you consider to have been the greatest achievements so far?
		What do you think is the next step?
	Do you think gastronomy can serve as a mechanism to build peace?	Do you think women in particular could benefit from this approach? Why?
Sustainable Food Systems (4 questions - 20 mins)	What is your opinion on basing Colombia's food security on domestic agricultural production and native products?	What benefits or benefits do you perceive?
		What products, and where would you highlight those local/native products?
	What are your reflections on working with native species?	What do you consider to be the main social gain of this work?
		Who do you think benefits from this effort?
	What role do you think gastronomy can play in slowing down climate change?	Who do you think is responsible for taking these actions?
		Do you think this is an achievable goal in the next 10 years?
	From your research, which areas have you identified as areas where we can strengthen the work to preserve native species and consume local products in a responsible manner?	Where do you think the agenda in Colombia and Latin America should go?
Who do you think may be the main allies and/or opponents?		

Links with other actors of the Cultural Network (3 questions - 15 min)	What do you consider to be a meeting point between products, farmers, and restaurants?	Why?
	From the work you do, which of all the lessons learned would you like to pass on?	Any others you would like to pass on?
		How receptive do you think people are at the table?
	Do you think that a Gastronomy & Peace project based on responsible and sustainable consumption can generate positive changes?	How / Which ones / Why?
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	What has been your greatest learning experience?	
	Any comments you would like to add?	Optional.

Appendix D: ASCOMAN. Interview Guide

PILLARS OF THE RESEARCH	QUESTIONS	SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	How did you become involved with ASOCOMAN? How did you start?	
Gastronomy and Peace (5 questions - 25 mins)	Do you think that social changes can be generated from gastronomy? What is the biggest challenge?	What is the biggest challenge?
	For you, what is the greatest advantage that gastronomy has to influence social change?	What key elements do you think should be included in a proposal with that objective?
	In your career you have highlighted the importance of working hand in hand with farmers/communities. What motivated you to do so? What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?	What have been the main lessons learned from your experience?
		Have you been able to transmit these lessons to your diners? How?
	If you had to highlight Colombia's main strength to impact the social agenda from gastronomy, what would it be?	What do you consider to have been the greatest achievements so far?
		What do you think is the next step?
Do you think gastronomy can serve as a mechanism to build peace?	Do you think women in particular could benefit from this approach? Why?	
Sustainable Food Systems (4 questions - 20 mins)	What is your opinion on basing Colombia's food security on domestic agricultural production and native products?	What benefits or benefits do you perceive?
		What products, and where would you highlight those local/native products?
	What are your reflections on working with native species?	What do you consider to be the main social gain of this work?

		Who do you think benefits from this effort?
	What role do you think gastronomy can play in slowing down climate change?	Who do you think is responsible for taking these actions?
		Do you think this is an achievable goal in the next 10 years?
	From your research, which areas have you identified as areas where we can strengthen the work to preserve native species and consume local products in a responsible manner?	Where do you think the agenda in Colombia and Latin America should go?
		Who do you think may be the main allies and/or opponents?
Links with other actors in the system (3 questions - 15 min)	What do you consider to be a meeting point between products, farmers, and restaurants?	Why?
	From the work you do, which of all the lessons learned would you like to pass on?	Any others you would like to pass on?
		How receptive do you think people are at the table?
	Do you think that a Gastronomy & Peace project based on responsible and sustainable consumption can generate positive changes?	How / Which ones / Why?
General Information (2 questions - 5 mins)	What has been your greatest learning experience?	
	Any comments you would like to add?	Optional.

Appendix E • WREM Letter of Approval



Date: 2 February 2022

To: Juan Suarez

Project ID: 120041

Study Title: Gastronomy and Peace. A Cultural Network Study for a Sustainable Future.

Short Title: Gastronomy & Peace: A model based on cultural networks to move towards a sustainable future in Latin American countries.

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 04/Mar/2022

Date Approval Issued: 02/Feb/2022 15:05

REB Approval Expiry Date: 02/Feb/2023

Dear Juan Suarez

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Interview Guide WREM	Interview Guide	17/Oct/2021	1
Protocol Document MPE	Protocol	17/Oct/2021	1
CLEAN 24-01-22 Recruitment Email WREM	Recruitment Materials	24/Jan/2022	2
CLEAN 24-01-22 Letter Of Information and Consent WREM	Written Consent/Assent	24/Jan/2022	2
CLEAN 24-01-22 Verbal. Letter Of Information and Consent WREM	Verbal Consent/Assent	24/Jan/2022	2
CLEAN Translated Documents WREM	Translated Documents	24/Jan/2022	2

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Katelyn Harris, Ms. Zoe Levi, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix F: WREM Letter of Approval - Extension



Date: 2 February 2024

To: Juan Suarez

Project ID: 120041

Study Title: GASTRONOMY & PEACE: A CASE STUDY ON HOW COLOMBIA CAN BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Application Type: Continuing Ethics Review (CER) Form

Review Type: Delegated

Date Approval Issued: 02/Feb/2024 10:38

REB Approval Expiry Date: 02/Feb/2025

Dear Juan Suarez,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board has reviewed this application. This study, including all currently approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 0000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Electronically signed by:

Mr. Joshua Hatherley, Ethics Coordinator on behalf of Dr. Isha DeCoito, NMREB Chair 02/Feb/2024 10:38

Reason: I am approving this document

Note: *This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

Appendix G: WREM Letter of Study Closure



Date: 27 January 2025

To: Juan Suarez

Project ID: 120041

Study Title: GASTRONOMY & PEACE: A CASE STUDY ON HOW COLOMBIA CAN BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

Application Type: Study Closure Form

Review Type: Delegated

Date Acknowledgement Issued: 27/Jan/2025 14:14

Dear Juan Suarez,

The Western NMREB has reviewed this application, and the closure of this study is acknowledged. The WREM project for this study is now officially closed and the data retention period indicated in your approved protocol/WREM application begins now.

There can be no further participant contact or involvement and no further data collection, transfer, or sharing.

The **only** study activities that should take place after a project involving human participants is closed are:

- De-identified data analysis by the existing study team members to achieve the **same** objectives outlined in your last approved protocol/WREM application;
- Preparation and dissemination of results; and
- Sharing of open access data, if already approved by the REB.

Study records must be destroyed in accordance with institutional policies and procedures after the data retention period indicated in your approved protocol/WREM application.

Should you or any other researchers/students choose to pursue *secondary* analysis of the data collected for the above project (*i.e., for a new purpose beyond the objectives of the original project*), separate REB approval may be required in accordance with TCPS2 Articles 2.4 and 5.5A/B.

We recommend contacting the Office (ethics@uwo.ca) to confirm if ongoing analysis, future analysis, or data transfer/sharing requires further REB oversight.

Sincerely,

The Office of Human Research Ethics on behalf of Western University's Research Ethics Boards

Note: *This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

Curriculum Vitae

Name: María-Paula Espejo Duarte

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
Bogotá D.C., Colombia
2011-2016 B.A. Political Science
Minor: Conflict Resolution & Peace Research

Universidad de Los Andes
Bogotá D.C., Colombia
2017-2019 M.A. Peacebuilding

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2019-Present Ph.D. Hispanic Studies
Specialization: Transitional Justice & Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Honours and Awards: Research Awardee Recipient, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
2023-2024

Bentley Research Award – Climate-Resilient Food Systems Program, International Development Research Centre (IDRC)
2023 – 2024

Summer School Fellowship “After the Green Revolution”,
Cambridge University (United Kingdom)
2021, 2022, 2023

Thesis Research Award, Department of Languages and Cultures,
The University of Western Ontario
2023

Inspiring Minds, The University of Western Ontario
2023

Dean’s Entrance Scholarship, The University of Western Ontario
2019

Colfuturo Graduate Studies Scholarship, Colfuturo (Colombia)
2016

**Related Work
Experience**

Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2019-2025

Program Manager Officer, Sustainable Inclusive Economies,
International Development Research Centre
2025

Knowledge Sharing Officer, Climate-Resilient Food Systems,
International Development Research Centre
2024-2025

Research Awardee Recipient, Climate-Resilient Food Systems,
International Development Research Centre
2025

National Analyst, Prevention of Human Rights Violations,
Ombudsperson Office Colombia
2021-2022

Follow-Up Analyst, Prevention of Human Rights Violations,
Ombudsperson Office Colombia
2021-2022

Conflict Mediator, Bureau of Indigenous Affairs and Minorities,
Ministry of Interior Colombia
2017-2018

Advisor, Honourable Congresswoman Legal Working Unit,
Congress of the Republic of Colombia
2017-2018

Publications:

- Espejo, M.P. (2021). *Drug-Trafficking in Colombia: The New Civil War Against Democracy and Peacebuilding*. *Co-herencia*, 18(34), 157–192.
- Espejo, M.P. (2021). *Victimizers No More: The Risk of Addressing Conflict's Actors from Binary Readings*. *Papel Político*, 26.
- Espejo, M.P. (2023). *Responsibility to Reconcile: Adopting New Terms to Foster Recognition*. *FORUM. Revista Departamento Ciencia Política*, 23, 57–79.
- Romero Ferrón, B., & Espejo, M.P. (2025, forthcoming). *Baking Critical Understanding: Crafting Impactful Social Science Research in the Anthropocene*. *ACRL Critical Digital Humanities Cookbook*. (Book Chapter)
- Espejo, M.P., Lizama-Mué, Y., & Suárez, J.L. (n.d.). *The use of children and youth in the Colombian armed conflict: A Natural Language Processing analysis of 900 Early Warnings (2002–2022)*. (Book Chapter)