JESSICA

Coca growing, stigmatization, violence and development in Colombia
I like the river in Puerto Asís, but I miss my cousins... I hope I can make new friends...

Jessica and her family arrive in Putumayo

Jessica and Pedro, husband and wife, until death do you part...

Don Luis, this cañuca seed is stronger...

For indigenous people, coca is a sacred plant

With this coca harvest, we have enough money to pay the electricity bill, and even buy a TV to watch the soaps
Comrades, without revolution there is no development in the countryside.

What brings development is coca. Let us work!

Here’s our contribution, but you need to organise a community workday soon, to fix the road.

Comrades we’re here to collect the revolutionary tax on your coca.

1989

INSPÉCION DE POLICÍA

What did you learn today?

No problem don Jacinto. I am here to help. Sorry, I must dash, gotta pick up my kids from school.

If I start saving, by the time I grow up I can buy a motorbike

For our ancestors the coca was sacred

Lady, they are looking for you in the community police inspection

The guerrillas only allow members of the community to be elected to the position of community police inspectors
Inspector, I am so happy, my daughter passed the entrance exam for the National University and was offered a place.

Congratulations! A great achievement. But living expenses in Bogotá are sky high...

Luckily the profit of the last coca harvest is enough to rent a room and give her some pocket money.

Inspector, Jelson is dumb as a mule. He does more good harvesting coca, at least that way he helps the household with our costs.

Inspector, Doña María, how could you possibly withdraw your son from school?

Dona María, how could you possibly withdraw your son from school?

Inspector, could you come to our village to register a death and do the official removal of the body?

Of course I can deal with the death, but the corpse is not going anywhere. I’ll attend the childbirth first. Cover the corpse with a blanket until I arrive.

Breathe deeply, count to 10 slowly.

His name will be Jesus, so he will be a good person.

Can I see your birth certificate, so I can make his?

What is a birth certificate, Inspector?

Inspector, this is the third person killed this week.

His nickname was Pastuso.

What did he do?

He harvested coca, he was from Narino, he wasn’t from Putumayo, I don’t know anything else...

So many assassinations, one doesn’t know if it’s because of drug-trafficking or politics.
1996

Coca is sold everywhere

Naranja x docena
Papa x kilo

Puerto Asís grows quickly

At least the guerrilla supply us with food, because feeding all these people is expensive.

This government is destroying all our crops, not only the coca.

Stop the repression, give us education!

No matter how great the sacrifice, we have to protest in defense of life and human rights.

We demand the government stop the aerial spraying!

Hand over the FARC guerrilla leaders! Don't let yourselves be manipulated by them.

The government starts aerial spraying with glyphosate

Support the strike

Don't shoot!

Fire!

Inspector: the army killed many people here.

Who were they? Where are the bodies?

They were coca growers, they came from other regions, men and women, some were community leaders, the army took their corpses away in helicopters...
1998

Rightwing paramilitary groups arrive and the killings increase. Peasants are afraid of going to buy groceries.

1998

Anyone wearing a Yoko brand shirt is a military target. Anyone wearing rubber boots is killed for being a guerrilla fighter.

2000

Comrade, in the demilitarised zone we will demand that the money from Plan Colombia is used to build roads; this must be part of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC.

2000

We are trapped. My two friends and their brother were killed in a shop while buying clothes.

2000

These red pepper seeds will allow us to sell legal produce.

2000

What do you mean, autonomy? We’re in charge here. Do you want to bring the army down on our region?

2000

No, a Peasant Reserve Zone is something else. Nothing to do with the military.

2002

We have to kill you, we are tired of people betraying us.

2002

Jessica gives up her role as community police inspector because she receives death threats. She flee's Puerto Asís. She tries to stop working, but people continue asking for her help and she helps them without being paid.

Don Allirio, life is getting tougher but I won’t leave. Even though I’ve been offered an exile opportunity, I’ve decided to stay here.

I won’t let them kill me, I am joining the FARC.

Unfortunately, Jessica, in Colombia nothing ever changes.

We need to lobby the state to honour its agreements with the peasant organisations after the coca strike. We peasants cannot live without our animals!

The money of Plan Colombia is not reaching the peasants, some so-called “NGOs” are stealing it.

To organise a Peasant Reserve Zone to develop an alternative sustainable economy. We must remain united to defend the territory and our autonomy.

Marulanda, you have betrayed the Colombian people. As the president, I order our Armed Forces to retake the demilitarised zone. We will defeat the FARC, we will defeat terrorism.

This is a declaration of war. What will that mean for us?

Allirio, what a relief! You know I only want the best for our people.

Release her, I take responsibility, dammit!
Our oil company wishes to bring you progress, and strengthen the legal economy for peasants to escape poverty.

No thank you, we don’t want to destroy the environment, we want to keep our territory, the Peasant Reserve Zone, with our animals and our legal crops.

Let me draw you a picture: suppose this is the house you live in, but the state owns the soil underneath, and the state is selling us the soil. We need to take possession of this house, and the state is obliged to get rid of everything that gets in the way of us getting this house.

Damn guerrilla fighter, you have 48 hours to get out of here.

Don’t come back to the farm, or you and your family will meet a nasty end.

And the state has forgotten us. They promise things but then forget about us. In these conditions it’ll be difficult for the Peasant Reserve Zone to survive.

Oh, Pedro! We can’t trust anyone anymore.

Really bad, councilors. A guerrilla fighter came, and she said that the soil belonged to the communities, and they would oppose the oil project.

2009

Concejo Municipal
We have been carrying out secret negotiations with the FARC and we have agreed an agenda to start peace negotiations.

I hope things improve, but how many times have they promised us peace?

A light of hope. God bless us!

In Putumayo, we agreed to do voluntary coca eradication, but then the state started aerial spraying with glyphosate and the money for productive projects never reached the campesinos.

Indeed, it’s much better to live in peace, not to have to worry about getting killed, and not being suspicious of everyone all the time.

Things have to change. We have to work together.

At least now they don’t seem so distrustful of us, before they used to call us guerrilla supporters.

COLOMBIA PIDEN PAZ

2016

We are delighted to see this and we will continue to support peacebuilding.

President Santos, our only weapons will be our words.

This peace process has been a blessing. The violence in Putumayo has substantially reduced. From today onwards our lives will be better and better.

CARTAGENA, SEPTEMBER 2016
I told you my dear, there will never be peace in this country.

I can't believe it, Colombians rejected the peace accord in the referendum. 58.21% voted 'no', and 41.79% didn't vote. Will the war come back?

In the Peasant Reserve Zone we need better irrigation systems.

We have to agree on what the most important infrastructure projects are in our region.

You must fill in the forms stating clearly how many acres of coca you grow.

Do we also have to write the size of our household?

We must trust the government that will pay us the subsidy.

The government hasn't sent us the money.

And there are so-called NGOs formulating projects without knowing the region.

We must keep our eyes open and demand that the government fulfill its promise.

A dissident FARC front is arriving south of the river saying that the government won't fulfill its promises. They are telling peasants that they should go back to growing coca crops and there are strangers with Mexican accents, walking around buying coca paste.

At least we knew who was who before - it's really scary now.

But Jessica, you know we rely on the coca to send our children to university. Without it they would be completely ignorant.

We signed an agreement to stop growing coca. We must strengthen the peasant economy and look after the environment.

Where is Jessica?

Tell her we are looking for her.

She is not here, she's not been here for days.

Pedro, you know that at this time it is forbidden to come through here!

You'd better listen, we won't warn you anymore.

It was an emergency.
According to the UN, 107 human rights defenders were killed in 2019.

This is really worrying.

Seven women have been killed in Puerto Asia.

And reporting it is useless.

Oh Jessica, I feel like a prisoner. The animals are alone on the farm, but we cannot live there in these conditions. We have to lay low in Puerto Asia.

The bodyguards refuse to come back with us to the farm. Pedro. Six leaders of the Peasant Reserve Zone have received death threats.

I don’t trust the government anymore. I think it is not going to fulfill its promises again. I feel so sad, people had rebuilt hope. I’m so tired. But I have to continue supporting other peasants. If I don’t do it, who else will? I don’t know if this country will ever change. For now I have to sell cosmetics in order to maintain the household income, as we couldn’t go back to the farm.

Darling how is university going? How is the weather in Bogotá?

Things are great Mama, agricultural engineering is tough but when I finish I will be able to help our communities, because this country has to change.
About Drugs & (dis)order

Drugs & (dis)order: building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war is a four-year research project generating new evidence on how to transform illicit drug economies into peace economies in Afghanistan, Colombia and Myanmar. It is the work of an international consortium of internationally recognised organisations with unrivalled expertise in drugs, conflict, health and development. Led by SOAS University of London, project partners are: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Acis, Christian Aid, Kachinland Research Centre (KRC), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), Organization for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR), Oxford’s School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA), PositiveNegatives, Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), Universidad de los Andes, and Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

To find out more about this research, visit: drugs-and-disorder.org

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