

THE AFTERLIFE OF COCA DREAMS

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I remember passing through this town many times. I would get tense as we arrived. It was like a heavy mantle of fear that would cling on to me and not let go until I was sure we had already left. The images of heavily armed young men hanging out at cantinas, or simply patrolling town would settle into my thoughts of what it was like to live here.

Until a few years ago, people in this small hamlet tucked in the mountains of the northern coast of Colombia made a living mostly from coca cultivation and cocaine production. It was not that different from many other places in the country, where coca has replaced cash crops and constituted a way of building shattered dreams. But this small place was also the hub of a well-known paramilitary (warlord) commander. The boss, as he was called, ruled this region, and to this day people consider him a father figure, a protector, benefactor and leader. Nothing was done here without his permission or supervision. But today he is serving a sentence for drug trafficking and murder in a US prison. The army has now set up provisional outposts in the mountains, erradicating most of the coca crops and labs. Peasants are wondering what to do, searching for petty alternatives.

I arrived here in search of frozen memories, of names that carried stains of blood in them. Glimpses of the past came about in every corner, and I felt a kind of thrill as I walked into homes once partially forbidden to me. Forbidden for the mere act of fear. The last time I saw this town it was filled with men in

army fatigues carrying grenade launchers and looking despairingly at me. Behind them, in their homes, in the fields, were the men and women that also lived under their gazes, for whom this was simply, life. I had never really engaged them*.

* Thanks to Santiago Giraldo for his help on location

Is it a place of roughness, or a rough place?



Something remains that for some is present





The hand down of power when the head is removed



The other face of fear







There was a time when someone actually bought something



Hoping our luck one day will change



What I seem to clearly remember



There was a time when someone actually bought something (2)



A sticky substance called fear



The real bloodlines that once were invisible





