

Propositions

Attached to the Thesis

Criminals Without Borders: Resilience and Interdependency in
Opium and Coca Commodity Chains

By Eric Dante Gutierrez
International Institute of Social Studies
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Thesis-related propositions

1. The global illicit drugs trade is an economic activity of such magnitude and depth that it inevitably shapes who owns what (property relations), who does what and where (labour supply regulation and migration), who gets what (income distribution), and what they do with it (social relations of consumption).
2. There are underlying, well-embedded labour and production networks in the illicit drugs trade that could not be brought down by state action alone.
3. The building blocks of a market, whether licit or illicit, do not come from the invisible hand of prices and free exchange, but primarily from the social and economic relationships that emerge among interdependent actors, typically guided by the visible hand of power.
4. Because illicit drug crops are commodities produced mainly in marginalised borderlands, its criminal entrepreneurs are necessarily agents of agrarian change who shape and are in turn shaped by conflict and contestation over land and resources, the reordering of the agrarian labour supply, and the outcomes of state formation in indirectly ruled territories.
5. Illicit economies are a paradox: though they may be drivers of criminal activity, they can also be a source of order under certain conditions; though its criminal actors bring predation and violence, they can be development actors too who play key roles in keeping moribund local economies from collapsing.

Non-thesis-related propositions

6. Failure and mistakes in development interventions are often concealed or disguised because of the embarrassment and reputational risks they bring, yet when accepted and analysed, they can be more enduring sources of lessons and improvement than routine 'success stories'.
7. Resilience to poverty and powerlessness is built upon the weapons of the weak.
8. International development work should have exit strategies, metrics for phasing out, and a plan for its own demise or redundancy, because ultimately the best measure of its success is when it is no longer needed.
9. A new respect and status for the non-credentialed are necessary if we are to rebuild from the damage brought by the rise of populist, authoritarian politicians.
10. All believers, agnostics, and atheists can unite in supporting life before death.

The quirky proposition

11. Academic research is often an undertaking in which it is easier to complicate than to simplify.