Criminal insurgencies and weak states
Understanding the structural causes of Colombian cartels

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Abstract

This paper discusses the socio-economic structural causes that favored the creation of drug cartels in Colombia. This paper argues that structural causes are often neglected from research on cartels and drug trafficking and the aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of how new policies can be achieved that are based on the comprehension of the deep socio-economic conditions which are a part of the very structures of Colombia and their relation to the cartels. This is done with a focus on the state and the social classes, and their development throughout the Colombian history since independence. The cartels are analyzed as criminal insurgencies in order to achieve a conceptual understanding of them. This paper concludes that the incomplete Colombian state formation, together with a great amount of marginalization of the lower social classes have been decisive factors in the creation of the criminal insurgencies and consequently, that we need to rethink the current policies on the war on drugs, since the policies in place have been rather unsuccessful in blocking the development of powerful cartels, not only in Colombia but Latin America in general.

Keywords: Colombia, cartels, criminal insurgencies, state formation,
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References
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The importance of researching the illicit drug trade and the criminal insurgencies they seem to fuel is evident, especially since the policies that have guided the global approach to narcotics have never been based on scientific research of the drugs themselves, but rather by vague moral puritan politics especially in the United States from where the policy of zero tolerance and the 'war on drugs' emerged (Inkster & Comolli 2012:37-54). Furthermore, the impact of illicit drugs and particularly the drug trafficking has played an important part in enabling and perpetuating conflicts in areas of the world that are vulnerable to destabilization, and with consequences that go beyond the areas in which these conflicts occur (Inkster & Comolli 2012:10).

There are unintended consequences of this policy and the most important ones, according to the UNODC 2008, may be the creation of criminal black markets and geographical displacement, or 'the balloon effect', whereby pressure on narcotics production and crop eradication in one location simply leads to it moving elsewhere (Inkster & Comolli 2012:53-54).

The fundamental source of the drug problem is the presence and power of consumer demand, a demand that is most conspicuous in advanced industrial countries, in Europe and especially the United States. Demand is what creates the market for drugs, and it is the illegality of the trade that makes it so profitable and attractive (Smith 1992:2-3). The demand is also what eventually defeats any efforts to control the supply side.

Global policies so far tend to focus on supply side control. The fundamental objective of supply side control is to engineer a decrease in production of the crop in question and thus to limit the amount available for sale to the market (Whynes 1992:340, Smith 1992:6). However, this has been difficult to achieve in the case of illicit commodities. For example, the reduction of cocaine production has not been a success, to put it in a different way, the approach to limit supply in order to thereby increase prices and limit demand has not worked (Fukumi 2008:138-139).

The reason for the failure of eradication or supply side control can be explained by the balloon effect. This means that the crop cultivation and drug production simply move on when it has been destroyed in one place. In this way, successful eradication programs in Bolivia and Peru in the 1990s pushed coca cultivation into Colombia, with a total production remaining even in

1 see chapter 2.3 on criminal insurgencies
the Andean Region (Fukumi 2008:152). More importantly the profitability of the illicit drug trade means that the scope for bribery and corruption to counter eradication policies and other legal actions is enormous (Whynes 1992:343).

The most severe aspect of the illicit drug trade is arguably the security implications for producer and transit states and the emergence of non-state groups linked to the drug trade which are able to challenge the authority of states (Inkster & Comolli 2012:18). As will be discussed, the financial incentive to enter the market is enormous, especially in the drug producing countries, which means a steady supply of rural workers to grow illicit crops, and unemployed young urban adults ready to enter into the world of illicit drugs.

In Colombia two powerful cartels emerged in the 1970s and the 1980s, eventually managing to control all aspects of the drug trade and changing the very meaning of the word cartel, from cartels as a mechanism to control supply and prices (Gugliotta 1992:112), into powerful Transnational Criminal Enterprises (TCEs) (Sullivan & Bunker 2013).

The Cartel of Medellin was the first one to draw international attention with its capo Pablo Escobar being one of the most famous and wanted criminals of the 20th century. The Cali Cartel favored a different tactic, operating in the shadows and with its leadership remaining unknown to the authorities for a long time. However, both cartels eventually launched an attack on the Colombian state itself. ‘Narco terrorism’ became a phenomenon and through violent murders, kidnappings, bombings and corruption, but also more subtle co-option, the cartels attempted to achieve total impunity and autonomy and there was international concern that Colombia would turn into a failed state (Chepesiuk 2003).

Colombia suffers from a history of violence, a weak central state, clientelist relations and social and economic exclusion dating back to the earliest days of independence (Bergquist 1986:275-375). A lot of research has been done on Colombia which became an infamous case in the 1980s when it started to draw a lot of attention during the rise of the first powerful Latin American criminal insurgencies, the cartels of Medellin and Cali. However, there seems to exist a general neglect or unwillingness to discuss the socio-economic structural causes and not only limit studies to analyze violence or economic development, therefore the focus on the structural causes in this paper intends to bridge that gap.

In a larger perspective, being able to understand cartels and their socio-economic structural causes is necessary in order to effectively stop the development of powerful cartels, not only in Colombia, but Latin America in general. The necessity of doing this is only increased by the fact that it seems as this problem, now facing other countries in Latin America at even more alarming rates, is never-ending as long as the structural problems are not addressed and changed.

1.2 Purpose and research question

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the socio-economic structural causes that affect and allow cartels to evolve into powerful criminal insurgencies and specifically to understand the role of the state in this process but also to research the role the social classes played in the creation of the cartels.
The structural causes in this paper have in part been decided by the concept of political economy\(^2\). Consequently, this paper looks at three sets of structural conditions, which are the state, the social classes, and the economic incentive of the drug trade. Among the important socio-economic structural causes discussed in this paper, the role of the state and the incomplete state formation process of Colombia stands out. Therefore, this paper asks

- Is the historical role of the incomplete Colombian state formation\(^3\) the main structural factor which allowed the cartels to evolve into powerful criminal insurgencies?

1.3 Methodology

One important question at the onset of any case study and a research on criminal insurgencies in this case, is of course, why Colombia? Powerful cartels are today active in an array of different countries in Latin America, and arguably there are other countries, for example Mexico, which today face a greater risk of becoming a failed state than Colombia (Grayson 2010). However, Colombia was the first country in Latin America where the drug cartels turned into powerful criminal insurgencies, launching an outright attack on the state (Bunker & Sullivan 2013:58-59).

Furthermore, Colombia provides an ideal case to test theories of civil war and nonstate violence because there are significant variations of violence, economic performance and political factors within the country (Holmes et al. 2008:64). Thereby follows that it also provides an ideal case to discuss the socio-economic structural causes of criminal insurgencies.

Since this paper is limited to analyze secondary sources, it was of paramount importance that a lot of material already existed from different disciplines that could easily be accessed and used for this paper.

The method used for gathering empirical data in this case has been an extensive literature review. The sources used for this paper have dealt with different parts of the issue, not only the cartels themselves, but also the history of Colombia with a focus on the Colombian state and the social classes, and finally on the economic aspects of drug trafficking. These structural conditions will be analyzed in the paper and should, when added up together, be able to answer the research question.

It is important to use a transnational economic approach\(^4\) to understand how the economy of the drug trafficking works and in order to understand the balloon effect, a consequence of the demand for illicit drugs in the US and the EU which fuels the production of drugs in Latin America.

One way to look at this is viewing illicit drug trafficking as various world networks or a kind of "commodity chain" (Gutenberg 1999a:8-9) and it is important to distinguish that besides the one relevant for this paper, Colombia - US, there have been others, such as the eastern Andean

\(^2\) see chapter 2.2 on political economy
\(^3\) see chapter 2.1 on state formation
\(^4\) see chapter 2.2 on political economy
Germanic Europe in 1850s to 1900s and the one between Peru and the US in the 1890s for example (Gutenberg 1999a:9).

However, there are other important economic aspects as well. In the work "Guns, Drugs & Development in Colombia" (Holmes et al. 2008), the researchers discuss several of the structural causes for the drug related violence in Colombia. They also base their discussion on primary research, having used quantitative methods, such as for example conducting analyses of the relationship between GDP and coca production, measuring the influence of drug money on the construction sector by analyzing the sector as a component of GDP and the correlation between inequality, as measured by the Gini Coefficient and violence. Since this paper lacks any primary sources on the subject, this work is important principally for providing accurate estimations of the profits that were to be made from the drug trade in the 1980s and 1990s.

Thoumi (2003:141-143) talks about the insecurity one faces when trying to arrive at certain numbers when estimating the size of the drug trade, this of course being a consequence of the illegality of the trade. Usually estimations are made by, first estimating the size of coca crop, then the conversion from coca leaves to coca paste, from coca paste to cocaine base and from cocaine base to cocaine. Every stage holds a margin of error that is difficult to solve, furthermore street prices in the US and the EU vary not only between different states and cities, but also in their level of purity. Price estimations are a part of chapter 4.2. However, even though absolute certainty is hard to achieve, the important point is the immense profits that are to be made from entering the illicit drug trade. For this paper, this incentive, well established by the estimations of the trade, is more important than the exact numbers, which are in any case, impossible to count.

This research is qualitative. One of the reasons for this is the tendency of quantitative studies to focus too much on quantifiable numbers and correlations. While statistics are more exact in their nature, there is always a risk of arriving at conclusions with high validity and replicability, without being able to understand why certain relationships exist, for example between inequality and violence, precisely what happened in the case of Holmes et al. (2008). Holmes et al. (2008:81) did not find any relationship between inequality and violence. Furthermore, they explain that, many of the direct theorized effects of violence and illegal drug production were not evident (Ibid:131). However, whether they are the catalyst or not, they are recognized as important contributing factors to the Colombian violence. They conclude that great social inequality and instability may give rise to a dynamic that legitimates revolutionary projects and violent alternatives (Holmes et al. 2008:81).

Colombia is thus a good example of the fact that there is no unidirectional relationship between poverty and violence, while it is simultaneously a good example of the strong correlation between inequality and violence (Holmes et al. 2008:85).

The qualitative approach allows for more flexibility and the freedom of interpreting conditions and causal circumstances unique to the Colombian history. To cite Rueschmeyer et al. "The systematic exploration of causal conditions, through comparative analysis of historical sequences is a cornerstone of our approach" 1992:29). While this paper is not comparative, it also emphasizes the importance of doing an analysis of historical sequences, in this case of Colombia. This method and the attention to historical circumstances and the specific context and development that is part of the case of Colombia, is difficult to account for with most quantitative methods. As further explained by Rueschmeyer et al.
While a causal condition obviously has to precede its result in time, historical depth is not so obviously required, it is logically quite conceivable that the outcomes we wish to explain result from conditions located in the most immediate past. However, macro-social research has taught us two lessons, which make it problematic to take this logical possibility for granted. We have learned that (1) sequence often matters and (2) structural conditions, once settled, often resist transformation (1992:34-35).

That statement offers an important explanation for the reasoning behind the research design of this paper. In order to understand the socio-economic structural causes that allowed the Colombian cartels to grow as powerful as they did, one must look at the history of Colombia and discuss the structural causes over time since this will explain the evolution of the state, and the social classes and what role they played in the creation of the cartels.

The method used for the analysis of the empirical data is thus a qualitative literature analysis of historical sequences. This paper is also interpretive and inductive in its approach (Bryman 2008:35).

The empirical data is divided into three parts, the first one concerning the evolution of the Colombian state and the social classes. The second part shows estimations for the size of the drug trade and the profits being made. These structural conditions will be analyzed from a political economy approach which consists of three factors; the state, the social classes and the economics of the drug trade. For the analysis of consolidation of the state, a discussion of the state formation process is used to understand the phenomenon. The third part of the empirical material deals with the cartels at the zenith of their power and provides data over the different ways in which they challenged the state. This will be analyzed using the concept of criminal insurgencies (Sullivan & Bunker 2013). The analysis of the socio-economic structural causes should in turn provide an answer to the research question.

1.4 Limitations

In order to be able to present relevant data and an analysis that is as precise as possible, several limitations have been made. First of all, this paper focuses on historical sequences. Therefore, the paper includes the Colombian socio-political history of the 19th century as an important historical factor that influenced the development and the role of the Colombian state and social classes during the 20th century. However, when it comes to analyzing the cartels, the years 1975 –1995 are the two important decades since it was during that time the Colombian Cartels were the most powerful and violent. While it could be argued that a smaller time span should be used, this would be a mistake since it is necessary to look at the evolution of the state, the social classes and the cartels over time, in order to understand the causality of the Colombian history and the specific context in which the cartels emerged.

When it comes to analyzing the cartels as criminal insurgencies, another limitation is made. That is to say that while Colombia has suffered from an array of insurgencies, both political and criminal, this paper puts the emphasis on the criminal insurgencies and the two most powerful cartels the country has seen; the 'Cartel de Medellin' and the 'Cartel de Cali'. Since this paper discusses structural causes not only limited to class and the Colombian state but also the transnational economics of the drug trade, it is inevitable to mention other insurgencies such as guerillas and paramilitaries, that have at one point in time taken control over drug
distribution and trafficking. However, they are secondary in importance in this paper, and are present only to help understand how powerful the socio-economic structural causes are, and how difficult it is to achieve meaningful change without addressing and improving the very structures of the country.

1.5 Previous Research

The Colombian violence and the cartels have been discussed from several aspects. Some important contributions are for example *Illegal Drugs, Economy, and Society in the Andes* (Thoumi 2003), which has been a valuable asset to this research. While Thoumi has a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Minnesota, he goes beyond the numbers in his work and discusses many factors important to this paper; history, political structure, and the evolution of the drug industries in the Andes as well as economic, political and social effects in Peru, Colombia and Bolivia.

For the synopsis of the Colombian political history since independence, the work of Bergquist (1986) has been of great help. He did a comparative historical research on four Latin American cases and hypothesized that the workers in the export sector of these countries played a decisive role in the modern history of the countries. Due to his focus on class and his thorough field research, his work provides a valuable source for the understanding of the historical legacy still very much important in contemporary Colombia, and even more so at the onset of the drug trafficking cartels.

Another important source for this paper is "*The bullet or the bribe: Taking down Colombia's Cali drug cartel*" (Chepesiuk 2003). It provides an extremely valuable overview over the rise and fall of the Cali cartel as well as the one in Medellin and contains a lot of primary sources as he spent 14 months interviewing people and doing research. Chepesiuk has visited and written about Colombia and its international drug trafficking since 1987. This work is the major source for the subchapter 4.3 'the cartels challenge the state'.

Holmes et al. (2008:81) focused on the economic factors which are important to research when it comes to any type of violence, and non-state violence in particular. They state that economic factors serve as a reason for the conflict, and they can also provide funding and motivation for continued violence, it is therefore important to analyze the economic factors of the drug trafficking in order to understand the aspect of recruitment. However, they neglect to discuss the socio-economic historical heritage which influenced Colombia at the time of the Cartels. Furthermore, they tend to view the economic aspect as absolute, when it is rather relative to the context of Colombia and therefore is difficult to understand without taking into account other structural conditions as well.

Roldán (1999) has a different approach and focuses on the social development in Medellin, and considers the city's drug war to be a natural step in the process of class struggle due to the historical exclusion of the lower classes. For example, she states that, in the decades before 1960 when Medellin was a relatively prosperous city, political exclusion of the working and middle classes could be offset by the promise of a better material life, however, as the city’s licit industries crumbled it became easy for drug traffickers such as Escobar and the Ochoa
brothers to recruit foot soldiers. Her attempt to understand the development in Medellin as part of class struggle is more closely intersected with the approach of this paper, and I develop this further in the analysis.

Finally, Keen (1998:10-11) emphasized the need of rethinking theories on civil war, since explaining the negative consequences of war (in his view, what most researchers tend to do) is different from understanding its causes. Furthermore, he states that old explanations focusing on what he calls the hatred thesis, often encompassing ideological or ethnic divisions fail to take into consideration the political and economic roots of conflict. The focus of the publication is similar to this paper even though Keen focuses on a general theoretical framework and does not conduct a case study, however, he also states that one of the important contributing factors for economic violence is a weak state as well as social and economic exclusion (1998:12).

1.6 Disposition

The first chapter starts with an introduction to the topic. It goes on to explain the purpose and research question, the methodology and finally limitations and previous research.

The second chapter focuses on the important concepts used in this paper and goes through the theory of state formation and the concepts of political economy and criminal insurgencies, which are used in the analysis.

The third chapter provides the empirical data, starting with 3.1 that deals with the political history of Colombia. The subchapter 3.2 talks about the economy of the drug trade and provides an understanding of the incentives to enter the drug trafficking, while 3.3 deals with the cartels and their war against the Colombian state.

In the fourth chapter the structural causes are analyzed in order to be able to answer the research question in chapter five.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 State formation

In order to define a weak state one first hast to define the concept of a state. Tilly (1992) reveals that the development of nation-states is closely integrated with coercion and capital, even though the discussion includes other kinds of states as well, such as empires, city-states and federations of cities.

There are competing theories regarding state formation, ranging from a more statist, or structural realist theoretical standpoint which focuses on the behavior of individual states in an anarchic international system and noneconomic events within its own territory, to the more geopolitical theory. The geopolitical approach argues that interstate relations have a logic and
influence of their own and that the state formation process is a consequence of the system of relations among states (Tilly 1992:6-10).

Since coercion (armies, navies, police forces etc.) plays a decisive role in the state formation process, it is not surprising that war drives state formation and transformation. The logic that follows is that men who controlled means of coercion ordinarily used them to extend the range of population and resources over which they wielded power, that is the process of conquering (Tilly 1992:14-20). However, of conquering follows a set of problems, (1) to establish a system of parallel rule, (2) to build up infrastructure of taxation, supply, and administration that also requires maintenance (Tilly 1992:14-20).

There are different definitions of a state, this paper borrows principally from Charles Tilly. He defines states as; coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some aspects over all other organizations within substantial territories (Tilly 1992:1)

However, one other definition needs to be mentioned and will also be discussed in the conclusion. Stepan (1988:4) defines a state as "the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic, and coercive system that attempts not only to manage the state apparatus but to structure relations between civil society and public power and to structure many crucial relationships within civil and political society". This is on point with the importance, not only of monopoly on violence but also of infrastructure, administration and political institutions.

Finally, it has to be understood that the strength or weakness of a state is relative to its specific context. Arguably there are other Latin American countries that have weaker states and don’t suffer from the problem of criminal insurgencies to the same extent. However, it is the context, in this case the history of Colombia that really determines the strength of the Colombian state. As will be discussed in this paper, it is principally the lack of a developed administrative and coercive system that has been the major reason for the incomplete Colombian state formation during the history of the country.

2.2 Political economy

The concept of political economy has long been used in the discussion on development in Latin America, and other parts of the world as well. The strength of this concept is that it accounts for several important factors and their evolvement over time that will affect the development of a society and therefor are important to consider when trying to understand the structural causes of any important phenomenon.

As explained by Cardoso & Faletto; a ruling social class tries to achieve a system of social relations that permits it to impose a form of production akin to its own interest (1979:15). Furthermore, it is explained that if structures appear as a mechanism that promotes the reinforcement of a given social order, they have in fact been built as a result of social struggles, and therefore, a historical product. Therefore, economic relations and social structures have to be studied as a process in which social classes try to sustain, preserve or change their political economic power (1979:14).
The concept of political economy can thus be understood as an approach that takes several factors into account and analyses them over time in order to understand social change or the lack of it. In this paper, three variables that form part of political economy are discussed; the state, the social classes, and the economics of drug trafficking, all of them are defined to be structural causes that made the creation of powerful cartels possible.

Finally, one aspect of the transnational economics of the drug trade which is not extensively discussed in this paper, since it is not confined to the country of Colombia, yet needs to be understood as one of the global structural causes, is the presence and power of consumer demand. This often results in the geographical displacement, or 'the balloon effect', whereby pressure on narcotics production and crop eradication, but also on drug producing actors in one location simply leads to the production and the traffickers moving elsewhere (Inkster & Comolli 2012:53-54).

2.3 Criminal insurgencies

While cartels historically have been viewed as a mainly economic phenomenon, this also seems to have been the case in Colombia in the early 1980s, - cartels as a mechanism to control supply and prices, this eventually changed. Consequently, the threat that cartels began to pose to the national security became evident as the cartels challenged the Colombian state to outright war (Gugliotta 1992:112).

In order to understand the cartels from a theoretical point of view, they are in this paper considered to be criminal insurgencies as defined by Sullivan & Bunker in the work "Criminal Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas" (2013). According to their definition of criminal insurgencies, there are four different levels which are;

- The first level; ‘Local insurgencies’: These are the so called 'failed communities' where gangs dominate political, economic, and social life, these areas may evolve into 'no-go' zones avoided by the police. This means that the criminals collect taxes and exercise a near-monopoly on violence. Here the gang seeks to develop a criminal enclave. In a federal state, the erosion of control at sub-state levels (municipalities, states, or provinces), can marginalize the capacity of the federal entity and create zones of impunity.
- The second level; ‘Battle for the parallel state’: These battles occur within the states governance space, and spills over to the public. Police and military forces seek to contain the violence which occurs when cartels battle each other for domination of the 'plazas' or control of the criminal enclave.
- The third level; ‘Combating the state’: Criminal insurgencies as a result of a TCE (Transnational Criminal Enterprise) engaging the state itself to secure its independence. This occurs when the state cracks down and takes action to dismantle or contain the TCEs, and they retaliate.
- The fourth level; ‘The state implodes’: This would be sustained, unchecked criminal violence and criminal subversion of state legitimacy through corruption and co-option and the state loses capacity to respond (a failed state).
Cartels or TCEs use an array of different tools and actions to retain their desired freedom for business. This includes direct attacks against the state or corruption of its political processes. Another powerful tool is the use of symbolic violence such as terrorist campaigns, leaving messages on corpses and attacks on police and journalists. They may also replace the state in terms of collection of taxes, and providing social goods, by doing this they can claim to protect the inhabitants of the areas they control. Given their vast wealth, criminal insurgents are often able to match the technological sophistication of the governments' counterinsurgency forces. They also weaken governments through bribes and corruption and they have established international linkages. While criminal insurgents may not seek the outright capture of political power like traditional revolutionary insurgents, they can pose serious security threats. While this competition is not for political participation it is a struggle to free themselves from state control in order to maximize profits (Sullivan & Bunker 2013:35).

3. Empirical data

3.1 Political history

Colombia's first century as an independent state was marked by economic uncertainty and political instability. Two political parties, the Liberal and the Conservative emerged from the ruling class and were able to maintain hegemony as both of them were committed to maintaining the social status quo. However, an eternal struggle between different economic approaches took form and several civil wars were fought between conservatives and liberals already during the 19th century. Political leaders developed a willingness to mobilize popular forces in the battle for hegemony, and Colombian society split between the two factions. The ability to win elections or civil wars became increasingly a matter of popular support. This resulted in an inability of Colombia's popular forces to develop a separate identity and an independent vision. Instead, this development polarized Colombian society into two multiclass blocs. Furthermore, local strongmen, liberal and conservative, manipulated economic power and used ties to the party to distribute favors at the departmental and municipal level (Bergquist 1986:275-292).

While the beginning of the 20th century saw remarkable economic development thanks to the coffee export, the Colombian elite continued to be able to take full advantage of the integration into the global capitalist world system (Ibid).

The Colombian government has traditionally been confined to the main square in Bogotá and other main regional capital cities. Many people in the countryside have had no incentive to obey arbitrary laws, coming from a distant capital and written by an elite that has never understood rural life in Colombia (LaRosa & Mejía 2012:85). Consequently, when the Liberal Party decided not to run a candidate in the 1950 election, politics changed, and liberals who held no stake in the official political apparatus turned to violence as the only means for political participation, so the vengeance killings, and long standing territorial disputes became a reality.
and lasted over a decade. *La Violencia* – the violence, highlighted a severe disconnection between urban and rural Colombians and between the wealthy and the poor. Furthermore, the solution to *La Violencia*; the emergence of a "National Front" led to new substructures of violence in the form of leftist guerrillas (Holmes et al. 2008:47, Inkster & Comolli 2012:59-60).

In the end, *La Violencia* reinforced emotional ties amongst workers to the traditional parties, and also reinforced partisan clientelist channels of protection. Furthermore, it severely weakened any chances for the working class to develop a coherent movement in terms of ideology and organization. Unlike many other Latin American civil conflicts, *La Violencia* can thus not be considered a social revolution, and no social or economic reforms resulted from the struggle (Bergquist 1986:359-375).

3.2 The economy of drug trafficking

Before cocaine became the major earning for Colombian cartels, marijuana was the major illicit drug exported to the US. The marijuana trade received a substantial boost in 1975 when Mexico launched a successful eradication program, and the US demand could be filled by a new actor. The basis of a large-scale drug smuggling network in Colombia was thus established and when the United States demand for cocaine began to increase in the seventies, this drug was also channeled through the network as distributors began to buy in large cocaine supplies from Bolivia and Peru (Whynes 1992:335).

Furthermore, the Colombian geographic position is perfectly suited for operating as a hub with its two access to both the pacific and the Atlantic Ocean, and the mountainous valleys which provide geographic cover for clandestine laboratories. The coca crops first appeared on a large scale in departments where the state was barely present and the peasant economy was severely sustained (Molano Bravo 2004:67).

Already in 1976, the capos, the heads of illicit trafficking networks, started to organize industry-wide meetings where production and distribution as well as commercialization and large-scale transportation systems were organized and centralized. Those who managed to get control over the markets in the United States consolidated themselves as the industry's monopolists. In 1978 the DEA estimated that 85 percent of all cocaine sold in the United States originated in Colombia and that the trade was worth around 4 billion US dollars a year, a number that *Time* estimated had grown to 30 billion only three years later (Roldán 1999:167). The size of the drug trade can be compared to the coffee trade, Colombia's major legitimate agricultural export in the 20th century. Coffee earnings in 1990 were estimated at 1.2 billion US dollars (Whynes 1992:336).

By one estimate Colombia’s foreign reserves nearly doubled in the space of two years from 262.7 million US dollars in 1975 to 467.9 million in 1977 a large amount of this being drug dollars laundered through the Banco de la Republica (Roldán 1999:171) As the United States increased pressure on the banks, the profits started to spill over into other sectors of the economy, amongst others, construction, medium sized industries, urban and rural real estate, service industries and recreation (Roldan 1999:171, Whynes 1992:338).
While the leaf needs to be processed into a coca paste and again into pure cocaine by additional chemical baths, the chemistry is relatively low cost and unsophisticated. Most commonly, the early refinements, turning the leaf into paste, is made close to the coca cultivation, whereas the later stages of manufacturing are made in Colombia (Whynes 1992:333). Significant is that studies suggest that the earnings yielded by coca cultivations is many times higher than what can be made from the majority of other crops (Whynes 1992:334).

In 1987 for example, the price of coca leaves sufficient for one kilogram of cocaine was worth between 500 – 750 US dollars, as coca paste 500 – 1000 and as pure cocaine 3000 – 6000 before entering the US market, where the wholesale price level was between 14,000 – 21,000 US dollars, and between 160,000 - 240,000 at the retail level. That results in a market value increase of over four hundred times (Smith 1992:10).

In 1995 the estimated prices were, coca leaves for one kilogram of cocaine around 400-600 US dollars. A kilogram of the coca paste about 800. Cocaine wholesale prices were between 1,500 to 1,800 and were sold in the US for about 18,000, once reached the street market however a kilogram of cocaine, depending on its purity and sold by the gram, could be worth around 120 000 (Thoumi 2003:145).

During the late 1980s the Cali cartel used boing 727s and other jumbo aircrafts to traffic cocaine to the US, and once the drugs were unloaded the planes would bring with them between 20 to 30 million US dollars in cash, sometimes even more (Chepesiuk 2003:96). By the early 1990s, the Cali cartel alone laundered an estimated 5 billion US dollars annually in the black market peso exchange (Chepesiuk 2003:92).

Finally, before their demise in the mid 1990s, the Cali cartel was estimated to have an annual income of 7 billion US dollars, and it was referred to as not only the most successful transnational criminal enterprise, but also the most successful transnational corporation of the developing world (Fukumi 2008:13).

Also land concentration has been affected by the drug trade. During the reform of the 1980s, cartel bosses bought large estates and land as legal investments. Estimates of the cartels land ownership varies from approximately 33 to 42 percent of the best agricultural land of the country in the 1990s (Holmes et al 2008:112). In 1992 for example, drug traffickers were estimated to own nearly 13 million hectares of excellent agricultural land worth about 300 million US dollars not including machinery or cattle (Roldán 1999:171)

As mentioned, drug money has also affected real estate values, and it has boosted the constructions sector, creating jobs for lower classes. This is due to the fact that funding real estate construction has been a common money laundering technique. However, in the long run, there is evidence of a collapse of real estate values, thereby eliminating any gains the lower classes had been able to make during the boom. Construction, measured as a component of GDP for example, had shown a decline after 1997 in the cases of Antioquia, Atlántico, Cundinamarca and Valle de Cauca (Holmes et al 2008:110, Fukumi 2008:14)

Some research even suggests that because of the illicit drug trade’s impact on job creation, cocaine has a more positive impact on income distribution than such traditional export crops as coffee, tobacco, sugar and bananas (Smith 1992:10)
However, it seems as any economic benefits that may have occurred in the 1980s are no longer there. The costs of the drug violence have been both increased governmental resources diverted to combat the cartels, but also other indirect, such as the uncertainty on economic, political and social institutions (Holmes et al 2008:105).

3.3 The cartels challenge the state

The cocaine industry initially emerged in Medellin, the first city to industrialize in Colombia and for many decades the country’s leading exporter of other valuable commodities such as gold and coffee (Roldán 1999:166, Chepesiuk 2003:20). While contraband trade of whiskey, cigarettes and marijuana already existed since the 1960s, several traffickers amongst whom Pablo Escobar was one, established contacts with coca producers in Bolivia and Peru, and started to establish distribution networks of cocaine as it was both easier to transport and gave higher earnings than other contraband goods and it quickly became Colombia's main illicit export commodity (Roldán 1999:167).

However, violence, which had been largely absent from the contraband trade until the mid 1970s became increasingly common as criminal organizations competed for control over the most lucrative networks and territories. Young assassins on motorbikes hired by the bosses to eliminate competitors and perceived traitors gave rise to whole neighborhood gangs of 'sicarios' - assassins in the so called 'comunas'. During the 1980s when the criminal organizations clashed with the state, it became the job of these assassins to target uncooperative public officials for established rates, the execution of a lowly policeman commanding a price of a few hundred dollars, while the politically charged murder of a state minister or politician might cost around several hundred thousand (Roldán 1999:167-168).

By 1980, two drug trafficking organizations emerged, one centered in Cali and the other in Medellin. The leaders of the Medellin cartel including Pablo Escobar and the Ochoa brothers all came from lower classes and fought their way up the criminal ladder using intimidation and violence (Chepesiuk 2003:61). However, from the onset, the cartels used distinct approaches. The Medellin cartel sought to intimidate the state, the Cali cartel to corrupt it. Still, during the early 1980s, intelligence sources stated that the two cartels were on generally good terms, for example, organizing joint shipments and setting up processing labs. The common political agenda included basic preservation interest such as blocking extradition, and perverting the criminal justice system (Chepesiuk 2003:62-63).

Besides the armies of sicarios contracted by the cartels, they also spend large sums penetrating Colombia's law enforcement and judiciary, and for a short amount of time, two of the most famous leaders, Escobar and Lehder even entered politics (Inkster & Comolli 2012:57). More importantly they invested heavily in local community projects, for example, social housing, churches, schools, hospitals, and football fields in both Cali and Medellin, in effect becoming two of the main sources of employment (Inkster & Comolli 2012:57).

However, while Escobar and the other Medellin bosses had been viewed as men of the people and local heroes and benefactors, this started to change with the assassination of Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara in 1984 (Gugliotta 1992:115).
After the Colombian government signed an extradition treaty with the US in 1987 there was a massive increase in violence, especially from the Medellin cartel. In 1988 the city suffered a homicide every three hours. Furthermore, bombings, kidnappings and assassinations became common. Involved in the extreme levels of violence seems to have been a general frustration by the cartel leaders' inability to gain acceptance by the historical elite of the country (Inkster & Comolli 2012:58).

On January 13, 1988 an attempt was made at Pablo Escobar's life. It was a new turn in the Colombian cartel development as no one had ever challenged Escobar before. He deemed the attack to originate in Cali and a war between the cartels broke out. Over the following months several dozens of sicarios were gunned down on both sides, including five ex-militaries who were left with a note explaining they had been working for the Cali cartel. The Colombian security forces however, seemed to focus on bringing down the Medellin cartel rather than their counterpart in Cali. Escobar believed that the Cali leaders were working with the DEA, and Colombian officials have later confirmed his suspicions (Chepesiuk 2003:127-130), meanwhile the violence only seemed to increase.

On august 18, 1989 presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán was assassinated by Escobar's sicarios. A series of terrorist bombings followed, amongst others against the offices of a newspaper, an Avianca commuter flight, and the Bogota headquarters of the Department of Administrative Security, the largest cartel terrorist attack in the history of Colombia (Chepesiuk 2003:130). By March 1990 Escobar had raised the bounty for the killing of a police officer to 4,000 US dollars, and 8,000 for any member of the security forces. Within three months, 108 police officers were murdered (Chepesiuk 2003:131).

However, the Medellin bosses changed strategy and started kidnaping prominent Colombians, and using hostages to blackmail the government into negotiating a peaceful settlement. In the absence of a public response from the government, the Medellin capos changed tactics again and began to release hostages, even turning over some laboratory complexes, suggesting that the government grant 'considerations'; to let them retire and live in peace. Eventually the Ochoa brothers took President Gaviria's deal to spend a few years in jail, without extradition to the US, and, once they got out they could still have their fortunes intact. Escobar was left alone to fight both the government and the Cali cartel (Chepesiuk 2003:134).

Both cartels now fought the Colombian constitutional assembly with bribes and threats. An accountant who worked for the Cali Cartel from 1990 – 1994 later testified that they even had organized a structure of bribes and payoffs to the constitutional assembly through the secretary of the assembly. His task was contacting members of the assembly and relay to them what the Cali cartel wanted regarding various laws, including the one on extradition, which in one specific instance saw 86,000 thousand US dollars handed over to a member of the constitutional assembly for his work in nullifying the extradition (Chepesiuk 2003:135).

At the time, the DEA as well as the Colombian government denied working with the Cali Cartel, but both actors have later admitted that the Cali cartel, and especially their 'intelligence network' was in fact a key player in the taking down of Escobar. Escobar was eventually gunned down on a rooftop in Medellin on December 2 1993 by Colombian security forces and with the aid of US law enforcement (Chepesiuk 2003:147).
After Pablo Escobar's death a dismantling of the vast drug empire began, and the number of unemployed males between twelve and twenty-nine in Medellin became the highest in the country. Former messengers, bodyguards and assassins turned to kidnapping, assault and robbery as substitutes for lost earnings. Even those engaged in licit activities suffered as the ready supply of cash that had kept the local economy going began to dry up. Every week between twenty and forty young men were found dead in the city's poorest zones, victims of either death squads, sometimes made up of rogue police men, turf wars between competing criminal bands or simply as casualties caught between an unfortunate exchange of crossfire (Roldán 1999:175).

Furthermore, the dismantling of the Medellin cartel saw an immediate increase in profits for the Cali cartel. In 1989 25-30% of all cocaine that came to the United States came from Cali, whereas the number was 70% as in 1991 (Smith 1992:14).

The Cali 'gentlemen' tended to keep a low profile, and tried to maximize their legitimate business holdings. They avoided confrontation with the government and until late 1987 with the Medellin cartel as well. The demise of the Medellin cartel did not end the organized drug trafficking, but transferred it to a much larger number of micro cartels, besides the major one in Cali which remained active. The smaller cartels were still powerful, wealthy, and well organized and continued to challenge the Colombian state through a combination of corruption and intimidation (Inkster & Comolli 2012:58).

Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela was the first one of the Cali cartel to be arrested on June 9 1995, and unlike Escobar, he was not killed. Two months later, on August 6, his brother Miguel, the highest-ranking leader of the Cali cartel was also arrested by DEA and the Colombian police forces. (Chepesiuk 2003:215-229)

By the mid-1990s, the cartel system of complete control of all aspects of the illicit drug business had been replaced by smaller, more dispersed, less visible, and less aggressive cartels, however, drug production and export out of Colombia continued, protected by extralegal paramilitary and guerrilla forces. However, the struggle between rivaling cartels and the state seemed to have ended, though not in a peaceful or harmonious way (LaRosa & Mejia 2012:91)

The new emerging smaller cartels seemed no longer to seek direct armed struggle with the government, rather they moved from an integrated model dominating all aspects of production and trafficking towards one characterized by flexibility and specialization. This meant the supply routes to the US moved to the control of Mexican cartels whose power started to grow significantly (Inkster & Comolli 2012:59, Thoumi 2003:99-101).

In total, it is estimated that during the armed struggle between cartels, guerillas, paramilitaries and the state between 1985 – 2000, four presidential candidates, half of the supreme court justices, over 1200 police officers, 200 journalists and judges and more than 300,000 ordinary citizens were murdered (Holmes et al. 2008:4).
4. Analysis

Let’s begin with looking at the Colombian state. If we accept the definition of a state as having a monopoly of legitimate force according to Tilly’s state formation process, there can be no doubt that Colombia has struggled to achieve this status, consequently that it suffers from an incomplete state formation. Tilly also highlights the importance of developing an infrastructure of taxation and administration in regards to the territory of the state. In the case of Colombia, it is not only the lack of coercion that stands out but also the non-existence of infrastructure and political institutions that could deal with the structural causes for violence. As Stepan (1988:4) stressed, a well-functioning state needs a highly developed administrative and coercive system, that it also able to manage relations between civil society and public power. It is clear that broadening the definition of a state, it becomes even more evident how weak the Colombian state and its institutions have been.

The distribution of the population and the physical geography has hindered effective central governmental control and provided opportunities for rebellion ever since the days of independence. The combination of strong regionalism, a weak state and a weak military has had a great impact on the country's development and allowed for several civil wars already in the 19th century, while it has also aggravated the lack of political order and confirmed the atomization of local authority, and left the field open for local and private power relationships to manage local tensions.

Switching focus to the social classes, Molano Bravo (2004:73) states that, the power-sharing between the liberals and conservatives can be understood as a defense mechanism of an elite who feared being displaced from power by other movements. This political hegemony has allowed the interests of the elite to merge with those of the state, a clear indicator of the excluding nature of Colombia’s political history. Finally, unlike many other Latin American countries, Colombia has not experienced a class-based revolution or civil conflict that resulted in any institutional gains, not even La Violencia can be understood as such, nor did it lead to any social improvements for the lower classes.

If we aggregate these variables there can be no doubt that the political history, the decentralized and regional power structure accompanied by the marginalization of the lower classes have created a set of structural socio-economic conditions which favored the creation of the cartels. If we now add the economic incentives to enter the drug trade as a third set of structural conditions, it should come as no surprise that the cartel bosses had an easy time recruiting people, especially marginalized young adults from the lower classes.

While there are other countries in South America that are even poorer than Colombia, the indicators are that the important factors may in fact not be any quantifiable levels of poverty, rather the historical marginalization and exclusion of the lower classes, and that they perceived a lack of other opportunities. Therefore, that crime, and in turn violence, provided the only viable option for accessing material wealth. As explained by Roldán:

Thus, the violence of the city (Medellin) was not only meaningless terror but a way for the city's traditionally least powerful to contest the distribution of urban political, social and economic power in ways that threatened the primacy of a historically exclusionary system of political control and its hierarchical social order (1999:174).
After having analyzed the Colombian political history, there are no indicators that the analysis of the drug war as part of a class struggle cannot be applied to other areas besides Medellin as well. As hypothesized by Holmes et al. (2008:82) "perhaps the most simply explanation for the violence is the struggle for power and economic advantage". To further explain this notion, it is a struggle for power and economic advantage by social classes that have been excluded from power since the days of independence.

The political economy approach used by Cardoso & Faletto (1979) can also help explain this phenomenon if we accept social classes as struggling for forms of production that favor them economically, and that economic relations and social structures are a result of this struggle. In this case, the production and trafficking of illicit drugs can be understood as coming from below and it became a way in which the lower classes could challenge the traditional elite and ruling class which had managed the Colombian political institutions and by extension the economy of the country.

However, this development can be considered to be an indicator that there exists a fourth set of structural conditions – the lack of economic development in terms of opportunities for the lower classes to achieve economic and political power through legitimate ways, such as primarily education and consequently being able to encounter licit jobs with high wages. Although it is not the same phenomenon, this is closely intersected with the general marginalization and exclusion of the lower classes evident throughout the Colombian history. Nonetheless, it is also the result of the lack of industrialization and modernization of the Colombian economy in general.

Before we answer the research question let us conclude the analysis with a discussion on the cartels themselves.

It is clear that Cali Cartel as well as the Medellin Cartel where both a third level insurgency, 'combating the state'. This was especially the result of the extradition treaty between the Colombian and the US government. The killings of police officers, journalists, and the terrorist bombings that followed, were a clear challenge to the state itself, however, the Colombian cartels, for all their power and wealth, were eventually defeated before they turned into fourth level insurgencies, even though international agencies and the US government expressed concern that Colombia would turn into a failed state.

We should also not forget the different ways in which criminal insurgencies challenge the state. It is not only through violence but also the corruption of its political processes. This included the replacement of the state in terms of collection taxes, and providing social goods, which was the case both in Medellin and Cali where the capos constructed social housings, football fields etc. and for a long time were viewed as benefactors by the cities' population.

For the purpose of this paper and the discussion on socio-economic structural causes, let us focus on the first level - 'Local insurgencies’. This is where the cartels first emerged in areas that evolved into 'failed communities' where they dominate the political, economic, and social life. The theory on local insurgencies includes the possible explanation of the erosion of control at sub-state levels (municipalities, states, or provinces).

5 see chapter 2.3 on criminal insurgencies
However, if we return to the history of Colombia, it is clear that the problem was not the erosion of any sub-state administration nor the demise of any developed political system, rather the fact that it never existed in the first place, consequently that it is the result of the incomplete Colombian state formation process. The lack of a developed infrastructure and a system of political institutions thus created a power vacuum which was easy for the Cartel capos to fill, and where they created criminal enclaves of their own.

5. Conclusion

Even though several important socio-economic structural causes are discussed in this paper, particularly for the reasons stated above related to the emergence of first level insurgencies and the understanding of a strong state as exercising monopoly on violence and requiring an infrastructure of administration and political institutions, this paper must conclude that the answer to the question, if the historical role of the incomplete Colombian state formation is the main reason that allowed the cartels to evolve into powerful criminal insurgencies, is yes.

This development is evident throughout the history of Colombia. It is the lack of coercion that allowed for the violence and conflict that has been endemic in Colombia since the earliest days of the republic. The legacy of the historical weakness of the central government, and the civil wars it has enabled, culminating with La violencia, and the lack of political inclusion of the lower classes has also blocked the development of a strong class movement and social progress (Bergquist 1986:275-375). This in turn left Colombia particularly vulnerable as the drug trade and the cartels emerged. There simply was no viable alternative to entering the drug trade for the lower classes. As Sullivan & Bunker state, one of the requirements for a cartel to emerge is that crime will appear to be the quickest and easiest path to material possessions (2013:30).

If we move on to a more general discussion about the illicit trade and the socio-economic structural causes, it is important to understand that the demise of the Colombian cartels, not by any means, resulted in an end to the drug trafficking in Colombia. As explained by Gootenberg, drugs have never respected national borders, which in part is what building prohibition walls and the war on drugs is about, and one reason why their builders also move to internationalize them. However, cocaine, with its high value-to-weight ratio, is an especially mobile substance and once deemed criminal simple to conceal and transport (1999a:8). Or as Fukumi (2008:2) so elegantly concludes, "drugs are one of the commodities that reflect the very nature of the capitalist economic system – the mechanism of the markets: if there were no demand there would be no supply".

This means that one of the most important structural conditions, consumer demand, as long as left intact will result in the displacement of drug trafficking when one organization is left incapable of delivering drugs to the consumers in the global north.

One cannot forget that even though the two cartels of Medellin and Cali were eventually defeated by the Colombian and US law enforcement agencies, the economic power which the guerrillas and paramilitaries achieved through the acquisition of the profits from drug trafficking confirm the importance of the structural socio-economic causes not only for the creation of
cartels but for drug trafficking and violence in general. Furthermore, both guerillas and paramilitaries do to an even greater extent than cartels seek absolute power and control over local populations and resources and have managed to do so through territorial control (Vargas Meza 2003:46-47), something that again highlights the incompleteness of the Colombian state formation. In fact, violence continued to increase throughout the 1990s, even after the Medellin and Cali cartel were left severely weakened and even when leftist guerilla violence began to decline, paramilitary violence continued to increase (Holmes et al 2008:122-123).

Finally, while this paper focuses on the Colombian cartels, it cannot be forgotten that their eventual demise not only fueled violence from the guerillas and paramilitaries but also resulted in the displacement of drug production and trafficking to Mexico according to the balloon effect (Inkster & Comolli 2012:58-62). This underlines the most important point made in this paper. The structural socio-economic causes that favor the creation of powerful cartels have to be addressed and changed in order to achieve true progress. While not discussed extensively in this paper, this includes the global demand for illicit drugs.

As stated in the introduction to this paper, one of the most important motives behind this research is the aim to develop an explanatory concept that can be applied to other cases and countries suffering from the problems of criminal insurgencies. This research concludes that the way in which the Colombian history and the socio-economic development is taken in account is important and suggestions for future research would be comparative historical case studies that focus on the state and social classes in other countries in Latin America as well. Weather other researches would conclude that the state has played a decisive role also in other countries cannot be answered at this stage, however, this paper highlights the importance of addressing and understanding structural socio-economic conditions, and by extent, to rethink the current war on drug policies that still guide the global approach to illicit drug trafficking, if we want to end the alarming development of powerful cartels challenging national security in Latin America.
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