Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Latin-American Illegal Markets: A Case Study of Paraguay's Hybrid Social Orders

Antonia Budion

Mestrado em Estudos Internacionais

Orientador:
Doutor Marcelo Moriconi Bezerra, Investigador Intergrado,
Centro de Estudos Internacionais, ISCTE

Outubro, 2024

History Department

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Latin-American Illegal Markets: A Case Study of Paraguay's Hybrid Social Orders

Antonia Budion

Mestrado em Estudos Internacionais

Orientador:
Doutor Marcelo Moriconi Bezerra, Investigador Intergrado,
Centro de Estudos Internacionais, ISCTE

Outubro, 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Marcelo Moriconi, for his exceptional patience, guidance, and support throughout the development of this thesis. His valuable feedback and encouragement were crucial to the completion of this work.

I am also truly thankful to my friends, who provided not only their time and effort in proofreading but also offered their moral support. Their help and belief in me have been a source of strength throughout this process.

Resumo

Esta tese de mestrado examina os mecanismos de desengajamento moral desenvolvidos por Albert Bandura e sua aplicação no contexto dos mercados ilegais no Paraguai. O desengajamento moral permite que indivíduos justifiquem ações ilegais ou prejudiciais sem sentir culpa moral. Utilizando os diferentes mecanismos (justificação moral, social e económica, linguagem eufemística, comparação vantajosa, deslocação e difusão da responsabilidade, desconsideração, distorção e negação das consequências, desumanização, atribuição de culpa), a tese analisa a maneira como os atores do tráfico de droga paraguaio racionalizam as suas ações e operam num ambiente em que as fronteiras entre legalidade e ilegalidade são ténues. O Paraguai serve como estudo de caso, pois possui o que Matías Dewey define como uma ordem social híbrida, na qual atores estatais e organizações criminosas coexistem e até colaboram para impor, regular e sancionar normas formais e informais para estruturar a convivência comunitária. Apesar do país se ter tornado um centro importante para o tráfico de drogas, o Paraguai continua a ser pouco estudado pela criminologia latino-americana e global. A exceção é o trabalho de Moriconi e Peris, que publicaram uma trilogia sobre mercados ilegais e moralidade no país. A tese baseia-se no corpus de análise desta trilogia para analisar e discutir quais os mecanismos da teoria de Bandura que podem ser encontrados neste estudo de caso. Desta forma, a tese esclarece a forma como o desengajamento moral contribui para a normalização de atividades ilegais e porque elas são consideradas legítimas em certos contextos sociais e políticos. A análise apoia-se em quadros teóricos fundamentais, tais como o conceito de *Crimilegalidade* de Markus Schultze-Kraft e as *Democracias Violentas* de Enrique Desmond Arias, para mostrar como o crime organizado pode florescer num cenário em que o Estado não actua como adversário do crime, mas frequentemente faz parte destas estruturas criminosas.

Palavras-chave: desengajamento moral, Paraguai, mercados ilegais, democracia, corrupção, crime organizado.

Abstract

This master thesis examines the mechanisms of moral disengagement as developed by Albert Bandura and their application in the context of illegal markets in Paraguay. Moral disengagement allows individuals to justify illegal or harmful actions without feeling moral guilt. Using the different mechanisms (moral, social, and economic justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, disregard, distortion, and denial of consequences, dehumanization, attribution of blame), the thesis analyses how actors in the Paraguayan drug trade rationalize their actions and operate in an environment where the boundaries between legality and illegality are blurred. Paraguay is a case study that features what Matías Dewey defines as a hybrid social order in which state actors and criminal organizations coexist and even collaborate to impose, regulate, and sanction formal and informal norms to structure communal coexistence. Although the country has become a central hub for drug trafficking, Paraguay remains understudied in Latin American and global criminology. As an exception, Moriconi and Peris have published a trilogy on illegal markets and morality in the country. This thesis is based on the analytical material of this trilogy to analyze and discuss which mechanisms of Bandura's theory can be found in this case study. By doing so, the thesis sheds light on how moral disengagement contributes to the normalization of illegal activities and why they are considered legitimate in certain social and political contexts. The analysis draws on key theoretical frameworks such as Markus Schultze-Kraft's concept of *Crimilegality* and Enrique Desmond Arias' *Violent Democracies* to show how organized crime can flourish in an environment where the state does not act as an adversary of crime, but is often part of these criminal structures.

Keywords: moral disengagement, Paraguay, illegal markets, democracy, corruption, organized crime.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Organized crime has become an omnipresent and deeply rooted issue across Latin America, and its influence extends beyond illegal markets into the political, social, and economic spheres in many countries. In the case of Paraguay, this phenomenon is particularly remarkable: The country's political culture, its economic dependence on illegal markets (more than 50% of its gross domestic product is estimated to come from illicit activities), and the historical connections between state actors and criminal organizations make the country an ideal example for exploring the dynamics of so-called hybrid social orders. These hybrid orders present a landscape in which state actors and criminal organizations interact and even cooperate, creating an environment in which legality and illegality coexist, overlap, and sometimes become inseparable.

Within this complex environment, it is interesting to look at the psychological mechanisms that allow individuals to reconcile their participation in illegal activities with their moral principles. A psychological perspective that remains underexplored. Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement provides an ideal framework for this analysis. Moral disengagement refers to cognitive processes through which individuals rationalize and justify behavior that violates their moral standards. Mechanisms, namely moral, social, and economic justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, disregard, distortion, and denial of consequences, dehumanization and attribution of blame help people to engage in illegal actions and still maintain a positive self-image.

This thesis builds on recent research in the field of organized crime, drawing from concepts such as *Crimilegality* (Markus Schultze-Kraft), *Violent Democracies* (Enrique Desmond Arias), and *Clusters of Order* (Matías Dewey). These perspectives help to understand the structural realities in places like Paraguay, where legality and illegality are tightly interwoven and produce alternative forms of social orders that defy binarity and easy categorization. For the analysis, two specific cases will be discussed: the border city of Pedro Juan Caballero and the Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve.

Pedro Juan Caballero is one of the most important centers of organized crime in Paraguay, particularly for drug trafficking. The city is located at the border with Brazil and due to several strategic location advantages, it serves as an important transit point for the trafficking of drugs such as cannabis and cocaine. Pedro Juan Caballero experiences high levels of violence caused primarily by the rivalry between two Brazilian criminal organizations. Despite the escalating violence, common and property

crimes are remarkably rare, and there is a perceived stability, suggesting the existence of an alternative form of social order maintained by both state and criminal actors. This hybrid social order allows organized crime to operate openly, while state actors either turn a blind eye or participate in these activities.

The Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve, on the other hand, is a contrasting but equally compelling case study. There, local farmers marginalized by the expansion of large-scale soy cultivation have turned to the cultivation of cannabis in order to make a living. Mbaracayú Forest's locational advantages emerge from its secluded and densely wooded terrain, which makes it difficult for law enforcement to monitor and control illegal activities such as cannabis cultivation. Unlike Pedro Juan Caballero, where illegal activities are controlled by large criminal organizations, cannabis production is managed by middlemen between the peasants and the drug traffickers. These intermediaries handle everything from recruiting workers to organizing the transportation of the drug.

Through an analysis of moral disengagement mechanisms in these two cases, this thesis seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological and social processes that allow organized crime to thrive. While there has been significant research on the socio-economic and political dimensions of organized crime, there has been comparatively little focus on the individuals and cognitive mechanisms that enable them to justify their involvement in illegal activities. This work not only addresses a gap in the existing literature on moral disengagement but also contributes to the broader field of criminology and the study of state-crime relations in Latin America.

Literature Review and Relevant Concepts

2.1. Moral Disengagement

2.1.1. Introduction to Moral Philosophy and Psychology

"Soon after human beings figured out how to write, they began writing about morality, law, and religion, which were often the same thing" (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010, p. 798).

For a long time, questions of morality were predominantly explored within the realm of philosophy (Doris, 2010). However, moral philosophy nowadays acknowledges the overlap of normativity[1] and psychology and envisions the benefits of incorporating psychological findings (Wallace, 2005). At present, research on morality can no longer be assigned to a single field, but rather plays a role in a number of different academic disciplines. Notably, social psychology, (social-cognitive) neuroscience, and evolutionary science are generating a large amount of the current insights on the subject of morality (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). This thesis focuses on the psychological perspective on morality: moral psychology.

Moral psychology can be located in various subfields of psychology, mainly in the above-mentioned extensively researched social psychology[2], but also in the subfield of developmental psychology[3]. In the past, the latter was clearly prevailing in outlining what the term *moral psychology* meant (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Decisive for this perspective on morality was U.S. psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who in 1958, through his doctoral dissertation and the resulting *Theory of Moral Development*, established the research area of moral development within psychology. His theory conceptually relied on psychologist Jean Piaget's *Theory of Cognitive Development* and was then further underpinned with additional data obtained through regularly repeated interviews and refined over the course of the following 20 years (Snarey, 2012).

---

[1] "Normativity, on one wide construal, concerns norms, values, oughts, requirements, reasons, justification, rationality" (Robertson, 2009, p. 1).

[2] "Social psychology is the study of human interaction, including communication, cooperation, competition, leadership, and attitude development" (Strickland, 2006, p. 607).

[3] Developmental psychology is defined as a "[…] field of psychology which examines how human behavior changes as a person matures through focusing on biological, emotional, physical, cognitive, and social changes that are age-related, sequential, and long-lasting" (Strickland, 2006, pp. 182–183).

Kohlberg (1958) assumes that moral consciousness develops in humans in a universal way (meaning unaffected by culture or religion[4]) throughout their lifetimes. The development occurs in stages in always the same order (people do not skip or invert the order), whereby not all people necessarily reach the higher levels of moral consciousness. Kohlberg identifies three main levels of moral judgment, each consisting of two sublevels (*stages*). These stages range from stage 1 (*punishment and obedience orientation)* in which

> "[t]he physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral"

to stage 6 (*universal ethical-principle orientation*), which is the most sophisticated stage of moral reasoning, meaning that

> "[r]ight is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons" (Kohlberg, 1971, pp. 87–88).

2.1.2. Theories of Moral Reasoning and Behavior

Kohlberg's developmental psychological approach, with its focus on moral reasoning, is still considered to be "one of the most influential theoretical approaches" (Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1423) when it comes to exploring the causes of moral behavior. Yet, it can also be argued that a person's level of moral reasoning alone is insufficient to reliably predict their moral behavior (ibid.).

Haidt (2001) criticizes the rationalist assumption that moral behavior is caused "primarily by a process of reasoning and reflection" (p. 814) and advocates for a social intuitionist model as an alternative, which he finds "[…] more consistent […] with recent findings in social, cultural, evolutionary, and biological psychology, as well as in anthropology and primatology" (ibid.). Rationalist approaches assume that "one briefly becomes a judge, weighing issues of harm, rights, justice and fairness" (ibid.) and reaches a judgment in the most unemotional and evidence-oriented way possible, whereas according to Haidt's research, people will often make moral decisions intuitively and, at best,

---

[4] "Both cultural values and religion are important factors in selectively elaborating certain themes in the moral life but they are not unique causes of the development of basic moral values. Our data do not indicate that all values are universal, but rather that basic moral values are universal" (Kohlberg, 1971, p. 39).

seek rational reasons in retrospect to justify their position (ibid.).[5] While some scholars share a similar perspective with Haidt, others (such as Brand) plead for so-called *dual process theories*, suggesting that there are "[…] two different ways in which decision making is performed. The first process is quick, implicit and unconscious. The second process is slow, explicit and conscious" (Brand, 2016, p. 12).

2.1.3. Theory of Moral Disengagement

It is not only moral behavior that can be scientifically explored, but also the question of what happens when moral standards and behavior are not aligned. Individuals acting contrary to their standards, showing transgressive behavior without feeling guilty can present researchers with a quandary:

> "A full understanding of morality must explain not only how people come to behave morally, but also how they can behave inhumanely and still retain their self-respect and feel good about themselves. The latter part of the story on the exercise of moral agency presents the tougher explanatory challenge. Adherence to moral principles is easier to explain than is the paradox of violating one's moral principles without loss of self-respect while doing so" (Bandura, 2016, p. 1).

In psychology, the term *Moral Disengagement* has been introduced to explain this seeming contradiction. The Oxford Handbook of Moral Development describes the mechanisms of moral disengagement as such that

> "[…] serve to exonerate immoral behavior, thereby reducing the discomfort and guilt that would typically be experienced when moral standards are violated. By justifying immoral behavior individuals are able to maintain their belief that they are moral people while behaving badly" (Bussey, 2020, p. 306).

The concept of moral disengagement is closely associated with the Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura, one of the most important psychologists of the 20th century (Haggbloom et al., 2002), who - with his social cognitive theory - provided the most influential theory on moral engagement.

In 1986, Bandura published the landmark book *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* where the idea of mechanisms of moral disengagement was first introduced. In this work, Bandura explores how individuals rationalize and justify their actions, even when those violate their own moral norms. He identifies a number of mechanisms that allow people to override

---

[5] Emblematic for this perspective stands Haidt's well-known *Julie and Mark* incest scenario, described 2001 in *The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail*, which shows that people tend to cling to their evaluation of the situation despite a lack of rational reasons.

('disengage') their moral self-sanctions and engage in behavior that they would otherwise consider unethical (Bandura, 1986).

These mechanisms include cognitive processes such as moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame (Bandura, 1999). These eight mechanisms will be discussed in detail in the chapter 4 of this thesis.

Lawrence Kohlberg's previously reviewed *Theory of Moral Development* can be considered one of the key predecessors, as it laid the groundwork for comprehending the cognitive processes which underlie moral reasoning. Another theory worth pointing out, as it shows certain relatedness to the phenomenon of moral disengagement, is Leon Festinger's *Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. According to this theory, individuals experience psychological discomfort when their beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent and strive to reduce the discrepancy using different strategies (Festinger, 1957).

2.1.4. Applications of the Theory of Moral Disengagement

It has been researched how and in what contexts mechanisms of moral disengagement contribute to unethical conduct. Throughout Bandura's scientific trajectory, the understanding of aggression and its disinhibition played a major role[6], and indeed, even in today's research, a remarkably large number of studies address the relationship between moral disengagement and aggression as well as actual violence (Castano, 2008; Gabbiadini et al., 2012; Gabbiadini et al., 2014; Gini et al., 2015; Gini et al., 2014; Hartmann et al., 2014; Paciello et al., 2008; Regis-Moura et al., 2022; Richmond & Wilson, 2008; White-Ajmani & Bursik, 2014).

A substantial proportion of the studies in the field of moral disengagement are concerned with a closely related topic, which is bullying, both 'traditional' bullying (Gini, 2006; Haddock & Jimerson, 2017; Hymel & Bonanno, 2014; Killer et al., 2019; Kowalski et al., 2021; Obermann, 2011b, 2013; Pozzoli et al., 2012; Teng et al., 2020; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014; Thornberg et al., 2021; C. Wang et al., 2017) and cyber-bullying (Bakioğlu & Çapan, 2022; Bussey et al., 2015; Francisco et al., 2022; Gajda et al., 2022; Jeong et al., 2022; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Romera et al., 2021; Runions et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2023; X. Wang et al., 2016). Those studies examine the level of moral disengagement of bullies but sometimes also that of bystanders (Obermann, 2011a).

---

[6] See Bandura and Walters (1959); Bandura et al. (1961); Bandura et al. (1963); Bandura (1973); Bandura et al. (1975); Bandura and Ribes-Inesta (1976); Bandura (1990); Bandura (1999).

According to the findings, there is a significant positive correlation between moral disengagement and bullying in different contexts, in most cases schools, but also online or in prisons (South & Wood, 2006). Applying the mechanisms of moral disengagement can help to understand this type of behavior and consequently counteract it, or, in best case even prevent it.

The issue of moral disengagement also affects the organizational and business spheres, as evidenced by a substantial number of papers published in the Journal of Business Ethics (Barsky, 2011; Beaudoin et al., 2015; Bonner et al., 2016; Christian & Ellis, 2014; Claybourn, 2011; Fida et al., 2015; Johnson & Ronald Buckley, 2015; Kish-Gephart et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2019; Moore, 2008; Newman et al., 2020; Niven & Healy, 2016; Samnani et al., 2014) and in other scientific peer-reviewed journals (Beu & Buckley, 2004; Huang et al., 2017; Maftei et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2012; White et al., 2009).

Research in this realm embraces a variety of different perspectives. On the one hand, it examines what is described as "counterproductive workplace behavior" (Fida et al., 2015, p. 135; Samnani et al., 2014, p. 235) or "deviant behavior at work" (Christian & Ellis, 2014, p. 193), which includes, for example, "theft, vandalism, and leaving early or arriving late to work" (Christian & Ellis, 2014, p. 193) just as "[...] drug and alcohol abuse, sabotage, [...] and disciplinary problems, among others" (Samnani et al., 2014, p. 235) and which is "[...] directly harmful or costly to the organization and/or its members" (Huang et al., 2017, p. 26). Diametrically opposed are papers that do not deal with business-damaging behavior, but with unethical conduct from which the company/organization benefits – "unethical pro-organizational behavior" (Lee et al., 2019, p. 109).

Particularly the more recent research shows that moral disengagement does not only play a role at the employee level, but also at the level of leaders and/or decision-makers (Johnson & Ronald Buckley, 2015). It explores the issue of organizational corruption (Moore, 2008), but also, how unethical or abusive leaders induce subordinates to engage in immoral practices (Beu & Buckley, 2004; Bonner et al., 2016). Even more attention has been devoted to corporate scandals, respectively scenarios where society is the primary victim and perpetrators use moral disengagement techniques to justify their actions (Bandura et al., 2000; Barsky, 2011; Beaudoin et al., 2015; Hessick, 2016).

Some of the other literature produced on the topic, that is rather marginal, are studies of moral disengagement in the context of unethical and/or unsustainable consumer decisions (Egan et al., 2015; Mann & Kilian, 2020; Paharia et al., 2013; Peeters et al., 2019), sports (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2011; Güvendi & Işım, 2019; Hodge et al., 2013; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011), dishonesty and cheating

(Doyle & Bussey, 2018; Fida et al., 2018; Lişman & Holman, 2022; Shu et al., 2011) and war (Aquino et al., 2007; Leidner et al., 2010; McAlister, 2001; McAlister et al., 2006) amongst others.

In comparison to the multitude of publications available on the aforementioned topics, out of which only a few examples could be presented here, there are rather few contributions on moral disengagement and crime or delinquency. The existing studies have almost exclusively focused on gang-related crimes and/or juvenile offenders. The majority of these stem from researchers in the field of forensic or clinical psychology. Of particular note is Alleyne along with fellow researches, who reach the following findings based on empirical data : (1) one of the characteristics that distinguishes gang members from control groups is their level of moral disengagement (Alleyne & Wood, 2010), (2) elevated levels of moral disengagement contribute to anti-authority attitudes which in turn result on gang-related criminal conduct (Alleyne & Wood, 2013), (3) the mechanism of dehumanization constitutes a large part in explaining the relationship between gang membership and violence (Alleyne et al., 2014).

Research also indicates a significant relationship between high levels of moral disengagement and gang-related activities in prisons (Wood et al., 2009), as wells as between street gang membership and the tendency to use moral disengagement strategies (Niebieszczanski et al., 2015). Others explore empirically less intensively illuminated concepts, such as *discriminant moral disengagement*, meaning that it "varies based on specific situations or targets", (Dyberg-Tengroth & Egan, 2020, p. 295) which conceptually intersects with Bandura's *selective moral disengagement*.

For studies about gang members, it is often young people who serve as the object of study, but there also exist papers that specifically focus on juvenile or young adult offenders irrespective of gang-membership. Findings include that "peer rejection in middle adolescence is predictive of criminal conduct in early adulthood via moral disengagement in late adolescence" (Fontaine et al., 2014, p. 16) and that "moral disengagement is an independent variable exerting an influence on juvenile delinquent behavior over and above the social characteristics of juvenile delinquents" (Kiriakidis, 2008, p. 571).

While studying young offenders, a number of authors observe that the degree of moral disengagement changes with the transition from adolescence to early adulthood and progressively decreases over time ("aging out of crime") (Cardwell et al., 2015, p. 836; Paciello et al., 2008; Shulman et al., 2011). Another interesting conclusion is that among young offenders with higher psychopathy levels, moral disengagement is less salient, since a certain emotional capability to experience

unpleasant emotions such as shame, guilt, or remorse (which psychopaths typically lack) is necessary in order to be affected by moral disengagement mechanisms (DeLisi et al., 2014).

2.1.5. Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

The literature review shows that although academic research has illuminated a considerable variety of different domains in which moral disengagement plays a role, however, when it comes to crime and delinquency, research is rather limited both thematically and in terms of quantity. Regarding this thesis, research in the field of gang activity is still the closest to being relevant. There is no consensus on what exactly a gang or a street gang in particular is[7] and whether a separation of the two terms is even necessary (Wood & Alleyne, 2010; Wortley, 2010). Additionally, there are diverging opinions as to whether street gangs are part of organized crime (as defined in the following subchapter).

Decker and Pyrooz (2014) turn this very question into the subject of an essay and compare gangs to other organized criminal groups such as "transnational organized crime, drug smuggling networks, human trafficking operations, and terrorist groups" (p. 270). They conclude that "[…] there are many organizational similarities between gangs and other organized crime groups, enough so to consider them criminal associations as opposed to associations of criminals." (ibid., p. 283). Nevertheless, their comparatively "[…] informal and diffuse organizational structure, public and street-oriented exposure, and expressive and cafeteria-style rather than instrumental and specialized offending patterns" (ibid., p. 270) make them quite unappealing partners for other groups in organized crime.

Part of organized crime or not, it can be stated that the studies on moral disengagement concerning gang crime thematically approach the subject of this thesis the closest, but in substance, there are no publications that review cases similar to the one treated here. This section provides an overview of the state of research regarding the psychological dimension, while the next one will be devoted to the literature located within the field of organized crime that is of interest for this work.

---

[7] One definition that authors often point to is the so-called Eurogang definition. "The Eurogang Program of Research is a loosely knit network of researchers and policymakers with an interest in better understanding troublesome youth groups. While the group is guided by a steering committee, that is the extent of the organizational structure. Members of the network volunteer to host the website, maintain the listserv, organize workshops, and engage in research that adopts the Eurogang definition, instruments, and methodologies" (Esbensen and Maxson, 2015). According to their definition "a street gang (or troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity" (Weerman et al., 2009, p. 20).

2.2 Organized Crime and Related Concepts

2.2.1. Defining Organized Crime: Challenges and Perspectives

Like many other concepts, the concept of organized crime is difficult to define or grasp in a scientific manner (Hagan, 2006, p. 127). This issue is illustrated by a comprehensive collection of definitions which is being curated by criminologist and former editor-in-chief of the prestigious journal *Trends in Organized Crime* Klaus von Lampe and currently includes more than 200 popular definitions of organized crime stemming from about 30 different countries.[8]

The definitions therein do not only have their origins in the academic sphere, but also come from institutions that deal with organized crime in a rather 'hands-on' way, e.g. the FBI, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Council of Europe, or Interpol. Varese (2010) takes on the task of coding and categorizing the (then included) definitions in von Lampe's list and resumes that originally the definitions of organized crime were strongly connected to La Cosa Nostra and thus rather narrowly defined: "[...] hierarchical structure, monopolisation and the provision of illegal goods and services" (Varese, 2010, p. 53). From 1970 onwards, organized crime became increasingly associated with "more general concepts such as 'illicit enterprise' and 'illegal activities'" (ibid.).

Nowadays, the focus has shifted to networks and "[...] the harmful consequences of organised crime" (ibid.). Varese observes that the definitions become more and more unspecific and blurred over the course of time and proposes "a narrower yet viable definition of organised crime" (ibid.). According to him "[...] an organised crime group attempts to regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully" (Varese, 2010, p. 45).

Von Lampe with regard to his compilation criticizes the purely descriptive character of many definitions and states that "for the time being there is no useful definition of organized crime" (Lampe, 2016, p. 14). There exist some definitions that aspire to be as complete and all-encompassing as possible and thus have the potential to fill up pages, and other definitions that are more compact and graspable but may not cover all the aspects. Markus Schultze-Kraft, whose research interests include transnational organized crime and hybrid political orders in Latin America (Bard College Berlin), notes that a key milestone in achieving consensus is embodied in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, commonly known as the Palermo Convention (Schultze-Kraft, 2016).

---

[8] The continuously growing collection can be found on www.organized-crime.de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm

The Convention was signed in December 2000, signaling the international community's determination to address the global issue of organized crime (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Article 2 of the Convention provides the following definition:

> "'Organized criminal group' shall mean a structured group[9] of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes[10] or offences established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004, p. 5).

Schultze-Kraft (2016) highlights that the wording of this definition leaves enough room for interpretation[11], which makes it flexible. However, he criticizes its focus on the economic motivation, as it runs the risk of simplifying the understanding of organized crime. Although he acknowledges the economic dimension, he insists that there are additional aspects that need to be taken into account. The aspects he refers to will be explored later in this chapter.

While the complexities and debates surrounding the concept - of which only a very simplified overview is provided - are intriguing, a detailed exploration is not imperative for the context of this thesis. Despite the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition, scientific research on organized crime is being carried out - reflecting the fact that the research interest lies less in achieving conceptual clarity than in addressing highly practical issues (Schultze-Kraft, 2016) and indicating that having a rough idea of the definition is sufficient to understand its implications.

> "All definitions of organized crime, including those proposed by scholars, are in the last instance shaped by practical and political considerations or simply by individual preferences" (Lampe, 2016, p. 21) implying variations in the characteristics of organized crime based on context.

---

[9] "'Structured group' shall mean a group that is not randomly formed for the immediate commission of an offence and that does not need to have formally defined roles for its members, continuity of its membership or a developed structure" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004, p. 5).

[10] "'Serious crime' shall mean conduct constituting an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty" (ibid.).

[11] Schultze-Kraft, for instance, appreciates the openness of the United Nations definition regarding the categories of persons it covers. It includes natural persons, legal persons, or civil servants, suggesting that the involvement of official or state authorities (although not explicitly mentioned) is not excluded by this wording.

2.2.2. Organized Crime in Latin America

Following the theoretical discussion, we now focus on the distinct manifestations of organized crime in the specific regional context of Latin America. In doing so, the attention shifts from the very nature or constitution of criminal organizations toward the environment and conditions in which organized crime thrives. Many regions in Latin America experience levels of insecurity and violence that are strikingly high, even in comparison to other violence-ridden areas of the world - a problem to which organized crime substantially contributes (Schultze-Kraft et al., 2018). Koonings and Krujit even state that

> "[s]ince the turn of the century more people in Latin America have been killed or otherwise afflicted by violence and insecurity than during the times of dictatorship, repressive regimes, guerrilla uprisings, and armed conflict […] Latin America has turned into what is on average the most lethal region in the world in terms of homicide rates" (Koonings & Kruijt, 2023, p. 1).

They also identify a link between these issues and "[…] non-state actors […] aspiring to become a 'regular' element with prestige and negotiating power in the economy and society [which] operate in criminal, violent, clandestine or at least extra-legal ambiences" (ibid.). It is not only the presence of criminal organizations that has increased, but also the depth of the influence they exert. They no longer merely engage in illegal business activities as their core business but anchor themselves in society and the state (Sampó, 2021).

2.2.3. The Relationship Between Crime and State

Parallel to this, there is a rise in literature examining the relationship between state and crime (Feldmann & Luna, 2022). Schultze-Kraft (2021) notes a recent surge in attention and interest across various disciplines regarding the challenges presented by organized crime. However, he points out that, despite the immediate relevance he perceives, the academic investigation of the crime-state relation continues to be relatively underexplored.

When it comes to the academic debate on organized crime in Latin America, the state is often viewed to be the antagonist to it, so consequently it is concluded that where there is violence, the state surely must be weak or absent; a perspective[12] that has started to be challenged by scholars (see for example Arias, 2017; Dewey et al., 2017; Moriconi, 2021). According to more recent approaches,

---

[12] As a major spokesman of this notion can be mentioned O'Donnell, known for his formative contributions to both democracy and democratization as well as authoritarianism. O'Donnell, in very simplified words, maintains that an increase in crime speaks for an ineffective state that is incapable of enforcing its laws, which inevitably interferes with a well-functioning democratic order (O'Donnell, 1993).

the states in question are "relatively consolidated and formally democratic states" (Koonings & Kruijt, 2023, p. 2), meaning that the issue "cannot simply be reduced to the often-mentioned fragility of the rule of law – or even the state as such" (ibid.). Enrique Desmond Arias, whose field of research is security and politics in Latin America and the Caribbean, ranks among the fiercest advocates of this view: "Chronic crime is not a result of the breakdown of the rule of law per se, but, rather, the presence of particular types of engagements between state and criminal actors" (Arias, 2017, p. 6). He concludes that "[i]n Latin America and the Caribbean criminal groups operate in the context of functioning state institutions" (ibid., p. 20).

In other words, it can be assumed that the presence of organized crime

"[…] does not reflect state failure [or] chronic conflict […]. Rather, these actors […] are often deeply implicated in the political system, shape local electoral politics and civic organizing, and decide how to develop and implement policies in many areas" (Arias, 2017, p. 2).

2.2.4. Violent Democracies and Violent Pluralism

Arias coined the term *Violent Democracy* to describe the phenomenon of the coexistence of democratic institutions and a high level of violence in a society. While one might see democracy and violence as incompatible, Arias (2017) argues that

"[…] violence is part and parcel of democracy in Latin America and other world regions and that existing democracies both have emerged from violence and are sustained by numerous violent practices. The presence of violence does not signify the breakdown or the failure of political order so much as its realization in many contexts" (p. 244).

While many researchers would agree that democracy stands in contrast to violence, the empirical reality in Latin America speaks a different language (Ross, 2005; Thomas, 2011). In *Violent Democracies in Latin America* (2010), which has received a lot of attention among scholars, Arias and Goldstein fundamentally criticize a lack of awareness of the coexistence of democracy and violence and approach the topic by looking at case studies from different countries. That said, their criticism goes much deeper, onto the very definition of democracy, as Arias and Goldstein state that

"[…] the meaning of democracy in Latin America (and indeed, around the world) is today the subject of some contestation. In many ways the label *democracy* is itself of questionable merit in analyzing the quality of political democracy […] in contemporary Latin American Nations. Indeed, if one considers violence as a measure of democratic failure – with greater levels of

violence indicating a breakdown of democratic institutions and values – then Latin American democracies could be considered profoundly *un*democratic" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 2).

Arias and Goldstein (2010) explain that most scholars assume a minimal definition of democracy, which is based on Robert Dahl's idea of polyarchy[13]. In their opinion, the issue thereby is that

> "[…] in its exclusive focus on elections, institutions, and rights, this formulation avoids the messy realities of actually existing political systems as they are found in Latin America (and elsewhere) today. Particularly problematic to these models is the existence of widespread violence, criminality, and insecurity in nations whose political systems might otherwise be characterized as democratic, if not polyarchic. Indeed, the obvious lack of basic public safety and a widespread distribution of rights, among many other problems, bring into question the possibility of establishing prototypical polyarchies in Latin America" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 10).

In addition, they express their dissatisfaction with the "west-oriented" deal of polyarchic democracy which uses the democracies that exist in Western Europe and the United States as a shining example, compared with which Latin American democracies perform unfavorably and are attributed negative adjectives such as "*imperfect*, *illiberal*, *incomplete*, *delegative*, and *disjunctive*" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 3). Viewing the Latin American reality "through the lens of the democratic ideal" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 11) falls short and clouds the understanding of "ongoing crime, violence, and rights violations among poor and marginal groups in Latin America" (ibid.). Thus, it is debatable whether it is useful to apply the same definition of an ideal democracy indiscriminately to all kind of cases and if western blueprints in general automatically are the 'right' ones.

Furthermore, they consider it a "developmentalist fallacy" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 12) to assume that Latin American countries are on the way to become polyarchies. They rather tend to expect that

> "[…] the political regimes that exist in Latin America [...] may have substantial difficulty achieving polyarchy" (ibid.). It is possible for such political regimes to have a constant high level of violence, which may yet be necessary to accomplish collective political goals. Violence should not only be understood as a symptom of a failing democracy, but "[...] as a key element of Latin American democracy itself, as the basis on which it was founded and a critical component allowing its maintenance" (ibid., 2010, p. 13).

---

[13] The concept of polyarchy was introduced in 1971 by Robert Dahl, one of the most important theorists of democracy. He uses the term 'polyarchy' to refer to the factually existing democracies of this world, while he reserves the term 'democracy' for a virtually unattainable ideal form of democratic rule. "*Polyarchy* is derived from Greek words meaning 'many' and 'rule', thus 'rule by the many', as distinguished from rule by the one, or monarchy, and rule by the few, oligarchy or aristocracy" (Dahl, 1998, p. 90). The six institutions that a so-called "polyarchal democracy" (ibid.) must possess are: "1. Elected officials 2. Free, fair, and frequent elections 3. Freedom of expression 4. Alternative sources of information 5. Associational autonomy 6. Inclusive citizenship" (Dahl, 1998, p. 85).

It is important to clarify another term that plays a central role in this work and is linked to violent democracies: violent pluralism. The explanation given by Arias and Goldstein also provides a helpful conclusion of the topic:

"The idea of violent pluralism is not intended to suggest [...] a kind of basic equivalency between types of violence in the region. Latin American democracies are not violently plural in the sense that these societies consist of a variety of groups maintaining equal access to power and equal use of violence to achieve or maintain it. Rather, what the notion of violent pluralism offers is a way to think about violence in Latin American society as not merely concentrated in the state or in 'deviant' groups and individuals who contravene otherwise accepted norms of comportment in a consensual democratic society. [...] [W]e can, from a violently plural perspective, understand violence as critical to the foundation of Latin American democracies, the maintenance of democratic states, and the political behavior of democratic citizens. In contemporary Latin American society violence emerges as much more than a social aberration: violence is a mechanism for keeping in place the very institutions and policies that neoliberal democracies have fashioned over the past several decades, as well as an instrument for coping with the myriad problems that neoliberal democracies have generated" (Arias & Goldstein, 2010, p. 5).

The example of violent democracies demonstrates that concepts which at first sight do not go together can coexist and be interwoven: democracy and violence, but also state and crime. It therefore makes sense to adopt a more differentiated view of the subject and to not necessarily regard state and organized crime as opponents. Likewise, the perspective on organized crime as kind of a parallel state or parallel world is not helpful for a proper understanding (Jaffe, 2013). Until recently, it was generally believed that the realm of organized crime was unrelated to the rest of the (legal) economic activity within a state, but rather just ran parallel to it. It is since becoming clear that legal and illegal economic activity are closely connected and that the state often goes hand in hand with organized crime or is even inseparable from it. In fact,

"[...] nowadays, legality and illegality often merge: criminal and financial worlds are intimately interwoven based on the interests and the needs of certain economic groups and of the banks to profit from organised crime. This illegal economic activity is therefore integrated into the sphere of legal activity and is a key part of political financing and governability" (Moriconi, 2018, p. 505).

2.2.5. Hybrid Orders

To address such cases of merging spheres, there exists the concept of *hybrid orders*, that is "[…] [orders] established by both legal and extra-legal actors" (Dewey et al., 2017, p. 395) or in other words "social formations where formal and informal elements co-exist, overlap and intertwine" (Kraushaar & Lambach, 2009, p. 1). Accordingly, organized crime does not constitute some sort of parallel state, but rather shapes a hybrid order together with the (formal) state. Some authors refer to this phenomenon as *hybrid state* (Jaffe, 2013) or *hybrid political order* (Boege et al., 2009; Kraushaar & Lambach, 2009), others talk about *hybrid social orders* (Dewey et al., 2017) or simply *hybrid orders* (Koonings & Kruijt, 2023; Moriconi & Peris, 2019). What they all have in common is their disbanding of dualistic perspectives: Kraushaar and Lambach (2009), for instance, suggest to "leave behind the strict dualism of formality and informality" (p. 15) and Dewey et. al (2007) to "mov[e] away from dualistic perspectives that see social order as the product of strong states but not weak states" (p. 395).

> Jaffe (2013) describes the hybrid state as
>> "an emergent form of statehood in which different governmental actors - in this case, criminal organizations, politicians, police, and bureaucrats - are entangled in a relationship of collusion and divestment, sharing control over urban spaces and populations" (p. 736).

He states:
> "While a heuristic distinction can be made between formal and nonformal governmental actors, between state sovereignty and social sovereignty, the hybrid state is that system of governance that emerges from the entanglement of these forms of political authority" (ibid.).

Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States (2009) by Boege et al. and *Hybrid Political Orders: The Added Value of a New Concept* (2009) by Kraushaar and Lambach come up with quite similar observations: Both argue in analogy to the previous section on violent democracies. They note that most states outside the OECD do not fit the ideal Weberian type of a state[14], while at the same time criticizing the fact that it is simply assumed "that the complete adoption of Western state models is the most appropriate avenue for conflict prevention, security, development, and good governance"

---

[14] "Weber defines the state as a political institution that claims successfully on the monopoly of violence. […] [T]his definition is a result of Weber's historical studies revealing the monopoly as the decisive criterion, which distinguishes the modern occidental state from all other historical forms of domination. The monopolization of violence by the occidental state was the result of a long-term process in which the local holders of powers were expropriated by a central force. Comparing the worldwide situation of present political communities, however, the Weberian state is rather the exception than the rule. State-free territories are facing political communities with a high degree of statehood. […] [P]articularly for democracies the maintaining of the monopoly of violence is of fundamental importance since it guarantees that legitimate decisions have the chance to be enforced" (Anter, 2019, p. 225).

(Boege et al., 2009, p. 14). Boege et al. (2009) "[…] therefore posit that rather than thinking in terms of fragile or failed states, it might be theoretically and practically more fruitful to think in terms of hybrid political orders" (ibid.). Hybridity should not be understood as something inherently negative, since the non-state actors in question might not only be "[…] 'spoilers' like warlords and leaders of organized crime" (ibid., p. 19), but also non-state/informal institutions or traditional authorities representing the local civil society, such as "village elders, clan chiefs, healers, big men, and religious leaders" (ibid., p. 15). The inclusion of the latter may even contribute to the legitimacy of the state. Additionally, even when dealing with harmful non-state actors ("spoilers") "[r]ecognizing the hybridity of political orders should be the starting point for any endeavors that aim at peacebuilding, development, and state-building" (ibid., pp. 19–20).

Kraushaar and Lambach (2009) as well are

"[...] of the opinion that a more explicit recognition of these [hybrid political] orders and their inclusion into governance mechanisms would be an asset to human development and human security in many developing societies" (p. 1)

and criticize that "[…] development policy in particular still clings to an image of the post-colonial state that is clearly at odds with empirical reality" (p. 3).

Dewey et al. (2017) propose a conceptualization that takes empirical reality into account and aims to provide a framework for analyzing it: *clusters of order*. Clusters are defined as "[…] highly specialized units, producing goods, services or knowledge" (p. 398). These clusters have a hybrid nature, which means that

"[…] there is a synergy between state institutions and actors involved in illegal practices that help both parties to meet certain social demands, or to supply public services more effectively than the rational state can by operating alone. These situations produce alternative, but also accepted, forms of social domination. We call these particular forms of social domination 'clusters of order': a type of social order that produces alternative rules and authorities that deviate from rational legal norms, but are still accepted by civil society (or at least parts of it)" (ibid., p. 396).

Dewey et al. (2017) thus challenge the established (binary) premise that "the state is the main 'producer' of social order" (ibid.). Areas that are affected by "continuous economic crisis, ethnic segregation, social marginalization and persistent inequality" (ibid., p. 395) are most susceptible to the formation of hybrid clusters of order. In such settings, state institutions fail to fulfill the tasks that (according to conventional social theory) are their responsibility. These include basic services such as

infrastructure, for instance communication infrastructure and public transportation, but also public security, the creation of jobs and the establishment of authority and legitimacy (ibid.). In these cases, clusters of order outperform the rational state in terms of productivity and efficiency when it comes to meeting the citizens' needs and thereby generate authority and a social order. Interactions between legal and extra-legal forces are by no means free of conflicts, yet their economic and political outputs are so significant and "have ordering effects both in terms of reducing uncertainty and regulating social expectations" (ibid., p. 395) as to make civil society inclined to accept these actors' activities and authority.

Similar to the authors discussed previously, Dewey et al. (2017) oppose speaking of strong or weak states, even if from a Weberian viewpoint such states would certainly qualify as weak states. They conclude that it is "more appropriate to understand that what is produced in such clusters is a particular form of state" (ibid., p. 405). In the context of hybrid social orders, the authors also mention the emergence of "socially tolerated illegal markets" (ibid., p. 395) – a phenomenon that will be addressed later on.

2.2.6. Crimilegal Orders and Crimilegality

After discussing hybrid orders and the associated departure from overly simplistic binary perspectives on states and societies while learning about the views of some relevant authors, we turn to another important and related concept or rather subtype of hybrid order: *Crimilegal Orders* and *Crimilegality* by Markus Schultze-Kraft.

The concept of crimilegal orders can be applied to political orders that are characterized by illegality and criminality. Schultze-Kraft (2019) understands crimilegal orders as

> "[…] ideal-type of a hybrid political order characterised by the blurring of the moral, normative and social boundaries between (formal) legality-legitimacy, on the one hand, and illegality-illegitimacy and criminality-immorality on the other" (p. 31).

He shares the general impression that conventional consolidated concepts struggle to grasp the complex reality of diverse political orders. Besides, he stresses that his concept is not the result of merely theoretical contemplation but has evolved from his observations of the real-life conditions in developing countries. He explains that crimilegality is not only found in developing or transitioning countries „[y]et, there is less room for crimilegality in countries where states approximate, rather more than less, the Weberian ideal-type of the modern state" (ibid., p.4). In the latter, the Weberian ideal-type, the legal framework revolves around the state, leaving limited space to debate the classification

of what acts are illegal, criminal, and/or immoral whereas in hybrid political orders there is more ambiguity creating a platform for the phenomenon of crimilegality.

For Weber (1922), the legitimacy of a ruling structure depends on its recognition by the ruled population. This recognition can be based on different foundations, including tradition (*traditional rule*), personal characteristics and abilities of the ruler (*charismatic rule*) or on rational-legal rules and institutions (*rational rule*). In contrast to the rational rule, the first two types of legitimate rule do not necessarily require adherence to the rule of law. Weber considers rationalization to be one of the key characteristics of modernity, wherefor traditional and charismatic forms of rule are viewed as less rational and thus non-modern in comparison to the rational rule with its underlying rational-legal foundation. A legal order requires trust in the enforcement of rules by the state, which has the exclusive right to coercion and use of violence (*monopoly of violence*) and creates legitimacy through legality.

So while Weber regards the monopoly on violence as essential for a modern order, Schultze-Kraft (2019) emphasizes the idea that violence in crimilegal orders *does* not come exclusively from the state but also from non-state actors, a condition described as "oligopolies of violence" (Lambach, 2007; Mehler, 2004).

This situation is empirical reality in Latin American Countries, but also in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South Asia (Schultze-Kraft, 2019). While previously discussed authors (i.e. Boege, 2009) also mention harmless non-state/informal actors, Schultze-Kraft's research focuses mostly on armed non-state actors such as „[…] criminal organisations […] paramilitaries, warlords, faith-based militants and insurgent organisations, among other armed non-state actors" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 4).

In scenarios where organized crime and illegality become structural, we would have to speak of non-modern types of order which lack the rational-legal foundation defined by Weber. Schultze-Kraft, however, considers this classification to be a mistake and fundamentally disagrees with this binary perspective:

> "While Weber's original thought remains relevant in this discussion, the framing of political order through the lens of the rational-legal order […] faces limitations when it comes to analysing the makeup and (re)production of political orders in less developed countries" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 164).

He concludes:

> "Instead of clinging to binary conceptions of 'modern' and 'non-modern' political orders, I suggest to go back to Weber's original idea of the rational/legal order […] without setting the focus, however, on 'legality' but on its opposite, i.e., 'illegality' and 'criminality'"[15] (Schultze-Kraft, 2016, p. 37).

Schultze-Kraft (2016, 2019) advocates for the concept of crimilegal orders, which are hybrid and cannot be categorized as modern or non-modern, as they combine and integrate elements of both. Crimilegal orders are based on and even require a rational-legal fundament. Formally, their legitimacy stems from legality and law, but that legitimacy is constantly contested by a variety of actors, both from within the state such as political leaders or civil servants, but also non-state actors like business magnates, social movement, paramilitary or organized crime (Schultze-Kraft, 2019). In a nutshell:

> "[…] the rational-legal basis […] is not rendered inexistent. Rather, it is maintained but its signification is reversed: instead of the legal it is the illegal and/or criminal that becomes legitimate" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 164).

"Does Legitimacy Flow from Legality Only?" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 22).
Crimilegality refers to regular social interactions between the state and non-state actors that occur in the grey area in between legality and criminality. The aim of such exchanges often involves financial gains, but they also lead to political and social order (Schultze-Kraft, 2016). It turns out that, within a criminal order, legality and illegality or criminality can coexist, and that "[…] due to the social legitimacy that is bestowed on them illegality and criminality may take on equally or perhaps even more important roles in (re) producing political order" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 21). He summarizes:

> "[…] I have shown that it is questionable that the legitimacy of a political order in the modern era is derived primarily from its formal and/or official lawfulness, for legitimacy also depends on a *socially-shared belief in legality*. However, such a belief represents a moral, not a legal category. This means that there is a theoretical possibility that the legitimacy of a political order can flow from a *socially-shared belief in illegality and/or criminality*" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 164).

That means that if the legitimacy of a political order is not solely based on the rationality of legal rules and their formal implementation, then the opposite of legality - namely, illegality and criminality - can possess its own morality which is not bound by a belief in legality but by illegality-criminality.

---

[15] "Ahora, en lugar de aferrarse a concepciones binarias de órdenes políticos 'modernos' y 'no modernos', sugiero regresar a la idea original de Weber del orden racional/ legal, […] , sin poner la mira, sin embargo, en 'legalidad' sino en su opuesto, es decir, 'ilegalidad' y 'criminalidad'". – Translation by author.

Thus, from Schultze-Kraft's angle, the question raised above can be negated. Legitimacy does not flow from legality only: "[...] [I]llegality-criminality can generate a legitimacy of its own" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 22). "In effect, in consolidated *crimilegal* orders what is illegal-criminal may become legitimate and morally acceptable, while what is legal may be perceived to be illegitimate and immoral" (Schultze-Kraft, 2019, p. 32).

This research encourages us to reflect on why some actions are officially labeled as illegal but are not seen as immoral by society, and why others are. Who defines what's illegal or criminal and what is the moral or social justification behind?

2.2.7. Illegal versus Illegitimate and the Nature of Illegal Markets

While behavior that breaks the law is classified as illegal, illegitimacy refers to the transgression of social norms or moral concepts. Illegality and illegitimacy do not necessarily have to be congruent; there are scenarios in which the legal framework and social norms are diverging. Matías Dewey (2016) emphasizes that one must be mindful of the fact that what is legal and what is illegal is a social construction. Dewey's primary area of research are illegal markets, and this thesis will mainly draw on his papers to explore them.

Dewey explains that economic sectors are constantly undergoing changes where some activities become legal (legalization), while others become illegal (illegalization). When a sector is made illegal, people generally react in two ways: some choose to obey the new laws, while others oppose them. Moral perceptions are expected to change, i.e. people's views on what is morally acceptable may undergo change as a result of these legal alterations, just as some may see prohibition as illegitimate and new groups may emerge that operate outside the law. He points to the legalization of marijuana as a prime example of how legislation can change social and moral perceptions (Dewey, 2016).

In Latin America, the illegal markets are varied, and their functioning is influenced by distinct legal and cultural factors. Illegal markets have different degrees of social legitimacy, depending on the commodities that are traded (Dewey & Thomas, 2022):

> "[...] [T]here are products whose exchange provokes instant moral rejection, such as child pornography, human trafficking, or the trades in hard drugs and wild animals. In contrast, there are also goods or services that provoke a far from unanimous rejection and may even be met with tolerance. These products, because of their very nature, because they are embedded in tradition, or because they are considered vital for life, are tolerated or even accepted by certain sectors of society. It is exactly these moral considerations that connect legality and illegality.

Good examples of markets experiencing some degree of tolerance are those for counterfeit garments or music, smuggled cigarettes, stolen products, certain soft drugs and, in some cases, for historical artefacts" (Dewey, 2016, pp. 5-6).

Dewey's perspective focuses on the nature of the traded commodities, whereas Michel Anteby (2010) takes a different stance, which he calls a practice-based view. Anteby is convinced "that *how* goods are traded, not only *what* is traded, proves integral for constructing legitimacy" (Anteby, 2010, p. 606). He gives much more significance to the practices and methods in trading and considers markets to be social projects shaped by the participants, who can influence its moral legitimacy, which is how acceptable and justified the market is seen by society. In case a product to be traded is considered inappropriate or unacceptable, participants may use stories or narratives to try legitimizing the trade.

As with Dewey's previously discussed phenomenon of clusters of order, the state is not a completely uninvolved bystander in the illegal markets. Illegal markets that create informal employment and help people fulfill their daily needs are interconnected with society and typically involve cooperation with state actors working well outside official records. These illegal economies are managed through a combination of formal and informal rules. The fact that the rational legal domination is being challenged does not mean that in illegal markets there is no kind of domination or authority (Dewey et al., 2017).

"[…] [J]ust as in legal markets, the internal coordination of illegal markets needs instances of norm enforcement, a task that may be performed informally by state actors, especially when the traded commodities are socially accepted and the workings of the market produce positive externalities" (ibid., p. 399).

Dewey (2016) highlights the important role of local politics and informal political institutions in coordinating illegal markets. He criticizes that many studies focus on corruption, and states that this is only one part of the picture.

"Instead, it must be taken into account that the exchange and circulation of products depend not only on agreements that neutralize the law but also on multiple mechanisms that legitimate actions, provide capital, mask transactions, and reduce violence" (ibid., p. 8).

Moriconi (2018) as well addresses the role of state actors, without whose support it would be difficult to create the right conditions to allow organized crime and violence to grow so strongly. This support does not necessarily have to be through direct participation in illegal activities, but rather, for example, through protection from prosecution, concealment, but also via the selective allocation of

budgets. He notes that illegal markets in Latin America are firmly integrated into society and cannot simply be dismissed as a deviation from the norm; to the contrary, they are an accepted part of everyday life. But what motives and circumstances lead people to engage in illegal markets?

According to Moriconi (2018), it is crucial to understand what people or society imagine to be the path to social success. If someone belonging to the lower class is convinced of meritocracy, meaning that everyone gets what they deserve, that social ascension is achievable and that hard work pays off, their approach is likely to be to try harder and make an effort. In a society that does not trust in meritocracy, the pathway to prosperity is associated with stereotypes such as receiving an inheritance, or fraud and corruption. Thus "[…] if poverty is placed within a framework where the social imperative is to acquire wealth and legality is not valued, engaging in criminal behaviour is a logical choice to remain competitive" (Moriconi, 2018, p. 501).

At the same time, however, the "criminalisation of precariousness" (ibid.) which further stigmatizes the lower class in addition to their already existing marginalization is being criticized. That poverty and crime should not simply be linked to each other is illustrated by the fact that "[…] in the last decade, crime and violence have increased in the region while poverty, unemployment, and inequality have declined" (ibid.). Another harmful aspect of this type of stigmatization is the Pygmalion effect, suggesting that people often tend to act according to the stereotypical characteristics that have been ascribed to them.

Oftentimes it is not possible to reach prosperity and lead a dignified life merely through paid labor, in extreme cases it is not even enough to overcome poverty (Moriconi, 2018).

> "While the legal markets are characterized by uncertainty, suspicion and speculation, illegal (and criminal) markets supply goods and services, employ many people, give them faith in the future, and promote social mobility and recognition" (ibid., pp. 512-513).

Moriconi (2018) concludes that cultural developments that put too much of a focus on individualism and self-interest, "[…] have encouraged both moral blindness and the collapse of legality as a categorical imperative" (p. 513). The result is a society

> "[…] in which it is openly recognized that legal means are not the way to achieve economic and social prestige. Furthermore, this undermining of legality is worsened by social realities that themselves encourage actors to both tolerate and reproduce deviant behaviors as the only possible way to achieve their social, political and economic objectives" (ibid., pp. 513–514).

Dewey and Thomas' (2022) paper *Futurity Beyond the State: Illegal Markets and Imagined Futures in Latin America*, a collection of articles, also puts the focus on people involved in illegal markets. They followed the current trend of examining the expectations for the future that develop among those persons, instead of just looking at the past and present. "Futurity has emerged as a keyword that refers to an affective phenomenon with concrete and specific manifestations and significant implications for everyday life" (p. 1). They argue that people's visions of the future, whether optimistic or pessimistic, significantly impact their daily lives and social practices. These future orientations are linked to economic activities, aspirations, and social change, especially in contexts of inequality. They explain that recent social science pays particular attention to studying hope, which helps people deal with uncertainty and initiate social change.

> "We appreciate aspiration as one driver of people's involvement in criminalized spheres of production and exchange in Latin America, especially since conditions of economic, legal, and social inequality foreclose formal channels of employment for so many people" (ibid., p. 2).

Dewey and Thomas (2022) examine the interrelation between states, markets, and conceptions of the future, looking in particular at how people who participate in illegal markets envision their future differently from those who participate in legal markets. They refer to researchers such as Kleist and Jansen (2016), who argue that hope for socioeconomic mobility is often tied to promises made by governments and legal markets/the capitalist system, e.g. via regular employment. When these fail to deliver what they promise, a kind of crisis of hope can arise.

> "People who participate in illegal economic activities may invest materially and emotionally in alternative visions, in which they imagine or expect that informality will predominate and counterhegemonic values will be more relevant than the values promoted by a government or formal market system" (Dewey & Thomas, 2022, p. 13).

Dewey and Thomas (2022) are wondering whether the future imaginaries of people involved in illegal markets differ from those shaped by state-backed institutions. They state that

> "[…] informal institutional arrangements structure and support expectations for the future among participants in illegal markets. To put it another way, we contend that particular ideas about what the future holds, […] emerge in close relationship with the institutions that facilitate market activity. This does not necessarily mean that imagined futures in the context of illegal economies are of a different type than the futures that people imagine in contexts dominated by legality. What do differ, however, are the mechanisms through which hopes, fears, aspirations, and desires emerge. Future imaginaries among people involved in illegal economic activities may be fueled and supported by less explicit agreements, strategically concealed

practices, and values and moralities that are in tension with hegemonic notions of right and wrong" (Dewey & Thomas, 2022, p. 6).

One case study presented to underpin this is that of Arias and Duica-Amaya (2022), which shows that coca growers in Putumayo, Colombia have quite similar aspirations to legal entrepreneurs, though "[t]heir means of achieving goals of education, self-sufficiency, and surplus […] are supported by informal networks and uneasy alliances with nonstate armed actors" (Dewey & Thomas, 2022, p. 16). These farmers are largely on their own, live a life characterized by uncertainty and "[…] experience fear and anxiety linked to the low degree of legitimacy that surrounds the trade" (ibid., p. 10).

> "While state agencies, paramilitary groups, and cartels compete for territorial control of this border region and for popular support, coca growers are left to struggle more or less on their own to protect their crops, minimize extortion, and maintain favorable market positions. The question of whom to trust is never clear, and growers must be prepared for state interventions (crop destruction, for example), state failures (to deliver cash payments in exchange for decreased coca production), and outbreaks of violence (clashes between state military forces and other armed groups) at any time" (ibid., p. 14).

Depending on the particular circumstances, different strategies are used to handle the situation. Some turn their back, also because of the considerable financial risks and the violence inherent to working in the coca business and seek legal ways to earn a living. Others resort to protest and resistance in response to state or paramilitary threats, or strategically pretend to be loyal and take advantage of "the murky institutional environment to achieve their visions of economic success and forge new certainties" (ibid.). Differentiating between the outward adherence to state norms and genuine intrinsic values is essential. People operating in illegal markets might appear to comply with legal norms for strategic reasons, while their true loyalty lies with alternative, informal systems that better support their future. This leads to a complex dynamic in which legality and legitimacy do not always coincide with the actual practice.

An interesting finding highlighted by Dewey and Thomas (2022) is that, in certain circumstances, the distinction between legal and illegal economic activities may be less significant for underprivileged inhabitants than the social acceptance of those activities. This implies that when deciding what to sell and at what price, market participants are more heavily influenced by social norms and the approval of their community. For instance, activities such as buying and reselling stolen goods might be viewed as generally acceptable, as they don't undermine the overall stability of the market or the future prospects of the vendors. On the other hand, gang-related activities involving theft and violence are

seen as a short-term, risky approach to generating income that does not contribute to the long-term economic stability that people seek. Additionally, informal social controls, like gossip and shunning, are often more effective in regulating behavior than formal state laws, demonstrating that communities can establish their own systems of order outside of official legal frameworks.

In conclusion, Dewey and Thomas' paper argues that informal institutions and networks shape future expectations in illegal markets just as formal institutions do in legal markets. People operating in illegal markets are not simply disconnected from formal systems; rather, they move within alternative institutions that offer different, sometimes more reliable, pathways to success. These informal arrangements, such as the alliances formed by coca growers help people achieve their aspirations outside the constraints of formal legality. The text suggests that more research is needed to understand how legality and legitimacy influence people's visions of the future, particularly in regions like Latin America where informal and illegal economies play a significant role.

The Case Study: Paraguay

3.1 Organized Crime and Illegal Markets in Paraguay

Building on the discussion about illegal markets and questions of legitimacy, it is useful to look at a real-life example that illustrates how illegality and social legitimacy can coexist. Paraguay, the country explored in the following section, is an interesting case where the lines between the legal and illegal spheres are blurred to an extraordinary degree. The works of Moriconi and Peris provide valuable insights into how Paraguay's economy, society and political structures are deeply intertwined with illicit markets, especially drug trafficking.

This chapter will be based primarily on Moriconi and Peris' papers *Análisis Sobre el Tráfico de Drogas en la Ciudad de Pedro Juan Caballero* (2018), *Merging Legality with Illegality in Paraguay. The Cluster of Order in Pedro Juan Caballero* (2019) and *Cultivating Cannabis in a Paraguayan Nature Reserve. Incentives and Moral Justification for Breaking the Law* (2022).

Illegal practices and markets play a major role in Paraguay and have historical roots. For decades, the country has been associated with the trade of smuggled, stolen or counterfeit goods and in particular with drug trafficking (Moriconi & Peris, 2019; Peris & Moriconi, 2018). Despite numerous studies on violence and crime and their social, economic or political backgrounds, there are only a few academic works that deal specifically with the influence of illicit markets and violent non-state actors in shaping alternative social orders and perceived democratic stability (Moriconi & Peris, 2019). In general, Paraguay tends to be neglected in studies on organized crime, although Moriconi and Peris consider the country

> "[…] an exemplary case for bridging this gap in the scientific literature. Despite many institutional reports and journalistic investigations denouncing the historical presence of drug trafficking, massive smuggling, violence, commercial piracy and massive corruption in the country, Paraguay maintains a democratic and social stability, and its economy continues to grow" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2211).

Moriconi and Peris (2019) point out that a remarkable aspect of the Paraguayan economic situation is the high percentage of illegal activities in the overall economy. It is estimated that more than 50% of the gross domestic product is generated by the illegal sector. While the 'official' economy grew by an average of 8% per year, illicit activities increased at an even higher rate (ibid.).

In 2016, Paraguay was the largest producer of cannabis in South America and one of the largest distributors in the world (Miranda, 2016). Today, it is not only the largest cannabis producer, but also one of the most important distributors of cocaine, even though the latter is not produced directly in Paraguay (Orgaz, 2023). A more recent BBC article based on an interview with researcher Carolina Sampó describes Paraguay's rapid rise in the Global Organized Crime Index from 2021 to 2023. While Paraguay was not among the 15 'top' countries in 2021, it ranked 4th in 2023, behind Myanmar, Colombia, and Mexico. However, the change in the ranking may have less to do with a shift in the country's reality and more with increased visibility. This visibility was boosted by public incidents such as the murder of public prosecutor Marcelo Pecci in 2022, who was investigating cases of corruption and money laundering. Suspected as the culprit of this murder is the Brazilian criminal organization First Capital Command (PCC), one of the largest criminal organizations in South America, which is also active in several neighboring countries other than Brazil (Orgaz, 2023). For years, they quote Sampó, criminals in Paraguay benefited from "the country's lack of reputation as a drug exporter" (ibid.). The same can be said of the fact that very little attention was paid to the country, which is now changing. But how did it all begin?

The emergence of drug trafficking in Paraguay can be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Auguste Ricord, a French delinquent, established the first major drug networks in the country. Under the authoritarian rule of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989), the drug trade experienced a further upswing:

> "Before Stroessner, illegality already existed but it was marginal, confined to small families dedicated to the smuggling of raw materials. Stronism[16], embodied in its military hierarchs, transformed the illicit, taking it to a new dimension, that of drugs produced and commercialized at international level. All this, under authoritarian impunity and at the service of the interests and interests of the authorities in power"[17] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 208).

After the end of the dictatorship in 1989, there was a "democratization of the drug trade"[18] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 209), meaning that the military lost its exclusive control over the trafficking, which enabled new criminal actors to take gain influence over these markets.

---

[16] The term 'Stronism' is a colloquial way of referring to the dictatorship under Stroessner.

[17] "El stronismo, traducido en sus jerarcas militares, transformó lo ilícito, llevándolo a una nueva dimensión, el de la droga producida y comercializada a nivel internacional. Todo esto, bajo la impunidad autoritaria y al servicio de los intereses y pretensiones de las autoridades de turno". – Translation by author.

[18] "democratización del narcotráfico" – Translation by author.

The BBC article mentioned above lists several factors that have made Paraguay the important international player in organized crime it is today. On the one hand, there are geographical and infrastructural advantages that speak in favor of Paraguay as a transit country. These include its proximity to countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, which are leading in cocaine production. Due to the short distances, drugs can easily be transported in small aircrafts, which in some cases do not even have to land, but simply drop off their cargo. Another logistical asset is Paraguay's central location within the Hidrovía Paraná-Paraguay. This waterway is one of the largest in the world and allows easy access to markets such as Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, facilitating drug trafficking. An additional contributing factor is the large number of border crossings, relatively lax border controls with Argentina and Brazil and a lack of air surveillance on the part of Uruguay. A crucial external driver was the entry of the aforementioned PCC in the mid-2010s, which, due to Paraguay's favorable location, decided to increase its presence in the country and has since controlled the drugs and arms market there. Last but not least, there is the well-known issue referred to in this article as "narcopolítica" (Orgaz, 2023), which refers to the institutional link between organized crime and public authorities involving high levels of corruption and a "systematic impunity" (ibid.).

Altogether, the illegal markets in Paraguay can be characterized by three features: High profits for the involved actors, a great diversification of illegal activities and a broad geographical presence (Peris & Moriconi, 2018). Although illegal activities are widespread throughout the entire country, two concrete locations merit closer examination: The Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve and the city of Pedro Juan Caballero. In the next step, these two scenarios will first be briefly outlined and thereafter the research conducted by Moriconi and Peris will be discussed in more detail.

3.2 Illegal Markets in Pedro Juan Caballero

First, the case of Pedro Juan Caballero will be presented, which Moriconi and Peris describe as the "most dramatic case, and the one of the greatest concern"[19] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 206) and, as they quote, is also perceived by the public as "Paraguay's most violent region" and "Latin America's drug trafficker town" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2211). The most important key facts are listed by Moriconi and Peris as follows:

> "It has a population of 80,000 inhabitants and is the biggest city along the 400-kilometre frontier between Paraguay and the State of Mato Grosso in Brazil. One of its characteristics is that people live and move freely between these two countries: they can go back and forth from Paraguay (Pedro Juan Caballero) to Brazil (Punta Porá) at any time. Another characteristic is that the cities

---

[19] "el caso más dramático, y de mayor desasosiego" – Translation by author.

were built next to other at the edge of their respective countries' boundary line, and only a few metres apart: the two border communities are so interconnected that the two towns even share public plazas along their border" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2214).

Apart from this extremely favorable (central) geographical location within South America and the uncontrolled border crossing to Brazil, there are other factors that make Pedro Juan Caballero a compelling case. These include an escalating rate of violence (including instances of extortion, kidnapping, and the presence of contract killers) caused by confrontations between different crime groups, namely the PCC and another Brazilian crime organization called Comando Rojo (CR) (Moriconi & Peris, 2019). Matching this, the annual homicide rate is also exceptionally high; to be precise, the rate in Amambay (the department in which Pedro Juan Caballero is located) is 71,75 per 100.000 inhabitants, while the rate for Paraguay as a whole is only 8,16 (Amarilla, 2017, p. 72). An unusual phenomenon is that despite the high level of violence and murder, "common and property crimes (theft, robbery, burglary, and assaults)" are reported to be relatively rare (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2212).

Particularly relevant for our purposes is the role of the state, as Pedro Juan Caballero is an excellent example of a hybrid social order, a concept already explored in the course of this thesis. The city displays a close entanglement of state and illegal actors who together established and maintain an order in which the boundary between legality and illegality is fluid. Moriconi and Peris (2019) note that the existing literature about Paraguay largely ignores the active involvement of state actors in criminal activities in Pedro Juan Caballero. While some of those authors point to the inefficiency of the Paraguayan bureaucracy and see this as the reason for the spreading illegal practices, others suggest that the state is weak, unable to enforce the law consistently and therefore compromises with criminals in certain areas (Moriconi & Peris, 2019). In this logic, the state tolerates illegal activities and even encourages them merely to ensure political stability. Once again, the narrative of dichotomy, of the state and crime being two opposing poles appears, a perspective that has already been challenged thoroughly.

Moriconi and Peris (2019) explain that Paraguay has a political culture that has been shaped by the period of dictatorship and "[…] where transgression became part of the national idiosyncrasy" (p. 2213). Political culture molds the social order, and in this case, it has led to the emergence of a hybrid system of order in which legality and criminality exist side by side and even permeate each other.

Pedro Juan Caballero is what Dewey et al. (2017) would understand as a cluster of order. As described earlier, these clusters refer to a hybrid social order in which legal and illegal actors work together and create alternative rules and authorities that deviate from the legal norms but are still socially accepted, at least to some degree. According to Dewey et al. (2017), such clusters often develop in contexts where the state is unable to meet the population's basic needs. Moriconi (2019) offers a different explanation. He sees the cause not only in the failing of the state but in "[…] the collapse of legality as a moral categorical imperative and the de-legitimisation of it as a means of social prestige" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2217).

Reframing Illegalities: Crime, Cultural Values and Ideas of Success (in Argentina) (2018) provides a more detailed explanation of what this means. Behind this lies a more profound social change that is aware that living within the bounds of the law is no longer enough to gain a certain amount of wealth and prestige. At the same time, crime is viewed less and less as something inherently bad or condemnable and everybody decides for themselves which illegal activities they want to legitimize (Moriconi, 2018). In contrast to Dewey et al. (2017), Moriconi (2018) argues that the disregard for legality is not necessarily the result of precariousness, as it can also be about tax evasion as an illegal practice, for example. Although tax evasion is formally illegal, it is partially legitimized by amnesties, which are endorsed by international bodies as an acceptable form of economic policy. This leads to a fusion of illegality and legality and a practice being perceived as socially acceptable.

Illegal activities (in the case of Pedro Juan Caballero drug production and distribution) are not only tolerated, but even considered legitimate means to achieve social or economic goals. Even if the actions in the city may seem chaotic for outsiders, there exists a clear and structured social order.

> "The interactions between […] different actors are mediated by informal norms and practices in which, alternatively, legality appears as a value to be respected, manipulated or ignored. For instance, lawyers frequently use the legal strategy of delaying a lawsuit so that the time allowed for the case expires; it is then filed away, and the defendant is freed based on the expiration of the case. But, if needed, judicial or law enforcement actors can create, manipulate, or destroy proof in order to have enough evidence to *legally* punish those who deserve it for going against the cluster of order […]" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2219).

This demonstrates that legality is not considered a value in itself, but only if it achieves to produce the desired results, and if the laws are not in line with what is perceived acceptable or right by society (social legitimacy), illegal actions can be legitimized (ibid.).

3.3 Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve

Moving a little further south from the Paraguayan-Brazilian border city, we head into the more rural area, the Mbaracayú Forest Nature Reserve, where a group of peasants have decided to grow cannabis in response to economic and social difficulties. To understand the reasons behind their situation, it helps to look at the more recent past, specifically at the soy boom of the early 2000s. This boom, triggered by the increasing demand for soy in international markets (particularly for animal consumption), helped Paraguay and other Latin American countries to achieve high economic growth rates, while Paraguay exported more soy in relation to total production than any other country in the region (Ezquerro-Cañete, 2016). During this process, also known as "sojización" (Fogel, 2015, p. 105), soybean cultivation became increasingly relevant for Paraguay's economy. However, this expansion also had negative consequences, as it puts great pressure on smaller, traditional forms of agriculture. The soybean sector requires vast amounts of land and relies more on technology than on 'old-fashioned' agricultural workers, reducing opportunities for local farmers. One consequence was the concentration of land in the hands of a few large landowners, which further intensified the already unequal distribution of land in the country, Guereña and Rojas Villagra (2017) even call Paraguay the country with the most unequal land distribution worldwide. Many of those big landowners are Brazilian, while most peasant and indigenous families do not own enough land to sustain themselves (Guereña & Rojas Villagra, 2017). The shift to a soy-focused agricultural economy also meant that traditional agricultural products such as manioc, sesame and corn lost value, and unemployment and social exclusion increased in communities characterized by traditional agriculture (Garat, 2016). In 2016, Garat registered a poverty rate of 33,8% in the rural population of Paraguay and a rate of 17,6% living in extreme poverty (Garat, 2016, p. 9). The rural community feels that the State is mainly to blame for these circumstances, as it has promoted the transition to an agro-industrial model. (Moriconi und Peris 2022). Garat (2016) explains:

> "The contradictions of the productive structures, the lack of agrarian policies, poverty, fragility and the absence of prospects for the rural population have gradually, and with less and less disguise, led young peasants to become involved in the cultivation of marijuana, managed by 'partners', as they call the intermediaries who buy the harvest"[20] (p. 9).

These 'partners' manage all aspects of the cannabis production and distribution, including hiring workers, protecting the crops, and handling the entire process from cultivation to transportation both within Paraguay and abroad (Garat, 2016).

---

[20] "Las contradicciones de las estructuras productivas, la falta de políticas agrarias, la pobreza, las fragilidades y la ausencia de perspectivas para la población rural hicieron que poco a poco, y cada vez con menos disimulo, jóvenes campesinos se vincularan al cultivo de marihuana, regentados por los 'socios', como llaman a los intermediarios que compran la cosecha." – Translation by author.

Moriconi and Peris (2022) describe how cannabis cultivation in Paraguay, which began in the late 1960s, has shifted from being controlled by national elites to being dominated by international criminal syndicates. These are primarily Brazilian organizations like the PCC and the CR, which are mostly commanded from Pedro Juan Caballero, and in 2016 accounted for around 80% of the national production. A standing they would not have been able to reach without the support of a network comprising both state and non-state actors. In practice, this means that there is corruption across all the hierarchical levels of power so that illegal markets are protected by arbitrarily enforcing laws or, in some cases completely suspending them. This environment puts the farmers in an unfavorable position in which they face threats and exploitation from criminal organizations on the one side and demands for bribes from state officials in order to be protected on the other.

Some peasants have started to establish their own structure in order to cultivate cannabis in a profitable and safe way. They use the nature reserve of the Mbaracayú forest, which is located at the Brazilian border and covers an area of 64.405 hectares. Due to its size and dense forest cover, the location is ideal for the clandestine plantation of cannabis, as navigation within the area is only possible for those who are familiar with the terrain. Cultivation takes place deep inside the reserve, in isolated deforested spots that are only visible on satellite images. The farmers who work this land are not indigenous inhabitants of the reserve, but come from the surrounding villages where they also have their own land, where it would be too risky to grow cannabis, which is why they use this land for subsistence farming and small markets (ibid.)

CHAPTER 4

Method and Analysis

The analysis of the case studies is going to be based on the research carried out by Moriconi and Peris in Paraguay. Their database is the result of extensive fieldwork in the area, interviews, ethnography, and analysis of secondary sources and data carried out between 2018 and 2020. For the interviews, 23 key informants, who were progressively recruited using the snowball method, were surveyed; among them "institutional actors, such as high-ranking members of law enforcement, policymakers, parliamentarians, diplomats, journalists, and political actors" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 5). Using the conclusions of this research, a map of moral disengagement will be developed.

The central question of *Cultivating Cannabis in a Paraguayan Nature Reserve. Incentives and Moral Justification for Breaking the Law* (2022) is what incentives and discourses exist regarding the participation in illegal activities and what moral justifications surround these actions. A special focus lies on the importance these peasants give to a 'good life' and how they connect their involvement in drug production to that idea. However, this view contradicts the prevailing literature, which portrays farmers as the "weakest actor of the production chain" (ibid., p. 4), pushed into illegal activities by the more powerful market players through coercion and violence. Even though violence is certainly a part of their reality, Moriconi and Peris believe those peasants have a certain agency and argue that the decision to participate in illegal markets is the result of a free decision-making process. Furthermore, they state that the farmers are driven by more than mere material need, but much more by "economic, institutional, and social premises linked to a generalized aspiration of dignity and a life worth living." This finding overlaps with Dewey's previously described concept of futurity, which emphasizes that actors in the illegal context have very similar hopes and desires to those who operate exclusively in the legal sphere.

Once again, the role of the state is critically examined, as it fails to create legal structures that enable a dignified life. On the contrary, compliance with the legal framework is often perceived as an obstacle to a good life. The state must not be seen "as the bearer of a positive morality intrinsically linked to the promotion of legality" (ibid., p. 3), but as what it is: an actor within a hybrid order that actively protects and regulates the illegal market and thus loses its credibility and moral integrity. At the same time, Moriconi and Peris (2022) criticize what has been stated by Dewey (2019) and Dewey and Thomas (2022): research about illegality in Latin America, tends to overemphasize the role of legality and the state, whereas the relevance of questions of morality and market participants' expectations have gone largely unnoticed. In line with this, Moriconi and Peris (2022) observe a

constant search for moral justification on the part of the people interviewed for their studies. They have already made an advance in the understanding of morality issues, by developing a moral map as a kind of framework or set of guidelines that the interviewees use to address ethical concerns and rationalize their actions. In the further course of this thesis, this topic will be explored in more depth and Bandura's theory of moral disengagement will be used to illustrate how the people in both case studies use a variety of mechanisms to bypass moral standards.

4.1 Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Applied on the Case

In chapter 2 the literature and theories surrounding morality and its circumvention have been discussed and the Theory of Moral Disengagement presented. In the following, the mechanisms of moral disengagement according to Bandura will be described and applied to the context of Pedro Juan Caballero and the farmers cultivating cannabis in the nature reserve of the Mbaracayú forest. All theoretical insights stem from Bandura's book *Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves* (2016). To answer the research question both cases are tested for mechanisms of moral disengagement based on a content analysis of Moriconi and Peris' papers.

Moral disengagement works by providing mechanisms that allow individuals to bypass or suppress their moral standards to justify or tolerate harmful behavior and distance themselves from self-sanctions and moral conflicts. Social cognitive theory sees morality not only as the result of individual deliberation, but as the product of a dynamic interplay between personal, affective, and social influences. Consequently, the justifications that are crafted are often embedded within the frameworks and operational norms of societal systems. In total, there are eight mechanisms that can be assigned to four superordinate categories.

The first one is the behavioral category, which includes three mechanisms that allow the individual to turn immoral behavior into good behavior on a cognitive level: (1) Moral, Social, and Economic Justification (2) Euphemistic Language and (3) Advantageous Comparison.

4.1.1 Moral, Social, and Economic Justification

With this mechanism, harmful conduct is justified by assigning noble or honorable ends to harmful means, making the act morally acceptable. These justifications can be religious, ideological, social, economic or of constitutional nature.

Both the example of Pedro Juan Caballero and the cannabis farmers show examples of this mechanism, while the economic justifications might be the most evident. Farmers involved in the illegal cannabis trade morally justify their participation by highlighting how it contributes to their survival and well-being: "Our land is fertile, we want to continue planting, and cannabis is the only thing that can earn us an income and give us hope for better times. What do you want us to do? (CA2)" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 13). A former local politician from Pedro Juan Caballero says about the farmers: "[...] [T]he peasants cultivate and their reward is economic, do you know how they live?, they don't have enough to eat, if they are in this, it is to subsist"[21] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 211).

Cannabis cultivation is presented as an economic necessity dictated by market conditions and the lack of support from the state. This economic justification underlines the fact that farmers do not see cannabis cultivation as morally problematic, but as an economically necessary measure to secure their livelihood. Apart from the purely monetary incentives, however, farmers are also motivated to continue using the resources at their disposal despite the low prices for traditional agricultural products; namely the know-how surrounding traditional agriculture and fertile soils, even if it is an illegal plant. If their motivation was purely about profitability, selling and smuggling drugs would be much more attractive. So there is also a cultural or traditional component to the justification:

> "Although the profitability of marijuana is one of the justifications that appears in the discourse of the farmers, the economic variable alone is not enough to understand the moral logic behind this type of agriculture. If the maxim of making money were everything, as some works have indicated, many farmers who [sic] would fight to become sellers and traffickers themselves. However, this is not the case. The economic justifications for participating in an illegal market are supported by a series of ideas around work, tradition, and politics" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 12-13).

Drug trafficking in Pedro Juan Caballero as well is portrayed to be an unavoidable economic necessity. The informal jobs and economic resources provided by illegal activities justify the behavior socially and economically:

> "This led consequently to a clandestine order, which not only generated large economic resources, but also served to establish a coexistence based on the distribution of resources to the conflictive sectors, avoiding protests, generating work, encouraging consumption; and most

---

[21] "[...] los campesinos cultivan y su premio es económico, ¿conoces cómo viven ellos?, no tienen para comer, si están en esto es para subsistir. – Translation by author.

importantly, creating a feeling of work mobility and prospects of a satisfactory future for the marginal-precarious sectors"[22] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 210).

Moriconi and Peris (2019) explain that:

"[w]hile legality, as a categorical imperative, remains in the background, the social aims of the cluster of order are, paradoxically, those that the rule of law promises, but does not deliver. In fact, the conjunction between state and non-state actors is socially legitimised because it provides goods and services in a much more effective and credible way than do state institutions alone. Employment, protection, security, justice, social mobility, social expectations, and economic resources are outcomes that our informants and interviewees consider the main reasons for social tolerance of illegal practices" (p. 2217).

These passages show that the rule of law is not rejected out of principle, but because it does not achieve the same goals as the illegal order can. Therefore, illegal behavior is seen as inevitable to accomplish social goals. Another aspect is the justification of illegal activities as a reaction to a state that is corrupt and ineffective and thus causes harm to citizens:

"In Paraguay there is a tradition of permanent institutionalised corruption. It is not the farmers who bring the illegal market to life, but they simply take on the primary tasks of a market whose horizon of possibility and existence is protected by a constant interaction between legal and non-legal actors. State actors appear as those who regulate the market and make it possible for the market to be sustainable. Legality has collapsed as a morsal [sic] categorical imperative. Its narrative loses any thread of verisimilitude" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 14).

The needs that the state does not fulfill are not only of a purely economic nature, but also refer to the need for security:

"A journalist [...] assures us that protection is provided in a tacit agreement, where 'regular thieves, outside the drug business, know that if they go after a certain neighborhood or house they will receive the drug trafficker's punishment'" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2220).

In this quote, the protection offered by drug dealers is presented as morally justified by its reduction of crime in the city, creating a sense of social justification for their presence. The rate of property crimes is provably low, and even the high murder rate does not worry the 'ordinary' citizen:

---

[22] "Se originó, consiguientemente, un orden clandestino, que no solo generó recursos económicos abultados, sino que sirvió para establecer una convivencia a partir de la repartición de recursos a los sectores conflictivos, evitando protestas, generando trabajo, incentivando el consumo; y lo más importante, formando un sentimiento de movilidad laboral y perspectivas de un futuro satisfactorio para los niveles marginales-precarios" – Translation by author.

„Paradoxically, while the rates of homicides are the highest in the country, the rates related to common crime and citizen security are among the lowest. [...] For some of our interviewees [...] this is clear evidence that homicides are the consequence of violent conflicts and confrontations between drugs [sic] gangs, and do not affect common people. 'They kill each other', states a prestigious journalist of the region [...]" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2217).

„Many people see homicides in Pedro Juan Caballero more as a regulation of the social order than as a manifestation of a violent ecosystem. They redefine the context of violence: the collective mind of the people recognises the existence of murders, but also recognises that the innocents (according to the norms of the cluster) should be left unharmed. Those who die have probably made a mistake or misbehaved: they broke a rule, did not fulfil [sic] a promise or simply chose to be common thieves [...]" (ibid., 2220).

Those paragraphs exemplify how violence and even murder are justified as a necessary side effect of drug trafficking because it supposedly only takes place between criminal gangs. This suggests a social justification that these acts are 'okay' as long as they do not affect the general public.

At the social level of justification, it can be said that there are no social consequences of involvement in crime, but quite the opposite:

"[...] [T]here is a social tolerance for the breaking of the law, and in such a social framework, the obscene path of legality is an obstacle to personal development. Consequently, illegality not only generates wealth and employment, but it also generates social recognition. There is no social cost for being recognised as someone who walks the path of crime" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 14-15).

"Everyone in our community knows what we do. Everyone is free to do what they want. Marijuana has brought progress or, in other words, economic welfare. We earn money and that allows us to eat. Everyone knows and supports us, it is a community work of families, of farmers who are tired of waiting (CA1)" (ibid., p. 15).

Indeed, working in the illicit sector can contribute to the sense of community and that in turn normalizes illegality. Moreover, the social legitimacy of illegal activities depends greatly on how damaging they are perceived to be for the community. In the case of the farmers and also Pedro Juan Caballero, it is clear that the cannabis is primarily intended for export to Brazil, which is why "[t]he production and commercialization of marijuana is considered a crime without local victims [...]" (ibid., p. 16).

In summary, the mechanism of moral, social and economic justification is clearly visible in the way illegal activities are presented as necessary and acceptable. These justifications are both moral and economic in nature and emphasize the necessity of illegal activities in order to lead a dignified life. Furthermore, operating illegally represents a sort of communal enterprise and the damage it causes is seen as marginal at best. These justifications allow those involved to reduce their moral concerns and present their behavior as unavoidable and essential.

4.1.2 Euphemistic Language

This mechanism refers to the use of euphemisms and camouflaging language to disguise harmful or unethical actions and make them socially acceptable. Bandura (2016) describes how words influence the perception of events, but also the way we think, and are therefore a powerful weapon. He refers to Gambino (1973), who identified three different types of euphemisms: The first type is called *sanitizing language*, which is the disguising of actions with more inoffensive terms (a classic example is the term "collateral damage" to refer to civilian fatalities). The second form is known as *convoluted language* and describes the use of complex and opaque technical terms; Bandura gives the example of "vertically deployed anti-personnel devices", meaning bombs. Finally, the *agentless passive form* can be named, which are linguistic constructions that shift the responsibility for actions from the individual to a more impersonal level. At this point, it can be noted that the Spanish language does in fact offer the option of verbally shifting from an active to a more passive role (e.g. 'se me cayó' instead of 'I dropped something', or 'se me olvidó' instead of 'I forgot'. Whether this also plays a role in these specific cases, however, can only be speculated.

There is no explicit evidence for the use of this mechanism in the texts, which may also be due to the fact that the transcripts of the interviews themselves are not available, but the papers, in which only a small part of the spoken word is reproduced. However, there are indications that the use of euphemistic language could play a role. A hint of downplay is represented by the way the farmers talk about their activity in growing cannabis, as they say, that "our work, what we know how to do, will always be needed. There is nothing wrong with this, it is cannabis" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 17) or that they "grow crops in the forest" (ibid., p. 16-17). By framing the cultivation of cannabis as a regular agricultural work, the farmers disengage from the moral implications of participating in an illegal market. They focus more on the cultivation as 'farming' in the traditional sense, on their skills, without emphasizing the illegal nature of the crop.

In the case of Pedro Juan Caballero, the passage in which the high homicide rate is discussed stands out, and in this regard, there is a trivialization of the homicides as "punishment" (Moriconi & Peris, 2019, p. 2220) imposed by the drug traffickers. Here, the drug dealers' violence is described as

a punishment, which gives it a mitigating and legitimizing connotation. The criminal violence is not described as such, but placed in a framework that makes it appear almost as a justified disciplinary measure. This linguistic disguising resembles Bandura's idea that damaging actions are made more acceptable through the choice of words.

4.1.3 Advantageous Comparison

The mechanism of advantageous comparison uses the contrast between different behaviors to make one's harmful actions appear in a better light. This can mean, for example, that one's behavior is seen as less negative or even positive by comparing it with even worse offenses. In the case of organized crime, of course, the comparison with even more serious crimes suggests itself. From the perspective of a member of a criminal organization, there will always be more violent and unscrupulous groups, in comparison to which their own actions look trivial. As for the peasants, they can benefit from cannabis' reputation as a relatively soft drug, which makes the cultivation of this plant appear less serious.

Advantageous comparisons are often based on the utilitarian assumption that an action is right if it maximizes the well-being of the greatest number of people. An aspect already mentioned in 4.1.1 is important here: There is enormous dissatisfaction with the state that fails to fulfill its citizens' needs. So, from the viewpoint of those participating in illegal markets, it can be argued that their activities are not as bad as the corruption that occurs in the political elite and puts the country and citizens in a miserable situation. The choice to step outside the bounds of legality can present itself as a way to increase the welfare of most.

4.1.4 Displacement and Diffusion of Responsibility

Moral control is most effective when individuals recognize their personal responsibility for causing harm. However, this control is weakened when responsibility is displaced or diffused. Displacement of responsibility happens when individuals attribute their actions to authoritative figures and thus view them as following orders rather than acting on their own initiative. This reduces self-blame and feelings of guilt because they perceive their actions as being directed by others. Similarly, personal accountability can be diluted in group settings. When a group causes harm, the individual often feels less responsible because the group's collective decision-making process obscures personal agency. As a result, people may act more cruelly or inhumanely under group responsibility compared to when they are individually accountable. When responsibility is shared among many, it becomes difficult for individuals to feel personally responsible, leading to a decrease in moral control and an increase in harmful behavior. Cruel real-life examples of this mechanisms are the famous Milgram experiment or institutional crimes such as the genocide and crimes committed under the Nazis, when perpetrators justified themselves by stating they were only following orders.

The two mechanisms listed separately by Bandura but grouped together under the category of agency locus, displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility, are examined together in this section as in the case studies they emerge from the same circumstances. In the context of organized crime both displacement and diffusion of responsibility play a role. One example of how these mechanisms work is the hierarchies and command structures that prevail in most criminal organizations. For example, a member who carries out illegal acts can easily deflect responsibility to higher management levels by arguing that they were only following orders. This is particularly applicable in the case of the farmers, who are referred to as the lowest ranking members:

> "At the bottom of the chain are the farmers, who do not act on their own and form the marihuana cooperatives, a whole community of children, women and adults who live by the cultivation of marihuana"[23] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 211).

On the next level, there is the police, whose job it is to protect the farmers, ensure the safe passage of shipments, and execute those people who fail to comply. Above them are the drug traffickers, who are at a medium level, controlling the lowest level, being blackmailed by judges and politicians. One power level above are the judges and defense attorneys who play a crucial role in issuing arrest warrants, seizing shipments but also ensuring legal impunity for traffickers. At the very top are the politicians who exert the most control. They make as much money as the drug dealers and receive payments from them as well as from the police and judges (ibid.).

By breaking down tasks into many small, supposedly more harmless subtasks, people lose sight of the bigger picture. As a result, they only see themselves as responsible for their specific activity, but not for the overall damage caused by the system. The structure in Pedro Juan Caballero is perfectly suited for using the mechanism of displacement and diffusion of responsibility.

4.1.5 Disregard, Distortion, and Denial of Harmful Effects

This category consists of the mechanism that concerns the effect of a harmful action. The mechanism of disregard, distortion, and denial of harmful effects show how people evade their moral responsibility by downplaying, ignoring, or denying the harmful effects of their behavior. People tend to minimize the harm they cause especially when acting alone, in which case it is difficult to escape responsibility. If downplaying the harm is not enough, they may deny the evidence of the harm done. By ignoring or denying the consequences, they avoid feelings of guilt or self-blame.

---

[23] "En la punta inferior de la cadena están los campesinos, no actúan solos y forman las cooperativas de marihuana, toda una comunidad de niños, mujeres y adultos que viven en función del cultivo" – Translation by author.

Harmful acts are easier to commit when the suffering of victims is invisible or distant. When people directly experience the damage they have caused, feelings of despair and guilt have an inhibiting effect. Studies show that people are less likely to comply with harmful orders from authorities when the pain of victims is obvious, but when the harm is invisible, even a strong sense of responsibility cannot prevent harmful behavior.

In the paper *Cultivating Cannabis in a Paraguayan Nature Reserve: Incentives and Moral Justification for Breaking the Law* (2022) there are quotes where the mechanism of disregard, distortion, and denial of harmful effects can be observed. These quotes reflect how the peasants minimize or deny the social harm caused by their actions, especially by focusing on the export markets: "What we produce goes to Brazil [...] We cultivate, harvest, and transport it to the border crossing, and we don't even affect the Paraguayans" (p. 16). For the paper *Merging Legality with Illegality in Paraguay: The Cluster of Order in Pedro Juan Caballero* (2019) the same applies:

> "The trafficking of drugs is accepted because the local society considers that the production is for exportation and will not remain in the region. Several of our interviewees emphasise that the drug 'goes to Brazil, Argentina or Europe'. They know it's an unhealthy product to consume, but it provides resources and security for common citizens" (p. 2220).

But the consequences occurring abroad are not the only negative effects of drug trafficking, there is also mention of "addiction habits in the population or violence resulting in murders"[24] (Peris & Moriconi, 2018, p. 206) but these tend to be ignored, and the attention is instead centered on the positive social and economic effects.

The damage caused by drug trafficking is presented as irrelevant to the local community, as the drugs are destined for export abroad. Instead, the focus is placed on the overall benefits for the population, downplaying or ignoring the harmful effects. This selective blindness to the wider negative impact reflects Bandura's idea of the mechanism of disregard, distortion, and denial of harmful effects.

4.1.6 Dehumanization

The last category comprises the two mechanisms that focus on the victims of the harmful practice. The mechanism of dehumanization refers to how perpetrators can reduce their moral self-blame by viewing their victims as less human. When others are perceived as sentient human beings who have similar needs to oneself, it inspires empathy and compassion, which makes abuse more difficult.

---

[24] "hábitos de adicción en la población o violencia traducida en asesinatos" – Translation by author.

However, when victims are stripped of their humanity and portrayed as inhuman, savages or animals, it becomes easier to inflict suffering on them without feeling guilt.

In the case of Pedro Juan Caballero, some form of dehumanization can be observed. As already discussed in 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, the murder rate in the city is very high, but this does not seem to worry most of the inhabitants, as these homicides take place among criminal gangs and not among 'ordinary' people. This implies a certain dehumanization of these victims, as the death of a criminal does not appear to fall into the same category as the death of a 'normal' citizen.

4.1.7 Attribution of Blame

This last mechanism describes the shifting of responsibility onto the victims in order to absolve oneself of guilt. Perpetrators see the victims as responsible for the damage they experience by portraying their actions as provocation. In this way, the victims appear to deserve punishment.

In the case studies presented, it is particularly striking that the attribution of blame relates less to individuals than to institutions as a whole. As discussed previously, the focus is on the state's responsibility for economic exclusion. In Moriconi und Peris (2022), peasants criticize the state for promoting an agro-industrial model centered around soybean production, which they argue is designed to meet international market demands but ultimately excludes small, traditional farmers.

> "The State is not only absent as the rector of well-being, but it proposes unworthy life models and supports the consolidation of economic models that, while generating a lot of wealth for a few, radically modify the rural ecosystem and generate unemployment and exclusion for the most" (Moriconi & Peris, 2022, p. 19).

The state itself can be seen as the cause of legality as a value losing its credibility, as it is oriented towards market logic and does not allow for a dignified life. It also contributes to the erosion of legality since its representatives operate in illegal markets and protect them. This leads to the contradiction that the authorities, who are supposed to enforce the law, actually support illegality and ensure the stability of illegal markets. All this leads to the collapse of legality as a categorical imperative and results in the perception of the state as 'to blame' for the circumstances that drive people into illegality.

Chapter 4 has shown in detail how various mechanisms of moral disengagement enable actors in Paraguay's illegal markets to rationalize and justify their behavior. In particular, the mechanisms of moral, social and economic justification and displacement and diffusion of responsibility have emerged as central.

CHAPTER 5
Conclusions

This master thesis analyzed the mechanisms of moral disengagement described by Albert Bandura and their specific manifestation in the context of illegal markets in Latin America, using Paraguay as a case study. By exploring moral disengagement, the thesis illustrates the psychological strategies that enable individuals involved in illegal activities such as drug trafficking and illegal cannabis cultivation to reconcile their actions with their personal and social morality. The mechanisms analyzed include moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparisons, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, dehumanization, and attribution of blame. These allow individuals to circumvent moral self-censorship, maintain a positive self-image and even gain social recognition allowing them to continue their involvement in illegal activities without internal conflict.

Paraguay proves to be an ideal case study location in this context, as the structures of a hybrid social order are particularly apparent here. State and non-state actors co-operate to enforce social norms that include both formal laws and informal rules. This work argues that this hybrid order enables a kind of social stability that exists despite widespread illegal activities.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis draws on several concepts, in particular from Enrique Desmond Arias' *Violent Democracies* and Markus Schultze-Kraft's concept of *Crimilegality* to explain how organized crime thrives in an environment where the state is not an adversary but a cooperative participant. This thesis highlights the crucial role that these concepts play in moving behind binary views that treat organized crime and the state as entirely separate or opposing actors.

One key insight of this thesis is that the major role that illicit markets play in Paraguay - they are estimated to contribute 50% of the country's gross domestic product - demands a reevaluation of traditional views on crime and legality. The pervasive integration of illegal markets is not simply a symptom of a weak state, it is part of the hybrid social order in which both legality and illegality are components. This social order does not only permit the functioning of illegal markets but also grants them social acceptability and, in some cases even some kind of legitimacy.

 This master thesis contributes to a nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms that allow illegal activities to become normalized within such environments. In places like Pedro Juan Caballero, where the boundaries between legality and illegality blur, drug trafficking organizations manage to operate relatively openly. At the same time, farmers in the Mbaracayú forest reserve, marginalized by limited access to legal economic opportunities, are growing cannabis illegally to secure

their survival. In both cases, moral disengagement acts as a crucial factor. The most common mechanisms are the mechanism of moral, social, and economic justification as well as the mechanism of displacement and diffusion of responsibility. The justification that illegal action is necessary for economic security and the collective nature of the actions, in which individuals see themselves as part of a larger system, make the tolerance towards illegal activities understandable. In addition, there is the denial of harmful effects by emphasizing that the illegal activities have no local victims, whereby the existing victims are stripped of part of their humanity, as they are 'only' narcos.

One of the main factors that is used for justification across most of the mechanisms is the state. People excuse their participation in illegal activities by blaming the state for their precarious situation and regarding themselves as victims of state neglect. Due to its corruption, the state and legality lose their role as moral authority. The state is perceived as incapable of creating functioning and fair structures, while the illegal economy promises some form of stability and enables a dignified life.

Future research is essential to further explore the implications of moral disengagement within hybrid social orders. Effective strategies to counteract the spread of organized crime should account for the underlying psychological and social factors that normalize illegal activities and offer individuals and communities pathways to achieve economic and social stability outside of illegality.

References

Alleyne, E., Fernandes, I., & Pritchard, E. (2014). Denying Humanness to Victims: How Gang Members Justify Violent Behaviour. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *17*(6), 750–762. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430214536064

Alleyne, E., & Wood, J. (2010). Gang Involvement: Psychological and Behavioral Characteristics of Gang Members, Peripheral Youth, and Nongang Youth. *Aggressive Behavior*, *36*(6), 423–436. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20360

Alleyne, E., & Wood, J. (2013). Gang-related Crime: The Social, Psychological and Behavioral Correlates. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *19*(7), 611–627. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.658050

Amarilla, J. M. (2017). La Cara Oculta de la Seguridad Pública en el Paraguay. In C. A. Peris & J. M. Amarilla (Eds.), *Seguridad Pública-Ciudadana en Paraguay: Enfoques, Saberes, Debates y Prácticas* (pp. 47–97). Universidad Nacional de Asunción.

Anteby, M. (2010). Markets, Morals, and Practices of Trade: Jurisdictional Disputes in the U.S. Commerce in Cadavers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *55*(4), 606–638. https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2010.55.4.606

Anter, A. (2019). The Modern State and Its Monopoly on Violence. In Hanke, Scaff, & Whimster (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Max Weber* (pp. 225–236). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190679545.013.13

Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The Self-Importance of Moral Identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*(6), 1423–1440. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.83.6.1423

Aquino, K., Reed, A., Thau, S., & Freeman, D. (2007). A Grotesque and Dark Beauty: How Moral Identity and Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Influence Cognitive and Emotional Reactions to War. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *43*(3), 385–392. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2006.05.013

Arias, E. D. (2017). *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316650073

Arias, E. D., & Duica-Amaya, L. (2022). Advocacy, Misdirection, Protest, and Exit: Strategies of Aspiration and Anxiety amid Crime and Conflict in Putumayo. *Latin American Politics and Society*, *64*(4), 24–47. https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2022.35

Arias, E. D., & Goldstein, D. M. (2010). Violent Pluralism: Understanding the New Democracies of Latin America. In E. D. Arias (Ed.), *The Cultures and Practice of Violence Series. Violent Democracies in Latin America* (pp. 1–34). Duke Univ. Press.

Bakioğlu, F., & Çapan, B. E. (2022). Moral Disengagement and Cyber Bullying, A Mediator Role of Emphatic Tendency. In I. R. Management Association (Ed.), *Research Anthology on Combating Cyber-Aggression and Online Negativity* (pp. 1444–1458). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-5594-4.ch073

Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis*. *Prentice-Hall Series in Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Thory*. *Prentice-Hall Series in Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1990). Selective Activation and Disengagement of Moral Control. *Journal of Social Issues*, *46*(1), 27–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00270.x

Bandura, A. (1999). Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*(3), 193–209. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0303_3

Bandura, A. (2016). Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves. Macmillan Learning. Worth Publishers Macmillan Learning. https://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy1617/2015936306-b.html

Bandura, A., Caprara, G. V., & Zsolnai, L. (2000). Corporate Transgressions through Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Human Values*, *6*(1), 57–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/097168580000600106

Bandura, A., & Ribes-Inesta, E. (1976). *Analysis of Delinquency and Aggression*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Bandura, A., Ross, D [Dorothea], & Ross, S. A. (1961). Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggressive Models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *63*, 575–582. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045925

Bandura, A., Ross, D [Dorothea], & Ross, S. A. (1963). Imitation of Film-mediated Agressive Models. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *66*, 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0048687

Bandura, A., Underwood, B., & Fromson, M. E. (1975). Disinhibition of Aggression Through Diffusion of Responsibility and Dehumanization of Victims. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *9*(4), 253–269. https://doi.org/10.1016/0092-6566(75)90001-X

Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1959). *Adolescent Aggression: A Study of the Influence of Child-training Practices and Family Interrelationships*. Ronald Press.

Bard College Berlin. *Profiles: Markus Schultze-Kraft*. https://berlin.bard.edu/people/profiles/markus-schultze-kraft

Barsky, A. (2011). Investigating the Effects of Moral Disengagement and Participation on Unethical Work Behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *104*(1), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0889-7

Beaudoin, C. A., Cianci, A. M., & Tsakumis, G. T. (2015). The Impact of CFOs' Incentives and Earnings Management Ethics on their Financial Reporting Decisions: The Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *128*(3), 505–518. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2107-x

Beu, D. S., & Buckley, M. (2004). This is War: How the Politically Astute Achieve Crimes of Obedience Through the Use of Moral Disengagement. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *15*(4), 551–568. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.05.007

Boardley, I. D., & Kavussanu, M. (2007). Development and Validation of the Moral Disengagement in Sport Scale. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *29*(5), 608–628. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.29.5.608

Boardley, I. D., & Kavussanu, M. (2011). Moral Disengagement in Sport. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *4*(2), 93–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2011.570361

Boege, V., Brown, M. A., & Clements, K. P. (2009). Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States. *Peace Review*, *21*(1), 13–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650802689997

Bonner, J. M., Greenbaum, R. L., & Mayer, D. M. (2016). My Boss is Morally Disengaged: The Role of Ethical Leadership in Explaining the Interactive Effect of Supervisor and Employee Moral Disengagement on Employee Behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *137*(4), 731–742. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2366-6

Brand, C. (Ed.). (2016). *Dual-Process Theories in Moral Psychology: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Theoretical, Empirical and Practical Considerations* (1st ed. 2016). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-12053-5

Bussey, K. (2020). Development of Moral Disengagement: Learning to Make Wrong Right. In *Oxford Library of Psychology. The Oxford Handbook of Moral Development: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp. 306–326). Oxford University Press.

Bussey, K., Fitzpatrick, S., & Raman, A. (2015). The Role of Moral Disengagement and Self-Efficacy in Cyberbullying. *Journal of School Violence*, *14*(1), 30–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2014.954045

Cardwell, S. M., Piquero, A. R., Jennings, W. G., Copes, H., Schubert, C. A., & Mulvey, E. P. (2015). Variability in Moral Disengagement and Its Relation to Offending in a Sample of Serious Youthful Offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *42*(8), 819–839. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854814567472

Castano, E. (2008). On the Perils of Glorifying the In-group: Intergroup Violence, In-group Glorification, and Moral Disengagement. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *2*(1), 154–170. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00040.x

Christian, J. S., & Ellis, A. P. J. (2014). The Crucial Role of Turnover Intentions in Transforming Moral Disengagement Into Deviant Behavior at Work. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *119*(2), 193–208. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1631-4

Claybourn, M. (2011). Relationships Between Moral Disengagement, Work Characteristics and Workplace Harassment. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *100*(2), 283–301. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0680-1

Dahl, R. A. (1998). *On Democracy*. Yale University Press.

Decker, S. H., & Pyrooz, D. C. (2014). Gangs: Another Form of Organized Crime? In L. Paoli (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime* (pp. 270–287). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199730445.013.008

DeLisi, M., Peters, D. J., Dansby, T., Vaughn, M. G., Shook, J. J., & Hochstetler, A. (2014). Dynamics of Psychopathy and Moral Disengagement in the Etiology of Crime. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, *12*(4), 295–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204013506919

Dewey, M. (2016). *Porous Borders: The Study of Illegal Market from a Sociological Perspective* (MPIfG Discussion Paper No. 16/2). Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies. https://hdl.handle.net/10419/129065

Dewey, M., Míguez, D. P., & Saín, M. F. (2017). The Strength of Collusion: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Hybrid Social Orders. *Current Sociology*, *65*(3), 395–410. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116661226

Dewey, M., & Thomas, K. (2022). Futurity Beyond the State: Illegal Markets and Imagined Futures in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, *64*(4), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2022.24

Doris, J. M. (2010). Introduction. In J. M. Doris & F. Cushman (Eds.), *The Moral Psychology Handbook* (pp. 1–2). Oxford University Press.

Doyle, F. L., & Bussey, K. (2018). Moral Disengagement and Children's Propensity to Tell Coached Lies. *Journal of Moral Education*, *47*(1), 91–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2017.1380611

Dyberg-Tengroth, M., & Egan, V. (2020). Moral Disengagement and Gangs. In C. Melde & F. M. Weerman (Eds.), *Gangs in the Era of Internet and Social Media* (pp. 291–311). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47214-6_14

Egan, V., Hughes, N., & Palmer, E. J. (2015). Moral Disengagement, the Dark Triad, and Unethical Consumer Attitudes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *76*, 123–128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.11.054

Esbensen, F.-A., & Maxson, C. L. (2015). The Eurogang Program of Research. In H. N. Pontell (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.421

Ezquerro-Cañete, A. (2016). Poisoned, Dispossessed and Excluded: A Critique of the Neoliberal Soy Regime in Paraguay. Journal of Agrarian Change, 16(4), 702–710. https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12164

Feldmann, A. E., & Luna, J. P. (2022). Criminal Governance and the Crisis of Contemporary Latin American States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *48*(1), 441-461. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-101221-021836

Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.

Fida, R., Paciello, M., Tramontano, C., Fontaine, R. G., Barbaranelli, C., & Farnese, M. L. (2015). An Integrative Approach to Understanding Counterproductive Work Behavior: The Roles of Stressors, Negative Emotions, and Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *130*(1), 131–144. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2209-5

Fida, R., Tramontano, C., Paciello, M., Ghezzi, V., & Barbaranelli, C. (2018). Understanding the Interplay Among Regulatory Self-Efficacy, Moral Disengagement, and Academic Cheating Behaviour During Vocational Education: A Three-Wave Study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *153*(3), 725–740. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3373-6

Fogel, R. (2015). Clases sociales y poder político en Paraguay. NovaPolis: Revista Paraguaya De Estudios Políticos Contemporáneos(8), 103–116.

Fontaine, R. G., Fida, R., Paciello, M., Tisak, M. S., & Caprara, G. V. (2014). The Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement in the Developmental Course from Peer Rejection in Adolescence to Crime in Early Adulthood. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *20*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2012.719622

Francisco, S. M., Ferreira, P. C., & Veiga Simão, A. M. (2022). Behind the Scenes of Cyberbullying: Personal and Normative Beliefs Across Profiles and Moral Disengagement Mechanisms. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *27*(1), 337–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2022.2095215

Gabbiadini, A., Andrighetto, L., & Volpato, C. (2012). Brief report: Does Exposure to Violent Video Games Increase Moral Disengagement Among Adolescents? *Journal of Adolescence*, *35*(5), 1403–1406. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.06.001

Gabbiadini, A., Riva, P., Andrighetto, L., Volpato, C., & Bushman, B. J. (2014). Interactive Effect of Moral Disengagement and Violent Video Games on Self-Control, Cheating, and Aggression. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *5*(4), 451–458. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613509286

Gajda, A., Moroń, M., Królik, M., Małuch, M., & Mraczek, M. (2022). The Dark Tetrad, Cybervictimization, and Cyberbullying: The Role of Moral Disengagement. *Current Psychology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/12144-022-03456-6

Gambino, R. (1973). Watergate Lingo: Language of Non-Responsibility. Freedom at Issue(22), 7-9, 15-17.

Garat, G. (2016). Paraguay: La Tierra Escondida: Examen del Mayor Productor de Cannabis de América del Sur (Análisis). Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/la-seguridad/12809.pdf

Gini, G. (2006). Social Cognition and Moral Cognition in Bullying: What's Wrong? *Aggressive Behavior*, *32*(6), 528–539. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20153

Gini, G., Pozzoli, T., & Bussey, K. (2015). The Role of Individual and Collective Moral Disengagement in Peer Aggression and Bystanding: A Multilevel Analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *43*(3), 441–452. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-014-9920-7

Gini, G., Pozzoli, T., & Hymel, S. (2014). Moral Disengagement Among Children and Youth: A Meta-analytic Review of Links to Aggressive Behavior. *Aggressive Behavior*, *40*(1), 56–68. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21502

Güereña, A., & Rojas Villagra, L. (2017). Yvy Járra: Los Dueños de la Tierra en Paraguay. https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/yvy_jara_informe_oxfamenparaguay.pdf

Güvendi, B., & Işım, A. T. (2019). Moral Disengagement and Aggression in Fight Sport Athletes. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, *7*(7), 118. https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i7.4244

Haddock, A. D., & Jimerson, S. R. (2017). An Examination of Differences in Moral Disengagement and Empathy Among Bullying Participant Groups. *Journal of Relationships Research*, *8.* https://doi.org/10.1017/jrr.2017.15

Hagan, F. E. (2006). "Organized Crime" and "organized crime": Indeterminate Problems of Definition. *Trends in Organized Crime*, *9*(4), 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-006-1017-4

Haggbloom, S. J., Warnick, R., Warnick, J. E., Jones, V. K., Yarbrough, G. L., Russell, T. M., Borecky, C. M., McGahhey, R., Powell, J. L., III, Beavers, J., & Monte, E. (2002). The 100 Most Eminent Psychologists of the 20th Century. *Review of General Psychology*, *6*(2), 139–152. https://doi.org/10.1037//1089-2680.6.2.139

Haidt, J. (2001). The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral. *Psychological Review*, *108*(4), 814–834. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.108.4.814

Haidt, J., & Kesebir, S. (2010). Morality. In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (5th. ed.). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002022

Hartmann, T., Krakowiak, K. M., & Tsay-Vogel, M. (2014). How Violent Video Games Communicate Violence: A Literature Review and Content Analysis of Moral Disengagement Factors. *Communication Monographs*, *81*(3), 310–332. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2014.922206

Hessick, C. (2016). Moral Disengagement and Organizations. In R. J. Aldag (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedias.* Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.107

Hodge, K., Hargreaves, E. A., Gerrard, D., & Lonsdale, C. (2013). Psychological Mechanisms Underlying Doping Attitudes in Sport: Motivation and Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *35*(4), 419–432. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.35.4.419

Hodge, K., & Lonsdale, C. (2011). Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport: The Role of Coaching Style, Autonomous vs. Controlled Motivation, and Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *33*(4), 527–547. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.33.4.527

Huang, G.-H., Wellman, N., Ashford, S. J., Lee, C., & Wang, L. (2017). Deviance and Exit: The Organizational Costs of Job Insecurity and Moral Disengagement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *102*(1), 26–42. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000158

Hymel, S., & Bonanno, R. A. (2014). Moral Disengagement Processes in Bullying. *Theory into Practice*, *53*(4), 278–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2014.947219

Jaffe, R. (2013). The Hybrid State: Crime and Citizenship in Urban Jamaica. *American Ethnologist*, *40*(4), 734–748. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12051

Jeong, R., Gilbertson, M., Riffle, L. N., & Demaray, M. K. (2022). Participant Role Behavior in Cyberbullying: An Examination of Moral Disengagement Among College Students. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-022-00137-7

Johnson, J. F., & Ronald Buckley, M. (2015). Multi-level Organizational Moral Disengagement: Directions for Future Investigation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *130*(2), 291–300. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2220-x

Killer, B., Bussey, K., Hawes, D. J., & Hunt, C. (2019). A Meta-analysis of the Relationship Between Moral Disengagement and Bullying Roles in Youth. *Aggressive Behavior*, *45*(4), 450–462. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21833

Kiriakidis, S. P. (2008). Moral Disengagement: Relation to Delinquency and Independence From Indices of Social Dysfunction. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *52*(5), 571–583. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X07309063

Kish-Gephart, J. J., Detert, J. R., Treviño, L. K., Baker, V. L., & Martin, S. R. (2014). Situational Moral Disengagement: Can the Effects of Self-Interest be Mitigated? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *125*(2), 267–285. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1909-6

Kleist, N., & Jansen, S. (2016). Introduction: Hope over Time - Crisis, Immobility and Future-Making. *History and Anthropology*, *27*(4), 373–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2016.1207636

Kohlberg, L. (1958). *The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years 10 to 16* [Dissertation]. University of Chicago.

Kohlberg, L. (1971). 1. Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education. In C. M. Beck, B. S. Crittenden, & E. Sullivan (Eds.), *Heritage. Moral Education* (pp. 23–92). University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442656758-004

Koonings, K., & Kruijt, D. (2023). Hybrid Violence and Criminal Governance in Latin America. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *8*(1), 100623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100623

Kowalski, R. M., Foster, M., Scarborough, M., Bourque, L., Wells, S., Graham, R., Bednar, H., Franchi, M., Nash, S., & Crawford, K. (2021). Hazing, Bullying, and Moral Disengagement. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, *3*(3), 159–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-020-00070-7

Kraushaar, M., & Lambach, D. (2009). Hybrid Political Orders: The Added Value of a New Concept. *The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies Occasional Papers Series*, *14*.

Lambach, D. (2007). *Die dicke Fassade der Zivilisation: Politische Ordnung, soziale Normen und Gewalt*. https://afk-web.de/bis_2018/fileadmin/afk-web.de/data/theorie/Workshop_Loccum_2007/Lambach.pdf

Lampe, K. von. *Definitions of Organized Crime*. http://www.organized-crime.de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm

Lampe, K. von. (2016). *Organized Crime: Analyzing Illegal Activities, Criminal Structures and Extra-legal Governance*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506305110

Lee, A., Schwarz, G., Newman, A., & Legood, A. (2019). Investigating When and Why Psychological Entitlement Predicts Unethical Pro-organizational Behavior. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *154*(1), 109–126. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3456-z

Leidner, B., Castano, E., Zaiser, E., & Giner-Sorolla, R. (2010). Ingroup Glorification, Moral Disengagement, and Justice in the Context of Collective Violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*(8), 1115–1129. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210376391

Lişman, C. G., & Holman, A.-C. (2022). Innocent Cheaters: A New Scale Measuring the Moral Disengagement of Marital Infidelity. *Studia Psychologica*, *64*(2), 214–227. https://doi.org/10.31577/sp.2022.02.849

Maftei, A., Holman, A.-C., & Elenescu, A.-G. (2022). The Dark Web of Machiavellianism and Psychopathy: Moral Disengagement in IT Organizations. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, *18*(2), 181–192. https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.4011

Mann, A., & Kilian, S. (2020). When the Damage is Done: Effects of Moral Disengagement on Sustainable Consumption. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, *20*(1). https://doi.org/10.33423/jop.v20i1.2764

Martin, S. R., Kish-Gephart, J. J., & Detert, J. R. (2014). Blind Forces: Ethical Infrastructures and Moral Disengagement in Organizations. *Organizational Psychology Review*, *4*(4), 295–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386613518576

McAlister, A. L. (2001). Moral Disengagement: Measurement and Modification. *Journal of Peace Research*, *38*(1), 87–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038001005

McAlister, A. L., Bandura, A., & Owen, S. V. (2006). Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Support of Military Force: The Impact of Sept. 11. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *25*(2), 141–165. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2006.25.2.141

Mehler, A. (2004). Oligopolies of Violence in Africa South of the Sahara. *Nord-Süd Aktuell*(3), 539–548.

Miranda, B. (2016). *Las terribles Causas y Consecuencias de que Paraguay sea el Mayor Productor de Marihuana de Sudamérica*. https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37791983

Moore, C. (2008). Moral Disengagement in Processes of Organizational Corruption. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *80*(1), 129–139. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9447-8

Moore, C., Detert, J. R., Klebe Treviño, L., Baker, V. L., & Mayer, D. M. (2012). Why Employees do Bad Things: Moral Disengagement and Unethical Organizational Behavior. *Personnel Psychology*, *65*(1), 1–48. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2011.01237.x

Moriconi, M. (2018). Reframing Illegalities: Crime, Cultural Values and Ideas of Success (in Argentina). *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *69*(4), 497–518. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9760-9

Moriconi, M. (2021). El Colapso de la Legalidad y la Naturalización de la Transgresión. In S. Alda Mejía (Ed.), *Los Actores Implicados en la Gobernanza Criminal en América Latina* (75-85).

Moriconi, M., & Peris, C. A. (2019). Merging Legality with Illegality in Paraguay: The Cluster of Order in Pedro Juan Caballero. *Third World Quarterly*, *40*(12), 2210–2227. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1636225

Moriconi, M., & Peris, C. A. (2022). Cultivating Cannabis in a Paraguayan Nature Reserve: Incentives and Moral Justification for Breaking the Law. Trends in Organized Crime. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-022-09464-z

Newman, A., Le, H., North-Samardzic, A., & Cohen, M. (2020). Moral Disengagement at Work: A Review and Research Agenda. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *167*(3), 535–570. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04173-0

Niebieszczanski, R., Harkins, L., Judson, S., Smith, K., & Dixon, L. (2015). The Role of Moral Disengagement in Street Gang Offending. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *21*(6), 589–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2015.1008476

Niven, K., & Healy, C. (2016). Susceptibility to the 'Dark Side' of Goal-Setting: Does Moral Justification Influence the Effect of Goals on Unethical Behavior? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *137*(1), 115–127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2545-0

Obermann, M.-L. (2011a). Moral Disengagement Among Bystanders to School Bullying. *Journal of School Violence*, *10*(3), 239–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.578276

Obermann, M.-L. (2011b). Moral Disengagement in Self-reported and Peer-nominated School Bullying. *Aggressive Behavior*, *37*(2), 133–144. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20378

Obermann, M.-L. (2013). Temporal Aspects of Moral Disengagement in School Bullying: Crystallization or Escalation? *Journal of School Violence*, *12*(2), 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2013.766133

O'Donnell, G. (1993). On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries. *World Development*, *21*(8), 1355–1369. https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(93)90048-E

Orgaz, C. (2023). *Por Qué Paraguay Se Sumó a Colombia y México Como Uno de los Países con Mayor Criminalidad Organizada del Mundo.* BBC Mundo. https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/c9743938lp8o

Paciello, M., Fida, R., Tramontano, C., Lupinetti, C., & Caprara, G. V. (2008). Stability and Change of Moral Disengagement and its Impact on Aggression and Violence in Late Adolescence. *Child Development*, *79*(5), 1288–1309. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2008.01189.x

Paharia, N., Vohs, K. D., & Deshpandé, R. (2013). Sweatshop Labor Is Wrong Unless the Shoes Are Cute: Cognition Can Both Help and Hurt Moral Motivated Reasoning. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *121*(1), 81–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2013.01.001

Peeters, W., Diependaele, L., & Sterckx, S. (2019). Moral Disengagement and the Motivational Gap in Climate Change. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *22*(2), 425–447. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-019-09995-5

Peris, C. A., & Moriconi, M. (2018). Análisis Sobre el Tráfico de Drogas en la Ciudad de Pedro Juan Caballero. *Religación. Revista De Ciencias Sociales Y Humanidades*, *3*(9), 202–215.

Perren, S., & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, E. (2012). Cyberbullying and Traditional Bullying in Adolescence: Differential Roles of Moral Disengagement, Moral Emotions, and Moral Values. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *9*(2), 195–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2011.643168

Pornari, C. D., & Wood, J. (2010). Peer and Cyber Aggression in Secondary School Students: The Role of Moral Disengagement, Hostile Attribution Bias, and Outcome Expectancies. *Aggressive Behavior*, *36*(2), 81–94. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20336

Pozzoli, T., Gini, G., & Vieno, A. (2012). Individual and Class Moral Disengagement in Bullying Among Elementary School Children. *Aggressive Behavior*, *38*(5), 378–388. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21442

Regis-Moura, A., Ferreira, L. B., Bonfá-Araujo, B., & Iglesias, F. (2022). "If not Mine, She Won't Belong to Another": Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in a Femicide Perpetrator from Brazil. *Violence Against Women*, *28*(12-13), 3135–3153. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211038969

Richmond, J., & Wilson, J. C. (2008). Are Graphic Media Violence, Aggression and Moral Disengagement Related? *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, *15*(2), 350–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/13218710802199716

Robertson, S. (2009). Introduction: Normativity, Reasons, Rationality. In S. Robertson (Ed.), *Spheres of Reason* (pp. 1–28). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572939.003.0001

Romera, E. M., Ortega-Ruiz, R., Runions, K. C., & Falla, D. (2021). Moral Disengagement Strategies in Online and Offline Bullying. *Psychosocial Intervention*, *30*(2), 85–93. https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2020a21

Ross, D [Daniel] (Ed.). (2005). *Violent Democracy*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481291

Runions, K. C., Shaw, T., Bussey, K., Thornberg, R., Salmivalli, C., & Cross, D. S. (2019). Moral Disengagement of Pure Bullies and Bully/Victims: Shared and Distinct Mechanisms. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *48*(9), 1835–1848. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01067-2

Samnani, A.-K., Salamon, S. D., & Singh, P. (2014). Negative Affect and Counterproductive Workplace Behavior: The Moderating Role of Moral Disengagement and Gender. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *119*(2), 235–244. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1635-0

Sampó, C. (2021). Una Aproximación Teórica, el Concepto de Gobernanza Criminal en América Latina. In S. Alda Mejía (Ed.), *Los Actores Implicados en la Gobernanza Criminal en América Latina* (pp. 9–18).

Schultze-Kraft, M. (2016). Crimillegal Orders: Revisiting Organized Crime's Political Power. *Íconos Revista De Ciencias Sociales*(55), 25–44. https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.55.2016.1899

Schultze-Kraft, M. (2019). *Crimilegal Orders, Governance and Armed Conflict* (1st ed. 2019). *SpringerLink Bücher*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03442-9

Schultze-Kraft, M. (2021). Las Bases Morales y Normativas de la "Connivencia" entre los Órdenes Políticos Legal e Ilegal: Una Aproximación desde el Concepto de la Crimilegalidad. In S. Alda Mejía (Ed.), *Los Actores Implicados en la Gobernanza Criminal en América Latina* (pp. 51–64).

Schultze-Kraft, M., Chinchilla, F. A., & Moriconi, M. (2018). New Perspectives on Crime, Violence and Insecurity in Latin America. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *69*(4), 465–473. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-017-9758-3

Shen, Y., Yuan, L., Xiong, X., & Xin, T. (2023). Empathy and Cyberbystander Behavior: The Role of Moral Disengagement. *Current Psychology*, *42*(21), 18070–18079. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03015-z

Shu, L. L., Gino, F., & Bazerman, M. H. (2011). Dishonest Deed, Clear Conscience: When Cheating Leads to Moral Disengagement and Motivated Forgetting. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *37*(3), 330–349. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167211398138

Shulman, E. P., Cauffman, E., Piquero, A. R., & Fagan, J. (2011). Moral Disengagement Among Serious Juvenile Offenders: A Longitudinal Study of the Relations Between Morally Disengaged Attitudes and Offending. *Developmental Psychology*, *47*(6), 1619–1632. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025404

Snarey, J. R. (2012). Lawrence Kohlberg: Moral Biography, Moral Psychology, and Moral Pedagogy. In W. E. Pickren, D. A. Dewsbury, & M. Wertheimer (Eds.), *Portraits of Pioneers in Developmental Psychology* (pp. 277–296). Psychology Press.

South, C. R., & Wood, J. (2006). Bullying in Prisons: The Importance of Perceived Social Status, Prisonization, and Moral Disengagement. *Aggressive Behavior*, *32*(5), 490–501. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20149

Strickland, B. B. (2006). *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology* (2nd ed.). *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Gale.

Teng, Z., Bear, G. G., Yang, C., Nie, Q., & Guo, C. (2020). Moral Disengagement and Bullying Perpetration: A Longitudinal Study of the Moderating Effect of School Climate. *School Psychology*, *35*(1), 99–109. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000348

Thomas, K. (2011). Violent Democracies in Latin America (Review). *Anthropological Quarterly*, *84*(1), 287–291. https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2011.0000

Thornberg, R., & Jungert, T. (2014). School Bullying and the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement. *Aggressive Behavior*, *40*(2), 99–108. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21509

Thornberg, R., Wänström, L., Gini, G., Varjas, K., Meyers, J., Elmelid, R., Johansson, A., & Mellander, E. (2021). Collective Moral Disengagement and its Associations with Bullying Perpetration and Victimization in Students. *Educational Psychology*, *41*(8), 952–966. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2020.1843005

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2004). *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto*. https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf

Varese, F. (2010). What is Organised Crime. In F. Varese (Ed.), *Organized Crime: Critical Concepts in Criminology* (pp. 27–55). Routledge.

Wallace, R. J. (2005). Moral Psychology. In F. Jackson & M. Smith (Eds.), *Oxford Handbooks. The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy* (pp. 86–113). Oxford University Press.

Wang, C., Ryoo, J. H., Swearer, S. M., Turner, R., & Goldberg, T. S. (2017). Longitudinal Relationships between Bullying and Moral Disengagement among Adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*(6), 1304–1317. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0577-0

Wang, X., Lei, L., Liu, D., & Hu, H. (2016). Moderating Effects of Moral Reasoning and Gender on the Relation Between Moral Disengagement and Cyberbullying in Adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *98*, 244–249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.04.056

Weber, M. (1922). *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.*

Weerman, F. M., Maxson, C. L., Esbensen, F.-A., Aldridge, J., Medina-Ariz, J., & van Gemert, F. (2009). *Eurogang Program Manual: Background, Development, and Use of the Eurogang Instruments in Multi-site, Multi-method Comparative Research.* The Eurogang Project.

White, J., Bandura, A., & Bero, L. A. (2009). Moral Disengagement in the Corporate World. *Accountability in Research*, *16*(1), 41–74. https://doi.org/10.1080/08989620802689847

White-Ajmani, M. L., & Bursik, K. (2014). Situational Context Moderates the Relationship Between Moral Disengagement and Aggression. *Psychology of Violence*, *4*(1), 90–100. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031728

Wood, J., & Alleyne, E. (2010). Street Gang Theory and Research: Where Are We Now and Where Do We Go from Here? *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *15*(2), 100–111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.005

Wood, J., Moir, A., & James, M. (2009). Prisoners' Gang-related Activity: The Importance of Bullying and Moral Disengagement. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *15*(6), 569–581. https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160802427786

Wortley, S. (2010). *Identifying Street Gangs: Definitional Dilemmas and Their Policy Implications* (Organized Crime Research Briefs).