

# Rechtsgeschichte Legal History

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Zitiervorschlag: Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History Rg 30 (2022)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12946/rg30/318-319>

Rg **30** 2022 318–319

**Karla L. Escobar H. \***

## Beyond Drugs, State and Legality

\* Max Planck Institute for Legal History and Legal Theory, Frankfurt am Main, [escobar@lhlt.mpg.de](mailto:escobar@lhlt.mpg.de)

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Auf der Grundlage eines soliden methodischen Konzepts eröffnet Berlin neue Dimensionen für ein zentrales Problem unserer Zeit. Wissenschaftler/innen und Studierende aus verschiedenen Forschungsbereichen (Völkerrecht, internationales Strafrecht, Politikwissenschaft, internationale Be-

ziehungen, Rechtsgeschichte und Kriminologie), aber auch das allgemeine Publikum und politische Entscheidungsträger werden von den bahnbrechenden Erkenntnissen seiner Arbeit profitieren. ■

**Karla L. Escobar H.**

## Beyond Drugs, State and Legality\*

Estefanía Ciro's book »Levantados de la Selva: Vidas y legitimidades en los territorios cocaleros del Caquetá« is based on her doctoral research in sociology, which in 2017 won the UNESCO/Juan Bosch Prize for the Promotion of Social Science Research in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This volume is the product of interdisciplinary work moving between the fields of economics, history, and sociology, and, therefore, draws on different kinds of historiographies: those dedicated to the sociology of exclusion, the effects of anti-drug policies in Latin America, and the historiography of rurality. This detailed review of the academic literature is accompanied by what I consider the most valuable part of the book: a rigorous ethnographic work about the men and women dedicated to coca leaf cultivation and the processing of coca paste in the region. The arguments put forward by Ciro are underpinned throughout the book by numerous interviews transcribed in extensive quotations that offer the reader a multifaceted picture of the coca issue.

Ciro divides her work into seven chapters plus an introduction and conclusions. Each chapter first offers a description of the lives of the *cocaleros* and *cocaleras* and the different problems that cut across their life experiences. These narratives are then tied together by diverse cross-cutting analyses. The book's narrative begins with a reflection on the role that moralizing discourses have played in thinking about public policy concerning coca cul-

tivation and the problems that this approach has entailed. It then discusses the role of violence, particularly that perpetrated by the state in the region, the role of paramilitarism, the guerrilla and international anti-drug policies, the historical migratory processes in the territory that characterize the life trajectories of its interviewees, and the analysis of the economic practices that characterize rural production in the Amazon region from a historical perspective.

This analysis is carried out at different scales, starting with the most immediate presentation of the lives of the interviewees: their life trajectories, their visions of themselves and their families, their expectations for the future, and their fears, dreams, and claims. These life experiences are complemented by other elements: accounts of settlement dynamics, forms of property ownership, local, regional and national economic practices, national and local legal discourses, and global political projects. This multi-scalar and contextual view considers both long-term and short-term events through which the author manages to foster a fruitful discussion on the various dichotomies that have characterized the narratives on the coca economy and the Amazon region. The author closes her study with a diagnosis of the »coca problem« in the region after the peace accords with the FARC guerrilla and makes important recommendations for the development of public policy in the region based on her findings.

\* ESTEFANÍA CIRO RODRÍGUEZ, *Levantados de la selva: Vidas y legitimidades en los territorios cocaleros del Caquetá*, Bogotá: Ediciones Uniandes 2020, 308 p., ISBN 978-958-774-883-3

Ciro's book is the product of rigorous and thoughtful research, and her arguments are thought-provoking and invite debate as well as being proactive: something we do not find very often in contemporary academic scholarship. Although it is not a work of legal history, it shares several concerns that many historians of law have today and traces a methodological path for thinking about solutions to contemporary issues based on historical analysis, aspects I consider to be of key importance for our discipline today. The author also participates in contemporary scholarship discussions related to how to understand illegality and marginalization in given normative orders.

Ciro keeps questioning the alleged dichotomy between what is considered legal and illegal in the contexts she studies and, by acknowledging that this dichotomy is actually a fiction, presents a rich grayscale between the two points. In that sense, the author facilitates a visualization of how the act of calling something »illegal« translates into everyday life. Who benefits from making something illegal, and what's the net of power relations woven from such an act? What are the particular differences between participating in an illegal or a legal global market? Ciro's text accounts for many of these nuances on multiple levels: from the idea of »la mata que mata« (the plant which kills) – a word-playing slogan reproduced by the Colombian National Narcotics Directorate in 2008 that many Colombians like myself grew up with due to its wide dissemination in different media – to the affirmation of the complete opposite, »amor por la mata« (the love for the plant), claimed by one of Ciro's interviewees. The author analyses the multiple dynamics in which the paths of the illegal and the legal intersect. These intersections are located in diverse spaces: in types of land ownership, in the collective and individual desires for »social improvement«, in the practices of economizing and consumption behavior, in the forms of family structures, in individual and collective strategies for »making a life for oneself« and »surviving«, in the generational migration practices, in the strategies made up by hundreds of people who live amid the war between the state forces, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries, and many more. All these different practices are constructed following disputed notions of law and justice that cross the everyday lives of the interviewed *campesinos*.

These reflections on the legal and the illegal and their blurred borders lead to another of Ciro's

central debates: the critique of the supposed »absence of the state« as the leading cause of illegal economies and the »mythological discourse« constructed across Colombian territory about the Amazonian region as a »no man's land« or as a »lawless region«. Ciro demonstrates in detail how, on the contrary, the state has a strong presence, not as a provider of services or a guardian of fundamental rights, but rather in its militaristic and warlike dimension, a situation that spawns a profound sense of discontent with and distrust of the state and its representatives. This feeling, shared by many of the interviewees, underlies an argument that has been heard in other spheres that see the state as one of the many actors violating the law in frontier regions. This discussion is not a minor issue in Colombian historiography. The thesis of the »weakness of the state« and the »wildness« of the Amazonian people was a commonplace justification for the use of violence in Colombia for a long time and, as Ciro points out, that view has produced weak public policies centered on creating a so-called »culture of legality« in the region without solving the structural issues linked to the rural crisis in the country and the militarized presence of the state.

Another essential aspect of Ciro's work is the in-depth characterization of the peasant population related to coca crops and coca paste production. Her work manages to show a very diverse and complex peasantry that goes beyond the stereotypes some literature has put forward, painting the peasants as a homogeneous and »isolated« group, usually opposed to the »modern« world. Quite the contrary is true: Ciro shows how the coca economy is deeply rooted in capitalist practices that peasants quickly learned to adopt and that, actually, follow patterns typical of other types of agro-export economies. This is another relevant contribution to economic history and specifically to the history of the rural world including in the literature about *Campesino* and *indígena* people in the Amazon.

This type of account of local history is highly relevant and should be widely read in the so-called global north. It not only brings new dimensions to the urgent discussion about drug penalization but also serves to evaluate, from a historic perspective, the terrible consequences that people have paid in the name of the euphemistic process called »the war on drugs«.

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