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The illicit trade in alcohol: mapping strategies of crime control and banditry in Ecuador

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Abstract

The following study seeks to critically assess and dissect existing narratives and agendas of crime control within the context of contraband alcohol in Ecuador by drawing upon recent measures implemented by the Ecuadorean Government to secure borders, bottles and the supply chain. The aim throughout the study was to present a critical reconstruction of these events situated within the framework of security studies, semiology, and social harms. The study navigates these various themes and their interactions with one another while engaging with the linear and core argument of this paper, namely that contraband is merely an invention of the government and corporate apparatus to justify exclusion, pursue monetary interests and push costly security solutions to contain the 'threat'. By pointing to concrete case studies and industry practices to secure the supply chain and mitigate risk, the study concludes that associations of contraband with organised crime and a security heavy crime control agenda perpetuate the myth of crime.

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The nature of the illegal trade in alcohol has received relatively limited academic attention in recent years despite the fact that it has been linked with significant tax evasion as well as serious health problems and even deaths (Shen and Antonopoulos 2016). Existing approaches to understanding the illicit trade in fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) are mostly econometric and data-based (see OECD 2007; Frontier 2015; Philip Morris International 2016). At the same time, illicit FMCG markets are measured as one large group comprising the categories of counterfeit and contraband (C&C) tobacco, spirits and luxury goods (Euromonitor 2016; Philip Morris International 2016, ICC 2017). Counterfeit and contraband markets may share many similarities, for example, they affect pharmaceuticals, mechanical spare parts, and electronic components as well as fashion accessories, clothing, cigarettes, and digital media (Staake and Fleisch 2008), and however, by viewing these as a single group of affected goods, the distinction of root causes and conditions for each individual product may become difficult. At the same time, existing approaches from both the private and public sectors to mitigate and control contraband tend to focus primarily on the alleged harms and dangers caused by the inflow of contraband. These initiatives cite the involvement of organised criminal groups in the smuggling of contraband and distribution of counterfeit goods, invest in large scale securitisation of their supply chain (see Philip Morris International 2017) and propagate a crime control agenda driven by the myth of ‘gangster’ smugglers and retailers (see British American Tobacco 2017 OCCRP 2011;) that seeks to reduce C&C market entry opportunities as opposed to individual and societal reform (Von Lampe 2017; KPMG 2014; WHO Protocol 2012 FCTC 2005;).

To counter the inflow of contraband liquor into Ecuador, authorities have implemented a costly and high-tech tracking system on bottles composed of Physical Security Components (CFS¹) adhered to and fixed on each bottle and have invested in large vehicle x-ray scanners placed across multiple points of entry into the country. These processes of product, supply chain and border securitisation as well as the labelling of individuals into the single category of cold organised criminals (see OCCRP 2011; Europe 2015; Philip Morris International 2016) unfold a series of criminological questions which draw upon semiology, security studies and critical criminology. Together, these themes are the core central foci of this research project centring solely on contraband alcohol (as opposed to both C&C). These themes will allow me to analytically discern and critically assess the current situation in Ecuador regarding contraband liquor in order to frame and position it with relevant literature and alongside the general argument spanning throughout this paper, namely that the crime of contraband and its actors are constructed in order to further sustain and protect the monetary interests of the state and corporate apparatus. Taking these foci and framing them with the gathered data will enable the

¹ Acronym in Spanish meaning ‘Componente Físico de Seguridad’

construction of a critical picture of the crime control landscape in Ecuador regarding contraband alcohol. Doing so in this manner is indispensable because as Carolyn Nordstrom (2007: 21) warns,

studying illicit goods as a whole gives three misleading impressions: the world acts according to these categories and divisions [of legal and illegal]; the sum total of these discrete analyses adds up to an encompassing reality; there is a discernible line between legal and illegal between acceptable and illicit, between legal development and criminal intent.

As such, this project seeks to situate the current state of contraband alcohol in Ecuador within the framework of existing literature which is highly critical of the Latin American crime control agenda and its ambition to securitise any possible threat(s) (see Paladines 2017; Gledhill 2015; Slatta 1987; Aas 2007; Jones 2009). In doing so, it is possible to construct an alternate understanding of the issue based on key critical readings and ideas on the themes mentioned above. This study is structured as follows: the first section provides the background needed in order to understand this project, how it relates to existing thinking on related topics (such as illicit markets, securitisation and semiology), and lastly, this first section provides the foundation required in order to follow the theory of frameworks I will apply in the analysis portion of this paper.

Brief note on methodology and data

Because this study seeks to critically engage with relevant literature to the issue of contraband, there were several methodological aspects to consider which warranted what Hobbs (2000) called ‘methodological pluralism’ and inspired me to re-adapt my research strategy. The first point pertains to the relatively limited availability of literature related to contraband alcohol and the second aspect reflects my intention to uncover and unmask existing processes of securitisation particularly in the context of private entities and their interactions with the public sector. With regard to adapting my approach to the topic, I drew upon various case studies, reports and figures relating to the tobacco industry. The reasoning behind this was twofold; both tobacco and alcohol are legal and taxable commodities and secondly, as shown below in the sections to come, the tobacco industry has pushed for similar measures to secure and control the supply chain (see EC Agreement 2016; EU Tobacco Product Directive 2016). Secondly, my choice of literature as a quasi-methodological decision was underpinned by my intention to provide a critical account of such processes which could serve as a point of departure for engaging with the topic on a deeper basis perhaps at the doctorate level through ethnographic study or a grounded theory approach. These drivers influenced my ‘methodology’ although the study

itself is purely based on a literature-based approach in order to revamp and re-frame notions of social harms, security and crime control in the context of contraband.

Background of the issue

In recent years the Ecuadorean government has unleashed a series of restrictive import policies with tax surcharges for the import of spirits as high as 50%. Such policies have created an uncertain environment for traders in many sectors (USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, 2015) and have allowed illegal spirits to dominate as much as 28,6% of the total market (Euromonitor, 2014). The large illegal alcohol market in Ecuador is driven by C&C, but also encompasses other categories of illicit spirits such as illegal artisanal beverages (referred to as ‘moonshine’ in the US context), surrogate beverages where alcohol not intended for human consumption was used (e.g. methanol) and legal alcoholic beverages (locally produced) on which excise tax was not paid (Euromonitor, 2014). Main sources of fiscal loss are attributed to contraband (Euromonitor, 2014) and the death toll of individuals ingesting adulterated artisanal alcohol amounted to 45 annually (BBC, 2011). State responses to the issue range from increased police presence in on-trade channels (mainly in bars and markets) (Euromonitor, 2014), to large vehicle x-ray scanners at the Peruvian and Colombian borders as well as the implementation of the costly ‘Identification, Marking and Tracking System’ (SIMAR²), aimed at labelling and sealing imported distilled beverages through a Physical Security Component which is printed and sealed on bottles to prove authenticity (Ernst & Young, 2014). In 2012 alone the total fiscal loss of the illegal alcohol market in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and Peru was \$736 million and illegal alcohol represented in the same year 25.5 percent of the total alcohol market in volume and 14 percent in value (Euromonitor 2012 cited in Lohmuller 2014) and the smuggling of liquor increased more than 167 percent in Ecuador in 2012.

Contraband is criminalised by the Ecuadorean Penal Code (Código Orgánico Integral Penal) under Art. 301, carrying prison sentences from three to five years and sanctioned with heavy fines as high as ten times the initial taxable amount on the product. Méndez (2017: 8) defines contraband as the introduction and movement of goods in and out of a country which have not been presented or declared to customs authorities in order to avoid customs tax. These goods enter a country through ‘enabled spaces’ (e.g. ports and airports) and ‘non-enabled spaces’ (e.g. beaches, country border lines, hidden checkpoints between country border lines). Contraband in Ecuador has existed since the Colonial Era and presents itself as a ‘modernising’ and ‘constantly evolving’ phenomenon in that those

² The acronym SIMAR in Spanish reads: ‘Sistema de Identificación, Marcación, y Rastreo’

involved in the smuggling of contraband are able to continuously adopt new modalities and strategies in order to avoid control (Méndez 2017: 7). In this context, Jones (2009) speaks for instance of how illegal goods can be ‘domesticated’ once they cross borders and Nordstrom (2007) sees the alternate reality, world and lifestyle made possible through contraband goods which are legitimised through their consumption by the general public.

Because contraband FMCG falls under the corporate label of C&C (see ICC 2017), it is worthwhile to begin by looking at some key ideas on counterfeit goods. This is because in many ways, contraband operates in a similar fashion and in accordance with many consumer tendencies identified in the movement and consumption of counterfeit goods. For example, Staake and Fleisch (2008) have found with regard to the demand side that consumers invest considerable effort in searching for low-cost imitations while those purchasing contraband are known to equally search for more accessible and affordable options. In reference to counterfeit goods, Staake and Fleisch (2008) note that consumers portray ambivalent behaviour when purchasing counterfeit goods; they either have a strong interest in buying genuine goods as a registered trademark because it is seen as a sign of quality or they knowingly buy counterfeit goods (and equally contraband) because they perceive the brand to be an interpersonal sign of wealth and social status. Shifting this into gear and in the direction of contraband, the dawn of free trade agreements has invited citizens to ‘participate in a modernist vision of citizenship and progress; where such agreements may also (re)create mechanisms of exclusion by opening some borders for cosmopolitan and officially sanctioned imports’ (Odegaard 2016: 346). Odegaard (2016) suggests in the case of Peru that internal economic structural adjustment programmes and trade agreements favouring overseas exports have directly contributed to a steady increase in cross-border trade activities taking place at the margin of the formal economy often involving *contrabandistas* or retailers as importers. Albeit flow and mobility may be key values of today’s globalised economy (see Castells 2000), various scholars have shown how the celebration of flow amounts to be discriminatory (Harvey, 2007; Li, 2009; Young 2007). To exemplify this, Ecuador’s high alcohol import tax has raised prices of liquor per bottle as high as three times the average retail price therefore making certain brands inaccessible to many consumers and subsequently demonising those who seek to purchase more affordable and available alternatives. This could be attributed to how Odegaard (2016: 347) sees the way conditions governing the ‘so-called free market promote certain kinds of flow while constraining others, and include some forms of work while excluding others’. Such forms of trade are according to Odegaard (2016), socially embedded in networks of cooperation based on household and kinship relations, which provide vital connections between urban markets and rural areas along trading routes.

Latin American banditry & the war on the poor

Odegaard (2016: 347) for instance observes that such social and spatial embeddedness of trade involves claims for local autonomy and a questioning of official interference, indicating how a ‘parallel or overlapping form of sovereignty characterises these forms of trade vis-à-vis the arbitrary presence of the state.’ Such market initiatives are common in Latin America and bring merchants and vendors a source of income; in Peru for example, those who bring contraband into the country self-identify as *contrabandistas* and proudly do so, claiming for their own right to earn a living (Odegaard 2016). Furthermore, the economic activity or social banditry of *contrabandismo* reflects in many ways the structural inequalities in Andean societies and the intersections between radicalised and class hierarchies (Odegaard 2016). Exploring this notion of banditry within the Latin American context is most valuable as it offers rich and new insights in understanding Latin American criminality and its construction in the political sphere. In this regard, looking at banditry in Latin America can help uncover and stress ‘deep social divisions and conflicts as well as elite monopolisation of economic opportunity as causal factors in Latin American criminality’ (Slatta 1987: 2). In his edited collection exploring varieties of banditry in Latin America, Slatta (1987: 3) asks, ‘what social conditions give rise to wider outbreaks of banditry?’ As such, the question itself is complex when applying it to the case of contraband alcohol but Slatta’s line of thought serves as a point of departure to question and critically analyse what the key drivers of contraband in Ecuador may be. Another reason why and how the lens of Latin American banditry can be useful in the present context is that by looking at an actual phenomenon such as contraband in Ecuador, the study of banditry is able to move away from its purely history-driven focus. To exemplify this, Hobsbawm (1969; 1974) acknowledges the methodological difficulties when studying banditry (i.e., focusing on archival material for the most part) and Slatta (1987) sees this strong historical focus as one of the downsides to the study of banditry mainly due to the fact that distinguishing myth from social reality is a difficult task. To balance and counter this issue, Phillips (1987) holds that the phenomenon of social banditry in Latin America provides ample evidence for the comparative analysis and critique of (Anglo-centric) criminological theory. Furthermore, banditry in Latin America may exhibit and enable a critical dialogue with today’s crime control agenda driven by neoliberal ideals, privatisation and persecution of minorities and the poor (see Wacquant 2001).

Latin American banditry therefore opens up a critical dialogue with criminological theory confronting theorists by questioning ‘facts’, and because criminological theory looks at the *why* (Phillips 1987),

Latin American banditry presents another kind of thinking by urging that we re-evaluate the foundations on which criminological theories are constructed. For instance, Phillips (1987: 181) holds that Latin American banditry has captured ‘the fancy of entire nations, (...) the mythology of banditry entered the collective conscience with all the force of hero worship, (...) criminals no longer were criminals, but became revered icons of a martyred peasantry.’ As a theoretical construct, Latin American banditry questions the dominance of criminological theories primarily due to the fact that it explores the dichotomy of ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’ by looking instead at ‘close ties of class and camaraderie’ (Slatta 1987: 192), collaboration and how banditry offers better work with higher pay (Lewin 1987) or even by looking at how it unfolds in the aftermath of late 20th and 21st Century consumer culture (e.g., by providing people who otherwise would have no access to pirated DVDs, game consoles, fake luxury goods these). Underpinning the framework of banditry in the Latin American context is the idea of rebellion and resistance exemplified in the work of Bolívar Echeverría (2008), a renowned Ecuadorean scholar who poignantly summarises this idea of resistance and rebellion in what he terms *el ethos barroco*³, on which I will further expand in the chapter of this project covering security.

Odegaard’s (2016) study in Peru suggests contraband and vending represent a possibility for social mobility and the potential to disturb hierarchies of class and ethnicity. In this regard, contested spaces in the circulation of goods (such as street markets and retailers offering bootlegged liquor) can offer critical and important insights in processes of globalisation and the workings of statecraft in times of neoliberalism (Odegaard 2016: 349). As I will further discuss in detail, contested spaces such as borders, markets and retailers have become highly securitised and surveilled as a result of SIMAR. To understand this, it is worthwhile examining and exploring where the social harm in contraband alcohol may lie. Looking at social harms and particularly the social harm of contraband in Ecuador is important because academic criminology has become increasingly defined by governments’ agendas on what constitutes the crime, law and order problems of our time (Hillyard and Tombs 2007). Furthermore, questioning the essence and extent of social harms in the context of contraband alcohol will allow the intentions and agendas of crime control agents and the private sector to surface. In doing so, it may demonstrate how the production of a particular type of crime (and therefore criminal) and the emergence of a collective urgency to contain it, ultimately seek to protect state monetary and corporate interests. Following this, one key aspect to consider when evaluating harms and crimes in

3 Briefly summarised, *el ethos barroco* signals the emergence of an attitude defiant to rules, regulations, the law and most importantly, the imposition of these brought about by neoliberalism. The *ethos barroco* is a conceptual construct which can be usefully employed to understand social dynamics, relations of power and resistance to change or authority by drawing upon forms of interaction which are culturally situated and embedded in Andean culture.

the context of contraband is the fundamental idea that crime has no ontological reality. As Hillyard and Tombs (2007: 10) posit, ‘there is little or nothing intrinsic to any particular event or incident which defines it as a “crime”. Crimes - and criminals - are fictive characters in the sense that they have to be constructed before they can exist’.

Complementing this central point is also the idea put forward by Hillyard and Tombs (2007) that social orders are increasingly characterised by an unacknowledged yet open war on the poor. Tying this into the Latin American context, a new war on the poor is waged through the use of ‘structural violence’ (Farmer 2004; cited in Gledhill 2015: 3) where a ‘machinery of oppression’ is embedded in social orders and includes racism and gender inequality. This notion resonates with some key ideas on securitisation and crime control where there is a new and growing concern from the public and private sectors to protect and secure corporate and monetary interests (see Findlay 1999; Jakobi 2013; Krahmman 2011; Bowling 2011; Zedner 2006) by waging a war on the poor, creating simultaneously ‘the myth’ of crime and criminals (see Hillyard and Tombs 2007). In a similar fashion, Gledhill (2015: 3) has found through his ethnographic work in Latin America, how large-scale processes and relations manifest themselves in local contexts that are populated by people who are socially heterogenous, often conflictive among themselves and not necessarily agreed on how to deal with a common enemy’. To exemplify this, in the case of Ecuador there has been a stark political division in the approach to crime control since 2009 and from 2010 onward, there has been a steady increase in prison population (Paladines 2017). The regime of President Rafael Correa is characterised by its predisposition to shift rapidly back and forth between extreme leftist policies marked by strong anti-neoliberal sentiments and more conservative, punitive policies favouring an ‘iron fist’ approach (Paladines 2017).

These keen observations from Gledhill (2015) on Latin America and targeting the poor overlap with Hillyard’s (1993) notion of the criminalisation of ‘suspect communities’ (see also Doody 2011) and Wacquant’s (2001) idea of the ‘penalisation of poverty’ which seek to segregate certain groups identified as threats and risks. This is because creating a suspect community legitimises harsh responses on the policy level and crime control front (Doody 2012) and allows for the standardisation of crime governance. Similar to Hillyard’s (1993) perspective on how Irish communities were labelled as suspect communities through the use of police powers, information dissemination, and executive powers, Gledhill’s (2015:15) work on Latin America contextualises this phenomenon and maintains for example that

when police in Brazil use what some would see as excessive violence in evicting homeless families with children (...) they are acting within the parameters of citizen security. (...) The emphasis on citizen security is therefore back on the state as guarantor of public order.

These remarks allude to and resonate with some key points on class, race and consumption in the Latin American context. Klaufus (2006) sees for instance that in the hegemonic discourse on social differences in Ecuador, as well as in other Latin American cities, class, race, and geographical identities are often intertwined to form a dichotomy in which a white or mestizo urban (upper) middle class places itself in opposition to suburban and rural popular classes (De la Cadena, 2000; Weismantel, 2003; Whitten, 1981). Furthermore, the construction of class, race, and place in Ecuador is still based on the perception of an ascribed superiority of the white (upper) middle class over the indigenous mestizo popular classes from the rural areas (Miles, 1994; Weismantel, 2003). The issue here is that one of the main hubs for the sale contraband in the city of Quito is the *mercado Iñaquito*, a local market selling a wide array of goods ranging from spiritual items such as incenses and candles to spirits. What makes *Iñaquito* special and sociologically relevant is the way in which divisions of class and race seem to fade and evaporate in the daily hectic of market stalls. The market itself has been a staple and pillar for many locals for over 30 years and stall owners are usually large families with heads who establish themselves as *doñas or seños*, two synonymous terms known in Quito and surrounding Andean towns to denote a woman of power who takes a motherly, caring and affectionate role with a firm and leading hand. *Iñaquito* could be seen as neutral territory where people look for bargains and fresh produce a couple of alleys away from the contraband alcohol section of the market. Another example to look at shows that when studying consumption patterns and architectural taste in the colonial city of Cuenca in Ecuador, Kyle (2000: 72) critically describes the barriers built and imposed by social system of Ecuador stating that whether peasants build four-storey buildings, they will never be able to buy culture, because, in the strict social hierarchy of the canton Cuenca, culture used to be something into which one was born.

Socials harms and beyond

This could be tied to the idea that in order to achieve security, the state seeks to segregate and keep potential offenders in line with the threat of inflicting suffering and punishment on behalf of the criminal justice system (Blad et al 1987; cited in Hillyard and Tombs 2007). This is because the inflicting of pain by the state through the criminal justice system involves a number of discreet, but mutually reinforcing, stages: defining, classifying, broadcasting, disposing and punishing the individual concerned (Hillyard and Tombs 2007) which serve the purpose of keeping anyone 'in line'

who may threaten private interests (e.g., street vendors or certain social groups threatening the investment and profit potential of property developers in up-and-coming neighbourhoods). At the same time according to Hillyard and Tombs (2007), these very processes create wider social harms-which may bear little relationship to the original offence and pain caused. For example, public and private institutions involved in the control and sanctioning of contraband cite specific harms resulting from contraband; some of these labelled under the broad and academically, not to mention semantically contested category of organised crime (Van Duyne 1995; Finckenauer 2005). Other harms cited extend to the consumer end where consumers are demonised for allegedly supporting criminal groups and other criminal activities by purchasing contraband (see British American Tobacco 2011, Schneider 2016). Among these working papers, policy documents and corporate statements citing alleged harms, there is a powerful theme at play which resonates with a central point made by Hillyard and Tombs (2007) where crime (and therefore criminalisation) is used to maintain power relations. This is achieved in such a way that criminal law focuses primarily on individual acts and behaviours on the streets rather than on large-scale social and economic processes within a given territory. In their seminal work *Beyond Criminology, Taking Harm seriously* (2004) Hillyard and Tombs attribute the focus on individuals' acts to the 'individualistic nature of judicial reasoning and its search for a liable and responsible individual'. The result of this is that the structural determinants which lead to crimes being committed such as poverty, social deprivation and social inequality are fully ignored. Crime is therefore used to maintain power relations through the crime control industry which is permeated by private and corporate actors who have a vested interest in defining crime and consequently, an interest in how to stop and control it.

Giving the ideas above on social harms further momentum, one rather useful perspective on the issue is Cohen (1972) and Hall's lens of moral panics (1978; 2013) which could be employed to expose and explicate how power relations are maintained. In his study of 'mods and rockers' Stanley Cohen (1972; 2002) defines a moral panic:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight.

Turning to Cohen's work on moral panics is important because he observes the shift of attention from the deviant act formerly treated in isolation to the reaction of the public and the control agencies to the act. Applied to the context of contraband, an increasing rhetoric and anxiety is seen for example through the emerging 'organised crime' discourse in the private sector concerning affected goods such as luxury items and tobacco (see Edwards and Jeffray 2015; FATF 2012; Joosens and Raw 2012). This 'juxtaposition of "serious" and "organised" in framing criminality is an example of securitisation and more in general can be understood as "shorthand for the construction of security" (McDonald, 2008, cited in Lavorgna and Sergi 2016: 172). Through this specific example of language use in policy discourse, an important feature emerges, namely the notion and imagination of contraband-related organised crime being used to emphasise certain security threats as they 'ought to be' (Lavorgna 2016), i.e., lucrative for the private security sector as several scholars have argued (Krahmann 2011; Zedner) and a potential business opportunity for key service and solution providers.

Picking up on this use of terminology along the lines of 'organised criminal networks and syndicates', 'terrorism', and 'serious organised crime' behind contraband, one could turn to the work of Stuart Hall (1978; 2013) *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. Hall looked particularly at how the label 'mugging', was indeed new to the British context, but how the crime it purported to describe was not. The term 'mugging' was widely covered in the press, by the government and the public signalling a shift in concern through the notion of *perceived* increases in crimes of violence at the time (especially 'muggings'). This occurrence was at the same time flanked by what Hall (1978; 2013) observed to be the notion that criminals were getting off lightly, courts were becoming 'soft', and the notion that the only strategy was to 'get tough'. Hall (1978; 2013) conceptualised this sentiment and inserted the mugging phenomenon into what he terms the 'equation of concern' where the term mugging was inserted and 'expressed as an equation, the argument ran: rapid increase in crimes of violence plus "soft" sentencing policy equals need to return to traditional 'tough' (or deterrent) measures.' Adding to this, Hall reconstructs the misuse of statistics highlighting at the time how the rate of violent crime was on the increase, a trend encouraged by a 'soft-on-the-criminal' policy in the courts (as well as the result of 'permissive' attitudes); and arguing that the only way to deal with this was to 'revert to traditional "get-tough" policies which were guaranteed to have the required deterring effect on those attracted to violent crime.' Statistics therefore have an ideological and political function according to Hall (2013: 13) where

they appear to ground free floating and controversial impressions in the hard, incontrovertible soil of numbers. Both the media and the public have enormous respect for ‘the facts’ – hard facts. And there is no fact so ‘hard’ as a number – unless it is the percentage difference between two numbers.

Numerous studies (see KPMG 2017; KPMG 2014) cite fiscal and corporate losses as a result of C&C markets and by creating a common enemy under the vague, highly contested rubric of ‘organised crime’, securitisation and disruption of criminal activity as well as its prevention become a top priority. In this regard, Lucia Zedner’s (2007) construct of ‘pre-crime and post-criminology’ is most useful as crime is conceived essentially as risk or potential loss, and ordering practices are ‘pre-emptive for security to be a commodity sold for profit’ (Zedner 2007: 261). Hall (1978; 2013: 21) had already hinted to this phenomenon and shift of focus with regard to mugging in 1970s Britain where ‘the police, reacting to these events, spurred on by a vigilant press, by public anxiety and professional duty, took rapid steps to isolate the “virus” and bring the fever under control.’ The result as noted by Hall, is that courts administered ‘hard’ law and the threat seemed to have disappeared within twelve months. A closer look at Hall (1978; 2013) in this regard is that with this whole complex of action and reaction, there is no simple ‘event’ to be understood, ‘apart from the social processes by which such events are produced, perceived, classified, explained and responded to.’ Hall warns that rather than focusing on the appearance and emergence of the crime itself (since organised crime is not a universally defined / acknowledged term and is constantly being disputed), more attention to the moral panic should be given. In doing so, it is possible to discern and critically evaluate the current crime control agenda aimed at securitising mundane objects, borders and any opportunity structure that enables crime to take place (Neyland 2009; Jones 2009; Aas et. al 2009; von Lampe 2017).

Dimensions of organised crime

Taking into account how policy documents and industry-led reports (see PMI 2017; KPMG 2016; OECD 2016; PMI 2017) label contraband as an illicit market with organised crime behind the scenes, it is worthwhile examining this discourse on organised crime within the context of illicit markets. This is important because illicit markets provide researchers a laboratory for observing cooperation and coercion in a near-anarchic setting and enable a closer look at what the relationship may be between illicit trade and alleged organised criminal involvement (Koivu 2015). According to Hill (2003), illicit markets emerge when states are either unwilling or unable to regulate them. It has often been assumed that illicit markets contain parallel, coercive governance structures (Tilly 1992 cited in Koivu 2015). It is questionable therefore whether or not the contraband alcohol market in the city of

Quito follows a similar pattern. As Koivu (2015) has argued, some illicit markets have mafias while others do not. She identifies the source of this variation as the costliness of the use of force and the imperatives of territorial control. In this context, Koivu (2015) employs the term mafia in accordance with Tilly's (1985) and Varese's (2010) approach, where such groups are characterised as state-like entities that attempt to 'regulate and control the production and distribution of a given commodity or service unlawfully' (Varese 2010: 14 cited in Koivu 2015). Furthermore, Koivu (2015) maintains with regard to illicit markets, that by virtue of having been excluded from state regulation, authority, i.e., third-party enforcement in the form of mafias is necessary to enforce contracts. In this regard, mafias operate as a unique type of criminal group that carries out state-like duties such as enforcement of contracts by way of violence and coercion (Gambetta 1993; Varese 2001). To this end, criminal groups may specialise in coercion to protect vulnerable property rights and in the case of contraband alcohol, they may seek to protect the right to distribute (what is in fact a legal substance) contraband alcohol at their will. Consequently, mafias may emerge when the state is unable or unwilling to protect specific markets (Hill 2003) or equally, they are likely to appear because the state creates the conditions for organised crime to emerge (Koivu 2015). As Koivu (2015: 162) posits,

Political theories of organised crime identify state absence as the causal factor for the emergence of mafias, specifically, the unwillingness of the state to protect the property rights of those trading in contraband.

However, it is also highlighted that not all illicit markets generate coercive organisations; in fact, this would be the case for those organisations which are characterised to be non-territorial and which deal with goods that are tradable over long distances where the use of force is sufficiently costly. To facilitate and enable this, there is usually an agent or broker that provides information rather than protection (Koivu 2015). To complement this, it is valuable to draw upon economic theories of organised crime to further understand the policy and industry discourse on organised crime in the context of contraband. To this end, economic theories on organised crime (see Naylor 1997; Reuter 1983) focus on market dynamics and entrepreneurial strategies. As such, organised crime therefore emerges from prohibition regimes and highly regulated environments to exploit the demand for a specific good or service. An economic perspective on organised crime argues that prohibition is a form of overregulation and that illicit markets emerge as an opportunity structure born from an impetus of entrepreneurial, rational thinking actors who seek to maximise profits (Koivu 2015).

Departing from this, one could also ask whether a hybrid of both perspectives on organised crime makes sense. To this extent, it would be possible to take Koivu's (2015) perspective who fuses economic and political explanations of organised crime and illicit markets arguing that a mafia-oriented illicit market is one in which coercive institutions and oligopolistic organisations, not market forces structure behaviour. Gambetta (1993) holds in this context for example that precisely illicit markets generate mafias, i.e. groups that concentrate on providing private (or quasi state-like protection or provision of goods). These perspectives serve as a point of departure to analyse the contraband alcohol market in Quito either as a non-mafia-oriented illicit market (Greif 1989) or as a mafia-oriented illicit market (Gambetta (1993). To balance this, one could further ask what the political context is in which illicit markets operate and unfold; as Williams (2009: 324) notes in this regard,

The difficulty comes in isolating illicit markets and criminal organisations from the broader political context in which they are embedded, in failing to delineate variations in the level and type of violence in different stages of the supply chain for any illicit commodity, and in inadvertently separating the use of violence from those who wield it, the purposes for which it is used, and the targets against whom it is used.

As highlighted above, illicit markets may be accompanied by their share of violence but Williams (2009) warns us that the use of violence by criminal organisations equally stems from the political, social and cultural context in which the organisations operate. Furthermore, Williams (2009: 324) makes a valid and important distinction between organised criminal activities in which violence or the threat of violence (coercion) is inherent, and organised criminal activities in which violence is attendant or supportive but not essential to the activities themselves. The response is usually triggered by state efforts to constrain activities of criminal organisations and most often comes as an attempt to seek to neutralise such efforts through corruption, the threat and or use of violence of a combination of all of the above (Williams 2009). Similarly, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), which took credit for Al Capone's arrest (Tucker 2014) has since taken a hard stance stating

ATF's Alcohol and Tobacco Enforcement Programs purpose is to target, identify, and dismantle criminal enterprises with ties to violent crime, that traffic illicit liquor or contraband tobacco in interstate commerce; seize and deny their access to assets and funds; and prevent their encroachment into the legitimate alcohol or tobacco industry.

(ATF 2017)

Supply chain security: Ecuador and the likes

This tough on crime approach waging a war with all actors involved in crimes covered by the ATF Bureau is equally employed by the Parties of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the first international public health treaty containing in itself a protocol drafted in 2012 for fighting illicit trade in cigarettes (see Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products 2012). Stipulated in the three part document with measures on supply chain controls through a tracking and tracing system for identifying diverted tobacco products upon seizures among other measures is an entire section devoted to outlining offences and obligations for Parties to implement in accordance with their national criminal laws. While these legislative exports of global crime governance and supply chain control refer to tobacco and tobacco products, they can equally be applied to the case of liquor and spirits as both move through duty-free channels, are levied with excise, customs and sometimes production taxes and are of course both legal substance. Following this line of thought whether it pertains to tobacco control and strategies to prevent illicit trade therein, there exists a neoliberal crime control agenda targeting the ‘inconvenient’, who enjoy a ‘distinctly second-class kind of citizenship, and often find themselves placed in the morally invidious position of having to hustle and lie. (Gledhill 2015: 17). To exemplify this through the example above of the WHO illicit tobacco protocol, Parties sought to either implement a licensing system for all participants in the supply chain in order to obtain information to prevent and follow-up in the event of seizures. During the negotiations pertaining to Article 6 of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products, few Parties expressed serious concern as to the implications this may have on street vendors, kiosks selling individual cigarettes, and tobacco growers in developing countries (WHO FCTC 2008; 2009; 2010). Critically expressed, these attempts to secure the supply chain through licensing schemes and control systems would be detrimental to the already limited income made available to vendors and kiosks who under the imperative of Article 6 must apply for a license in order to operate and sell cigarettes. Furthermore, communities such as these are seen as inconvenient in the contemporary capitalist concept where there is a hidden agenda behind the securitisation of *favelas*, marginalised communities (Gledhill 2015) and [legitimate] businesses dealing with [legitimate] products such as tobacco.

To further exemplify this, the securitisation phenomenon seeks to exterminate inconveniences which are a barrier to capital accumulation because they occupy spaces which may have investment potential and can be exploited for significant monetary gain or because they may be taxable commodities or entities. These tendencies could therefore be attributed to the rise of the risk society where risk miti-

gation, calculation and crime prevention are the top priorities on the neoliberal agenda of crime control. This reconfiguration of crime control is attributed to an adjustment in the emotional tone of crime control and crime discourse, particularly to the heightened perception of threats, an idea that resonates with Beck's (1992) term 'risk society'. According to Beck, the term 'risk' refers to a world governed entirely by the laws of probability in which everything is measurable to 'calculable and non-quantitative uncertainties, to risks that cannot be known' (Beck and Yates, 2003: 96). Inherent to broader global processes of crime control and prevention, there is a latent sense of collective fear and shared anxiety. Jakobi (2013) for instance points out that since world politics is increasingly concerned with setting up regulations that define and redefine criminal activities on the global level, the formation of global crime governance is becoming a cultural process. In his work *The Culture of Control* (2002) David Garland identifies a loss of faith in expert systems, i.e., a loss of faith in the state's ability to control crime resulting in a climate of insecurity which brings with it consumer demand for the multiplying products of the security market (Pavarini, 1997; Kempa et. al, 2004). In his earlier work, Garland sees this loss of faith in criminal justice as a 'new sense of the failure of criminal justice agencies, and a more limited sense of the state's powers to regulate conduct and prohibit deviance' (Garland, 1996: 447). An example of this is what Zedner (2006) coins to be 'liquid security', i.e., the shift from the solid-state technology of the criminal justice state to the more fluid, transient and dispersed operations of the private security industry. She questions in this context, whether the state is better understood as co-regulator or as 'pimp to the private security industry' (Zedner, 2006) and Garland terms this 'supply side criminology', i.e., 'a new programme of action directed towards the conduct of potential victims through the private arm of the state targeted at those routines of everyday life which create criminal opportunities as an unintended by-product' (1996: 451).

These observations on the shift to a security-heavy crime control agenda are congruent in many ways with the securitisation of the alcohol industry in Ecuador, e.g., the spaces and flows of distribution, consumption and retail. This is because to borrow from Gledhill (2015: 19),

the issue of contraband alcohol is 'securitised' in that it passes from the 'realm of ordinary politicised questions, becoming an issue that threatens the very survival of states and their citizens, defined not as individuals but as the collective object 'society'.

Of particular interest in this context is Ecuador's new counter contraband strategy 'SIMAR', meaning Identification, Marking, and Tracking system which consists of a comprehensive database and information bank storing production, commercialisation, and tax information for alcohol which is not only imported into the country but also produced locally (Ernst & Young 2014). SIMAR operates through

the implementation of physical and technical components; through this system, tracking and tracing bottles is made possible (Ernst & Young 2014). At the same time, SIMAR employs a complex information and security system, where the former is aimed at compiling data on manufacturers, importers, retailers and medium-sized vendors and the latter is made up of a barcode or physical component adhered to the bottle allowing the authenticity of each bottle to be confirmed (Ernst & Young 2014). In line with these initiatives, Crawford (2002: 208) offers some insight and observes how ‘symbols of trust and security take less the human form of a police officer’ and more the form of virtual, institutional fixtures such as the SIMAR-approved hologram or seal on bottles.

The costly and robust SIMAR tracking and tracing system can equally be viewed through a critical lens by taking the above mentioned ideas on risk and situating them with recent technological advancements. Underpinning this is the common theme latent in policy documents and counter contraband measures following a rationale which seeks to shut down and secure any exposed gaps and vulnerabilities. One notable example of this in the context of tobacco control is Article 13 of the WHO Protocol on illicit trade which seeks to implement a ban on duty-free sales of tobacco with the argument that duty-free channels are points of diversion into the black market (FCTC 2012). This pattern follows the imperative that failing to shut down any exposed gaps or vulnerable points is extremely risky and unsafe and as Krahmman (2011) for example points out, the anticipation and calculation of risks has paved the way for private companies to commodify risk and security in Europe and North America. Similarly, Lupton (1999) holds that risk is seen as an institutional strategy of regulatory power through which populations and individuals are monitored through the goals of neoliberalism. Consequently, the security and crime control apparatus dealing with contraband ‘stresses the modification of situations and opportunity structures rather than the reform of deviant individuals; prescribing situational engineering rather than social engineering’ (Garland 2001: 182). A prime example of this in the case of Ecuador is the use of large x-ray machines on the border with Peru used to scan vehicles and detect contraband (Paspuel 2014). Adding to this, there are numerous manufacturers of contraband detection equipment (see SAS R&D; CSECO; SpyZone) marketing x-ray scanners, density metres and even personal radiation detectors aimed to ‘quickly and discreetly locate radiation threats in an unpredictable radiation background’ (CSECO 2017).

The underlying theme and goal of these products for contraband detection is to completely intercept any opportunities which would allow individuals to bring contraband products into a country. As such, these market-driven initiatives for contraband detection resonate with a vital question within the field of criminology, namely whether opportunity makes the offender or if the offender makes an

opportunity (Zabyelina 2017). This line of thought is characterised by an emphasis on how opportunity creates crime and has received broad support among criminologists and practitioners focusing on developing situational crime prevention approaches (SCP) and planning initiatives aimed at modifying and designing physical environments (e.g., border checkpoints such as those in Ecuador using vehicle x-ray machines, airports) in order to prevent crime (see Clarke 1980; Brantingham and Brantingham 1990). Following this, opportunities are necessary within a specific environment for a crime to take place (see Felson and Clarke 1998) and to borrow from Felson (2010), ‘the nature of opportunity affects what, where, how and against whom crimes are committed. In a given situation, it shapes what choices offenders make. These perspectives further suggest that offenders look for opportunities to exploit (Zabyelina 2017). To exemplify this, Klima (2011) has shown how the transport sector’s vulnerability to crime has two dimensions: on one side, opportunities play a vital role and on the other, poor regulation is exploited. While Klima (2011) has shown that both weaknesses might run in parallel and do not necessarily depend on each other, spatial-temporal analyses of crime (Newton and Felson 2015; Newton and Hirschfield 2009) suggest that certain activities occur at a finite number of locations and times and that ‘the movement of offenders is structured and regulated by the daily routines of offenders, and the social and physical environments in which they interact’ (Newton and Felson 2015: 2).

Alternative explanations & analysis

In the context of opportunity theories and structures, one rather interesting angle to the supply side of goods is the CRAVED model (see Clarke 1999; Pires and Petrossian 2016). In accordance with the emergence of ‘opportunity theories’, inter alia Rational Choice Theory (Cornish and Clarke 1986), Crime Pattern Theory (Brantingham and Brantingham 1993), and Routine Activity Theory (Cohen and Nelson 1979), there has been a shift of focus from offenders and victims to targets of crime (Pires and Petrossian 2016). As a result, Ronald Clarke (1999) developed the CRAVED model in order to account for and explain the attributes of inanimate objects of property crime. This approach argued that products which generally have one or more of the following characteristics of concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable, are more likely to be stolen (Clarke, 1999). This approach has enabled the study of what offenders value and prefer during the theft stage (and in the case of alcohol, the legal acquisition stage) and what kinds of goods are likely to be found in illicit markets. Because of this, much of the research applying the CRAVED model has centred on the theft stage in order to zoom in on the features and characteristics of most frequently stolen products (see Baker 2003; Fass and Francis 2004). The CRAVED model has therefore solely been applied

to *illegally* acquired goods, i.e. stolen and re-entered into legal and illegal marketplaces. There may be however, another way to apply the CRAVED model by turning to contraband products, which in contrast to existing applications of the CRAVED model, are not illegally acquired but are in fact acquired overseas at low prices and re-introduced into a new market. Specifically, I suggest utilising the CRAVED model to further understand the inflow of contraband alcohol into Ecuador through its borders and what authorities coin to be ‘ant’ contraband, i.e., small volumes of goods entering undeclared at a faster rate (Schuster 2015; Mathews et. al 2012). Adapting the CRAVED model may be useful in the context of contraband alcohol because a wide application of the CRAVED model can help understand the underlying attributes of frequently stolen (or soon-to-be contraband) products at the acquisition stage and may also enable a better understanding of market stages of a specific product (Pires and Petrossian 2016). Furthermore, the versatility of the model proves useful for analysing preventive measures and in the case of Ecuador’s illegal alcohol markets, it enables a closer look at how these measures unfold themselves within the neoliberal framework of security and crime control thoroughly discussed in the following section.

Because the focal point of the CRAVED model is the object itself, e.g., liquor, cigarettes and other goods which resemble the characteristics of concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at how these objects relate to processes of securitisation. Of particular interest in this context is the idea of mundane objects suddenly becoming targets of surveillance and securitisation. In the present case, I outlined the SIMAR tracking system above and in a similar fashion, tobacco products and other mundane objects have become the centre of attention in defining how these objects go from being quotidian to potential threats (e.g. letters being potential letter bombs, bottled water at airport security) (see Aas et. al 2009). Zooming in on this ‘status shift’ of mundane objects to potential threats is important because as Neyland (2009: 39) argues,

objects can be conceived as focal points for networks of relations, held together by governance and accountability relations, which attempt to reorient actions around objects to confirm transformations of the objects’ ontological status as no longer mundane but now a matter of concern.

As such, issues of security and insecurity can evolve through the mundane ontology of things. What this means is that specific categories of previously ordinary, everyday objects have also been called to attention where for example backpacks, plastic bags, cars and vans, and recently water bottles or other liquid containers have begun to shift from the ordinary, comfortable and everyday into catego-

ries of suspicion (Neyland 2009). This is because as Neyland (2009) has found through his ethnographic research at airports, mundane and ordinary objects begin to raise challenging, provocative and unsettling questions of our sense of security and insecurity when something goes bad. To understand how an ordinary item suddenly becomes an issue of concern in daily life, it is possible to shift to the field of surveillance studies as a point of departure. In this line of thought, CCTV systems (Norris and Armstrong 1999), airports (Neyland 2009; Adey 2004), the web (Wall 2011) have been studied in order to analyse issues of (in)security. At the same time, this wide ranging field of studies has failed to focus on the identity, nature, and materiality of objects encompassed by the subject matter of surveillance. The pressing question then is what role do ordinary items such as liquor bottles and their adhered hologram labels and physical components play?

This question unfolds for instance an interesting and timely dialogue looking at the intersection of surveillance and consumption. In this regard, consumption becomes the focus of surveillance where for example, internet consumer and browsing patterns are increasingly surveilled through the use of cookies⁴, and IP⁵ tracking. The surveillance of consumption not only takes place online but also manifests itself in the present case through the implementation of the SIMAR tracking system. As such, the surveillance of consumption brings with it a shift in how consumers and users relate to the now surveilled platforms and products, either in on or offline spheres. This resonates to some extent with what Neyland (2009: 39) calls ‘ontological shifts’ in mundane objects where these begin to simultaneously occupy several ontological positions. For example, such shifts imply a re-categorisation of objects where these no longer possess their previous ontological status of simply being letters or sharp objects but instead are seen as letter bombs or potential weapons. In the case of alcohol and the security components of the SIMAR system, liquor bottles which do not comply with these regulations are now assigned the category of ‘suspicious’, counterfeit, and potentially dangerous. In contrast, those which are properly marked and carrying the required components under SIMAR guidelines, cease being simply an ordinary bottle of alcohol and form part of a new category of safe-to-drink, state-and industry-approved products.

In line with these perspectives, a Foucaultian input (1977) would suggest for example that through such measures, social control and governance is readily made possible for the state apparatus to control how consumer relationships to previously ordinary and quotidian objects unfold. In this sense,

⁴ A small text file (up to 4KB) created by a website that is stored in the user's computer either temporarily for that session only or permanently on the hard disk (persistent cookie). Cookies provide a way for the website to recognise users and keep track of preferences (PC Mag 2017)

⁵ Internet Protocol Address refers to the numeric address of a computer on the Internet (Merriam Webster 2017)

Neyland (2009) sees how a network of governance and accountability relations establishes the ways in which letters should be handled given the potential of letter bombs, thus establishing the new identity for the object at the heart of accountability. The result of this is the emergence of a network of relations built around the mundane object; the network draws together entities and actors to manage the risks, threats and responsibilities encompassing the object at hand. Zooming in on this, the long and extended (private) arm of the state reaches security companies (see list above of relevant contraband detection manufacturers) and a myriad of bureaucratic institutions all tasked and commissioned to regulate and control threats as the dominant network of governance and accountability. An example of some of these networks of governance in the case of Ecuador and contraband is the Switzerland-based company SICPA which provides secured identification, traceability, and authentication solutions and services (Bloomberg 2017). Coining itself as an enabler of trust (SICPA 2017), the company offers security ink solutions for security applications, such as banknotes, official identity documents (passports, identity cards, birth certificates, etc.), postage stamps, tax banderoles, security labels, and product markings and also provides SICPATRACE, a multi-product and multi-functional system that provides visibility and accountability of national production and import of products⁶ (Bloomberg 2017). Together, these networks change the ways in which mundane objects are treated and are a causal factor in an object's ontological transformation. This is because such networks reorient their activities and operations around the object in focus (in this case liquor bottles) and establish new and different ways as to how they should interact with said objects. Under this line of thought, liquor bottles should be treated differently and with suspicion as they should be seen as potential objects of crime. As a consequence of this, those involved in contact with liquor distribution, import, or even travellers bringing duty free goods should also in the eyes of the control apparatus, be handled and treated as suspicious.

Mundane objects and the formation of governance

The formation of networks seeking to govern and transform the ontology of mundane objects into potentially dangerous ones has a strong educational component compelled to produce 'safe environments' and educate consumers. Neyland (2009) shows for example how airport surveillance is actually about educating passengers on their security responsibilities, changing their consciousness and

⁶Products under SICPA's belt include tobacco, alcoholic beverages, pharmaceuticals, and food and soft drinks; and tailored solutions and services to industry comprising integrated and multi-layered authentication, anti-tampering, identification, and traceability to ensure product and supply chain integrity. The company serves governments, central banks, and high-security printers; and agrochemicals, apparel, explosives and fireworks, fast moving consumer goods, food and beverage, health and personal care, luxury industry, mechanical spare parts, returnable assets, watch, and wood and timber industries worldwide.

eventually turning them from ‘security unready’ passengers to ‘security ready’ passengers (Aas et. al 2009). Applied to the case of SIMAR and contraband alcohol, the bottle securitising process serves an equal function of educating consumers to purchase ‘legal’ alcohol which complies with the law as opposed to purchasing bottles with labels in other languages and which do not display the government approved holograms of SIMAR. As I mentioned above, this process of educating individuals finds resonance with Crawford’s insight on (2002: 208) how ‘symbols of trust and security take the form of virtual, institutional fixtures such as the SIMAR-approved hologram or seal on bottles’. The idea behind this then is for consumers to affirm and recognise this new ontological status of bottles displaying ‘certified’ ‘consumption-ready’ fixtures signalling that only and exclusively these products may be consumed. The result of this process, to borrow from Neyland (2009: 38) is that

Attempts to lift objects out of their ordinariness and into the category of things that now need attention require shifting stubborn and routinised network relations. The people and things connected around the object need to act and inter-relate in new ways.

One way through which interaction with previously mundane objects is re-calibrated occurs through the use of checkpoint security. In a similar fashion to the surveillance of consumption and supply chain, checkpoints can also be viewed as a form of surveillance in their own right changing the way in which networks and control agents inter-relate with people, objects and data. This is because as Katja Aas (2005) posits, security checkpoints embody a very particular type of response to perceived social and political threats of unsecured flows of people (and in this case also goods) across borders. In line with this, Jones (2009: 81) holds that checkpoint security typically ‘exploits constraint measures in order to process people passing through the checkpoints and architecture’ is at the heart of checkpoints.’ In this case, and through the use of architecture, e.g. metal detectors, x-ray scanners, checkpoints, road blocks, the constraints exploited are usually of either physical limits of the body, which are exploited in terms of channelling individuals along channels and through gateways; and checking, performing checks on people, their bodies, identities and belongings. Lyon (2005) identifies in this process one central feature where categories are produced by control agents themselves through which items and groups of persons may be sorted (e.g., one checkpoint at borders for travellers with nothing to declare to customs and another for those with taxable goods). To situate this perspective on the present study, the term surveillance is most useful as it bears with it a connotation of [state] attempts to know about and hence gain power and advantage over a population, with the finality of governing it more effectively and efficiently (Foucault 1979). As such, the use of regulated gateways such as x-ray scanners and checkpoints marks a different kind of regulatory tactic *sui gen-*

eris: namely that of waiting for a segment of the population to present themselves before the checkpoint to gather and store data on individuals, goods, and vehicles passing through the border (Jones 2009). This process has, according to Lyon (2006) and Jones (2009) one central goal where

If personal data can be extracted, combined, and extrapolated in order to create profiles of potential consumers for targeted marketing purposes, then, by a similar logic, such data can be similarly processed in order to identify and isolate groups and persons that may be thought of as potential perpetrators of ‘terrorist’ acts.

(Lyon 2006: 404)

In the case of contraband alcohol in Ecuador, I suggest replacing the term above ‘terrorist acts’ with ‘acts seeking to discredit and disqualify the current and ongoing “Citizen’s Revolution” of Rafael Correa’s government’. As such, gateway and security checkpoints can be seen as a central device in perpetuating wider social exclusion (Jones 2009) and in the present case, exclusion and tight control for those who instead of supporting locally produced liquor chose in their own right and legitimacy to purchase contraband, foreign-brought products. One angle to this points to Jock Young (2007) who saw and identified late modernity’s exclusionary tendencies of consumer capitalism (1999; 2007). Under the recent tax increases and throughout the ten year reign of the Citizen’s Revolution, authorities have been adamant in emphasising and promoting consumption of locally produced goods as opposed to imported ones (Pallares 2016). President Correa has been known to demonise his opponents and takes a rather harsh stance towards the *pelucones*, or wealthy upper-middle classes who express their outrage and concern of not having access to certain goods as a result of the recent tax laws (Pallares 2017). As such, Jones (2009) offers an interesting point to be applied in this scenario where

the drive for security takes place against the backdrop of a perceived world of insecurity, a world in which significant flows of people make some fearful of introducing dangers ‘from the outside’, or of allowing dangerous networks to develop.

In this context, I employ Jones’ (2009) term of security as a malleable conceptual construct denoting security and protection against outside forces which could destabilise national production, or undermine the commitment of the Citizen’s Revolution to rid itself of Western influence and products. To this end, security checkpoints can be seen as carrying out situated, social-controlling roles within a wider social geographic context of managing flows of people, or of responding to perceived insecurities (Lyon 2007 cited in Jones 2009). In this regard, through security checkpoints, what are actually

being socially sorted are not just data but also real bodies and goods such as alcohol and other taxable commodities. This is because security checkpoints (and thus policies and programmes implemented to run these such as SIMAR) effectively operate on a ‘standalone’ basis, subject to specific internal mechanisms and dynamics (Jones 2009: 98). Expanding on this, specific internal mechanisms or dynamics can be interpreted in the present context to suggest that Ecuador’s strict import taxes and policies have in fact a strong ideological component of isolationism through the promotion and emphasis on national production as opposed to liquor imports.

Conceptually, taking security checkpoints apart and distinguishing between these various modes of functioning is valuable when trying to think about what security systems and checkpoints like SIMAR are trying to achieve in light of the Citizen’s Revolution. One approach proposed by Schneier (2006) seeks to distinguish between verification and identification functions of checkpoint security systems. With regard to verification, a person’s details or biometric measurements are usually checked for a match with those previously obtained from or allocated to them. Equally, using the labelling and hologram system on bottles and now cigarettes (see KPMG GS1 2014), it is possible to track not only individuals violating contraband laws but each stage of the supply chain, as well as the origin and manufacturer for each individual product. With the second function of identification, identification details supplied (e.g. passports, relevant import documentation, customs declarations) are checked against the whole database, seeking a unique match, to establish identity and in the case of alcohol, to establish authenticity. A further category suggested by Schneier (2006) is that of authentication where it is to be established whether the person or item(s) in question are who they claim to be. These forms of security are often referred to colloquially as ‘airport-style security’ suggesting that such practices may have recently taken a certain cultural life of their own (Jones 2009).

Zooming in on the idea of how security practices take a certain cultural life of their own, it is worthwhile to consider the various ways in which one can ‘extract’ or seek to understand the culture behind border policing, security and surveillance in Ecuador and the region. This is valuable because as Jones (2009) notes, illicit markets are ‘domesticated’ by people living near or working within borderland regions. Following this, one could argue that contraband alcohol in Ecuador is the result of either corrupt government officials ‘looking the other way’ or it may be to some extent legitimised by consumers themselves who seek to score better bargains or purchase brands otherwise not usually available in major Ecuadorean supermarkets/retailers. As such, the phenomenon of contraband has become a way of Ecuadorean people’s culture and is legitimised through the mechanisms of commercial exchange which sustain the country’s national culture. Ruiz (2015) sees Ecuadorean contraband goods

as ‘complimentary asymmetries’ which are the result of economic policies and import restrictions. Contraband is seen by many (SEANAE 2017; Interpol 2016) as an old problem with new players, namely transnational organised criminal groups (TOC) or individuals entering the country multiple times to smuggle in goods. Adding to this, Ecuador’s Health Minister at the time David Chiriboga highlighted in an interview with the BBC⁷;

In Ecuador we have a very lax culture with respect to alcohol. (...). It is very worrying that Ecuador ranks as the second country with the highest alcohol consumption rate per capita in the region. There is a combination of factors at play, from sociocultural patterns to a very traditionally lax system when it comes to alcohol control.

Localising governance networks and ideologies

In line with Jones’ (2009) idea of how security practices take a certain cultural life of their own, Chiriboga’s (2011) use of the term *cultura laxa*, or lax culture in the context of alcohol control finds resonance. Referring to the problem of alcohol consumption and its control in Ecuador as a ‘lax culture’ Chiriboga’s remarks unfold connotations and issues of authority, control, and corruption which are socially embedded and manifested in what the Ecuadorean scholar Bolívar Echeverría calls *el ethos barroco*, or baroque ethos (Echeverría 2008). For Echeverría, the *ethos barroco* is an alternative proposal to modernity, and as such, it is an essentially cultural and social phenomenon, a principle for the order of things and relations in the Andean world (Echeverría 2008). The term *ethos* in this context is suggestive of the customs, behaviours and habits which are characteristic of *mestizo* and Andean culture. It signals the emergence of an attitude defiant to rules, regulations, the law and most importantly, the imposition of these brought about by neoliberalism. The *ethos barroco* is a conceptual construct which can be usefully employed to understand the roots of corruption and lax culture behind alcohol control; this is because it follows a logic through which the *mestizo* re-invents the indigenous and colonised Andean world; it proposes new forms of relating and cohabiting in the post-colonial by operating with a resistance to modern productivity, functionality and order. In this regard, the construct of the *ethos barroco* suggests that lax customs and alcohol control is symptomatic of an already institutionalised practice and culture characterised by officials’ nonchalance and indifference with regard to the policing of borders (see Fried et. al 2010; Cruz 2015).

⁷ The full interview is available in Spanish. Translation of the original text by myself.

This brief digression into the *ethos barroco* as a construct for seeking to explain how security practices take a culture of their own is important and valuable because as Bowling (2011) notes, there are doubts raised as to the relevance and applicability of contemporary criminology to the global South, and corresponding potential for harm in the transplantation of criminological concepts to these environments. Furthermore, Nelken (2012) warns in this context against the risk of taking as global what is in fact local and as a result, what takes place is an appropriation of local happenings viewed through the lens of the global North for criminologists and the entire crime control apparatus to study and analyse on their own terms. An example of this are some of the recent efforts implemented by the leading tobacco firm Philip Morris International to stop the illegal tobacco trade which seek to use a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to the nature of illicit markets. In turn, irrespective of whether or not the allegedly lax control culture of alcohol in Ecuador is attributed to nonchalance, indifference and resistance to change embodied in the *ethos barroco*, looking at processes of border and checkpoint securitisation through an alternative lens brings critical insights as to how knowledge is produced and co-produced in the field of criminology. This matters because criminology has ‘the most dangerous relationship to power: the categories and classifications, the labels and diagnoses and the images of the criminal produced by criminologists are stigmatising and pejorative’ (Hudson 2000 cited in Lumsden and Winter 2014: 1). Whether or not these labels are applied to *contrabandistas* or lax customs officials, ‘criminology must avoid the pit-fall of regular sociology and its sub disciplines, wherein the researchers not only imposed their own reality on the “subjects”, but assume an all-knowing status with the consequence that research findings contradicted reality (Oriola 2006: 123). To this end, a critical and sensitive perspective on the production of knowledge within criminology states that not only the ‘what’ of criminology matters, but also the ‘where’ and the ‘who’ (Hoyle and Bosworth, 2011).

Closing thoughts

This research study sought to provide a critical and sensitive perspective on current shifts in crime control within the context of illicit markets and more specifically within the context of contraband alcohol in Ecuador. The case of contraband in Ecuador is indeed not a stand-alone and in no way a one of a kind issue; as shown above, processes of securitisation unfold at rapid speeds and involve to the extent possible, private actors, solution providers and corporate entities. The difference however, lies in the fact that such solutions to mitigate and contain contraband are localised (SIMAR) and can resemble deeply embedded cultural practices (lax culture on alcohol, corruption). This study has taken these phenomena and situated them within a critical line of thought to uncover how the crime control apparatus emerges to pursue its interests and propagate an agenda focused on threat containment, risk mitigation and social exclusion. To this extent, crime control strategies in Ecuador resemble those of the neoliberal and corporatised state; namely those that heavily rely on moral panics, situational crime prevention and securitisation of the mundane.

Finally, this study could in fact be restricted to some extent by some minor limitations which could easily be addressed with the proper methodology, research strategy and sufficient time to carry out field work to address such issues and themes 'in the heart of the action' as Ferrell (1997) once argued. In this regard, this study finds a somewhat frustrating limitation in that it is purely theoretical and reliant on existing theorisations and conceptions on the topics covered. In this capacity, the study would further benefit from qualitatively rich encounters with law enforcement, smugglers, lawyers and other stakeholders. In doing so, the immediacy of crime (Ferrell 1997) and its subsequent qualitative in-field study would perhaps enable deeper engagement with the literature covered and reviewed in this study.

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