

1. Chains, Adhocracy, Categorical Value

Viewed as on the fringes of the state, illegal markets are generally understood to require a strong central authority, with violence as a sanctioning capacity to ensure co-ordination and co-operation, and enforce the 'rules of the game'. The organisational form is hierarchical along clan/family lines, with a strong central authority to compensate for high buy-in costs. Think of The Sopranos.

Alternatively, in the Global South, the organisational form is viewed as flat, organised along bonds of ethnicity, with relatively low buy-in costs that counteract the need for centralised authority. Think of Somali piracy.

Likewise, important co-ordination problems in illegal markets, like the value of the commodity (how much we think something is worth)—be it organs, child pornography or narcotic drugs—is believed to be beyond doubt. These assumptions underpin typical models of organised crime.

The *cannabis sativa* market inverts these assumptions. It appears to lack organisational form, yet corresponds to categorical distinctions in value determination. It is not hierarchical, but relatively flat. There is a system of 'bosses' in cultivation who *de facto* 'own' and rent out land, yet a young male floating population is drawn upon for labour. Land owners cut across a range of ages and ethnicities. Pushers, those that distribute cannabis, have a variety of different backgrounds. Some are established, some less so. The threat of violence is rare, yet participants hold and practice strong notions of private property rights. Three features are outlined below:

- A. The organisation of cannabis production and distribution is referred to by my informants as **chain work**:
 - "Me now, I am the grower, then we have the pedlars and we have the main sellers and buyers, that is chain work. I am the grower, I have a middle man, which I can link with and sell it. You see? This is the chain work"
- Nigerian crime syndicates have a similar organisational logic, known as **adhocracy**: the ability to fuse people with different skills together, work on a project and then quickly disband.
- B. The organisational form bare similarity to adhocracy.
 - For instance, some informants bemoaned how everyone is referred to as a "chairman" these days: "Chair? Who? There are many chairmen these days!". Authority is less centralised and more distributed, there is no strict hierarchy.

Informants continually contrast adhoc forms of organisation, with bureaucratic ones, delimiting the boundaries of what we otherwise refer to as the informal economy:

- "Everything is stiff [...] movement is not easy [...] cannot mix well" – such are the problems of getting a citizen's ID card and finding a job in the formal economy.
- C. During price negotiations between pushers and buyers, the discussion is about price, but does not correspond to price as read off the intersection between supply and demand:
 - Tina: "One peku [i.e. ¼ of a kilo] is 50,000, two pekus are 100,000, three pekus are 150,000"
 - Me: "So how does the price of one peku change?"
 - Tina: "This is a small-large peku, maybe 75,000 le, not a large-large peku"

Instead negotiation of 'price' corresponds to **categorical/ordinal schemes of valuation**.

- 1. Social relations not primarily organised around essential identities (e.g. ethnicity, religion), but rather, identity is instrumental.
- 2. Economic behaviour and practice is shaped by these histories of social and cultural change.

Hypothesis: Drug economy not organised around ethnically bonded groups.

Hypothesis: Co-ordination and co-operation in drug economy does not conform to conventional models in economic sociology.

Creolisation considers the processes by which particular cultural patterns and social relations emerge amongst societies that were historically de-socialised and displaced (e.g. returnee slaves). Large number of different ethnicities mixed during the slave to constitute the Sierra Leonean state we see today. Two implications emerge from analysis of these processes of change:

2. Ethics of Illegality

State regulation of economic activity has always remained tenuous in Sierra Leone. Since the chieftaincies of colonial indirect rule; involvement of Lebanese 'strangers' in the diamond trade, and the patrimonial networks holding up Siaka Steven's APC regime – the informal and illegal economy has been integral to the maintenance of state power. In this case, rather than use a functional interpretation of state power and ask if the state has weakened in its command over the bureaucratic apparatus and monopoly over means of violence, it is better to think in terms of regulatory authority (Roitman 2005). A discursive interpretation of the political is taken to emphasise the ability of a given authority—the state, big men, chiefs—to constitute the discursive field of "the economy".

The analysis seeks to ascertain conditions that give rise to particular concepts and objects that constitute the discursive field of the economy, in which particular categories (e.g. informal, illegal), events (slavery, civil war), economic relationships (e.g. redistributive, appropriative) and production of particular kinds of spaces (e.g. the bush, the wharf) turn on historical and contemporary debates regarding the nature of wealth, property, justice and equity.

Historically, the discursive terrain of the economy in Sierra Leone has been contradictory. Events such as the 1898 Hut Tax War; 1931 Tax Rebellion in Kambia, and notions of 'revo-loot-ion' among members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) emphasise radical changes in the nature of economic relationships (e.g. contribution and redistribution) and status of economic concepts (e.g. private property and wealth). This history points to multiple sources of authority in regulating the economy—besides the state—and for the strengthening of *state power* even whilst illegal markets continue to grow.

To analyse the regulation of illegal markets I focus on changing patterns of reasoning in order to ascertain how informants explicate particular economic "truths" regarding the nature of economic objects, concepts and relations. I am interested in how informants comment on their relations to particular kinds of economic truths—on what is illegal, on protecting private property, on legitimate forms of wealth generation, on the point of paying tax—and how they live with these truths yet question them at the same time.

A. Soft Touch vs. Strain

Informants make a distinction between economic practices that, whilst knowingly illegal, are either licit or illicit. "Wi de sten o" (We are straining!) is a common phrase indexing the hard, physical labour associated with cannabis cultivation. *Strain* is contrasted with the work of those engaged in 'soft touch': pickpocketing or burgling homes. Whilst the contrast between *strain* and *soft touch* reasons hard physical labour as licit, the distinction rests on respect for private property against its infringement in theft. There is a strong notion of private property rights among cannabis cultivators. → **Rather than property being conceptualised as an externally imposed rule, it is instead something practiced.**

B. Refraining from Violence

Cannabis pushers put a great deal of work into refraining from the use of physical violence. Routinely they refer to the use of physical violence as being 'advantaged', of gaining an unfair advantage:

- "write ... ADVANTAGE ... when you don't offend someone but they hit you, they are advantaging you".
- "these gangs, these klicks ... fight people quick ... you are advantaged".

Similarly the term 'boff' arises in situations where one should not retaliate and take action, for example against a corrupt police force:

- "You just boff, do nothing".
- **Violence is costly. The practice of refraining from violence holds the cannabis market in a delicate position between being criminalised and yet remaining licit.**

1. What is the organisational form?

2. What are the regulatory mechanisms?

Hypotheses

Chain Work

Notes on the Organisation and Regulation of the Informal Drug Economy in Sierra Leone

1. What is the organisational form of cannabis *sativa* production and distribution?
2. What are the regulatory mechanisms for ensuring co-ordination and co-operation in the drug market?
 - 11 ½ months participant observation
 - 56 interviews with cultivators and distributors
 - Archival research

Research Rationale

Cannabis sativa is the most widely produced and consumed illicit substance in the world (UNODC 2013), with the bulk of cultivation in the Global South. There is a growing sense among policy makers that the "war on drugs" has failed, with decriminalisation and state regulation of cannabis seen as increasingly favourable. Particular attention has focussed on West Africa figuring as a production and distribution hub for a range of narcotic drugs; the activities of which have been associated with increasing levels of gang violence; trafficking and terrorism. Narcotic drugs undermine the rule of law but are an important source of livelihood for the urban and rural poor. Presently there is limited research on how production and distribution of illicit substances in the Global South are organised outside the regulatory framework of the state. This makes it difficult to think about what successful decriminalisation strategies might look like, and what the socio-economic and political effects of narcotics in West Africa might be.