

## Introduction

# *Futurity Beyond the State: Illegal Markets and Imagined Futures in Latin America*

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This collection of articles features field-based research on illegal markets across Latin America, with special attention to the expectations and representations of the future that surround and emerge from people's involvement in illegal economic activities. In contrast to explanatory models in the social sciences that are oriented toward the past and the present—where “an outcome is explained by previous events, leading causally to what is being observed in the present” (Beckert and Suckert 2020, 2)—we are witnessing renewed interest across various disciplines in the future, understood as a temporality that is socially produced, circulated, and experienced. Scholars in anthropology, sociology, and political science are now documenting the ways that people imagine the future and orient themselves in practice toward potential opportunities and outcomes. Futurity has emerged as a keyword that refers to an affective phenomenon with concrete and specific manifestations and significant implications for everyday life.

This introduction overviews the extant literature on futurity and presents a set of distinctions to guide research on representations of the future in social spaces beyond or parallel to state law. Questions of temporality are intrinsic to social science research and analysis, given that social practice involves a temporal dimension; ideas, visions, and perceptions of past and future events are both socially constituted and generative of social processes. There has been limited interest, however, in approaching

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representations of the future as social facts that might explain other social phenomena. Here, we begin by discussing the benefits of such an approach to the social science of economic activity. We then present a typology of illegal markets, one that is sensitive to the interfaces between legality and illegality in market settings. We further stipulate how different kinds of illegality tend to correlate with different levels of social legitimacy, and we examine how these factors might shape perceptions of the future and associated practices. We analyze the relationship between morality and futurity to argue that moral evaluations and judgments are constitutive of people's visions of the future. Finally, we address the relationship of futurity to other powerful sources of hope and aspiration in Latin America: the state, governments, and private corporations.

## SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURITY

Amid intensifying concerns about climate, disease, and inequality, the future holds our attention in unprecedented ways. Recent social science research on futurity has highlighted the role of expectations, promises, and visions of the future in the reproduction of capitalist dynamics (Fischer 2014; Beckert 2016; Miyazaki and Swedberg 2017; Beckert and Bronk 2018) and in processes of technological innovation (Brown and Rappert 2000; Jasanoff and Kim 2009; Harrison 2017). Scholars have also examined related discourses and experiences of “waiting” (Janeja and Bandak 2018), practices of patience, and the feelings of anticipation and frustration that arise as the future unfolds (or fails to unfold) in the ways that people expect. Notably, research on these dynamics in Latin America has demonstrated how structures of social domination depend on the effective promotion of certain expectations and the conditioning of people to wait “for the state” (Auyero 2012) to deliver on promises of opportunity, care, and assistance.

There has been special interest in the ethnographic study of hope as a particularly powerful future orientation and affective state, with researchers emphasizing the role of hope in knowledge formation (Miyazaki 2006), dealing with or overcoming uncertainty (Kleist and Jansen 2016), and enacting social change (Mische 2009). The current wave of research on hope would seem to build on or complement previous scholarship on “aspiration,” which has been a more traditional theme in sociology (Merton 1963; Morgan 2007; Frye 2012). It is important for our purposes here that aspiration has been examined extensively in contexts of inequality (MacLeod 1995), where it may serve as a source of motivation for social and political mobilization among marginalized populations or compel forms of economic exchange that take place outside the bounds of state law (Dewey 2020). We appreciate aspiration as one driver of people's involvement in criminalized spheres of production and exchange in Latin America, especially since conditions of economic, legal, and social inequality foreclose formal channels of employment for so many people.

Together with other scholars examining futurity, we are interested in how optimistic notions of progress, advancement, achievement, modernity, class

mobility, and geographical mobility inspire hope, fuel aspirations, and shape economic practices. However, we advocate broadening the analytical scope of social science research to include other, less optimistic aspects of what people imagine for the future, including negatively perceived risks and challenges. We view pessimism, doubtfulness, and other uneasy orientations and expectations to be just as important as hope and aspiration in shaping people's lives. A more expansive account of future orientations is particularly important for research in Latin America, given the sharp and rapid economic fluctuations across the region and their potential impact on people's representations of and expectations for the future. This collection takes an ecumenical approach as we seek to ascertain how the future matters for social action in each of the settings under study.

We also aim to sharpen social scientific analysis by posing the question: What is the nature of "the future" in studies of futurity? As Beckert and Suckert (2020) have recently argued, scholars tend to approach people's perceptions of the future in one of two ways: as variable outcomes dependent on people's present actions, including the collective actions that comprise institutions; or as an image or projection that exerts influence on people's present actions. In the first case, perceptions of the future act as an explanandum. The underlying assumption is that certain present economic activities or institutions help to produce specific imagined future scenarios. Examples of this case include the idea that state interventions will contribute to the general welfare, that education will open up future opportunities, or that market dynamics will produce beneficial effects. In these examples, visions of the future are dependent on current institutional arrangements or actions.

In the second case, imagined futures are the explanans of current practices. That is, future imaginaries (as expressed in hopes, aspirations, and wishes) are said to guide people's actions in the present. Robert Merton's 1963 theory of the compelling influence of cultural goals on people's behavior exemplifies this approach. A more recent example is Edward Fischer's multisited 2014 research on the "good life," which examines how particular models of the future, influenced by cultural norms and collective values, guide people's economic behavior.

Rather than adopting *a priori* a view of the future as either an explanandum or an explanans, we see value in a flexible methodology that holds open the possibility that both modes of futurity may be relevant in a given social context. Jens Beckert's *Imagined Futures* (2016) provides a road map for this combined approach. In theorizing social dynamics of contemporary global capitalism, Beckert asserts that future imaginaries help to explain economic behaviors at the same time that the structures of capitalist market systems help to constitute these imagined futures. Capitalist markets, Beckert argues, oblige people to overcome or otherwise contend with uncertainty by projecting and reckoning with the possible outcomes of their economic actions. The content of these projections and expectations depends on the interactions of individual market actors, but the need to imagine future scenarios—to rely on and make use of imagined futures to guide decisionmaking—arises because people perpetually confront uncertainty in contexts of capitalist exchange.

We take from this aspect of Beckert's analysis that the *form* of future orientations is strongly correlated with the mode of production and exchange, while the *content* of future imaginaries needs to be understood in relation to specific social contexts. Building on these insights, we advocate research that situates economic actions amid the institutional dynamics, historical processes, and legal and regulatory frames that can mitigate or compound uncertainty and ambiguity and that are likely to shape visions of the future.

## FUTURITY IN ILLEGAL ECONOMIES

This special section is intended both to broaden and to sharpen social science research on futurity. A main motivation behind our efforts is the lack of research on future imaginaries among people who participate in illegal markets. In spite of the preponderance of illegal and informal economic activities worldwide and their ubiquity in Latin America, research has paid surprisingly little attention to people's perceptions of the future in these contexts. We are not suggesting that the extant literature does not include evidence of future expectations among people participating in illegal markets. Recent studies describe various affects and orientations toward the future, including the aspirational efforts of cartels and gang members to expand the drug trade, people's fears of potential violence in informal and illegal markets, parents' anxieties about their children's future, and cynicism about the state's potential to curb crime, for example (Auyero and Berti 2015; Durán-Martínez 2018; Caldeira 2000; Arias 2019; Rodgers 2004). Our point is that these studies have not treated representations of the future as explanations of present practices (future as explanans), nor have they given direct attention to how future orientations might be dependent on unfolding circumstances (future as explanandum). More concerted attention to futurity could amplify scholarship on illegal markets in Latin America in meaningful and consequential ways.

The examples that the current literature offers of how people conceptualize and evaluate the future point to the important role of future imaginaries in structuring illegal markets. Debates across Latin America about the legalization of marijuana, for example, have arisen not only in response to the past and present injustices of mass incarceration and the violence of the War of Drugs. Support for medical and recreational marijuana has also been fomented amid promises of the plant's health and economic benefits and as part of the search for alternative legal, public health, and educational approaches to drug use (Dioun and Haveman 2017; Pedersen and Sandberg 2013). Around the world, calls to outlaw the hunting of endangered animal species and the trade in products derived from poached animals have been motivated by fears of the impending extinction of valued species and imaginings of what a world without elephants, rhinoceros, and other large mammals, for instance, might look like (Hübschle 2017).

Similarly, policy debates about the globalized illegal trade in antiquities are animated by concerns about how the loss of cultural heritage will impact future

generations (Yates 2019). In other sectors, from organ trafficking to prostitution and gambling, claims about how “the market” or “market dynamics” might affect particular populations now and in the future figure prominently in demands for criminalization and enforcement (Steiner 2013; Trespeuch and Steiner 2015). These examples illustrate the dynamic interplay between representations of the future and policy decisions about whether to permit or restrict certain activities. The laws and regulations that render markets illegal, as well as the social processes through which questions of law and regulation come to matter for people involved in these markets, need to be analyzed with reference to future imaginaries and associated narratives and practices.

Our attention to futurity in the context of illegal markets is inspired by a number of recent studies in anthropology and economic sociology that emphasize the cultural and economic importance of illegal activities, both for the regular functioning of market systems and for the diverse forms of value that emerge from informal and illegal practices. We have been influenced by work on the concept of illegalization (Thomas and Galemba 2013), alternative norms and modes of ethical reasoning generated alongside and through illegal markets (Panella and Thomas 2015; Roitman 2004), the state’s role in modeling and managing frontiers of legality (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Das and Poole 2004; Heyman 1999; Van Schendel and Abraham 2005), and the complex sociological interfaces between legality and illegality (Beckert and Dewey 2017). Building on this scholarship, the contributions to this special section demonstrate the importance of apprehending illegal practices from the perspectives of the actors involved and with attention to their visions of the future. The result is a set of case studies that challenge conventional approaches to core social science issues, especially social legitimacy, formal and informal authority, and violence.

While our focus is on economic activities that have been illegalized by state authorities, we understand that illegalization is not a totalizing process. In practice, the lines between legal and illegal and legitimate and illegitimate activities may be ambiguous, historically dynamic, and continually contested among the individuals and communities who participate in these activities or who are impacted by them. As Panella and Thomas (2015, 8) argue, illegality is “a politicized category that says less about what targeted groups are doing and more about the values and goals of states” and transnational institutions. Nevertheless, when the legality and legitimacy of people’s lives and livelihoods are called into question via processes of illegalization, the dynamics of problematization can generate varied modes of engagement with states and market systems (Roitman 2004). We are interested here in understanding how such contestation can also lend itself to diverse visions of the future.

One effect of the process of illegalization is that people involved in illegal activities commonly rely on informal institutional arrangements to order and facilitate market exchange. In legal markets, people tend to act with some expectation that the state will intervene in cases of breach of contract or conflicts over property rights. In illegal markets, the state may play little or no positive role in supporting the goals,

obligations, and desires of individuals. Instead, state authorities either limit economic activities (working to prevent or punish outlawed transactions) or play a parasitic role (demanding bribes, for example, in exchange for allowing illegal exchanges to take place).<sup>1</sup>

If we define illegal markets as arenas of competitive exchange in which the state cannot or refuses to secure property rights, resolve conflicts, or provide other market-related supports, then we have to look elsewhere for these ordering arrangements. We therefore advocate attention to the informal institutions that regulate competition and cooperation and through which people involved in illegal economic activities manage disputes, generate capital investment, and set the parameters of fairness. People invest in these institutions as a way of “getting things done” (Ledeneva 2018, 1). In turn, these institutions come to structure what seems possible.

An underlying thesis of this special section is therefore that informal institutional arrangements structure and support expectations for the future among participants in illegal markets. To put it another way, we contend that particular ideas about what the future holds, as well as specific practices of imagining possible futures, emerge in close relationship with the institutions that facilitate market activity.

This does not necessarily mean that imagined futures in the context of illegal economies are of a different type than the futures that people imagine in contexts dominated by legality. What do differ, however, are the mechanisms through which hopes, fears, aspirations, and desires emerge. Future imaginaries among people involved in illegal economic activities may be fueled and supported by less explicit agreements, strategically concealed practices, and values and moralities that are in tension with hegemonic notions of right and wrong. For example, as demonstrated in the contribution to this section by Arias and Duica, coca growers in Colombia rely on informal institutional arrangements to facilitate their trade. Based on varying degrees of confidence in these institutions and their perceptions of the threats posed by the state and paramilitary forces, coca growers embrace varying strategies—resistance, protest, misdirection, and exit—to protect their livelihoods. Across all the articles presented here, we see how both formal and informal institutions shape ideas about potential futures as people work with (and sometimes against) various mechanisms of regulation and control.

## THE LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY FACTORS

Given the diversity that characterizes illegal markets in Latin America, our analysis of futurity must be sensitive not only to broad differences between formal and informal institutions, but also to the specific institutional arrangements and cultural dynamics of each setting. The research featured in this section spans the drug trade in Putumayo, Colombia; land occupation in Medellín; fraud in Venezuela; and gang activity in Nicaragua. To avoid overgeneralizing about illegality and futurity across these contexts, we propose a differentiated approach based on two criteria. First, drawing on previous work in economic sociology (Beckert and Wehinger 2013; Beckert and Dewey 2017), we distinguish five types of illegal markets according to

the point at which the products or activities involved become illegal. In other words, this typology—what we refer to as the legality factor—denotes what qualifies a market as illegal. Is it the nature of the product being sold, for instance, or the mechanism of exchange?

By making this aspect of a given economic activity explicit and available for comparison, we are also highlighting important dynamics of surveillance and domination, including how or to what extent states seek to control the activity, as well as how actors might be able to utilize or take advantage of state laws and regulations. In the cases presented in this collection, market participants' positions in society, economic success, relationships with state authorities, and perspectives on the future are all influenced by the nature of the commodities they buy and sell and the type of illegal behavior they engage in.

Second, we differentiate illegal markets according to whether they enjoy greater or lesser social legitimacy or acceptance in the context under consideration.<sup>2</sup> We term this the legitimacy factor. This is an important variable because the degree of social legitimacy ascribed to an illegal economic activity is likely to influence how it is policed or otherwise controlled by both states and communities and to what extent social or political resistance is possible. The legitimacy factor also matters in terms of which populations are likely to become involved in the activity and how integrated these actors are with broader formal and informal institutions at multiple scales of governance and regulation.

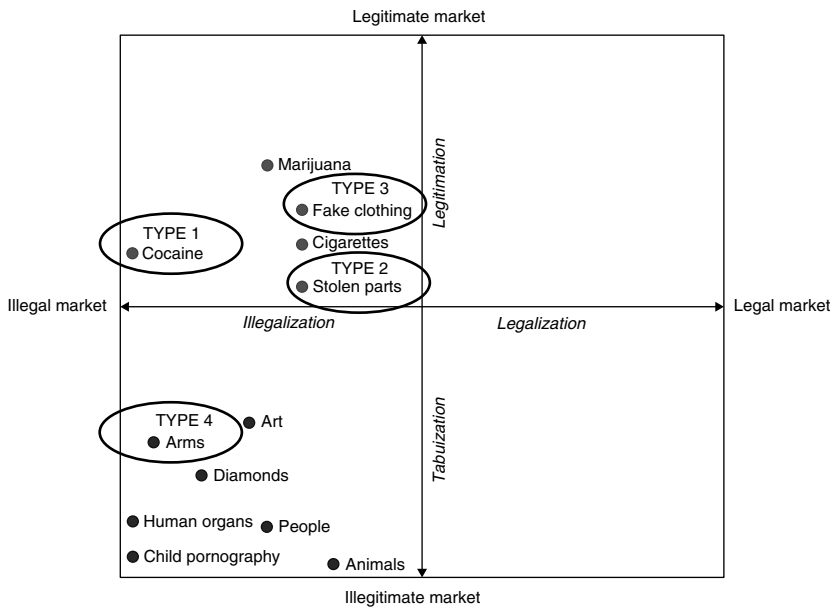
In what follows, we first describe five different market types according to the legality factor, and then discuss the issue of social legitimacy (see figure 1). Both factors, we hope to demonstrate, help to condition relationships to the state and formal markets, shape the kinds of institutional arrangements that undergird the functioning of illegal markets, and therefore influence the future imaginaries of the market participants.

## **SPECIFYING ILLEGALITY: THE LEGALITY FACTOR**

Illegalization is a diverse process, and what makes a market “illegal” varies according to both the type of economic activity and the aims of the state or transnational institutions that seek to control or eliminate it. A typology of such markets provides analytical tools for assessing and comparing illegal market sectors, on the one hand, and their relationships to states and other authorities, on the other hand. In setting up these comparisons, our broader aim is to understand how different types of illegality and the different institutional arrangements that undergird them might shape future orientations among market participants.

A first type of illegal market is characterized by the circulation of goods (or services) that are legally prohibited. In other words, the traded commodities themselves, as well as their production, distribution, and consumption, have been illegalized. Examples of this type of market include child pornography and child prostitution, as well as illegal drugs. In the case of coca in Colombia, as examined by Arias and Duica, the crop's cultivation is prohibited, which forces peasants at

Figure 1. Dimensions of the Legal/Illegal and Legitimate/Illegitimate, Indicating the Legality Factor for Several Markets. Source: Based on Beckert and Dewey 2017



different times to publicly protest state interventions or placate state agencies, paramilitary forces, and local officials in order to protect their ability to grow and market an illegal product.

The second type of illegal market is the trade of products that have been procured illegally; that is, the trade in stolen goods. In this case, the product as such is legal, but its sale and purchase (if the buyer is aware of the product's origins) is illegal because the seller broke the law in acquiring the product. In markets for stolen cars, antiques, or artwork, for example, what makes the exchanges illegal is the origin or procurement of these commodities rather than their nature. Often, the process of illegalization involves a discursive characterization of these markets as putting buyers at risk for deception (Davison 2011). One of the questions asked in the case study by Rodgers is what happens in a Managua neighborhood when stolen goods are introduced into a market that otherwise functions legally.

A third market type involves products that have been falsified, counterfeited, pirated, or forged. Since the act of copying or reproducing protected materials for private use is legal per globalized intellectual property frameworks, it is the trade of such products that makes these markets illegal. Nevertheless, the sale of counterfeit and pirated goods is a multibillion-dollar global business, and one that is easily



observed in many places throughout Latin America. International institutions such as the World Intellectual Property Organization, state governments, and corporations tend to characterize these markets as both deceptive and potentially dangerous. They point to examples such as counterfeit medicines that could lead to suffering or death and counterfeit airplane parts that could result in crashes as evidence of the need for strict enforcement (e.g., Chaudhry and Zimmerman 2010).

In other publications, we have examined how counterfeit and pirated fashions (which feature unauthorized reproductions of trademarked brand names and logos) are produced and sold in Guatemala (Thomas 2016) and Argentina (Dewey 2020). Given that governments do not provide the structural supports necessary for these markets to function (even if, in practice, state officials tend to tolerate their existence), we both have analyzed extensively the informal institutional arrangements that undergird this trade in Latin America.

A fourth type of illegal market is the exchange of perfectly legal products whose sale is nonetheless legally prohibited. The trades in human organs, children for adoption, and (depending on the country) surrogate motherhood are exemplary cases. This type of market has been frequently characterized in the literature as “repugnant” or “noxious” (Satz 2010; Trespeuch and Steiner 2015) because of the moral and ethical stakes involved in the commodification of the products. Although not covered by the case studies presented here, recent anthropological and sociological studies of such markets (e.g., Scheper-Hughes 2000; Zheng 2010; Lerum and Brents 2016) have described both the global networks through which these trades happen and the politics that condition their illegalization.

The fifth and final type of market is one in which the products are legal to produce, exchange, and consume, but the process of production or exchange involves legal or regulatory violations. Common examples include tariff evasion on the importation and sale of tobacco products (Shen et al. 2010; Antonopoulos 2009), insider trading on the stock market, the sale of weapons without appropriate permissions, and the export of diamonds without a Kimberley certificate (Engwicht 2016). Such circumventions and violations also help to define these exchanges as part of the informal economy. Generally, these activities do not constitute a market in their own right; instead, production and exchange take place alongside or within legal markets.<sup>3</sup>

There is relatively close interrelation, then, between legal and illegal aspects of such activities. This type of illegal market is perhaps the most common, due to the broad range of forms that regulatory violations can take—from a manufacturer failing to adhere to labor laws to tax evasion. Leslie’s contribution to this issue examines a case of this type, in which illegal actions (the sale of fraudulent investment products) take place in perfectly legal markets that are supported by both states and transnational capital.

The contribution by Moore, Eiró, and Koster also analyzes an illegal practice, the autoconstruction of homes in Medellín, happening in legal markets. Moore et al. interpret this activity as a material expression of hope, as people pursue the dignity of homeownership and a sense of permanence and agency in the city. State and

local government officials are ambivalent about autoconstruction, but their interventions often deny households the ability to establish themselves in long-term and secure residences. Moore et al.'s article addresses a major failure and ongoing crisis of urban planning and provision across Latin America. It also offers a compelling picture of how expectations of the future can materialize in ordinary, unspectacular objects and processes.

## MORALITY IN ILLEGAL MARKETS: THE LEGITIMACY FACTOR

Illegal markets differ not only according to what makes them illegal; there is also the question of how socially accepted or legitimate the products, modes of exchange, and actors involved in these markets are. Acknowledging that social illegitimacy, like informality, is not an exclusive feature of illegal markets—think of the relatively low social tolerance for legal trades of rare animal species and the informality that characterizes the legal market for domestic services—the degree to which illegal economic activities are considered legitimate or illegitimate varies widely. A set of recent works investigates the legitimacy of illegal markets (Misse 2007, 2018; Van Schendel and Abraham 2005; Beckert and Dewey 2017), but this subject requires much more scholarly attention. Here, we offer some preliminary observations.

In illegal markets in which the commodity itself is forbidden (type 1), social legitimacy is relatively low. The legal definitions supporting prohibitions tend to be backed by broad moral consent, as in the cases of illicit drugs, child pornography, and prostitution. Those who challenge these prohibitions risk being themselves socially stigmatized or discredited. Arias and Duica, for example, assert that cocaine “is illegal but has mixed acceptance” in Putumayo. They go on to explain that “some segments of society, particularly in Latin America, tolerate cocaine and even embrace coca leaf while other sectors of society reject the drug wholesale.” Their research participants affirmed their involvement in the trade because it generates some economic stability and solidifies kinship relations. At the same time, people working in coca cultivation experience fear and anxiety linked to the low degree of legitimacy that surrounds the trade. Although they derive their livelihoods from coca, some of the people interviewed by Arias and Duica expressed the opinion that they would rather see it replaced with other economic opportunities, given the high degrees of financial risk and violence that are part and parcel of the trade.

Markets for stolen goods (type 2) do not typically enjoy widespread social acceptance, although participants in these markets and surrounding communities may view them as legitimate. In his contribution to this issue, Rodgers reminds us of Eric Hobsbawm's 1969 classic work on “social bandits,” according to which certain populations may interpret theft, pilfering, and fencing as acts of resistance in a context of resource inequality or limited political power. This is the case in the Managua neighborhood where Rodgers has carried out research for more than two decades. Neighborhood residents view the purchase of stolen goods as “an

inevitable aspect of life in [the] *barrio* . . . insofar as buying stolen goods at reduced prices was, for many, an essential means through which to survive in a context generally characterized by high levels of poverty and lack of opportunities.” Notably, in this type of market, there is no simple mechanism to achieve legalization. Whereas commodities might be variously rendered legal or illegal over time (type 1) and regulations can change (type 5), the legalization of a market for stolen goods cannot happen unless the property rights regime that forms the basis for the market is reworked, if not completely overhauled. As it stands, the high levels of social consent around private property rights amid global capitalism contribute to the hegemonic sense that markets for stolen goods are immoral and undesirable.

Markets for counterfeits, pirated goods, and forgeries (type 3) are somewhat similar to markets for stolen goods in their low levels of social legitimacy beyond the communities that participate in the production and consumption of these commodities. Strong support for copyright, trademark, and patent law stems, at least in part, from the close connections between intellectual property protections and Western conceptions of personhood, property, and economy (Thomas 2016, 244; Goldgel-Carballo and Poblete 2020). Regulations that delineate what counts as an “original” and a “copy,” Thomas (2016, 8) has argued, are the result of “tremendous ideological work” that has helped to establish a “seemingly commonsense legal framework and political economy” resting on these definitions and divides.

In markets of type 1 (illegalized classes of goods), industry professionals may publicly advocate wider legitimization with some success, as has recently been the case with marijuana in several contexts (Dioun and Haveman 2017). In illegal markets of types 2 and 3, however, it is less common to find participants lobbying for legalization or encouraging wider public legitimization of their trade or industry (Dewey 2019). In view of the broad moral consensus around intellectual property laws, we observe in these markets that distinctive cultural conceptions of property, personhood, and fairness sometimes serve as justifications for violations. We also find what Anteby (2010, 607) refers to as “practice-based legitimization,” meaning the emergence of moral justifications from the experience of market participation. But it is difficult to imagine a widespread movement to legalize counterfeit or forged goods, or even to significantly weaken intellectual property laws, as legalization would upturn globalized models of property rights that are rooted in widespread and deeply held moral values (Hudson and Okhuysen 2009; Jensen 2010; Chan 2009).

In the case of illegal actions that take place in legal markets (type 5), the degree of social legitimacy can vary widely, depending on the type of crime and the sociomoral implications. Tax evasion among poorer classes may be appreciated as entirely legitimate in contexts of steep inequality, for instance, while marginalized groups may view the avoidance of taxes among wealthier classes as illegitimate and a clear sign of corruption (Thomas 2016, 150–59). From a consumer perspective, illegal actions in legal markets are somewhat similar to markets for stolen goods (type 2) and markets for counterfeits, pirated goods, and forgeries (type 3) in the sense that

buyers may be uninterested in the production or procurement process and more concerned with the product's price, availability, or value. Alternatively, these types of markets may involve consumer deception, as illustrated by Leslie's remarkable research on how Venezuelans fell victim to a fraud scheme while trying to maintain their middle-class status and ensure future economic stability.

With regard to markets such as those for human organs, adoption, or surrogacy, where the product itself is legal but its exchange is prohibited by the state (type 4), the trade is often perceived as morally offensive. These markets typically involve exchanges in which ontological and existential considerations regarding human bodies and human lives are at issue for market participants, regulators, and wider publics. Debates regarding legalization and illegalization involve considerable social and moral stakes, as well as in-depth technical discussions concerning how to appropriately manage a contested trade (Scheper-Hughes 2000). Even if the market is legalized, it may never achieve public legitimacy. This has little to do with property rights; instead, it is often the fact of commodification and the perceived exposures of especially vulnerable populations (such as children or poor people) to "dangerous forces" of chance and profiteering that people perceive as illegitimate (Trespeuch and Steiner 2015; Steiner 2013).

Diagramming the legality and legitimacy of illegal markets draws attention to how particular characteristics and processes of production, circulation, and commodification are linked with questions of politics, ethics, and sociality. It opens up questions about what is materially and morally at stake for people who participate in illegal markets, advocate for the legality and legitimacy of certain trades, or work to disparage specific goods or market activities as illegitimate. If the profit motive is important in structuring markets, it is also the case that moral values, ethical commitments, and collective attachments to certain conceptions of rights, property, and personhood emerge and endure alongside economic activities (Fischer 2014). This perspective on legality and legitimacy powerfully informs our qualitative approach to questions of futurity, as we analyze how institutions that structure illegal markets also shape the futures that people imagine and attempt to realize for themselves and others.

## MORALITY, ILLEGAL MARKETS, AND FUTURITY

Different forms of criminalization and degrees of social legitimacy influence how markets operate. Those who sell clothing with pirated logos experience far greater social tolerance than those who sell child pornography. This is linked to the nature of the goods themselves, which evoke different collective feelings (see also Appadurai 2013). It is perhaps also because these markets generate very different externalities: markets for knockoff clothing create highly visible kinds of informal sector employment (Thomas 2016; Dewey 2020), while child pornography is associated with harming children. Social acceptance allows participants in counterfeit clothing markets to do business more easily, more publicly, and in greater numbers than is the case for people working in highly stigmatized markets

or in trades that are more heavily surveilled and policed. People who buy and sell knockoff fashions are likely to have different perceptions of state law and its legitimacy than participants in legal enterprises, but this difference might be even more pronounced among people who participate in socially illegitimate, illegal markets.

The same may be true of illegal market participants' perspectives on the formal market system. As noted, people whose trades are excluded from or marginalized in relation to formal institutional supports tend to rely on informal networks of capital, credit, commerce, and knowledge sharing, as well as modes of secrecy and concealment (Dewey 2019; Thomas 2015; Feige 1990; Castells and Portes 1989), in order to facilitate market exchange, guarantee contracts, and otherwise do business. The degree to which people are excluded from formal institutions and social networks is likely to depend on legality and legitimacy factors.

In turn, these social and structural conditions may translate into different visions of the future. In the context of legal economic activities, state agencies help to guarantee access to material resources, economic rights, and legal protections. In the case of illegal and illegitimate markets, people may be denied those resources and protections. States and other formal institutions may close off certain future possibilities or otherwise make it clear that particular promises for the future do not apply. People who participate in illegal economic activities may invest materially and emotionally in alternative visions, in which they imagine or expect that informality will predominate and counterhegemonic values will be more relevant than the values promoted by a government or formal market system. Research on the relationship between illegality and futurity is needed, we argue, because it illuminates these possibilities for how legality and legitimacy can influence, open up, or constrain future imaginaries and future orientations.

Already, the articles presented here reveal some compelling findings. The authors demonstrate, for instance, that people experience different degrees of moral ambiguity and confusion about what the future is likely to hold depending on the relationship between their economic practices and state institutions. Ambiguity results from intermittent or otherwise unpredictable law enforcement actions in illegal markets, as well as from contestations over the legitimacy of particular markets and the failures of institutions (formal or informal) to generate public confidence.

Leslie's study of fraud in Venezuela offers an excellent example of how institutional failures lead to ambiguity and confusion among market participants. He explains the Venezuelan state's past efforts to demarcate clear boundaries between trustworthy and corrupt institutions and officials based on rule of law. Middle-class Venezuelans relied on formal institutional mechanisms to enable the kind of "prudent but profitable [economic] choices" they hoped would help them fulfill their perceived moral and monetary "obligation to their future selves." Economic and political turmoil since the 1980s disrupted that sense of trust and reliability. The middle class could no longer count on the state government to guarantee the value of their savings and related possibilities for the future.

Leslie characterizes middle-class Venezuelans as living in a situation of “normative ambiguity,” where the lines between credible and deceptive and between certainty and doubt were blurred in ways that left people vulnerable to the predatory practices of pyramid schemes. Confronted with the criminality and corruption of state institutions and private firms, middle-class Venezuelans did not abandon their strivings for class stability and comfort; rather, people maintained their goals and values. Leslie’s analysis suggests, then, that the future orientations of Latin American middle classes may remain constant even when the institutions that engendered and promised to support those visions have seemingly failed.

In contrast, lower classes—who are often also subordinated along intersectional lines of race, gender, sexuality, and disability—might experience normative ambiguity even in the midst of “successful” liberal democratic systems that are not necessarily built around or convergent with their imagined futures. We see this scenario play out in the case of *cocaleros* in Putumayo, Colombia, as described by Arias and Duica. Life in Putumayo is marked by uncertainty. As Arias and Duica explain, peasants who rely on the coca trade find themselves living “in the interstices of both licit and illicit armed power.” While state agencies, paramilitary groups, and cartels compete for territorial control of this border region and for popular support, coca growers are left to struggle more or less on their own to protect their crops, minimize extortion, and maintain favorable market positions. The question of whom to trust is never clear, and growers must be prepared for state interventions (crop destruction, for example), state failures (to deliver cash payments in exchange for decreased coca production), and outbreaks of violence (clashes between state military forces and other armed groups) at any time.<sup>4</sup>

The peasants do not passively accept this situation, however. Some leave coca production and start a legal business. Those who stick with coca production actively employ normative ambiguity to their advantage, as much as this is possible. Arias and Duica vividly demonstrate how coca growers “use the ambiguity created by the inaccessible forest terrain and dual authority structures in the region in order to protect their engagement with the global illicit drug trade and the accompanying economic stability.” Through various measures—from strategically feigning loyalty as a means to placate multiple authorities to leveraging state funds in order to secretly increase coca production—peasants work within the murky institutional environment to achieve their visions of economic success and forge new certainties.

The contributions to this special section make clear that institutional arrangements and relationships to states and formal markets help to engender particular future orientations. In contexts of illegality and social illegitimacy, scholars must also attend to the ambiguities and confusions that actors may experience in the absence of state-guaranteed market stability, in situations where multiple and competing authorities vie for economic and political control, and amid law enforcement threats to people’s livelihoods.

As noted above, research on the relationships among illegality, institutional arrangements, and futurity is especially relevant in Latin America, given the

region's high rates of informal and illegal employment. Recent estimates from the International Labor Organization indicate that more than 50 percent of the working population in the region is employed in the informal sector (Salazar-Xirinachs and Chacaltana 2018, 15). At the same time, Latin America is characterized by relatively strong states that continuously seek to exert control and leverage authority by demarcating the boundaries between legal and illegal activities. The convergence between strong states and high rates of informality means that legality and legitimacy are problematized in ways that they might not otherwise be, and that future imaginaries may be a site of struggle and contestation among many people in the region.

## HOPE IN AND OF THE STATE

Recent work in the social sciences has honed in on this relationship among states, markets, and futurity. For example, Nauja Kleist and Stef Jansen, in their essay titled "Hope Over Time: Crisis, Immobility, and Future-making" (2016), define hope in terms of possibilities for upward social and economic mobility and "going somewhere." They explain that such hope is "triggered" by the formal market system through the provision of credit and the promise of formalized employment. The "crisis" of hope they outline is conceived as a direct result of the failures of governments and formal markets to actually fulfill these expectations. Their analysis usefully highlights how states and capitalist systems function as "hope-generating machines" (Nuijten and Anders 2007) that serve as important sources and arbiters of optimism. While we share Kleist and Jansen's concern with what such failures mean for people who have embraced the promises put forth by states and formal markets, we are also interested, in this collection, in what may lie outside these ideological frames.

We therefore ask: If participation in legal and socially legitimate capitalist markets tends to inculcate people with a shared future imaginary, how might futurity differ among populations who view governments, legal regimes, and corporate power with greater suspicion? Is it possible for futurity to diverge or deviate from the "expectations of modernity" (Ferguson 1999) associated with states and formal markets? Our sense is that the tendency for studies of futurity to focus on legal markets risks prematurely foreclosing counterhegemonic aspirations and overlooking alternative formulations of the future. There may be meaningful, qualitative differences in hopes, fears, and desires that emerge in relation to illegal markets and informal institutional arrangements, given the differing relationships to states and state-backed institutions that can describe these contexts. Do illegal markets offer something other than a deepening relationship to hope-generating machines, the dominant systems that tend to perpetuate the risks, uncertainties, and also inequalities that make hope and aspiration so vital and compelling? Do informal institutions and arrangements, including those that structure illegal economic activities, fuel different aspirations, or are the future imaginaries of legal and illegal market participants similar? How do the legality and legitimacy factors



diagrammed above match up with the kinds of futures that people project for themselves and their communities? And finally, how does the blurring of authority structures in many parts of Latin America impact the future imaginings of people who live in the “interstices” (see Arias and Duica, this section) of state and nonstate forms of violence, surveillance, and control? In centering populations whose economic activities have been problematized to greater or lesser degrees by governments and wider publics, this special section opens up space to investigate these questions.

The contributions by Leslie and by Moore, Eiró, and Koster affirm the central role of the state and formal market systems in creating and perpetually reshaping people’s expectations. In Venezuela, as Leslie explains, investors had to adjust their expectations once they realized that neither the government nor the private companies the state purported to regulate were keeping their promises. In Medellín, residents of the self-built settlement El Oasis are more or less permanently stalled out in “waiting time” (Auyero 2012) as they anticipate state assistance for establishing a permanent place to live. Katherine Verdery (1995) has argued that assimilating to the “rationality” of capitalism is also a process of adopting “irrational” forms of faith and hope in the promises and opportunities said to be available to everyone in a “free” market. Aspirations and imaginings of the future can be powerfully conditioned by political-economic systems that may benefit some populations more than others, even as they promise opportunity for all.

In Arias and Duica’s article, we learn that the aspirations of people involved in the coca trade are quite similar to those of government officials and capitalist entrepreneurs operating in the formal market. Their means of achieving goals of education, self-sufficiency, and surplus, however, are supported by informal networks and uneasy alliances with nonstate armed actors. There is the question, of course, as to whether the espousal of neoliberal norms and values among *cocaleros* is precisely the kind of strategic resistance that Arias and Duica discuss in terms of *malicia*. That is, outward expressions of support for authorities and their agendas may be weapons of the weak (Scott 1985) that mask commitments to illicit markets and alternative values.

One of the challenges of doing research with people involved in informal and illegal activities is to distinguish between strategic forms of compliance and conformity, on the one hand, and the norms, values, and commitments that are at stake for research participants, on the other hand (Benson and Thomas 2010). Arias and Duica’s study bears out the notion that participation in a competitive market system, even without state support, encourages the embrace of values of self-sufficiency and self-maximization. This has also been shown in work on informal markets in Bolivia (Gordon 2011), for example. Their research demonstrates that “state thought” (Bourdieu 2014)—or, at the least, its public expression—may be both valuable and strategic for people involved in illegal economic activities.

Rodgers’s study of market exchange in Managua suggests that the divide between legal and illegal economic sectors is less meaningful for lower-class urban residents



than the divide between socially legitimate and illegitimate market activities. This is true, he shows, in terms of everyday decisionmaking about what products to sell and at what price, and also in relation to the future orientations and perceived possibilities that are associated with different economic practices. For instance, buying and selling stolen goods is generally considered acceptable among Managua's market vendors. The families of the gang members who are involved in the actual theft of the goods, however, routinely refuse the proceeds that their sons obtain from fencing the stolen items. The key difference, as Rodgers brilliantly discerns, has to do with the future orientations attached to and implied by these economic actions. Whereas a market vendor's decision to buy stolen goods at a minimal price and then sell them at standard pricing in the market (and thereby derive a larger profit than would otherwise be possible) has no long-term impact on the economic stability of fellow vendors, gang membership and associated acts of theft and violence are viewed as temporary, high-risk means of earning money. In other words, short-term profits derived from gang activity do not guarantee the kind of future stability and economic security that household members desire.

It is therefore the "question of the legitimacy/illegitimacy," Rodgers writes, that matters most for "questions of futurity." This finding suggests that state law and formal market regulations have little to do with how business is done in Managua's markets. In contrast, informal mechanisms of social control (gossip and ostracism), which Rodgers himself experienced when testing out various profit strategies, are highly effective at both regulating present actions and orienting people toward collective goals of solidarity and stability. The fact that the state and private capital play almost no role in provisioning the public good in this context may be important for understanding how and why informal regulatory mechanisms are oriented toward positively supporting collective (rather than individual) futures.

Leslie's case study, though less explicitly about informal institutional arrangements, usefully points to the kinds of dynamics that produce nonstate authority and informal trust relations in many settings. Failed by formal institutions, Venezuelans began to keep the state and private sector at arm's length in favor of extralegal and parallel institutions (whether legal or illegal) that seemed to guarantee a stable future. It is notable that Leslie documents this process among the country's middle class, when scholars have more commonly documented the turn to alternative markets and authority structures among lower classes given their subordination by states and private industry. A crucial point that emerges from Leslie's study is that Venezuelans did not become vulnerable to predation because they were seeking out extralegal and nonstate channels for investment; rather, the possibility for fraud in Venezuela's financial products sector opened up because of the state's failure to guarantee a stable set of rights and a reliable path to future success.

Each of these contributions illustrates our point that states and formal market systems shape future imaginaries in ways that have been underanalyzed, even as the methods and concepts of qualitative social science are well suited for linking affects, institutions, and economic practices.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study of future imaginaries in the context of illegal markets—that is, arenas in which goods or services are exchanged for money, and where the product itself, or its production, exchange, or consumption, has been illegalized by the state—offers important insights into futurity as an affective orientation and set of practices that are powerfully shaped by historical forces, social experience, and institutional contexts. The articles collected here avoid a tendency to rationalize illegal practices by claiming they are rooted in the same hopes and aspirations as legal economic activities (see also Bourgois 2002). Instead, each author offers a fine-grained analysis of the particular formulations of the future that emerge within domains of contested legality and legitimacy. Looking across these studies, we contend that people whose economic activities are illegalized do not always or necessarily embrace hegemonic visions of future success, nor do they necessarily envision the state and formal market as sources of promise and potential prosperity. In other words, their hopes are not necessarily a matter of either “waiting for the state” (Auyero 2012, 20) or placing one’s faith in entrepreneurial business activities. Rather, in the cases presented here, states, formal market systems, and legal regimes play an ambiguous role: they are sometimes seen as facilitators of the fulfillment of hope and aspiration and sometimes seen as barriers to such fulfillment. As Moore, Eiró, and Koster write, the very condition of being involved in “illegal” activities can be taken “as a sign of state abandonment and disinterest,” but this does not necessarily stop people from “clamour(ing) for state recognition,” not least because of the narrow paths available for realizing future goals and possibilities. State agents may be perceived as arbiters of inequity and sources of stigma, discrimination, and violence, even as people make political demands for greater equity and inclusion in formal systems of rights guarantees, welfare and credit provision, and educational and economic opportunity.

Thinking about recent history and current events in Latin America, future research should pay attention to the relationship between economic, social, and political crises, on the one hand, and the formulation of specific visions of the future, on the other. This is especially imperative in a region characterized by continuous upheaval. In fact, a careful reading of the contributions contained in this special issue reveals that expectations about the future develop in close connection with the unfolding of economic crises, political changes that rapidly erode citizens’ senses of certainty, and transformations that lead to the exclusion of large segments of national or regional populations. Leslie’s case illustrates how major political and economic changes that diminished trust in the national currency and the futures that hung on it served as a catalyst for the reorientation of middle-class citizens toward seemingly more trustworthy institutions.

Finally, this issue draws attention to inequalities and social exclusions as undeniable vectors that shape how people imagine the future and put their fears, hopes, anxieties, and aspirations into practice. Each article in this collection examines contexts that are characterized by inequitable social and economic

conditions. This is the general state of affairs in Latin America. Most people are excluded from public health and biomedical systems and do not have access to public education. Many rely on community patrols or “armies” of private security for safety and protection and, as emphasized above, must organize their own systems of finance, welfare, and internal market regulation. Intersectional inequalities have only been aggravated and made more obvious amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. If we define the regional situation in terms of the progressive separation of individuals from social spaces formerly created and maintained by the state (see, e.g., Portes and Schauffler 1993)—though acknowledging that in many settings the state has never been a beneficent actor and has, in fact, often been a source of terror—we can hypothesize that this separation also shapes the way that people imagine the future and materialize their fears and aspirations. As the articles presented in this special section demonstrate, this does not mean that hope and desire are absent from illegal markets; rather, people’s expectations may or may not derive from formal institutions, and whether or not they follow prescribed visions of progress and advancement must be an open question for us as researchers.

## NOTES

1. The recent work of Vanegas et al. (2021) in Colombia, for example, offers a detailed depiction of how formal state institutions actively participate in the constitution of informal markets through relationships of regulation, extortion, and inclusion or exclusion. Notably, the authors also emphasize the role of informal and illegal market actors in shaping state institutions, through their ability to foment (or deny) political support for particular parties, candidates, and policies.

2. Although not relevant for the line of argument pursued here, a distinction can be made between acceptance and legitimacy. Legitimacy, following Weber’s definition, implies a belief in the beneficent properties of a person, product, or practice. Acceptance does not imply such a belief. People may therefore accept illegal behavior without being convinced of the activity’s goodness or beneficial nature.

3. A similar argument could be made about forgeries and fakes, which would not exist without there also being a legal market. These interdependencies are observable in the cases of alcohol (Radaev 2017), cigarettes (Shen et al. 2010), and precious stones (Engwicht 2016).

4. For a detailed discussion of states’ roles in structuring the illicit drug trade in Latin America, see, e.g., Lessing’s 2017 comparative analysis.

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