

Profile Area Political Legitimacy
Research Group 'From Disorder to Order:
Counter-Societies and the Resources of Legitimacy'

'Rebels, criminals, militias and warlords on a global scale:
Comparing actors and their resources across regions'
Research Seminar



November 14, 2017
Klein Auditorium, Leiden University

Keynote address
Prof. John Gledhill (University of Manchester)

In the study of the legitimacy of rebels and armed actors, notions of honour, trust, security, religion, gender and material progress can play a role. Some degree, or even promise, of social emancipation can help to explain the strategies counter-state actors employ to win popular support. Clearly, rebels respond to, and act within, specific social, political and normative contexts. Still, the resources actors employ in order to win and retain legitimacy are linked to pre-existing ideas about order, authority and power that circulate locally, regionally, and globally. The content of these political projects and the identity of counter-state actors are influenced by events occurring around the world and they themselves are influenced by these events.

In this research seminar, we seek to unpack 'the global' in the mechanisms and strategies counter-state actors employ in order to win popular support. Our interest is to discuss the relevance of, and limits in, comparing rebel and counter-state actors in local, regional, and global contexts. The case studies include Brazil, DRC, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Kosovo, Mexico, and Nigeria. By choosing a global perspective, we will be able to debate, first, the validity of comparing rebel legitimacy claims and legitimizing processes across time and place. Second, the global perspective will allow us to discuss the different methodologies to study armed actors in specific regions, and the challenges researchers face when gathering first-hand information in contexts of high violence. Finally, it will enable us to highlight differences and similarities, continuities and discontinuities in rebel legitimization strategies.

To what extent does globalisation influence the political projects and aesthetics of counter-state actors? How can comparisons across the cases be established? What kind of conceptual insights does this debate engender?

Keynote address

John Gledhill, University of Manchester

'Rebels, criminals and the criminalised: global perspectives on illegality, violence and legitimacy'

Presenters (in alphabetic order)

Laurens Bakker, University of Amsterdam
Carrie Comer, International Commission on Missing Persons
Ian Madison, University of Oxford/Leiden University
Rodrigo Peña, Leiden University
David Pratten, University of Oxford
Judith Verweijen, Ghent University

Date and place

Tuesday November 14, 10-17 hrs.
Klein Auditorium, Leiden University
Rapenburg 73, 2311 Leiden
[See map](#)

Programme

10:00 Welcome coffee and tea

10:30 Keynote address

John Gledhill, University of Manchester
'Rebels, criminals and the criminalised: global perspectives on illegality, violence and legitimacy'

11:30 Session 1

Judith Verweijen, Ghent University
'A governmentality perspective on rebel governance'

Most of the recent literature on rebel governance and rebel legitimacy employs "centered" understandings of power. That is, power is seen as "something" that is situated within authorities, political institutions or networks of political actors and that is "exercised" over subjects. Drawing on forthcoming work by Hoffmann and Verweijen, this paper adopts a governmentality perspective to rebel governance instead. Consequently, it conceptualizes power as a relational effect of the entire social field in which rebels are situated rather than as vested in rebels themselves. As illustrated by empirical data drawn from fieldwork in the eastern DRC, the analytic of governmentality facilitates the comparative analysis of the modes of governing of heterogeneous armed groups, for instance both those with and without stable territorial control or elaborate organizational structures of governance. Furthermore, it enables tracing the effects of rebels' embedding in global networks—in both past and present—on their rationalities and techniques of government.

Ian Madison, University of Oxford/Leiden University
'Rebels with a cause? Exploring counter-state legitimacy claims at local and international levels'

This paper addresses the comparability of counter-state movements by focusing on their legitimizing claims. To begin with, it analyzes two secessionist counter-state movements in Kosovo. First, a non-violent movement that sought to display moral superiority to an international audience while establishing a social contract through public service provision to a local audience. Second, a violent insurgent movement that built on the perceived failure of non-violence to defend Kosovars at the local level while internationalizing the human rights abuses of the conflict at an opportune geopolitical moment for an international audience. The paper argues that the success or failure of each movement was heavily based on the receptiveness of the international audience to their respective legitimizing claims while leaving local-level legitimacy as a secondary factor. It illustrates this point by briefly highlighting other relevant cases. The paper concludes with a discussion on how legitimacy claims made by counter-state actors may be an area of further comparative research.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Session 2

Laurens Bakker, University of Amsterdam

'Activist premanism. Violence and social responsibility against the state in Indonesia'

Indonesia has a long tradition of premanism: organized security providers to one area who double as criminals in another. Protected by patrons within the elite, they act as go-betweens for government and criminal circles, as private muscle and as enforcers. Being 'too much of a preman' or the 'wrong kind of preman' easily results in the withdrawal of such support and consequentially in the loss of economic, political and societal influence. In this paper I consider the resources that sustain and legitimate 'good' preman in dealing with 'injustices', particularly in terms of NGO-like activities, and differentiate these from criminal offenses.

Rodrigo Peña González, Leiden University

'Data Collection in Contexts of Criminality. Research from a Legitimacy Perspective in Michoacán, Mexico'

The investigations on legitimacy within social sciences have rested commonly on the grounds of the state. However, the emergence of social actors engaged or interested in becoming legitimate increasingly appears all around the world –generally, this is the so called non-state actors participating in the process of legitimation at the expense of other political actors. Some of those cases involve violence, as it happens with criminal phenomena. How to address these phenomena from the perspective of social sciences? Moreover, which is the path to obtain data from the field that let researchers study those cases?

15:30 Session 3

Carrie Comer, International Commission on Missing Persons

'From Los Zetas to Daesh: Non-state Actors, Extreme Violence and the Law'

How does a State decide if and when it is at war with a non-state armed actor? Or, more precisely, when, and according to what criteria, do States assess violence perpetrated by non-state armed actors as an armed conflict as defined under International Humanitarian Law, rather than as violent criminal acts that are covered by domestic law? This discussion will question if non-state armed actors apparently motivated by ideology are legally different from non-state armed actors motivated by economic gain. Further, if the international community of States treats these actors differently, are certain non-state actors unintentionally legitimised? This discussion will take a pragmatic approach to answering these questions by evaluating the actions of (and State reactions to) two hyper-violent non-state actors: Daesh in the Middle East and Los Zetas in Mesoamerica.

David Pratten, Oxford University

'Militant Masks: Youth and insecurity in the Niger Delta'

This paper is based on over 20 years of ethnographic engagement with youth in the Niger Delta. It traces the emergence of modes of sociality and mobilisation that are linked to masquerades, cult practices and confraternities. The focus is on a particular group, *agaba*, and the insights that can be drawn from its performance and politics onto broader trends in the oil economy of the Niger Delta. An area of especial interest is in conceptualising the significance of 'radical insecurity' in the context of material, political and epistemological realms.

Final remarks

17:00 Drinks

Organisers

Jose Carlos G. Aguiar; Isabelle Duyvesteyn.

Publication research project:

You can read our special issue published by *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28(5-6):

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/fswi20/28/4-5/>

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