

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	Coca eradication programs and environmental detriment in Colombia
Author of the thesis:	M.Sc. Camilla Bregante
Referee (<i>incl. titles</i>):	Mgr. Kateřina Březinová, Ph.D.

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the five numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

Master's Dissertation of Camila Bregante is dedicated to the issue of coca eradication program under the Plan Colombia, a wide-scope initiative to provide security and economic development assistance to help combat the spread of narcotics in Colombia, conceived in bi-national partnership between Colombia and the United States of America. The thesis is, in particular, trying to inquire into the environmental impact of coca eradication efforts carried out through the aerial spraying or fumigation with a chemical mixture containing glyphosate between the years 2000 and 2015. The author is mainly interested in the impact of these eradication efforts on the Colombian flora and fauna. She sets on to prove the ineffectiveness of such illicit drugs eradication and their harmfulness by arguing that deforestation and damages to ecosystems - as a consequence of the anti-narcotics policies - should be securitized in Colombia.

The Masters thesis relies on the theory of securitization. Bregante offers a competent discussion of the securitization theory as conceived by the scholars of the Copenhagen school and extended to the environmental sector to include agendas such as ecosystem degradation (global climate change, deforestation, desertification, etc.), energy problems (access to natural resources and inequality in distribution), demographic issues (unsustainable development, epidemics, uncontrollable migration, etc). (see 1.2.) She observes that while the environmental security is deeply linked to the larger paradigm of human security, it is nevertheless still overlooked in favour of traditional threats. Arguments stemming from outside of the Copenhagen School, which question the use of power and highlight instead the importance of development cooperation, soft power, democratization and cooperation between states and transnational organizations as the most effective and preferable tools, are brought into the theoretical debate, if only towards the end of the thesis in Chapter 5.

The securitization theory is operationalized throughout this Dissertation with a partial success. Some of the hypotheses and research questions are asked and responded rather implicitly; while the research is rather wide in scope and time frame, the analysis would benefit from a deeper analytical stance (see below).

2) Contribution:

The author argues that the environmental damage caused by illicit crop eradication programmes constitutes a security concern. Referring to the particular case of environment-related security issues in Colombia within the Plan Colombia implementation from 2000-2015, moreover, she builds evidence to argue that environmental concerns shall be included in the strategy of governments and international bodies when shaping antidrug policies.

Beyond doubt, the thesis has a value added in that it partially seals the existing blind spot in the scholarship on the environmental and human security in Latin America, widely recognized by the academic community and practitioners. It brings several inspiring case studies of the Colombian departments of Putumayo, Nariño, Choco, Cauca and Valle del Cauca (especially Chapter 4).

The policy implications (Chapter 5) are partially founded on the research into the so-called Balloon Effect in Chapter 4. By comparing the policy adopted by the administrations of presidents Uribe and Santos, the author invites to consider the environmental rhetoric accompanying the inception of Plan Colombia as a „simple means to reach political objectives“ (p. 47), yet the discussion here is too brief

to fully support this stance. Finally, the author raises questions testing the reason that led Colombian government to continue pursuing the Plan instead of adopting different, less harmful and even more cost-effective solutions. Yet again, the influence of stakeholders other than Colombian government – such as local and regional Colombian authorities, NGOs and civil society, as well as the U.S. government - is briefly mentioned but stops short of serious discussion.

3) Methods:

The autor formulates the following hypotheses to operationalize the theory and turn abstract concepts into measurable observations:

- „the fumigations produce negative effects on the ecosystems“. Bregante tries to prove that the implementation of Plan Colombia, between 2001 and 2015, coincided with an increasing loss of biodiversity (mainly Chapter 3);
- „when eradicating by manually pulling the roots of coca plants, environmental degradation (deforestation) takes place because of the replanting of crops in new areas“. Bregante tries to prove that the measurable displacement of crops occurred both within the departments as well as in between them 2001 and 2015 (mainly Chapter 4).

As I have stated already, some of the hypotheses and research questions are asked and responded rather implicitly. Second, while the research is rather wide in scope and time frame, the analysis would benefit from a deeper analytical stance. Third, while the thesis argues for an inclusion of harmful impact of coca eradication programs into the security agenda, it should not resign to provide for a solid background to understanding the deep-rooted conflict in Colombia without ignoring the role of narco-trafficking and other illicit activities that sustain the guerrillas activities, as well as the complex relation between coca growing and large segments of Colombia's impoverished population that is forced into internal displacement.

4) Literature:

The thesis provides a competent discussion of the securitization theory as conceived by the scholars of the Copenhagen school and extended to the environmental sector. Having said this, some state-of the art research published in Spanish in research periodicals such as LARR (Latin American Research Review) would reveal some of the new trends in considering the latest debates on the nexus of the environment and security in Colombia.

From the hindsight, the Thesis would also benefit from more literature delving into the context in which leftist guerrillas (namely FARC, ELN) and rightist self-defense paramilitaries emerged and used coca plantations as part of their economic strategy.

5) Manuscript form:

In my view, Camila Bregante has proven sound academic capabilities in her thesis. The thesis is well structured and it uses the appropriate language and style, including correct quotation standard. I also praise the author for pursuing a topic that reaches out of the strict realm of the political science and security studies, one which also includes research into the toxic impact of the aerial spraying.

The room for improvement in the manuscript are some parts that could use a more careful editing, though these are very limited; The example of such practice (p. 34, italics mine): Furthermore, as confirmed by the case study of Putumayo, damages to licit cultivations force local communities relying *on them to their knees*. This last eventuality, *a party from taking away any legitimacy of the state at the eyes of population*, is counterproductive for the effectiveness of the eradication program, since it could induce the poor peasants to start producing coca leaves in order to survive.

Box for the thesis supervisor only. Please characterize the progress in the working out of thesis (e.g., steady and gradual versus discontinuous and abrupt) and the level (intensity) of communication/cooperation with the author:

The author was in a regular, yet not necessarily frequent contact with the supervisor. She was timely with her assignments.

Suggested questions for the defence are:

Please discuss the influence of stakeholders other than Colombian government in the discussion about harmful effects of aerial spraying in the period under the scrutiny; Actors such as local and regional Colombian authorities, NGOs and civil society, as well as the U.S. government.

Can you please refer to some of the major financial aspects of the anti-drug policy involving aerial spraying in Colombia, such as the financial backing of the U.S., Colombia's close ally? Would these aspect shed further light onto the policies implemented by the administrations of presidents Uribe and Santos?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20 points)</i>	12
<i>Contribution (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Methods (max. 20 points)</i>	12
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	15
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20 points)</i>	18
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	72
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	C

DATE OF EVALUATION: 13.9.2021



Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honour)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honour)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant to this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts **omitted**? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently **incorporated with the topic** and hypotheses tested? Has the author demonstrated a genuine **understanding** of the theories addressed?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and the ability to draw **conclusions** based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the **policy implications** well founded?

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further **verification and testing**? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or **irrelevant detours** off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 12 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates the author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author **quotes** relevant literature in a **proper way** and works with a **representative bibliography**. (Remarks: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**. If they dominate, you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give a much better impression. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate **language and style**, including the academic **format for quotations**, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**. The text is free from typos and easy to comprehend.

Strong	Average	Weak	
20	15	< 10	points

Remarks for the referees:

- 1) Download the thesis from the SIS. If you have no access to SIS, please ask the secretary of IPS (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz, tel. 296 824 641) for sending you the thesis by e-mail.
- 2) Use the IEPS Thesis Report form only for your comments. **It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 400 words.** In case you assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.
- 3) Retain your critical stance. You cannot confer more than 80 points upon a thesis that does not satisfy research standards in top European universities.
- 4) Upload the Report as PDF/A file into the SIS. Instructions on how to convert .DOCx to PDF/A): „Save as“ – select „PDF“ – check-in „Options or Možnosti“ that „PDF options“ tick „ISO 19005-1 compliant /kompatibilní s/ (PDF/A)“ – „Save“. If you have no access to SIS, please send the unsigned PDF file to the secretary of IPS (katerina.bubnova@fsv.cuni.cz).
- 5) Please deliver to the IPS Secretariat, Pekařská 16, 158 00 Praha 5- Nové Butovice, **two hand-signed originals**. Unfortunately, a photocopied report with signature does not suffice. Sorry.
- 6) Your Report will be remunerated, so we need also your account information (separate from this form).