

Living in the Illicit Global Economy

University of Toronto
Political Science
Fall 2022

T 2-4pm EST, SS 581
Office hours: T 4:30-5:30pm EST or by appointment



A woman with a child harvesting opium sap from a poppy field in Mexico. Photo credit: Rodrigo Cruz for the NYT

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. María J. Méndez, maria.mendez@utoronto.ca

Course Overview

For as long as the global economy has existed, it has had a clandestine “underside.” Today, illicit trade is estimated to represent as much as 20% of total economic activity in some countries. Yet for most of us, our knowledge of the global economy is limited to legally recognized profits and expenses. This course explores the illicit side of the global economy, particularly as it is experienced by those living in the social peripheries. Drawing on political, historical, and ethnographic accounts of illicit economies from across the globe we will examine how distinctions between legal/illegal and licit/illicit activities are drawn, as well as the forms of life and death that emerge at the interface of the state, legal economies, and illicit activities. Tacking back and forth between theoretical texts and empirical research, students will reflect on prevalent ethical judgements about illicit activities, and on how their everyday lives might be entangled with them.

Course Readings

Required Readings: There will be three required books to buy for this course. These titles are available at the college bookstore and will also be on reserve at the library either in print or digital form (to find them click on the Library reading list tab on Quercus). You can also obtain them online or buy used copies. All other readings will be posted on the course website.

Required texts:

- Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*
- Graham Denyer Willis, *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*
- Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*

Grading and due dates

- Attendance and participation: 15%
- Seminar presentation & discussion (2x): 20% *questions due by 11:59pm EST, day before session*
- Reflection entries (3x): 15% *due by 2:00pm EST, day of chosen session*
- Book review: 10% *due by November 29th 11:59pm EST*
- Research proposal: 10% *due October 25th by 11:59pm EST*
- Peer review feedback: 5% *due November 1st by 11:59pm EST*
- Final paper: 25% *due December 6th by 11:59pm EST*

Assessment

Note: Expectations and guidelines on how to write the book review, research proposal, and research paper will be distributed a minimum of two weeks before they are due.

Attendance & Participation: 15%

This is a discussion-based seminar, and your participation is essential for the success of the course. You are expected to arrive on time and stay until the end of class. In addition to attending each session and bringing your course readings, you should come prepared with thoughtful questions and comments about the assigned materials. Participation will not be evaluated based on how much you speak but on the quality of the insights you share and your fruitful engagement with the views of others. Active participation in class also means being a good listener and contributing to in-class group activities. I encourage you to attend office hours to discuss class material, particularly if you find it difficult to engage in class discussions. I do not expect you to agree with the readings or with what your instructor or other classmates think. I very much welcome lively discussion as long as we treat each other with respect.

Seminar Presentation & Discussion: 20%

Twice during the semester (depending on enrollment), you will sign up with your peers to present on an issue related to that week's readings and will lead discussion for the rest of the session. Each group has two primary tasks: 1) Collectively craft polished discussion questions (#of questions = #of participants) and post them on Quercus the day before the session by 11:59pm EST. Since

these questions are meant to facilitate sustained conversations and inspire critical reflections, think carefully about what you circulate. Here are some questions you want to avoid: simple yes-no; leading (conveys the expected answer); and slanted (prevents participation from students who might disagree with the implied assumptions). 2) Your second task is to introduce the readings at the beginning of the session for about 15-20 minutes. This can take many forms: identifying the main arguments; connecting a theoretical provocation with a historical or contemporary political issue; or linking your research topic with the assigned readings. Multi-media and multi-genre presentations that stir thoughtful discussions are welcomed. You must sign up to present once during weeks 2-6 and once again during weeks 7-12 (depending on enrollment).

Reflection entries* 3 x 5%: 15%

These 1-page single-spaced entries offer you the opportunity to respond to a week's course materials through unanswered questions, criticisms, or creative extensions of the readings. Rather than summarize the ideas contained in the assigned texts for the week you choose to respond, your task is to explore your own ideas about them. These papers are also opportunities for you to reflect on how the readings' arguments, concepts, and themes connect with your everyday lives, current events, popular culture (memes, films, tv series, games, etc.), and other course materials. Moreover, they are a space for you draw connections between the readings and the research topic that you will explore in the final paper. You must write one reflection piece for one week in each of the following course sections: weeks 2-4, weeks 5-7, weeks 8-11. These papers are due before our seminar meets and you may not write a reflection piece for your assigned discussion day. If you use outside references, make sure to cite them. Alternative forms of media and genres (videos, songs, drawings, comics, poems, and interactive presentations) will be accepted.

Book Review*: 10%

At any point but by November 29th, you will submit a 2-page single-spaced essay review of one of the three books for the course. The point of this assignment is not to summarize the book content but to critically evaluate the author's objective, main argument, contentions, and methods. The essay will analyze how convincing the main thesis of the book is and will comment on the book's contribution to understanding a dimension of the illicit global economy.

Research Paper* (research proposal 10% + peer review 5% + 25% final paper): 40%

You will write a research paper on a topic of your choosing. Students registered in POL 438 will write a 6-page single-spaced paper (around 3,000 words) and students registered in POL 2321 will write a 10-page single-spaced paper (around 5,000 words). This paper length excludes bibliography. The research paper must advance an argument on some dimension of the illicit global economy in relation to course materials. Prior to the final research paper, you will prepare a 4-page double-spaced research proposal, which needs to be completed for you to get a passing grade and for which you will provide peer feedback.

**Paper format: 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins.*

Course policies

Personal Accessibility Needs

All students are welcome in the course and should provide reasonable prior notice to facilitate any needed disability accommodation. To arrange accommodations, contact the Accessibility Services staff: Phone: 416-978-8060; E-mail: accessibility.services@utoronto.ca.

Assignments

- *Submission:* Unless otherwise specified, all assignments must be submitted on Quercus and emailed to me by 11:59 pm on their due date.
- *Late penalty:* Assignments will receive a late penalty of 5%/day, including weekends, and will only be accepted within 7 days of their due date. Moreover, feedback on late assignments is not guaranteed.
- *Extensions, make-ups, and incompletes:* These will not be granted unless you meet one of the University's identified exceptions (official documentation is required). If you are absent for legitimate reasons, such as illness or injury, report your absence through the online absence declaration form available on ACORN and contact me to arrange an accommodation within a week of your missed assignment.
- *Grade appeals:* If you believe that I have given you an unfair grade, you may request a re-evaluation of the assignment. Grading appeals must be submitted after 48 hours and within 72 hours of receiving the graded assignment. They should be sent to my email with a cover letter detailing the reasons for the appeal. Please note that a re-evaluation doesn't guarantee a change in your letter grade; it can result in the same or lower grade.

Fostering a Positive Learning Environment

Effective learning can only occur in a positive classroom environment; therefore, we have a shared responsibility in ensuring that everyone in the class feels welcome to contribute. As your course instructor, I am committed to fostering a learning community that recognizes your inherent worth and dignity. This means that I will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or hate speech.

Office Hours

This class will require you to digest and synthesize a large range of materials, therefore I encourage you to attend office hours early and often or contact me to set up an appointment. Here are some reasons why you might attend office hours:

- You need clarification on a concept, aspect of class discussion, or reading.
- You want to discuss course materials or topics further.
- You want to chat about a topic related to course materials.
- You have a question, concern, or comment about the course.
- You need to ask a question about an assignment that is specific to you.

Communication policy

We will communicate via our University of Toronto e-mails. I will not respond to any messages sent through Quercus. You are expected to check your email on a consistent basis to stay abreast of any important course updates. When emailing me regarding the course please include in the subject line the course number (POL 438 or POL 2321) and a short description of your query. I will try to respond to your message within 2 to 3 business days, Monday-Friday (8:00am-5:00pm). Please plan accordingly for urgent queries and conduct all communication (electronic and otherwise) in a professional manner, using adequate salutations.

Academic integrity

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense punishable by the university, and which can result in failure of the course. Examples of plagiarism include copying another's work without attribution, falsifying records, cheating on tests, and submitting your own previous work. For advice on how to avoid plagiarism see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>). If you wish to opt out of the university's plagiarism detection tool, email me no later than September 20, 2022.

Course support

If you are struggling in the course in personal or academic ways and/or need special accommodations, here are some helpful resources available to you:

- For mental health: <https://mentalhealth.utoronto.ca/>
- For writing: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres>
- For research: <https://onereach.library.utoronto.ca/research-help>
- For religious accommodations: <http://uoft.me/religiousaccommodation>
- For other support contact the Registrar's Office: <https://future.utoronto.ca/current-students/registrars/>

Course schedule

All materials that are not required books or hyperlinks will be made available through Quercus. I recommend engaging with these materials in the order in which they are listed. Please note that this schedule is subject to modification.

Week 1

September 13— Introduction: What is this course about? —No readings

Week 2

September 20—The Illicit Global Economy and its Misconceptions

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "The global illicit economy: Trajectories of transnational organized crime," March 2021. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Global-Illicit-Economy-GITOC-Low.pdf>

Helen Fitzwilliam, *Illicit: The Dark Trade*, <https://vimeo.com/178255490>

Susan Strange, "Organised crime: the mafias"

Peter Andreas, “Illicit Globalization: Myths, Misconceptions, and Historical Lessons”

Week 3

September 27—Rule of Law

Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”

Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.”

Week 4

October 4 — Illegalities

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, “Generalized Punishment” and “Illegalities and Delinquency”

Week 5

October 11 —Criminal governance

Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection*, “Introduction” and “The Industry of Protection”

Week 6

October 18 — Shadow economies

Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*, Parts 1-3

Week 7

October 25 — Shadow economies

Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*, Parts 4-5

Research proposal (10%) due October 25

Week 8

November 1 — Criminal violence

Graham Denyer Willis, *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4

Peer review feedback (5%) due November 1

Week 9

November 8 — Reading week, no class

Week 10

November 15 — Criminal violence

Graham Denyer Willis, *The Killing Consensus: Police, Organized Crime, and the Regulation of Life and Death in Urban Brazil*, Chapters 4-8

last day to drop course is November 16

Week 11

November 22 — Cultures of the underworld

Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Introduction and Chapters 1-4

Week 12

November 29 — Cultures of the underworld

Phillipe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Chapters 5-9

Week 13

December 6 — Conclusion: What did we learn? — No reading

Final assignment due (25%).