

Abstract

Through a detailed life history of Bismarck, a Nicaraguan youth gang member turned illegal drug dealer turned legal entrepreneur, this paper explores the potential relationships between formal and informal economic activity. It focuses particularly on the various economic activities that he has been involved in at different stages in his life, tracing their origins and evolving dynamics in order to highlight not only how the 'formal' and 'informal' often mix, but also how they can in fact be extremely interdependent, to the extent that they often directly feed off each other. At the same time, however, Bismarck's story also underlines how the systemic iteration of economic activity ultimately depends less on their form and more on the contingent articulation of the specific type of activity concerned, the particular trajectory of the individual social agents involved, as well as ultimately the nature of the broader contextual political economy.

Keywords: Gangs, Drug dealing, Informal economic activity, Entrepreneurship

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