

Kate Moss Should Support Reparations for Colombia's Victims

By Michael Spagat*

September 27, 2005

Europeans are recoiling in shock at the apparent cocaine use of supermodel Kate Moss. Well, perhaps not all Europeans. Perhaps less shocked are those leaving behind traces of cocaine on toilets in the European Parliament building to be retrieved by enterprising German journalists. Perhaps the 3 percent of the local Italian population filling the River Po with cocaine-laced urine are only mildly surprised. As Ms. Moss herself pointed out in 1998 "I don't think you have to be in this industry to see (hard drug use). You just have to look around you."

Now Hennes & Mauritz of Sweden, Chanel of France and Burberry of the UK will be forging ahead into an uncertain future without Ms. Moss's valued services. Good luck to them. Rimmel London may be swayed by Mosses apology to "family, friends, co-workers, business associates and others." Catherine Deneuve thought this unnecessary as "She's a great model. If she's ruining her personal life, that belongs to her." Maybe Deneuve, like all other commentators on this sad saga, has forgotten all the "others" who are killed in the course of bringing cocaine to market.

Colombian drug dealers must be lamenting the potential loss of one of their wealthiest patrons. But they can console themselves with their diverse and growing European customer base, particularly in the UK.

Meanwhile, cocaine money fills the coffers of illegal left-wing guerrillas in Colombia. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) strives incessantly to overthrow the Colombian government, despite the FARC's 98% disapproval rating in the polls. But then why would any reasonable person support a group that makes regular use of 'gas canister bombs' into which guerrillas often pack shrapnel and even rotten bananas to infect the wounds of their victims? A few years ago the guerrillas shelled a church where people were sheltering from a nearby clash, killing 119 and wounding 90.

Illegal right-wing paramilitaries are also happy to exchange white powder for Euros. In recent years this trade has underpinned their strategy of massacring civilians whom they suspect of helping the guerrillas. In the dataset I maintain with colleagues in Bogotá on the Colombian conflict, we find that the paramilitaries tend to get mauled when they tangle with the guerrillas. Yet they manage to kill ten people for every one they injure. How? Because most of their victims are civilians shot at close range with intent to kill.

Reasonable people would not want to support the paramilitaries any more than they would want to support the guerrillas.

Europe has played a bit part in addressing the Colombian conflict and the “war on drugs”, dwarfed by \$700 million a year in US expenditures. Europeans tend to reject the whole notion of a war on drugs and criticize the US for militarizing anti-drug policy. The US stands accused of behaving like a 200-ton flying guerrilla, seeking a quick fix to the drug problem by spraying herbicides out of airplanes. Europe does not want any part of that.

Aerial eradication is, of course, inconvenient for Colombia’s illegal armed groups. Nevertheless, spraying does appear to be reaching its limits as coca planters shift their planting toward more erratic patches in increasingly isolated areas. Continued progress now requires a broader counterinsurgency approach, with the State taking control of new land and providing institutional infrastructure such as police, judges and prosecutors to address burning justice needs and to consolidate civilian support. Unfortunately, this is also a militarized approach that is unlikely to draw consistent European support outside the UK.

In principle, Europeans favor providing good economic alternatives for poor Colombians so that they will voluntarily exit the drug business. But in practice Europe has offered only small-scale support for alternative development, mainly through their small, though helpful, “peace laboratories”.

Europeans have also steered clear of the ongoing process of demobilizing right-wing paramilitaries, which does actually present an opportunity to decommission arms and to retrain and occupy thousands of violent men. They argue that Colombia’s Peace and Justice Law is too soft on drug-dealing mass murders. It is, after all, a gamble that by compromising on punishments for terrible crimes Colombia can reduce the number of people who will be victimized in the future. It is possible that the Colombians have gotten the balance wrong.

So perhaps there is some sense in Europe’s aloofness from Colombia in recent years. But Europe cannot ignore Colombia’s victims, as its separation from the perpetrators is paper-thin. Europe must back Colombia’s just-formed Reparations and Conciliation Commission. This fledgling body represents a unique opportunity for Colombia to break its cycle of violence and transition to a brighter future.

As for Ms. Moss, after rehab she should also support the Commission, financially and morally. Suppose she were able to perceive the link between her personal behavior and the victims of the Colombian conflict. Suppose that she worked to repair that damage. She might inspire others to do the same and, in the process, redeem herself.

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