Chapter IV

With A Cross on the Forehead

Colombian Migrants in the Netherlands

"San Antonio, dame novio (give me a boyfriend)!

Hispano-American invocation, very popular in Colombia

The preceding chapters have outlined the position and relative importance of Colombia and the Netherlands in the global cocaine business. The huge benefits to be made around the export, import and distribution of cocaine in destination countries has clearly intensified a migration of Colombians who struggle to get a share of them. Whether they are proper traquetos, adventurers, unskilled smugglers or temporary residents who support themselves by dealing cocaine, these 'migrant-traffickers' (Hernandez 1997: 541) are stimulated by a manifold demand - of illicit drugs, of labour force, of repression - in an industry that heavily relies on human resources. Moreover, this migration has not only been a result but also, like in the US, an important condition for the Colombian advantage.

Before exploring the particular involvement of Colombian nationals in the cocaine business once the merchandise has entered the Netherlands (chapters V to IX), I consider it important to discuss some general features of Colombian migrants in the Netherlands. In order to be able to assess opportunities and limitations for involvement, one should understand who these people are and the nature of their lives. In contrast with other well-researched ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, Latin Americans and particularly Colombians have never been the objects of systematic socio-anthropological research. They remain as an invisible, non-quantified community, which makes their problems more difficult to understand and tackle. This chapter will be devoted to providing some essential data on their migration patterns, their demographic and social profiles, and in particular the several economic activities they perform. I will try to extract conclusions about the nature of this community, testing the applicability of some notions developed by social scientists on migration and ethnic entrepreneurship. Chapter VI will further provide some bases for comparison through revealing the reality of Colombians in the US.

4.1. Colombians in the Polders

4.1.1. Migration patterns and demographic profile

In contrast to other migrant groups that arrived in one primary wave, Colombians have poured continuously into the Netherlands for the last two decades. However, it was not until the 1980s that a noticeable group of young Colombian women started to arrive to the Netherlands.

Colombians had already been leaving their country in large numbers, first from the 1930s to Venezuela, and later in the 1950s to the US. These processes only intensified during the 1960s and late 1970s to countries such as Ecuador and Panama. During the 1980s, emigration to other Latin American countries stagnated as they were hit by severe economic recession. Despite the fact that some migrants from the US started to return to Colombia with some accumulated...
capital made in legal and illegal activities, the outflows did not stop and now were targeted at smaller cities in the US, and other regions such as Europe and Japan.

While cultural links made Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia) their primary target, previous experience in - and the model of - the US, pushed many to look to the United Kingdom (London). Spain and the UK are followed by France and Germany, which has a large community based in Frankfurt. In smaller numbers, Colombians settled in the Netherlands (The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam), Belgium (Brussels) and Switzerland (Zurich).

Table VII. Colombians in the Netherlands (1991-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>THE HAGUE</th>
<th>AMSTERDAM</th>
<th>ROTTERDAM</th>
<th>TOTAL THE NETHERLANDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>Ethnic (a)</td>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>Ethnic (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- Nat: Total of Colombian residents inscribed in the Register Office of City Councils.
- Ethnic (c): COS Centrum Voor Onderzoek en Statistiek, Rotterdam. Residents born in Colombia (excludes second generation born in the Netherlands).
- Ethnic (d): Until 1997, 'broad' definition of non-native (allochtoon) that included persons with Colombian citizenship, born in Colombia, or those with at least one parent born in Colombia. For 1998, the CBS uses a 'narrow' definition, which only includes those persons born in Colombia with at least one parent born abroad, and those born in the Netherlands with both parents born in Colombia. This excludes two large groups formerly taken into account: around 1,300 second generation Colombians born in the Netherlands with one parent born abroad, and between 1,500 to 2,000 adopted children from Colombia (born in Colombia, Dutch nationality and Dutch parents). For 1999, a 'new' definition is adopted recognising all second generation: Colombians are those persons with at least one parent born in Colombia. This still excludes the group of adopted children.
In the Dutch case, the large proportion of young women from the very start of the immigration wave (a constant of 2/3) is explained by the main activities that attract them to or keep them in the Netherlands: marriage with a local male partner, and other 'gendered' occupations in house cleaning and prostitution. Some of these migrants had been already abroad - especially in the US, the Netherlands Antilles or Japan - or had some relative in London, Spain or Frankfurt. Many came with small children, others just got them in the Netherlands giving birth to a second generation Colombians.

Once this first group was established - in financial and juridical terms, especially through obtaining the Dutch nationality - it triggered a chain migration that would intensify during the 1990s. More restricting migration legislation, especially measures creating greater obstacles for mixed marriages in 1994, decreased and later maintained the number of legal Colombians residents below the 2,000 mark (see Table VII). The inflow, however, has regained dynamism since 1997, only increasing the number of illegal immigrants, the Dutch born second generation and those ethnic Colombians with Dutch nationality.

Most migrants come from either the main urban areas or have lived there prior to emigration. Vallunos from the area around the city of Cali and paisas from the Antioquia region (Medellín) constitute by far the two largest groups. There are nevertheless many Colombians from Bogotá, from the 'coffee area' around Armenia, Pereira and Ibagué, some costeños from Barranquilla and Santa Marta, and some immigrants from smaller regional capitals. In this sense, even with a slight over-representation of vallunos, Colombian immigrants in the Netherlands come from the traditional emigration areas, which are the most populated and industrialised strips of the country.

**Table VIII. Estimation Total Ethnic Colombians (2000)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombian Nationals</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation with Dutch nationality</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation with Colombian parents</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation with one Colombian parent</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombian adopted children</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal Immigrants</td>
<td>3,000-4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11,500-12,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CBS and Colombian Migrant Organisations.

In contrast to the decreasing or rather stagnated population of older Latin American refugees from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay,² women and children form the growing Colombian group. Two thirds are women and the average age is very young with 30% below 15 years.

Table VIII estimates the total number of Colombians living in the Netherlands by the year 2000. This number is small compared with many other immigrant communities, but it is the largest Latin American group, closely followed by Brazilians and Dominicans. It is of course a matter of dispute whether Colombian adopted children should be counted as Colombians. Many of these children do not speak Spanish and have no cultural or social relation with Colombia or Colombians. However, a growing number of them, some teenagers at the edge of self-sufficiency, seem to be active in reaffirming or rediscovering their

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² The political refugees who arrived in the 1970s were predominantly male and remained more concentrated and closed. The group started to decrease with the return of many during democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s. Some still remained, especially the second generation born in the Netherlands.
'Colombianess'. Just when the CBS ceased to consider them *allochtonen* (non-native) in 1998 in their statistics, some of these Dutch adolescents started to feel and act 'differently'. While they differ in socio-cultural background to other second generation Colombians (half of which nevertheless have a Dutch father), their increasing 'Colombian awareness' can attract them to other Colombian immigrants.

Colombians in the Netherlands do not live together. Despite the fact that half of them live in the province of *Zuid Holland*, they are truly dispersed all over the whole *Randstad* area and its peripheries. In no single street or neighbourhood, do they constitute a visible group in the way they are in Jackson Heights (Queens, New York) or the Elephant & Castle (London). Due to the high number of mixed couples, many of them live in suburban areas or small municipalities: Almere, Alkmaar, Amstelveen, Nieuw Vennep, Haarlem, Zaandam, Purmerend, Rijswijk, Zoetermeer, Noordwijk, Spijkenisse, Capelle aan de Ijssel, Hoogvliet, Woerden or Nieuwegein, to give a few common destinations of the Colombian diaspora in the Netherlands.

However, a large group of around 40%, especially Colombian nationals and illegal immigrants, prefers to endure higher living costs in the three larger cities, and stay closer to formal and informal job opportunities, education facilities, or cultural and leisure events. The Hague is by far the city with the most Colombians, followed by Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Again, they do not concentrate in particular areas but rather merge into many immigrant or mixed neighbourhoods: for example in the *Laakkwartier*, *Transvaalkwartier* or *Den Haag Centrum*; in Amsterdam West, *Oud Zuid* or *De Pijp*; or in Rotterdam *Zuid*.

### 4.1.2. Class background and social capital

The socio-economic and cultural background of Colombian immigrants is heterogeneous, which reflect the different reasons why they come to the Netherlands. They belong to various ethnic groups and different social strata, from low to upper middle classes. While ethnic and regional differences are mitigated during the immigrant experience, class and educational disparities are a permanent source of social fragmentation inside the Colombian group. With very few exceptions, there are no common 'ethnic' activities or businesses that interconnect Colombians from different social classes.

A first group of young women come or stay in the Netherlands primarily because they have met a local partner, most often a Dutchman but also Spanish or Antillean men. I found several cases in which the encounter did not take place in the Netherlands: Dutch entrepreneurs, students, tourists, merchants or sailors who travelled abroad and met a Colombian woman in one way or the other. Others met in the Dutch Caribbean enclaves, places visited and populated by both Dutch and Colombian nationals. Others still met their local partners in the course of a visit to a relative already living in the Netherlands. These 'love' immigrants tend to come from middle classes with at least secondary education completed and some labour experience. Within this group, I met women with degrees in law, psychology, accountancy, journalism, or who were employed in Colombia as secretaries, salespersons, tourist operators or factory workers. As I will later explain, they usually do not keep their occupations or careers once in the Netherlands. Only some, after a period in which they learn the language and complete a new study or training, will

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3 Maybe the most active and dynamic Colombian organisation during my fieldwork was *Chicolad - Chicos Colombianos Adoptados* (Colombian adopted children) - a teenage group based in Amsterdam that in 1997 grew from two or three enthusiastic youngsters to a countrywide network of more than 100 participants. They organised Colombian tertulias (social gatherings), Spanish and salsa courses, cultural activities, 'roots' trips or inquires in Colombia, as well as football or theatre events. Some of them were always visible in broader *Latino* events and settings.

4 The most notorious are the cocaine enterprises that often connect, for example, unskilled workers with university degree holders.
eventually find jobs appropriate to their educational background. Until then, they either work in unskilled jobs or are financially dependent on their partners or social benefits.

A second group, also mainly formed by women, come to the Netherlands in search of better job opportunities. This labour migration is heavily dependent on personal networks of relatives and friends already established (chain migration) and initially targets activities in the informal economy, the two paradigmatic examples being prostitution and housecleaning. These women tend to come from a lower class, but still have basic levels of formal education. Some were unemployed; others had experience in low-wage jobs in the formal or informal economy. In some cases, they have already had a family in Colombia, which either stays behind or is brought over later once settlement has taken place. They often do not plan to stay for long when they realise that formal job opportunities are blocked, but they will stay as long as they are able to support family livelihoods and meet long-desired material aspirations. Many of these women eventually improve their relative situation in the Netherlands by becoming legal residents, again by meeting a local man willing to support them or to provide them with a residence permit. Others return to Colombia after some years, still being followed by other relatives who just walk in their shoes.

There are also some men amongst this second group. They are usually relatives or friends of a 'pioneer' woman of the first or second group who is already established and can assist newcomers with basic needs such as accommodation and employment tips.

The absence of more skilled workers or professional migrants amongst newcomers who can rapidly enter the formal economy is a result of several circumstances. Firstly, restrictive migration laws put a barrier that, in the case of Colombians, is particularly directed at men. Secondly, cultural and language obstacles make these migrants to select other destinations such as the US, the UK or Spain. Finally, those chain migrants described above can neither assist high skilled migrants. Only those who are able to overcome these obstacles (by marrying a local, by retraining in the Netherlands and by actually relying on the Dutch business market) have the opportunity to occupy higher layers in the formal labour market. Exceptions to this are of course the few diplomatic personnel, some temporary managers and employees of the few Colombian enterprises, and some exchange students and internship trainees. However, only a tiny fraction of them actually remain in the Netherlands.

From the small number of Colombian artists (musicians, dancers, painters and writers), only some were already active in Colombia but almost none actually migrated due to their artistic careers or activities. The very small group of officially recognised political refugees tends to come from middle classes and usually have educational levels above average.

Although this heterogeneity is also reflected in the second generation Colombians, this group of children and teenagers displays more common characteristics in terms of formal education, bilingualism, and future perspectives in the Dutch environment. Many of them follow higher education and are starting to get better jobs than their Colombian parents.

However, whilst the Netherlands is not an interesting destination for Colombian professionals, it also does not attract entrepreneurial immigrants. Many Colombians have long established trade skills and business expertise, but, as I will soon explain, some of the conditions for the emergence of a local entrepreneurial class are absent. The few entrepreneurs found do not bring capital from abroad but tend to rely on local sources, whether they are savings accumulated from labour or external sources from local (Dutch) partners.

5 During the 1980s, many women came to the Netherlands with their babies or small children. Although statistically considered as first generation immigrants, they show all the traits of their second generation fellows (bilingualism, no intention to return, social mobility, and so on). Thus, I do not make any distinction amongst both groups of teenagers.
4.1.3. Welcomed?

As Portes (1995) explains, the way in which immigrant groups are incorporated into social and economic local structures is not only determined by their individual human capital and skills. As members of broader structures and networks, the process of assimilation is also affected by their interaction with the social context. Contextual effects are reflected in three different levels of reception: by the government's immigrant policies, by the acceptance from civil society and public opinion, and finally by the nature of the co-ethnic community already present. Let now see how these three levels affect the specific assimilation of Colombians in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands has no prior history of colonial, geopolitical or significant economic domination over Colombia, facts that often influence some destinations of immigrant outflows. The Netherlands is indeed considered as part of the 'advanced West', but it is culturally and geographically far, a truly strange and remote land for those who do not have direct references from friends or relatives. Moreover, the Netherlands has never engaged in systematic labour recruitment from Colombia. However, if - until the beginning of the 1990s - Colombians arrived with no official invitation, from then on their entrance to the Netherlands has been actively combated with increasingly restrictive laws. Newcomers are not assisted and are denied basic rights. Claims for asylum are routinely refused to Colombians, and migration laws even try to discourage locals from bringing a Colombian partner to the Netherlands. Genuine students and tourists are often denied visas even when legal requirements are fulfilled. At this official level, reception for Colombians can be defined as hostile.

A second level of reception involves the social acceptance or rejection from Dutch society, not only in terms of instrumental demand but also in terms of public opinion and images. This level of reaction is more contradictory since different groups or even individuals are accepted/rejected in many ways by various social groups. Colombian architects, for example, have good chances of being discriminated or ignored by their Dutch colleagues, while Colombian prostitutes are not only accepted but also encouraged to come by their many local clients. Colombian women are positively regarded by local men as being exotic, sexually appealing, hot, spontaneous, straightforward, loyal, home loving and hard working. 'What more can you expect from a woman?' I once heard a Dutchman saying. These images seem to play a positive role in their relative success as prostitutes and potential partners/wives of local men.

Further elements contribute to guarantee, at least, further public indifference: they are tolerated as 'Western' and Catholic; they are few and dispersed; most of them are women; their music and dance is very popular in the Netherlands; and so forth.

However, many feel discriminated against and stigmatised by the bad reputation of Colombia as a source of drugs, poverty and endemic violence. This feeling is particularly noticeable amongst men, illegal immigrants, and those highly skilled or educated. In general terms, however, the social reception of Colombians can be characterised as being neutral or positive.

Finally, a third level of reception is formed by the nature of the Colombian community already established. The assistance of relatives and close friends is essential for almost all Colombian newcomers. These small, personal networks are necessary for securing initial credit, accommodation, employment tips, basic social and psychological support, and cash flows to Colombia. However, these 'ethnic' networks rarely go beyond kinship. In fact, as I will explain, there is no Colombian community to welcome or assist newcomers. They are forced to dissolve and be dispersed within other groups of foreigners or native-born, so they are less protected from outside prejudice and culture shock. The lack of substantial entrepreneurial and professional presence reduces the economic opportunities of new arrived Colombians. There is a rather weak reception from co-nationals.
Colombian reception in the Netherlands can thus be conceptualised as officially hostile, socially neutral or positive, and ethnically weak. What sort of immigrant community is shaped under such conditions? Before addressing this question, it is still necessary to show what they actually do in the Netherlands and the obstacles they face.

4.2. Survival Strategies: 'A Colombian doesn't get stuck'

4.2.1. Colombian jobs and incomes

Informal labour
Maybe one half of Colombian immigrants work in informal activities. The group includes not only the vast majority of illegal immigrants (men and women), but also some legal residents who either get better incomes in the informal economy (prostitution) or just work there part-time to get extra-incomes. It can be argued that many Colombians concentrate in two informal occupational niches: prostitution and private housecleaning. Of course, their importance in both activities is not absolute but relative regarding the group's size. Cabeza:

"Most women here [in The Hague] are cleaning. A huge number are just working behind the window. Some retire and new ones keep coming. Some disappear for a while but you see them again after some time."

Prostitution is indeed a major income resource for many legal and illegal Colombian immigrant women. Despite potential higher profits, many women do not want to work in prostitution, do not have the necessary contacts in the circuit or prefer the security of wage labour, so they exploit the local demand for housecleaners and baby-sitters. Both services are more expensive if contracted in the formal economy, so many Dutch households rely on illegal immigrants to get these services more cheaply. These labourers usually work long hours combining many employers, do not have any formal labour protection, and they are paid in cash per hour worked. Some women also clean in bars, offices and studios.

For Colombian men, the Dutch informal economy offers a more limited set of activities. Many are also engaged in both housecleaning and cleaning of (non-Colombian) bars and restaurants, earning the same wages as women. Other people work in seasonal activities linked to gardening and 'green house' agriculture. I also found men working as newspaper or leaflet distributors, illegally employed in dry cleaners, or sporadically contracted to perform small rebuilding or renovation works. Some illegal immigrant men complained about increasing difficulties to find informal jobs, while others suggested that legal workers do not fulfill the increasing demand for unskilled labourers.

Further, some men and women also engage in part-time jobs connected to several circuits. Some people cook and sell Colombian food (empanadas, tamales, rellena, patacón, arroz con pollo and so on) for informal restaurants, special events or the street prostitution circuit. Some men also provide informal services for traquetos as chauffeurs and telephone operators. Other Colombians give individual Spanish lessons to a varied clientele. Finally, some also perform as translators and interpreters on informal bases.

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6 Most Colombian prostitutes work either for legal sex entrepreneurs (club owners) or are truly independent (window-rentals). Their activities are informal since they are neither criminally prosecuted nor fully integrated in the legal economy. Only illegal prostitutes complain about being criminalised and persecuted, but in their condition of being illegal foreigners. Even in cases of criminal involvement (traffic in women, pimping, and so forth), the women are considered victims rather than offenders. See chapter VII for a full account on Colombian prostitutes in the Netherlands.

7 See chapters V and VI on informal jobs (rebusques) around the cocaine business.
It should be stressed again that almost all these informal activities are not framed inside any own 'ethnic economy' (Light and Karageorgis 1995). These services and jobs target local clients and employers: prostitutes work for local men, cleaners and baby-sitters work in Dutch households, language teachers for Dutch natives, and so forth. Only a small number of Colombians informally work for other Colombians, essentially cleaning and baby-sitting. In many cases, it is a relative who either works unpaid in exchange for food and accommodation, or, extremely rare, belongs to some family business in which he or she has to help.

Though most of these informal transactions are not inter-ethnic, these job opportunities - especially in prostitution and domestic service - are strongly dependent on tips, contacts and recommendations provided by co-nationals, whether relatives or friends. In this way, a very dynamic demand for these services stimulates a chain (illegal) migration of relatives and friends willing to take these jobs.

For example, Amanda's pioneer arrival in the mid-1980s prompted a chain migration of almost 15 direct relatives and in laws over the past 15 years. All of them work in informal activities, mainly housecleaning, baby-sitting and construction work. Only one woman managed to regularise her situation by re-marrying a local man. The others stay as illegal immigrants either for a couple of years or even longer. Some still have commitments in Colombia - children - and want to go back after accumulating some money, but others prefer and have the opportunity to stay and rebuild their lives in the Netherlands. They all dream with the eventual possibility of finding local partners or being made legal by employers or the state. Only under these conditions, can they seriously think about basic rights, study prospects or a formal job.

Formal employment
A large number of Colombians with work permits or double nationality are wage earners in the Dutch legal economy. Occupational skilled immigrants, some of them with a technical or university degree and work experience, are often underemployed. They usually follow some training, internship or new study in the Netherlands before getting more highly qualified jobs. Amongst these professionals, there are social workers, psychologists, environment specialists and journalists.

Many Colombians, especially women, work in unskilled jobs on a temporary or permanent basis, mostly through local private employment agencies (uitzendbureaus). These jobs are usually combined with another income from a partner or relative, and in many cases, they are performed next to household chores. They are mostly employed in cleaning companies, supermarkets, call centres, catering services, conference halls, hotels, or as administrative personnel in all sorts of firms and institutions, including universities, NGO's, computer companies or chemical factories. Others hold more stable and qualified jobs as secretaries, technicians or low managers in engineer and construction firms, airline companies, or expensive hotels. However, I did not find managers or top employees amongst Colombian immigrants.

Further to this, a very small group work legally in the few Colombian businesses or institutions in the Netherlands. They include some local offices of Colombian enterprises (Uniban, Transportadora Maritima Grancolombiana, and so on), the Colombian Embassy and Consulates, some small import-export firms or some bars and restaurants.

Many relatively well educated and skilled Colombians are often willing to accept, at least for a while, harsh jobs in which they can easily earn twice as much as what they could get in a white-collar job in Colombia. Despite the fact that a strong demand seems to exist for many of these legal jobs performed by Colombians, it should be borne in mind that very often this labour is not the primary magnet for these people to come or stay in the Netherlands. In this sense, this labour migration is, in many cases, the result of individual decisions concerning not only
economic matters: local partners, (illegal) family reunification, search for new life-styles, knowledge advancement, and so on.

Finally, a number of Colombians sell particular skills related to Colombian culture for the Dutch market, for which a local demand exists. With or without formal training, people work as translators, Spanish and salsa teachers either for schools, institutes or organisations as employed personnel or free-lance contractors. A few professional, mainly jazz and salsa musicians, also manage to survive by playing music for a local audience.

**Social Security and partner income**
I found many immigrants who received social benefits or relied on their partner's income. Different sorts of Colombians receive social benefits: divorced women with children, artists, unemployed, and even some prostitutes and cleaners who work unregistered. In fact, given the middle class background of many migrants and their consumption expectations, none consider these benefits enough and try to combine them with informal work.

Many women, however, stay at home and have full time jobs as housewives and mothers. Some feel frustrated about a broken career. Others only depend on their husbands for some time but eventually find a job. I found, amongst other Dutch partners, police officers, truck drivers, pensioners, merchants, computer analysts, hairdressers, small entrepreneurs, scientific researchers and construction workers.

**Students**
There are two types of Colombian students in the Netherlands. The temporary exchange students who only come to the Netherlands with a scholarship and return to Colombia after 6 months/2 years form a first group. They target many disciplines, but concentrate on agricultural (Wageningen), technical (Delft), or development and social studies (The Hague). Especially long established Colombians and second generation teenagers form a second larger - and increasing - group of students. They are dispersed through all sorts of colleges, institutes and universities, and do not form any visible or organised group. Some of these students also work part-time to support themselves.

Colombian scholars, with some presence in other European countries such as Britain, Spain, France or Germany, are almost absent in Dutch academic circles.

**Ethnic entrepreneurship: the lack of own infrastructure**
Most of the ethnic small enterprises are family businesses organised by Dutch-Colombian couples, in almost all the cases with Dutch capital. A Dutch man married to a Colombian woman, for example, buys Colombian products in Germany (food, handicraft and alcohol) that are sold in the large Dutch cities for extremely high prices. His market stall in Blaak (Rotterdam) was closed down when the police discovered that he was selling unlicensed Colombian aguardiente. In The Hague, his market shop is frequented by Colombian food cooks and sellers.

The few import-export businesses in Colombian hands - some small-scale including retail of their imported products - are essentially limited to food and handicrafts. Larger import-export businesses dealing with products such as coal, coffee, flowers, textiles, chemicals or industrial machinery are not owned by Colombian entrepreneurs.

There are also some salsa discotheques, bars and restaurants run by Colombians. They are dispersed, and only few of them manage to stay in business for a long time. For various reasons, many do not last more than 2 years: financial troubles regarding debts or taxes, quarrels amongst owners, re-migration, or official close-down due to violent acts or cocaine involvement. Some of them are well known in the Latino circuit and have a high degree of visibility. They do not only target Colombians, but also try to reach a broader clientele that includes other Latin
Americans, Antilleans, Surinamese and Dutch. I also discovered some travel agencies owned by Colombians.

Some people who started as language or salsa teachers manage to organise their own 'cultural' business offering Spanish, salsa or music courses, in some cases combining them with more 'committed' activities around development projects in Latin America. Some criticised these entrepreneurs for engaging in what some people referred as the 'business of solidarity'.

Other typical 'ethnic' businesses such as grocery shops, financial institutions, bakeries or other retail shops are totally absent in the Netherlands.

4.2.2. Facing obstacles

'Colombiano no se vara' (A Colombian doesn't get stuck) is a popular saying repeated again and again by proud Colombian immigrants about their superb skills for survival. No matter how difficult the situation is, they claim to have not only a positive attitude against adversity but also ready-made solutions for their problems.

What are the major problems of Colombian immigrants? Do they actually organise themselves to overcome them together? Both questions are only partially related. Many problems are not shared and are only experienced by particular groups within this heterogeneous population. Moreover, some problems are in fact felt to be created or amplified by 'Colombia' or other Colombians, so a common answer would be unthinkable. However, many problems are perceived as common and externally created or imposed, and still ethnic solidarity (Bonacich and Modell 1980) does not seem to flourish. After reviewing the main social and personal obstacles both suffered and perceived by Colombian migrants, I will try to illustrate the limits of 'Colombian' organisation and solidarity. I will then identify the factors that plausibly explain fragmentation amongst Colombians in the Netherlands.

Colombia as a trauma

Only very few immigrants come to the Netherlands leaving behind acute poverty. As explained, emigration is a closed road for the most deprived and poor in Colombia. Even when they belong to the lower middle class, their situation was already substantially better than that of their parents. In fact, it can be argued that many come to the Netherlands precisely because they had improved their social position to a level from which further mobility is blocked or uncertain. This symbolic or material relative deprivation takes various forms amongst different immigrants.

Some experience unemployment or can just make ends meet with a high degree of job dissatisfaction. Others have a job, but realise they can never save enough to buy a house or support large households. Some working class Colombians dream about becoming self-employed or small entrepreneurs, for which start capital is required. Others feel excluded from surrounding consumption patterns.

Some migrants suffered violence in Colombia. I met women whose husbands or partners were murdered. Others were threatened and did not want to risk more. Still others were victims of abuses and domestic violence. Despite attempts to present a good country's image, all sort of immigrants had direct experience with violent death: a relative or friend killed, dead in an accident, victimised or persecuted. For many immigrants, the Netherlands represent a sanctuary of peace and harmony.

A small number of immigrants were politically involved in Colombia during the 1980s - in trade unions or guerrilla groups - and had to leave the country as political asylum seekers. In contrast with older Latin American refugees, who expected to go back once dictatorships would disappear, these Colombian refugees have little hopes of short or middle-term changes in
Colombia. Most immigrants are rather pessimistic about Colombia's deteriorated social and political situation.

These experiences - economic deprivation, physical violence, and persecution - are by no means closed chapters for immigrants. Some of these traumatic experiences have lasting consequences in terms of fears, suspicious attitudes and self-images. Relatives and friends in Colombia still connect them with those realities. In addition, some newcomers miss their families in Colombia: many left children or old relatives behind.

**Legal status and material deprivation**

Colombian illegal immigrants always complain about the consequences of illegality. They are denied basic social and civil rights (health, education, housing, vote, retirement and so forth), not only in open contrast with local or legal residents, but also with their own past in which some of these rights were acknowledged. Some feel discriminated against by official institutions (employers, government, and so forth) and ignored or patronised by neighbours. They claim to be ignored or at best tolerated by other legal Colombian residents, the only financial help coming from direct relatives also living in the Netherlands. They also help with initial accommodation, but at the cost of overcrowding. They are later forced to pay high rent prices mostly to local proprietors.

Financial assistance from relatives and rather stable informal jobs prevent them from becoming marginalised, but these immigrants are truly forced to remain at the margins of Dutch society. Work conditions are bad, especially in hard physical activities such as prostitution and housecleaning: they suffer long hours and chronic health problems due to deficient safety or sanitary conditions.

They have few possibilities for moving around. They cannot leave the country even when they have the money, either to visit relatives or for holidays. In fact, they become seldom visitors of public domains: they spend most of their free time at home, restricting their outside social life to private parties and home visits. Those with children also complain about the lack of prospects for them in the Netherlands. Although the Dutch aliens police do not actively track or persecute some of these illegal Colombian immigrants, all of them live in fear of possible expulsion. Anxiety and stress are endemic amongst most illegal Colombian immigrants I have met.

For better-off immigrants with legal permits or even double nationality, some of these problems are of course absent. However, even those who enjoy basic securities also feel deprived in various and more subtle ways. Some referred to situations of high dependency on the state and local partners. Others, particularly the high skilled and educated, often argued that they worked under their level and that they earned much lower incomes than their Dutch 'equals'. Some people sending regular remittances to Colombia found it very difficult to save money as originally planned.

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8 Dutch official policies invoke 'humanitarian' arguments both to tolerate illegal immigrants (against razzias and police state) and to persecute them (against social and economic slavery). These arguments are combined with a 'law and order' rhetoric about expelling the most socially dangerous (against illegal criminals). In reality, not 'humanity' but 'economic utility' defines who stays and who is thrown out. Those filling the most poorly paid jobs (cleaners) are allowed to stay. Self-employed (prostitutes) have to go. Moreover, not 'crime' but 'visual pollution' and 'annoyance' are the criteria at work. Smart and more skilled outlaws (drug importers, burglars or fraudsters) are difficult to find or to successfully expel. Street dealers, pickpockets, drug tourists and again prostitutes are considered on the contrary the illegal criminals par excellence.

9 These traits of illegal Colombian immigrants have also been found in Belgium (Murillo Perdomo 1996) and England (Pearce 1990).
Othering the Dutch: self-identity and 'cultural' complaints

Nevertheless, Colombia is not merely seen as a source of problems. Nor is the immigrant's precarious situation a daily subject of conversations. To the contrary, most first generation Colombians place the social, cultural and even weather Dutch conditions at the centre of their daily chats. Colombian pride and self-identity are often reinforced by all sorts of negative references about 'the Netherlands' and the 'Dutch', whether they take the form of jokes, irony, critical remarks, open complaints or back-stage commentaries. The extent to which they pejoratively represent the other vary according to people and settings, but seldom crystallise in open confrontation. People focus on several issues when trying to put the Netherlands down. Around these recurring themes, Colombians feel closer to each other.

A first 'problem' is of course the Dutch weather. Despite the fact that there is indeed a big contrast in terms of temperatures and sun hours, constant references to the weather are used to praise their own hometowns.

Secondly, many complaints target the 'cold' social life and the local ways of relating and expressing emotions. In one way or another, they usually refer to the lack of 'street' and 'night' culture; to people with undeveloped body language; to a tendency to avoid conflict often associated with notions of cowardice and weakness; to a dominant pragmatic and business-like mentality; and to a formal and law-abiding behaviour. From these traits, a whole range of cultural 'differences' appears. It is common to hear that "my husband can not dance at all", "my doctor has done nothing about my stomach pain", or that the party "has been as entertaining as a funeral wake".

Family relations are the next matter of conversation, especially in mixed couples. Since families do not play a central role in daily life, Colombian women for example have mixed feelings about their new Dutch families: on the one hand they point out a sort of indifferent stance, regretting the few and weak interaction between family members. Some women even indicate that "they don't know what I do", "they do not help with the child" or "they hold boring family encounters". Yet on the other hand, most seem to enjoy a good personal relationship with their in-laws, enjoying the non-intrusive and non-conflictive attitude from them.

The list of 'cultural' complaints I heard from Colombian migrants is endless: dinner is served too early; lunch is too frugal; Dutch people do not practice any religion (often associated to a materialist mentality); parties are boring and finish too early; and so on.

A very important subject is language. The Spanish language is not only central to Colombian migrant identities, but it is also what connects them with people from a whole continent. It is the key element to feel and act at the same time, for example, as a paisa or as a latino. Spanish is considered a valuable asset and, on the contrary, the Dutch language is regarded as difficult and useless, English still considered the language of 'success'. Most first generation migrants speak Dutch after some years since they have to interact with Dutch people at home, work or study. Many prostitutes or illegal Colombian couples only manage to learn a few words or sentences out of necessity. Even amongst mixed couples, I found some of them talking in English or even in Spanish with their partners. In fact, many Dutch partners speak basic Spanish and many really enjoy it. However, it can be argued that the frequent complaints about Dutch language precisely reflect the high degree of interaction with the local environment - through marrying out and working in the formal and informal Dutch economy.

Bored Women: "the old man is watching TV"

The rate of mixed marriages - marriage to Dutch natives- amongst Colombians is exceptionally high. In 1997, the CBS reported 908 couples amongst the legal Colombian nationals living in the Netherlands (1584, see Table VII). Only 5% had both partners with Colombian nationality, a
13% consisted of couples with a Colombian man and a Dutch woman, and 77% was formed by Colombian woman and Dutch man\(^{10}\) (CBS Maandstatistiek van de Bevolking 1998). Even if some of these couples break up after naturalisation, mixed couples continue to be the rule rather than the exception. Although no statistics are available, second generation Colombian teenagers show in my opinion an even higher tendency to mix with non-Colombian boy- or girlfriends.

While, as I mentioned before, Dutch men tended to portray Colombian women in positive terms, an overall positive image was reciprocated from the woman's side. Dutch men were considered a 'good catch': they were usually regarded as either financially solvent or skilled for making money, strong and good looking, sweet and naïve, hard-working, reliable, loyal and ready to accept woman's choices and freedom. Of course, every woman pondered these variables differently. Couples ranged from young middle class with rather common backgrounds and interests, to extremely asymmetrical (and instrumental) relations between, for example, a young poor prostitute with basic education and an old Dutch with no financial problems.

Marga, a good-looking illegal prostitute working in Rotterdam, had a marriage proposal from one of her Dutch clients who offered her "buen eten, buen huis" (good food, good house). She declined the offer arguing that

"If I marry I have to stay here, with an older man that I don't love. And my children? No, you see, I have seen many girls that have done it and they are not happy at all."

Although often censured and granted with a low 'moral' status, these 'unhappy' women were often tolerated and never cast out by co-nationals. One way of coping with dissatisfaction was to share it with other Latinos, openly degrading their husbands and making explicit the delimitation of social spaces. It was not rare to hear these women, for example at salsa parties, saying that they were bored and that the "fat man", the "bold man" or the "old man" just stayed at home watching TV.

Also women engaged in more even relations had routinely complaints about their Dutch partners or ex-partners. Some condemned them for being mean and tight-fisted. Others were criticised for being too quiet, hardly going out and preferring to stay home in front of the TV. Several women regretted that their husbands did not like Colombian music and that they could not dance.

**Second Generation: salseros or ravers?**

Many children have been born from these and other Colombian couples over the past two decades. While 75% of these offspring have mixed parents (see Table VIII), 25% have two Colombian parents, suggesting that many children of illegal Colombian couples are indeed recorded in the statistics. The older ones are teenagers who are leaving school to either follow a study or enter the labour market. Their 'assimilation' patterns resemble that of dispersed working class immigrants (Portes and Rumbaut 1990: 218), with the difference that a large percentage also speaks some Dutch at home. Spanish is, of course, the mother tongue for many, so the tendency is to become limited or fluent bilinguals.

While many remain dispersed and have few contacts with other second generation Colombians (neither in the same neighbourhood nor school), some, for example in The Hague, form combos (groups of friends) especially to go out or to visit each other. Robert

\(^{10}\) This percentage of 77% is only surpassed by Filipinos (86.5%) and Thais (90.9%), while even more 'integrated' groups such as Surinamese or British show much lower rates of outmarriage. First generation Turkish and Moroccan women, on the other hand, rarely marry native Dutchmen. Further high percentages of outmarriage amongst Polish, Russian and Dominican women suggest multiple interconnections between the prostitution and the marriage markets: arranged marriages to work as a prostitute, ex-prostitutes getting married, prostitutes and partners recruited from the same areas, and so on.
from Cali is 18 years old and lives close to the Amsterdam RAI. His girlfriend is Linda, the teenage daughter of Omaira from The Hague. He explains:

"Most of my friends live there in The Hague; we have a nice combo on weekends. Look, some Saturdays after El Caleno closes at 5 o'clock, we use to continue in some amanecederos ['sun rise' discotheques]... I know at least three amanecederos here in Amsterdam. They are not open for everybody; you have to know the people to enter. They are just houses; you get some food, strong drinks, and of course music until the next Sunday noon."

As many others, he was rather fed up with Colombian salsa music and bars, and was lately more attracted by the Dutch nightlife around the Amsterdam Rembrandtplein. Many of these boys did not even enjoy Latino discotheques, and hung out in Dutch techno or hip-hop places and concerts. The girls kept somewhat closer to salsa discotheques as well, acting out more explicitly a Colombian profile (actually, in many cases, going out together with their Colombian mothers).

Paranoid distrust and stigmas: with a cross on the forehead

A final obstacle that all Colombian migrants have to deal with does not refer directly either to their Colombian past, their residence status, their socio-economic position, the Dutch culture, their local husbands or their newborn.

Colombians have also to cope with very negative images about them. Constant bad press about the country, reflecting endemic problems of poverty, natural disasters, violence and illegal businesses has a persistent effect on public opinion, according to all Colombians interviewed. In the Netherlands, they feel the target of both international wars on drugs and restrictive migration policies. Both policies combined, Colombian immigrants (or travellers) become Nr. 1 suspects not only for law enforcers but also for a whole range of state agencies. Everybody agreed that crossing borders for Colombians is a nightmare. Marisol explained that having a Colombian passport is like having a

"Cross on the forehead, a mark. Don't we have enough punishment to also suffer this?"

In the Netherlands, as I explained before, a more neutral stance from civil society contrasts with the hostile attitude from official bodies. However, they do have to face a prejudiced stand, especially from those who do not have contact with Colombian citizens. For example, immigrants are believed to be poorer and less educated that what they actually are; they have to face jokes about the cocaine business; and some are even approached asking for drugs.

However, this feeling of stigmatisation from outside does not only lead to collective defences and victimisation attitudes. Many Colombians actually believe that it is not only a matter of bad reputation. Many immigrants, especially middle class women with Dutch partners, artists, students, and even illegal workers, point an accusing finger at other Colombians. Some people claim to avoid contact as much as they can. Others feel uneasy with this extreme solution, but still acknowledge the problem. Aurora:

"It is urgent to improve the Colombian image, I don't know how. It is sad to say but in my experience, where there are Colombians there are problems. (...) We keep much separated among Colombians. We have a bad name and many problems, but it's only a small group who gives bad reputation to all of us. Some are told, even before leaving the country, to avoid contact with other Colombians. I am against that."

Many women understand the situation of Colombian prostitutes, but they also see them as a source of disgrace. They avoid being associated with them, and some even underplay their
quantitative importance. Legal residents also feel 'threatened' by illegal newcomers. Hard working illegal immigrants feel uncomfortable with those Colombians making rapid earnings in illegal activities such as cocaine dealing or theft. Some Colombian bars and restaurants have to fight not only against bad publicity, but also for actually keeping the place *sano* (healthy). Gossip travels across cities and towns, since Colombians are dispersed throughout the country. Newcomers have to justify their situation before being helped. The more isolated and 'assimilated' they live, the less responsible they feel for other Colombian migrants. Many fear being cheated and used. Paranoid distrust amongst Colombians is a rather extended pattern.

### 4.2.3. Dispersion and the limits of ethnic solidarity

The social profile of Colombian migrants on the one hand, and all the obstacles mentioned above on the other, guarantee that Colombians remain unorganised. They lack economic associations and barely have migrant or social organisations.

The few political or cultural committees and initiatives around Colombia are totally controlled by Dutch people, whether leftist sympathisers, human rights activists, salsa aficionados, or even Dutch adopting parents interested in Colombia. Sporadically, some Colombian intellectuals and political refugees try to get involved in these initiatives or to create new groups, but they fail due to a lack of support, interest and personal conflicts. These organisations do not play any role in the daily life of Colombian migrants.

Some social organisations, especially linked to the Catholic church and to the Dutch network of social services, work with the most vulnerable groups amongst *Latinos*: prostitutes, illegal residents, prisoners, ex-prisoners, homeless and drug addicts. While these have more credit and recognition by Colombian migrants, again these institutions are 'external' and not in the hands of Colombians themselves (though some of them volunteer, they are not the most active amongst *Latino* groups).

Some local initiatives are indeed organised by *Latinos*, but they do not last for long. These usually involve established Colombian women who come together to talk and eventually organise some activity. One exception is *Chicolad*, the organisation of Colombian adopted children, which has proved to be very dynamic and successful in bringing people together.

The Colombian Consulate also organises, once a year, an event with food and music to 'unite' Colombian immigrants. However, these and other social gatherings are only seen as nice leisure programmes or, by some, as a good opportunity to make some money. Germán:

"Last year we cooked and we went to Utrecht with plenty of food. The thing didn't sell."

I witnessed personal fights for organising and selling the food in smaller parties. One Colombian man crudely posed the situation:

"Look, it is very difficult to do things with Colombians. They come for the *rumba*, looking for good cheap Colombian food and *trago* [aguardiente]. They want to be 'served', and will do the minimum to help in advance."

Social interaction and economic cooperation is restricted to the level of kinship. Relatives see and visit each other regularly, since they often live together or in the same area. However, the same does not occur at a broader level. Contacts are irregular and scarce, and many friends only meet in special occasions - birthdays, parties, events, and so on. Those with no relatives in the Netherlands and with a Dutch partner have few contacts with other Colombians, sometimes with no more than 5 or 10 of them.
Why are Colombians in the Netherlands so atomised and unable to cooperate in order to, for example, secure better jobs, fight bad reputations or press for entrance legislation changes? The answer to this question can be formulated by summing up all the characteristics of Colombians in the Netherlands described in this chapter.

Colombians arrived to the Netherlands only recently but not in one single wave. As destination country, the Netherlands is secondary and distant. It is a small group, from which 2/3 are women and 1/3 are children. They live dispersed mainly in urban areas, with no visible Colombian neighbourhoods or streets. They come from the richer areas of Colombia (Cauca Valley and Antioquia), but they also belong to different ethnic groups and social strata.

Many women come as 'sentimental' immigrants to marry a local man and eventually find a job. Others come as labour immigrants to work mainly in the Dutch informal economy - especially in house cleaning, baby-sitting and prostitution - and eventually find a local partner. Both groups prompt a stable chain migration and they explain the high number of women and the strong presence of three groups: illegal immigrants, naturalised Dutch and second generation Colombians. Dutch citizenship is massively obtained through marriage and not through legal residence. There are also some men, but usually connected to a woman (Colombian partner or 'pioneer' migrant). They have good levels of education, but most skilled workers are underemployed and there is a lack of professional immigrants. There are very few political refugees and artists. Students usually do not overstayed after their studies. Those who work, work dispersed for Dutch clients or employers. Many depend on partner’s incomes and social benefits. More importantly, there is a lack of Colombian enterprises, large or small businesses and even (legal) entrepreneurial immigrants.

All these socio-economic characteristics are embedded in particular social reactions and experiences. Firstly, their mode of incorporation in the Netherlands is mediated by a very hostile reception from official agencies and formal employers, a neutral/positive but still prejudiced stand from civil society, and a weak reception from their own co-nationals.

Secondly, these immigrants face a number of problems that are difficult to overcome. They keep a fresh contact with Colombia through relatives, remittances, visits and also longer stays. However, many also try to place a big gap with uncomfortable past experiences: relative poverty, endemic violence, authoritarian mentality, persecution, machismo, and so on. Colombian immigrants in the Netherlands also suffer various forms of material deprivation, dependence and psychological problems linked with the exercise of prostitution or with immigrant laws that keep them in illegality. Although they are economically assimilated and subordinated, only their children start to feel truly 'Dutch'. First generation Colombians remain culturally distant and continue to complain about the local environment: the awful weather, the 'business' and mean mentality, the barbaric customs, the incomprehensible language and boring husbands.

Finally, these immigrants have to face negative stigmas, Colombia(ns) being essentially identified with violence, mafia, cocaine, poverty, prostitution, and so on. However, many not only recognise that the crude reality can be even worse than the bad press. Some also feel ashamed of 'undesirable' co-nationals: prostitutes, illegal immigrants, drug entrepreneurs, thieves, and so forth. Distrust, paranoid attitudes and fragmentation amongst Colombians are the result.

All these factors considered together explain what so many Colombians keep repeating: that there is no Colombian 'community' in the Netherlands. However, is there a chance that Colombians in the Netherlands can succeed as cocaine entrepreneurs and employees when they do not constitute an ethnic economy?