Traquetos: Colombians involved in the cocaine business in the Netherlands
Zaitch, D.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter V
Crossing and Crowning
Colombian cocaine smugglers and importers in the Netherlands

"...and a slippery and instant notion of happiness has been fomented upon us: we always want a bit more of what we already have, more and more than what seemed impossible, much more than what the law allows, and we take it no matter how: even against the law."

G. García Márquez, *For a Country within Children's Reach*.

Introduction

The Sunday Mass given in Spanish was about to begin at the Saint Nicholas church in Amsterdam. A multinational congregation mainly Spanish, Colombian and Dominican slowly filled the benches, while latecomers preferred to stand at the back by the entrance. Amidst the shuffling of feet and the crying of children, the service started. At the entrance, a small group kept coming and going while their ringing mobile phones irritated the adjacent worshippers. While I observed the situation Ana Inés complained to me in a low voice:

"What a shame, they don't show respect. They could at least wait until mass is over. All openly doing their business here... I don't like it."

Being within earshot it was not difficult to figure out that the people in question were Colombians, and the business was the cocaine trade.

This happened in 1996 when I was just starting my fieldwork in the Netherlands. However, who were these Colombian *traquetos* and the people working for them? What were their motivations, their backgrounds and the risks they faced? Finally, what was their relationship with the local Colombian community (if any) and their specific role in the cocaine business? After two years of fieldwork it was absolutely clear to me that involvement of Colombians in the cocaine business did not stop at export level. There was indeed a significant participation of some Colombian individuals in subsequent stages of trade, here in the Netherlands, from transport and import to distribution and retail selling.

The numbers game

By referring to a 'significant participation' of Colombians in the Dutch cocaine market, I am trying to stay away from the quantitative dimension. How many people are involved? What proportion of the Colombian community has anything to do with the cocaine business? These are two questions that go far beyond the limits of my methodological tool-kit, which is heavily qualitative in nature. Producing empirical evidence to answer such questions would have involved a different approach, not always compatible with my primarily ethnographic stance. Dark numbers are by definition difficult to trace, but calculations in this case are even more problematic for several reasons. Firstly, no study of any sort has yet been conducted on this specific involvement. Secondly, the number of illegal Colombian migrants is a matter of rough estimation. Thirdly, secrecy, flexibility and imperfect information exchange lie at the core of any drug transaction. Fourthly, transactions go beyond the local level, so that patterns of residence and drug involvement do not necessarily coincide. Finally, many of the Colombians involved are not even living permanently or temporarily in the Netherlands.
All this acknowledged, the question of numbers is unavoidable. In fact almost every informant, from Colombian migrants and drug dealers to field experts and practitioners, had some remark to make with regard to the extent of the involvement. However the views were rather divergent, if not contradictory. The police liaison-officer at the Dutch Embassy in Bogotá, for example, stated:

"I estimate that between 100 and 200 Colombians living in the Netherlands have a relation with the cocaine business" (Ab van Stormbroek, 27-8-96, Bogotá).

A former Colombian Ambassador to the Netherlands:

"The group is very small, and most of them are mulas. The majority have nothing to do with cocaine." (Carlos G. Arrieta, 1996, The Hague).

Solano:

"At least here in The Hague many Colombians are *untados* [lit. 'smeared', implicated in illegal activities]. Look, I saw more than 100 Colombians, illegal, legal and with Dutch nationality, mixed with the business in one way or another. Not now, but let's say in the last three or four years. I mean people really implicated, *traquetos* and also women, not the prostitutes and the small fry."

Jaime:

"In my experience around here the involvement of Colombians in the business is marginal and those involved are not part of the established community. *Traquetos* do not stay long in one place, you know..."

Amanda:

"...it's only a small group that gives us all a bad reputation..."

Tano:

"All the Colombians I met come for the same thing, all come to 'work' with it. Once you are in, the only Colombians you meet are *traquetos*, thieves and prostitutes."

Perceptions thus clearly diverged within the Colombian community. In general terms, Colombian officials and community leaders tended to minimise the problem in the same way as those Colombians not involved in the business. On the other hand, those directly or indirectly involved claimed that the group was large and all Colombians came to the Netherlands 'for the same thing'. This divergence of opinion occurs for two reasons. Firstly, it is obvious that people make judgements on the basis of their own social world, and secondly, they may trivialise or amplify the problem to serve personal or institutional interests. In contrast, police sources were often cautious and well aware of selectivity problems: they only knew Colombians involved in the cocaine business.

In 1996, the *Van Traa Report* (Fijnaut et al. 1996) produced a more official picture of the involvement of particular ethnic groups in illicit activities. Referring to the extent of Colombian participation in the local cocaine market, it is stated that

"Based on what we have found in the Amsterdam case, from which a special report appears in this series, it seems possible to assert that a considerable part of the small Colombian community indeed plays, in one way or another, a role in the import and distribution of drugs." (Sub-report I, VII.5, p.176, my emphasis).
"Despite the fact that we cannot attribute the relative success of Colombian [drug] organisations to the local Colombian community, it is likely that a large proportion of the few Colombians participates somehow in drug trafficking." (Sub-report I, VII.7, p.179, my emphasis).

While it is impossible to contest these claims with hard numbers, there are enough indirect indicators to state that the opposite seems to be the case: only a small number of Colombians are actually involved in particular levels of the cocaine business.¹ These indicators are as follows:

(i) While most of the people involved are men, the Colombian community in the Netherlands is two-thirds women. Second generation Colombians are hardly involved. As explained in chapter IV, the group does not form an ethnic enclave.
(ii) Many Colombian drug dealers interviewed, contacted or heard of, both in the streets and in prison, were not living permanently in the Netherlands. Some were only coming to perform a specific task in the cocaine business.
(iii) Although the police claim to know less about Colombians than about other groups - thus increasing the dark number of undetected participation - the tasks in which they are involved, as I will show, are those primarily targeted by drug law enforcers.
(iv) Although Colombians in the Netherlands suffer imprisonment rates about 20 times higher than the average,² prison numbers cannot be used to make further calculations, not only due to selectivity biases (regarding offence, ethnic origin, vulnerability and so forth), but also to the fact that most of detained Colombians are caught at borders or airports, rendering this rate a meaningless abstraction.
(v) At all cocaine business levels, the ethnic composition has increasingly diversified throughout the 1990s. Whatever the figure, the relative number of Colombians involved has certainly declined in recent years. Changes in law enforcement and in the cocaine market in Europe and Latin America have also contributed to this diversification.
(vi) Finally, as will later be explained, the levels at which Colombians are more involved are either of low labour intensity (importation) or international in nature (transport). For more local and labour intensive levels (distribution and retail selling) disadvantaged competition with other individuals and groups is the case.

It seems impossible to dream up figures from these considerations and one can only think in the terms of hundreds at the most rather than thousands of people. However, what is striking about their participation can only be assessed in qualitative terms. Indeed, many Colombians play roles in the local cocaine trade that they do not play in any other local legal or illegal activity. Their business reputation within the illegal cocaine trade remains, for better or worse, unquestioned. They draw disproportionate police and media attention, while their strong cultural and social impact upon the whole Colombian community is acknowledged even by those who consider them 'marginal'.

² In 1997, the average imprisonment rate in the Netherlands was around 82 (inmates per 100,000 inhabitants). With 80 Colombians imprisoned (most of them for drug offences) and a population of around 5,000 - in both cases legal and illegal people only with Colombian nationality - their imprisonment rate rises to 1,600.
*Crossing and Crowning*

**Four trade levels: heterogeneity and articulation**

The cocaine business, as I pointed out in earlier chapters, should be understood as an articulation of legal and illegal arrangements where various tasks are performed in a flexible way by many different people. The tasks, skills and risks differ to a great extent as do the people involved, the opportunities to enter the business and the chances of succeeding in it. From the time that cocaine leaves the export country to when it reaches the hands of the final European consumer, four different trade levels can be distinguished: transport, import, wholesale distribution and retail selling.

The separation between these levels is not only analytical. In practice, every step in a single trade line involves a mark up in the cocaine price and usually implies distinct actors and economic units. In a few cases two levels can be integrated by one economic unit, for instance import-transport or import-distribution. In other cases, a single level can imply the involvement of many economic units, as is often the case in distribution and retail selling. Finally, every single level entails a number of interconnected tasks, some of which link together legal and illegal activities and enterprises.\(^3\) Figure III illustrates those four levels.

**Figure III. Four Trade Levels in the Cocaine Business in Europe**

Identifying these four levels and the Colombian participation in each of them will allow me to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of such an involvement (avoiding

---

\(^3\) Chapter VIII will analyse the nature of organisational and labour relations found within and around Colombian cocaine enterprises in the Netherlands.
simple pictures that hardly distinguish amongst the people engaged) in terms of background, chances, skills, commitments, expectations, social and labour relations, power and gender differences, and so on. This chapter will focus on Colombians involved in smuggling and import, while the next will depict their roles and activities as wholesalers and retail dealers. I will argue in this chapter and the next that, for Dutch related cases, Colombians have been modestly involved in cocaine smuggling and small import, very active in large import, noticeable but erratic in wholesale distribution and almost non-existent in small distribution and retail selling. This uneven picture, I will also argue, is the result of diverging conditions and variables that restrict and enlarge the opportunities of Colombians at each market level. I will then try to identify those factors and see how they actually shape the involvement of Colombians at each stage. In describing some of their arrangements, risks, opportunities and perceptions, I wish to explore some of the logic behind their successes and failures, their relationship with the local Colombian community and their overall place in the Dutch cocaine market. Finally, a more systematic analysis about the labour and organisational relationships involved will be tackled in chapter VIII.

5.1. Smuggling Cocaine

5.1.1. The options

Borrowed from the game of Draughts, in which a single piece is 'crowned' when it reaches the king-row of the board, Colombians commonly use the verb coronar (to crown) to refer to any cocaine freight that arrives at the destination without being intercepted. Depending on the amounts involved and the human and material resources available to both the exporter and the importer, there are four different ways to 'crown' cocaine in the Netherlands. The first method, by means of regular, private or institutional internal post, does not require a smuggler. Despite the increasing variety of techniques to monitor packages - sniffer-dogs, X-ray machines and special scanners - interception rates for such a method of transporting the drug are uncertain. In addition to this, special mail companies have their own internal measures to control freights, tipping the police or Customs in case of suspicion.\footnote{For example, 8 kg were seized in Tilburg in July 1996 after a tip from the courier company. The package came from Curacao, and the two Dutchmen paid to receive it were arrested.}

The Dutch Post Office intercepts around 20 kg of cocaine per month, most of which is discovered in letters or packages sent from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (OGD 1997b: 52). However, cocaine by post constitutes less than 5% of total cocaine seizures (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 107) since the quantities conveyed are rather small. Such dispatches are often performed by small-scale exporters, amateurish adventurers or even by local consumers with friends or contacts in source countries. Risks can be lowered by all sorts of tricks and simple measures: faking the sender and the origin country, concealing the cocaine within protective materials or disguising it with special products, faking the recipient by writing a false name, simulating ignorance or using safer addresses of employers or friends who are unaware of the illicit content. The use of internal post systems of major, well-established
transnational companies or institutions is a safer option when employees are involved as importers or receivers: in January 1997, three Dutch employees of the headquarters of Mercedes Benz in Utrecht were arrested for importing cocaine from Suriname.

A second method of smuggling cocaine is by scheduled flights through international airports. Quantities between half and twenty kilos are regularly smuggled, mainly through the Schiphol airport, by small-time or professional couriers, the cocaine being concealed in all imaginable ways: in hand- or checked baggage, hidden within clothes or objects - for example bike frames, handicraft, baby pampers, CD boxes, tape-recorders, music instruments, food and so forth -, diluted in all sort of liquids, impregnated in textile or swallowed in the form of balls. Large quantities\(^6\) by air arrive as freight or hidden in special cargos.\(^7\) Although the skill of the operation mostly consists of avoiding controls, in some cases the smuggling can be performed or secured by the aid of aircraft crewmen, airport or diplomatic personnel or even military members and resources.\(^8\)

Over the years, the routes for carriers arriving at Schiphol airport have proliferated since transshipments and stopovers are the rule rather than the exception. Although interception data should be cautiously considered due to selectivity biases, smugglers targeting Amsterdam or Brussels have been principally detained in or coming from Paramaribo, the Netherlands Antilles, São Paulo, Bogotá, Caracas, Panamá, Tegucigalpa, Asunció, Quito, Buenos Aires, Lima, Paris, Madrid, Copenhagen, Frankfurt and Moscow. In fact, these are more or less the same places that were repeatedly mentioned during fieldwork. It can be argued that tip-offs from - more familiar - areas such as Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles can lead to more interception and thus over-represent their role as source countries for cocaine arriving by air. However, flights from Colombia, Venezuela or Brazil, also heavily under surveillance, are less frequent and far behind in terms of seizures. Indeed, during the 1990s, at least half of the seized cocaine entering the Netherlands by air came from both Suriname\(^9\) and the Netherlands Antilles. African airports as transit points for cocaine aimed at Europe are often used for France, United Kingdom and Spain, but less frequently for the Netherlands.

Small cocaine shipments arriving to the Netherlands by air from Colombia were more common during the 1980s, but sharply decreased in the course of the 1990s. A number of reasons can be given for this development. Firstly, the lack of direct flights from Bogotá to Schiphol makes stopovers necessary. The introduction, in 1990, of a tourist visa requirement for Colombian citizens to enter the Netherlands has, in the second place, partially affected Colombian exporters working with Colombian couriers.\(^10\) A third reason is the increased

\(^6\) Regarding cocaine smuggling, I consider loads of 100 kg or more to be 'large', between 20 kg and 100 kg to be 'medium-sized' and up to 20 kg 'small'.

\(^7\) An unusually large shipment of 142 kg of cocaine dissolved in water inside plastic bags and hidden amongst 5,000 tropical fish from Colombia was seized in Schiphol in February 1996. In May 1999, the Dutch Customs made their record seizure in Schiphol: 700 kg hidden in 144 boxes of fruit and vegetables arriving from Suriname.

\(^8\) In September 1995, two KLM employees working in Schiphol (baggage) were involved in several smuggling operations of 14 kg to 21 kg each time. In May 1997, a KLM stewardess coming from Paramaribo was caught with 10 kg. In 1998, some Dutch marines were charged for the smuggling of 125 kg using an Orion aircraft from the Dutch Marine, ironically all were posted in the Netherlands Antilles in the fight against drug traffic in the region.

\(^9\) In 1990, 53 % of the cocaine seized in Schiphol came from Suriname (Het Parool, 2-2-91 ). By 1996, 25% of the couriers detained in that airport came from Paramaribo. There are political, historical and socio-economic reasons that explain the important role of Suriname as a transshipment point for small and medium-seized quantities of cocaine entering the Netherlands. See Fijnaut et al. (1996) and Haenen and Buddingh' (1994).

\(^10\) However, in order to overcome this obstacle, it is easier for cocaine exporters to change the nationality of the courier rather than the destination airport, which is often chosen for its accessibility and the nature and resources of the importer involved. Nevertheless, it is a fact that after the introduction of the visa requirement, some Colombian smugglers relocated from Schiphol to Frankfurt.
importance, especially for small quantities, of other transit points in order to obscure ‘hot’ routes by diverting less obvious couriers through safer airports. This principle applies to all sorts of (cocaine) smuggling, but exporters using air transportation often have more choices available than those who rely on more highly organised - legal and illegal - means. Finally, the decentralisation process of cocaine export during the last decade has reinforced the power of intermediaries and non-Colombian exporters, especially those handling smaller quantities with restricted infrastructure.

Although cocaine smuggled in cargo or scheduled flights seems to be only a fraction of the total, this method accounts for the vast majority of people detained and charged in the Netherlands for international cocaine smuggling. It is difficult to estimate the actual centrality of Schiphol. A total of 2,300 kg were intercepted at this airport during 1996, which represented 25% of all cocaine seized in the Netherlands the same year. Yet this proportion is not stable since sporadic multi-ton seizures, re-allocation of enforcement resources and priorities, and changes in traffic patterns can transform the picture overnight. Neither is it representative of real traffic trends, since it is unclear how interception rates differ for air and sea operations.

A third way to smuggle cocaine into the Netherlands is by land across the Belgian and German open borders, the illegal freight concealed in cars, trucks or small buses. These are (parts of) shipments arriving by sea mainly at the harbours of Antwerp and Hamburg, but actually handled in the Netherlands for further wholesale distribution in Europe. In this way, many of these loads ironically come back to those countries untouched. Seizures of these loads are rare and usually involve long-term investigation, tips from or co-operation with the German and Belgian police. In some cases the loads are brought in TIR-trucks of legal transport companies, but in other cases it is the final importer in the Netherlands who organises the smuggling, sending people to collect the shipment.

Finally, the vast majority of cocaine reaches the Netherlands in multi-hundred kilo operations by sea. Quantities from 20 kg to 3 tons are regularly smuggled in various forms by container ships, open cargo or fruit boats, yachts, sailing ships and tankers, all shipped from South American and Caribbean harbours. In the case of Galicia and Cantabria, illegal ships transfer the cocaine load, still out at sea, to smaller vessels or speedboats that reach the coast unnoticed and unload the cocaine in remote uncontrolled spots. In contrast, most cocaine shipments to the Netherlands are smuggled alongside legal merchandise, thus following legitimate commercial routes, transport and unloading procedures. Thus, by far, the most targeted harbours are Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and to a lesser extent Vlissingen, IJmuiden and Zeewolde.

With a varying degree of creativity, the cocaine is often hidden amongst or inside products such as fruits and vegetables from South America, frozen fruit-juice, fish, shrimps, cocoa beans, meat, biscuits, spices, coffee, iron, coal, calcium carbonate, plastic, asphalt, oil,

11 Global interception rates are fairly easy to calculate - see chapters II and III, and Farrell (1995) - but extremely hard to estimate in national, local or sector terms since it is impossible to know how much cocaine passes through specific points. Rough estimations can only rely on subjective risk assessment by cocaine entrepreneurs and smugglers themselves, and on indirect indicators such as the general volume of people and goods moving through a particular spot and the nature and probability of controls.

12 For example, in 1993, 175 kg were seized in Zaanstad in containers with false coal blocks. In 1997, 1,400 kg were found in Hoorn and Zaandam in containers and a bus with oranges. All shipments came from Antwerp and involved co-operation or tips from the Belgian police.

13 Curiously enough, the 2nd largest Dutch seizure took place in the secondary port of Zeewolde (3 tons in 1994). One cocaine importer interviewed suggested that smaller harbours are attractive since controls are less tight. However, most informants claimed the contrary, implying that multi-ton shipments have better chances of passing unnoticed through large harbours.
wheelchairs, carpet rolls, furniture, ceramics and sport bags, amongst other things. In most of these cases, the legal cargo is also dispatched by the cocaine exporters, who use either bona fide or their own import-export firms. Here, no illegal smuggler is involved: legal shipping, transport and freight companies unwittingly perform the operation, often even unloading and delivering the cocaine to the warehouse.

In some other cases, the cocaine is especially packed and hidden inside the ship or vessel itself: in the engine room, under the keel or within the hull. These operations involve one or more crewmen engaged by either the exporter or the importer to conceal, look after and sometimes supervise other tasks around delivery and unloading. Although many Colombians have been detained performing these smuggling tasks, those involved often belong to transshipment and destination countries (Spain, the Netherlands) or to countries traditionally supplying cheap seamen (Poland, Croatia, the Philippines, Brazil, and so on), even in operations that are completely managed by Colombian exporters and importers. This method obviously involves greater risks than the 'container' method: skilled smugglers and importers, as well as the shipment itself, also risk capture. 'Clean' crew members may inform the authorities about the smuggler\(^\text{14}\) and the importer has to undertake the delicate task of cocaine unloading.

Finally, cocaine has also been smuggled by private yachts or smaller sailing ships, either rented or owned by the cocaine entrepreneurs themselves.\(^\text{15}\) The main or only aim of the trip is smuggling the cocaine, the smugglers being in these cases either (closely connected with) the importers or subcontracted by them. Whether they are professionally organised or individual adventures, personal risks are again higher: it is cheaper and technically easier to enforce (routine) controls upon suspicious small boats, people or movements than on sealed cargoes of legal merchandise. Indeed, most of the seizures from small private vessels are not prompted by prior intelligence or tips but occur during routine or selective controls.

Cocaine sea routes are more stable and less decentralised than air traffic: they are scarcer, and they involve more complex and risky arrangements that require closer management. Despite the frequent use of transshipment areas - Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Suriname and Trinidad being the most common - or stopovers - Cape Verde, Spain and England - most of large cocaine loads arriving by sea come directly from Colombia. If Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles are the source of at least half of the small and medium-seized shipments by air, with only a very modest Colombian share, this proportion becomes inverted when analysing cocaine seizures of more than 20 kg by sea. Indeed, Colombia is not only the ultimate source\(^\text{16}\) but also the main direct cocaine exporter to the Netherlands. Colombians have tried to lower risks by exporting from elsewhere: Colombian ships are suspicious by definition and local harbours have been increasingly controlled. However, there are still many reasons to send cocaine directly from Colombia. First of all, it is difficult and dangerous to move large cocaine volumes within South America: the cocaine can be seized or stolen by hostile authorities and competitors. Besides, many Colombian cocaine exporters are either unable to establish more complex international arrangements - since they rely on local

\(^{14}\) In 1996, two Croat crewmen were denounced - and later sentenced - after the captain and other crew members discovered 85 kg of cocaine in their ship sailing to the Netherlands.

\(^{15}\) In 1993, 490 kg were found in a sailing boat in Texel, the cocaine bought and smuggled by two Americans. In 1997, more than 1 ton was seized in Hansweert (Zeeland) in an Antillean ship belonging to the Dutch importer, and other 486 kg were later found in Stellendam in a yacht. The use of these smaller, peripheral harbours is related to the nature, size and ownership of the boats.

\(^{16}\) Although there is growing evidence of cocaine kitchens in surrounding countries, most of the cocaine shipped from Suriname, Venezuela, Brazil and Ecuador is refined in and smuggled from Colombia.
corruption or local resources - or unwilling to sacrifice profit margins in favour of intermediaries, foreign authorities and distant companies.

5.1.2. The players

The fall of the independent smuggler

As I explained in chapters II and III, it would not be profitable for Colombian cocaine exporters to sell the merchandise at ports of departure.\(^1\) Their powerful market position has been the result of their ability to 'place' and trade the cocaine overseas, first in the American market and, since the mid- and late 1980s, at European ports. This means that whatever method is used, transporting the cocaine and delivering it to the importer is an important part of their concern, indeed a highly risky and extremely profitable task. Exporters may hire people for transport, may use their own infrastructure or may subcontract the service to others - including legal cargo companies, fishing ships and vessels, or even competing cocaine entrepreneurs from transshipment areas. Cocaine smuggling is indeed in almost all cases both integrated into and subordinated to the exporters' activities, while the people involved in smuggling are employees, subcontracted entrepreneurs, independent organisations or people selling them a service.

There are exceptions. Hypothetically speaking, one could imagine that any person can travel to Colombia, buy cocaine there, smuggle it, and sell it in the Netherlands at import prices, thus becoming an independent smuggling trader. After all, with some infrastructure, contacts and luck, many people would be tempted to take the chance. Even a one-kilo operation could yield many thousand dollars. Yet however easy and logical it may appear, it is hard to find independent smuggling traders in the cocaine business.

During my first stay in Colombia, I was occasionally offered cocaine for personal consumption. I did not ask whether it was possible to buy a kilo on the spot, since a Colombian friend had advised:

"Do not ask stupid questions that you will regret. It is fine that you write your thesis about us, but don't play the dealer or the policeman. If they offer you a lot, it is to test you; you just stay sano [lit. healthy, clean]. They won't sell you anything big, for what? They have people that bring it [the cocaine] for them. No! It's suicidal, for you and for them."

The most I could get, he said, would be an offer to act as a drug courier. Apart from the internal market, nobody would sell cocaine in Colombia that could otherwise be more profitably sold in Miami or Rotterdam. My friend concluded by showing me that even if I could obtain the cocaine, the profit margins were so high that I could easily hire a person to smuggle it for me, and still make money. Cocaine smuggling is almost never an independent activity.

Independent globetrotters were in business at a very early stage during the 1960s and 1970s, before the consolidation of Colombian exporters.\(^2\) The sporadic occurrence of cases in Europe are usually not linked with Colombia, but primarily with secondary or transshipment countries, and the people involved are often Europeans with their own smuggling infrastructure.

---

\(^1\) The export price is relatively low, at around US$ 2,000 per kilo. According to time, place and amount, import prices in Europe oscillate around the US$ 24,000 per kilo.

\(^2\) Before 1980, with a more fragmented supply and with exporters willing to expand sales, the role of free-lance amateur cocaine smugglers buying at source was larger. See Sabbag (1978) and Adler (1985).
Colombian smugglers in the Netherlands

The opportunities for Colombians to become involved in cocaine smuggling have been favoured by a number of circumstances. Firstly, exporters require close and trustworthy people to perform such a risky task. As personnel remain accountable for possible failure or dirty play and should not talk if caught, the exporter can better control another Colombian by, for example, targeting the courier's relatives for retaliation or compensation claims. A second reason is that drug smuggling is, in some cases, either a career step for 'job promotion' or a task performed by people with a previous or parallel involvement in other activities such as cocaine 'cooking' or security. Many Colombian exporters have indeed started as smugglers, and many couriers are flexible workers for various tasks. Finally, in Colombia there exists a huge 'reserve army' of people willing to take the risk, pushed not only by negative personal circumstances like deprivation, unemployment, debts, social exclusion or specific calamities, but also by a more 'positive' mechanism: the pressure for upward mobility in the context of violent competition and overnight turnovers in which successful role models have made it by illegal means.

However, other circumstances have hindered the participation of Colombian citizens as cocaine smugglers, especially since the mid-1990s. In the first place, Colombians have become increasingly targeted by anti-drug enforcers as potential suspects, so exporters have tried to find less conspicuous couriers such as other Latin American or native European citizens. The result has been a diversification in the social, national and ethnic composition of cocaine couriers, for example old men, entire families with children, young blonde students and European tourists. A second limitation is marked by the developments in large-scale transportation. Professional smugglers with their own legal or illegal infrastructure are often not Colombians, but tend to be linked with transshipment or destination countries. American pilots, Mexican drug organisations, transnational freight or airway companies and the thousands of ships with a non-Colombian flag and multinational crew are the intermediaries that account for the vast bulk of cocaine transported. In addition, the fact that the role of transshipment countries has grown over the years has increased the diversity of smugglers.

Until the mid-1980s, cocaine smugglers in the Netherlands were predominantly Dutch individuals moving independently. Also during the 1980s, a growing number of Latin Americans from Chile, Argentina, Cuba, Peru and Bolivia were also involved in low and medium-level smuggling positions. The period between 1988-1994, a period of consolidation of Colombia as the main exporter to Europe, is marked by a decline of the latter group and the strong leading role of Surinamese air couriers and Colombian smugglers of all sorts. From the mid-1990s, a more diverse picture is the case, with Dutch and non-Latin American couriers increasingly used alongside all the others.

Despite all the changes, a very heterogeneous Colombian participation in cocaine smuggling to the Netherlands has been noticeable during the last ten years. The social composition of this group varies considerably. According to the quantities and the smuggling modalities involved, four different groups can be identified: *mulas* (small air couriers), *boleros* 19

---

19 Although, especially in small scale operations, most of the times the smuggler or drug courier simply ignores the names and whereabouts of both exporters and importers.

20 In October 1991, a Dutch organisation importing cocaine from Suriname and Curaçao was dismantled. Amongst the smugglers, there were 55 young blonde couriers. A 72 years old man smuggling 15 kg was detained in Schiphol in November 1994. A Dutch couple was detained in April 1996 in Copenhagen smuggling 6 kg from São Paulo to Amsterdam (Several Dutch newspapers). Cases like these have only increased during the 1990s.

21 This involvement marks the transition from small-scale craft to large-scale organised cocaine smuggling. It was favoured by the growing accessibility of supply sources and the serious economic and political deterioration of the whole region that compelled many Latin Americans to migrate to Europe. Networks of friends and relatives around some of these immigrants became involved in the illegal business.
Traquetos
(ball swallowing couriers or 'body packers'), nineras ('baby sitters' and professional couriers) and tripulantes (ship crew members).

Mulas
Although this pejorative name\textsuperscript{22} primarily evokes exploited, poor, female couriers, all sorts of Colombians have been involved as unskilled air couriers: from desperate young men and women of urban areas to rather well-established migrants in destination countries; from friends and relatives of other drug exporters and couriers to low and middle class adults willing to move upwards; from adventurers to diplomatic personnel and students.

According to those interviewed, the motivations to work as drug couriers are manifold: debts and other money needs, pressures and threats, lack of job or occupation prospects, the ambition to gain more status and material wealth, the desire to travel, to migrate, or to emulate other couriers - whether neighbours, relatives or friends. The broad range of backgrounds and motivations of mulas is further evidenced in their payment, which can fluctuate, according also to the amount transported, between US$ 1,500 and US$ 10,000.

The profile of Colombian mulas coming to the Netherlands has changed over the years. Despite the fact that some available data either concentrate on specific groups - for example on criminalised female couriers - or refer to a larger population beyond air couriers - such as Colombians imprisoned abroad -, all sources indicate a major shift from 1991 onwards. The period before this time is characterised by the involvement of a relatively larger group with a high number of poorly paid, ill-informed women from large urban centres. These women were, in general terms, from a lower or lower-middle class background, poorly educated, under- or unemployed adults (25/40 years old), alone with many children, and often victims of pressures, threats, violent situations and financial calamities (Del Olmo 1990; Janssen 1994, Câmara de Representantes 1995). However, the situation slowly changed after 1991. Increasing global drug enforcement efforts pushed cocaine exporters to use less vulnerable couriers: more men, younger or older people, better off individuals with steady jobs, frequent flyers, and more Colombians living abroad. In local terms, the introduction of a tourist visa requirement in October 1990 for Colombians to enter the Benelux countries had an impact in this direction. During the 1990s, Colombian air couriers operating in the Netherlands became a more diversified and smaller group. Small in two senses: compared to other nationalities involved in Schiphol and compared to the number of other Colombians arriving at other European airports.\textsuperscript{23}

Most Colombians I met or heard of performing as mulas were neither established residents in the Netherlands nor complete strangers to the Dutch environment. On the one hand, established Colombian migrants or people with double nationality know the risks the unskilled drug courier usually takes and have better chances of becoming involved in less risky and more profitable activities around import and distribution. Except for some cases

\textsuperscript{22} The recurrent use of animal metaphors to describe small drug couriers - referred to as mules, camels or ants - presupposes an emphasis in notions such as physical strength and resistance, docility, exploitation and smart 'instincts' to avoid controls or adversity. Other images regularly presented not only in the media but also by social practitioners and progressive scholars stress their condition of pitiful victims and scapegoats, often invoking drama, sorrow and compassion.

\textsuperscript{23} During the first five months of 1997, the Colombian police authorities in El Dorado airport (Bogotá) made 75 cocaine seizures, with a total of 25 people detained and 500 kg seized. In only 4 cases was the Netherlands the final destination (2 cases involving shipments by DHL post), Madrid and Frankfurt far ahead with 21 and 14 cases respectively (Metropolitan Police of Bogotá, Airport Section: 1997). A similar trend is confirmed when analysing couriers detained in European airports coming from Colombia as first place of departure: from July to December 1997, 156 people were detained, among which were a significant number of Colombians. The 5 people detained in the Netherlands contrast with the 67 captured in Germany (Frankfurt) and the 32 in Italy and Spain (Interpol Office, DAS: 1997). Finally, both seizures and detentions in the Schiphol airport show for that period a clear prominence of Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and Brazil as main source countries, far ahead of Colombian-related cases (Several newspapers).
involving (ex) prostitutes (usually with residence, debts, good contacts in Colombia and a proclivity for conspicuous consumption) or some VIP frequent flyers (with local support and a strong sense of invulnerability) I could hardly find any Colombian living in the Netherlands as legal or illegal\textsuperscript{24} migrant who would work as a \textit{mula}.\textsuperscript{25} On the other hand, cases involving unskilled poor couriers from Colombia with no visa permit to enter Schiphol were nonexistent. Since it is rather risky and complex to get a visa for a simple courier, cocaine exporters and intermediary organisations only look for Colombians with the access problem already solved: someone with a second nationality or a permit to stay in the EU, the Netherlands Antilles or the US, a relative to visit, a course or study to follow, and so on.

Even when they hold a visa to enter the Netherlands, Colombians are particularly scrutinised upon arrival. The mother of a Colombian woman living in the Netherlands pays a regular visit to her daughter. She explained to me:

"They see your passport and you notice their faces. You are immediately a suspect. They treat you well, but in the way they treat criminals here. Every time it's a nightmare, first in Bogotá with all the bureaucracy, then at the airport, they ask many questions and often search for drugs. I understand why these people are caught."

Despite her claims, she is the sort of Colombian person targeted by drug exporters to bring a cocaine package to the Netherlands. Most of the cases encountered include entire families travelling as tourists,\textsuperscript{26} special travellers with good reasons to visit the Netherlands, and Colombians holding another less conspicuous nationality. Those reasons can be, as the following case illustrates, rather unconventional and seemingly well orchestrated. It was related to me during a service in the Amsterdam Church as a hilarious true story:

"Two Colombian women, dressed up as Catholic nuns, arrived to Schiphol carrying cocaine in their hand-bags. They were not inspected by Customs, but the police kept an eye on them. They thought they had made it, so already in Arrivals they started to happily kiss many people, laughing loud, and not properly behaving as nuns. They were caught immediately."

Although many couriers claimed to have been fooled about the real content of the transport, a less naive picture was usually given by lawyers, professional couriers and drug exporters. In most of the cases, the couriers are held fully responsible for the transport. Some argued that the cocaine was carefully weighted and packed in front of them to avoid misunderstandings, others claimed to know just the weight carried and the very basic instructions. Other couriers still allege to have been helped by airport employees in El Dorado airport, handing them the baggage or freight after they have passed migration. A 'clean' employee I interviewed in that airport while he was controlling my luggage for the second time, openly said - I suppose to impress me with a 'before/after' situation - that:

"In former times, many corrupted employees here would just tell the courier that his package was ready in the roof rack over his seat, but today we control and we get many people. Two hours ago I got a woman, she had too many shoes in her bag, and they were all the same."

\textsuperscript{24} The relationship between drug traffic and illegal immigrants will be dealt with in chapter VII.

\textsuperscript{25} Couriers visited in prison (Over-Amstel, Haarlem, Eserheem and Breda) as well as cases encountered in the 'milieu' had no fixed address in the Netherlands. Some of them smuggled cocaine before, usually not only to the Netherlands. Others stayed as tourists for a short period. This means a radical contrast with the situation in the US, where at least half of the Colombian couriers detained in the mid-1990s were residents, from which a 30% living in the US for more than 10 years (Ospina and Hofmann 1996).

\textsuperscript{26} For example, in October 1995, a Colombian couple with three children was caught in Schiphol smuggling 14 kg of cocaine.
However, there are indeed a few cases in which the passenger is completely ignorant of the nature of the freight transported, either given by an acquaintance as a package to hand over to some friend at arrival or, even less common, unwittingly introduced into the baggage by an unknown before or during the journey. Although I could not identify concrete cases like this, many people and signs in Colombia repeatedly reminded travellers, in a rather paranoid fashion, to avoid 'strange' requests and watch out for own bags. This risky method shows the strong asymmetry of the exporter-courier relationship, in which ill- or misinformation is a key element protecting the former and weakening the latter. It demands the extra skill of concealing and recovering the freight from the carrier, with a couple of potential advantages: less vulnerable and conspicuous people who would otherwise not perform as drug couriers can be used; they have less likelihood of behaving tensely even during superficial baggage checks; they are also cost-free in case of success; and law enforcers will not believe them.

The story of Susana, who served time in the women's prison of Breda, shows how some couriers are forced to keep working as a consequence of a previous failure. Susana first smuggled 5 kg of cocaine through the Brussels airport and went to Rotterdam to deliver the merchandise. She almost made it, but two men to whom the importer owed some money followed her and stole the cocaine. She was made fully responsible, and had to keep working in the illegal business to repay the loss. In a second operation involving the land transport of 3 kg, she was finally caught with another Colombian woman.

In another case, the courier was pressured to work for a second time since the previous success was seen by the exporter as a favour. In fact, some couriers claim to have suffered some sort of violent pressure, either in the form of threats, kidnapping or blackmail, especially against relatives. In some occasions these pressures were not explicit. One woman, for example, denied having been pressured but talked and acted as if she felt far from free:

"Look, they don't tell you the rules but these are the rules and you know what can happen to you if you play smart. I wasn't threatened, they were very gentle, but I knew they would go to them [her family] if things went wrong..."

This is maybe why the claim of pressure, a standard defence strategy in courtrooms, is so difficult to prove.

In any case it should be acknowledged that exporters exercise control over the couriers by a range of measures. They include paying the courier after successful delivery; claiming compensation to relatives in case of failure; and pushing people to work as couriers either as the result of an earlier favour, an unpaid debt, a failure or a previous successful journey.

In sum, Colombian mulas found in the Netherlands from the mid-1990s onwards are a very small group of drug couriers. They are first of all people in search of labour opportunities and upward social mobility. In many occasions they have improved their educational levels, but their expectations are truncated either by denied access to the labour market or by unsatisfactory jobs in terms of personal aims and achievements. 27 These aims are strongly influenced by socialisation patterns that regard money, competitiveness and individual success as fundamental values in a cultural context where overnight turnovers is positively valued. They are men and women from lower or middle class, usually adults in charge of a household,

27 See Pulido et al. (1995) for a similar conclusion on Colombian mulas detained in the United States. See also Green (1996: 18). Her research on drug couriers in Britain puts all the emphasis on the relative poverty and economic hardship of couriers. Poverty, however, does not explain why they are pushed to 'deviate' from mainstream survival strategies. While I also identified other mechanisms that play a role, I nevertheless share her conclusion that they are double victims of drug entrepreneurs and law enforcers.
some experiencing particular acute economic problems while others just facing few prospects for the future. These couriers do not have a criminal record in Colombia, but many have 'crowned' or have been imprisoned elsewhere before. They normally know the dangerous nature of the job, but their risk perception is often diminished by a number of circumstances. Risk is often underplayed by the suffering of a calamity, by a too fatalistic or too positive attitude towards adversity, by the excitement of potential rewards, by a strong identification with surrounding successful couriers, or by the trust endowed to friends and relatives who often mediate in the recruitment. These mechanisms are further promoted by cocaine exporters with an active policy of misinformation. They do that by denying controls, lying about the freight, trivialising the risks around the delivery, and even hiding the fact that they will be denounced to the police. Finally, most of these couriers live either in Colombia or in places with large Colombian communities such as the US, Spain or Central America. Some have friends or family members in the Netherlands while others are travellers with convincing credentials at Schiphol's migration desks.

Boleros
From the mid-1990s on, a particular way of smuggling cocaine drew special attention amongst European airports, hospitals and media. The so-called boleros (body packers) became a particular sub-category of mulas. Boleros are people who carry between 400 grams and 1 kg of pure cocaine, usually distributed in balls containing 5 grams to 10 grams each. The cocaine - usually packed inside latex fingers made from surgical gloves or condoms - is swallowed or hidden in body cavities, smuggled by many couriers on one or several scheduled flights, and delivered - after being excreted - on arrival.

The method is extremely dangerous for the courier, who risks dying if only one of the balls breaks. Since the mid-1990s, between one and three boleros per year are already dead on arrival at Schiphol Airport, and many others in critical condition. Fatal cases are also regularly reported in Frankfurt and Barajas. Up to seven boleros die every year in the route Bogotá-Barajas, either before, during or after the trip, while cases of dead Colombian boleros have also been found in Australia, Tokyo, Tel Aviv and New York. They should not be regarded as mere 'labour accidents', as the following case referred to me by an informant illustrates:

"A Colombian woman arrived to Frankfurt with many balls in her stomach, she was pretty much sick and in pain, but she made it through. When she arrived to the delivery place, she was in very bad shape. Do you think they took her to the hospital? No, they just locked her up and waited until she died, so they opened her belly and removed the balls. The woman was found by the German police chopped in pieces in several garbage bags."

However primitive and small-scale this smuggling method may appear, it has been a cheap, low-risk option for many middle and small cocaine exporters. A number of reasons can

---

28 Far from being new, this method was already in vogue in small scale smuggling to the US during the early 1970s. Unfortunately, detection was normally only prompted by the courier's death. Large scale smuggling to the US and Europe later overshadowed the interest for this smuggling modality. It is nowadays used to transport both cocaine and heroin.

29 Depending on their stomach size, a bolero can swallow between 50 and 100 balls.

30 In September 1998, a 21 years old woman from Dordrecht died in Curaçao before catching her plane to Schiphol. The same month another Colombian woman carrying 96 balls died during the flight from Bogotá to Amsterdam (De Volkskrant, 15-9-98 and 29-9-98). Many more couriers died coming from Caracas and Paramaribo.

31 Indeed, from the total 32 deceased Colombians reported in 1996 by Consulates in 7 European countries, these were the indicated dead causes: 9 Cocaine and/or heroin ingestion; 6 Homicide; 5 Accident; 5 Natural; 1 Suicide and 6 No Data (Colombian Ministry of Communications 1997).
be identified for the emergence and vitality of this smuggling method. First of all, it developed out of the fact that until very recently, European airports did not have the proper material and human resources to detect cocaine ball swallowing couriers.

Secondly, despite the dangerous nature of the job, the recruitment of boleros does not seem to be a problem for cocaine exporters. On the one hand, these particular couriers are often even more ill-informed than conventional unskilled mulas: they are usually made to believe that chances of ball breaking are minimal, rarely fatal, and that it is an easy operation with low chances of detection. In some cases, boleros report to have suffered some sort of pressure from the cargadores (loaders): psychological blackmail or explicit threats, especially on those who have already crowned before and are seen as owing a favour to the exporter. On the other hand, many people, from South American poor town-dwellers to European citizens, are willing to take the chance for some US$ 1,000 or US$ 2,000.

Finally, while this method entails low personal risks for the exporter, who remains out of the picture, it also implies few cocaine losses if one courier is intercepted. By spreading small quantities amongst many people, cocaine entrepreneurs can easily sacrifice couriers - even in a literal sense - losing little cocaine. The police and custom authorities are often more interested in producing detentions than in seizing drugs. On the contrary, cocaine exporters are primarily 'shipment' oriented and very often have no concern at all about the fate of unskilled, replaceable smugglers.

When boleros are detained in Schiphol, they are remitted to a penitentiary hospital after an initial check up in the airport. If the balls are not expelled naturally, they are often removed surgically. They subsequently face around one year of prison, depending on their background and their link with the exporter and the importer. The number of arrested boleros in Schiphol grew dramatically since the mid-1990s: 17 people arrested in 1994, 87 in 1995, 172 in 1996 and 196 in 1997 (De Volkskrant, 27-07-96 and 15-09-98). This improved detection rate of boleros is not only the result of more technology and human resources at arrival controls. Airway crew personnel are increasingly trained to recognise boleros: they do not eat during the flight and they are often very nervous. However, some help for drug enforcers have also come from the cocaine exporters themselves.

The common practice of sacrificing one or two boleros is constantly indicated by couriers and cocaine entrepreneurs. Since many recuas (lit. mule train, groups of five to ten mulas travelling together) are formed by some boleros and some couriers smuggling more quantities, it is wise to entertain the police and the Custom authorities with the smallest and most vulnerable so the largest and less noticeable courier can crown safely. Boleros who fall as ganchos ciegos (lit. ‘blind hooks’, decoys) as the result of a tip-off always report the same story: after their passport has been checked, the police either get them on the spot or - more rarely due to the health risks and the small quantities involved - follow them to capture the importer.

Most of the boleros arriving to the Netherlands come from Paramaribo and Curaçao and only a small minority are Colombians. A large number are Surinamese women. As explained in 1996 by the head of the Schipholteam after a group of 7 Dutch boleros were detained:

---

32 Only as a post-factum reaction, airports such as Barajas, Schiphol or Frankfurt lately introduced special X-ray or 'purge' rooms, first-aid facilities and specialised personnel for controlling and assisting boleros.

33 The fact that sentences for boleros in the Netherlands are rather low compared with places like the US, Italy, France or Spain, does not influence cocaine exporter's choices, who could not care less about the fate of a failed bolero. However, the couriers themselves often expressed satisfaction in the fact that they had been caught in the Netherlands and not elsewhere.
"Earlier there came boleros from the whole of South America. They were poor devils for whom those earnings of f 2,000 represented more than a year wage. But during the last months we see many Dutch Surinamese that travel again and again. It is unimaginable that they are prepared to take the risk for that money."

His amazement, however, should be cautiously considered. People do not measure risks in the same cold, rational way when they face limit situations or pressure. Moreover, many boleros indeed crown successfully, especially those who are better off and less evident. In fact, the less vulnerable the boleros are - in terms of gender, age, nationality or legal status, social skills and contacts, and so on - the less they fear detection and the more they are trusted and rewarded. Of course, the additional fear of the balls breaking is also neutralised by misleading information and a strong economic urge, both indicators of some sort of - relative - deprivation. However, not all boleros are desperate couriers. Some seem to smuggle in a routine way and achieve the skills necessary to survive many cruces (lit. cross, any cocaine export-import operation). As Tico explains:

"Once I met a paisano [Colombian] living in New York, a very normal guy, you could not say that he was in the business. But 4 or 5 times a year he made a cross with some balls, each one with 8 or 9 grams."

Colombian boleros - or better still Colombians at risk of becoming boleros - always seem to have one or more of the following characteristics: they come from deprived - not the poorest - neighbourhoods with high unemployment rates and large rural-urban migration - for example the San Judas neighbourhood in Pereira or Ciudad Bolivar in Bogotá-, they have friends or relatives either performing as boleros or as mediators with the cargadores, they have residence abroad - with travelling experience and valid passports to pass migration checks - and/or, they urgently need the money - more often for a relative than for themselves. Adding the fact that drug entrepreneurs always look for new, less conspicuous couriers, the range of men and women at risk is enormous.

Recruitment is usually made by intermediaries, and the courier never gets in touch with the exporter. Two weeks before the trip, the preparation starts. They are trained by swallowing grapes, carrots or banana pieces, and they follow a diet to regularise the digestive cycle. The last two days they eat very light meals: vegetables, fruits and no fat. The painful loading process takes in some cases few hours, walks and massages helping to accommodate the balls, and some yoghurt, olive oil or Vaseline to swallow them. After that, they have at the most 36 hours to expel the balls.

Passing the Schiphol gates does not imply, for some, a guaranteed safe crown. Every year, an increasing number of couriers are treated in Dutch intensive-care units after their cocaine balls break once they have arrived. In order to encourage boleros to seek medical help, Dutch hospitals such as the Kennemer Gasthuis in Haarlem, the Academisch Medisch Centrum in Amsterdam, and the Dijkzigt or the Zuiderziekenhuis in Rotterdam, have adopted a pragmatic policy based on confidentiality and health priorities: the cocaine balls are handed over to the police as found objects, but the patient is not reported and remains at liberty after recovery. In some cases, the hospital can even turn a blind eye to the whole situation. One informant was rather surprised about a Colombian woman:

34 Interview with Mr. De Jong, in De Volkskrant, 31-07-96.
35 This practice has been a subject of debate since 1998, the medical bodies arguing for 'hospitals as safe havens for everybody' and some politicians for breaking confidentiality and reporting boleros to the police. Further, hospitals plead for a more transparent procedure regarding the delivery of the cocaine balls, since the police do not issue any formal receipt (De Volkskrant, 15-09-98).
"...she was very critical but we managed to bring her to hospital. She was operated and she had to stay there for three weeks, and everything was for free! I tried to contact the people that would receive her here [in Amsterdam], but of course they were gone. When the woman left the hospital after three weeks, somebody came to her and said: 'you forget something!'. She was given back, in a plastic bag and very discreetly, the remaining removed balls. I don't know, but I think she finally delivered the balls."

Niñeras
Next to the occasional, unskilled couriers, it is also possible to find professional smugglers. While they also transport a few kilograms by air, they usually have a better infrastructure and logistic support. These smugglers are less vulnerable to detection. Some have a better know-how cultivated in earlier operations. Others profit from better operational arrangements by the exporter: contacts or corruption at arrival, better packaging methods, a preferential situation amongst other sacrificed couriers, and so on. In other cases they hold positions that reduce their vulnerability: stewardesses, pilots, military and diplomatic personnel, or merchants. Although there have been particular cases of the latter kind, most of the Colombian professional couriers smuggling cocaine to the Netherlands are just experienced travellers closely linked to the exporters, often already involved in the cocaine business in Colombia.

Professional couriers can also perform as niñeras ('baby sitters'), an ironic name for the people who are sent to covertly escort and control less experienced couriers during their trip. 'Baby sitting' implies a less risky task with a higher status attached, and usually includes keeping an eye on multiple couriers who are unaware of his presence, securing the delivery and handling payments and collections with couriers and importers.

Most of these smugglers, often men with middle or low-middle class backgrounds, are just employees who either combine transportation with other unskilled tasks around production and export, or consider smuggling as a necessary step in their 'career' promotion. Miguel is a Colombian cocaine smuggler in his mid-thirties who embodies this type of professional courier:

"Couriers are selected for their reliability and their chances to crown. You accept the most risky job, but you don't want to stay as a courier, you want more. Patrones are not patrones because they talk nicely, no. They have the 'balls' of being couriers and doing first the dirty and risky work. So you have two sorts of people: the mulas, they are not going to make it. They don't receive much money, but more importantly, they are uneducated, they want to stay where they are. And they don't have the patron's confidence, they even don't know them. But then you have those who want to climb; you really work for the patron. It is not only for the money, you see, you want more."

In 1993, Miguel was assigned to travel as 'baby sitter'. He had to look after a Dutch courier smuggling 15 kg to Frankfurt Airport.

"The thing was in a suitcase, put on board by a pilot of Lufthansa. I took the same flight, but he did not know me. European couriers are the best, you see, but when they start you have to watch them. Once in the airport, I contacted the man by a countersign, he crowned easily, and I paid him US$ 10,000."

Miguel delivered the cocaine to some Italian buyers. The instructions were to go with them to Naples, where they would pay him US$ 450,000 for the load. However, the Italians did not want to take him, so after new negotiations with the exporter in Colombia, it was agreed that

---

36 There have been, during the 1980s, isolated cases of Colombian diplomatic personnel and employees of large Colombian companies involved in cocaine smuggling.
Miguel would wait in Frankfurt. It was for him a fortuitous change of plans: while returning to Italy by car, the buyers were caught by the *carabinieri*, the illegal freight was seized, and they later received very high sentences. However, Miguel had nothing to fear: he did his job properly and was not responsible for the losses.

"It is very important to perfectly know when your responsibility begins and ends. You have to report everything and always ask for instructions and confirmation."

His problems actually started a couple of months later, when he was caught at Schiphol Airport smuggling a few kilos. Miguel spent almost 3 years in a Dutch prison.

"A courier earns according to who he is and how much he transports. For good couriers getting let's say 5 to 10 kg, you need not less than US$ 20,000 to US$ 30,000, including payment, tickets, accommodation and extras. One rule is that you are not helped if you get caught. Only *traquetos* are helped, but not couriers. They do not kill you, but you are alone. The worst thing that can happen to you is that the police take the thing but let you go. That's very common in Colombia. He [the *patrón*] would think that you are trying to fool him. It is better to go to jail, you see, otherwise the police is possibly sentencing you to death."

Colombian professional couriers do not live in the Netherlands, since they usually travel to many destinations and are close to one or more cocaine exporters in Colombia, for whom they also perform other tasks. As other professional travellers, they can also extend the stop either to arrange money issues or for a short holiday, usually staying in a hotel.

**Tripulantes**

Far less frequent but more interesting for law enforcement scorers, some Colombians have also been involved as crew members in ships smuggling cocaine into the Netherlands. Large cargo operations often require big financial investments or joint ventures, and require close control by trusted individuals during the whole journey.

Tico, before getting involved in cocaine import and distribution in Amsterdam, worked for two years as cook on board of a large cruiser for tourists across the Caribbean Sea. He claims knowledge about the wheeling and dealing of Colombian crew members:

"See, there is a lot of smuggling, but more for yourself, for selling here and there. With *perico* [cocaine] it is different. It depends on the ship and on who is running the operation, it can be one person or the whole crew involved. If the ship is *sano* [clean], you know, a real ship, you have one or two men in charge of the operation, but real sailors, people who know about navigation, about loading and unloading. But let's say the ship is only for the cross. So they want to be sure that everything is OK, somebody has to go to close the deal, to see that the coke is delivered, so they send somebody from the organisation. See, I know cases where the *patrón* in person gets on board."

Unless he means that in some cases the exporter can supervise the freight uploading, his final statement does not seem to have any empirical grounds: exporters never take this sort of risk. The distinction between normal crew members and envoys, however, is a fact with interesting consequences in organisational terms. Whether these crew members are employees of a legal shipping, transport or export company unwittingly involved or recruited for a specific illegal operation, all of them are real contracted carriers with few or no links with

---

37 Since cocaine smuggling through illegal ships, smaller vessels and non-containerised freight require more human resources to load, conceal, control, unload and deal with other procedures, Spain has witnessed a larger involvement of this kind than the Netherlands.
cocaine exporters and importers. They truly belong to the maritime environment as corrupted sailors, experienced smugglers or a criminal labour force. In some cases, claims about pressure and involuntary involvement should not be discarded. Tico:

"You can't run away in a ship. You can shut up and watch the other side, which is the best thing to do. See, it can be like in prison, heavy guys give orders and if you are new and sano there is no choice."

The situation of people sent by the exporter is different. Their main task is to protect the freight from dirty play, to transfer information about practical issues, and to negotiate the remaining business deals. In this sense they can be compared with air 'baby sitters'. They are more likely to be found in cases where transport is arranged by importers in ships solely transporting drugs, especially when many parties are involved and when transactions are still open.38

All sources indicate that for ships arriving at the Netherlands cases like these are rare. Neither Colombian crew members nor envoys live temporarily or permanently in the Netherlands.

5.1.3. The chances to crown: assessing risks

Cocaine importers and smugglers were rather puzzling when talking about their chances of successfully crowning shipments. Firstly, they always tended to exaggerate the risks. For people who failed, exaggeration was a way of legitimising their situation. Miguel:

M: "For every 10 people loaded only one can get away with it."
DZ: "You mean the other way around..."
M: "No, no, it is extremely dangerous. I mean... sooner or later you fail."

By overstating risks, those still in business tried to stress, on the other hand, how skilful or lucky they were. For others, it was a good opportunity to gain status or credibility in front of partners and employers, or to present their profits as a deserved price. On a few occasions, the same people seemed to contradict themselves by underplaying law enforcement performance.

Secondly, most of the people contacted could hardly go beyond their personal experience when assessing smuggling risks. People were usually familiar with one method and with people taking the same sorts of risks. The question 'what method is less risky?', I came to realise, made little sense when asked in a broad sense to individuals. A method is primarily determined by the scale of the operation, the capital available to invest and the access to transport and import resources. Less than a choice, for example, air smuggling is the only method available for the vast majority of small exporters since sea lines are scarcer and require contacts and arrangements that are often beyond their reach. For larger exporters handling a shipment of 2 tons, millions to invest and insure losses, and strong contacts with import-export and cargo companies, sea transportation is the natural choice. Risks and chances to succeed are not so much attached to a particular method but to the individual opportunities, constraints, skills and resources deployed in each operation, in which a complex sum of variables play a role.

38 In August 1994, the ship Zwanet owned by the Dutch firm Marship from Delfzijl was discovered near the Spanish coast transporting 1,100 kg of cocaine from Venezuela. Three Dutchmen, three Poles, six Spaniards and one Colombian were detained on board, the Colombian was viewed as the main suspect.
This explains the contradictory nature of risk perception. Some agreed that smuggling cocaine through small couriers was based upon the principle that there is "less risk involved if large numbers of people carry relatively small amounts of cocaine" (Philips and Wynne 1980: 235). Others claimed, on the contrary, that sea smuggling was safer because it often implies more organisation and local protection at destination points - by powerful illegal entrepreneurs, legal companies or drug enforcement authorities.

5.2. Importing cocaine

5.2.1. The Colombian share in cocaine import

Colombians have also been actively involved in organising cocaine import into the Netherlands. Far from controlling it, a number of independent Colombian importers both compete and co-operate principally with native Dutch and Surinamese importers, and to a lesser extent with many other nationalities. Colombian participation is modest for small quantities - smuggled by air - but strikingly high for large freights shipped from Colombia by sea. Table IX roughly illustrates the Colombian share at this business level.

Table IX. Colombian Share in Cocaine Import to the Netherlands (1989-1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic-national background (main involvement-secondary involvement)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 20 kg (31 cases)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Surinamese-Dutch | Dutch 8 | Surinamese 1 | Syrian-South American 1 | Spanish-Dutch 1 | Dutch-Chilean-Spanish 1 | Dutch 3 | Dutch-Colombian 2 | Dutch-Colombian-Italian 3 | Colombian 3 | Surinamese 2 | Croat 2 | Yugoslav-Antillean 1 | Surinamese-Dutch-German 1 | Colombian-Belgian 1 | Chilean-Dutch 1 | Dutch-Antillean 1 | Dutch-Antillean-Colombian 1 | No Data 4 | Dutch 4 | Colombian 4 | Dutch-Surinamese 4 | Dutch-Colombian 3 | Colombian-Dutch 3 | Surinamese-Dutch 2 | Surinamese-Colombian 2 | Antillean 2 | Colombian-Dutch-Irish 1 | Colombian-Mexican-Dutch 1 | Colombian-English-Surinamese-Greek 1 | Colombian-Dutch-Polish-Spanish 1 | Colombian-Surinamese-Dutch-Bolivian 1 | Dutch-Colombian-French 1 | Dutch-Colombian-Antillean 1 | Dutch-Belgian 1 | Dutch-Antillean-Canadian-Filipino 1 | Surinamese-Togo 1 | Dominican 1 | North-American 1 | No Data 12 |
Some reasons are obvious, others deserve a closer look. As I will later explain, there are many import methods implying distinct business arrangements. Normally speaking, cocaine importers have to perform several - sometimes complex - tasks around communication, unloading, internal transport, stashing, selling to distributors and handling payments and money flows. These tasks require a minimum of planning and co-ordination, and often imply the deployment of many human and material resources: skilled and unskilled labour force, communication devices, entrance to restricted areas, cars or other vehicles, houses, hotel rooms, warehouses, import firms, weapons, local contacts with wholesale buyers, and resources to move and deal with large cash amounts.

No wonder that cocaine import into Europe, as indicated in chapter III, is performed by various types of groups. Firstly, by local groups with access and control over those local resources, such as mafiosi, legal entrepreneurs or officials. Secondly, by local illegal entrepreneurs protected by them. Thirdly, by ethnic minority groups from source, transit or destination countries with their own local infrastructures, and finally by partnerships between all three mentioned groups. Although these possibilities always coexist, places with strong local groups involved in cocaine import such as Spain, Italy or Russia witness indeed a relatively smaller involvement of Colombians at this stage, especially when these local groups are illegal and effectively exercise social and territorial control.

In the Dutch case, although most of the cocaine imported is indeed controlled by native Dutch illegal entrepreneurs, they are not in a position to effectively deter other groups from entering business. On the one hand, these Dutch entrepreneurs are either too marginal to confront Colombians with resources and know-how (criminal penose), too well established and tolerated in other illegal profitable businesses to start a war around cocaine (synthetic drugs, marihuana, prostitution and gambling) or too 'clean' and legitimate to claim control or even involvement in any of these activities (legal importers, policemen, military personnel, and so forth). Colombians, on the other hand, need those people and their resources to import cocaine since they do not hold material infrastructure or social and political local power, the result being a whole range of labour co-operation amongst them and with other individuals (see Table IX).

Cocaine import is in itself a profitable activity, with mark-ups per kilo of up to US$ 3,000. For Colombian exporters or people close to them it is even more attractive: if they are able to sell directly to wholesale distributors, their mark-ups can rise to US$ 18,000 per kilo.

---

39 M:x = Cases of main involvement; S:x = Cases of secondary involvement. These rankings are only rough indicators, since the data suffer from biases and limitations. These are: the presence of dark numbers and drug enforcement selectivity (arguably under-representing less vulnerable and less researched importers); media selectivity (more interested in large or 'explosive' cases); incomplete or unclear data on ethnic-national background (absent in some large cases with ongoing long-term investigation, occasionally unclear when ethnicity or nationality is reported, especially problematic for Dutch Surinamese); and, finally, incomplete data on main and secondary involvement. However, these trends have been consistently confirmed by drug experts, enforcers and entrepreneurs interviewed during my fieldwork. See also Van Duyne et al. (1990); Van Duyne (1995); Bovenkerk (1995b) and Fijnaut et al. (1996).
This comparative advantage based on some sort of vertical integration or preferential market situation has been reflected on wholesale prices, which Colombians have managed to lower at times.

Colombian cocaine importers operating in the Netherlands move, on the one hand, in a rather open market place with a clear advantage in terms of supply and prices. They face, on the other hand, a continuous shortage of own material and human resources to safely organise cocaine import. While some have closer links with Colombia, others exploit a particular good local contact. As it was the case with drug couriers, not all importers have the same chances to succeed.

5.2.2. From business envoys to local adventurers: social hierarchies amongst traquetos

Colombian cocaine importers differ very much amongst themselves in terms of social background and skills, place of permanent residence, degree of professionalisation, and indeed material wealth and social prestige. Tano:

"No, I don't believe there is only one type. Some are educated and others are very simple, speaking as gamines [street-children]. You have real professionals, very discrete, others giving papaya [showing-off] with gold and looking for problems. Some really believe this is a job, others see it as pure excitement. But all have one thing in common and that's money."

A first clue to understanding these differences lies in the question of initiative. There are two most common scenarios in import operations run by Colombians in the Netherlands. For some the question is: "I have cocaine and I want to deliver it in the Netherlands". In these cases the cocaine exporters take the initiative for setting up operations, either by sending 'own' people to organise the import (envoys) or, less frequently, looking for reliable Colombian groups active in the Netherlands. However, for others the question is the inverse one: "I can sell cocaine in the Netherlands and I am looking for a supplier". In this case Colombian groups or individuals in the Netherlands take the initiative, usually pushed by demand, good marketing or infrastructural conditions or by police infiltration. Of course they exploit a privileged access to source through friends, contacts or even relatives but, as I will explain in chapter VIII, this relationship between local traquetos and exporters is problematic, flexible and extremely fragile.

Envoys

A first group of importers is formed by envoys, men working for medium or large export groups. They are sent to the Netherlands especially to receive, stash and sell the shipment to distributors, and eventually arrange financial matters. Far from being, as often depicted, fixed 'ambassadors' of certain 'cartel', these envoys tend to remain in the Netherlands for short periods of time. They usually stay in hotels, have very weak ties with the local Colombian immigrants, and spend a great deal of time travelling and negotiating with business partners and recruited employees. Close to and protected by large exporters, they enjoy the highest prestige amongst traquetos. Even when their operations are tracked by the police, they remain as the last and most difficult people to catch: they delegate many of the operational details to others and try to avoid unnecessary exposure. Some grew from low-ranked jobs next to a particular patrón, others were successful immigrants in the United States. Others still stayed in the Netherlands longer than expected.

A good example of these envoys is Jairo, a caleño detained in September 1992 in Rome during the Green Ice operation. He was later convicted to 24 years of imprisonment by an Italian tribunal, and is currently serving time in a Roman prison. During the late 1980s,
Jairo worked for some members of the well-known Grajales family from the Cauca Valley. His task was to organise a line in the Netherlands able to receive cocaine freights imported in tropical fruit juice. Although he first lived in Den Bosch for four years, and later in Amsterdam in a rented flat near the Bijlmerbajes, Jairo used to travel a lot to Colombia and England to both prepare the operations and arrange money transfers. He had a false Spanish passport to move safely and many nicknames for different people and operations. He spoke good English, but never learned Dutch.

When the police seized 2,658 kg in IJmuiden in February 1990 during the so-called Holle Vaten operation, they knew that Jairo was their chief suspect. Eight other people were arrested and convicted, but he remained untraceable in Cali. During 1988 and 1989 he had organised a line and crowned three times before the police finally intervened. Closely following instructions from Colombia, he financed and organised the Dutch import front store, rented the warehouse in IJmuiden, recruited the other Colombians involved, and monitored, especially through the Dutch partners, money transfers and debts from wholesalers.

After this failure, Jairo still tried to organise a new operation for the Grajales, but this time from Colombia. He worked with new people, this time using coal bricks instead of passion fruit juice. In November 1990, and again due to the amateurish mistakes made by those responsible for the import operational details, 600 kg destined for Rotterdam harbour were seized. This was to be his last project for the Grajales family.

In fact, most of these envoys dream of becoming independent exporters like their bosses. They lack capital to invest in a project so they are forced to 'sell' it to large exporters and investors. Only after some successful operations and good skills for replacing or competing with other exporters, they might have a chance of becoming real bosses. However, after failed operations, their usual fate is to end up in prison or, what Jairo did, to look for a new employer.

In 1990 and 1991, Jairo offered two separate projects, both with the Netherlands as final target, to two different exporters. Despite the time and resources invested in travelling and research, none of them were ever realised. His final appearance as an envoy was in 1992, after he and his boss had to appear personally in Rome, trapped by undercover DEA officers in the Green Ice Operation.

**Line owners**

Other Colombian importers are even more independent from the exporters. They stay in the Netherlands in a more permanent basis, but always intend to return to Colombia. Naturally, personal circumstances such as legal status or family bonds also influence their decisions, but either failed or successful, they tend to leave the country after some years. These importers usually have been in the Netherlands for some time and are able to mobilise both local and Colombian human and material resources. Some are approached by the exporter and are tested before being accepted as partners. Others work with more than one supplier, who at the same time could be working with two or more independent importers. Others still are poorly connected and have to make a greater effort in building and mantaining supply resources.

---

40 Before losing, selling or laundering their companies in the mid-1990s, the Grajales owned the largest winery in Colombia, a leading chain of Department Stores, coal mines and a large agroindustrial business specialised in fruit-juice production and export. They exported large quantities of cocaine to many destinations in the US and Europe, almost always hidden within barrels of deep-frozen tropical fruit-juice. See Castillo (1996: 102-103); Bovenkerk (1995a: 40) and Van Duyne (1995: 81).

41 Since they have the contacts at destination points they could become exporters if they had the money to invest.
I will call this second group of importers the 'line owners', even when the 'line' actually only implies one single operation. Usually male adults, they have a strong bargaining position: much better local contacts, sometimes with legal front-stores or infrastructure, and an even more flexible relation with the exporters who are just business partners. Some often travel to Colombia and most of them have their closest relatives - including a wife and children - over there.

They have plenty of time. Sometimes they stay for months looking for an operation to arise. Before actually becoming concrete, many ideas, attempts or promises lead to dead end. These _trajetos_ subsequently take a great deal of time to prepare and monitor the project and then waiting for the shipment to arrive. After a success or a failure, they have to start all over again, sometimes having to find new suppliers and wholesalers. Many of them have enough to do and to earn with two or three operations a year.

'Owning a line' is a rather pretentious notion: it is in fact very easy to lose it. The _flecha_ ("arrow"), another name for the line, can be broken at source with suppliers being killed, imprisoned, displaced, retired or moved to other activities; shipment routes can change for safer and more profitable destinations, transport means or partners; importers themselves can face prison or deportation; and finally distributors can also walk away by being imprisoned or by finding better quality or prices. New individuals and groups quickly replace older ones, and they hardly stay untouched for long.

In December 1995, Mocho and other 18 people were detained and 360 kg of cocaine was seized in a German-Dutch police operation involving some unlawful and uncontrolled research and infiltration methods. He was fortunate that these methods were the object of national debate and his case was even discussed by the _Van Traa_ Commission: he was first looking at 12 years, sentenced to 8, and later released at appeal along with other 4 Colombians connected to him. Although he and his group were importers supplied by large and well-known cocaine exporters from Cali, the Public Ministry finally lost the case. The intervention of dubious intermediaries working for the police not only explained this failure but also uncovered interesting details about the nature of Mocho's import organisation.

Mocho was not a newcomer. He rented a flat in Amsterdam West, and his nickname was familiar to the local _trajeto_ scene. Far from being a 'representative of the Cali Cartel' and although his brother in Colombia was also involved, Mocho should be regarded as a local independent importer. He was chosen by the exporters after long contretemps. They first wanted to place a shipment in Italy, but a large seizure forced them to re-route the line towards North Europe. After negotiations with two groups - in which police infiltrators helped to find the importers and arrange the transport – Mocho’s group got a deal: a large marihuana shipment via Germany, followed by many cocaine freights. As it is the case with many of these Colombian 'line owner' importers, Mocho’s group mixes professionalism with improvisation and amateurish mistakes. For example, they failed to recognise many key infiltrators, while they could have realised that they were controlled by just reading the newspapers. They also used to talk openly about business on the phone. In contrast, they managed to get top lawyers, to avoid long sentences and presumably to keep the profits of earlier operations.

---

42 These Colombian importers usually refer to themselves as 'contando una linea' (owning a line, having it under control).
43 In September 1994, 9,200 kg of Colombian marihuana were delivered to Mocho's group under German-Dutch police surveillance. The case was publicly discussed during the _Van Traa_ hearings in 1995, and still Mocho was arrested in December during a cocaine related operation.
Mixed couples

In some cases, the import operation is organised and performed by mixed couples - especially a Colombian with a Dutch, Antillean or Turkish partner. The friends or relatives of the Colombian partner are usually involved as exporters or smugglers, while the local partners often provide infrastructure, financial and marketing resources. Cases can vary from a secondary involvement of a Colombian woman to more leading roles from the Colombian side. Although this 'family business' type of importer also employs all sort of people and in practice does not differ very much from the 'line owners', these couples tend to be more established and integrated - relatives and children around, properties, Dutch language, residence permits or even double nationality. Some have an even lower profile than other traquetos, while others are frequent travellers with luxury properties far from the Netherlands.

Alicia comes from Cali and has lived in Rotterdam since 1987. She has three teenage sons with her Colombian ex-husband, and she is now married to a Turkish man. During her trial in 1997 she claimed to have started as a prostitute, but none of the judges seemed to believe her. She was accused of organising the import of 5 kg of cocaine via Antwerp, smuggled in a ship from Peru. While her husband's family indicated that she was the main person responsible, the public prosecutor believed that she only functioned as a mediator. This operation involved Colombian suppliers, Peruvian intermediaries and Turkish buyers - also involved in heroin traffic -, the couple being at the core of the transactions. As it is often the case, evidence against employees or general helpers was stronger than against the importers themselves: she finally got 2 years, only half of the sentence given to the real mediator. Other couples can move and operate in many countries, being also involved in cocaine export and money laundering. Rosaura and Wilder have Spanish names, but he is Colombian and she is Dutch. They were accused of organising three shipments to the Netherlands in 1991 and 1992, a total of 200 kg having been intercepted before arrival. They were rarely in the Netherlands. After many successful operations, they remained safe by moving between Cali, Bogotá and the Netherlands Antilles, organising more lines from Colombia and Curaçao to the Netherlands and United Kingdom, and of course enjoying high living standards.

The first one to be arrested was Wilder. For many years wanted by the DEA and the Antillean police, he was finally captured on December 1997 in Willemstad (Curaçao) and was immediately extradited to the Netherlands. A short holiday visiting some relatives, even while holding a false identity, ended prematurely. While the Dutch Public Ministry triumphantly presented him as 'head of the Cali Cartel', the Colombian authorities did not consider Wilder to be at the top.

Rosaura was detained only 6 months later when she was about to board a plane in Bogotá. She had been in charge since her husband was captured, mainly operating from Quito, Cali and Bogotá, where they had around US$ 10 million in legal business, properties and other goods.

Adventurers

A final group amongst Colombian cocaine importers is formed by some local adventurers. They are newcomers - usually young men from the middle classes with no criminal record - who after arriving to the Netherlands for adventure, holidays or work become involved in the cocaine circuit. Those with better contacts and skills eventually manage to become independent and to handle their own loads, often small quantities. These traquetos who come

44 In the fashion of a case described by Korf and Verbraeck: "... a friend, married with a South-American woman, imported cocaine. Shipments up to some tens of kilos were smuggled to the Netherlands by relatives of the woman..." (Korf and Verbraeck 1993: 122).
and go, are locally known within the street Latino circuits, are erratic and vulnerable to repression, and in fact have a close relationship, in social and business terms, to local Colombian wholesale distributors.

Pollo is a young Colombian who used to earn US$ 400 per month in a full-time job in Cali. He has a degree in economics:

"I came to see what happens, I can't do anything with economics in Colombia. I have been in Germany for a while, but here in Amsterdam things are more easy going."

He first worked for other Colombians engaged in import. While waiting for a second operation he became paranoid about DEA officers training Colombians to infiltrate drug organisations, so he decided to go on alone with an associate. He claimed to have risks under control and believed that the only way to survive was working alone or with very few people. Through an old friend he finally found somebody to send him few kilos by plane, which he immediately sold to other Colombians. As a small scale, independent traqueto not willing to take many risks, he also acknowledged his limits the last time I saw him:

"I'm empty handed, it's completely seco [lit. dry, with no cocaine] at the moment. Either I'm dry or the manes [men, buyers] don't buy. And it's not only me, many others complaint as well."

To conclude, the four types of Colombian importers discussed above differ very much regarding specific features. This heterogeneity can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Prestige</th>
<th>Envoys</th>
<th>Mixed Couples</th>
<th>Line Owners</th>
<th>Adventurers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence in the Netherlands</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation with Colombian community</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation with other importers</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3. Getting (un)organised

Mobile phones and call centres

Sometimes even outdoing their legal fellows, cocaine importers spend a great deal of time talking on the phone about business matters. Paradoxically, a will to restrict its use for security reasons clashes with more objective needs: personal meetings can be even more dangerous, transactions lack the standardised and bureaucratic procedures and channels available to legal trade, and imperfect or false information force people to stay in touch regularly. Moreover, unexpected changes and improvisation are so common features in the business that traders have to be 'on line' to check, confirm or repeat instructions. After all, deals involving millions of dollars are closed by pure verbal communication.

No wonder therefore that some of the settings in which I met many traquetos and made interesting observations about their daily routines are particular cheap-rate international telephone centres in Amsterdam or The Hague. One of the first things I discovered was that these public telephone booths are not seldom used to make quick, secret phone-calls to Colombia. On the contrary, these places seem to have social life of their own. Some dealers gather there for hours, visit the place one or two times a day, have endless conversations with
friends and relatives in Colombia, make also local phone-calls, and use the place and its surrounding bars to meet each other. The phone centres are usually small and very busy, not more than five or six cabins and some mobile phones. Lack of discretion is the rule, but nobody, including the telephone operators, pays any attention to another’s business. This double nature of public and mobile conversations effectively restricts the police in any serious attempt to get key information on the operations.

Not only importers, but also wholesale distributors can be found in these call centres. In fact, many of these places function as a real and symbolic bridge between exporters or those responsible in Colombia, and local traquetos. In reality, only some of them actually phone Colombia to arrange smuggling details, talk about money issues or discuss problematic delays. For many others, it is just a place to meet the boss to talk about local operational matters. Traquetos working for different people occasionally bump into each other to comment on business and social affairs. They stop by to complain about prices and market developments, to warn about other people or the police, or to gossip about common friends in prison. It is the time to specifically show one’s own strength and achievements, and to comment about the bad weather, football, a new restaurant, and above all about Colombia. Others still hang around in the hope of getting in touch with the important figures or to find new partners or employees. Indeed, since these centres are also used by Colombian immigrants of all sorts - but especially prostitutes, illegal migrants and newcomers - Colombian importers use the call centres as a suitable recruitment pool. For many Colombians, these telephone centres are the very first place in the Netherlands to meet other Colombians.

Ana Ines remembers the circumstances in which she met her first fellow Colombians soon after arrival:

“It was in a call centre in Amsterdam West, a young couple from Cali. We chatted for a while, I told them about Miami, and then we went for a coffee. I realised they were traquetos when others arrived and started to talk about enormous amounts of money. He explained me as if I was a friend that the market in Amsterdam is in the hands of Calenos. We live in Rotterdam because down there it is more quiet, Amsterdam is very hot at the moment. They did not offer me anything concrete, but they were clearly interested in my past in Miami and the fact that I spoke English. They tried to be friendly but I never phoned back (...) The second time was a man from Cali. He invited me to go out the next night to El Caleno, I really wanted to dance and I didn’t know the place. We were leaving the phones, another man arrived and they got into a discussion about a debt. Again! I went with him to El Caleno; I just wanted to know more Colombians. He was well known there, everybody came to greet him, I suspected already that he was into something, but then he explained me that he was a boss and he worked for people in Cali. I was really scared, he phoned me several times and the last time I told him not to phone again. Luckily he didn’t.”

Some do not use the call centres, but have their own - bought or stolen - mobile phones, which they use everywhere, even in church. For security reasons, they always take ‘pre-pay’ mobile phones, which they replace after an operation is closed or after some weeks. Some informants owned various phones that they interchanged all the time.

An even safer method to phone abroad is through illegal telephone operators, people with neither a licence nor a public office, offering cheap-rate phone calls through a changing network of mobile phones. In this way, traquetos can phone Colombia from wherever they are, avoiding ‘hot’ own lines or exposure in public phone booths.

**Commercial bridgeheads: front stores vs. bona fide firms**

In the case of large quantities arriving by ship alongside legal merchandise, the cocaine has to be imported by legal companies, which knowingly or unwittingly receive and store the illegal
freight. Depending on their resources, experience and contacts, Colombian importers have either created their own 'front stores' or have used non Colombian, well-established import-export firms operating in the Netherlands.

The first method - the creation of own import-export front stores - has been very popular amongst Colombian importers. Firstly, the capital investment is negligible compared to potential profits. Secondly, the timing of the operation can be better controlled through their own front stores. Thirdly, they can easily adapt to the exporter's requirements - in terms of goods traded - and to importer's needs - unloading, storage and so forth. Finally, it is for many the only resource available since the use of existing companies requires the kind of contacts that these importers often lack.

However, the problems and the risks faced by these Colombian front stores in the Netherlands are rather obvious. The first limitation refers to visibility. The volume of Colombian companies - or legal businesses run by Colombians - engaged in import-export in the Netherlands is extremely small, therefore fake companies cannot be so easily concealed behind other legal Colombian affairs. As explained in chapter IV, a very restricted number of formal or informal Colombian business - restaurants, bars, and shops - and in fact the whole Colombian community hardly depend on or consume Colombian imports. Moreover, the main legal imports from Colombia - coal, coffee, food and fruits - are in the hands of non-Colombian enterprises. New, small import-export companies trading goods from South America are indeed priority and easy targets for Dutch Custom or police.

A second problem with these companies refers to performance and management. They hardly really handle the legal goods they are supposed to be importing, so they often attract the attention of trade partners, neighbours or tax authorities for obvious omissions, mistakes or irregularities. The people running these companies are usually either short-term minded - disappearing overnight, letting small problems grow, always improvising - or just not the 'best' candidates for the job - foreigners with no working permits, locals with criminal records, and so on. Illegal entrepreneurs and their employees are dangerously exposed through these tapaderas (lit. cover, front store). In fact, front stores are often perceived even by outsiders, and they frequently prompt police intervention. Finally, the vulnerability of these front stores increases when they are also used to launder or transfer money.

In some cases, front stores are more than empty structures. For two years, three Colombians were buying and renting houses in Rotterdam, Amsterdam and mainly in The Hague, and managed to organise a firm with 27 employees - almost all Colombians - including managers and computer personnel, for the import and distribution of cocaine. In April 1993, 120 kg of cocaine were found in Amsterdam's harbour between dry bananas, and the three Colombians were later sentenced to 8, 10 and 12 years (De Volkskrant, 20-4-93 and 29-7-93). In a few cases, they can take the shape of a 'family business'. While playing football in Rotterdam with some Colombians, the following story was told to me by Helmer:

"There was a paisa playing a couple of years ago, he lived in The Hague and every day took the train to Rotterdam. He said he worked in the import-export firm of his father, I think that was true. He said that the business was doing well, that they were very glad, and so on. Well, he was detained between Brussels and Rotterdam with 10 kg and one million florins [guilders]."

Helmer continued:

45 Colombian individuals and business in the Netherlands seem to be well supplied by, for instance, Dutch Department Stores, Surinamese tokos, Moroccan butchers or Turkish greengrocers.
"Look, when somebody tells me that he has an import-export, I smell dirty business. I also know another paisa, and he said he was importing blue-jeans [laughs]...he worked for people in Medellín...he got 8 years and is now in Leeuwarden but he keeps denying, he won't talk to you."

In order to avoid visibility, many Colombian importers would use Dutch or other local groups to set up the import infrastructure. Jairo, for example, paid some Dutch people to organise a tropical fruit import front store. Flor and Nico were once approached by a Colombian couple who proposed that they set up an import firm together for Colombian products. Flor:

"They had a tapadera [front store] in mind. Nico is Dutch and they thought they could easily use him."

Others would carefully choose less conspicuous countries and products, profiting from strong contacts in transshipment areas. Import front stores run by Colombians during the 1990s handled, for example, plastic via Portugal, asphalt barrels from Colombia, coal blocks from Venezuela, iron and aluminium from Venezuela to England and Greece, oil barrels or tropical fruit juice.

Less frequently but far more successfully, Colombians have also used established firms to import cocaine. These bona fide companies are real import-export businesses, often active and well-known, and they do not attract the attention of law enforcers. The importers keep out of the picture, while the freights are handled more safely. Non-Colombian enterprises trading with South America are usually targeted, especially those importing food, coffee, fruits, flowers, clothing, minerals or industrial raw materials. In some cases, only special employees or managers are involved, and the operation is performed behind the company's back. Yet in other cases small enterprises in financial need are approached by drug importers, who tempt the owners with overnight profits.

Bona fide enterprises importing cacao, sport bags or carpet rolls have been involved, others dealing with flowers, textile, trees and shoe polish machines are said to have been approached as well (Bovenkerk 1995b: 171).

**White, green and brown**

Next to legal products, cocaine also gets mixed with other illicit substances imported into the Netherlands. As explained in chapter II, Colombia is also a major producer and exporter of marihuana and heroin, especially for the US market. Although in historical terms each illegal drug has had its own momentum regarding actors involved and market or law enforcement dynamics, the 1990s have witnessed a growing tendency for integration of business networks and marketing procedures. Data available on seizures and detentions for Colombian-US related cases reveal that Colombian cocaine exporters and importers, small or large, have often been involved in marihuana or heroin trade as well.

In Europe, both illegal Colombian products have had a tougher competitive disadvantage. Colombian marihuana is massively imported but it has to compete with North African, Asian or domestic cannabis, while Colombian heroin has - up to now - not been able to gain a share against the long established Asian supply through the Balkan route. The Netherlands being a key entry point for both illegal substances to the European market, the question remains about the involvement of Colombian cocaine importers in marihuana and heroin operations.

Colombian marihuana reaches the Netherlands by ship, usually in 1 to 30 ton loads. It is not rare to find cases in which the same importers are handling, both mixed or alternately,
large cocaine and marihuana shipments. During fieldwork in Amsterdam, some *traquetos* eventually referred to these cases. Tano:

"...20 tons of *bareto* [marihuana] arrived and it is being sold for f 1,200 per kilo [in February 1997] because there is over-supply. Two months ago they were asking the double."

Cases from the 1990s (see Table XI, Appendix) show remarkable regularities for mixed cocaine-marihuana operations. They usually involve large quantities of cocaine - more than 400 kg - and they are handled either by local mixed Colombian-Dutch networks, or by what the Colombians vaguely define as the 'Dutch mafia': local marihuana importers, corrupt Custom or police officers, and so forth. In some cases, cocaine is a further step after some less risky marihuana hits. In others, the marihuana only represents the police decoy in 'front store operations' organised by law enforcers themselves.\(^{46}\) In another case a container holding both cocaine and marihuana was found in Amsterdam. In yet another, still the police found cocaine base while looking for hemp.\(^{47}\)

The involvement of Colombian importers in heroin shipments is totally different: they hardly take place, they entail very small quantities, and they are rarely detected. On one single occasion, a Colombian distributor commented:

"Last week there were two despatches, one 150 grams and the other 200 grams. No, they weren't try-outs, they were for sale."

However, all my informants agreed that in the Netherlands heroin was not a Colombian affair, and that cases connecting heroin and cocaine only occurred at low wholesale and retail levels in the hands of non-Colombian dealers.\(^{48}\) Smugglers visited in prison often showed a less tolerant attitude towards the heroin trade and consumption, some strongly condemned it.\(^{49}\)

*The 'animals' are coming*

Unloading operations are considered extremely dangerous by Colombian importers, especially when local people and arrangements - harbour personnel, police, customs or import-export firms - are not involved. If the operation has been discovered by a tip-off, there is a considerable chance that the police will intervene at that time. If it is screened, those unloading would be identified and followed to capture their bosses. Even when nobody knows about it, the attempt can easily fail by unexpected controls or, as it is often the case, by practical and technical mistakes.

In these cases, one of the major tasks of the importer is to identify the date, time and place of arrival, and to have everything ready to get the *animales* (lit. animals, cocaine load) out. Despite the extensive use of all secret words and codes imagined to pass that information,
delays, misunderstandings and last-minute changes often force importers to make real efforts to get in touch with events.

If the freight is concealed in containers or amongst legal merchandise, the actual unloading follows regular procedures and the 'rescue operation' starts once the load has reached certain hangar, warehouse or depot. When the load is hidden inside the ship or under the keel, the unloading becomes in itself a rather complex and risky form of burglary, requiring for example extensive surveillance, co-ordinated moves and even the use of diving equipment.

For the unloading of cocaine freights hidden under the ship's keel, it is rather common that Colombian importers employ one or two divers to recover the cocaine. In January 1997, two divers sent from Colombia went on trial in The Hague after having been captured in a failed operation in Rotterdam. An importer selling to Joel, a wholesale distributor in Amsterdam, has used divers to unload the cocaine from Rotterdam. Other informants also referred to divers operating in Belgian harbours. A Colombian man I met was asked if he could swim before he was offered the "easy job" of getting 5 kg cocaine from under the water.

Yet it is far from an easy task, so people interviewed agreed that importers delegate the unloading risks by employing or subcontracting others, from Colombian helpers to harbour personnel. Problems around the unloading are also evidenced by the frequent delays: there are usually days or even months between the ship arrival and the actual unloading. The reasons are manifold, some unbelievable. In some cases it can take a while for the cargo to be finally delivered to the importer's warehouse. For burglary' operations I heard stories of unloading personnel not showing up or targeting the wrong ship or container. In other cases, the importers discovered police surveillance and decided to wait until they could move safely. Even fear is a motive for delay. Joel:

"Can you believe that the thing [cocaine freight] arrived to France but nobody wants to take it out? It is there, and somebody has to go and get it but it looks like a tough one, I think they will abandon it".

Fear and secrecy around an approaching ship contrast with joy and publicity after the load has made it through. When a large shipment crowns successfully, even peripheral people around the local Latino street circuit would get the news. Nobody would know dangerous details, but gossip about the quantity and the celebrations would spread very fast. Solano:

"Two months ago it was a big one. There was lots of money for many people... they are still spending the money. You see it everywhere: with the girls, at the restaurants and at the rumba. We sell more food, some people close their debts, see, an endless hangover..."

5.2.4. Further tasks around the importer

After crowning, Colombian importers need people to perform specific business-related tasks. Some of these tasks are part of the core routines and are entrusted to close associates and employees, while others are more peripheral or project-oriented and can be delegated or subcontracted to outsiders, in some cases to people who know very little about what is really going on. The list ranges from internal carriers to security personnel - load-keepers, bodyguards and sicarios -, from chauffeurs and hosts to interpreters and phone-operators. Regardless of the status of the importer - temporary envoy or rather established - and maybe with the exception of hired killers, the people involved in these activities are likely to be recruited locally. And in some cases they are indeed Colombians.
Internal Transport

Import operations also involve a great deal of internal transportation, since unloading and final stashing points are often far apart - for example from a warehouse in Rotterdam to a flat in The Hague or from Hamburg or Antwerp ports to Amsterdam. Small importers would take the task in their own hands, but others would just employ or subcontract the services of other people to do this risky job.

After he gained trust with a particular importer as load-keeper, Riverito was asked to unload and transport 50 kg from a ship in Zeebrugge. Although he earned less than the US$15,000 originally promised - he was in fact subcontracted together with a Colombian associate - he successfully organised and performed the operation.50

When 2,658 kg were seized in IJmuiden in 1990, the police detained five Colombians working for the importer Jairo - who happened to be in Colombia and was only captured two years later in Rome. Two of them were young Colombians who claimed to have been recruited the day before to help with the unloading. They had no criminal record, had been living a very short time in the Netherlands, and had student visas as a cover. The situation of the other three was different. They were older, much better connected in Colombia, and responsible for transporting the cocaine - in three earlier successful operations during 1989 - in a Traffic van from the warehouse in IJmuiden to the 'safe house' near the Stadionplein in Amsterdam (Bovenkerk 1995a: 36). One of them served 4 years in Spain during the 1980s for cocaine trading.

Security tasks

The encaletadores (load-keepers) are people entrusted by the importer to shield and look after the cocaine load from the moment it arrives until it is sold to wholesale distributors. These employees are people close to the patron, and in fact they do little more than what a legal security guard usually does, namely: keep an eye on the freight, listen to music, watch television and the like. However, it is indeed a more dangerous job: they are sometimes involved in unloading and delivery activities, so highly exposed to rip-deals and arrest. In the words of Riverito:

"It is dangerous, but you don’t have to do anything. They carry the stuff in and out; you just stay close to it for one or two days. They didn’t give me much, only f300 or f400 per day, but they also paid food and drinks."

Many encaletadores, like Riverito, consider the job as a temporary step for a future engagement in more profitable deals or tasks as independent traquetos.

The presence of professional bodyguards is rare and only limited to cases in which the importer is especially sent from Colombia. Normally speaking, personal security is performed by friends or informal helpers of the traquito and only for situations that involve money or cocaine exchange. The excessive use of bodyguards is considered dangerous and avoided, and many traquetos would only bring ‘a couple of friends’ in extreme cases.

All informants in the Netherlands and Colombia indicated that the use of Colombian sicarios in Dutch territory is extremely rare if not completely absent.51 Assassinations in the Netherlands amongst Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs - again hard to find - are either performed by ‘helpers’, bodyguards and the very drug dealers, or by non-Colombian - usually East European - professional assassins locally contracted. The few cases involving sicarios recruited from Colombia to settle scores in Europe usually take place in Spain and often

50 Organisational details and labour relations of this and other Riverito’s operations are closely analysed in chapter VIII.
51 Chapter IX on the use of violence will thoroughly handle this issue.
implicate other ethnic groups as targets or contractors. These hired killers are moreover discrete and professional travellers, even able to mislead other people. Cabeza experienced the following:

"the first time they sent me back I sat in the plane and another Colombian started talking to me. He asked me if I wanted to make billete [money]. I said yes, so he told me that the job was to knock off somebody. I was shocked and the man kept asking, but after the third time he desisted and told me to completely forget about it. He then realised, I suppose, that he was talking with the wrong guy."

Logistic tasks
Colombian traquetos also request or make use of other Colombians for more peripheral tasks. They are very important in logistic terms, but they imply either a secondary or sometimes unwittingly involvement. This help from local Colombians involves all sorts of people, from long established immigrants moving in the formal or informal legal economy to adventurers surviving through legal or illegal small jobs.

A first matter of involvement refers to accommodation. While established importers would have the problem solved and special envoys from large organisations would stay at hotels or rented flats, many traquetos would still need a place to stay and would use the resources provided by Colombian relatives, friends or acquaintances in the Netherlands. In one case, a Colombian woman living in Amsterdam unwittingly arranged the rent of a flat for cocaine entrepreneurs who concealed the real purpose of their visit. However, most of similar cases also involving bona fide hosting in own houses, actually regarded Colombian adventurers who would later be involved in wholesale distribution. For accommodation, importers seemed to rely more on other illegal entrepreneurs.

Tico and Tano stayed for a while in a fully furnished small flat in the centre of Amsterdam. Nobody lived there, but the place was kept clean and had a small bar, a microwave oven, a video-recorder and a subscription to a private pornographic TV channel. An annual rent of around ¤ 30,000 was covered by Joel, who used the flat for occasional 'special' guests. Tano:

"We have to leave tomorrow because a man from Cali arrived, a duro with a suitcase to stay for a while. So we come back to Joel's place for 3 or 4 days, and then who knows."

Some of these top-businessmen may need to move around, and instead of renting a car they can arrange things in a more informal way. Manolo is a Spanish immigrant who in the 1970s came to the Netherlands as a 'guest worker' and moved to Rotterdam after an early retirement. He has a teenage daughter with his second and current wife, Colombian Iris from Cali. Once in a while, an acquainted Colombian of Iris' relatives in Cali comes to Rotterdam for a short business trip of two or three days. Manolo is then contracted to be his chauffeur during his stay. The man pays him the petrol, some ¤ 1,000, and invites the whole family for an excellent dinner in the best restaurant in town. For Manolo the job represents a nice extra income, and he seems to like both the man and the way in which things flow:

"He is very well dressed and stays in a hotel near Central Station. He never asked me to stay with us. I drive him wherever he tells me, sometimes to Belgium."

---

52 For example, according to B. Martens, in 1990 a Dutch importer contracted two sicarios to kill a Moroccan man in Marbella (Spain) for an unpaid debt (Bovenkerk 1995b: 117). In 1994, a Galician man was killed in Cambados (Pontevedra, Spain) by two Colombian sicarios after he decided to denounce his partners in a large Colombian-Galician import operation (El País, 29-5-95).
Manolo 'knows' about his actual business, but he does not ask questions and sticks to a policy of discretion. Also the man keeps things very formal and distant, and Manolo clearly respects him for being "a man of his word, a generous man". Manolo’s help is not only based on economic interest and mutual trust, but on the conviction that the man is to a certain extent clean:

"I think he doesn’t handle the stuff himself, he once suggested that I shouldn’t worry because he was intocable [untouchable]. He just closes deals or arranges money things, maybe payments and shipments and that sort of things. You know, a business person."

Although in general terms cocaine entrepreneurs operating in the Netherlands show good skills for languages, most Colombian traquetos do not speak Dutch and sometimes not even English. Transactions usually take place in Spanish, also as some informants suggested for security reasons. The intervention of interpreters is thus occasionally required. In a rather improvised fashion, trusted - not necessarily involved - people around the traquetos are often called to translate to and from Spanish. For example, Solano performed a couple of times as a Spanish-Dutch interpreter in a deal between a Colombian importer and a Turkish wholesaler in The Hague. These Colombians are usually illegal immigrants around the cocaine and prostitution circuits who have already lived in the Netherlands for some time.

Especially around the window prostitution areas of The Hague and Amsterdam, I found Colombians linked to the telephone services often used by cocaine entrepreneurs. Some, as it was the case of an entire paisa family in Amsterdam, were running legal businesses targeted at a broader clientele - especially prostitutes and illegal immigrants. Others were just illegally organised, short-lived but very profitable: the so called teléfonos negros (illegal call centres). The operators - usually not Colombians and co-organised with other legal or illegal phone operators abroad - would 'hang' to changing lines and offer people, either on the street by mobile phones or from hidden rooms, the possibility of phoning for very cheap rates. Some Colombians or other Latinos were employed to sell the service, which was exclusively targeted for prostitutes and drug dealers. Before he was expelled from the Netherlands, Solano survived for a while in The Hague as a 'telephone-runner':

"...Two guilders. No matter where you phone it costs two guilders per minute [in 1996]. I go knocking the windows with the mobile phone, and then I get these women for hours on the phone, talking with everybody there [in Colombia]. Traquetos also use it a lot but they speak less... I don’t get that much, but the boss indeed gets rich because he has the business with a Puertorican operator. They steal the line, they do not pay a cent."

Germán had credit in an illegal telephone centre run by a Dominican in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. After ringing the bell three times in one of the prostitution windows, a man who recognised Germán allowed us to enter. The place was a simple room with some chairs and a desk with three or four mobile phones. Two men were making phone-calls in Spanish, and the guy who opened the door was in charge. That first visit did not lead me to believe that this was a 'hot' spot. However, I later discovered that the Dominican owner had already been investigated by the police in a former office he had: they were searching for drugs. In further visits with Germán, I had the opportunity to meet some Colombians there, and it became clear to me that most of them were cocaine entrepreneurs.

---

53 Next to Dutch and English, many Dutch, Surinamese and especially Antillean dealers speak some Spanish.
54 In the three cases I directly contacted, the owners were Dutch, Dominicans and Turkish with the Dutch nationality. However, they all had Colombian young men (often illegal immigrants) employed as telephone-runners.