Traquetos: Colombians involved in the cocaine business in the Netherlands
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Chapter VI

Sly Traquetos, Safe Houses and Salsa Dealers
Colombian cocaine wholesalers and retailers in the Netherlands

"Like an agent, a distributor will usually be a local firm or individual and a specialist in the requirements of the local market. He or she should be familiar with the business practices of the area, the structure of the market, local customs, and the various socio-cultural factors pertaining to the market."

Jobber and Lancaster, Selling and Sales Management

6.1. Wholesale Cocaine

6.1.1. Locality and the social organisation of cocaine distribution

While people barely linked to the Netherlands can engage in cocaine smuggling and import, wholesale distribution is an internal market activity reserved for locals. Whether they are either native, mainstream business groups, come from a middlemen minority or belong to some ethnic enclave, the opportunities of these local cocaine wholesalers mirror, with minor distortions, those of legal local traders.

Groups engaged in cocaine import can substantially differ from their legal counterparts due to the key role played by cocaine exporters or the privileged link with them. At the one end of chain, the social or ethnic background of cocaine retailers also tend to vary from surrounding legal (shop) retailers. They are often close to - or overlap with - the drug consumers they supply, from street crack smokers to establishment sniffers, and in many cases they alternate with other activities in the informal economy.

Cocaine wholesale distributors, I will argue here, are local illegal buyers and sellers not so different from other legitimate distributors, shopkeepers or businessmen. Although cocaine wholesalers lack legal permits, cannot advertise their product and have to be ready to use violence, they typically need to combine access to the required infrastructure, to further distributors or retailers, to cocaine importers, and enjoy some sort of local protection.

The material and human resources to organise the distribution channels are partly dependent upon the quantities involved and the local/distant nature of the transactions, but in general terms are nothing extraordinary. The basic equipment includes a car or a van for transport, a 'safe house' or store to stash, conceal and divide the loads, a mobile or public phone, a weapon, and eventually some access to cash and financial resources through bank accounts, funds transfer companies, cash carriers, and so on. All kinds of 'front stores' - especially small and with continual movement of people or merchandise to retail such as restaurants, bars, small shops or warehouses - are well-suited and widely used to disguise the illegal transactions. However, a large number of small distributors and intermediates can do and actually operate without them. Finally, tasks to perform or subcontract are less risky and complex than in cocaine import, and even fewer skills are required from those employed by the wholesalers. At this general level, cocaine distribution is a matter for 'local entrepreneurs' - whether local businessmen, shop-keepers, merchants, established migrants, dealers in other illegal goods, and so forth - and in principle restricted for newcomers with no access to these local resources.
The local character of cocaine distribution is further evidenced by another essential asset of wholesalers: their privileged contact with potential buyers - other distributors, smaller dealers, international or foreign wholesalers from destination countries, and so on.

What is easier? To find a supplier when you already have a customer, or to find a customer once you have a supplier? The answers I received from my informants and the observations I made around this question clearly indicate the first option as the more viable one. Even more evident than in legal business, reliable customers are cherished and carefully kept, while suppliers come and go, and are sometimes even switched with respect to the prices and qualities handled. Wholesalers with a solid small clientele are definitely in business, while those who have to 'hunt' for buyers are often expelled early on in the game.\(^1\) In this sense, well-placed wholesalers tend to have strong links with the levels below, exploiting preferential trade lines based in ethnic, cultural and/or purely economic considerations. Again, newcomers or poorly connected migrants lack this sort of advantage to become successful illegal brokers.

Naturally, wholesalers can also derive or strengthen their market position by a privileged link with cocaine importers or exporters. This is particularly the case of some distributors with ethnic or family bonds with those engaged in upper levels. In a few cases, individuals with no capacity to import cocaine can indeed be granted some kilos to distribute from a larger bulk, just because they are trusted blindly by the Colombian exporter. These 'credentials' can also eventually be used by unconnected individuals to move, for example, in middle and low distribution levels, far from the big shots. However, as explained before, people with no infrastructure, no financial capability and no local contacts can hardly become wholesalers, no matter how close they are from suppliers. They have better chances of working for them than working with them.

Finally, the sort of local protection they enjoy further enhances the possibilities of these illegal entrepreneurs to succeed.\(^2\) As priority targets of drug enforcers in a highly unstable market section, they often rely on measures and social arrangements to ground their position. From 'inside', protection can take the form of physical violence\(^3\) - whether real or symbolic - to neutralise competition and law enforcement. From 'below', it can mean toleration from specific ethnic, business or professional communities that can benefit from their trade - for example, particular ethnic shops, truck chauffeurs, banks and funds transfer companies, and so forth. From 'above', active and passive protection can be delivered by many sort of power brokers: police and military authorities, prison guards, top lawyers, local politicians or mafia type organisations controlling illegal markets in specific areas. These forms of social regulation and social control often surround the cocaine wholesaler's activities. Again, individuals or groups able to either get away with violence or to receive the elementary protection tend to be locally established, to already have some knowledge of the cultural environment, and some legitimation as local legal or illegal entrepreneurs.

Cocaine importers sell the freight to what Colombian traquetos call the primera mano (first hand), top wholesalers who are in a position to buy many kilos, sometimes the whole bulk, and who resell it for a mark up to two or three other smaller distributors (second hand). All the cocaine re-exported to other European countries - as argued in chapter III, most of the

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1. They expand the chances of being ripped-off by insolvent dealers or captured by undercover policemen, who more often present themselves from 'below' as potential customers or partners.
2. The proposition advanced by Blok: "the more successful a man is as a bandit, the more extensive the protection granted him" (Blok 1974: 100), is also applicable to these illegal traders, whether this protection comes from legal or illegal power brokers. In this sense, success as illegal entrepreneur and protection are inseparably interrelated. See also Gambetta (1996: 226-244).
3. However, the use of violence can be an obstacle for business performance (see chapter IX).
cocaine reaching the Netherlands – has already been handled by these first and second hand distributors. Large bulks are further divided amongst smaller distributors who eventually sell per kilo or fractions thereof to local retailers of all sorts.

However, a clean picture of a symmetric pyramidal trade chain is far from reality in the cocaine business. Firstly, the original imported amount can vary from one kilogram to some tons, which of course not only influences the number of possible ‘hands’ but the actual quantities handled by them. Single wholesalers can handle different quantities in different operations. Secondly, the cocaine loads are sold depending on the financial situation of the buyers and the credit they are granted. Since both things tend to change even per operation, it is not rare to find similar traquetos moving different quantities.

Under these circumstances, it is possible to understand the involvement of particular groups in cocaine distribution. Before analysing the performance of Colombian distributors in the Netherlands, it is worthwhile to focus first on the American cocaine market, where they happened to be rather successful. Much can be learned from this comparison.

6.1.2. Back in the States

All sources recognise and stress the key role played by Colombians as major cocaine wholesalers in the US during the expansion and consolidation of the American cocaine market from the early 1980s onwards. Although no study has been conducted about this specific involvement, a broad agreement exists on this point amongst Colombian and American researchers. The ethnographic material on street cocaine dealers in New York provided by Williams (1989) and Bourgois (1995) show the absence of Colombians at retail level but their strong position as wholesale suppliers.

Almost all famous cocaine exporters from the first and second generation - thus until the early 1990s - had long experience as successful traquetos in Miami and New York either staying there for a while or using local Colombian immigrants as wholesalers. Legends such as Herrera Zuleta and Blanco de Trujillo were present in Miami very early, Escobar went to the US in the 1960s, Lehder was a truly Colombian immigrant in the US, the Rodriguez brothers and Santacruz Londoño were active in New York, and the Ochoa brothers in Miami. Most of them made their large profits by selling the cocaine to non-Colombian middle distributors. In New York, an early control by Colombians displaced Puertoricans and Americans to lower levels and expelled Dominicans and African-Americans to street retail and crack circuits. In Miami, as I explained in chapter II, Colombian networks managed in the early 1980s to subordinate, after a bloody war, earlier Cuban control on the business. Moreover, in cities like Houston, Detroit, Chicago, Washington DC or Atlanta, Colombians have also been identified as powerful wholesale suppliers. Wilson and Zambrano (1994: 304) rightly question a significant Colombian share in the West Coast, where in fact the Colombian enclave was and remains rather small. An early involvement of US citizens in large distribution (Adler 1985) was followed during the 1990s by an increasing role of Mexico as the main source/transit country and Mexican dealers as growing drug entrepreneurs (Lupsha 1995). However, this Mexican participation seems to be stronger for cross-border cocaine smuggling, Colombians remaining as ‘border watchers’ and wholesalers (Lupsha 1995: 98).

In general terms, it can be argued with Thoumi that:

"Independent Colombians control a portion of the wholesale business. Cocaine is sold four or five times before reaching the retail level. Colombians are involved in those stages, but once cocaine is at the retail level, it is in the hands of countless independent sellers who rarely have any connection to Colombian traffickers." (Thoumi 1995: 150).

The many Colombians with whom I spoke confirmed these trends. Joel and his brother, for example, were large distributors in Chicago before they began to operate in the Netherlands. Ana Inés recalls from her times in Miami:

"In Miami, I had a student visa, but I also worked in a Latino bar. The place was really hot, you know, heavy guys and fights all the time. I left the job because I was scared. They offered me many times to do some work, to transport and to distribute the thing... I had a boyfriend who happened to be a traqueto and went to prison. See, 90% of the Colombians I knew in Miami were involved in drug trafficking. So I later avoided Colombian boyfriends because I had a couple of bad experiences. First you don't know, but later you realise that he is a traqueto (...) Once my mother asked me to send her some money. She said to me: 'everybody else there send money home'. So I told her: 'I am sorry mother, but I am not working in that [cocaine dealing] like everybody else you mean' (...) In another occasion, a friend of mine invited me to New York, and he wanted to pay everything. I suspected that in fact he wanted me to transport the thing [cocaine] from Miami to New York so I refused. In Miami they were mainly paisas, in New York the vallunos controlled the business."

One of Marisol's best friends is still serving a 12-year sentence in an American Federal prison. As she explained to me in Cali:

"She wasn't smuggling, no, she went there as many others around here to organise it. For many years, she enjoyed a high life, or how do you think her family bought all these cars? I visited her last year and it was devastating."

The vast majority of the 6,400 Colombians imprisoned in the United States are, as everywhere else outside Colombia, being punished for some drug offence. Despite the fact that the main fronts of the American war on drugs are either allocated at producing and transit countries (export), at borders (smuggling) and at deprived, ghettoised inner-slums (crack-cocaine retail), there seems to exist a large proportion of local residents and local drug offences (distribution) amongst these Colombians imprisoned. The exploratory research of Ospina and Hofmann (1996) shows indeed for the area of New York, comprising around 40% of the Colombian prison population, that 52% were residing in the US before being detained from which half of them for 7 years or more. Another interesting trend refers to the drug offences: almost 45% are charged with (conspiracy and/or intent to) possession and/or distribution of illegal drugs - typical local activities - while import amounts for 18% of the cases - i.e. smuggling into the country. Even recognising the specificity of the New York case, these numbers are unimaginable in the European context.

While it is difficult to assess the extent of this engagement - presumably very low in quantitative terms regarding the number of migrants and the possible available jobs at wholesale distribution - it is clear that local Colombian networks provided excellent

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5 See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia (1997). The number of Colombians in US Federal Prisons - drug dealing is a Federal Offence - was 4,373 in 1997, representing a 3.3% of the Federal prison population. As explained before, prison statistics primarily reflect criminalisation trends, and only indirectly tell something about the relationship between certain groups and deviant behaviour, due to selectivity biases regarding offence, vulnerability of the offender and enforcement priorities.

6 Other unspecified drug offences with 28%, money laundering with 4%, illegal residence and other crimes with 5% (Ospina and Hofmann 1996: 25).
distribution channels to Colombian exporters. Some authors have indicated this fact as a key factor for the success of Colombian drug groups in the American market (Thoumi 1995: 174-175). Once this control was achieved for the mid-1980s, it is also argued that it operated as a symbolic or real pull factor for some Colombians who went and still go to the US to work, many of them as illegal immigrants, in various informal and illegal labour markets (Urrea Giraldo 1993: 10).

In general terms, three reasons stand behind this success of Colombians in the American cocaine market: the nature of the migration enclave, the unbeatable link with supply sources and the business resources deployed for co-operation and confrontation.

A migration flow mainly composed of paisas had been pouring to the United States, especially to New York and Miami, since the mid-1960s. During the 1980s, less well-off migrants from all parts of Colombia - including many vallunos destined for New York and young black norteños from the Pacific Coast - kept entering the United States, targeting other regions and cities as well (Urrea Giraldo 1993: 9-10). The result is a very heterogeneous population of more than half a million Colombians rather concentrated in New York and Miami, places in which they are the second largest Latino group after Dominicans and Cubans respectively. In clear contrast with other Colombian communities - for example in Venezuela or Europe - they display patterns of long term settlement with upward mobility, and the development of formal and informal own business and local shops. They also show residential concentration - such as Jackson Heights in Queens, NY, with some estimated 80,000 Colombian immigrants - and, especially before the emergence of an American born Colombian generation, good networks for cash remittances to Colombia and weak loyalties to the United States in terms of political participation, social power or cultural identification.

Next to these well-established Colombians, the number of unskilled illegal immigrants working for low wages either in the informal economy or for co-ethnic employers has also been growing in large cities. Since this group can provide the indispensable unskilled workers who perform flexible tasks for cocaine wholesalers, it has been reasonably argued that some of these undocumented immigrants have also been involved in local cocaine distribution (Krauthausen and Sarmiento 1991: 157-158). Indeed, the presence of illegal co-national

7 It should be stressed that, whenever possible, this participation has been exaggerated, sensationalised or framed in racial fears and moral panics by American law enforcement viewpoints. During the 1990s, Colombians became suitable enemies of collective anxieties around the crack epidemic, the poor results of drug crusades and the growing urban violence and social unrest in large American cities. This process is superbly exposed by Mike Davis while commenting upon a "Cartel L.A." series published in 1989 by the Herald-Examiner synthesising DEA positions:

"...Cocaine...is supposedly warehoused and processed for wholesale distribution by Colombian nationals bound to the cartels by unbreakable omerta. Originally estimated to number a few hundred, the Colombians in 1989 suddenly became an 'invading army ... thousands strong' organised into as many as '1,000 cells'. Alarmed by news of the 'invasion', nervous Southern California residents were put on the lookout for 'suspicious' Latin Americans, especially 'polite, well-dressed' families or individuals with penchants for quiet suburban neighborhoods... The Herald-Examiner reassured its readers that 'the 63,000 Colombians living in the Los Angeles area do not all work in cocaine distribution cells' - 'only 6,000'" (Davis 1990: 311-312).

8 They are the largest and oldest South American group in the United States, but smaller than other Latino groups such as Mexicans, Cubans, Puertoricans, Dominicans and Salvadorians. However, regarding their socio-economic position - in terms of naturalisation, educational levels, average income, medical care, job and property tenure - they stand above average far better than Mexicans, Dominicans and Salvadorians (US Census Bureau 1997).

9 For the specific characteristics of Colombians in the Netherlands, see chapter IV.
immigrants can certainly represent an asset to Colombians organising the cocaine distribution in the US. However, as I will show for the Dutch case, a mechanic relationship between illegal immigrants and cocaine distribution is far from simple or even logical. Krauthausen and Sarmiento, for example, take criminal activity for granted as a direct substitute of labour market success,\textsuperscript{10} and wrongly presuppose a natural 'identification' or solidarity between drug dealers and illegal immigrants through mechanisms of trust and loyalty. Their argument forgets that most illegal immigrants work for wages in the general informal labour market; that illegalities are different in nature and not a unified field; that Colombians are doubly suspected and illegal residents more vulnerable; and finally that skills, status, experience or contacts are often more important than mere ethnic or kinship lines to get and keep a job in the cocaine business.

In short, Colombians in the US are in a position somewhere in between Mexican and Cuban immigrants, neither predominantly proletarised in the mainstream economy like the former nor with a fully developed ethnic enclave economy like the latter (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). They present some of the characteristics of middlemen minorities described by Bonacich and Modell (1980) such as strong ties with their homeland (mobility, family members, the sending of remittances, and so forth), visible levels of ethnic solidarity (family ties, suprafamiliar institutions, voluntary associations, community leaders and organisations), urban preferences, low political participation, travel experience, hostility from the surrounding society and in some cases the concentration of trade and entrepreneurial activities held in contempt by mainstream economy. However, other key features of middlemen groups are absent. Firstly, they do not perform as real brokers between local elites and subordinate groups. Self-employment in small-businesses and shops exists but is small if compared with Chinese, Indian or Korean diasporas. The image of frugal families dwelling behind their shop, working long hours and ploughing profits back into the businesses, is too narrow and simple. In fact, Colombians are far from the 'trading people with a history of traditional capitalism' (Bonacich 1973: 591-592) often depicted in middlemen theories. They lack the language skills attributed to middlemen, and they push for assimilation through intermarriage or the education system, with relative success. Finally, a heterogeneous class and ethnic composition within the group often limits solidarity to the level of kinship or locality of origin.

It can be argued that some Colombians in the US are linked to the so-called 'ethnic economy' (Light and Karageorgis 1995), a broader and more agnostic notion involving the Colombian self-employed, Colombian entrepreneurs and their Colombian employees. Only some of these immigrant businesses are spatially clustered, have achieved some vertical and horizontal integration, have employed other Colombians and have gone beyond a co-ethnic clientele, which are all further characteristics of full-fledged 'ethnic enclaves' to be found, for example, in the Cuban business concentration in 'Little Havana' in Miami (Wilson and Portes 1980). Moreover, a visible residential concentration in some neighbourhoods, a large population size providing a core market and a source of labour, good entrepreneurial skills and the availability of capital resources, are additional features that shape the Colombian enclaves of New York and Miami. All these enclave features constitute, as I argued earlier, a fertile soil for both expanding and concealing the networks engaged in cocaine distribution.

\textsuperscript{10} This idea, especially for drug dealing, has been consistently undermined. Recent and weak immigrants have generally fewer opportunities than established ones both as legal AND illegal entrepreneurs and employees (see Reuter et al. 1990; Engbersen et al. 1995; and Butcher and Piehl 1997). For the specific involvement of illegal Colombian immigrants in the cocaine business, see chapter VIII.
Next to the nature of the group, a second reason for their success obviously relates to their privileged position regarding supply sources, an advantage that, for example, Cubans did not have. In a time in which cocaine demand was expanding in explosive proportions (with no moral panics and a few negative stigmas around cocaine), the war on drugs had not even begun and the potential profits were already considerable, why would Colombian immigrants not use their infrastructure to help and profit from the *traquetos* travelling to the States to organise cocaine import? In this way, Colombian *traquetos* and immigrants could profit from each other, the first by concealing transactions and improving business performance, and the second by getting the chance to share the profits as entrepreneurs or employees. Also the way in which cocaine was smuggled in the late 1970s, by plane and in medium or small quantities, allowed for and easier participation of co-nationals even with low levels of organisation.

Finally, Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs in the US showed a remarkable ability to combine mixed business partnerships with extreme violence, or to switch from one to the other whenever required. Changing in time and space, both coexistence with and annihilation of potential competitors are well documented. Thus, on the one hand, Colombians managed in different periods and regions to establish business links - thus up to kilo transactions - with Americans (Lee III 1989), Cubans (Eddy et al. 1992) or Mexicans (Lupsha 1995). On the other, they did not hesitate to use violence to neutralise competitors. I have explained in chapter II that Cubans controlled the marketing channels until Colombians replaced them following the ‘Miami Wars’ of 1979-1982. New York also evidenced high levels of violence around the control of cocaine wholesale distribution. While some authors have over-dramatised this Colombian related violence (Eddy et al. 1992; Gugliotta and Leen 1990; Mermelstein 1990) others have just recognised it as an important element to explain the Colombian advantage (Thoumi 1995; Bagley 1990). The localised, sporadic violent outbreaks for the control of the illegal business in major American cities - also between Colombian groups themselves - indicate potentially well-placed groups in terms of local networks, business resources and supply access - actually able to perform violence - but temporarily excluded from the market by other dealers and groups better tolerated or protected from ‘above’. In a context of market expansion, high competition, enormous profits and police incapability to react, some Colombian groups hostile to local authorities and not protected by other illegal power brokers were able to deploy physical violence to secure their position.

In this way, Colombian *traquetos* managed to become illegal middlemen. With the escalation of the war on drugs and the pumping of their dollars into mainstream US economy, the initial indifference of American traditional mobs - whether Italo-American *mafiosi* or native groups - towards Colombian cocaine wholesalers turned into toleration, shared partnerships or active protection. Cubans were neutralised and only kept some share in Florida, while Puertorican, Dominicans or Afro-Americans were subordinated and forced to occupy the retail ends in the streets of New York or Los Angeles. More recently, their intensive co-operation and competition with Mexican organisations marks new trends still dominated by Colombian and American wholesalers.

### 6.1.3. The comparative disadvantage of Colombian distributors in the Netherlands

In contrast to American developments, the involvement of Colombians in cocaine distribution in the Netherlands is highly problematic. Contrary to their rather active role in cocaine import, especially of large quantities by sea, local Colombians suffer a strong comparative disadvantage to engage in further cocaine distribution.

As shown in chapter IV, Colombians in the Netherlands are neither a middleman minority nor an ethnic enclave. It is even difficult to find traces of a mere ethnic economy
amongst them. They are few and dispersed, and they lack social or financial capital. Rather than owning businesses, they share with other ethnic minorities the exploitation of particular occupational niches in the general economy, usually for local employers or clientele. They also lack the social institutions and the infrastructure required to properly conceal cocaine distribution: retail shops, restaurants, warehouses and other possible front stores. In this sense, other ethnic minorities such as Surinamese or Turks are better positioned to provide a base for the business, leaving aside native Dutch illegal entrepreneurs who in fact dominate at wholesale level.

Moreover, Colombians also lack the main marketing channels towards 'below' - local or European buyers - only developed through active local engagement and some degree of successful economic brokerage. Successful drug entrepreneurs often regard local Colombians as unskilled, socially isolated and too vulnerable. Their marginal position excludes them from the most effective forms of local protection, and they are often forced to truly work 'underground'. In contrast with the US situation, they cannot widely resort to physical violence and get away with it in the Dutch context.

This comparative disadvantage of Colombians at the distribution level can be generalised for the rest of Europe. Even in Spain, with a larger and stronger community, other local or foreign groups seem to enjoy better marketing channels and protection resources.

Finally, the uneven involvement of Colombians in the American and the European wholesale markets has also historical causes. From their perspective, the control on distribution in both places had a truly different meaning. As already explained, the control over the internal market in the United States was simultaneous or even prior (1978-1983) to the consolidation of Colombian groups as main cocaine producers and exporters. Grasping the American market through own distribution channels was essential for gaining a privileged position over other possible competitors in Latin America. The first Colombians to make cocaine fortunes were those able to import and sell kilo quantities in American cities. The high levels of violence around the cocaine wars also reflect such articulation.

Later European developments did not have the same meaning: Colombians were comfortable in control of the export business when they targeted this market. Gaining a position in distribution, though extremely interesting for multiplying profits, was not a condition for their already undisputed leadership as producers and exporters. The lack of strong Colombian networks and the fact that large sea smuggling operations required more entrepreneurial arrangements forced Colombians to deal with other groups or individuals with stronger roots in the local context.

The international palette: dealing in a non-Colombian environment
A salient feature of these cocaine distributors is that they belong to several ethnic and national groups, even more than importers. The international composition is remarkable not only between but also within organisations. It reflects the fact that most cocaine traded is in transit to other European destinations, the market openness beyond any monopolist or regulatory local control by power holders, and to some extent the collusion with other legal and illegal markets and activities at European level.

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11 According to Latino migrant organisations in Brussels, there are around 100,000 Colombians living legally and illegally in Spain.

12 Since most of the cocaine is bound to other European countries, the Netherlands attracts wholesale buyers from those places, who come to buy cheaper and directly from importers.
However, was wholesale distribution, as I argued before, not a truly local activity? It is in fact at this very stage where the local and the global nature of the cocaine business are more obviously related as two faces of the same coin (Hobbs and Dunnighan 1998). An international crowd from source, transit or destination countries can perform as local wholesalers, all profiting from different resources and contacts.

Native Dutch cocaine entrepreneurs form a first group of wholesalers. Some researchers have pointed out the ways in which Colombian importers sell to Dutch individuals or groups (Van Duyne et al. 1990: 54-55; Van Duyne 1995: 79; Bovenkerk 1995b: 100-103). Antillean intermediaries facilitate some of these Colombian-Dutch transactions. Others are brought about by mixed couples, the Dutch partner distributing the cocaine after import.

Many of these Dutch cocaine wholesalers, especially those who entered the business during the late 1980s, are 'criminal diversifiers', i.e. existing illegal entrepreneurs that 'diversify' their operations to include cocaine distribution (Dorn et al. 1992: xiii). They have often grown in safer and more tolerated businesses such as hashish/marihuana import and distribution, have good contacts in the local sex industry, and only move to cocaine operations when a good opportunity arises. Some also have experience with heroin and have foreign contacts.

A good example of these diversifiers was Klaas Bruinsma, a top Dutch drug entrepreneur who became, even before he was killed in 1991, a mythical figure in the Amsterdam drug scene. He bought cocaine from Colombian exporters and importers, engaging for these transactions partners, intermediaries or employees from many places: Surinamese, Chileans, Yugoslavs and Dutch. He cultivated contacts with foreign drug suppliers, with local authorities and did not hesitate to use physical violence (Fijnaut et al. 1996). With a much lower profile, two Dutch brothers I met were also buying cocaine from Colombian importers. They owned a coffee-shop in the centre of Amsterdam, and one of them had spent five years in a Spanish prison for trafficking hashish.

Not all have a criminal background. A number of these Dutch wholesalers belong to the category of 'sideliners', people with legal business enterprises who trade cocaine as a 'sideline' activity on an occasional or regular basis (Dorn et al. 1992: xiii). As was the case with local importers, they enter the business due to financial problems, a strong sense of invulnerability - they are indeed harder to detect - and/or a good contact with some supplier.

However, most of the Colombian importers and distributors interviewed usually preferred to deal with local ethnic minorities (mainly Turks and Antilleans) as well as with all sorts of European groups (Italians, Germans, British, Russians, Yugoslavs and so forth). They often had a negative image about Dutch drug dealers, partly reflecting more general feelings about the local environment. Joel explained:

"Don't mistake yourself. See, the Dutch mafia, yes they run the coffee-shops and all that. They also bring the thing [cocaine] through their corrupt friends. Then you have all over the city (Amsterdam) these small thieves and junkers, they want to have something from you, they want to impress you. But you can't trust these people, they come with cola [they attract the police], they talk to everybody and they speak if they pull their balls... I sell in Germany and here I deal with Turks and Italians."

It is agreed that most of these Dutch illegal entrepreneurs have enough financial incentives sticking to these safer activities, which they know and control, and consider cocaine and heroin two delicate and dangerous businesses. During the 1990s, they had more chances to diversify to the more domestic ecstasy than to cocaine traffic.

As a product for entertainment, Bruinsma was even portrayed as a mafia boss of a criminal 'syndicate' with almost 200 people organised in strict divisions within a hierarchical structure (Middelburg 1992). See for a critique: Bovenkerk (1995b: 108-110).
Other Colombian dealers made the same sort of remarks, portraying Dutch dealers as too distant, too small or too ready to talk with the police. Additionally, cocaine related cases analysed show some interesting patterns in this direction. In all Colombian-Dutch transactions intended for the European market, Dutch wholesalers seem to be also involved in cocaine import. When Colombians alone control the import operation, they either prefer to sell directly to foreign organisations - avoiding the unnecessary intermediation of Dutch wholesalers and a price mark-up - or to some local non-Dutch groups considered safer. Dutch wholesalers are more active in non-Colombian operations, and, of course, when the cocaine is aimed for retail in the Netherlands.

Surinamese and Antilleans are also involved in cocaine distribution. Colombians have more contact with Antillean dealers, who often speak both Spanish and Dutch and who are also trade partners in other business levels like export-import, smuggling or money laundering. Surinamese wholesalers are somewhat further removed from Colombian traquetos, either closer to Dutch importers or responsible for channelling small and medium quantities directly imported from Suriname. They profit from their own local infrastructure around their communities in the Netherlands - tokos, small import and retail businesses, gold shops, bars and so on - and from local protection in the form of indifference, passive or active corruption (Fijnaut et al. 1996: Sub-reports I and IV on Surinamese and Antillean dealers). They are more oriented to the local cocaine market, supplying the many groups involved in retail and street dealing, which also involve Antilleans and Surinamese especially in the larger cities. In line with drug enforcement priorities, very little is known about these Surinamese wholesalers. Their involvement in export-import or street levels is better documented and ranks higher in media and policy agendas.

Although Turkish and Kurdish drug entrepreneurs have been primarily connected with heroin import and distribution in the Netherlands, they have also diversified to cannabis import and, to a lesser extent, to cocaine wholesale. Many Colombians claimed to have been selling cocaine to the arables (Arabs, a broad label used beyond ethnic or political boundaries), especially in The Hague and Amsterdam. Some of these transactions were facilitated by a sentimental relationship - usually between a Colombian woman and a Turkish man - but in most of the cases referred, they were pure business contacts. Despite the few social and cultural intersections between both groups, Colombians seemed to like Turks as business partners. As Solano recalls from his participation as interpreter in a Colombian-Turkish transaction:

15 However, in some large 'Surinamese' or 'Antillean' operations, there is a clear link with Colombians at export or import level. In October 1994, 550 kg cocaine were seized in Amsterdam and 17 people detained in connection with a distribution network via Surinamese tokos (shops). The cocaine arrived hidden in fruit juice from Colombia.


17 Their involvement in the Dutch heroin market can be fairly compared with that of Colombians in the cocaine business in the USA, especially during the 1980s. However, while transit routes in the American case have gained power on their own (Mexico), Turks and Kurds seem to control the whole line through the Balkans and Germany. They also enjoy a less hostile environment in the Netherlands, with degrees of toleration and protection not granted to Colombian traquetos in the US. For the involvement of Turks and Kurds in the heroin business in the Netherlands, see: Fijnaut et al. (1996); Yesilgöz et al. (1996, 1997) and Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz (1998).
"Here in The Hague you see many Turks buying from Colombians. The Turks are a real mafia with their families and so. That is the impression they give compared with the messy Colombians... You can find Colombians saying nasty things about the Arabs, whatever you want. You won't find them together, maybe some Turkish men visit the girls [Colombian prostitutes] but that's all. They go to different churches, bars and discotheques, and if they live in the same flat, they hardly communicate. But I think they respect each other. They like dealing with Turks because they are sober and to certain extent trustworthy. They know the ground and they know how to move the thing [cocaine] all over Europe..."

Indeed, other traquetos like Joel also sold cocaine to Turks based in Germany. In order to close the deals, he either went to Germany or they came to the Netherlands. For these and other local Turkish wholesalers it is not only easy but also very profitable to diversify to cocaine. They use the same routes, transport facilities, local infrastructure and international contacts to further sell, next to heroin, cocaine. Colombians systematically played down indications that they also get cocaine from other wholesalers in exchange for heroin (Fijnaut et al. 1996; Yesilgöz et al. 1997: 61). Moreover, I did not come across any detected or undetected case like this. This cocaine-heroin exchange method, however, might well take place between Turkish and non-Colombian wholesalers.

Some wholesale operations involve British and German citizens. Britain and Germany are closely linked with the Netherlands as direct destination or transit points for the cocaine traded, and Britain plays a central role in terms of financial resources and money laundering. They are very mobile, work close or integrated to other local groups, and often provide professional expertise or material resources in terms of transport, front stores, luxury investments or financial matters. They can more easily afford an - unnoticed - wealthy lifestyle as they belong to the local 'foreign elites'. Some of the cases reported in the media indeed involved exclusive houses and expensive cars.

The presence of Italian wholesalers buying from cocaine importers in major Dutch cities has not only been highlighted by police and judicial sources (Fijnaut et al. 1996), but also consistently confirmed by all Colombian traquetos interviewed. Colombians were always positive about Italian partners and acknowledged that Colombian-Italian transactions were cherished, welcome and usually profitable. The role of Amsterdam as a meeting point for these transactions was also emphasised, and so the fact that Italians arrange the transport to Italy (especially Naples) where the cocaine is re-sold. After analysing the material collected by Fijnaut et al. (1996), the available Italian sources on cocaine traffic in Italy and what I gathered from Colombians themselves in the Netherlands, a number of remarks should be made about the nature of this Italian involvement. Firstly, despite a clear tendency during the 1990s towards professionalisation, these Italians belong to many groups and regions in Italy. Next to drug entrepreneurs from Naples - often protected by, more than belonging to some Camorra Clan, particularly active in Amsterdam - there have been Italian groups and individuals from Sicily, Calabria, Rome, Milan, Florence, Bari and Genoa. Again, they range

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18 Tano, for example, exclaimed: "No, you want to see the money, you have to send it immediately. What do you want Turkish heroin for? Not to bring it back, because we produce and export our own. Neither to sell it here, that's not our business. I told you before, the heroin we get comes from Colombia but is nothing compared with what the Turkish mafia handles."

19 In November 1992, the police seized in several places 1100 kg cocaine, more than a ton marihuana, money and nine cars, detaining many Dutch and Colombian importers. The loot included a Porsche containing 126 gold kg bars, both belonging to an Irishman who claimed them back in 1996. In October 1996, 317 kg cocaine were found in the house of a British citizen in Sassenheim, at the time one of the Top-3 most wanted in Britain. The police also found weapons, money and other illegal drugs.
from drug entrepreneurs closely protected by local *mafia* groups,\(^{20}\) to underground organisations such as the Roman *banda della Magliana*, or even to smaller groups from the North. I even found Italian individuals working for other wholesalers, like an Italian chauffeur of Colombian local wholesalers, or living here for many years with no relation with *mafia* groups. Secondly, most of these Italians have been active in all sorts of Dutch cities and towns, from Amsterdam to Zevenhuizen or Barendrecht, dealing independently with different groups. Beyond cliché images of 'pizza' or 'ice-cream connections',\(^{21}\) the contacts are made in all sorts of settings and the cocaine is transported by car or truck. Thirdly, Italians do not limit their transactions to Colombians but they also buy from Dutch and Antillean suppliers.

Other wholesalers operating in the Netherlands come from Israel, Russia and the former Yugoslavia, all countries directly involved in cocaine import, transit and final retail, and with powerful local groups often dealing directly with Colombians. Jaime's wife Carla:

"Look, I know cocaine addicts in Russia who bought the drug from Yugoslavs, who bought it here in the Netherlands from Colombians."

Even when they move rather marginally in the Dutch context, they profit from a number of advantages. Firstly, they operate and are dispersed throughout many countries in the chain, like Israelis in Colombia,\(^{22}\) or Russians and Yugoslavs in Germany. This facilitates international transactions. Secondly, they are also involved in other illegal markets either connected or including the outflow of illegal commodities and assets: weapons, traffic in people, and money laundering. Tano:

"The buyer was an Israeli guy who also bought a couple of **mazos** (guns)... Yeah, they usually sell them. They know about weapons... but he needed the guns quickly and he got them from Colombians (laughs)."

Finally, especially Russian wholesalers profit from the growing Western (and Dutch) interest to conquer Eastern European markets. Dutch or Colombian importers have used the increasing infrastructure in terms of import firms and transport companies to sell to Russian groups.

Especially during the 1980s, some Latin Americans have also been involved as local distributors. Venezuelans, Dominicans, Argentineans, Peruvians and Chileans have been found, the first three groups mainly performing as partners or employees of other importers and wholesalers and the last two as small independent groups. Chileans were particularly

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\(^{20}\) As explained before, *mafia* groups do not engage in cocaine traffic, but individual traffickers protected by or belonging to a specific family do. As political organisations, *mafia* groups simply protect them - granting infrastructure, excluding competitors, and so on - and heavily tax them. In terms of business performance and reputation, it is important for these wholesalers to make appear protection as affiliation to dangerous and powerful organisations, for instance claiming to be part of the *Neapolitan Camorra* in the same fashion than some Colombians claim to belong to the *Cali Cartel*.

\(^{21}\) The role of Italian *pizzerias* in the Netherlands - like in the Campina (Camorra-Pizza-Naples) case of 1992 or more recent cases in Utrecht and Amsterdam - as 'front stores' of these Italian wholesalers, has been overstated (cf. Fijnaut et al 1996). These 'pizza-connections' partly reflect limitations and choices in police research, hunting in rather safe game reserves with a guaranteed score. Two Colombians dealing with Italians had ironic remarks when I asked them about cocaine *pizzerias*: "I won't tell you where we meet, but I prefer Chinese or Argentinean food", said one. "You mean those pizzerias in which suddenly a fat Italian gets a gun from his pasta plate? I've seen all that", said the other one.

\(^{22}\) In 1993, the Russian customs seized 1,100 kg of Colombian cocaine in Vyborg, Russia. The operation involved Colombian exporters, Israelis in Bogotá and the Netherlands, and Russians in Belgium and the Netherlands (Clawson and Lee III 1996: 87).
noticeable in the early 1980s, when they were by far the largest Latino community in the Netherlands and before the massive arrival of cargo ships from Colombia.

A very interesting peculiarity is the absence of Brazilians at this or other levels of the local cocaine business. Brazil is a major export and transshipment country for cocaine arriving to the Netherlands, and the Brazilian community in the Netherlands is almost as large as the Colombian one.23 With this in mind, I expected to find Brazilians amongst the many groups dealing cocaine. However, I barely came across them during my research. Wilma, working for the Amsterdam police, was one of the first to point this out to me:

"Some of them are involved in prostitution, and that's it. I never get cases of theft, fraud or drugs amongst Brazilians."

The same trend was noticed when studying the Dutch cocaine related cases for the last 10 years, in which Brazilian citizens only appeared in a couple of small air operations. Colombians and other Latinos interviewed explicitly acknowledged the point. Finally, my observations in many Spanish-speaking settings as well as further inquiries within Brazilian circuits also confirmed the absence of Brazilian organisations or individuals in cocaine distribution.

The main explanation for this lays in South America. While Brazil has had a growing role as a transit and export country for cocaine bound to Africa and Europe, those transit operations have fairly remained in the hands of Colombian exporters and overseas importers who only use Brazilian territory for the transactions. In contrast with Mexico, where powerful local organisations have developed around cocaine transit to the US, Brazilians themselves neither organise export nor large-scale smuggling to Europe. Lacking essential links at export side and the necessary local resources in the Netherlands, Brazilians are also excluded from import activities.24 It is this exclusion, which further eliminates them from cocaine distribution.

Many Latinos also stressed the fact that Brazilians were a "different group", with their own language, cultural identity or social institutions and networks. Some Colombians felt closer not only to other Spanish-speaking groups, but also to Antilleans or native Dutch with whom they were often married. This distance, at least amongst cocaine entrepreneurs, was less related to cultural differences and more to the Brazilian lack of power, contacts and social prestige in the business. All cocaine wholesale distributors I came across in the Netherlands from export or transit countries - whether entrepreneurs or employees - were either locally strong (Surinamese and Antilleans), closely linked with importers (Colombians) or belonged to countries presently or formerly involved in cocaine export (Venezuelans, Peruvians and Chileans). Their presence and the absence of Brazilians support the idea that some locally weak wholesalers can indeed derive their position primarily from an exclusive access to exporters or importers.

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23 With a fewer number of prostitutes, adopted children, and mixed couples, the Brazilian community is highly concentrated in Amsterdam. Their 'ethnic economy' is not smaller or essentially different than the Colombian one.

24 In an exceptional case, 13 kg cocaine were found in Rotterdam in April 1993. The load was smuggled in the fruit ship Ana Luisa. A woman from Amsterdam and three Brazilians were detained: one of them came with the ship and the two others had arrived before to organise the import operation.
6.1.4. Local Colombian traquetos

There are, in this way, some Colombians involved in wholesale distribution in the Netherlands. After all, some of them have a privileged access to Colombian importers, from which they of course receive or buy the merchandise. Some Colombian distributors are in business only because - and as long as - a Colombian importer would provide them with cocaine to sell. They are easily suspected and they find difficulties in concealing cocaine distribution within larger legal arrangements. Nevertheless, they also profit from some particular circumstances.

If they cannot rely on a strong local Colombian community, at least they can claim indifference, toleration or acceptance from their co-nationals. Some of them are dispersed and often invisible within other social networks. Others stay and deal together, but the police have to invest extra efforts to follow their steps. Police officers interviewed or encountered during my fieldwork acknowledged that they knew much more about other groups easier to police or infiltrate, that informants have to be gathered from other groups (especially native Dutch and Antilleans), that they always need translators and that all these efforts are often focused on import rather than on distribution operations. When Colombian distributors get in touch with the Dutch police, it is usually to be captured. Occasionally they have access to some legal business to conceal their activities. Others profit from their previous experience in distributing cocaine elsewhere. Finally, a number of Colombians can also profit from the reputation they have in the cocaine business. I met many Colombians, especially men, who insisted that they were frequently addressed by people either trying to buy them or sell them cocaine; the only reason being that they were Colombians. Most people rejected the offers, some accepted occasional involvement (especially in peripheral roles and intermediation), and others still did not join but kept flirting with the idea of becoming cocaine dealers.

The Colombian distributors I found active in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague share many common characteristics. They all receive the cocaine from other Colombians, but trade it further to non-Colombian distributors. They form rather small units of two or three people, all independent of each other, and have also a couple of helpers - usually Colombians or other Latin Americans - who either work for them or receive some cocaine to trade it through alternative channels.

However, they also differ from each other. As it was the case with smugglers and importers, I found key differences amongst Colombian traquetos in terms of modus operandi, the interaction with the local environment, their financial capacity and their lifestyles. Around distinctions in these fields, I identified three types of Colombian distributors: "conspicuous traders", 'discreet professionals' and 'flexible amateurs'.

Conspicuous traders
A first group of distributors run or use some legal business to cover up cocaine distribution. These businesses, Colombian and non-Colombian related restaurants, bars, salsa discos, souvenir shops or telephone centres, are often run by mixed couples or partnerships and in fact do not usually last for very long. As legal businesses they are often poorly managed, surrounded by personal quarrels, unpaid debts and problems with the tax

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25 This typology should be regarded as a mere descriptive device to visualise my own observations and empirical findings. Although clear-cut categories are at this stage less evident than in higher levels - for instance between a mula and a 'crew member' or between an 'envoy' and an 'adventurer' - these types are rather familiar to the people involved. To some extent, they reflect the conscious and unconscious images that they built from each other. However, they may well overlap with more systematic categorisations; and I doubt if they can be applied to other drug actors and settings.
office. In contrast with businesses involved in import - often in industrial or rural areas - these places are central and closer to police detection.

Although some of these Colombians are women, in most of the cases there is a romantic partner - local or Colombian - involved. They tend to be well-established migrants, with children and relatives around. They also have close social contact with other Colombians and are often well known in some institutional or recreational Latino places. These distributors strive to appear as legitimate traders or businessmen, attributing their visible high living standards to some cover-up legal activity. Despite these efforts, most of the people in those circuits are aware of or imagine the illegal nature of their activities. Their reactions, however, ranged from mild condemnation and ironic commentaries to indifference, excluding both total rejection or complete acceptance.

These conspicuous traders are able to handle middle and large quantities of cocaine, but they are often amateurish, only relying on a good contact as supplier and a 'front store', which they quickly burn. While they send some of the illegal profits back to Colombia (usually for buying property there), they also spend money in the Netherlands. Most of it, however, goes on conspicuous consumption - leisure, expensive clothing, car, employees, perishable goods, and so on - rather than in local investments or real estate.

A good example of these conspicuous traders are Pacho and Blanca, a Colombian couple who distributed cocaine in Amsterdam between 1990 and 1995.

Blanca and Pacho owned a pizzeria and a restaurant next to the Rembrantplein in Amsterdam. Both places were used as a business meeting point and as a place to stash the cocaine. When the restaurant was closed down in 1995, the police found 10 kg cocaine in the cellar. They did not have the infrastructure to import, so they bought cocaine loads from other Colombians and re-sold them to Italian distributors who came to Amsterdam to close the deals and pick up the merchandise.

Blanca and Pacho had an Italian chauffeur, a strange character who was mysteriously inscribed in a list as tap telephone translator for the Amsterdam police. He was never actually asked to translate anything for them. He was either trying to infiltrate the police or he just had multiple jobs to make ends meet. Two Colombian men were also involved as subordinates. They were in charge of practical matters such as moving the merchandise and arranging the money transfers, for which they used to send Colombian prostitutes to a particular exchange office.

Blanca and Pacho were rather established in Amsterdam, and were well known in many circuits: in church, by their restaurant's legal employees and customers, or by other Colombians around. When their illegal business started to flourish, they decided to bring relatives from Colombia to the Netherlands. First they brought Blanca's mother, later their son, and finally another of Blanca's son from a past relationship. They rented a large house with fashionable decoration in Amsterdam Oud-Zuid, they employed a Colombian woman as housecleaner, and bought a new car. Blanca claims that this was nothing particularly luxurious, but it was indeed very exceptional compared to other Colombian traquetos who lived more soberly and unnoticed. In contrast to them, Blanca and Pacho had expectations of achieving in the Netherlands not only material wealth but also a noticeable degree of social recognition and prestige. A former employee explained:

"They are very generous people. I think they did too many favours for people that didn't deserve them. They didn't take care, many people knew about what they were doing."
When Blanca and Pacho moved to their new house in Amsterdam Oud-Zuid, they organised a party and called the priest to bless the house. He still remembers the occasion:

"I entered and saw all those mafia type people gathered. The house had expensive furniture, everybody was well dressed and the food looked great. I was a little bit shocked, so I started the ceremony by saying that I wasn’t sure if it was the house or the people present that ought to be blessed. There was a silence, but I continued and I blessed the house. But don’t get me wrong, I didn’t stay for the meal, I left immediately."

Blanca and Pacho were caught after long-term surveillance, which included observation and telephone tapping. He got 4 years and Blanca received 3 years, most of which she served in the women’s prison in Breda. The restaurant was closed down, but the pizzeria was under a figurehead name, and remained open.

Discreet professionals

A more successful group of Colombian distributors combine experience with less visibility. They do not rely on legal front stores but on more basic and low profile arrangements such as rented flats in popular neighbourhoods to live and stash the cocaine. Some of them have previous experience in the business, for instance in Colombia, Spain or the US. Although they live in the Netherlands - usually only as long as they are in business - they are less established and return to Colombia after some years. Most of their relatives live there. As Colombian importers, they really feel at home in Colombia. They hardly speak Dutch, move often around the Latino prostitution circuit, and even limit themselves to interacting with the few Latinos around: helpers, other traquetos, incidental travellers or some frequenters of local bars and coffee-shops.

These discreet professionals realise that their access to Colombian suppliers and to potential buyers is not extensive enough to succeed. Lacking infrastructure and protection, their only chance of survival is to behave professionally, or at least to be seen as reliable, concerned, protective and up to the circumstances. Moreover, they have to stay away from the two only things that, in their view, prompt police attention in the Netherlands: money and violence. They send all the money away - to Colombia or elsewhere - and they engage in an active and conscious policy of keeping a low profile.

So low is the profile of Joel, that one can hardly believe he is a wholesaler dealing between tens and hundreds of kilos of cocaine. He lives and works in Amsterdam, buying from importers from Cali, his hometown, and selling especially to Turkish, Italian and German groups.

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26 In Colombia, Catholic priests had to compromise with popular beliefs and unwillingly engage in practices of blessing objects or goods in order to drive out bad spirits or influences. A priest told me that “Colombians are so superstitious, that if they don’t do it they lose clients to the competition” (sic), especially to commercial magicians, espiritistas and brujos (witches) of all sorts. However, people seemed to respect the boundaries and complement their services whenever required. For instance, drug entrepreneurs who go to church and respect the Catholic priest’s authority for certain occasions (sacraments, blessing of goods, and so on) would also consult a brujo before making important decisions, to foresee the future or to bless a cocaine shipment before departure.

Houses can be ‘cleaned’ in situ with the simple blessing of a priest invited to a housewarming party. This practice seems to be restricted to powerful, influential people, who can in fact ‘convince’ priests to bless their houses. For practical and theological reasons, they have been reluctant to massively engage in this practice. However, for less privileged worshippers, houses can be collectively blessed. During a mass in the famous Cathedral of Buga (Valle), I observed how the priest asked the crowd to raise first their small children, later their home’s and car’s keys, and finally any other object, all to be blessed by him.
In contrast with Blanca and Pacho, nobody knows him. He came alone to the Netherlands in 1996, leaving his wife and two teenage sons in Colombia. For some years, he distributed cocaine in Chicago with varying fortunes, until an operation was busted and he had to 'disappear'. His brother, who had worked with him in the US, was already in the Netherlands and convinced him to come. He introduced him to some local as well as foreign buyers. Combined with good contacts at import and export level, he soon managed to be in business.

"My family lives in Colombia and they tell others that I am in a 'business trip'. I really would like to see my sons. Here, you see, every day is the same. I miss going to play football with them, just a nice picnic. I think I will soon retire, so I go back."

He completed secondary school, and worked as a successful legal entrepreneur until he had to liquidate the business, a company with some small buses for public transport. Both his brother and some in-laws were connected to the cocaine business moving small quantities to the US, so he entered the cocaine business in the hope of making a financial recovery. He would not tell much about his former roles in the business and the way in which he got to the US. He had certainly good and bad times, suggesting a positive balance. However, he also implied that it is hard to make it as wholesale distributor and, before retiring, he wanted to 'crown' a big shipment himself as a nice last job. After retirement, he wants to regain a - larger - bus company, and live quietly in his hometown near his family:

"My son is already 14 and I would love to be playing basketball with him. You see, with a legal job, you grow slow but you build something. With traqueteo [cocaine dealing] you make money fast, but as it comes, it vanishes. (...) I get bored in the Netherlands. Every day the same, and in the weekends to a bar to drink beer."

He does not look like a traqueto. He is older than the average - in his fifties - and wears very simple clothes, avoiding all sort of ostentation. He knows when to redraw from ollas (drug dealing areas or places) when they become dangerous. He also shrinks from appearing in public places with Latino crowds: he does not go to church since

"...The police has been there before. I don't need to see anybody there and I wasn't going to church in Colombia anyway..."

His brother, on the contrary, is far from discreet. He wears expensive clothes, golden chains and rings, and spent 3 years in a Belgian prison. His infrastructure is very basic. He lives in a normal council flat rented by Simona, a young Colombian woman with a baby and a residence permit. Joel pays her a generous rent, and an additional payment for stashing cocaine there for a couple of days. He also drives a slightly old car, which he tries to use only in Amsterdam. He takes the train to Belgium, and if he has to go to Germany,

"I won't use it [the car] to drive around. I just leave it somewhere, and then I take the tram. A Dutch plate with a Colombian inside is too much for these Germans! (laughs)..."

He also carries a personal buzzer, but no mobile telephone. He goes to bed at 10:00 PM, after which he does not want to be disturbed. When he receives a message from somebody, he phones back from the nearest telephone booth. Curiously, while he takes care about not using hot lines himself, he does not seem to care that much about the numbers he phones. For long-distance arrangements, he goes to cheap-rate telephone centres where he
often meets his brother, Paisita and some other helpers like Tico (his nephew), Chino and Tano.

He tries to minimise risk by delegating cocaine collection and delivery, and cash transfers or transportation. He only negotiates the terms of the deals, handles the money and stashes the cocaine. He usually buys and sells escama de pescado (fish scale) or concha de nácar (nacre shell), top quality cocaine known for its pink shining glints.

Joel has an excellent reputation not only around business partners but also amongst close friends and subordinates, especially for being just and jointly liable. Tano:

"He is incapable of killing a fly, and he keeps his word... He lends money, invites dinners, and always asks if everything is OK. Once he helped a friend with US$ 19,000 and he never saw it back. He even helps unknown people. Last week, for example, he gave accommodation to a Bolivian woman, just because she was illegal and had nowhere to go... I don't think these are interested favours, he might have his reasons to help, but he is just like that."

Not all these sort of distributors were men. I found at least two cases of women in charge of distribution networks, though they were also connected with import activities and had always a male relative associated in Colombia.

**Flexible Amateurs**

Finally, a third group of Colombian wholesalers are neither professionals nor full-time distributors. They usually enter the activity through some acquainted importer to whom they remain truly dependent. With no start-up capital, they get some quantity from him, make a mark-up, and pay it back when the deal is closed. They deal smaller quantities, between 1 kg and 5 kg, and often have no previous experience. Since they depend on the importer's - or other distributor's - favour, they tend to see the job as a one-off operation or a sporadic opportunity. They plan very little, and work with very few people. These flexible entrepreneurs mix distribution with other activities, either as employees of other traqueto, or as hustlers in the informal economy or other illegal markets. Some of these flexible amateurs speak neither Dutch nor English, and move exclusively in the Latino circuit. They are mostly men. Riverito, for example, can be seen as one of those Colombians who switch many roles in the cocaine business, to eventually engage in cocaine distribution.  

Lupo comes from Cali, and he is well established in Amsterdam where he lived for the last 15 years with his Latin American wife. He works in a Latin American restaurant, but he engages in all sorts of informal activities or cruces that he either seeks out or happens to come across. In fact, one of his nicknames is little camera. Tano:

"He always has 3 or 4 crazy ideas on how to make money, some are incredible. He talks and talks about his projects, people think that he is in his own film or video..."

However, some of Lupo's businesses are indeed real. Sometimes he works in a restaurant. Sometimes he sells stolen objects like computers, watches or cash registers that he gets from some Colombian apartamenteros (burglars) he knows. He first tries to sell them in restaurants or to people he knows, but he often ends up in a pawnshop. He also lends small quantities of money - up to f 5,000 - to friends and acquaintances, charging shark interests for the service. Cocaine distribution is just a side-activity, something to do now and then when he matches a supplier with a potential client. In fact, he does not distinguish very much between cocaine and the other goods he sells, and he does not care much about organisational and

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27 See chapter VII for a full description of Riverito's career and involvement.
security questions. Most distributors contacted in The Hague also belonged to this category of entrepreneur.

To summarise, local traquetos engaged in wholesale distribution belong to three groups with distinctive characteristics:

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**Hanging around distributors: correitos and ASOTRAPO members**

As was the case of some Colombians making a living around cocaine importers, wholesale distributors are also surrounded by a number of people who help them in many ways. These helpers are locally recruited and include illegal newcomers, established migrants or some traquito's relative and friend. They can also be part-time distributors themselves (flexible amateurs) or engage in various legal and illegal activities.

They have to move (collect and deliver) merchandise from one place to the other (correitos, local couriers), to collect or transfer cash, to escort traquetos and to keep an eye on stashed cocaine. Wholesale distributors do not usually have more than two or three of these flexible labourers.

Paisita works for Joel, but he is his opposite: young, improvised, slightly unstable and rather violent, always threatening debtors. He performs many tasks: usually escorts Joel to close deals, picks up and deliver merchandise, threatens people, and arranges cash transfers to Colombia. He openly wants to become the boss some day, but Joel does not believe in his business skills. Paisita is one of those people who usually end up in prison, but thanks to Joel's professionalism, he has managed to remain at liberty. He shouts about business matters in the telephone centres, and manages to make enemies everywhere he goes.

Tico from Cali has a turbulent past. In Colombia, he used to sniff coke and smoke basuco, periodically losing control over his habit. Fortunate enough to avoid the worst prison blocks, he served 2 years in a Colombian prison after killing somebody. There he met major drug exporters from the Cauca Valley region, but did not become involved in their businesses. After living in Miami for 6 months, he was recruited as a cook on a cruiser for tourists where he worked for two years. One of those tourists was a Dutch woman who brought him to the Netherlands. They married and lived for another two years in a small town. He recalls the period as a nightmare:
"I was going dead there. I did not work, only received social security and completely depended on my wife’s family. Sometimes I smoked, but I kept mostly clean. I left her because I needed some action."

His idea was to go back to Miami, but in Amsterdam he found his cousin Chino and his uncle Joel, who was a cocaine wholesale distributor. In fact, there were more traquetos in Tico’s large family, some of them already dead. They suggested he stay and make some money by helping in the business. He then changed plans and remain in the Netherlands. He rebuilt a violent reputation by talking about his past in Colombia, carrying a knife everywhere, resuming his cocaine/crack habit and showing no sign of fear when working for Joel.

Tano also comes from Cali, but in contrast with Tico and Joel, he belongs to an upper middle class family. He came to the Netherlands following Chino: they were in search of adventure, fun and eventually a qualified job. They could not find the latter, but they found Joel who offered them food, a place to stay and eventually some work. Chino returned to Colombia rather soon after, but Tano stayed and met Tico. Tico and Tano became parceros (friends), forming in fact a good business team: Tano had charisma, Tico had the guts. Tano says of Tico:

"I really feel safe with him. He should get the flechas [business lines] if Joel goes back to Colombia. But he should stop smoking that shit [crack]."

Tico about Tano:

"People like him. He is still green, but people trust him. He gets whatever he wants."

Although Tico and Tano work for Joel, they often owe him money. They are heavy borrowers, they spend more than they earn, and they both sniff some of the cocaine they are occasionally supplied. They hardly survive with the money they make with Joel, which in fact pays very well: f 200 for a cash transfer of f 3,000 or for each kilo moved inside Amsterdam. Tico would have f 1,000 one day and only debts the day after.

Many of these helpers do not get enough money or excitement as flexible labourers and try to perform as distributors, constituting a sort of underclass amongst traquetos. Some of these people were dreamers, others exaggerated their power, and still others systematically complained about the business. However, some jokes reflected their awareness about their lower status. In Amsterdam, some of these people would gather and ask each other if they had already applied for membership to the ASOTRAPO, a fictitious Asociación de Traquetos Pobres (Association of Poor Traquetos) that would protect their interests as a trade union.

Things were not easy for these ‘poor’ traquetos. They were usually promised much more than they actually got. If they got cocaine to sell, they had to be very careful. Tano:

"In that Brazilian bar a Dutch guy asked me for two kilos. He said that he had cancer and that he badly needed the money. I did not phone him; I believe he was a tira (police)."

The irregular nature of distribution forced some of them to combine drug distribution with other illegal activities. Tano again:

"Sometimes one can wait for months until a cruce appears. And what in the meantime? One can’t wait and wait. Stealing is more secure, there are less profits but at least they are regular."

Indeed, these poor traquetos had many contacts with a number of Colombian thieves active in three modalities of robbery: burglars in large and small cities (apartamenteros),
armed robbery of specific targets (quietos), and various methods of shop-lifting (escapes, raponeo, and so forth). Stars amongst these thieves were the bambero (jewellery traders) hunters. They worked in groups of three people, renting cars and going after jewellery and diamond dealers who had to move their merchandise by car. Either using tricks or force, they managed to steal a valuable loot that was later sold in major cities.

Second generation traquetos
Although traquetos in the Netherlands are first generation Colombian adults who keep contact with their country, I found, especially in The Hague, a small group of second generation teenagers somewhat close to the cocaine business. They are usually not truly involved, but some of them take the risk of becoming helpers or the victims of physical violence. As I explained before, most Colombian teenagers are rather assimilated, but although they do not hang out at telephone booths or prostitution streets many are indeed regular visitors of the same salsa discotheques and restaurants frequented by traquetos. Some follow their example as role models, and just try to imitate them regarding appearance, language and behaviour. However, they seem to restrict these performances to the realm of leisure time. Even when they have nothing to do with cocaine dealing, they enjoy playing the traquito when they go out together.

The boys dress conspicuously, like to show their dance skills, restrict drug consumption to alcohol, and try to be seen as cool, generous and eventually violent. The girls play their part by dressing sexily, receiving lifts, being invited and eventually becoming the objects of dispute amongst the boys. Interestingly, some of the fights or shootings taking place in Colombian salsa bars or restaurants have these youngsters as protagonists.

Relations with traquetos are more often mediated through friends and acquaintances than through kinship. Cocaine dealers actually try to protect their own families - and especially children - by excluding them from any business activity. However, this protection does not take place with other’s children or teenage sons. Paisita, for example, liked to tell Simona when her little boy started to cry, that she should not comfort him and that he "should learn to become a traquito" (que aprenda a hacerse traquito).

In general, traquetos have not tried to target these teenagers as useful recruits: they are considered either troublemakers, too assimilated to accept unskilled risky little jobs or too young to provide contacts, business opportunities and local infrastructure.  

Operational problems and daily routines: the 'apartacho'
Colombian distributors use flats or apartments to live, conceal drugs, and socialise with their helpers and friends. These apartachos are often provided by another Colombian, and in many cases, they are normal social housing in populated neighbourhoods. The most vulnerable ones are close to the prostitution streets, and are frequented daily by all sorts of people including prostitutes, thieves and drug dealers. Others are much better situated and less noticeable, like Simona’s place for example.

They are far from being work offices or permanent warehouses. For most of the time, nothing (illegal) happens in these apartachos. People come and go, gather there to listen music, to watch TV or to eat together. At Simona’s flat, there was a great deal of waiting: helpers would stay there waiting instructions from the traquito or for a shipment still to arrive. In these periods, Joel tolerated a degree of relaxation: friends would visit the place and stay overnight and some of his helpers would regularly invite prostitutes. They would also

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28 This situation differs from the one in the US, where some of these second generation Colombians are already adults and Colombian networks are very active in local distribution.
cook Colombian food for many people. Things were quieter if there was some business to do or some cocaine to stash. However, by no means did the place remain closed to trusted outsiders.

Cocaine stash in these apartachos is only a matter of few hours or a couple of days, since having the aparatos (cocaine kilograms) close is considered by everybody as a very dangerous business.

**Favoured by other traquetos**

Trusted helpers sometimes had the chance of becoming salesmen on commission. Tano, for example, knew everything about kilo prices since he was occasionally supplied kilo quantities to sell, either getting a fixed f 1,000 gilders per kilo sold, or everything above a certain price. He always complained about competitors:

"I just met an Algerian who was offering the kilo at 48 points [f 48,000] brought from North Africa. We were shocked because it's a good price. At the moment, the competition is very high."

It is thus possible for helpers or even newcomers to become wholesale distributors if they manage to know an importer or another distributor. Several informants report that they have been approached by Colombians in language schools and proposed a deal. Silvio:

"His offer was: I give you 1 kg or ½ kg and you give me the money as you sell it."

However, the following case illustrates the weak situation of these dealers, who often have to rely on too many favours to survive in business.

Manolo once received a Colombian young man from Cali, an acquaintance of his brother in law, who arrived to the Netherlands to try his luck. Manolo remembers him as an upstanding and extremely polite person. He told Manolo he would try to find something in his former activity: gold export-import. He then stayed in his house in Rotterdam for about two months in perfect and cordial terms. One day he disappeared for a couple of nights. A friend of Manolo saw him hanging out in a night-bar especially frequented by Colombian illegal entrepreneurs. He was handling quite a lot of money, and was clearly involved in cocaine dealing. Manolo heard the story and threw him out of his house. The man did not resent Manolo's decision, and left. In the meantime, the Colombian had already brought his wife and son to the Netherlands. Manolo:

"I did not want any problem with the police, and he lied to me, (...) He was very stupid. He could have stayed clean because he finally got a job in an oil platform, and he could have obtained a work permit. It was all a big decoy! No gold, but cocaine... He wasn't honest with me; he could have brought me problems. My brother in law is angry with him, see, he feels guilty for having recommended him to me."

Manolo's friend came to the Netherlands to distribute cocaine, everything else was secondary. He worked with somebody connected with Colombian importers. They both received cocaine loads to sell for a mark-up. As partners, they usually shared profits, but in one specific operation, Manolo's friend made the mistake of keeping the assigned load for himself only. When his partner found out, he just denounced him to the police. He was finally detained and imprisoned.
6.2. Retailing Cocaine

A final market level to be considered is the local retail of cocaine, which of course involves several methods regarding quantities, qualities and social settings involved. Cocaine retail is a truly local business. Wholesale cocaine distribution still involves many foreign buyers since most cocaine marketed in the Netherlands goes through to other European countries. Retail, on the contrary, is a localised operation involving local dealers and consumers, who often belong to the same social or ethnic groups.

The question now is to assess the participation of Colombians in this local trade. To put it in simple terms: if their involvement in wholesale distribution is highly problematic, their engagement in retail selling is almost insignificant within the multi-ethnic range of cocaine retailers active in the Netherlands. Cocaine retail is performed by a countless crowd of individuals or small groups of all nationalities, with a noticeable participation of Dutch, Surinamese and Moroccan dealers, and is spread along various urban settings and consumers.

Away from the streets

Colombians are completely absent from street dealing in major cities. All informants agreed that there is no need for a Colombian who wants to participate in the business of taking the risk of performing as a street jibaro (drug pusher). These people are vulnerable and have a fluid contact with the police, often being drug addicts themselves. A Colombian informant explained that

"If a Moroccan is selling dope, fine. If we would be standing here [Damstraat, Amsterdam], they would start looking for Pablo Escobar."

In fact, nobody wants to see Colombians on the Dutch streets. The police, because they fear an increase of violence and a loss of control. Other retailers, because they fear unfair competition from Colombian dealers who are ready to 'give away' excellent cocaine quality at bargain prices. Finally, Colombian traquetos, who do not dare to jeopardise their safer position as importers or wholesale distributors by supplying or having direct contact with these risky types of dealers.

Nor do Colombians retail drugs around the Latino prostitution areas or streets. All drug retailers I found close to Colombian prostitutes were Dutch, Dominicans, Moroccans or Antilleans. However, Cabeza claims to have been offered something:

"They know I work here, that I know many women and clients, some young Dutch or Moroccan teenagers. A paisano [Colombian] offered me many cuadritos [cocaine balls up to 1 gram] to distribute here. I am and want to remain sano [clean], I don't want to mess things up, because the tombos [police] regularly clean the street, and they go for drug dealers and illegal prostitutes. I tell you, you won't find Colombians selling like these Dominicans."

Bart is a native Dutchman who makes a living as drug retailer in inner Amsterdam. He has been selling, for the last 7 years, cocaine and trip (LSD) to consumers both on the street and in coffee-shops or bars, and sells his modest marihuana yield to one specific coffee-shop. Many of his clients are tourists. He insists:

"I have seen all sort of people selling coke [at retail level]: addicts, students, old folks, white Dutchmen, Surinamese, Moroccans, you name it. You hardly see Latin Americans on the streets or

29 See chapter VIII for the relation between Colombian prostitutes and drug dealers.
in coffee-shops. I only know some Peruvians, pretty known in the city, eh. They are just surviving here; they also live in squats. I think they make it in the old way. They go to Peru and bring back small quantities. They sell them directly with no people in between."

If he knows very little about his own competitors, he hardly knows anything about higher levels of the cocaine business: he does not have a single contact with Colombians, and has no idea about import and wholesale distribution.

There are also no Colombians selling cocaine as house dealers, neither by appointment in well reputed flats for middle and upper class users, nor in the so called drugpanden (drug buildings) supplying junkies and drug tourists. I found however a case in which two Colombians sold quantities up to 300 grams to drug tourists for f 40 per gram, who would retail the cocaine at better prices in Paris, the Ruhr region and smaller German cities. They did so by smuggling the modest amounts per train, using a method described as 'rail trade' (OGD 1996a: 65-66).

**How far from traquetos?**

There are other situations as well, in which Colombians sell small amounts of cocaine either to final consumers or retailers.

On the one hand, some Colombian men are often pushed or asked by potential consumers about cocaine. Especially for non-problematic consumers buying quality and larger quantities, to buy directly from a Colombian is seen as an exceptional opportunity. They are seen as closer to the source, so their merchandise is thought to keep original purity levels. Moreover, I noticed that some cocaine consumers in the Netherlands would find it glamorous to have a - rare - Colombian supplier. I found situations in which Colombians not related to the cocaine business liked to 'flirt' with cocaine users, playing a game that enhanced the status of both.

Moreover, street pushers are aware of this situation. During fieldwork in Amsterdam, I was chatting on the street with two Colombian distributors. A Moroccan street dealer approached us and offered cocaine claiming he was Colombian. He had to laugh when the Colombians asked him exactly where in Colombia he came from.

On the other hand, it is also clear that many Colombian importers and wholesalers, especially those handling smaller quantities, always keep some amounts available for either personal consumption or their social circle. In the same fashion as helpers or flexible amateurs who manage to get kilo quantities from traquetos to sell on commission, some cocaine trickled to be consumed, given away or traded in gram quantities in bars, coffee-shops or inside some Latino circuits.

These people are usually men and tend to be very erratic suppliers rather than professional retailers. They completely depend on a traquito favour and on a particular demand from close people in special settings.

**Bars and coffee-shops**

In this way, I found few cases of Colombians who sold quantities between 100 grams and 500 grams to (especially foreign) customers of Dutch bars and coffee-shops. In December 1999, for example, the police found 218 ecstasy pills, 300 grams cocaine and a weapon in a bar near the Amsterdam's Rembrantplein. The bar's owner, a DJ, a house dealer and a 25 years old Colombian were detained and later prosecuted.

Tano, Chino and Lupo, sometimes involved in wholesale distribution, were occasionally engaged in retailing cocaine in a couple of bars. However, most of them were once-off transactions and none of them established a clientele or a supply line. They regarded
these dealings as mere *rebusques* (hustles, informal activities) in a broader picture. They sold gram quantities while waiting for other jobs in larger operations or while trading other goods.

**The paquete: gram distribution inside the Latino salsa circuit**

Most cocaine retail in Colombian hands is restricted to circulate within what can be broadly defined as the 'recreational Latino market': salsa discoteques, concerts and schools, Brazilian bars, and some other private and public parties and entertainment events. In some of these places, it is not rare to find cocaine consumed by dealers, customers or musicians, discreetly traded in toilets or even openly offered in public. However, not every discotheque or event has the same level of cocaine dealing and use.

For example, in truly Colombian places like *El Caleño* in Amsterdam or *El Llano Bar* in The Hague, with a rather homogeneous ethnic clientele (*Latinos*) and a worse reputation (more presence of *traquetos* and prostitutes), cocaine retail and consumption is less evident and open than in other discoteques and salsa parties. On the contrary, it is easier to find cocaine in more fashionable and established places of the Salsa circuit, with a more mixed clientele of Latin Americans, Dutch and other ethnic minorities. In well known and reputed places in Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam, cocaine finds its way in through security doormen, regular habitués or sporadic retailers.

As a rule, it can be argued that cocaine will be more easily found in places not run or owned by Latin Americans, with a live salsa band playing, and with an ethnically mixed clientele. These - larger - discoteques have better security systems, personnel and controls, which paradoxically allow for more tolerance. Silvio, a Latin American salsa musician living and working in Amsterdam for some years, explains:

"...In that place there was a DJ, a policeman himself, married with a Colombian woman, and he seemed to tolerate it if the thing was discreet and did not go out of limits. You should see it by yourself... Of course, people take care. For example, those two brothers going every night to deal cocaine, they only carry small amounts just in case, all night long going out and returning with more. Famous guys, people around here know them very well."

Most of this trade is tolerated but rarely involves the owners or organisers. It is wiser, safer and more profitable for owners, managers and personnel to turn a blind eye or to keep a distance and play a regulatory role. They channel information between clients, dealers and authorities, and they change controls and rules according to several factors. 'Salsa dealers' are left alone unless the police target the place for unwelcome controls, unknown drug dealers appear or drug users cross the line. Further, the danger of violence and personal fights that can damage the place's reputation, the change in clientele profile or the organisation of special nights with unusual profits can also influence the local tolerance towards cocaine dealing.

Lupo, for example, used to retail in a Brazilian bar in Amsterdam where cocaine use was a common feature. Another Colombian openly offered cocaine at a big Colombian event organised by a major Amsterdam concert hall:

"I just arrived from the *platanal* [Colombia] with good *perico*. Who wants to try?"

The cocaine offered by these Colombians is usually of excellent quality, commanding gram prices around f 90 in The Hague and f 100 in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Even in so called *lugares sanos* ('healthy' places) such as salsa schools that organise parties on weekly or monthly basis with live music, cocaine is also present. In these cases, cocaine retail is not so overt and it is restricted to the people and friends around the musicians, who are often heavy users. Cocaine consumption amongst salsa musicians and their close ring
is impressive. Regardless their origin, some salsa musicians are confronted with recreational cocaine use before and during the performance. For some, it can only mean a single línea or pase (line, fix) during the break. For others, it can rise up to 2 grams for the whole night. Even non-users are often offered the drug several times during the night. However, most seems to be recreational consumption for the occasion rather than the expression of a daily and heavier use.

Amongst Latino musicians, cocaine use is fairly open and widely accepted. Everybody knows whom the retailers and pushers are, but many users already bring their own cocaine already purchased elsewhere. Silvio:

"I don't use myself, but when we play I see cocaine all around. We receive a special treatment; you get free drinks but also special prices from people. They won't charge you a gram $100 but $80; they will give you a 'bonus' as courtesy or they will just give you some for free. When somebody gives me a paquete (package, ball with 1 gram cocaine) as a present, I give it to somebody else. People criticise me for doing that..."

These gifts are even more common in private Colombian salsa parties, especially when the organisers are cocaine entrepreneurs or people connected to them. Again Silvio:

"They give everyone in the band a paquete and they tell us to ask for more when it's over."

In contrast with public parties, it is hard if not impossible to find there cocaine consumption or retail amongst the assistants. In many cases, the guests are families with children or mixed couples with no connection at all to the cocaine circuit. Meanwhile they eat, drink and dance, most are unaware that salsa musicians receive and sniff coke.

Crack
Finally, only in exceptional cases did the Colombian dealers have any contact with crack-cocaine, which traquetos do not regard as a recreational drug and stigmatise as a substance for dropouts.

One of these cases was Tico. He loved crack, and he would go to the streets around the Amsterdam Central Station to buy anything offered to him, sometimes spending up to $500 in a single day. His friends could never understand this behaviour, since he had easy access to the most pure and white cocaine one can find in Amsterdam. Tico:

"I don't know. I want to be high and if I have the money, I spend it."

I found also a case in which a Colombian dealer in Amsterdam imported 50 grams of basuco for personal consumption and for his closest friends. Colombian basuco - cocaine base mixed with tobacco - and European crack are comparable substances in use patterns and effects, and some traquetos have smoked it in Colombia. People around were rather surprised about the unusual import. Tano:

"Who the hell dares to get basuco from Colombia to the Netherlands!? He's really out of his mind. It was blown very soon; there are some sopladores [basuco smokers] around here... [laughs]."

However, the operation was exceptional, a nice surprise for friends that both celebrated their Colombian identity and strengthened his status as drug dealer.
6.3. Closing remarks

This chapter and the previous one have described the nature and extent of the Colombian participation in cocaine transport, import, distribution and retail selling in the Netherlands. They have made clear that a small but heterogeneous group of Colombians from various geographical, social and ethnic origins is involved in the cocaine business in the Netherlands. Many of them do not even live in the Netherlands, but are only there to perform specific tasks or activities related to the business. Tasks, risks and skills required differ in a great deal, and chances to fail or succeed are very distinct regarding level of involvement, legal status, degree of organisation, and overlap with legal structures and arrangements.

From transport to retail selling, I identified several types of Colombian entrepreneurs and employees who interact in flexible ways. Cocaine transport is performed by Colombian *mulas*, *boleros*, *niñeras*, professional smugglers and *tripulantes*, all of them employed by exporters and importers to 'crown' shipments through different modalities and routes. These couriers do not tend to live in the Netherlands and share such a risky job with less conspicuous couriers recruited from many countries.

Cocaine import is organised by four sorts of *traquetos*: envoys, line owners, mixed couples and adventurers. They are again heterogeneous regarding social prestige, vulnerability, infrastructure and connections with exporters, non-Colombian importers and other Colombian migrants. Around these entrepreneurs, a number of Colombians are employed or subcontracted to perform important tasks: unloading, internal transport, load-keeping, security and logistic help as hosts, chauffeurs, translators and telephone operators. Although Colombian importers and their helpers have been very active and noticeable in the Netherlands over the past 10 years, they have a subordinate position regarding better positioned Dutch importers.

Colombians have also been involved in wholesale distribution in the Netherlands. However, their position at this level is weak and disadvantaged. I found three types of distributors: conspicuous traders, discreet professionals and flexible amateurs. They also rely on various Colombian helpers even less skilled than those linked to direct import tasks.

Finally, very few Colombians are engaged in retail selling, acting as 'salsa dealers' within the recreational Latino circuit.

It is mainly around this circuit where all sorts of *traquetos* also interact with another particular group of Colombians: women working in the prostitution. The next chapter will be devoted to exploring the involvement of Colombian prostitutes and illegal immigrants in the cocaine business.