

## Introduction

*Dina Siegel (CIROC/Utrecht University)*

After a short break we are proud to present the latest English Newsletter from the Centre for Information and Research on Organised Crime (CIROC). As always, our purpose is to connect academic researchers and practitioners on the one hand, and Dutch and foreign scholars interested in topics related to transnational organised crime on the other. This Newsletter is intended to inform our foreign colleagues about contributions by Dutch and foreign scholars affiliated with Dutch universities to new developments in research on transnational organised crime.

Organised crime is related to modern developments such as growing mobility, the emergence of new markets, products and clients, and advancements in technology. The changes in *modi operandi*, organisation and facilitation of cross border activities are rapid and unpredictable. Drug traffickers, for example, are looking for more lucrative markets, such as the illicit trade in wildlife or the smuggling of art and antiques. Some organised groups are moving to other countries, thereby creating competition to local criminal groups, for example Nigerian criminal groups in Italy. There is also a flourishing market for cyber crime, which remains one of the most difficult challenges for law enforcement worldwide. Criminologists who study these new developments have drawn attention to the high level of mobility and sophistication of organised crime groups. New empirical data are therefore highly needed for a better theoretical understanding of and a practical and effective response to these new forms of transnational organised crime.

In this issue we provide a podium to a number of young scholars conducting empirical research in different parts of the world. Ecuadorian criminologist Byron Villagomez Moncayo presents his findings on immigration control in Spain, based on his PhD research carried out within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus DCGC (Doctorate on Cultural and Global Criminology) programme at Utrecht University and the University of Hamburg. Elvira Loibl from Maastricht University discusses criminogenic factors in the adoption market and the trafficking of children in Germany and the Netherlands. The theme of crimes of mobility is continued by Charlotte Baarda (Oxford University), who presents part of her PhD dissertation on human smuggling from Nigeria to Europe, with an emphasis on the phenomenon of hostage-taking. Jing Hiah from Utrecht University explores the client side of everyday corruption in Romania as experienced by Chinese migrant entrepreneurs.

Hans Nelen continues the important and timely debate on the academic and societal value of statistical estimates of the size of the synthetic drug market and the volume of money laundering in the Netherlands, and summarizes the results of a round-table seminar organised by CIROC on 9 November 2018. We invite the researchers who attended this meeting, but also those who would like to express their opinion or share specific, relevant knowledge, to participate in this challenging discussion. Their responses will be published in the next Newsletter.

As always, recent publications by Dutch authors on different aspects of organised crime are listed at the end of this Newsletter.

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## Analysis

**The punitive meanings of immigration control: The Spanish case**  
*Byron Villagomez Moncayo (DCGC/Utrecht University/Hamburg University)*

### Introduction

The convergence between immigration control and criminal law is nowadays a topical matter that has increasingly called the attention of criminologists and legal scholars (Franko Aas & Bosworth, 2013; Guia et al., 2012; Parkin, 2013). Understood as a prominent mechanism within the contemporary processes of criminalisation of immigration in the Western world, one of its most significant features is the decisive intervention of the criminal justice system in matters related to immigration control. Whilst the empirical studies upon this phenomenon have rapidly proliferated in the last decade, research regarding the judicial decision-making processes of immigration control within the realm of criminal courts is still scant. My doctoral research has purported to contribute to the scholarly inquiry on such aspects by conducting an in-depth qualitative case-study of a specific court setting in Spain (Malaga). The Spanish case is relevant not only due to its strategic role at controlling the Southern border of the so-called 'fortress Europe', but also because its legal migration regime comprises a series of mechanisms involving an interconnection between immigration control and criminal justice.

**The intricate process of criminalisation of immigration in Spain:** Relying on Becker's (1963) conceptualisation of social reaction, in my dissertation the criminalisation of immigration has been understood as a process of social construction determined by the interaction between the person who commits the act and those who respond to it. Criminalisation is thus considered a selective operation by which

certain populations are primarily targeted by the criminal justice system. Following Turk's (1969) theorisation of the social conflict, this criminalisation process is seen as the simultaneous result of both such populations' sociocultural exclusion/non-conformity and the specific consistency in the enforcement of criminal laws by the state agencies. Explicitly referring to the criminalisation of immigration, Melossi (2003) has deepened this line of inquiry, arguing that the disproportionate involvement and public representation of (irregular) immigrants regarding criminality is a social construct, embedded within the structure of social relationships of a given context. This means that the likelihood of participation in particular deviant types of behaviour is increased by the structure of opportunities available to certain groups of migrants, which also entails the higher likelihood of police focus being directed towards them. Ultimately, these structures push them towards what is officially represented as crime, making the otherness of the stranger and the otherness of the 'deviant being' overlap in the social portrayal of the 'criminal immigrant'.

The Spanish context seems to be a paradigmatic case of these phenomena. On the one hand, irregular immigration is not a statutory crime, which means that the criminalisation of immigration cannot be explained in terms of a merely formal-legal labelling, but as the consequence of a complex social process. As already explained by many authors (e.g., Brandariz & Fernández, 2011; Calavita, 2003; Moffette, 2014; Silveira & Rivera, 2007), the Spanish immigration laws have primarily focused upon defining levels of social and economic inclusion/exclusion, which in turn has had the effect of marginalising immigrants. Concomitantly, within a context seemingly characterised by social bulimia and ontological insecurity (Young, 2007), Spanish policymakers have ostensibly fostered the image of the 'criminal immigrant'. In such conditions, (irregular) immigrants are more likely to be involved in deviant behaviours that are more readily targeted by law enforcement.

Once caught by the criminal justice system, immigrants can be subjected to the peculiar mechanisms of the Spanish legal regime. In Spain, immigration detention is authorised by a low-level criminal judge at the request of the police. Whilst not all detainees are concomitantly prosecuted for an ordinary crime, many of them are taken before a criminal court for both an immigration detention request and a parallel criminal charge. In addition, criminal judges can admit the early termination of criminal proceedings, or the substitution of imprisonment, to allow the defendant's deportation. Whilst such measures correspond primarily to immigration law enforcement, they entail the decisive intervention of the criminal judiciary. This raises questions regarding the decisional determinants and conditions of such mechanisms, as well as in relation to the meanings attributed by court actors to immigration control within the cultural realm of criminal court decision-making.

#### **Research methods: Judicial decision-making from a cultural perspective:**

Drawing on 78 in-depth semi-structured interviews with judges, prosecutors, court personnel and defence attorneys, as well as focused observation for a period of eight months, in my dissertation I sought to address such inquiries. To do so, I relied on organisational, social-psychological, and cultural frameworks for explaining judicial decision-making by criminal courts. Specifically, criminal courts were assumed as a sort of community embedded in particular contexts (Dixon, 1995; Eisenstein & Jacob, 1977; Myers & Talarico, 1987). The idea of a judicial culture is central in this regard, understood in Garland's terms (1991:219), as an *immediate framework of meaning* within which the diverse practices, routines and procedures which make up the penal realm are undertaken. Besides, conceived as a juridical field (Bourdieu, 1987), law in action has been seen as a site of competition for the monopoly of the right to determine the law, by which the practical meaning of the law is defined in the confrontation between judicial actors, moved by divergent specific interests.

#### **The punitive meanings of immigration control:**

Whilst assuming that the convergence between immigration control and criminal justice is a contemporary mechanism for the social construction of the 'criminal immigrant', the main findings of my

dissertation were structured in two parts. The first delved into the idiosyncratic features of immigration detention decision-making, and the second into the determinants and meanings ascribed by court actors to the early termination of criminal proceedings/ substitution of imprisonment, to allow the deportation of a foreign defendant. This analysis evidenced that immigration detention decision-making is substantially determined by the convergence of bureaucratically patterned decisional mechanics and the intrinsic criminal justice cultural identity of criminal courts. This embodies Kafkaesque dynamics characterised by automation, thoughtlessness and dehumanisation in decision-making. Although the judicial overseeing exerted by criminal judges could be seen as an enhanced legal guarantee, my research has confirmed previous evidence (Martínez-Escamilla, 2016) that such control tends to be ineffective. Furthermore, my research has revealed that deportation is a court's culturally constructed punishment, defined more by the meanings produced and attributed to it by court actors than by its formal legal categorisation. Specifically, in my thesis I contend that the authorisation for deportation is assessed by court actors in terms of its suitability for attaining such traditional purposes of punishment as incapacitation, deterrence and retribution. Therefore, my research showed that immigration detention and expulsion are substantially traversed by the constitutive cultural identity of criminal courts, which in turn determines their key procedural traits and decisional outcomes.

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# The Illegal Adoption Market – How the German and Dutch Adoption Systems Facilitate the Trafficking in Children for the Purpose of Adoption

Elvira Loibl (Maastricht University)

## Introduction

The last half-century has witnessed the emergence of a transnational market in adoptable children. Numerous cases were uncovered in which children were obtained illegally from their families or child-care institutions and then placed for intercountry adoption (ICA). This article explains the organization and operation of the illegal adoption market in children from a criminological perspective, and addresses some major weaknesses within the German and Dutch adoption systems that encourage and facilitate the trafficking in children for adoption purposes.

## The Organization of the Illegal Adoption Market

The adoption market can be described as a patterned system of economic exchange, consisting of three components: demand, supply and regulation. Whereas adopters (often involuntarily childless) and adoption agencies in countries of the Global North constitute the *demand* component, the large volume of poor families and orphanages caring for children in low income countries of the Global South (including post-communist Eastern Europe), particularly China, Russia, and more recently several African states, constitute the *supply* component of the illegal adoption market (Selman, 2018). Poverty, war and natural disasters leave numerous children in these countries vulnerable and in need of protection. Yet, contrary to the common Western belief of a 'global orphan crisis' (Cheney et al., 2015), only a small share of these children are deprived of their family environment and therefore legitimately available for ICA. Thus, in order to meet the high demand for healthy babies, actors in the supply countries employ a variety of illegal methods to secure 'adoptees': they purchase children from their families, provide false information to birth parents in order to obtain their consent to adoption, or kidnap children from the streets, their homes, or child-care institutions (Smolin, 2006).

In order to sustain an illegal adoption market, the demand and supply components need to be linked, which is organized differently than in conventional forms of human trafficking. Whereas the purpose of conventional forms of human trafficking is illegal (e.g. sexual exploitation, organ removal, slavery), adopting a child is legal at the demand end of the system. An adoption only becomes illegal when the child has been obtained illegally. Therefore, the illicit means by which children were supplied must be disguised: a laundering process is necessary (Smolin 2006), where birth certificates and other documents necessary for an adoption are falsified or fabricated to convert the children into 'paper orphans'. This laundering process is commonly facilitated by legitimate actors from the public and private sector (e.g. doctors, orphanage directors, government officials) that misuse their knowledge and status to pass an illegally obtained child through the adoption system. As a final step in this laundering process, an illegal adoption decision is rendered by a court that bears all the hallmarks of a perfectly legal adoption procedure (Cantwell, 2005). By the time the child arrives in the receiving country, all traces of the illegal adoption are wiped out, and the adoptive parents and the adoption agencies can plausibly deny knowledge of the child's illegal origin.

## Criminogenic Factors within the German and Dutch Adoption Systems

*The flow of money into the sending countries.* The Western money involved in the ICA system is the primary incentive for actors in the poor sending countries to illegally obtain children for adoption. Many German and Dutch adoption agencies adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude with regard to the money they transfer to the states of origin. They would often simply pass on the country fee to the adopters that the foreign organizations require without knowing exactly which services it covers, and whether they are high in relation to the standards in the sending country.

*Institutional pressure.* In both Germany and the Netherlands, adoption

agencies experience financial strain. Since they do not receive any government subsidies, they need to finance themselves with the 'administration fees' paid by their adoption applicants. Thus, in order to keep their business up and running, they must handle a minimum number of adoption placements per year. This financial dependency on ICAs creates an incentive for adoption agencies to turn a blind eye to signs of irregular practices in the sending countries. The agencies' 'hear no evil, see no evil' attitude is possible as they are generally not held accountable for abuses abroad.

*Trust in Hague sending countries.* In 1993, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption was drafted, outlining minimum standards for ethical adoptions. Many sending countries do, however, lack the required resources to enforce these standards. Yet, notwithstanding continued abuses in numerous 'Hague sending countries', stakeholders in Germany and the Netherlands would often blindly trust that countries that have ratified the treaty, have established proper safeguards that would prevent illegal practices, and fail to make their own assessments regarding the integrity of the foreign adoption system and the reliability of the information provided about the children.

## Conclusion

In 2016, the *Raad voor Strafrechtstoepassing en Jeugdbescherming* recommended banning ICAs to the Netherlands, arguing that the risks of abuses within the ICA system were too high. The Netherlands is the first receiving country to seriously consider banning ICAs. From a criminological perspective, this approach will most certainly not stop the trafficking of children, but might lead to unwanted consequences: removing the legal channel to adopt a child from abroad could result in Dutch couples and individuals pursuing an adoption via 'underground' means, which is devoid of any control and supervision by official authorities. Instead of banning ICAs, the receiving countries should rather focus on removing the weaknesses within their adoption system. Possible reforms include: creating accountability of adoption agencies for abusive practices in the sending countries, as well as obliging the agencies to disclose more information about the country fees that adopters need to pay, and sufficiently demonstrating that these fees are reasonable.

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## Hostage-taking as contract enforcement among migrants and smugglers

Charlotte Baarda (Oxford University)

In this text, I would like to introduce one of the findings of my recently completed PhD thesis on 'Cooperation, Exploitation, and Trust: Migration from Edo State, Nigeria, into Sex Work in Europe' at the University of Oxford.

The puzzle of the first chapter of my thesis is how commitments are made between migrants and smugglers/traffickers before a journey starts. If the latter loans money to the former for the journey, how is repayment ensured? Why would the migrant not just disappear upon arrival? I use data from semi-structured interviews with Nigerian women who migrated to Europe, conducted in the Netherlands and Nigeria, and the transcripts of 826 wiretapped phone conversations from the criminal case 'Koolvis' (2006-2007) to study this.

Commitments made between migrant and smuggler before a journey would explain cooperation later on, when the journey has commenced or is completed, and when the migrant is not geographically close to those who financed the journey, but a loan still has to be repaid. In the case I studied, migration from Edo State, Nigeria, to Europe, the answer lies in the fact that Nigerian madams (see Siegel and de Blank, 2010) who live in Europe will only recruit women from their own region of origin. In Edo State, migration has led to more migration: the demand exists because the first generation of madams came back successfully. They can recruit other women because they have advertised their wealth back in Edo State. They invest in real estate, legitimate businesses, and the community. The demand to go to Europe is high, and the means for people from Edo State to go through other networks than that of the madam is limited. However, the puzzling aspect is how a madam or another sponsor of a journey can trust that the migrant will repay them, and that the migrant trusts that they will not be cheated either.

I found that in this case, the madam or sponsor aligns their incentives with the family of the migrant and effectively takes the family hostage. Far from the popular use of the word 'hostage' in kidnapping acts of terrorism, the hostage commits to the agreement willingly. Hostage taking is used to support exchange, rather than as pure coercion (see Williamson, 1983). This mechanism was used to allow for trade over long distances by the Romans (Allen, 2006), and has been observed among contemporary criminals, such as Colombian cocaine networks (Zaitch, 2002). In the Colombian case, the hostage, a cousin of the boss, for example, is placed in the house of the family of the trading partner, treated very well, and is released once the product is delivered. However, if the other party cheats on the agreement, the hostage is killed. In the Nigerian case, the madam or sponsor does not physically confine the hostage because they are assured that the families of the migrants cannot disappear, as they are deeply embedded in the community in Edo State and have their houses and land there. Third parties are involved in enforcing the agreement. Once the migrant seems to renege on the agreement, the family receives a subpoena to appear before a traditional religious court. This court may rule that the sponsor gets ownership of the family's house if this was put up as a guarantee. Alternatively, the family will start receiving physical threats, and the threat of them being killed is credible due to weak and corrupt law enforcement.

However, the findings show that the traffickers will avoid using violence if they can. When, as in the 'Koolvis case' (2006-2007), the migrants receive offers from the Dutch authorities to cooperate with them instead of their traffickers, the traffickers first respond by advertising their services more to the migrants. They highlight their knowledge of migration routes, their ability to provide migrants with a residence permit, and the unreliability of the European authorities. When the migrant is still hesitant, the traffickers start to appeal to the families. The families contact the migrants and try to convince them to cooperate with the traffickers. If that still does not work, the family will receive a subpoena to appear in the Aylala court. Finally, threats to the lives of the migrants and their families are made only as a last resort. The hostage-taking mechanism works, because this seems to be a case where migrants tend to maintain strong ties to their country of origin

and travel with a motivation to invest some income back into their lives and families back home, rather than the type of migration where migrants maintain weak ties to the country of origin (see Engbersen et al., 2013). The incentive is not for entire families to migrate or for migrants to never return. They all remain embedded in the community. Looking at a simple model of formal rationality, the individual choice for migration through this route does not always add up. Calculating the probability of avoiding deportation, the probability of employment, and earnings higher than employment in the country of origin, plus the cost of migration, the migrant may come to a negative conclusion (Massey et al., 1993). The market is such that traffickers ask for prices as high as 50,000 to 60,000 euros. Many Nigerian women are deported before they have repaid this sum. However, the behaviour is rational if the model is elaborated upon with household decisions, social norms, and beliefs (see Elster, 2007). Sending one daughter to Europe with a high risk of failure, but some chance of high returns, is a strategy that the families can adopt as insurance when other family activities do not work out. Social norms are such that the responsibility of success lies with the migrant and there is the belief that making money in Europe is easy. The following hypothesis emerges from the data, which can be tested in more cases in future research: *The mechanism of hostage-taking increases the likelihood of cooperation between migrant and trafficker.*

Finally, the connection between sex trafficking and traditional religion and Pentecostal churches appeals to beliefs deeply ingrained in Edo society. I found that traditional religion is used to 1) close the deal between migrant and trafficker, 2) enforce this deal and 3) negotiate disputes. The counterfactual, if trafficking had no connection to religious beliefs, means that the reputation of traffickers would be worse, that they could not rely on religious institutions as meeting places and enforcement of contracts, and cannot amplify threats by showing that the spirits are on their side and will harm those who break an agreement.

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### The client side of everyday corruption in Central and Eastern Europe: The case of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Romania

Jing Hiah (Utrecht University)

Corruption, generally defined as the misuse of public power for private benefit, is reported to be pervasive and affecting the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the transition societies of Central and Eastern Europe (Neamtu and Dragos, 2014: 71). Although corruption has been studied widely, most research focuses on the causes and effects of corruption at the societal level or on the role of public institutions in relation to corruption (Torsello and Venard, 2015: 34). Studies on everyday life accounts of common people who are on the client side of a transaction involving bribery are scarce (but see Jansics 2013) and there is an even greater lack of attention to the impact of corruption on



newcomers such as migrants in the transition countries of CEE. I explored the more mundane, everyday corruption through the perspective of Chinese migrants as clients of corruption in Romania in the context of my PhD thesis (Hiah Forthcoming; Hiah 2019), which compares labour relations in Chinese migrant businesses and the impact of labour exploitation and human trafficking policies in the Netherlands and Romania through multi-site ethnography (Marcus, 1995). During my seven months of fieldwork in Bucharest (Romania) between 2014 and 2016, I interviewed fifty respondents, twenty of whom were Chinese migrant entrepreneurs active in micro businesses in the wholesale markets of Bucharest. Other interviewees included Romanian and Turkish entrepreneurs/shopkeepers active in these markets; professionals such as interpreters and bookkeepers who worked with and/or possessed information about Chinese immigrants and entrepreneurs in Romania; and different Romanian NGOs and governmental agencies active in the domains of migration and labour exploitation.

My findings argue that to understand the relationship that Chinese migrants have with corruption, it is important to view Chinese immigration and entrepreneurship in the historical context of the transitioning societies of Central and Eastern Europe in general and Romania in particular. From a societal perspective, corruption is part of the everyday functioning of the wholesale market in Romania owing to its historical development, which started from informal suitcase trading directly post-1989 and developed into what is today a state of the art market for wholesale. As a result, corruption became normalized and part of the everyday life of Chinese migrants, including their entrepreneurial activities, strategies and different domains of their social life. Still, my findings also show that migrant status plays an important role in the client side of petty corruption. In the following I will elaborate on these different findings.

#### ***Normalization of small scale bribery as 'xiao fei', survival strategy***

Small scale bribes were referred to as xiao fei, the literal translation of which is 'small fee or expense'. *Xiao fei* was translated by my English-speaking respondents as 'tips' or 'tipping'. The negative connotation of bribery is thus normalized by applying the terminology of *xiao fei*, which refers to a positive action where you pay an extra small fee because you appreciated the service. In addition to normalizing corruption by using de-criminalized terminology, the respondents in my study also normalized the motivations of public officials asking for a bribe. Arguments like: 'They are not bad people, they earn very little money, the people in this country are poor' were very common. Instead of viewing bribe demands as morally wrong, the migrants rather argued that Romania is a poor country and, accordingly, Romanian public servants get paid poorly.

#### ***Corruption as a strategy for informal activities, circumventing bureaucratic red tape***

Furthermore, corruption also created flexibility in the application of rules and laws where migrants' entrepreneurial activities and strategies benefitted from. The paying of bribes benefitted migrants' entrepreneurial activities in two respects. First, paying a bribe was done to prevent supervision on their informal activities such as income tax evasion and underreporting of the amount of goods for VAT. Second, paying a bribe was used to circumvent long bureaucratic processes. For instance, a respondent was able to speed up the application of his working permit through paying a bribe. In addition to their entrepreneurial activities, bribes were also paid in the migrants' private lives to secure good quality of services such as in their access to healthcare and the education of their children. What surprised me was that my respondents were often unaware of whether the bribes they paid were for obtaining a service they were already entitled to, or that they were used to coerce a public servant in providing an illicit service.

#### ***The migrant on the client side of corruption***

I found three factors to be relevant in considering the client side of corruption from a migrant perspective. First, migrants are dealing with administrative procedures related to their permission to stay and these procedures create opportunities for public officials for

petty corruption. Besides, there is much on the line when corruption concerns fundamental aspects of life, such as the right to stay and work. Second, migrants are more susceptible to paying a bribe because of their (perceived) vulnerability and consequently an increased (perceived) need to buy certainty through bribing. Third, limited language fluency and knowledge of local rules and laws, which in part might coincide with a migrant background, play a further role on the client side of corruption. Those who speak the local language and know their rights, the rules and appropriate procedures are not easily duped by public officials. Many of the migrants were neither fluent in the local language nor in English and therefore had more difficulty in rejecting the demand for a bribe.

#### ***Meanings of anti-corruption***

During the final weeks of my fieldwork, the Romanian tax authorities launched 'Operation Crystal' and dozens of law enforcement officials would visit the market on a daily basis to check for irregularities with the tax administration of businesses in the wholesale trade. Many shopkeepers were heavily fined because of a lack of compliance. These anti-corruption measures were however perceived as illegitimate by the Chinese migrant entrepreneurs. Tax evasion and other irregularities by businesses in the wholesale sector had previously been quietly accepted owing to corruption among regulatory agencies. Public officials used to turn a blind eye to the irregularities in the businesses on the condition that business owners paid them a bribe. Operation Crystal would break with this status quo. In addition, it was not only the anti-corruption measures themselves that were perceived to be unfair, but also the way in which the measures were carried out in practice. The measures did not acknowledge the crucial role public officials played in establishing practices of *xiao fei* and informality in the previous three decades. On the contrary, few of the public officials guilty of corruption were fired or reprimanded. This suggests that the perceived fairness of corruption measures depends on (visibly) addressing the problem from both sides, not just the clients paying bribes, but also the public officials guilty of accepting bribes.

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### Estimating market sizes and the volume of money laundering: the inconvenient truth?

Hans Nelen (Maastricht University/CIROC)

In the autumn of 2018, a report was published by a research group of the Dutch Police Academy under the supervision of Professor Pieter Tops of Tilburg University (Tops et al., 2018). The report had a somewhat ominous title: *The Netherlands and Synthetic drugs: an inconvenient truth*. The report confirms previous research findings that the Netherlands is a large producer and trader of synthetic drugs (notably XTC and amphetamines), and that Dutch criminals are global leaders in the synthetic drugs industry, with distribution networks and commercial activities across the world. Moreover, Tops et al. (2018) tried to come up with estimates of the extent of the synthetic drug market. They claim that, in 2017, criminals in the Netherlands produced at least 18.9 billion euros of XTC and amphetamines. This amount concerns the street value in the Netherlands and abroad. According to the researchers, this finding must be understood as the contribution of the Dutch synthetic drugs world to the global illegal drugs economy. Ultimately, traders all over the world pocket a slice of that amount, with a particularly large chunk ending up with the middlemen. The amount of money paid for synthetic drugs 'off-lab', i.e. paid directly to the producers in the Netherlands by both native and foreign criminals, is at least 610 million euros. About the phases between off-lab and final street sale, which are so crucial because this is where the top-criminals earn their 'big' money, less is known. The researchers estimate that the revenue for Dutch producers and traders in this phase ranges from a minimum of 3 to 5 billion euros (Tops et al., 2018)

A couple of weeks later, a research group from Utrecht University and Ecorys published their report on the nature and extent of money laundering in the Netherlands (Unger et al, 2018). Estimates of the size of the criminally earned assets were made on the basis of macroeconomic statistics, available crime data and the worldwide gravity model, as originally developed by Walker (1999). In total, the researchers estimate the scale of money laundering in the Netherlands in 2014 at 16 billion euros. This amount consists of domestic criminal money that is laundered in the Netherlands (6.9 billion in 2014) and the influx of money laundering from other countries (9.1 billion in 2014).

Without doubt, these staggering figures have had a tremendous impact on the political debate regarding organized crime in the Netherlands. The figures have fuelled the debate on the threats that organized crime may pose for the legitimate society in terms of economic and political infiltration. In the Netherlands, a special term – 'undermining', which is hard to translate but comes close to corruption and criminal infiltration – has been introduced to emphasize this threat. Scholars who have tried to nuance the dark picture of the Dutch criminal landscape have been publicly accused of not taking the threat of organized crime seriously. At the same time, many criminologists are skeptical about macroeconomic approaches trying to estimate the size of crime markets or money laundering activities in a sound and solid way. The main points of criticism are that these estimates are built on a large number of disputable and untenable assumptions, and that many of the available databases do not contain sufficient accurate and reliable data to be used in advanced statistical analysis.

On November 9, 2018, a CIROC-roundtable was organized in Utrecht, the Netherlands, to discuss the added value of the aforementioned research reports, and their statistical findings in particular. Both the researchers of the two research projects participated, as well as other Dutch scholars in the field of organized crime. Not surprisingly, the lively debate revealed strongly opposing positions/views and arguments. Those in favor of quantifying the extent of drug markets and money laundering acknowledged the methodological difficulties of their endeavor, but emphasized the need of showing quantitative trends and patterns. The opponents disputed this claim and argued that previous studies on the nature of organized crime had already illuminated and contextualized why the Netherlands plays a pivotal role in

the synthetic drug market and money laundering. According to these critics, due to a lack of consensus on definitional issues (e.g. money laundering) and some serious methodological flaws, the academic value of the two recent publications was limited.

Of course, the debate on the possibilities and added value of economic calculations of the threat of organized crime is nothing new. In the Netherlands, it started more than twenty years ago when Fijnaut et al. (1998) concluded in one of the first empirical studies on organized crime in the Netherlands that "their excursion into the world of figures on production, quantities seized, market sizes and criminal profits was an overall disappointment". Later, other scholars, including Naylor (2004) and Van Duyne (2006), emphasized that it has to be acknowledged that "no one has a clue how much illegal money is earned, saved, laundered, or moved around the world" (Naylor, 2004). Nevertheless, policymakers, politicians, the press, and law enforcement agencies alike, keep looking for figures that may help them to substantiate the claim of an 'epidemic' of organized crime sweeping through the globalized economy. The need for this kind of quantitative data has only increased throughout the last decade. The fact that most - if not all - estimates in threat analyses are based upon a series of assumptions lacking logical or factual basis, and that the quality of the data that these estimates are based upon is flawed, seems to be of secondary interest. This brings us back to the fundamental question of whether the primary role of academic research is to demystify and nuance contemporary crime problems, or to fuel a political debate.

The latter seems to be the dominant viewpoint nowadays. That may be an inconvenient truth for some academic researchers, but politicians and policymakers couldn't care less.

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## COLOPHON

**Chief Editor:** Prof. Dr. Dina Siegel

### CIROC

Willem Pompe Institute,  
Utrecht University  
Newtonlaan 201, 3584 BH Utrecht  
The Netherlands

Email: [ciroc@uu.nl](mailto:ciroc@uu.nl)  
Tel. +31 30 2537125

[www.ciroc.org](http://www.ciroc.org)