Introduction

Dina Siegel (CIROC/Utrecht University)

This issue of the Ciroc Newsletter comes out at a time when the world is facing a major crisis. The SARS-CoVid-2 virus has sent many people into isolation as the media continue to report on catastrophic numbers of infections and deaths. Academic research has either come to a halt or has shifted from fieldwork and universities to online settings. Ciroc (Center for Information and Research on Organised Crime) has also been hit by the threat of the coronavirus. Many Dutch criminologists have been forced to postpone their empirical research, suspend their fieldwork and/or limit their research activities to online data collection and 'armchair criminology'.

Looking back on the academic year 2019/2020, however, it is remarkable that the number of studies on organised crime in the Netherlands and abroad has remained more or less constant. In this Newsletter, five new research projects are presented. *Joseph Whittle* and *Georgios Antonopoulos* critically discuss human smuggling from Eritrea and challenge some of the existing stereotypes on the size of the problem, the profiles of the human smugglers and their involvement in transnational organised crime. In her contribution on cross-border crime, *Martina Cataldo* examines the link between Nigerian secret cults, human trafficking and the mafia in northern Italy.

The next three studies were conducted in the Netherlands. *Thijs Jeursen* and *Maggie Achleitner* carried out fieldwork in a 'deviant' neighbourhood in Amsterdam and found that by criminalising young people policymakers ignore significant factors contributing to their 'problematic' behaviour, such as structural inequality and discrimination. *Teun van Ruitenburg* analyzed the historical development of the Dutch approach towards outlaw motorcycle gangs, which has changed from tolerance in the 1970s to strict control and prevention in our time. Finally, research on 'high risk' dogs and whether and how organised crime is involved in illegal dog fights in the Netherlands is discussed in a contribution by *Daan van Uhm, Dina Siegel, Anton van Wijk and Nienke Endenburg.*

As always, this Newsletter also includes a list of recent publications in English by Dutch researchers on various aspects of organised crime.

Analysis

On irregular migration from Eritrea, human smuggling and 'criminal networks'

Joseph Whittle (Liverpool John Moores University) & Georgios A. Antonopoulos (Teesside University)

The increased government, media and public focus on migration from Africa to the EU in the past few years has led to an explosion in reporting on the phenomenon. Within this context, there are a number of basic assumptions in relation to these migratory processes from Africa: (1) migrants from Africa intend to cross the Mediterranean Sea in an effort to reach Western European countries; (2) in their effort to cross the Mediterranean, African migrants are facilitated by 'organised criminal networks'

CONTENT

that exploit the migrants' vulnerability (see EU, 2015). A joint Europol-Interpol report stated that the migration of more than 90% of those coming to the EU is facilitated, mostly by members of *a criminal network* (Europol and Interpol, 2016); (3) understanding smuggling financing can inform policies specifically targeting migrant smuggling. This short article, which is based on interviews with 30 Eritrean irregular migrants in Cairo, Egypt, aims to add to the understanding about how Eritrean people plan, fund and manage irregular migration journeys. Some of the main findings of our study (see also Whittle and Antonopoulos, 2020 for more details) are as follows:

• The open-ended national service is the main driver for people leaving Eritrea. Conscription is major component of the Eritrean Government's policy under the 1999 National Service Proclamation, which was extended in 2002 and, according to which, even high school children must undertake one year of military training in order to complete their studies. The open-ended (and unpaid) military service has kept thousands of Eritreans in a state of control and (sometimes even commercial) exploitation, and has been the context for many of them to become victims of torture and sexual violence (see, for example, Kibreab, 2017). Twenty-four (both male and female) of the thirty res-pondents in our study confirmed that national service, whether for them personally or linked to a family member, was their motivation to leave. A further four of our interviewees left due to corruption and/or persecution from the state that, until July 2018, was still fully mobilised for war with Ethiopia.

• Despite western media accounts referring to a 'biblical exodus' from Africa to Europe taking place (see, for instance, Daily Mail, 2017) our research found that only seven of the thirty people interviewed had in-

tended to go to Europe; the vast-majority were focussed simply on escaping Eritrea and getting to another country in the region in search of safety for themselves and members of their families. Most of those interviewed had no plans beyond getting out of Eritrea to elsewhere in the region.

- 22 of the 30 people interviewed obtained information about the irregular migration from friends or family. A further 6 said it was either 'common knowledge' in their locality. Some of the participants' friends and family were based abroad and so had been through a migration journey themselves. It is of note that not one interviewee obtained information from (someone s/he would define as) a 'smuggler', a 'trafficker' or a 'criminal'. The sources of most information were from what could be termed 'reliable' (i.e. friends/family) sources.

- A number of participants proceeded into the most crucial part of the journey i.e. getting out of Eritrea without anyone facilitating their journey, although at a later stage of the journey some facilitation was essential. However, almost three-quarters of the journeys outlined by respondents were with facilitators identified through friends and family. In some cases, the facilitator was actually a friend or family member. Only in a handful of cases were migrants approached directly by facilitators and most of these were in the Shagarab Refugee camp in Sudan.

- The route used by the vast majority of the participants involved migrating from Eritrea into Sudan and then into Egypt. Some also entered Libya before entering Egypt, whereas in one case a migrant crossed over to Ethiopia before travelling to Sudan and subsequently Egypt. There were, however, a couple of cases in which an irregular migratory journey involved a much more complicated route. For example, one 19-year-old male, initially travelled from Eritrea to Sudan; however, during the journey, he was kidnapped and his mother paid US$ 3.500. The kidnappers left him at the border between Egypt and Israel, and then the Israeli government transported him (along with others) to Rwanda. From Rwanda, he then crossed over to Uganda before continuing his trip northbound to Egypt.

- Regarding funding the trip, 26 out of 30 participants secured funding from members of their (extended) family and friends (often based abroad). One participant secured funding through his own work in agriculture. Interestingly, two of the participants did not have to secure any funding for the trip as the smuggling service was provided to them for free (n=1) or they were assisted by members of their extended social network as a favour (n=1).

- The vast majority of the participants who paid a smuggling fee, paid that fee on arrival to the agreed destination. Only one of the migrants interviewed paid the fee in advance. In addition, in our interviews, we did not come across any cases in which prospective smuggled migrants borrowed money from local moneylenders with interest, as is identified in other research on human smuggling (see, for example, Koser, 2008). Even in those cases in which migrants borrowed money from others (n=7), there was no interest at all, and the provision of the loan appears to be a convenience for someone in their social network. Finally, in our interviews, there were no occasions in which Eritrean migrants entered into debt bondage with the smuggler promising that they will pay back the debt once work is found at the country of destination.

- The smuggling fees paid by our interviewees to the facilitators of their irregular journey vary considerably for virtually identical smuggling processes and and/or comparable distances travelled, as well as corresponding complexities of the journey. For example, there have been cases in which migrants paid absolutely nothing, paid in kind (acting as a broker between a facilitator and other potential irregular migrants), or paid as much as £17.820 for crossing one border (Eritrea to Sudan) by truck.

In our study we, of course, neither suggest that smuggling from Africa into West Europe does not take place nor that 'criminal networks' are not involved in the process. We merely wish to highlight that irregular migration from Africa is an extremely diverse phenomenon that often involves rela-

tionships between 'smugglers' and 'smuggled', which are grounded in local community connections and strategies (see also Siegel, 2019; Sanchez, 2017). Our case study of Eritrean irregular migrants is based on a relatively small sub-set from a geographically contained group and suggests that there may be localised exceptions to some of the research on human smuggling from Africa. However, it is equally important to ensure Western conceptions of what 'must' be happening in relation to human smuggling do not overwrite the views of those who actually take part in the process.

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Are there "*foreign mafias*" in Italy? The case of Nigerian secret cults in the North of Italy

Martina Cataldo (Utrecht University)

Introduction

In the last the last few years Italy has witnessed to the internationalization and ethnicization of illegal markets. Next to *Mafiosi* and local criminals, illicit entrepreneurs come from all parts of the world, led to the growth of organized crime with an ethnical matrix, often defined in terms of transnational organized crime or foreign mafias. Since the Nineties, Nigerian criminal organizations in Italy, especially in the North, have extended their reach and have given rise to stable forms of rooting, attracting attention among the Italian law enforcement personnel, journalists and criminologists. However most of the literature regarding Nigerian criminal groups in Northern Italy is concerned with smuggling and trafficking of girls for sexual exploitation.

Academic studies on the characteristics and modus operandi of the so-called Nigerian secret cults in the North of Italy are still scarce and the construction process of this phenomenon seems to be strictly linked to the specific Italian context, historically characterized by mafia-type organizations. During eight months of fieldwork I explored the phenomenon of the Nigerian secret cults in Italy. I used data from semi-structured interviews with law enforcement actors, academics and representatives of NGO and the analysis of court files; in addition I reconstructed the structure, rules, codes and rites of one specific secret cult operating in Northern Italy through the analysis of the Green Bible, the cult's rule book.

The mobility of Nigerian cults in Northern Italy

Though originally founded in Nigeria, the Nigerian secret cults or campus cults phenomenon has since its start expanded globally. The first Nigerian secret cults, conceived along the line of American student fraternities, were originated in Southern Nigeria universities in the 50s,with the aim of abolish elitism within the university context (Ellis, 2016). However after the oil-boom of the 1960-70s the campus cults started to be associated with robberies, extorsions, murders. Driven by a rhetoric of anti- colonialism and of opposition to apartheid in South Africa, they started to become what they are deemed to be today, namely '*a perverse and destructive aspect of a student movement*'(Ellis, 2008). Furthermore they began to actively engage in transnational illegal activities: they started to be associated with human trafficking rings, human rights abuses, drug trafficking and fraud. Due to economic, political and social crisis, there was (and still is) in Nigeria a considerable pressure to emigrate. In this regard, relying on Varese's conceptualization of '*mafia transplantation*', I analysed the mobility of Nigerian secret cults in the North of Italy.

The first consideration concerns the generalized migration pattern of Nigerian population wherein these cults are well established : people move and criminal groups members move as well. In the last 20 years, Prosecutors in Brescia, Genoa, Naples, and Turin have documented the presence of Nigerian secret cults across the country. However the presence of migrants from countries in which exists the phenomenon of organized crime, it is not enough for the establishment of new mafias. Indeed the second consideration concerns the fact that people from Edo State (where most of the Nigerian cults proliferated) had existing contracts and experience in Italy (Ellis, 2016): Nigeria was involved in the trade of clothes and beads, especially in the region of Piedmont. When the unemployment rate became higher and higher, people used their existing connections in Italy to leave their country and to migrate where they had knowledge and resources of those who went before them. Finally, the findings show that members of Nigerian cults did not decide to rationally open a new branch in Italy, but they were mostly forced to migrate in order to escape to police and state repression, moving where they had previous contacts, friends or relatives. The secret cults operating in Northern Italy are the *Eiye confraternity*, the *Vikings* and the *M.A.P.H.I.T.E.* These three cults are characterized by their own recruitment mechanism, initiation ceremony, oaths, secret codes, rituals and aesthetic. The research shows how these cults tried to maintain a symbolic connection with their origins, transmitting over time to the new affiliates the memory of some distinctive signs, such as the colors of the uniforms adopted and the cults' symbols. As previous studies have highlighted, the use of unique symbols and style, helps the criminal group to build a criminal identity, generated within the boundaries of a criminal subculture and recognized both by the members of the group and by the agents of legal control.

Structure, rules and mafia features: the case of the M.A.H.P.I.T.E cult

The acronym M.A.H.P.I.T.E, stands for Maximum, Academic, Performance, Highly, Intellectuals, Train, Executioner. The first accounts of the presence of this group in northern Italy date back to 2011, however the foundation of the *maphite* group took place already between 1998 and 1999 in Turin. The cult is composed of *families*, scattered all around the Italian territory, divided in three organs: the head, the consultative organ and the executive body. The base of the family is formed by *sergeants* and *soldiers:* the former maintain order within the members, the latter carry out operational orders for the family. Even though the division of tasks within the cult shows a high level of specialization, I found that they have interchangeable and overlapping roles, posits them more closed to fluid associations rather than mafia-type criminal groups. However, the cult's rules book found by the Italian police, shows norms and rules similar to those of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. The Green Bible emphasises the concept of '*man of honor*' , '*loyalty*' , '*brotherhood*' and '*secrecy*'. The membership within the cult is like belonging to a family: it is deemed more important than any other relationship the members could have. After the initiation ritual, the brotherhood is enforced and re- established constantly by the cult itself. The membership establishes a blood-like bonds, that takes supremacy over any other relationship and after the initiation ritual, members become brothers to all intents and purposes.

I found that the strength of Nigerian cults lies in the fact that they are able to mobilize internal cultural material, symbolic resources and relations. In this regard, social ties also '*mitigate the problem of distrus*t' (Kleemans and Van de Bunt, 1999: 20), the environment in which offenders have to carry out their illegal activities is hostile and uncertain, and still collaboration in the underworld requires mutual trust. Trust is fundamental, because these activities involve significant financial risks and the social embeddedness may discourage opportunistic and selfish behavior (Gambetta, 2000).

Furthermore the establishment of norms ensures the state of secrecy of the organization: the cult members' adherence to the so-called code of silence (*omertà*) is a crucial feature of the maphite cult. The concept denotes a specific type of behavior, *omertoso*, implying secrecy and the attitude of silence. The refusal to collaborate with the law enforcement during an investigation is a necessary requirement for the life of an illegal criminal organization. As a matter of fact, for a mafia-type organization, the secrecy means above all handling information, so to avoid the danger of unwanted attention.

To conclude

During the fieldwork arguments like '*they are like a mafia, they are involved in human trafficking, drug trafficking money laundering and extorsions*' were very common. The mafia is usually described as a hierarchical criminal organization effectively exercising control on a certain territory while maintaining contacts with relevant persons from politics and society. In this regard, while in Nigeria secret cults are involved in the political scene (they engage in political thuggery to get money from politicians or they are paid to assassinate political opponents), in Italy they seem to be only linked to a variety of criminal markets. Furthermore the loose structure posits them more akin to gangs, as well as the use of colors, but their inner world is clocked in a completely different vocabulary, made by biblical references and esoteric language.

Nevertheless during the fieldwork emerged that Nigerian cults perform forms of territorial control over the cult and, more generally and broadly, over the Nigerian community. As Merenda and Visconti (2019) explain, mafia-like crimes are more than just crimes, they are a certain 'style' in committing offences. In this context, it can be argued that the form that the foreign criminal organization assumes may be directly linked to the culture of the country of arrival. In other words, foreign criminal groups, in building "mafias", may borrow cultural and behavioral models from the host country. The secret cults case seems to be a paradigmatic case of this phenomenon. I noticed various references to 'mafia-culture': the name Prince Mafia as nickname, used by two of the man convicted, the constant mention to be '*man of honor*' and to not to be an infamous (*infame*), the concept of '*brotherhood*'and the performing of a ceremony of initiation. To categorize them under a single ideal type, such as cult or gang or organized crime groups, is eventually impossible, as they represent a bordering form of social organization which characteristics are borrowed from very different sources. The only conclusion that can be drawn with a satisfying degree of certainty is that, indeed, Nigerian cults belong to their own genus.

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Organized crime or local nuisances? Criminalizing drugs and hanging out in the Wildemanbuurt in Amsterdam-West

Thijs Jeursen (Utrecht University) and Maggie Achleitner (Utrecht University)

Introduction

In this article we share our insights from a qualitative, policy-oriented study on drug crime in the Amsterdam neighbourhood *Wildemanbuurt* conducted between May and September 2019. Commissioned by the municipality of the Dutch capital, the study was set up in order to provide insight into the local dynamics of drug trafficking and networks, focusing on the specific geographical and social conditions of the residential area in Amsterdam-West. We collected our data primarily by conducting interviews with police officers, residents, and policy makers who are connected to the neighbourhood, by doing observations of different locations during different times of day, as well as by analysing policy documents and interventions. We organized our data along three main themes, namely: supply and demand of drugs, violence and nuisance, and policy making regarding different local problems connected to our research focus.

Wildemanbuurt

The Wildemanbuurt is a neighbourhood located in the Amsterdam city district Nieuw-West and is home to about 5,000 inhabitants. In spite of its relatively small size, the area is notorious among police, social workers and the municipality, "as one where urban problems aggregate". Identified as a so-called "ontwikkelbuurt", a Dutch term best translated as development neighbourhood, it has a reputation of being generally deprived, run-down and crime-ridden. Due to the area's "stickiness" (Innes, 2014) the area has undergone intensive city interventions and an abundance of research has been conducted in the neighbourhood in recent years from different perspectives, ranging from anthropology course assignments to extensive policy evaluations. According to municipality-commissioned/official reports and census data, the area is characterized by inhabitants having a comparatively low socio-economic status who have a migratory background. Furthermore, researchers postulate that there is overall comparatively little social cohesion, as well as low satisfaction with the neighbourhood in terms of quality of housing, public space, and maintenance.

Researchers and policy-makers alike consider so-called "hangjongeren", a term to stigmatize adolescent boys, to be the neighbourhood's main problem. There seems to be a divergent understanding and image portrayed of these minors. Hanging out in public spaces, such as corners, parks, and sidewalks in the middle of the day, they are presented as the victims of their circumstances: they come from broken homes, leave education early, have troubles finding a job, maybe even a low IQ, which adds further to their stigmatization. Having lost ties to society due to their lack of opportunities therein, they easily fall prey to the "hardened" and "real" criminals involved in large-scale organized crime and the drug trade. Attracted by fast money and status, they are swayed into doing small tasks, such as standing guard and picking up packages for their superiors.

Recognizing the precarity of these individuals, policy makers and researchers have suggested that they get "sucked" into a downward spiral – either by force and their inability of getting out, or because they became addicted to a luxurious lifestyle, leading down a path towards serious violent offences and even contract killings. It is why local police officers often emphasize the need to show that "crime doesn't pay", even though it often does. Police officers and policy makers consider these problems to be cha-

racteristic of a geographical area. In this case, the Wildemanbuurt was labelled as a "zwijg-wijk", a term used to describe a place where criminals force other residents to remain "silent", to refrain from communicating with the local police. While residents were indeed at times reluctant to speak to the police, reasons were multiple, and included beliefs that the police was unable to help them, or that the police would only cause more harm. The idea of a "zwijg-wijk" failed to capture these local realities, and, more importantly, was used by policy makers to justify a set of broader interventions aimed at addressing organized crime in specific neighbourhoods and residents.

What we've all known?

Another study published shortly before the end of our research that tried to assess the extent to which the drug trade in the larger urban environment of Amsterdam had "undermined" legitimate business and society, supposedly brought to light "what we have all known" (Tops and Tromp 2019). Also within this study, which painted a bleak picture of the city's drug problem but received a lot of media attention, the Wildemanbuurt, its "problem youth" and the supposed silence around criminal activity was mentioned explicitly. While conducting our research in the neighbourhood and interviewing residents and business owners, our impression was a different one. Many local residents people readily talked about problems that concerned *their* realities – stories that often had a strong local character and revolved around issues of nuisance, noise, waste, and overdue maintenance.

In general terms, there was a strong narrative of "us versus them", both metaphorically and literally. On one side of the neighbourhood's main street, small shops and restaurants provide spaces of consumption for the "good, law-abiding citizens", while on the other side of the street, the *hangjongeren* occupy an otherwise empty green space, allegedly leading to a feeling of insecurity among the former. Furthermore, the narrative is ripe with xenophobic undertones since those mentioning the *hangjongeren* as a problem were to a large extent elderly, white Dutch people, while most of the adolescents came from migrant backgrounds. This is worth mentioning also because some behaviour that might be considered problematic, such as the activity of "hanging" itself, has different connotations in other cultural contexts.

International problems, local solutions

Moreover, their "hanging" is time and again associated with serious forms of organized crime, in particular with drug trade. This narrative of two opposing sides is highly problematic and detrimental to any meaningful improvement and our understanding of the situation. Importantly, this sentiment is internalized by the adolescents themselves. When asked about problems of violence and organized crime in their neighbourhood, the reply of young boys was often a prompt "Problems? We are the problem!". The answer suggested that they felt that their presence in itself was the crime – not so much their (perceived) connections to organized crime. They felt targeted by the police, generally unwanted in the neighbourhood, and constantly under surveillance by street coaches, police officers, and local business owners.

When governmental institutions and the media continuously conflate their hanging out with serious organized crime, the distinction between friendship and 'criminal networks' easily gets lost and ultimately, their existence is being criminalized. Dynamics like these potentially lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, but in any case they raise questions about how much and what kind of intervention by the municipality is actually helpful. Moreover, the question can be asked how much the study of such a neighbourhood can really say about drug-related crime. While problems emerging out of the drug economy certainly have effects in neighbourhoods and for individuals, they are not limited to a neighbourhood, or even a city.

Contrary to beliefs about the adolescents being part of organized criminal networks, which are iterated in numerous municipality-commissioned studies their media coverage, and despite anecdotal stories about issues such as drug trade, weapons or violence which were brought up on various occasions, we did not find evidence of such activities. More importantly, however, our research showed the narrow and scripted idea of organized drug crime in the eyes of the municipality and public debate. From the onset, the research problem was framed in a way which named the *hangjongeren* in one breath with serious forms of organized crime, a conception which certainly does not mitigate the issues at hand. Our research was critical of this dominant idea of understanding international drug criminality in terms of deprived neighbourhoods and their "problem youth", and especially of answers that call for a "hard on drugs" approach. Therefore, we call for more caution in the way such issues are being conflated within policies and interventions, which ultimately only serves to deepen existing divergences and hostilities.

Conclusions

Too easily are nuisances and interactions interpreted as problems of organized crime and (inter)national drug trafficking. Again, this is not to argue that these issues do not intersect, but to warn for policies that privilege increased surveillance, anti-drug legislation, and individualized solutions to a broad range of local issues. Our research suggests that as these actors continue to focus on a selective group of residents, simultaneously criminalizing them as well as "empowering" them to make the "right decision", they neglect the larger structural conditions of inequality and racialized ideologies that have identified these groups as main obstacles. Such ideologies continue to justify programs and approaches aimed at creating "safer and resilient communities" that are hardly inclusive in practice.

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Raising Moral Barriers. An empirical study on the Dutch approach to outlaw motorcycle gangs

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The Dutch approach to outlaw motorcycle gangs: A 180-degree turn

In 1973, a civil servant of the city of Amsterdam wrote in a letter sent to the city council that the eastern part of Amsterdam was increasingly in the grip of the Hells Angels. In the letter, the civil servant described the youth group as 'a group of 30 youngsters that is hardly to be controlled and who have long replaced simple punch work with knives and firearms'. In response to the problematic behaviour of these youngsters, the city council decided in 1974 to offer the Hells Angels its own clubhouse. With this clubhouse it was expected that 'many of the problems will disappear' (Van Ruitenburg, 2020). Today, the government approach to these and other so-called outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) such as Satudarah MC and No Surrender MC seems to have made a 180-degree turn. While the mayor of Amsterdam at the time tried to control the problematic behaviour of the Hells Angels by building a clubhouse, in present times local authorities go to great lengths to prevent the settlement of OMGs in clubhouses. Put differently, while the government initially aimed to include OMGs in society, the present-day approach aims for the exclusion of these groups from society.

The general aim of this research was to understand, explain and describe this 180-degree turn in the Dutch national approach to outlaw motorcycle gangs from the year 1970 to present times. To do so, I used archive material from the Amsterdam City Archive, public and confidential national policy documents, and media reports. In addition, I conducted interviews with 76 respondents working for the Dutch National Police, the Public Prosecution Service, Regional Information and Expertise Centres (RIECs) and local governments including 19 mayors (Van Ruitenburg, 2020).

Raising barriers

In the current national and multi-agency approach to OMGs in the Netherlands, state agencies aim to raise 'barriers' that 'make it harder for OMGs to commit undermining and criminal activities' (LIEC, 2016). These barriers among other things involve preventing and hindering OMG-related events and clubhouses, wearing club-related symbols or *colours* in public spaces, and aim to hinder OMG-members from working in the civil service. This study showed that it is no coincidence that the Dutch government speaks in terms of 'raising barriers' to OMGs. By using the word 'barrier' the government built upon a development that is in line with the shift to a pre-crime society in which state agencies increasingly strive to prevent (the risks of) crime in the earliest stages possible (Zedner, 2007). After the turn of the millennium, this preventive turn reflected in the development of various 'barrier models'. These models depict criminal activities as logistic processes as a way to provide insight in how government agencies, private organizations and citizens are able to frustrate and prevent these (organized) crimes. Although this form of situational crime prevention has theoretically shifted the focus away from the offender towards the criminal activity, this method did inspire the Dutch government in 2011 to develop a specific barrier model to fight 'outlaw bikers' (TK 2011-2012, 29 911, no. 71).

The problem of 'outlaw motorcycle gangs'

The historical analysis of how Dutch government agencies perceive(d) the problem of these 'outlaw bikers' unravelled an interesting development. In the 1970s, the violent behaviour of the Hells Angels was explained by the view that the socio-cultural youth work activities in Amsterdam were not geared to the needs and interests of the working class youth. Besides mere boredom, the aggressive behaviour of the members was thus regarded as a dislike with their (social) position in life. In the attempt to better meet the social needs of the young Hells Angels, the local government in turn facilitated and built a new clubhouse where the members could hang-out and be guided by two social workers. Today, OMGs are often viewed by the police and national government as a 'criminal network' or 'cover up' for organized crime activities. However, I have shown that the term 'outlaw motorcycle gang' should in the first place be considered a government-inflicted label with a masking effect for important differences between and within OMGs. Additionally, I have revealed that the problem of OMGs not only relates to the involvement of club members in serious forms of (organized) crime, but also concerns the idea that OMGs have placed themselves above the law and deliberately distanced themselves from the rules and norms of society. This is reflected, for example, in the way in which members appropriate for themselves the public road during *ride-outs* or walk the city centre in V-shape formation. During the interviews, several mayors spoke in this context of the idea that OMGs pretend to be 'untouchable' and the 'boss' in the Netherlands and for this reason undermine the authority of the state. Hence, the policy goal of the government to prevent and fight criminal activities in practice also turned in what Gusfield (1963: 66-67) described as a conflict between the 'norm-proscribers' and the 'norm-violators', or put simply, into a conflict over who sets and enforces the rules in the Netherlands. What is more, OMGs are currently regarded by state agencies as 'not-normal', 'unwanted', 'wrong', and as a phenomenon for which there should be no place in a 'good' and 'normal' society.

Moral barriers

While the Dutch government aims to hinder OMG-related activities in order to make it 'more difficult' for OMG members to carry out 'undermining and criminal activities', I conclude that the barriers raised can also be characterized as 'moralizing practices' (Hunt, 2013). To give an example,

the prevention and closure of clubhouses is believed to frustrate in a practical and technical way the opportunity structure for crime in the same way as it reflects what and who is regarded by the government as 'good' and 'bad'. In contrast to what is suggested in the literature, this research reveals that the pre-crime society should not be understood as an amoral and technically operating society. Finally, this study contributes to the discussion whether raising moral barriers to OMGs indeed makes 'it harder for OMGs to commit undermining and criminal activities' (LIEC, 2016; LIEC, 2020).

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'High-risk' Dogs, Dog Fighting and Criminal Networks in the Netherlands

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Introduction

In the Netherlands, dogs that are able to seriously hurt humans and animals are considered to be 'high-risk' dogs. Reports on 'dog attacks' and biting incidents are being regularly reported in international and Dutch media, but biting attacks are not the only problem with regard to 'high-risk' dogs. Dog fighting, often connected to organised crime activities, is another serious issue, which was put on the agenda in Europe in the past years.

The phenomenon of fighting dogs is not new: historical sources trace it back to 2100 BCE, when kings armed their warriors with fighting dogs, either in their wars, or for entertainment (Fleig 1996). This phenomenon has survived until the present day, as shown by recent research in the United Kingdom and the United States (Harding & Nurse 2015).
Although dog fights are prohibited by Dutch law, they still take place in the Netherlands (Duijnker 2016). This article is based on our research on 'high-risk' dogs and dog fighting in the Netherlands in 2018 and 2019 (van Wijk et al. 2019). The study included interviews, analysis of police files and observations at various dog events. We focused on incidents related to 'high-risk' dogs, the profile of their owners, the consequences of these incidents for animal welfare and public health, and legal regulations as a possible response. In the present contribution, we focus on one specific research question: who are the offenders of dog fighting and to what extent is there a criminal structure in place with regard to dog fighting in the Netherlands? Here we present some of our findings.

Criminal networks

A so-called "Dog Mafia," a strictly hierarchical professional criminal organisation involved in dog fighting, does not exist in the Netherlands. There are fluid alliances formed by various international actors that find each other through social media or during dog shows. Criminal networks involved in the organisation form flexible partnerships in which 'brokers' play a central role due to their wide social contacts and 'know-how'. Even though the dog fighting takes place in clandestine settings, these networks often have strong relationships with legitimate dog activities. We estimated that there are about 400 fighting dogs in the Netherlands.

People who engage in dog fighting can be divided into different categories. The first category we found consisted of young men between the ages of 14 and 25 who are embedded in street life activities. They have their own rules and see it mainly as entertainment, where there is little to no money involved. In Rotterdam, one such group is involved in minor offences, including drug use and occasional violence. They organise dog fights in abandoned buildings in quiet areas or in public parks, which are easily accessible to pedestrians, but have limited vehicle access.

The second category includes 'hobbyists' who are interested in dog fighting at a higher level. These dog fights are small-scale and take place in houses, garages or outbuildings at the dog fighters' home. The Dutch hobbyists invite only a limited number of spectators and they all know each other well. The dog fights are seen by these Dutch hobbyists as a social activity and an opportunity for gambling. Members of various dog associations are usually present at these fights, which take place in various Dutch cities across the Netherlands, including Amsterdam, Lelystad, and Rotterdam. Some of these hobbyists are also involved in legitimate dog events, such as dog shows and weight pulling competitions for dogs.

The third category involves professionals, also known as 'dogmen'. These are a few middle-aged men in the Netherlands who have a total of 40-50 fighting dogs. The dog fights are well-organised, taking place at agreed times and shielded locations, and professional referees are invited. These 'dogmen' also bring their dogs to fight abroad. If they do not participate in the fighting, they fulfil other (paid) roles, for example, as referees, organisers, and promoters. Before the fight starts, they train their dogs intensively. This group considers dog fighting as a 'sport' with a long history of rules and traditions and not as an illegal activity. Therefore, they strongly advocate for its regulation.

The most commonly used dogs for dog fighting in the Netherlands are Pitbull and American Staffordshire types. These dogs are trained in preparation and tested for 'gameness.' Gameness is defined as the behavioural characteristic of 'not stopping' or 'finishing the task' despite the threat of substantive injury. Among fighting dogs, this is a dog that, even with broken and mutilated limbs, fights to the bitter end (Harding, 2012). Because organising and attending dog fights is prohibited in the Netherlands, organisers often move their activities abroad. A popular region is Eastern Europe, especially Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Dutch participants maintain their contacts with Eastern European colleagues to train, trade and organise events for their dogs. In addition to Eastern Europe, they also have good contacts with American pure-bred breeding clubs that provide Pitbulls and American Staffordshire Terriers with a pedigree.

Most organised dog fighting networks operate both nationally and internationally within private settings. For example, to prevent intervention by the police, participants and spectators are only informed shortly in advance where the dog fight will take place. They meet at a secret location, which can be in a shed on a remote industrial area, but also in homes. A few days before the fight, the locations are announced, mostly via Facebook and WhatsApp. The financial aspect of dog fighting in the Netherlands is arranged in advance. One of the police files shows that bets for dog fighting vary between € 500 and € 5,000, and that the fighters must pay this amount eight weeks in advance. The 'award' for the winner and the referee are financed by these payments. In addition to his travel and accommoda-

tion costs, the referee receives 10% of the bets, but sometimes he is paid a fixed fee of € 500.

A number of important actors in the dog fighting world are also involved in drug related crimes. In addition to drug trafficking, various types of hard drugs and soft drugs are traded during some of the dog fight events. Furthermore, various respondents, both dog fight participants and enforcers, report having been victims of harassment by dog fighters. The threats manifest themselves in different ways. Dog fighters intimidate them by indicating that they know which school their children attend, the colour of their bicycle, and details of their home address. There are also reports of threats on the street and through e-mails. Finally, police investigators pointed to the link with outlaw motor gangs: people from certain motor gangs were linked to the protection of dog fights, for example, through surveillance on the site where the activities take place. From this perspective, some dog fights are not an isolated phenomenon, but exist in a broader context of criminal behaviour.

Conclusion

This research shows that dog fighting is a relatively invisible, illegal activity in the Netherlands. The criminal networks are formed by various international actors and may be intertwined with upper world activities or other criminal activities such as drug crimes or violence. The dog fighters are not only driven by status or money; they also regard dog fighting as a sport and do it out of 'love' for the dogs. However, the low priority, the international character, and the closedness of the networks make it difficult for law enforcement in the Netherlands to act.

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