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ARTICLES

Drug Trafficking and Ethnic Minorities in Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

Popular media as well as law enforcement agencies throughout Europe routinely identify members of ethnic minorities, and recent migrants in particular, as responsible for selling a large proportion of the illegal drugs that are consumed in Europe. Examination of the existing and modest research literature, as well as a careful reading of the official data, does indeed indicate that certain sectors of the drug market are dominated by a small number of specific immigrant groups. Turkish and Albanian ethnic groups largely control the importation, high-level trafficking and open-air retailing of heroin; Colombian groups dominate the importation of cocaine. However, there are other major sectors of the drug market, notably those for cannabis and synthetic drugs, in which native populations seem to be more important. We offer an explanation for this configuration in terms of the advantages conferred on specific immigrant groups by tighter connections to source and transshipment countries as well as by the lesser ability of police to gain cooperation within those immigrants' communities in the consuming countries.

KEY WORDS

Drug Trafficking / Drugs / Ethnic Minorities / Europe.

Introduction

Popular media as well as law enforcement agencies throughout Europe routinely identify members of ethnic minorities, and recent migrants in

particular, as responsible for selling a large proportion of the illegal drugs that are consumed in Europe. This claim has both political and analytical significance. On the one hand, it provides a handy tool for nationalist parties, such as those of Jean Le Pen and Pia Kjærsgaard, to attack immigration as a threat to the welfare of Western Europe. On the other hand, if true, the claim poses an interesting challenge to researchers to explain why some immigrant groups are advantaged. The political has so far overshadowed the analytical significance of the claim and has, at least in Europe, discouraged serious research on the topic. As Frank Bovenkerk pointed out for the more general relationship between organized crime and ethnic minorities, the involvement of ethnic minorities in drug trafficking is a 'touchy subject' (2001: 124). In criminology, as in the liberal public sphere, the topic is usually avoided for fear of reinforcing the cheap and distorted ethnic stereotypes popularized by popular media. As Ruggiero and South put it, 'the vilification, persecution and victimization of various ethnic groups for real or imagined associations with drugs has been a strong constant of drug control history, since at least the late nineteenth century' (1995: 110). However, the relationship between ethnic minorities and crime (including drug trafficking but other crimes as well) is too important to be left solely to moral entrepreneurs. And that is why in this article we have set out to discuss the official and scientific information so far available in Europe on ethnic minorities' involvement in drug trafficking.

In tackling this topic we are picking up on a small but venerable literature most famously associated with the work of Daniel Bell in the 1950s in the United States. Bell (1953) was concerned with explaining the prominent, perhaps even dominant, role of immigrant groups in American organized crime. He saw this as a response to blocked opportunity, a hypothesis that has gained general acceptance without much formal testing. We also make no claim to formal testing but suggest that the hypothesis probably holds for drug trafficking in Western Europe. However, it turns out that immigrants are prominent in only certain aspects of the drug trade and we believe that we can offer an account for the distribution of their presence that is broadly consistent with the Bell hypothesis and gives it somewhat more nuance.

We also reflect a growing literature on crime and immigration (e.g. Tonry 1997). It has often been noted, at least since the 1931 report of the Wickersham Commission (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement 1931) in the United States, that first-generation immigrants have lower rates of serious criminal offending than the native-born population. The corollary, with less certainty, has been that the children of immigrants have higher rates of crime than the native population. The collection of essays in Tonry's 1997 volume show that, with some important exceptions,

these statements turn out to have some generality across western nations and over time. The exceptions are important and interesting for our particular purpose; for example, Tonry (1997: 23) notes that '[c]ultural differences between structurally similarly situated immigrants can result in sharply different crime patterns'. Although this article provides support for the hypothesized importance of cultural differences, it also points to the key relevance of opportunities, in our case the drug-trafficking opportunities available to particular immigrant groups, to explain some of those differences.

In the first three sections, we examine the strength of the claims of immigrant involvement, distinguishing among different types of illegal drugs, distribution levels and transaction settings. We then discuss the factors pushing members of some ethnic groups to engage in drug trafficking. We largely focus on the heroin market and thus on the two migrant groups dominating heroin import and wholesale distribution in Europe: Turkish nationals (including ethnic Kurds) and ethnic Albanians (whether from Albania, Kosovo or other neighbouring Balkan states). We also discuss the cocaine market, dominated by Colombian immigrants at the import level. In the final section, we draw some contrasts with markets for cannabis and synthetic drugs.

What criminal justice statistics and intelligence analyses tell us

Drug dealers belonging to ethnic minorities, particularly if they are recent migrants, represent a popular 'folk devil' (Cohen 1972) for targeting by tabloids as well as by more serious media and law enforcement agencies throughout Europe (e.g. Stehr 1998: 97–9). The tabloids mostly feature scandals based on individual cases. Law enforcement agencies are usually able to substantiate their claims with criminal justice statistics and/or intelligence analyses, albeit that these reflect political and professional priorities.

Statistics on foreigners' involvement in drug trafficking are collected and published in only a few European countries. Moreover, they provide an indication of ethnic minorities' role in the drug market only for those countries that have recently started to attract migration flows (such as Italy, Spain and the East European countries) or have very strict criteria for granting citizenship to foreign residents (such as Germany).¹ In these countries, criminal justice statistics indicate a striking overrepresentation of foreigners in drug dealing and trafficking. This overrepresentation, of course, should

¹ In nations where immigrants arrived a long time ago and citizenship is easy to obtain, many who are in effect immigrants may not be identified as foreign nationals.

not be considered to represent reality, because, as we show in the following pages, it also reflects to a certain extent selective enforcement.

In Italy, for example, foreigners represented 37.1 percent of all persons convicted of drug offences in 2003,² up from 10.2 percent in 1990 (ISTAT 2005: 137 and 182).³ Yet foreigners represented only 2.3 percent of the Italian population in 1990, rising to 4.1 percent in 2005 (ISTAT 2006). Similar statements hold for Germany. Throughout the 10 years from 1996 to 2005, foreigners represented a large fraction of drug-trafficking and importation arrestees (BKA 2006: 13–14). In 2005, for example, foreigners were charged in 44.5 percent of all reported cases for importing large drug amounts; in the earlier years the rate varied between 32 and 42 percent.⁴ Yet foreigners constitute less than 9 percent of the total German population (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland 2006).

Even in countries that do not differentiate between nationals and foreigners in criminal justice statistics (or where such distinctions are not indicative of ethnic minorities' involvement in drug trafficking), law enforcement agencies invariably report that some minorities dominate the import and wholesale distribution of plant-based illegal drugs, particularly heroin and cocaine. The 2006/7 *United Kingdom Threat Assessment of Serious Organised Crime*, for instance, states: 'Some significant stages of the main supply routes are effectively controlled by criminals of a particular ethnicity' (SOCA 2006: 27). Turkish traffickers are said to 'continue to dominate the supply of heroin to the UK, both within the UK itself and further upstream' (SOCA 2006: 27). The report goes on to say: 'All indications are that Colombian traffickers continue to dominate cocaine supply in Europe. Colombian traffickers have representatives in most countries where cocaine is transited' (SOCA 2006: 28).

The assessments made by SOCA, the United Kingdom's new agency for serious organized crime (OC), are similar to those of law enforcement agencies throughout Europe. The only major distinction concerns ethnic Albanians' growing role in importing and distributing multi-kilo shipments of heroin, competing with or supplementing Turkish groups.⁵ Europol presents

² Until February 2006, Italy had decriminalized possession of small amounts of prohibited drugs; the 2006 changes tightened the personal possession limits. Essentially, all arrests for drug offences before 2006 involved distribution-related activities.

³ The official data on foreigners convicted in European countries do not permit a distinction between immigrants (resident foreigners) and foreigners who are in the country only briefly, presumably for trafficking purposes.

⁴ When possession offences are included, the percentage of foreigners is smaller but still very high, varying between 20.0 and 26.1 percent (BKA 2006: 13–14).

⁵ See, e.g. DCSA (2006: 9–10) and Nett (2006: 146–7, 213–27), referring to the reports of the Swiss Federal Office for Police.

the different positions on the matter: 'Trafficking of heroin towards and within the EU continues to be dominated by Turkish OC groups. Ethnic Albanians OC groups have increased their role in the trafficking of heroin. They are reported to control up to 80 per cent of such trafficking in some of the Nordic countries and 40 per cent of heroin trafficking in other Western European countries, although they often rely on Turkish criminal organizations to supply them with heroin' (Europol 2005: 11). As far as cocaine is concerned, Europol (2005: 10) and the national law enforcement agencies also acknowledge Colombians' dominance at the import level. Like SOCA (2006: 28), other national law enforcement agencies also stress that cocaine primarily enters their countries through either Spain or the Netherlands, the two main European 'entry points' for this drug. Smuggling within Europe and national wholesale distribution are taken care of sometimes by Colombian groups themselves but, more frequently, by native-born criminals, such as members of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta mafia association in Italy; increasingly cocaine trafficking also includes members of a variety of other ethnic minority groups such as Nigerian and Albanian organized crime groups (BKA 2005: 29–30; DCSA 2006: 7–12, 35–42).

Criminal justice statistics and, even more, intelligence analyses reflect law enforcement agencies' work and certainly reflect their priorities and biases; they should not be taken at face value as unbiased indicators of real trends in illegal markets (Kitsuse and Cicourel 1963). Priorities in law enforcement are explicit in countries adopting the 'opportunity' principle of law enforcement, such as the Netherlands and all common law countries. The tolerant Dutch policy toward cannabis consumers, for example, long implied that low priority was given to prosecuting cannabis dealers as well, though enforcement against cannabis production and trafficking has become more stringent since the mid-1990s (PEO 1996: 19–22). In the United Kingdom, cannabis is not scheduled as a Class A drug and, as such, the control of both its consumption and trafficking receives less emphasis than the fight against more serious drugs (Home Office 2006). Consequently, 'white' Europeans predominantly engaging in such activities are, or were, much less targeted by law enforcement agencies than are heroin and cocaine traffickers. Thus the official reports, whether statistical or intelligence, are likely to overemphasize the segments of drug markets in which foreign nationals are more active.

Even in countries formally committed to the 'legality' principle, under which all offences known by the police must be investigated and prosecuted with the same intensity, police officers admit that they have priorities among drug offences. Germany is one of these 'legality' countries; in Frankfurt, however, local police officers report that they focus on hard drug trafficking and dealing in open drug settings, because these activities cause most harm

and social alarm (Schäfer and Paoli 2006: 202). As shown in greater detail below, most retail dealers on Frankfurt's open drug scene are foreigners, who thus have a greater chance of being arrested than their native-born colleagues working in closed settings.

In some European countries, there is evidence of disparities in criminal justice treatment. In Italy, for example, foreign migrants constitute a growing proportion of the people caught up in the criminal justice system as the process moves from the initial police report to conviction and imprisonment. In 2003, for example, foreigners represented 22 percent of defendants against whom criminal proceedings had been initiated, 40 percent of those convicted and 39 percent of those imprisoned; this pattern has been found at least since the mid-1990s (ISTAT 2005; see also Quassoli 1999).

Is this statistical overrepresentation of foreigners, along with the emphasis placed on some ethnic groups by intelligence analyses, reflective of the reality of drug markets in Europe? If so, what are the reasons for minorities' disproportionate presence in drug trafficking? We deal with the second question in the next section, but unfortunately the information on the first question remains weak, because no one has ever sought a systematic answer for the whole of Europe or even for the major European countries. Some insights can be gained from the few empirical studies focusing on drug markets in single cities or regions and their discussion of local and national official statistics and intelligence analyses. On the basis of this 'patchwork' material, it is clear that distinctions must be made between plant-based and synthetic drugs and among the different distribution levels of each market and the different settings of retail transactions.

Retail distribution: Open drug scene v. closed settings

Empirical research shows that, in most large cities in Western Europe, members of ethnic minorities and, specifically, recent immigrants do have a predominant share of dealing in open drug scenes in hard drugs (heroin, cocaine and now crack) and cannabis products. These minorities are, however, much less present in transactions in closed settings, where synthetic drugs (ecstasy and amphetamines) but also hashish and cocaine are exchanged and consumed.

The fieldwork carried out by Paoli in Frankfurt and Milan (Paoli 2000) a few years ago found that foreign dealers play a leading role in the street drug markets of both cities. Support for this conclusion was provided not only by police statistics but also by interviews with key witnesses, including drug users and dealers in Frankfurt (84) and Milan (60). In both cities, there was a rapid replacement process during the 1990s: the lowest

and most dangerous positions, which until 1990 were occupied by the most marginalized Italian/German drug users, were taken over by foreigners, especially recent immigrants who were applying for political asylum or did not have a residence permit (Paoli 2000: 58–61, 116–19). Similar changes have been noted in Basel, Bern and Zurich. As early as the mid-1990s Killias (1997) noted the predominance of immigrants at every level of the drug trade in Zurich; this has been confirmed by a more recent study in the three Swiss cities where German is spoken (Nett 2006: 215–27).

In many large West European cities North African and black African migrants often work as drug dealers in open settings, though other ethnic minorities are also present. Which groups are present depends on the context and on which countries account for most immigrants, which is often determined by the country's colonial past (Paoli, 2000: 58–61, 110–14; Mareso et al. 2003: 178; Lalam 2004: 376–8). In London, Jamaicans are also active (Ruggiero and South 1995: 116–19). In Amsterdam, Surinamese from the former Dutch colony have played a leading role in selling heroin since the 1970s and, more recently, crack in open settings (Blickman et al. 2003: 29). In some cities a clear pattern of ethnic succession has emerged. In Basel, Bern and Zurich, for example, ethnic Albanians have taken over both wholesale and retail heroin trafficking, succeeding Turkish nationals, who had a leading role up to the mid-1990s (Nett 2006: 215–27).

Despite the visibility of ethnic minority dealers, there is no doubt that in most cities native-born drug addicts continue to function as sellers (Blickmann et al. 2003: 29; Braun et al. 2001; Paoli 2000). Notwithstanding the lack of recent empirical studies, it is plausible that these native dealers still constitute a substantial proportion of street dealers in smaller cities and in areas that have not yet been heavily affected by migration flows.

Though most foreign street dealers aim to abandon the open drug scene and move to safer closed settings, existing studies show that closed-scene dealing is still largely carried out by indigenous people or by second- or third-generation immigrants, who were born and raised in a West European country (Paoli 2000: 61–4). In the next section we discuss in more detail the factors that explain this.

Wholesale trafficking: Plant-based v. synthetic drugs

Few empirical studies of upper-level drug dealing in Europe have been carried out independently of police and criminal justice sources. These essentially ethnographic studies (e.g. Bovenkerk 1995; Zaitch 2002) do not aim, nor are they able, to test law enforcement's assessments of the predominance of specific ethnic groups in the direct importation and wholesale trafficking of

heroin and cocaine. Nonetheless, many academic researchers accept the view of law enforcement agencies that Turkish and Albanian groups dominate the import and wholesale trade of heroin and Colombians dominate the import and wholesale trade of cocaine (e.g. Fijnaut et al. 1998: 74–87; Paoli 2000 for Italy and Germany; Pearson and Hobbs 2001 for the UK; Blickman et al. 2003 for the Netherlands; Kleemans 2007). At the same time, however, some scholars point to the under-researched role still played by native Europeans at both the middle market and wholesale/import levels (Hobbs 1998; Paoli 2000: 115–16; Pearson and Hobbs 2001: 27–30). Several national and international research studies also object to the excessive emphasis placed by some law enforcement agencies on the supposed ethnic homogeneity and drug specialization of trafficking groups. They stress instead that traffickers with diverse origins find it increasingly easy to work together and learn from each other (e.g. Kleemans and van de Bunt 1999; for a review, see Dorn et al. 2005).

Both law enforcement agencies and academics also believe that the intra-European importation of all drugs is frequently carried out by people not belonging to these ethnic groups, especially if smaller quantities are involved. The Frankfurt drug market, for example, was frequently supplied with heroin, cocaine, hashish and ecstasy imported from the Netherlands by different types of smugglers, including many ‘user-importers’ (Paoli 2000: 50–2; see also BKA 2005: 27–37 for all of Germany). Similar patterns link many Belgian and northern French cities to the Dutch market (e.g. Duprez and Kokoreff 1997).

Despite the predominance of Turkish/Albanian and Colombian importers for heroin and cocaine respectively, it would be a great mistake to consider these groups of traffickers as monolithic blocs. In his ethnographic study of Colombian traffickers in the Netherlands, Damian Zaitch (2002), for example, identified different types of Colombian smugglers and importers, stressing that they are very heterogeneous with respect to social background and prestige, vulnerability, infrastructure, organization and size of their enterprises and connections with Colombian exporters, non-Colombian importers and other Colombian immigrants.

Similar insights emerged from a study of Turkish heroin entrepreneurs active in Frankfurt, who had the lion’s share of heroin import and wholesale distribution at least until the mid-1990s. In Frankfurt, as presumably in other cities and countries, Turkish heroin entrepreneurs never made up a single trafficking organization; rather they formed a galaxy of independent dealing enterprises. Some of these were composed of just a few friends or associates. Many were family businesses, sometimes quite stable, that relied upon a large but changing pool of more recently arrived Turkish collaborators for the more menial and risky tasks. Additionally, there were a few

large-scale criminal organizations capable of organizing shipments of several hundred kilograms. Turkish traffickers in the market had varying roles. Depending on their financial and organizational capabilities, some Turkish importers sold exclusively to wholesale dealers, whereas others directly provided drugs to users and/or apartment dealers, selling drugs only part time to supplement their legitimate income (Paoli 2000: 65–6; see also Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz 2004 and Fijnaut et al. 1998: 86).

Law enforcement agencies and academics also agree that cannabis is the only plant-based drug for which no single nationality has emerged to play a dominant role in its import and wholesale trafficking throughout Europe. Intelligence reports and criminal justice statistics generally indicate that Morocco constitutes the primary foreign source for cannabis resin (or hashish), whereas Albania and, to a lesser extent, Jamaica and Colombia provide much smaller quantities of cannabis herb (or marijuana) (see, e.g. Europol 2005: 13). Moroccan trafficking enterprises are primarily responsible for bringing hashish into Spain, which is the natural European entry point, and also further smuggle it into several final consuming countries, such as the Netherlands, France and Italy, where Moroccan immigrant communities are settled (Tarrus 1995, 1997: 77–135; Fijnaut et al. 1998: 84–7; Paoli 2000: 114–16). However, their role is not comparable to that of the Turkish nationals and ethnic Albanians in the heroin market and Colombians in the cocaine market. Indigenous professional traffickers of several European nationalities compete with Moroccan traffickers in the import and distribution of non-European cannabis products (e.g. Paoli 2000: 110). In addition, many users also produce cannabis for their own consumption and for resale. Indoor producers are especially active in the Netherlands (Bovenkerk and Hogewind 2003), providing a large share of what is sold in coffee shops that have a *de facto* licence to sell (Niesink et al. 2005).

There is also unanimity that the production and trafficking of synthetic drugs are dominated by ‘indigenous groups’ (Europol 2005: 11), in particular those from the Netherlands and Belgium, where much of the production is concentrated.⁶ According to Blickman and his colleagues (2003: 58), for example, ‘the top level of the ecstasy business . . . is predominantly in the hands of native “white” Dutch individuals and groups’.

⁶ However, Dutch law enforcement agencies and independent researchers question the alleged overwhelming predominance of the Netherlands in world ecstasy production claimed by foreign, particularly US, agencies. According to Blickman’s estimates (2004), based on Dutch police data, as of 2003 Dutch production was sufficient for 32–42 percent of the global ecstasy demand, instead of the 80 percent previously claimed by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA 2001).

Why do particular ethnic minorities dominate some segments of the European drug supply?

Distinctions are again necessary to understand why some ethnic groups are disproportionately present in specific phases of drug trafficking. Some factors promoting ethnic minorities' involvement in the drug trade are common to all immigrant groups and market segments; some are instead specific to the import and wholesale trafficking of plant-based drugs and to the ethnic groups predominantly engaging in those activities (i.e. Turkish nationals and ethnic Albanians for heroin and Colombians for cocaine).

Low socioeconomic status and cultural marginalization

Whether they have recently arrived or not, many members of some ethnic minorities have a low social and economic position within their European host societies and are often not well integrated. This is true particularly for recent undocumented immigrants, who have few opportunities to find a job in the legal economy and, as a result of the restrictive policies adopted by most West European states, are de facto forced to find menial jobs in the informal and illegal economies. Given these factors and their limited social and cultural capital in host societies, it is no wonder that undocumented immigrants tend to occupy the lowest and most dangerous levels of the illegal drug distribution, predominantly working as street 'pushers'.

It is not just recent immigrants who are at risk. Long-established migrant communities also suffer from the combination of low socioeconomic status and cultural marginalization. At least until the mid-1990s, for example, unemployment rates among people from Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba, Turkey and Morocco who had lived for one or two generations in the Netherlands were three to four times higher than the Dutch average. Those who were employed were greatly overrepresented in the lowest job categories. Many of these immigrants continue to live in the worst neighbourhoods and in the poorest quality of housing. The schools in these neighbourhoods have fewer pupils who go on to complete secondary or higher education. Despite the integration efforts of Dutch and some other national governments, this situation perpetuates itself; even the children and grandchildren of immigrants have very poor chances in competing with their indigenous peers in the labour market (Fijnaut et al. 1998: 84–5). In the Netherlands as in France, in the United Kingdom as in Germany, some migrant communities now in effect form an underclass, in which the relative poverty and dearth of opportunities are passed from one generation to the next.

Whether or not one subscribes to anomie or strain theory, it is clear that immigrants' involvement in today's largest illegal market – like other forms of crime in the past – serves as a 'queer ladder of social mobility' (Bell 1953). The new generations of ethnic minorities, sometimes even before reaching European soil, are socialized to the same lifestyle and status symbols as native Europeans of the same generation. Lacking the means to fulfil their dreams, some of these first- or second-generation migrants enter the drug trade – at varying levels depending on their social, cultural and economic capital – hoping to earn large sums of money quickly (Colombo 1998).

Interestingly, the social, economic and cultural exclusion of many members of ethnic communities increasingly manifests itself in high rates of drug use, eventually undermining some of the advantages migrants gain from dealing in illegal commodities. Until a few years ago, drug use was believed to be low among immigrant groups that are involved in the drug trade. However, this undifferentiated assessment is increasingly being questioned in several European countries. Not only has cannabis use turned out to be widespread and socially accepted in many North African and Asian communities, but the official, low prevalence of heroin use has come to be seen as at least partially associated with the inability of European drug treatment centres and researchers to get into contact with migrant drug users (Pearson and Patel 1998; Fountain et al. 2002). Drug addiction and injecting are still highly stigmatized in most immigrant communities. However, an increasing number of Europe-born members of ethnic groups use cannabis, ecstasy and even hard drugs as a short-cut to gain acceptance by their white peers, and many first-generation migrants, particularly retail drug dealers, drift into drug consumption to forget their 'broken dreams' and the hard conditions in which they are obliged to live. A few of them reportedly start dealing to finance their own drug consumption, which may even pre-date their arrival in Europe (Palidda 1999; Paoli 2000: 81–2). As they themselves become drug addicts, migrant dealers almost paradoxically undermine the main comparative advantage they originally had vis-à-vis local user-dealers, thus paving the way for a new (ethnic?) substitution process. For example, Turkish migrants' retreat from the Swiss heroin retail market has been linked by Nett (2006: 215–27) not only to a series of successful law enforcement campaigns but also to deterioration in the Turkish dealers' ethnic cohesion and to segmentation following the spread of drug use and addiction.

Immigrant diasporas in consuming countries

A large immigrant diaspora in one or more West European countries is a common trait of the principal immigrant groups in the European drug

trade. In particular, the three groups involved in the import of either heroin or cocaine have large diasporas in at least one West European nation. Criminal networks comprise an extremely small part of the diasporas; however, precisely because of this, they are able to hide their illegal operations very effectively.

Europe is home to 5 million Turkish citizens (Stiftung Zentrum für Türkeistudien 2003).⁷ In the constant flow of communication and exchanges linking them to relatives and friends in their home country, heroin loads can be easily disguised. Similarly, the large Albanian diaspora has facilitated the rapid rise of ethnic Albanians in the trade of heroin and other illegal commodities in Europe. The 1.4 million ethnic Albanians living in Europe represent about a quarter of the total population of Albania and Kosovo (Arlacchi 2004: 6–7). Colombia, too, has experienced large-scale emigration since the early 1990s, following the upturn in political violence there, with roughly 10 percent of Colombians now living abroad. According to the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, almost half a million Colombians are estimated to live in Europe. Half of the Colombian ‘expats’ in Europe are resident in Spain, which helps explain why Spain accounts for most cocaine seizures in Europe (Bérubé 2005).

Generally speaking, immigrant communities provide substantial advantages to drug dealers in the consuming country as well as in their own country. At a practical level, even language can be a major asset; for example, few European police departments are able to conduct effective wire-taps or other electronic surveillances of Albanian dialects. Moreover, even when they are not involved in any illicit activity, ethnic communities are likely to provide less cooperation to the police and to tolerate and even hide drug trafficking by their own members. Although support may occasionally be the result of intimidation, this is usually not necessary. Most immigrant groups are so poorly integrated into their host societies they do not share the moral condemnation of the drug trade and the political prioritization of the fight against it. As long as drug addiction does not spread within the group, the drug trade is often considered at best with ambivalence, because many members of ethnic communities realize that it has become a source of wealth, prestige and respect for some of them (e.g. Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz 1998: 294–326; De Vries 2006: 173). Particularly in the Netherlands, many members of the Turkish, Moroccan and other ethnic communities fail to see what is morally wrong in engaging in drug dealing, given the fact that the host country in effect permits the use of certain drugs (Bovenkerk 2001: 121). Occasionally local ethnic communities become

⁷ This includes many born in Germany who cannot adopt German citizenship without losing their Turkish citizenship.

partially dependent on specific dealing groups for their income and prosperity; the community then provides extensive protection and support (Fijnaut et al. 1998: 85–7).

Strong family and locality ties

Illegal entrepreneurs from many immigrant communities, including the three dominating the import of either heroin or cocaine, profit from the strength of family ties and the spread of extended families within their communities. Although trafficking groups are often distinguished on the basis of their ethnicity, it is family ties that really keep drug trafficking groups together. Edward Kleemans (2007) rightly points out that ‘criminal cooperation . . . is built not so much on ethnicity as it is on social relationships among several individuals. People cooperate because they are family and they originate from the same village.’ Strong family and local ties ensure not only the cohesion of the trafficking group but also impermeability to police enquiries.

As already mentioned, many Turkish drug-trafficking enterprises importing drugs are family businesses, with members of the core family in charge of the core tasks and myriad expendable collaborators handling the most dangerous and less essential tasks. At the end of an extensive and well-documented enquiry into the Turkish mafia, Frank Bovenkerk and Yücel Yesilgöz (2004) reported that police investigations in various countries have produced evidence that entire Turkish families in Western Europe supplement their incomes by investing in the heroin-smuggling business. Even larger, more structured enterprises have at their core a blood family. The Baybasin clan, a Kurdish trafficking group that has come to play a leading role in the West European heroin market, has a core of about 40 people; since the early 1980s it has been led by Husseyin Baybasin with the support of his three bothers (Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz 1998: 257–93).

Ethnic Albanian drug-trafficking enterprises, although much newer, also rest upon – and disguise themselves in – the typical ethnic Albanian extended family, which may well have up to 60 core members and 150 surrounding relatives. In fact, according to ethnographers (e.g. Giordano 2002), many Albanian men can still identify relatives of the seventh to tenth degree and expect to be able to rely on them if they need support in either licit or illicit businesses. What sociologists call ‘Gemeinschaft’, the feeling of common belonging, is further enhanced by the recent experience of emigration and, in Kosovo, of the perceived oppression by the Serbian government. As Italian mafia groups did (and partially still do) in Sicily and Calabria, ethnic Albanian groups reflect – and profit from – the widespread phenomenon of a ‘double morality’, whereby family and community interests and values are put first and pursued even at the expense of the interests of the larger

collectivities and in defiance of state rules. Their willingness to take up arms to defend such interests and the resulting reputation for violence constitute further comparative advantages that have helped ethnic Albanian trafficking groups acquire significant slices of the European heroin market since the mid-1990s (Arsovska 2006).

Geographical proximity to production or to trafficking routes

For the groups dominating the import of either heroin or cocaine, the proximity to drug-producing areas and/or to major trafficking routes provides an important comparative advantage. Colombia has long been dominant in the processing of coca and the international smuggling of cocaine; since the mid-1990s it has also been the principal producer of coca leaf (UNODC 2006: 81–6). It is thus natural that Colombians are advantaged compared with members of other nationalities, and particularly Europeans, in buying cocaine in producing areas.

Neither Turkey nor Albania is a major illicit producer of opium, of which heroin is a derivative. Turkey did historically play an important role in the opium industry, being the principal producer for the European market (both legal and illegal) until the middle of the 20th century; a crackdown on the legal opium industry in the 1970s has apparently been effective in preventing diversion. Nonetheless, since the 1970s Turkey has been a major hub of the route for transporting heroin and other opiates from Afghanistan, which has now become the largest illicit opium producer and has long provided most of Europe's heroin.

Albania and Kosovo have become part of the so-called 'Balkan route' for heroin only more recently. The traditional Balkan route for heroin smuggling from Turkey to Western Europe went through Yugoslavia during the 1980s; before Yugoslavia's break-up, there was minimal spillover into the local societies because the heroin was mostly smuggled by cars or trucks, which did not stop in Yugoslavia.⁸ Since 1991, when the war among the Yugoslav republics began and sanctions were imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (consisting only of Serbia and Montenegro) between 1992 and 2003, two alternative routes emerged. The northern one went from Turkey through Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic to Western Europe, and the southern route directly involved Albania, with heroin imported through Kosovo or Macedonia. Despite the

⁸ Most trucks, moreover, travel under the TIR (Transport Internationale Routiers) Treaty; i.e. they are sealed vehicles allowed to travel between countries without border checks at each intermediate country.

poor road infrastructure of this second route, Albania and Kosovo remained major hubs for heroin trafficking even when the 'original' Balkan route was revived in 1995, at the end of the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. From Albania, heroin is smuggled via sea into Italy, which at its closest point is less than 41 sea miles away.

Immigrants from Colombia, Turkey, Albania or Kosovo have clear advantages in smuggling cocaine or heroin into Europe, because they have better knowledge of potential sellers and corruption opportunities. The Colombians may go directly to the producers, Turkish wholesale traffickers can buy heroin directly from Iranian smugglers, and ethnic Albanian traffickers usually get their supplies directly from the Turks. It is not accidental, for example, that many prominent Turkish traffickers were born in southeast Turkey, the major point of entry for heroin coming from Afghanistan via Iran. Corrupt officials may be much more at ease in dealing with traffickers whose families they can hold in mutual hostage. Nor are the exporters merely agents for wealthy nations, in sharp contrast to the international trade in refined agricultural products. Under Husseyin's leadership, the Baybasin trafficking group has become one of the largest suppliers of heroin for the West European market. According to Interpol, the Baybasin family has been involved in large-scale heroin smuggling in Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain. Since the late 1970s, the Baybasin clan has also manufactured heroin in concealed factories around its home town of Lice in southeast Turkey (Bovenkerk and Yesilgöz 1998: 257–88). The Colombian cocaine trade has spawned some spectacular figures, such as Pablo Escobar and Carlos Lehder, all of them of Colombian descent (Lee 1989). If there are major European (or US) exporters in countries close to production areas, they have managed to escape detection.

Despite the relevance of geography, the peripheral position of Albania and Kosovo on heroin trafficking routes, and the lack of any large-scale involvement of Afghan nationals in heroin exports to Europe, clearly show that geographical proximity to drug-producing areas and/or routes, though an important facilitating factor, is not sufficient in itself to explain which ethnic minorities have a prominent role in wholesale drug trafficking.

Lax enforcement in home countries

The dominant groups in the cocaine and heroin trade share another characteristic. Their home countries have long traditions of very lax enforcement of the global prohibition regime. Despite the strong state legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey has long had a very corrupt and ineffective drug-trafficking control system. Since the 1990s Albania and Kosovo have seen the near collapse of effective law enforcement, particularly related to

organized crime (Priest 2004; Paoli et al. 2008). The same can be said of Colombia for the derivatives of both coca and opium poppies.⁹ Our thesis is that lax enforcement represents a considerable advantage for Turkish, Albanian and Colombian enterprises vis-à-vis their European competitors, because the former keep their bases, leaders and military and economic resources in their safe national havens. Laxness in the enforcement of prohibition has a direct impact on the traffickers' risk assessments and modus operandi and on the size and organization of the firms they set up.

In countries with lax enforcement of prohibition, large trafficking enterprises may rest not only on clan or family affiliations but also on (quasi-) military structures, which mostly challenge the official government authority but can sometimes also be part of the government itself. According to some sources (International Media Corporation 2005; Arsovska 2007), the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has been involved directly in heroin trafficking and has extensively profited from the generous contributions of several Kosovo Albanian drug traffickers. Similarly, several Turkish cabinets and the Turkish military developed shady alliances with right-wing paramilitary groups and with certain Kurdish clans in their strenuous fight against left-wing protestors in the 1970s and, later, against Kurdish separatist groups. This allowed the groups to commit numerous crimes, including extortion, murder and the processing and smuggling of heroin into other European countries (Paoli et al. 2008).

Large drug-trafficking firms with roots in countries with lax prohibition enforcement are at an advantage vis-à-vis competitors based in countries with strict prohibition enforcement; the latter condition characterizes all West European states, with some variation. As a result of the constraints of illegality, Europe-based firms tend to be small and ephemeral illegal enterprises and have no political ambitions (Reuter 1985). Facing such disorganized competition, large illegal enterprises with foreign roots may even be able to exploit their sheer size and economic and political resources to gain control of significant market shares, though they still have to avoid becoming too visible and thus vulnerable to detection by the host law enforcement agencies. Evidence from several European countries backs this hypothesis, although additional research would be needed to test it conclusively.

⁹ Numerous Colombian specialists, ranging from Francisco Thoumi (2003) to Rens Lee (1989) and Ciro Krauthausen (1997), have linked the development of the Colombian drug industry and the consolidation of large and powerful drug-trafficking organizations (above all, the Medellín and Cali cartels) during the 1980s to Colombia's weak government and the poor legitimacy it has traditionally enjoyed in the population. We refer to these sources and particularly to Thoumi (2003) for a discussion of the Colombian case.

Learning from other drugs and groups

The focus so far has been on the heroin and cocaine markets, in both of which ethnic minorities play a key role in the import, wholesale and open-air retail trade. We turn now to cannabis and to synthetic drugs, in which ethnic minorities are much less prominent, because we may be able to learn about the basis of immigrants' role by contrasting the different markets.

Why are immigrant groups less prominent at the top levels of the cannabis and synthetic drugs markets? After all, the general factors that we have identified (e.g. low status and economic opportunity, relative impenetrability to law enforcement) remain relevant. Immigrant groups might be expected to be very active in the retail market. However, some other factors seem less relevant.

Consider the cannabis market. First, importers face competition from local producers. The value of more efficient importation that Moroccan groups might have is limited by the fact that wholesalers can buy from domestic growers. The available rents for efficient importation are modest. Second, cannabis importers face less law enforcement pressure than do importers of cocaine or heroin. This lowers the value of a less permeable organization. Third, the stigmatization of importing and trafficking activities among the indigenous population is much less than for cocaine or heroin; again the immigrant communities' advantage is correspondingly reduced at the same time as there is a larger pool of native Europeans willing to deal with cannabis than with heroin and cocaine. Fourth, Morocco is geographically and culturally closer to Europe than to either Afghanistan or Colombia. As the businesses of an Italian 'Ndrangheta family and a few other less prominent traffickers show (Paoli 2000: 110), it may be easier for native white Europeans to establish contacts with Moroccan traders close to production sites than is the case for heroin or cocaine.

The relevant factors for synthetic drugs may be different. The producers have command of at least moderate technical skills and may have prior connections to the chemical industry; Blickman (2004) offers the latter as one factor accounting for the dominant role of the Netherlands in ecstasy production. This may have been at least initially the main factor preventing immigrant groups from entering production. The current saturation of the market, as shown by the sharp decline in ecstasy prices, probably discourages migrants' entry into the industry as much as it has slowed the spread of ecstasy production outside the Benelux countries.

Ethnic minorities may also be disadvantaged at the retail end. Ecstasy is seen by many users and retailers as a thoroughly benign substance; not only is there little sense of stigma in the youth communities where the drug is used,

but some sellers are enthusiasts and have legitimate jobs and middle-class status. Most of them are not well connected to the broader criminal underworld and may prefer to avoid dealing with ethnic gangs that have tough reputations. Even if such dealers account for a minority of the market, they reduce the profitability of the trade and the advantage of the immigrant trafficking groups.

We can also learn something from examining the role of West African (particularly Nigerian) immigrants in cocaine and heroin markets. Nigeria is an interesting anomaly, a nation that seems to have little potential role in the international drug trade. It is isolated from all of the principal producer or consumer countries and lacks a significant base of traditional domestic production or consumption. Nonetheless, Nigerian traffickers played a considerable role in the shipping of heroin to Europe during the 1990s (as they still do in the United States); recently these traffickers have even entered the cocaine business, though the production centres are even more remote from their home country (BKA 2005: 30; Europol 2005: 10). Note that it is Nigerians as an immigrant group rather than Nigeria as a nation that is important.

The explanation is probably to be found in a complex of factors. Nigerians are highly entrepreneurial, have been misruled by corrupt governments for a long time and have large overseas populations, and Nigeria has a weak civil society, very low domestic wages and moderately good commercial links to the rest of the world. Thus it is relatively easy to buy protection for transactions in Nigerian airports (corruption and a weak governmental tradition), to establish connections in both the source and consumption nations (large overseas populations) and to use existing commercial transportation;¹⁰ smuggling labour is cheap (low domestic wages) and the entrepreneurial tradition produces many competent and enthusiastic smuggling organizers. Nigeria is not unique in most of these dimensions (except for its size and its connections with the rest of the world) and there is perhaps an accidental quality to its initiation into the trade, but these other factors plausibly play a major role.

The negligible role of Iranian nationals in the European heroin market is also informative. Iran is the initial transshipment country for a large proportion of Afghanistan's heroin destined for Europe. Almost all the heroin going through Turkey passes through Iran. There is a large Iranian diaspora in Europe,¹¹ yet Iranians are hardly mentioned in connection with heroin trafficking in Europe. We hypothesize that the relatively high education

¹⁰ Note that, as expected, the drugs travel with passengers rather than in cargo, since Nigerian exports (apart from oil) are modest.

¹¹ An estimated 5 million Iranians are resident in North America and Western Europe (Asgharzadeh 2004: 130–50).

of Iranian immigrants to Europe may be the critical factor here; they are, as a population, better integrated both economically and socially than are Turks, Albanians or Nigerians.

Finally we consider indoor markets, in which immigrant groups are a minor presence. Unlike recent immigrants, local people possess the 'social and cultural capitals' (Bourdieu 1986) necessary to carry out closed-scene deals. They have a network of friends and acquaintances, among whom they can at least initially sell drugs. They know the local language and social rules, which makes them appear inconspicuous and avoid police detection. They visit the cafés, bars and public places where potential customers congregate, as part of their routine activities. Thanks to these skills, which can be acquired only slowly through socialization, local people have been able to retain the lion's share of retail and middle drug dealing in private settings. It is not accidental that the only ethnic minority dealers in indoor markets are second- or third-generation migrants, who are comparatively well integrated in European societies and have learned to become inconspicuous (e.g. Schoers 1998; Paoli 2000: 61–4). Surveys of drug users and ad hoc studies also show the low level of criminal professionalization of most closed-setting retail dealers: users report acquiring cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis (with the partial exception of the Netherlands, where coffee shops are the usual source) most frequently from friends, relatives and acquaintances; if they use dealers, the latter are deeply embedded in the users' life-worlds (Bieleman et al. 1993; Ward and Pearson 1997; Colombié et al. 2000; Blickman et al. 2003; Barruti et al. 2003; Mareso et al. 2003; Kemmesies 2004).

Conclusions

We began this article by noting that the role of immigrants in organized crime has been a staple of American research for many years. This surely reflects the greater role of immigration in the demography of the United States. Except for the period 1915–1965, when there were tight restrictions on who could enter the USA for immigration purposes, there has been a large flow of immigrants, frequently from nations with different languages, cultures and customs from the resident population. The Irish immigrants who arrived in the middle of the 19th century were greeted with the same ambivalence, often hostility, that now confronts many Hispanic immigrants from the late 20th and into early 21st century. Facing discrimination, at least in the first and second generations, successive waves of immigrant groups became a prominent presence in American organized crime. The mafia of Italian descent in the mid-20th century is merely the most famous of these manifestations.

These organized crime groups seem in general to be of declining importance and have had a minor role in the drug trade since the expansion of the cocaine market in the 1980s (Reuter 1995). However, immigrant populations have been very prominent in the US drug trade over the past 30 years. Some of the specific immigrant groups involved have been from the countries that produce most of the drugs for the US market, namely Colombia (cocaine and heroin) and Mexico (cannabis, heroin and methamphetamines). Chinese-origin groups have also been prominent in the heroin trade, probably drawing on established connections with traffickers from the Golden Triangle region. Other immigrant groups with only weak ties to production areas, including those from Central America and the Caribbean, have also played a role in the domestic distribution of cocaine. Immigrant groups are less important in the cannabis and synthetic trades in the USA, just as in Europe. Indeed, the patterns and explanations are probably very similar to those we note in Europe.

Immigration involving cultures very different from their own is a relatively new phenomenon for many European nations. For example, foreign residents in Sweden until the late 20th century were mostly Finns. They might have brought some differences in culture and faced some discrimination, but the strains were hardly comparable to those associated with the arrival of the Asian and East European immigrant groups in the last 25 years. Only in a few countries (France, Germany and the United Kingdom being most prominent) has such immigration been a multi-generational phenomenon. Thus it is hardly surprising that the European criminological literature has started only recently to devote attention to this subject.

Consistent with popular assumptions, we find that some ethnic groups are disproportionately present in some segments of the drug markets. In particular, they dominate the import and high-level wholesale trade of heroin and cocaine. They also play a major role at the retail level in the open drug setting, which is the most visible and attracts most attention by law enforcement agencies. Our discussion, however, also shows that native 'white' Europeans not only constitute the demand of European drug markets but also dominate some segments of the drug supply, such as the retail sale of all illegal drugs in private settings and the production and wholesale distribution of synthetic drugs. Moreover, they are also not entirely absent from the segments predominantly occupied by members of ethnic minorities.

In the course of our analysis, we have also identified the different factors inducing members of different minority groups to enter different stages of the drug trade. Our analysis may contribute to the general literature on crime and immigration in that it supports the claimed relevance of cultural differences at the same time as it draws attention to the key role played by opportunities. As we have shown in this article, cultural differences,

understood in terms of both the different cultural attitudes of various minorities and different perceptions of the various illegal drugs, appear to be key factors in explaining the disproportionate involvement of particular ethnic groups in certain sectors of the drug market, the marginal position of other groups and the native population's dominant position in the production and distribution of cannabis and synthetic drugs. However, our analysis also points to the crucial relevance of opportunities, in our case the drug-trafficking opportunities available to particular immigrant groups, in explaining ethnic groups' different patterns of involvement in drug trafficking, thus linking to the general crime opportunity theory (Felson and Clarke 1998).

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