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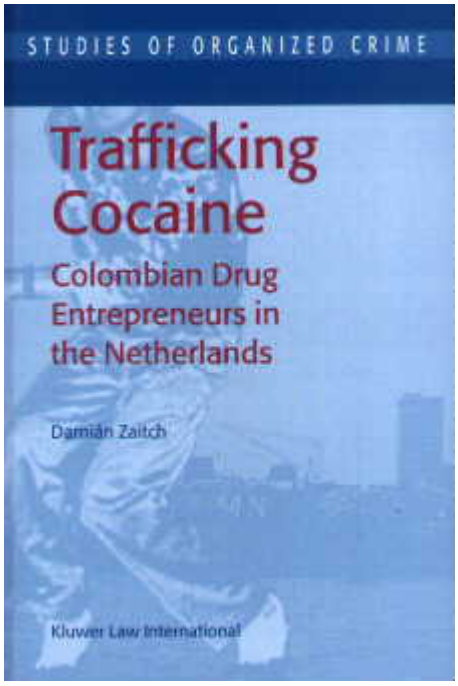
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A WELL-RESEARCHED STUDY

Trafficking Cocaine - Colombian Drug Entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, 1st Edition, *by* Damián Zaitch. Hard Bound, 6.5" x 9.5".
Kluwer Law International, P.O. Box 85889, 2508 CN The Hague, The Netherlands. Publication Date July 2002, 340 pp., ISBN 90-411-1882-9. Price EUR 98.00 / USD 90.00 / GBP 62.00

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The book under review is a study of organized crime relating to the international cocaine trade, and addresses several questions concerning the involvement of Colombians. Whenever one refers to cocaine, images of Colombian drug lords and cocaine cartels come to mind, the result of media hype. As this book shows, much of what we think we know about cocaine smuggling is the outcome of Western (especially American) portrayal of Colombian cocaine exporters as members of highly structured groups, as discrete from mainstream society, as powerful political brokers, or as ruling monopolist enterprises. This "cartel model" further emphasizes sophisticated coordination, central operational control, strict labour division, and advanced organizational skills. But in reality, as this book reveals, the smugglers involved who are referred to as "traquetos," mainly engage in short-lived business operations that involve legal and illegal arrangements in which protagonists and transactions are linked in flexible and changing forms. In contrast to popular criminological notions that try to delimit Colombian criminal organizations or networks, the author of this remarkable book, Damian Zaitch suggests that cocaine ventures involve a wide array of enterprises and people, including bonafide companies, law-abiding relatives or friends, and an army of helpers and service providers who are as essential to the business, as they are disconnected from it. In fact, traquetos neither perform mainly as powerbrokers, nor are their relationships with overseas compatriots always smoothly coordinated.

...(in this book) ..there are a number of useful tables, figures, and illustrations, and even a map of Colombia. An extensive bibliography and a glossary of common terms used by street dealers and smugglers have also been included. All in all, the book represents a well-researched study grounded in practicalities that should be of great value to criminologists, social scientists, toxicologists, drug researchers, and all those involved in dealing with organized crime...

The origin of the term "traqueto" is interesting. In the early days the term was applied only to trusted individuals sent by cocaine "exporters" to the US to organize the distribution channels. But today, it is the name given to every Colombian cocaine entrepreneur working abroad, and includes importers as well as distributors. The study on which this book is based, is the outcome of five years of ethnographic fieldwork with these traquetos in the Netherlands and Colombia. By spending long hours in the streets, salsa bars, and prisons, the author has delved deep into the shady world of the traquetos, exploring the reasons for their involvement in illicit activities, the exact nature of their work, the manner in which they relate to one another, and the way they organize their businesses. The result is a highly illuminating and fascinating study that explodes common myths and clichés on "cartels," and instead highlights the complex, flexible, and heterogenous nature of cocaine enterprises. The book however restricts itself mainly to Colombian traquetos in the Netherlands, and the people working for them.

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The author's itinerary begins in Colombia, which produces and exports 75% of all cocaine consumed worldwide, and is invariably identified as the source of all the problems around the international cocaine trade. Following some introductory remarks in Chapter I, the historical origins of the cocaine business in Columbia are traced in Chapter II. The author examines the competitive advantages of that country which were responsible for its assumption of a leading role in the global cocaine market. Chapter III deals with the European scenario as far as cocaine trade is concerned, and the position of the Netherlands within it. In both these chapters the author has emphasized historical developments, the business social structure, and the ways in which this illegal market is embedded in broader social, economical, and political conditions. Chapter IV

presents the main socio-economic characteristics of Colombian immigrants living in the Netherlands, and examines the reasons for their involvement in the cocaine business. Chapters V and VI reveal the ways in which a variety of Colombians from different backgrounds are deeply entrenched in cocaine smuggling, import, distribution, and retail sale of cocaine in the Netherlands. Chapter VII focuses on two specific groups of Colombians who are inextricably linked to the illegal trade: prostitutes and illegal immigrants. Chapter VIII examines the specific internal relations between Colombian cocaine entrepreneurs and their employees, while Chapter IX analyses the role of violence, secrecy, and trust in the cocaine business.

Every chapter begins with an appropriate quote, and is written in clear and lucid style. The headings used for the various sections are uniquely conceived ("White shipments, sour transactions," "With a cross on the forehead," "Crossing and crowning," and so on).

The last chapter (Chapter X) summarizes the study, in which conclusions are put forth in a cogent manner. There are a number of useful tables, figures, and illustrations, and even a map of Colombia. An extensive bibliography and a glossary of common terms used by street dealers and smugglers have also been included. All in all, the book represents a well-researched study grounded in practicalities that should be of great value to criminologists, social scientists, toxicologists, drug researchers, and all those involved in dealing with organized crime.

-V.V.Pillay



Dr. Pillay is one of the foremost exponents of toxicology in the Asian continent. He has authored two books on toxicology, besides a Comprehensive textbook on Forensic Medicine. His books on toxicology include the bestseller "Pocketbook of Pesticide Poisoning for physicians".

He is currently the Chief of Poison Control Centre, at the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Cochin - 682 026. He is the Chief Reviewer of Best Toxicology Books.

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