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**THE ROLE OF CRIMINAL DIASPORAS IN DRUG
TRAFFICKING:
MEXICO AND COLOMBIA**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is the sole work of the author, and has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree; all quotations and sources of information have been acknowledged.

I confirm that my research did not require ethical approval.

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ABSTRACT

Drug trafficking is a growing security problem in Latin America, specifically for Mexico and Colombia. This paper aims to identify the role of the Mexican and Colombian ‘criminal diasporas’ in the four different phases of drug trafficking: cultivation, production, transit and distribution. This paper introduces the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ to unpack the connection between Mexican and Colombian criminal organisations and their respective migrants overseas involved in the narcotics trade. The notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ is useful in these case studies because it highlights the ethnic, identity and diasporic elements that characterise the migrant populations involved in Mexican and Colombian drug trade.

The paper concludes that the role of the diasporic members in the whole process depends on their legal status, level of education and hierarchical status inside their respective drug trafficking organisation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUC *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or United Self- Defence Forces of Colombia

DTOs Drug Trafficking Organisations

ELN *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* or National Liberation Army

FARC *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation

LTTE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

NGIC National Gang Intelligence Centre

SAIA *Servicio de Análisis e Información de Antinarcoótico* or the Service of Analysis and Information of Anti-narcotics

INTRODUCTION

Drug trafficking is a growing security problem in Latin America, specifically for the major producers of narcotics in the region: Mexico and Colombia (UNODC, 2014). This paper aims to identify the role of the Mexican and Colombian ‘criminal diasporas’ in the four different phases of drug trafficking: cultivation, production, transit and distribution. This paper introduces the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ to understand the connection between national criminal organisations and their migrants overseas involved in the narcotics trade. The notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ highlights the ethnic, identity and diasporic elements that characterise the migrant populations involved in drug trafficking.

The main purpose of this paper is to answer to the following questions:

- Why is the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ useful to understand the dynamics and processes of drug trafficking in the American region?
- Who are the members of the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas?
- Why can we argue that members of the criminal transnational organisations form a diasporic community?
- What is the role of the criminal diasporas in the drug trafficking process?
- What are the differences and similarities between the Mexican and the Colombian criminal diasporas?

In order to answer to these questions, this paper is organised into five chapters. The first chapter presents the existent literature of diaspora studies, notions and characteristics. In addition, this section frames the analysis and defines the terminology used in this research. This chapter also introduces the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ as a tool for understanding the role of the members of the Mexican and Colombian diaspora involved in drug trafficking.

The second chapter presents an overview of drug trafficking in Mexico and in Colombia. After introducing the context and actors involved in drug trafficking in both countries, it is argued that Mexican and Colombian drug trafficking organisations have developed strong ties with the ‘criminal diaspora’ in order to guarantee the production, cultivation, transport and distribution of their narcotics. In addition, this section justifies the comparison between the Mexican and Colombian criminal diaspora. These cases are comparable for three reasons: first, because of the inability of both states to guarantee the security and monopoly of force in their respective territory; second, because both DTOs operate in similar ways; and third because both DTOs have formed international alliances to sustain their criminal activities.

The third chapter explores the relation between drug trafficking organisations and criminal diasporas. It is argued that DTOs assign different roles to the members of their criminal diaspora according to their dwelling, capacity of mobilisation and status in the organisation. Furthermore, this chapter argues that both Mexican and Colombian DTOs have developed strong links with members of the ‘criminal diasporas’ to ensure access to intelligence¹, their security and subsistence.

The fourth chapter unpacks the role of the criminal diaspora in the cultivation and processing of narcotics. In this section, it is argued that Mexican and Colombian DTOs are expanding their activities to their neighbouring countries as a result of the restrictive laws against drug production and, import of chemicals required for processing and trafficking. In addition, it is demonstrated that Mexican and Colombian DTOs tend to subcontract croppers in other

¹ According to the FBI, intelligence refers to both the individual organisations that shape raw data into a finished intelligence product for the benefit of decision makers and the larger community of these organisations.

countries but hire members of their respective criminal diasporas to manage the plantations and laboratories.

Finally, the fifth chapter explores the role of the criminal diaspora in the transportation and distribution phases of the drug trafficking process. This section concludes that both the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas are developing routes for trafficking narcotics from South America to the United States. However, it is noted that the Mexican criminal diaspora has a predominant role in the distribution of narcotics due to US-gangs and the evolution of trade routes.

This research is based on the reports of national and international organisations which focus on security and drug trafficking issues such as the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, the National Gang Intelligence Centre and Woodrow Wilson Institute. Furthermore, in order to complement the analysis and present specific cases of diasporic criminals actively involved in drug trafficking, information published in newspapers, and magazines specialised in organised crime such as *InSightCrime*, *Stratfor* and *Nexos* will be presented. Finally, this dissertation integrates several ethnographic studies which look at the mechanics and dynamics of drug trafficking in Mexico and Colombia. The incorporation of qualitative information extracted from newspapers and specialist magazines is relevant to provide specific cases where members of the criminal diasporas penetrate the transnational criminal networks.

The objective is to present a clear analysis of the role of the members of the Colombian and Mexican criminal diasporas in drug trafficking. However, it is important to note that due to recent changes in anti-drug policies and the diversification of drug routes, the Mexican drug trafficking organisations are the protagonist actors in the narcotic trade. Therefore, the analysis primarily focuses on the Mexican case.

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUALISATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to fully understand the role of diasporas in drug trafficking and their involvement in each phase of the trade, it is necessary to define different concepts and notions that will frame this analysis. This chapter presents the key academic debates on diasporas involved in conflict and development. The current scholarship on diasporas does not address specifically the engagement and role of diasporic communities in drug trafficking. However, this chapter demonstrates that transnational criminal networks constitute ‘criminal diasporas’. In sum, it is argued that ethnic and diasporic elements facilitate the cooperation between national and transnational criminals. Finally, the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ is introduced as the primary framework to study the role of the Mexican and Colombian diasporas in the drug trade.

1. 1. Defining the ‘diaspora’

The use of the term ‘diaspora’ has proliferated in the last two decades (Brubaker, 2005). Academics have debated on how to distinguish a community of migrants, sojourners or travellers, from migrant communities that constitute a diaspora attached to their homeland. In fact, the scholarship on diaspora studies offers a big range of options to define the characteristics and elements of a diasporic community.

According to Cohen (2008) the classical use of the term ‘diaspora’ was mainly applied to the study of the Jewish community. The Jewish experience connotes the scattering resulting from a cataclysmic event that traumatised the whole group, thereby creating ‘a central historical experience of victimhood at the hand of a cruel oppressor (Cohen, 2008: 1).’ Nevertheless, the recent social and economic transformations, transnational practices and the recognised

attachment of migrant communities to their homelands have modified the conceptualisation of the term 'diaspora'.

The term 'diaspora' is no longer a metaphoric designation used to describe different categories of 'expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities (Safran, 1991).' Nowadays, scholars recognise the de-territorialisation of identities and individuals constructing and deconstructing new socio-economic and political transnational spaces.

Robin Cohen (2008) developed a typology to study diasporas based on two elements: dispersal and expansion. On the one hand, the dispersal element takes into consideration the various mechanisms and reasons for displacement and migration. On the other hand, the expansion element emphasises the purposes of migratory flows and focuses specifically on diasporas' formation (Cohen, 2008).

Considering these two elements as the core basis of his typology, Cohen identifies five different types of diasporas. The first are 'victim diasporas', which involve persecution and forcible evacuation from their homeland (Cohen, 2008). This type of diaspora often refers to the Jewish experience, however nowadays Africans, Armenians, Irish and Palestinians are also considered victim diasporas (Mohan, 2002). The second category refers to 'imperial diasporas', which involve the 'proactive colonisation of foreign land to be used as resource bases to service the imperial home (Mohan, 2002: 84).' These diasporas include the Ancient Greeks, British, French, Dutch and Russians. The third type of diasporas identified by Cohen (2008) considers the cultural elements and styles that transcend national boundaries and territories. 'Cultural diasporas' are communities united in their exile by a mutual de-territorialised identity, for instance the Caribbean and Indian diasporas (Cohen, 2008 and Mohan, 2002). The fourth group

encompasses ‘labour diasporas’, identified as groups migrating to have access to better job opportunities than those available in their homelands. For example, the Indian, Italian, Turkish and Chinese diasporas (Cohen, 2008). Finally, the fifth category comprises ‘trade diasporas’, which involve a group of dispersed people who serve one or more markets in places other than their homeland (Mohan, 2002: 84). Members of trade diasporas are usually commuting between their home and their hostland therefore they never really settle abroad, remaining sojourners. Furthermore, they tend to congregate with traders from their place of origin in their host societies and (Mohan, 2002). Examples of this type of diasporas include the Venetians, Lebanese and Chinese (Cohen, 2008).

The current consensus to designate diasporas includes three elements: the first is dispersion in space to two or more locations; the second, orientation towards a homeland; and the third, boundary maintenance over time (Gamlen, 2011 and Brubaker, 2005). In addition, there are some relevant characteristics pointed out by Gamlen: ‘diasporas include temporary or transnational migrants who hold some or other status and diasporas include longer term but still first-generation emigrants settled in another country (Gamlen, 2011: 267).’ In other words, both pioneer migrants and its descendants compose diasporas as long as they identify themselves as diasporic members and maintain ties with their homeland.

Essentially, diasporas are heterogeneous subgroups, which share one thing in common: ‘a complex set of attachments to a perceived place of origin in which it is not resident (Bush, 2011).’ The core particularity of diasporic members is their uninterrupted interaction with their homeland through different types of social, economic, political and cultural networks. In fact, ‘diaspora engagement’ is the term that has been used to study the different channels of interaction between diasporic members and members of their homeland societies.

According to Gamlen, ‘diaspora engagement’ can refer to the bottom-up, grass-roots trans-local activities of migrants and their associations (2011: 268). In this sense, diasporas are contextualised as active transnational agents participating in the social, economic and political life of their home country.

Diaspora engagement has become a notion not only used by academics but also by international organisations, non-governmental organisations, policy makers and governmental offices. In general, international institutions have linked diaspora engagement with development (Gamlen, 2011). Accordingly, diasporic communities contribute to the economic acceleration and social well-being of their localities back home (Mohan, 2002).

Overall, the scholarship looking at the relation between diasporas and development underline the positive effect that diasporic communities have in their homeland. However, some scholars have been sceptical about the exclusive positive impact and benefits of diasporic engagement, specifically in countries where there is an ongoing conflict. In fact, after analysing the role of diasporas in conflict zones, it has been concluded that they can either be peace-wreckers, peacemakers or decide to play neither role when their homeland is in a critical situation (Smith, 2007). In general, the literature on diasporas in conflict zones emphasise a negative role of diasporic members financing and perpetuating the conflict (Smith, 2007).

1. 2. Diasporas in conflict

The conceptualisation of diasporic communities as ‘unaccountable and irresponsible long distance nationalists’ once established by Anderson in 1998 was fuelled and sustained by the World Bank’s econometric work (Turner, 2011:179). Collier and Hoeffler (2000) published the most important work conceptualising diasporas as fundamentally negative during conflict (Koser, 2007). In a World Bank Report, they argue that diasporas are usually much richer than

the population in their homeland and that they tend to be more “grievance-conscious” than the populations from which they originate. As a result, they argue that diasporas can on the one hand spark conflict, and on the other hand, represent a significant risk factor in the de-escalation and termination of the conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000). Using specific case studies and developing an econometric model, they conclude that countries with large diaspora populations living abroad are six times more likely to experience a recrudescence of violence (Collier and Hoeffler, 2000).

Most relevant literature that portrays diasporas as negative actors, underlines their nationalistic character, which encourages them to be directly engaged in the conflict and assist rebels. Kaldor argues that direct assistance from the diaspora living abroad includes material assistance, arms and money (2012: 109). Accordingly, the most illustrative cases of long-distance nationalists who directly support violent conflict from afar are the Jewish American right wing extremists, the Irish-American supporters of the Irish Republican Army, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) settled in England, Canada and Norway, and the Kurds throughout Europe (Glick Schiller, 2005: 571).

Perhaps the best-documented case study of diasporic engagement in conflict zones are the Tamil communities who finance the political and military struggle carried out by the LTTE (Williams and Picarelli: 2005). The LTTE established cells in 38 countries to obtain support from Tamil communities through either voluntary contributions or intimidation and extortion (Williams and Picarelli, 2005:133).

The examples previously discussed reveal that the economic resources sent by diasporas to their homeland in war can be used to fuel and sustain the ongoing conflict. In fact, Lyons points out (2004, in Koser 2007) that due to their economic engagement, diasporas can become a

factor that complicates the processes of conflict resolution. However, it is important to note that diasporas do not engage with conflict societies exclusively through economic networks. On occasion, diasporas organise themselves to achieve political goals to retard or influence the de-escalation or termination of the conflict. As pointed out by Bush (2011), the political implications of diasporic engagement include the manipulation or lobbying of the hostland politicians and officers for example in the cases of Croatia, Armenia and Kurdistan (Bush, 2011:198).

Instead of unpacking the diasporic engagement in relation to their economic, military or political nature, Ali and Koser (2002) argue that diasporas can adopt direct or indirect strategies to change their home societies. On the one hand, they argue that direct strategies might include economic or military support, while on the other hand, indirect strategies might include working or lobbying through political institutions (Ali and Koser: 2002).

Conversely, for the study of diasporic engagement in conflict zones, the distinction between indirect and direct strategies is limited. Firstly, the distinction proposed by Ali and Koser (2002) assumes that the members of the diaspora have full agency and power to determine in which sphere they want to intervene, either economic, political or military. Secondly, it presents a misguided dichotomy, which assumes that diasporas do not engage directly in political activities. On the contrary, it portrays diasporic political organisation as an indirect mechanism of transformation. Thirdly, this dichotomy diminishes the complexity of the transnational exchanges during conflict as well as the state of emergency, which characterises conflict zones.

The literature influenced by Collier's findings portrays diasporas as almost exclusively destructive actors fuelling the escalation of war. Most attention and studies of migrant

communities in conflict zones focus on the role of diasporas fomenting violence, financing weapons and inciting insurgency (Van Hear, 2011; Smith, 2007). However, Van Hear (2011) points out that in the last decade, there has been a general shift in the conceptualisation of diasporas as negative, bellicose and problematic agents. Overall, a more nuanced and critical view of the role of diasporas during conflict zones has been introduced in the scholarship more recently.

For instance, Berdal (2005) argues that in conflict zones, where international aid is scarce, the transfer of funds can maintain marginalised groups. As a result, diasporic communities perform vital humanitarian functions to ensure access to aid to the most deprived groups back in their home societies. Arguing that diasporas involved in conflict can foment recovery, security and development, Van Hear (2011) suggests a typology to study the impact of economic transfers from abroad in conflict contexts.

Diaspora transfers can be disaggregated into three different categories (Van Hear, 2011). First, the ‘transfers for survival’, which are sent to get people out of the area of immediate danger. These type of transfers are necessary for poorer households to sustain life during the escalation and even during the de-escalation of the conflict. The second category identified by Van Hear (2011) are the ‘transfers for coping’. He argues that acute crisis are the exception rather than the rule, thus, these financial transfers help to meet the daily needs of the deprived groups. In addition, he explains that transfers for coping may again assist people to get out of danger (Van Hear, 2011: 98). Finally, the third rubric developed by Van Hear encompasses the ‘transfers for accumulation’. During the ceasefires and peace processes, the resources sent by the diasporic members might be used to reconstruct the infrastructure in the aftermath of the conflict.

The typology developed by Van Hear (2011) is useful to understand to a certain extent the dynamics of conflicts and their impact on the expenditure of remittances in conflict zones. However, the distinction between ‘transfers for survival’ and ‘transfers for coping’ remains very subtle. In fact, the expenses made in torn-war societies during these two rubrics overlap. In addition, the ‘transfers for accumulation’ rubric suggests that remittances are invested in the development of infrastructure (Van Hear, 2011: 28). There are misleading processes suggested by the label chosen by Van Hear for this category. ‘Accumulation’ refers to a process of revenue conglomeration and storage. As such, the accumulation process suggests that there is a pre-accumulation process where all the basic needs are covered and guaranteed. Nevertheless, Van Hear (2011) suggests that the ‘transfers for accumulation’ are used to reconstruct houses, therefore the basic housing of marginalised groups has not been guaranteed during a pre-accumulation process.

Instead, of using a misleading label or trying to separate overlapping expenses, it would be more fruitful to study the impact and expenditures of remittances in each phase of the conflict. Looking at how people spend remittances during the initiation, escalation, de-escalation and termination of the conflict might enable us to have a better idea of the type of expenditures made during the conflict.

Overall, diasporas have been portrayed either as negative (Collier and Hoeffler 2002, Koser, 2007) or positive agents intervening in conflict zones (Van Hear, 2011; Berdal, 2005). During on-going wars, diasporas have proven to engage with their host societies to fuel the conflict by providing weapons, rebels or financial resources (Kaldor, 2012, Smith 2007). Nevertheless, diasporic members have also played an important role in the alleviation, reconstruction and aid recovery for war-torn societies (Van Hear, 2011; Berdal 2005). Even if this dichotomy still

presents a quite simplistic view of diaspora engagement in war zones, it reveals that the process is complex because of the dynamics, actors and the interests resulting from the conflict.

The scholarship studying diasporas in conflict zones reveals that there is not a clear consensus about the role that diasporas play in the transformation of war-torn societies. However, as Berdal clearly states, ‘the impact of diaspora and migrant remittances on conflict is highly context-specific (Berdal, 2005).’ By accepting this last premise, this essay introduces an innovative framework to analyse the role of diasporas specifically involved in drug-trafficking related conflicts. The notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ seems appropriate to study the Mexican and Colombian diasporas involved in drug trafficking because it emphasises the exclusive criminal nature of their activities, as well as the specificities of the drug trafficking processes.

1. 3. Criminal diaspora

Garzón (2013) coined the notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ in a Woodrow Wilson Paper in an effort to understand the criminal networks in Latin America, specifically in Colombia, Mexico and Central America. This section will argue that this notion is useful to frame the diasporic engagement with their homeland in the context of drug trafficking.

The notion of ‘criminal diaspora’ is useful to frame the study of criminals involved in transnational criminal networks because of the way they operate and the relation they have with their origin and host societies.

Focusing on the causes of their displacement and behaviour in their host societies, Cohen (2008) identifies several characteristics of diasporic groups. He considers that members of diasporas are:

dispersed from an original homeland, [...] in pursuit of work or trade, [...] maintain a collective memory about the homeland and strong ethnic connections, [...] have a troubled relationship with host societies, [...] and commute between their home and their hostland remaining sojourners (Cohen, 2008:17).

These characteristics are relevant and applicable to the study of transnational connections between the Mexican and Colombian DTOs and criminals from their same place of origin dwelling abroad. In fact, Mexican and Colombian criminals collaborating in drug trade are usually scattered from their place of origin, in pursuit of work, usually having a troubled relationship with their host society, with strong ethnic connections to their homeland and living a transnational unsettled life.

Drug trafficking encompasses four different stages: cultivation, processing, transport, and distribution of narcotics (Clutterbuck, 1990). In each of these phases, there are agents who sustain and develop criminal networks with merely economic purposes. It is important to note that the legal aspect of the trade is not relevant because in each phase of the drug trafficking process, there are legal and illegal activities performed by legal or illegal actors (Zaitch: 2002). In addition, the nature and complexity of the drug trafficking process blur the distinction between illegal and legal acts. For instance, in the transport phase of the process, actors might use both illegal and legal channels of transportation, for example delivery companies and collusion with officials at the border (Zaitch: 2002).

As a result, this paper conceptualises the members of a diaspora involved in drug trafficking as members of the 'criminal diaspora'. This framework highlights the diasporic characteristics of people involved in drug trafficking activities, such as attachment with the homeland, ethnic

and cultural features, the relation with their host society and their incorporation and activity in organised crime networks.

Finally, it is important to point out as Nonini (2005) states, that diasporas participating and involved in criminal networks form ‘only small minorities among much larger populations of migrants seeking employment and security from persecution in core regions (Nonini, 2005: 567).’ The ‘criminal diaspora’ is the exception rather than the norm of diasporic communities interacting with their homeland. Nevertheless, the levels of violence and homicide rates related to drug trafficking reported in Latin America (UNODC, 2012 and Garzón, 2013) underline the relevance of the topic for the security of the region.

CHAPTER 2: ORIGINS AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE MEXICAN AND COLOMBIAN DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANISATIONS (DTOS)

Before analysing the role of the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas in drug trafficking, it is necessary to understand the dynamics and actors involved in the cultivation, processing,

transport and distribution of narcotics in both countries. This chapter reviews the origins and consolidation of both the Mexican and Colombian Drug Trafficking Organisations (DTOs). In addition, it emphasises the outcomes and conflicts generated by the drug trade in both Latin American states. Finally, the last part of this chapter presents the arguments justifying the comparison between the Mexican and the Colombian case studies.

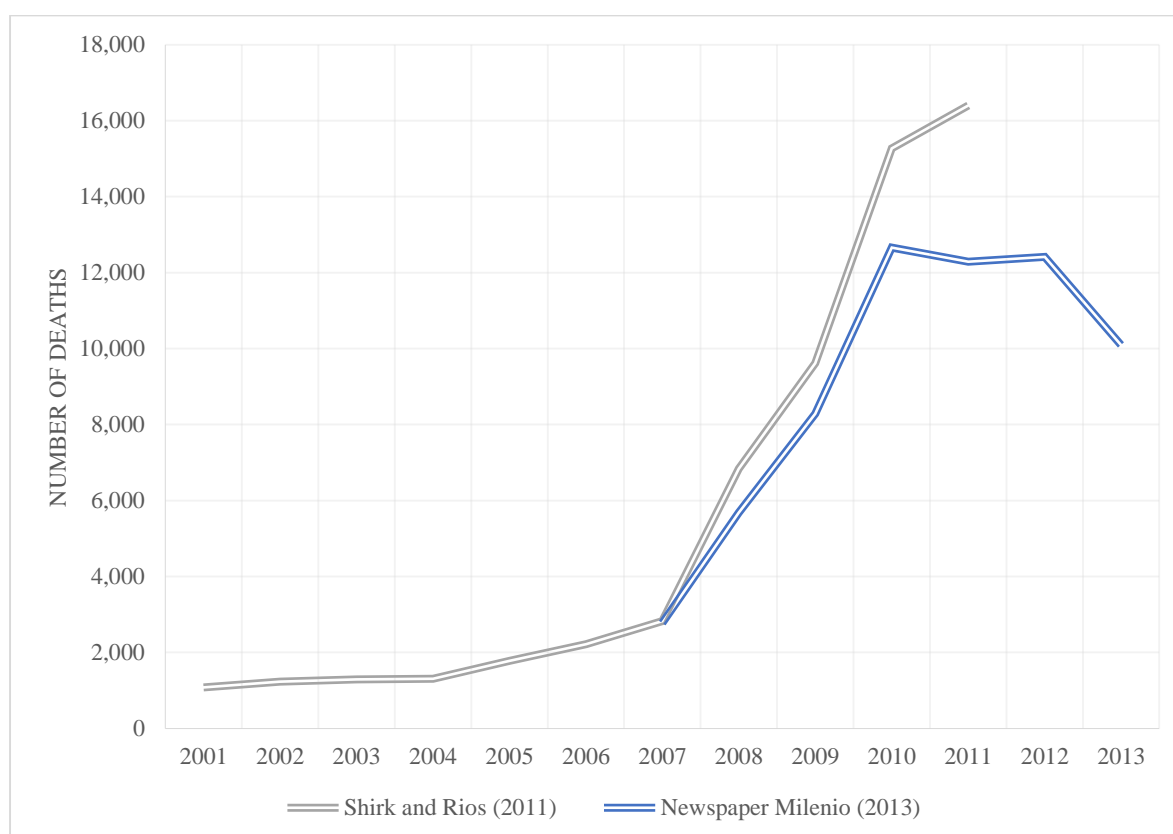
2. 1. Mexican DTOs

Drug trafficking in Mexico is not new; in fact, marijuana and opium production began in the 19th century in the state of Sinaloa (Osorno, 2009). However from 2006, when the ‘war against drug’ was declared, drug trafficking became a major source of conflict and violence in the country. Drug trafficking in Mexico has been the cause of hundreds of homicides and a wave of terror in Mexico (Grillo, 2012). The exact number of homicides related to drug trafficking is difficult to determine because of two main reasons. First, because drug trafficking is an integral part of organised crime (Richani, 2007), therefore the data concerning all acts of violence committed by two or more persons are lumped together on many occasions. Second, the methodology used to collect this type of data is not very reliable and rigorous due to the illegal nature of the phenomenon.

Beittel (2013) states that most analysts estimate that in Mexico, there have been at least 60,000 homicides related to organised crime since 2006. Accordingly, data shown in Figure 1. shows that from 2007 to 2010, the murders related to organised crime in Mexico skyrocketed. Several security analysts attribute this growth to the war against drugs declared during government of president Calderon from 2006 to 2012 (Bonne, 2012; Grillo, 2012, Bagley, 2012). In fact, in

2007, after president Calderon decided to deploy 2,837 soldiers throughout the country the number of deaths associated to drug trafficking increased from one every six days to 19 per day (Langton, 2012).

FIGURE 1. HOMICIDES RELATED TO ORGANISED CRIME ACTIVITIES IN MEXICO FROM 2001-2013 ACCORDING TO TWO DIFFERENT SOURCES



Sources: Shirk and Rios (2011) and López, Milenio Newspaper (2013)

When Calderon started his mandate in 2006, there were roughly half a dozen of drug trafficking organisations (Bonne, 2012). Nevertheless, the war against drugs dramatically changed this panorama in four ways: it increased the number of DTOs (Figure 2) (Guerrero Gutierrez, 2012), it strengthened the transnational criminal networks (Bagley, 2012), it increased the level of violence and terror in Mexico (Grillo, 2012) and it posed security threats in neighbouring countries (Beittel, 2013).

FIGURE 2. PROLIFERATION OF THE MEXICAN DTOs, 2006-2010

2006	2007-2009	2010
Pacífico DTO	Pacífico DTO	Pacífico DTO
	Beltrán Leyva DTO	Pacífico Sur DTO
		Acapulco
		“La Barbie” DTO
Juárez DTO	Juárez DTO	Juárez DTO
Tijuana DTO	Tijuana DTO	Tijuana DTO
	“El Teo” Faction	“El Teo” Faction
Gulf DTO	Gulf-Zetas DTO	Gulf DTO
		Zetas DTO
La Familia Michoacana	La Familia Michoacana	La Familia Michoacana
Milenio Cartel	Milenio Cartel	La Resistencia
		Jalisco Cartel-New Generation
6 Organisations	8 Organisations	12 Organisations

Source: Bagley, B. (2012). “Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in the Americas: Major Trends in the Twenty-First Century”- Washington D.C: Woodrow Wilson Centre.

Despite the DTOs fragmentation and proliferation of new organisations, six main DTOs control the narcotics trade within and outside the Mexican state (Figure 3). The Sinaloa DTO controls the drug trafficking and production in the ‘Golden Triangle’ states (Chihuahua, Durango and Sinaloa), and is active in Europe, the US and in several countries in South and Central America. They specialise in poppy and marijuana cultivation and processing of heroin and methamphetamine (UNODC, 2012). In addition, this DTO fights for more control of trafficking

routes through Chihuahua, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas and Baja California (Figure 3) (Arson and Olson, 2011).

The Gulf DTO is originally from Tamaulipas but operates in other states in the centre and in the north of Mexico. Los Zetas are formerly the armed wing of the Gulf DTO; however, they have expanded their networks across other Mexican states, the US and in other countries. Today, they constitute one of the most dangerous, ruthless and disciplined DTOs from Mexico (Arson and Olson, 2011). The Zetas do not only engage in drug trafficking but also in a range of predatory activities such as extortion, kidnapping, migrant smuggling and human trafficking (UNODC, 2012).

The Juarez DTO controls mainly the north of the country and cities in Chihuahua. This organisation plays a central role in the conflict for the control of the border (Arson and Olson, 2011). The Tijuana cartel is settled in the north-west of Mexico and controls mainly the drug trafficking with the US in the Tijuana-San Diego border. Finally, the Familia Michoacana DTO is based in Michoacan but has also an important presence in other west-central states and in Mexico City (Acosta, 2012).

FIGURE 3. MEXICAN DTOs MAIN AREAS OF INFLUENCE



Source: Stratfor and Mexican Attorney's General Office

As previously mentioned, one of the main consequences of the war against drugs in Mexico was the expansion of the international criminal networks of the Mexican DTOs in other countries such as Guatemala, Colombia, Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador (UNODC, 2012). This effect is known as the 'cockroach effect', referring specifically to the 'displacement of criminal networks from one city/state/region to another within a given country or from one country to another in search of safer havens and more pliable state authorities (Bagley, 2012:11).' In the next sections, it will be argued that the 'cockroach effect' caused by the restrictive measures promoted by the Mexican and American authorities fuelled the transnational criminal networks and the vigorous interaction between Mexican DTOs and members of the criminal diaspora.

2. 2. Colombian DTOs

Colombia has experienced more than fifty-seven years of war, making it the longest-running 20th century internal armed conflict that has endured into the 21st century (Chernick, 2005: 178). The conflict originated in the mid-1940s and involved the government, three insurgent groups, two left wing guerrillas (ELN and the FARC) and a 'right wing guerrilla' (Díaz, 2011). Overall, the conflict resulted in the death of more than 300,000 people, 400,000 refugees and almost 4 million internally displaced persons (Díaz, 2011; UNHCR 2012).

During the conflict, the Colombian government confronted an insurgency of armed guerrillas looking to replace the Colombian state (Beittel, 2013). The evolution of the conflict became complex because of the number of parties involved and the activities performed by each of them. For instance, Mejía Tirado (2005) explains that the expansion of guerrilla groups led to an explosion of new organisations such as pro-soviet guerrillas (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC and the *Ejército de Liberación* or National Liberation Army), pro Chinese guerrillas; Cuban style guerrillas (Quintín Lame) and Trotskyist guerrillas (2005:113).

In addition, Guáqueta (2003) points out the different trends of the Colombian conflict from the beginning of the 1990s. Overall, she argues that the conflict progressively expanded in the number of combatants involved and in the number of regions affected. In addition, she explains that the conflict was increasingly financed by criminal activities such as drug trade, extortion, kidnapping, money laundering, the illegal exploitation of minerals, and arm trafficking (Guáqueta, 2003:4).

In fact, during the post-war period, guerrillas and paramilitaries became directly involved in drug trafficking and illegal activities (Chernick, 2005). For instance, 45% of the income of the FARC comes from drug trade and about 70% of the profits made by the paramilitary militias

so called *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self- Defence Forces of Colombia, or AUC) are related to drug trafficking (Díaz, 2011:9).

According to Bagley (2012), by the late 1990s these two groups gained control of coca cultivation and processing throughout rural Colombia (2012:4). The high profitability of drug trade appealed to both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries and became their main source of financing to expand their military capacities and territory (Guáqueta, 2003). In fact, from 1970 to 2000, Colombia became one of the most important drug producers and distributors in the world. It went from being a minor marijuana exporter to the largest cocaine producer and exporter since 1982 and an important source of heroin since 1996 (Guáqueta, 2003:4). In addition to the guerrilla and paramilitary groups involved in drug trafficking, the two major DTOs in Colombia in charge of the cultivation, processing, transport and distribution of narcotics were the Medellin and Bogota organisations dismantled in the 1990s (Arson and Olson: 2011; Clutterbuck: 1990).

The complexity and outcomes of the conflict as well the attacks by the illegal armed groups designated as ‘terrorist’ groups by the US State Department (Bouvier, 2007) created a state of emergency in Colombia. As a result, the Colombian government with the collaboration of the US formulated and launched the *Plan Colombia* in 1998 (Thoumi, 2012). The Plan included counter-insurgency and anti-drug initiatives to reduce drug production and violence in the Colombian territory. The project cost over \$6 billion and had three main objectives: (1) reduce the flow of illicit narcotics and improve security; (2) promote social and economic justice; and (3) promote the rule of law (Jenner, 2014). Some of the efforts to eradicate drug trafficking included seizing the crops and spraying of herbicide (Jenner, 2014). Despite the numerous

efforts to control the cultivation of narcotics, the global cocaine production and distribution did not decline (UNODC, 2012).

The maintained levels of narcotic production are explained by the so called ‘balloon effect’, which describes the phenomenon by which reductions in illegal drug activity in one country lead to increases in another (Arson and Olson, 2011). In fact, according to Jenner (2014), in the aftermath of *Plan Colombia*, the level of cocaine production was curtailed in Colombia but the global production remained steady because Peru and Bolivia filled the demand of the market (2014: 79).

Just as in the case of Mexico, restrictive anti-drug initiatives propelled the diversification of criminal networks in two main ways. First, as noted by Arson and Olson (2011), the ‘balloon effect’ boosted the production and trade of narcotics in other Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador. Second, as a result of the prosecution and law enforcement, Colombian DTOs started looking for allies to ensure the route of trade for their narcotics, for instance with Mexican DTOs (Garzón, 2013).

Nowadays, there are four main Colombian DTOs. The Ratrojos operate in the Pacific Coast and in the Venezuelan border. In addition, they have developed partnerships with the Sinaloa and Juarez Mexican DTOs (Arson and Olson, 2011). The Urabeños, which are remnants of the AUC, are positioned along the Panamanian border and collaborate with the Mexican Gulf DTO (Arson and Olson, 2011). The FARC operate in the Ecuadorian, Venezuelan, and Panamanian borders and sell their products to the Tijuana and Juarez DTOs. Finally, the Paisas (originally members of the Medellin DTO) control the Caribbean coast and have been linked with the Mexican Zetas (Arson and Olson, 2011).

In the next sections, it will be argued that the ‘balloon effect’, just as the ‘cockroach effect’ (Garzón, 2013) have been partially sustained by the criminal diasporas in both the Mexican and the Colombian cases. Nevertheless, before proceeding into the analysis the relevance of comparing the Mexican and Colombian case studies will be demonstrated, since the conflicts in both countries are not exactly from the same nature.

2. 3. Comparison between Mexico and Colombia

The comparison between the Mexican and Colombian conflicts have generated several academic debates. For instance, Beittel (2013) explains that some analysts compare the two cases to evaluate the success or limitations of the restrictive measures implemented with the help of the US. On the contrary, some observers stress that the origins, goals and outcomes of both conflicts are different.

This paper focuses explicitly on the drug trafficking mechanisms and specifically on the role of the diasporic communities in these processes. It is important to note that the comparison is exclusively made on the criminal diasporas enrolled and participating in the drug trafficking. As a result, the analysis excludes the origins and causes of the bleeding conflicts.

In this paper, the comparison between the Mexican and the Colombian criminal diasporas is justified by three elements. The first element considers the weakness of both states. As argued by Thoumi (2012), the central governments in Colombia and in Mexico could not control large areas of the country and local political establishments controlled by DTOs. The lack of capacity of in both states as well as the proliferation of corruption in government institutions (Garzón, 2013) constitute the first similarity between both cases. As noted by Garzón (2013), corruption of government institutions is one necessary condition for the spread of criminal networks

constituted by customs, migration officials, police, government authorities and diasporic members.

For the Colombian case, Clutterbuck (1990) explains that corruption, intimidation and weak institutions facilitated the cultivation, processing, transport, and distribution of narcotics in the region. In addition, the growth and entrenchment of these criminal networks replaced the state in several localities. For instance, the FARC and other insurgents controlled more than a third of the country's municipalities (Beittel, 2013). The propagation of corruption, the weak rule of law and lack of governance characterised the Mexican state as well. Beittel (2013) argues that the degree to which some Mexican municipalities are controlled by the DTOs is hard to determine. Nevertheless, he states that Mexican authorities and drug lords have collaborated to sustain an imputative system. Overall, these elements show that both the Mexican and the Colombian DTOs had enough power to collude with political and judicial authorities and challenge the monopoly of force of their respective states.

The second element of similarity between the Mexican and Colombian DTOs is their *modus operandi*. DTOs from both countries are hierarchical organisations operating transnationally and committing criminal and violent activities. Even if the nature and ultimate goals of the DTOs may vary, it has been noted that the means used to achieve their objectives are very similar. Both in Mexico and in Colombia, DTOs have diversified into other predatory activities such as extortion, kidnapping, oil theft, money laundering, taxing and directing drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, and human trafficking (Beittel 2013, Chernick 2005, UNODC 2012, Berdal 2005).

Finally, the third element of comparison between Mexican and Colombian DTOs are the outcomes of restrictive policies in both countries. As previously mentioned, the 'balloon and

cockroach' effects (Arson and Olson, 2011 and Garzón, 2013) have propelled an intensification and expansion of international criminal networks. The governmental efforts to dismantle DTOs in both countries have forced the criminal organisations to look for safer places to cultivate and produce narcotics and for safer routes to ensure their transport and distribution. Overall, the strategies of the DTOs in both countries are similar. For instance, both DTOs migrated to neighbouring countries to reallocate their plantations or narcotic laboratories and refineries (Arson and Olson, 2011; Bagley, 2012; Zaitch, 2002).

The displacement of their place of origin has also pushed the DTOs to form transnational alliances and to develop solid relations with their criminal diasporas. For instance, academics and ethnographers have traced alliances between Mexican and Colombian DTO (Beittel 2013 and Bragley 2012). In fact, Beittel (2013) argued that the intense efforts to dismantle the 'traditional' Colombian trafficking route through the Caribbean have strengthened relations between the Mexican and Colombian DTOs. Nowadays Colombian DTOs subcontract Mexican organisations to ensure a safer route of trafficking narcotics to the US (Beittel, 2013). The three elements mentioned in this part constitute a solid framework of analysis to justify the comparison between the Mexican and Colombians DTOs. In general, the strategies developed by both groups are very similar. The rest of the paper will discuss the mechanisms and relations between the Mexican and Colombian DTOs and the respective members of their criminal diasporas involved in the drug trafficking process.

CHAPTER 3: CRIMINAL DIASPORAS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

This chapter studies the relationship between criminal diasporas and drug trafficking. In addition, it argues that national DTOs recruit and make alliances with diasporic members to endure their access to intelligence, security and subsistence.

3. 1. The link between criminal diasporas and drug trafficking

In an attempt to understand the mobility of criminal groups, Varese (2010), argues that members of DTOs decide to move either strategically or unintentionally. Looking at the case of Italian Mafias, Varese determines that criminals end up moving strategically to a new territory when they are searching for new resources, investment opportunities or they wish to invade a new market (Varese, 2010:8). Nevertheless, he argues that criminals might also move unintentionally when they are not actively looking to open a criminal branch and expand their network abroad. In fact, he states that these criminals might leave their homeland for reasons unrelated to crime, such as poverty or persecution.

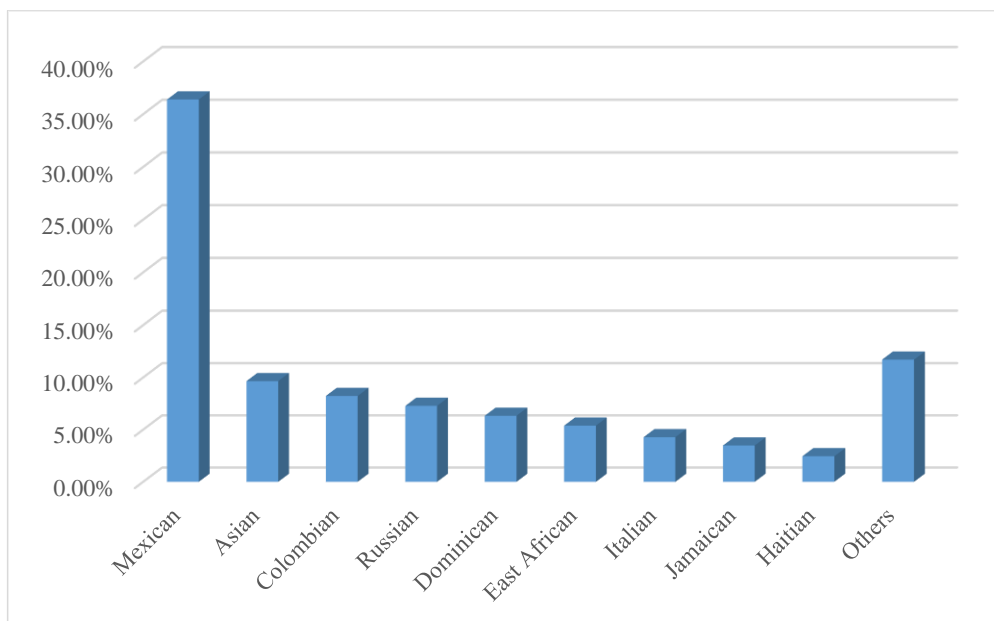
This dichotomy is useful to understand how pioneer migrants integrate into criminal networks. However, it does not take into consideration members of the diaspora already settled in foreign countries who decide to integrate into DTOs. Contrary to the case of Italian Mafias, described by Varese (2010), Latin American DTOs, specifically the Mexican ones have proven to interact with Mexican American gangs originally born in the US but that maintain a collective memory and strong ethnic connections to Mexico (Finckenauer and Albanese: 2014).

In fact, the US National Gang Intelligence Centre (2011, 2013) has recently confirmed the increasing interaction between gangs and DTOs (Figure 4). In relation to this, the National Gang Intelligence Centre has reported that in 2009, more than 900,000 criminally active gang

members, representing approximately 20,000 domestic street gangs in more than 2,500 cities, dominated drug distribution in the United States (NGIC, 2010: 12). In addition, according to the National Drug Intelligence Centre, more than 45 percent of law enforcement agencies in the Southwestern US reported that gangs were moderately to highly involved in drug trafficking during 2010 (National Gang Intelligence Centre, 2011).

The available data published by the National Gang Intelligence Centre (2010, 2011, 2013), as well as ethnographies studying drug trafficking between Mexico and the US (Grillo 2012; Campbell, 2009; Langton, 2012) highlight the increasing interactions between Mexican DTOs and Mexican gang associations in the US making it necessary to understand the role of criminal diasporas involved in drug trade.

FIGURE 4. GANG ASSOCIATIONS WITH CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS BY NATIONALITY



Source: National Gang Intelligence Center, 2011. The following figures represent the percentage of law enforcement who report that gangs in their jurisdiction have ties to various criminal organisations.

Focusing on the dispersion and expansion of the criminal diaspora (Cohen, 2008) and analysing the available data we can observe that the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas are formed by two different groups of migrants. First, pioneer migrants who are actively looking for the expansion of the criminal networks or who are just simply moving in search of shelter (Varese, 2010). These pioneer migrants move from their country of origin with the specific purpose of finding new strategies, supplies, resources and routes for drug trafficking or shelter and security.

The second type of migrants are those already established in a foreign country. In the specific case of criminal diasporas, this refers to second and upper generations, attached to their homeland and participating in transitional criminal activities. Even if both types of migrants constitute criminal diasporas, this distinction is valuable because pioneer and established migrants perform different activities and have different roles in each phase of the drug trafficking process. As will be demonstrated in the next section, DTOs assign specific tasks to members of their criminal diaspora according to their place of origin, citizenship and status in the hierarchy of the organisation. DTOs have integrated members of their criminal diasporas into their activities because migrants provide them with information, protection, security and supplies.

FIGURE 5. GANGS WITH SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON US DRUG MARKETS

NAME	PRIMARY AREAS OF OPERATION	ETHNICITY	DRUGS TRAFFICKED	AFFILIATIONS (DTOs)
18th Street	Pacific	Mostly Central and South	Methamphetamine	Sinaloa
	Southwest	Americans		Tijuana
Bandidos	Pacific	Multi-ethnic	Cocaine	Juarez
	Southwest		Heroin	
			Marijuana	
			Methamphetamine	
Barrio Azteca	Southwest	Mexicans and Mexican American	Cocaine	Juarez
			Heroin	
			Marijuana	
			Methamphetamine	
Black Guerrilla Family	Pacific	African American	Cocaine	Sinaloa
	Mid-Atlantic		Marijuana	
Bloods	New England	African American	Cocaine	Sinaloa
	New York/ New Jersey		Heroin	Tijuana
	Southwest		Marijuana	
	Southeast		MDMA	
	Pacific			
Crips	New England	Mostly African American	Cocaine	Juarez
	Southwest		Heroin	
	Southeast		Marijuana	
	Pacific		MDMA	
Florencia 13	Southwest	Hispanic	Cocaine	Sinaloa
	Southeast		Heroin	Tijuana
	Pacific		Marijuana	
			Methamphetamine	

	Great Lakes	Mostly African American	Cocaine	Sinaloa
Gangster	Pacific		Heroin	
Disciples	Southeast		Marijuana	
	West Central			
	Pacific	Multi-ethnic but mostly	Cocaine	Sinaloa
Hells Angels	Southwest	White	Marijuana	Tijuana
	New England		MDMA	
	New York/ New Jersey			
Hermanos de	Southwest	Hispanic	Cocaine	Gulf
Pistoleros			Heroin	Zetas
Latinos				
	Florida	Hispanic	Cocaine	
	Great Lakes		Heroin	Gulf
	New England		Marijuana	Sinaloa
	New York/ New Jersey		MDMA	Tijuana
Latin Kings	Mid-Atlantic			
	Pacific			
	Southwest			
	Southeast			
	West-Central			
	Mid-Atlantic	Mostly Salvadorans	Cocaine	Gulf
	New England		Heroin	Sinaloa
	New York/ New Jersey		Marijuana	Zetas
Mara	Southwest		Methamphetamine	
Salvatrucha	Southeast			
	West-Central			
	Pacific			

	Pacific	Mexicans and Mexican	Cocaine	Sinaloa
Mexican Mafia	Southwest	American	Marijuana	Zetas Tijuana
	Southwest	Mexicans and Mexican	Cocaine	Gulf
Mexikanemi		American	Marijuana Methamphetamine	Zetas
	Pacific	Mexican American	Marijuana	Sinaloa
Norteños	Southwest		Methamphetamine	Tijuana
	Pacific	Mexicans and Mexican	Cocaine	Sinaloa
	Southwest	American	Heroin	Tijuana
Sureños	Southeast		Marijuana	
	West-Central		Methamphetamine	
	Southeast	Hispanic	Cocaine	Gulf
Tango Blast			Marijuana	Zetas
	Southwest	Mexican American/White	Cocaine	Gulf
Texas Syndicate			Marijuana	Zetas
Tiny Rascal	New England	Asian, predominately	Marijuana	Asian DTOs
Gangsters	Pacific	Cambodian	MDMA	
	Pacific	Multi-ethnic	Cocaine	Tijuana
Vagos	Southwest		Marijuana	

Source: United States Department, Attorney General's Report on Growth of Violence Street Gangs in Suburban Areas, April 2000; High Intensity Drug Area reporting. Available in National Drug Intelligence Center (2010).

3. 2. Interests of exploiting diasporic networks

In this section, it is argued that the DTOs exploit their criminal diasporas to ensure their access to intelligence, security and subsistence. The core of this analysis will focus on Mexican DTOs because they are mainly in charge of the drug trade to the US as a result of its geographical proximity and the alliances developed with Colombian DTOs (Beittel, 2013). Even if there is more information for the Mexican DTOs due to the intensity and size of the drug trade in the Mexican-US border, the Colombian case also presents relevant examples to support this analysis (Bagley, 2012; Burton and West, 2008).

Intelligence

Looking at the interaction between DTOs and their criminal diasporas, it can be observed that members of the criminal diasporas are able to provide tactical intelligence and information for drug lords. In fact, DTOs have interests in developing a strong relationship with their criminal diaspora because they provide helpful information and updates about the situation of the border.

A Stratfor report notes that Mexico's cartels rely on US gangs with Hispanic origins such as Barrio Azteca because they know the border, the terrain, the drug prosecutors, investigators, and the dynamics between other gangs (Grillo, 2012; Guerrero Gutiérrez, 2010). The information provided by the Mexican-American gangs enables the Mexican DTOs to reduce the risk while trading drugs. As noted by Burton and West (2008), getting drugs across the Mexican-US border requires local connections to bribe border guards or police. In addition to the information provided by gang members to DTOs, members of street gangs might have contracts at crossing points at the border to facilitate drug trade.

Some gangs have proven to have a resourceful network of informants in different federal American institutions. For instance, the case of Sandy Valles New, who worked in the investigations section of the Office of the Federal Public Defender in El Paso from 1996 to 2002. The FBI arrested Sandy in 2007 after agents discovered she was transmitting information to gang leaders (*El Paso Times*, 2008). When detained she admitted to travelling to Ciudad Juarez in Mexico to share information directly with Mexican drug lords. Overall, the information gathered by the members of the criminal diaspora and shared with Mexican DTOs is useful to minimise the risks involved in drug trafficking. Nevertheless, this is not the only way in which gangs provide protection to Mexican DTOs.

Security

DTOs have security interests in establishing links with their criminal diaspora because of three main reasons. First, adding more actors in the drug trafficking process by subcontracting members of their criminal diaspora reduces the chance to be traced or caught by drug prosecutors. According to Guerrero Gutiérrez (2010), an asset of the interaction between DTOs and gangs, is that the latter are independent cells that do not know exactly how DTOs operate. As a result, even if members of the criminal diaspora are arrested, they might not be able to provide information to the authorities about the *modus operandi* of the DTO they are linked with.

A second security advantage resulting from the interaction between Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas and their respective DTOs derives from their cultural and ethnic rapprochement. Zaitch (2002) explains that ethnic ties are declared 'functional' to DTOs for their ability to control information flows, keep solidarity, trust and loyalty. This 'functionality' can be explained by the nature of the criminal diaspora to maintain a 'collective memory about

the homeland and strong ethnic connections (Cohen, 2008: 17).’ In fact, during his fieldwork, Zaitch (2002) discovered that drug traffickers consider the ethnicity and nationality of the people they work with abroad. Colombian DTOs tend to develop closer criminal ties with members of their own ethnicity because they portray them as more trustworthy and loyal people (Zaitch: 2002). The same tendency can be observed in the case of Mexican DTOs who develop ties with gangs with Mexican origins (Figure 4 and 5).

Finally, a third security reason for the DTOs to collaborate with members of their criminal diaspora is the fact that they might know family members of the diaspora living back in their place of origin, especially if they are pioneer migrants. As a result, DTOs have power over the members of their criminal diasporas. For example, in his research, Zaitch (2002) interviewed Colombian people involved in drug trafficking in Europe who were still very connected with their family members back in their homeland.

DTOs operate by threatening and extorting people (Bagley, 2012). In fact, as explained by Brophy (2008) drug traffickers use force or threats for the settling of scores when there is an issue. This type of ‘conflict resolution’ used by DTOs could be also applied to members’ criminal diasporas. Interacting with people from the same community gives them the power to threaten family members and acquaintances of members of their criminal diasporas back in their homeland. As a result, the relation between DTOs and criminal diasporas becomes interdependent and reliable.

Subsistence

Finally, the criminal diaspora facilitates access to infrastructure, sources, distribution channels and shelter that sustain drug trafficking processes. By creating and maintaining alliances with

their criminal diasporas, DTOs have access to a cheaper and reliable workforce, arms and trafficking routes.

The first advantage offered by the criminal diaspora, at least for the case of the Mexican DTOs is the easy access to arms. According to McDougal *et al.* (2013), most of the weapons used in drug related conflicts in Mexico since 2006 are made in the US (2013:5). In fact, these scholars argue that a significant proportion (46.7%) of US firearm dealers are dependent on Mexican demand. The volume of arms produced in the US and the seizures in Mexico simultaneously reveal the inability of the governments to control the porosity of the border and the ability of DTOs to access firearms.

Tracking the number of trafficked arms into Mexico is a hard task because of the illegal nature of the process, the number of registered guns produced and purchased and the lack of inspections on gun dealers in the US (McDougal *et al.*, 2013). However, it is believed that most of the firearms confiscated in Mexico come from California, Arizona and Texas, all border states (McDougal *et al.*, 2013).

After an investigation in the south of the US, McGreal (2011) reports that US federal agents have discovered an operation where that at least 24 people purchased 300 weapons legally from Texas gun shops for the Zetas DTO. According to Dewey Webb, a special agent interviewed by McGreal, ‘the United States is the easiest and cheapest way to purchase firearms’ (2011). This statement was confirmed when a drug lord from the Zetas explained that they obtained their arms from the US (McGreal, 2011). It is important to note that only residents have access to purchase weapons in American gun shops, therefore people purchasing firearms for Mexican DTOs are American citizens.

Howard Campbell (2009) has further explored the link between Hispanic gangs and Mexican DTOs. In his ethnography, he interviewed members of gangs or marginalised people involved in the drug and arms trade. In his book, he narrates the stories of Fred Morales and ‘the Chicano smuggler’ who are members of the criminal diaspora supplying arms to the DTOs back in Mexico. Indeed, members of the Mexican diaspora supply arms to Mexican DTOs (McGreal, 2011; Grillo, 2012; Langton, 2012). In addition, Kuhn and Bunker (2011) suggest that Colombian DTOs are also taking advantage of this trade to obtain their own weapons.

Besides enabling access to weapons, the criminal diaspora constitutes a workforce less expensive but nevertheless trustworthy for the DTOs. Guerrero Gutiérrez (2010) argues that DTOs subcontract members of the criminal diaspora to perform activities that allow drug lords to save financial resources. When DTOs subcontract gangs they save resources in their training and protection. For instance, members of the gangs have their own weapons and are responsible for trafficking the narcotics they purchase from DTOs (Grillo, 2012).

Finally, in case of persecution and need of shelter, Mexican drug lords can use their connections with their criminal diaspora to hide in the United States. For example, according to Statfor, Barrio Azteca, a Hispanic gang from Texas provides shelter to leaders of Juarez DTOs when they need to hide from Mexican authorities (Burton and West, 2008). The tendency to use the criminal diaspora to hide has also been observed in the Colombian case. According to Pachico (2012a), Colombian drug warlords have moved to Argentina to hide from war prosecutors. In addition, Messi and Bordón (2014) argue that Colombian drug lords find a safe haven in Argentina because of three main reasons. Firstly, they can move easily because Colombian criminals do not have any criminal record in Argentina. Secondly, Colombia is an associate

member of the Mercosur;² therefore, mobility between both countries is almost automatic. Thirdly, there are exclusively enclosed Colombian neighbourhoods such as Nordelta, where access is strictly controlled (Messi and Bordón: 2014). Since the Colombian criminal diaspora has developed isolated and safe communities where they have access to all services such as schools, banks and hospitals, Argentina has become a convenient place to migrate (Messi and Bordón: 2014).

This chapter has explored the relation between DTOs and criminal diasporas. It has been argued that DTOs have several interests in developing ties with their criminal diasporas to facilitate access to intelligence, security and subsistence. The next section will examine the role of diasporas in each of the four phases of drug-trafficking.

² Mercosur is South America's leading trading bloc. Known as the Common Market of the South, it aims to bring about the free movement of goods, capital, services and people among its member states (BBC, 2012).

CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF CRIMINAL DIASPORAS IN THE CULTIVATION AND PROCESSING OF DRUG TRAFFICKING

In this chapter, it will be argued that criminal diasporas have an increasing role in the cultivation and processing of drugs. By analysing recent events in Central and South American, it will be demonstrated that criminal diasporas are involved in the early stages of drug production for both Mexican and Colombian DTOs.

4. 1. Diasporic participation in the cultivation of narcotics

The data available to determine how many members of the criminal diasporas are involved in the cultivation of narcotics is very patchy. The two main variables used to determine the involvement of diasporic criminals in the cultivation of narcotics are the people arrested on drug plantations and the number of plantations discovered and destroyed by drug prosecutors. In order to determine the engagement of members of the Mexican and Colombians criminal diasporas, this section presents on the one hand this quantitative data and on the other hand, qualitative accounts published in newspapers and reports. Qualitative accounts are used complement the quantitative data and reflect the growing displacement of Mexican and Colombian DTOs across the entire Latin American region, specifically in neighbouring countries.

Coca leaf crops

Cocaine is only produced in three countries of the Western Hemisphere: Colombia (45 percent), Peru (35-40 percent) and Bolivia (15-20 percent) (Bagley, 2012:3) The main producer of cocaine is Colombia, nevertheless Colombian DTOs are expanding their agricultural

activities beyond their national borders for example into Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama (Williams and Picarelli: 2005).

The Colombian criminal diaspora is involved in two ways in the cultivation of cocaine crops. Firstly, members of the criminal diaspora are involved directly in the harboring and plantation of the cocaine crops. Secondly, members of the criminal diasporas subcontract crofters in other regions from whom they buy coca leafs or cocaine paste.

Members of the criminal diaspora directly involved in the cultivation of narcotics are either people who deliberately decide to move to fill employment gaps in the drug industry (Arson and Olson, 2011) or refugees without better labor opportunities in a foreign land (Bouvier, 2007).

On the one hand, Arson and Olson (2011) note that since the 1990s the supply chain of cocaine changed after the dismantling of the two main Colombian DTOs. They argue that the end of the Medellin and Cali cartels propelled the dispersion and multiplication of several drug producers (including guerrillas) in new regions such as Putumayo, along the Ecuadorean border, Norte de Santander, along the Venezuelan border, north-central Antioquia near the Panamanian border and the northern coast, and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the Caribbean (Arson and Olson, 2011: 29).

On the other hand, Bouvier (2007) points out that the Colombian conflict against armed groups pushed hundreds of thousands of refugees abroad. Refugees are usually affected by spill-over violence and by the lack of security and opportunities (Guglielmelli, 2011).

Overall, the marginality, violence and crime rates that characterise borders cities in conflict and the lack of opportunities that refugees face can push them to join the drug trafficking business.

The data available demonstrates a spread of drug plantations across the Colombian borders specifically in the regions near Panama and Ecuador. In a joint anti-drug operation, the governments of Colombia and Panama discovered a cocaine plantation in the Panamanian jungle in the region of Churcuti near the Caribbean (Cawley, M: 2013). Accordingly, 4,495 plants were destroyed in an approximate area of two hectares. After the investigations, the authorities concluded that the coca crops were in the region occupied by the FARC and by the Urabeños, both Colombian DTOs (Meléndez: 2013). In Ecuador, the authorities found a coca plantation in a zone of difficult access near the Colombian border. Bargent (2013) reports that the Ecuadorian army destroyed 8,500 coca plants hidden just 100 metres from the border with Colombia where the FARC is located.

The two examples mentioned show the direct engagement of the Colombian criminal diaspora in Ecuador and Panama. Nevertheless, there are members of the criminal diaspora interacting with coca growers in Peru and Bolivia, directly purchasing the coca paste (Arson and Olson, 2011). These type of criminals can be categorised as sojourners since they do not reside in a different country from their place of origin. As referred by Cohen (2008) for trade diasporas, it can be observed that members of the criminal diasporas live between their place of origin and the place where they are involved in criminal activities.

Opium crops

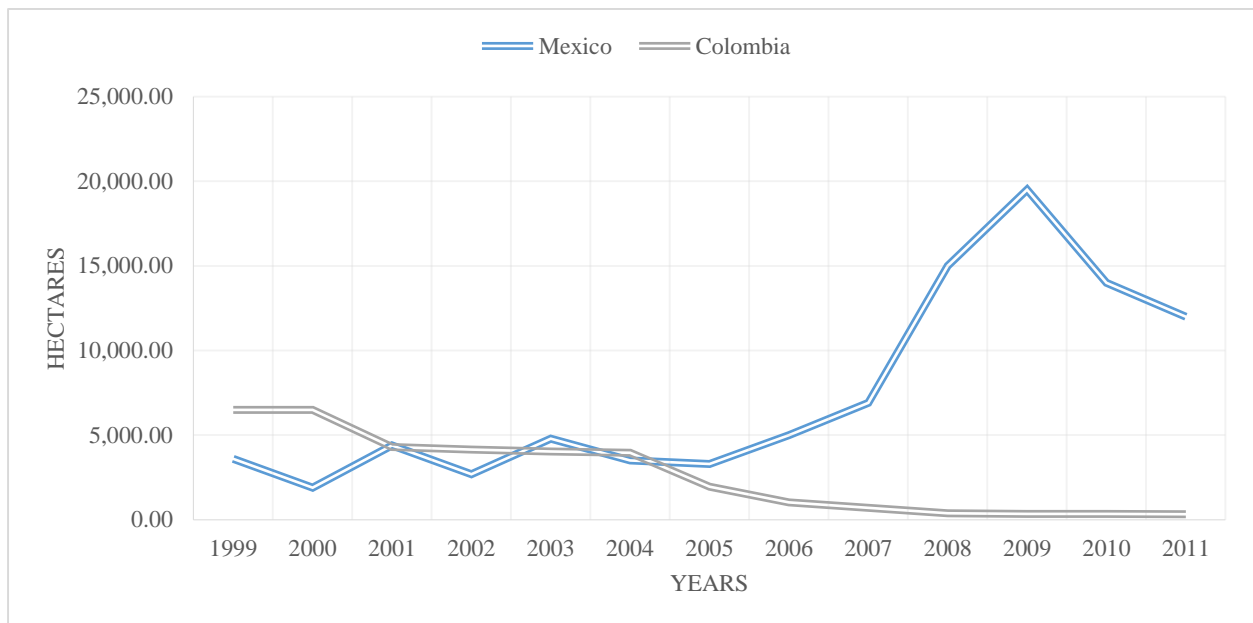
According to the UNODC (2014), Mexico is the third largest opium producer after Myanmar and Afghanistan with an estimated production of 12,000 hectares for the year 2011. Mexico

has largely surpassed Colombia in the production of opium (Figure 6), nevertheless because of several governmental restrictions such as the war against drugs and the ban on importing chemicals used to synthesise narcotics, Mexican DTOs have started to diversify their areas of cultivation and production. Following these restrictions, in the year 2009, the government of Guatemala seized approximately 148% more poppy plants than in the year 2008, equivalent to 413,479,744 plants (UNOCD, 2014).

The growth in the cultivation of poppy in Guatemala has been recently confirmed by the President of Guatemala, Otto Pérez Molina, who attributes the increase of violence, homicides rates and drug plantations to the territorial expansion of the Mexican DTOs (Elias, 2014). The unstable rule of law and lack of job opportunities on the Guatemalan side have facilitated the spread of cultivations across the border (Elias, 2014 and Septien 2014). Overall, unemployment and poverty in Guatemala create a pool of potential workers ready to join the DTOs. For instance, Elias (2014) sustains that farmers have replaced the traditional corn and beans plantations with narcotic crops. In fact, according to the SAIA (*Servicio de Análisis e Información de Antinarcótico*, or the Service of Analysis and Information of anti-narcotics for Guatemala), a narcotics' farmer can make a profit of 6,600 USD per harvest, equivalent to 500 times the profit obtained by growing any other type of crop (Pérez and Peters: 2006).

FIGURE 6. NET CULTIVATION OF OPIUM POPPY IN MEXICO AND COLOMBIA, 1999-2012

(HECTARES)



Source: UNODC (2014) World Drug Report 2014

During the year 2012, the Guatemalan government reported the discovery of opium plantations in the municipality of San Marcos, near the Mexican border. Even if the exact number of plantations destroyed is unknown, the minister Mauricio López declared that their value was estimated at \$308,048 billions (ACAN-EFE: 2012).

The plantations in Guatemala are believed to be owned by members of the Mexican criminal diaspora who live a transnational life between Mexico and Guatemala. The Mexican criminal diaspora does not settle permanently in other places to cultivate their crops (Figure 6). Nevertheless, even if Mexico is still the main land for the Mexican DTOs agriculture, the criminal diaspora is increasingly subcontracting farmers in Guatemala to seed and harvest their

poppy crops. According to Pérez and Peters (2006), the Gulf Sinaloa and Juarez DTOs are increasingly employing this technique to expand their territory and production.

4. 2. Diasporic participation in the processing of narcotics

The processing of narcotics refers to the manufacturing of drugs. In other words, it refers to the conversion of the plant matter (e.g. coca leaves or poppy crops) into its marketable form (e.g. cocaine, heroin, etc.). Generally, the processing of narcotics involves the use of chemicals, synthetic substances and solvents in a laboratory. As a result, there are two available ways to determine where narcotics are processed. The first one focuses on the type and quantity of chemicals available and imported. The second takes into account the number and type of laboratories (UNODC, 2014).

According to the UNODC (2014), the chemical industry is one of the most globalised of all manufacturing industries. Since the chemical industry is facilitated by reduced import duties and flexibility in the market, it is hard to identify exactly the quantity of chemicals diverted for the processing of narcotics. For example, toluene (the most traded chemical) is a chemical used as a solvent (paint thinner) and a booster in gasoline fuels but it also is used in the processing of cocaine (UNODC, 2014).

The engagement of the criminal diaspora in the processing of narcotics can be observed either in the trade of chemicals or in their direct involvement in the drug manufacturing in clandestine laboratories. According to the information published by newspapers and reports, there is an increasing engagement of members of the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas in the processing part of drug trafficking (Mayorca, 2014; Pachico, 2011). Overall, there is a tendency to believe that diasporic members are opening new laboratories in other countries than their

homeland to avoid persecution and to take advantage of more flexible legal systems to import chemicals.

Mexican criminal diaspora

Arson and Olson (2011) note that Mexican DTOs are opening their laboratories in Central America. For instance, it has been discovered that the Sinaloa DTO has used Honduras as a base for meth and ecstasy production (Arson and Olson: 2011). In the year 2009, a Mexican narcotics laboratory was found in Naco Santa Barbara, Honduras.

The authorities declared that this location used to process mainly pseudoephedrine and ecstasy was owned by 15 Mexicans (Arson and Olson: 2011). The fact that the location was owned by Mexicans, reveals the presence of criminal diasporic members in the region. In addition, it underlines the transnational character of the processing of narcotics in the region and the ability of the Mexican criminals to perform their illicit activities overseas. In the year 2012, another laboratory owned by the Sinaloa DTO was discovered in Honduras (Fox, 2012). Accordingly, Honduran officials seized some \$100 million in assets and reported that 'El Chapo' Guzman, the boss of the Sinaloa Cartel used to hide out in the country (Knott, 2012).

The Zetas have also expanded their criminal network in Honduras in the past decade. The activities performed by the Mexican diasporic members in Honduras are made possible by the collusion with corrupted officials who protect the landing routes and sea shipments (Arson and Olson: 2011). This tendency to establish links with local authorities has been also noted in El Salvador, where according to intelligence and law enforcement officials, the Mexican DTOs have developed cocaine transport networks (Arson and Olson: 2011).

The presence of Mexican DTOs has also been detected in Guatemala. In 2012, the Guatemalan authorities discovered what is considered the second biggest laboratory to process narcotics

(Cawley, 2014). *La Prensa Libre* reported the dismantling of the most industrialised lab in Guatemala sprawling over 10 thousand squared metres. The lab included high-tech equipment for the decanting, drying and refining of narcotics and dorms for the workers involved in the manufacturing of drugs. Later in that year, Guatemalan officers dismantled a laboratory in Huehuetenango, where they sized 1,059 barrels with monomethylamine and other chemicals used to synthesise narcotics (Editorial Prensa Libre: 2012a and 2012b). Finally, according to Pachico (2012b), in 2011, authorities seized about 1,600 tons of precursor chemicals, four times the amount seized in 2010.

The number of seizures and the dismantling of laboratories reflect a tendency of Mexican DTOs to expand their processing activities across the Central America. The laboratories are related to Mexican DTOs because of their financial capacities to invest and develop modern and well-equipped laboratories. The information available is limited to determine how many members of the Mexican criminal diaspora remain in foreign soil to develop their activities, nevertheless it can be noted that they own the properties where they work (Pachico, 2012). Another argument is that Mexican diasporic criminals are involved in the processing of narcotics is the existence of dorms inside the laboratories. In fact, it has been noted that the Sinaloa cartel recruits Mexican chemical engineers and send them to work for the laboratories abroad (Univision, 2014).

Finally, it has been argued that Mexican DTOs are developing laboratories abroad because of prohibitionist measures to import chemicals such ephedrine used to produce methamphetamine (Cawley: 2014). As a result, Mexican DTOs, specifically the Sinaloa Gulf have developed alliances with Chinese based organised criminal groups who export the chemicals directly to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (Pelcastre: 2014).

Colombian criminal diaspora

The UNODC (2014) reported that in 2012 Colombian authorities dismantled eight clandestine laboratories in Colombian soil. Nevertheless, backtracking investigators suggests that there is tendency of the Colombian DTOs to use other localities to produce their narcotics and obtain chemicals, for instance across the Andean Region, specifically in Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Panama (UNODC, 2014).

As for the Mexican case, Colombian DTOs are expanding into the neighbouring countries. Arson and Olson (2011) argue that the FARC have developed laboratories specialised in the production of HCL (refined cocaine) in Ecuador, specifically in the borderland region. Colombian DTOs in charge of processing narcotics have not only been discovered in Ecuador but also in Panama, Venezuela and Peru.

In the past years, more laboratories have been discovered in the border between Colombia and Panama. As informed by Cawley (2013), Colombian authorities found a small laboratory specialised in cocaine production, estimated to produce 30 kilograms monthly. In addition, it has been noted than the region of Darien, is used by the FARC to store cocaine. The border between Panama and Colombia is characterised by its wilderness and difficult access therefore, it offers safe heaven to store narcotics (Pachico, 2011). The porousness of the Colombian border with Panama, as well as the vegetation of the terrain attracts the members of the Colombian criminal diaspora to operate in that region.

Furthermore, the Colombian criminal diaspora produces narcotics in Venezuela. According to Mayorca (2014) in 2012, the Venezuelan authorities dismantled 24 laboratories. These laboratories specialised in the manufacturing of coca leafs were located principally in the region of Zulia, Táchira, Apure and Delta Amacuro, close to the Colombian border. The

Colombian criminal diaspora is increasingly moving to process cocaine in Venezuela for two main reasons.

The first element to consider is the proximity between the coca plantations and the cocaine laboratories. According to Mayorca (2014), DTOs are developing clandestine labs in the same location as coca leaf plantations to have easier access to the raw material.

The second reason why Colombian DTOs are moving to Venezuela is the pool of workers available to join their industry. According to Venezuelan militaries, the Colombian labs are found in the same region where Colombian refugees settle (Mayorca, 2014). As previously explained, Colombian refugees are a potential workers for the Colombian criminal diaspora, specifically for the FARC.

Finally, Colombian labs have also been found in Peru. During an anti-drug operation, Peruvian officials captured seven Colombian warlords working in coca laboratories (Chumpitaz: 2011). In addition, according to a Peruvian investigator, prosecutors and investigators have detected a flow of Colombian migration specialised in the processing of cocaine (Chumpitaz: 2011). He explained that the new Colombian criminal technique consists of sending Colombian chemists to run the Peruvian laboratories (Chumpitaz: 2011).

To conclude, the information available reflects that there is a trend of both the Mexican and Colombian DTOs processing narcotics overseas. In this specific phase of the drug trafficking process, we can conclude that the members of the criminal diaspora support drug production by negotiating with local authorities and by running laboratories. This means that members of the criminal diaspora tend to occupy the higher positions in the laboratories, such as chemists and engineers or as negotiators with local authorities (Univision, 2014; Chumpitaz: 2011).

Employing members of the diaspora might be useful for the DTOs for two main reasons: academic qualification and power of coercion over their family back in their places of origin. First, it is suspected that national DTOs prepare and choose the engineers and chemists who join their criminal organisations. Second, by subcontracting members of their diasporas, national DTOs can easily threaten their family and strong-arm them into working more effectively. Finally, it has been demonstrated that diasporas prefer to move to neighbouring regions, mainly because of costs and accessibility to their drug plantations.

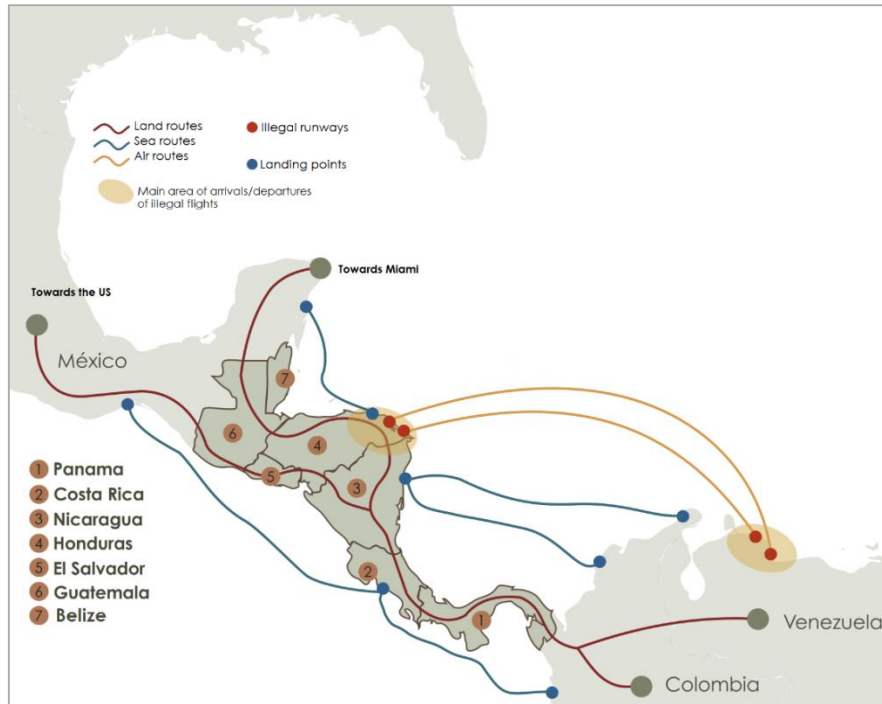
CHAPTER 5: THE ROLE OF CRIMINAL DIASPORAS IN THE TRANSPORT AND DISTRIBUTION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING

This chapter argues that the Mexican and Colombian criminal diasporas are engaged in the transport and distribution of narcotics in the Latin American region and overseas. In general, DTOs integrate members of their diasporas in these steps of the drug trafficking process because they share the same language, culture, and ethnicity therefore they are portrayed as more trustworthy people. Furthermore, it can be noticed that for these particular stages of the narcotics trade process, DTOs tend to integrate migrants of second and further generations that know better the terrain where drugs are being imported and distributed.

5. 1. The role of criminal diasporas in the transport of narcotics

In the context of drug trafficking, transport refers to the action of taking narcotics from one place to another by means of a vehicle, aircraft, or ship. The transport of narcotics is quite complex as it involves a large range of agents in Latin America. Once drugs are synthesised, they can be sent to the destination country by air, sea or land (Figure. 7). The transport of narcotics can be divided into retail and wholesale. Retail trade is when drug traffickers smuggle drugs individually and in small quantities across borders whereas wholesale refers to the trafficking of large amounts of narcotics (Zaitch, 2002).

FIGURE 7. DRUG TRAFFICKING TRADE IN LATIN AMERICA



Source: Pérez Ventura (2014). *El Camino de la Droga. El Orden Mundial en siglo XXI*.

The Mexican criminal diaspora transporting narcotics to the US

In the Latin American region, Mexican DTOs are the most active in relation to drug trafficking due to the alliances developed with Colombian DTOs (Arson and Olson, 2011). Mexican DTOs control mostly all the drug trafficking to the United States, according to the American government 90 per cent of the illicit drugs entering its borders passes through the Central American Isthmus and Mexico (Arson and Olson, 2011:27).

Diasporic members engaged in the transport of narcotics from Mexico to the US can be broken down in two main categories: the sojourner traders and members of the Mexican criminal diaspora already settled in the US. Focusing on the wholesale of narcotics, three main techniques of trafficking used by the Mexican criminal diaspora can be identified: 1) a direct

route from the place of production to the destination, 2) an intermediate route involving other DTOs and 3) a route sustained with the collusion of the Mexican American criminal diaspora.

Mexican DTOs are operating in Central American countries to cultivate and produce their own narcotics. Furthermore, the seizures and laboratories discovered show that they have the necessary logistics to conduct the trafficking directly from the place where drugs are produced. For instance, in a laboratory dismantling in 2009 in Honduras, planes and landing runways were discovered (Arson and Olson, 2011). In fact, it has been noted that drug shipments leave Honduras by air in light planes and small helicopters flying short distances (Arson and Olson, 2011).

In addition to transporting their own-made narcotics, Mexican diasporic criminals have developed channels to transport Colombian cocaine. According to Arson and Olson (2011), recent reports suggest that the Gulf DTO picks up cocaine in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and traffics it through Honduran territory by land and sea. The UNODC (2012) explains that cocaine trafficking arrests in Central America have increased in recent years. For instance in Costa Rica, where even if the majority of the traffickers arrested are still Costa Ricans, the UNODC (2012) reports that there is an increasing number of Mexican and Colombian criminals involved in the drug trade in that region (Figure. 8).

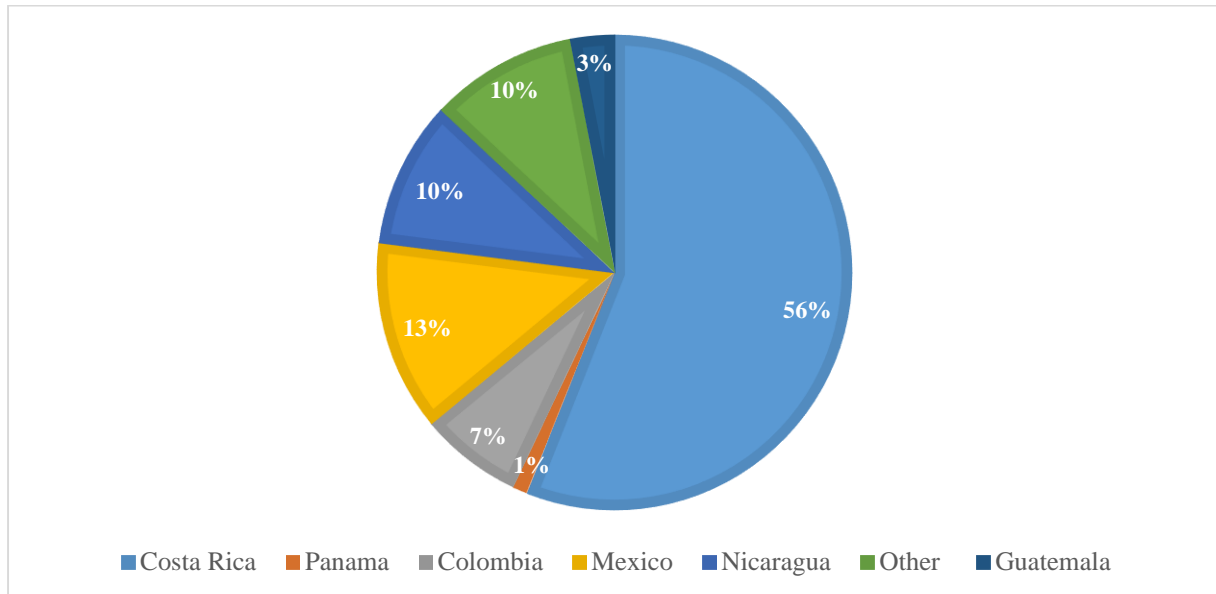
For example in February 2011, three Mexicans were arrested in el Guaco, Costa Rica with more than 300 kg of cocaine (UNODC, 2012: 42). Even if this type of diasporic criminals can be considered sojourners, they are having an increasing presence in the region. In addition, we can identify them as members of the Mexican diaspora because of their identity and the ethnic characteristics that link them back to their homeland.

Besides the increasing number of Mexicans arrested in Central America, we can observe their growing presence in the region through the behaviour of local gangs in other countries. Arson and Olson (2011) note that local gangs in Honduras are adopting cultural traits of Mexican DTOs. The fact that local gangs and criminals in Honduras are copying cultural elements of the Mexican DTOs suggests the rising power of the Mexican criminal diaspora overseas and the aspiration to become as influential as they are. For instance, drug traffickers in Central America are listening to *narcorridos*, songs composed for Mexican drug traffickers which lyrics narrate their stories (Arson and Olson, 2011).

The second type of members of the Mexican criminal diaspora involved in the transport of narcotics are gangsters. Gangsters have an important role in the trafficking of drugs to the US, specifically for land trafficking.

As formulated in the third chapter of this paper, Mexican DTOs have interests in developing a solid relation with Mexican-American gangs to ensure their access to information, security and subsistence. Since members of the Mexican criminal diaspora living in the US have access to more information about the complications encountered at the border and the unforeseen incidents during the trip, they have become important players in the drug trafficking to the United States (Grillo, 2012).

FIGURE 8. NATIONALITIES OF PEOPLE ARRESTED FOR COCAINE TRAFFICKING IN COSTA RICA IN 2010



Source: UNODC (2012)

The Colombian criminal diaspora

The Colombian criminal diaspora has an important role in the drug transportation; however, it is not exactly the same as for the Mexican diaspora. The role of the Colombian diaspora in trafficking drugs to the United States differs because of three main reasons: firstly because of its geographical location; secondly, because of the lack of existence of exclusively Colombian gangs living in the US; and most importantly because of the agreements between Mexican and Colombian DTOs. As a result of these differences, it can be concluded that the main role of the Colombian criminal diaspora is to transport the narcotics to Central America in order to supply Mexican DTOs.

The role of the Colombian diaspora trading drugs to the US was not always mainly through Mexico. In fact, it is argued that during the 1980s Colombian drug-traffickers created tight

criminal networks in Miami and New York (Collier and Gamarra, 2001). Nevertheless, the major offensive against Colombian DTOs carried out by the American and Colombian governments in the late 1980s shifted the drug trafficking routes and actors involved in the business (Bouvier, 2007).

Nowadays, Colombian DTOs use Central America as the hub for cocaine trafficking. This trend can be observed in Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica (Arson and Olson, 2011; UNODC, 2002 and Yagoub, 2014). According to Arson and Olson (2011), members of the Rastrojos managed to traffic cocaine in illicit planes from Venezuela to Honduras in 2009. As for the Mexican case, Colombian DTOs have enough resources to purchase aircrafts and bribe local authorities.

In Panama, Yagoub (2014) explains that the Colombian DTOs are positioning members of the criminal diaspora (paramilitaries) in the region to facilitate the transit of drugs to the north. Supposedly, in this region members of the FARC and Urabeños are in charge of trafficking narcotics in retail. This technique consists of carrying small packages of cocaine in backpacks to hide easily in the jungle.

Finally, the UNODC (2012) has argued that a growing number of traffickers arrested in Costa Rica are originally from Colombia (Figure. 8). For instance, in January 2011, Costa Rican authorities dismantled a Colombian DTO and detained five members of the Colombian criminal diaspora transporting narcotics (UNODC: 2012). Overall, the Colombian criminal diaspora has a minor role in the transport of drugs to the US because the Mexican criminal diaspora is in charge of bringing their cocaine from Central America. However, the information available reflects an increasing involvement of the Colombian diaspora in the transport of drugs to Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica, where Mexican DTOs travel to get the merchandise.

Even if the majority of drugs consumed in the United States are transported through the Mexican route (UNODC, 2014), it is important to note that the Colombian criminal diasporas have also developed their own trafficking routes based mainly in Florida. The members of the criminal Colombian diaspora who migrated as the result of the conflict in the 1980s sustain this route (Malone and Malone-Rowe, 2014). In fact, Collier and Gamarra (2001) argue that as a result of the conflict, many Colombians moved to the south of Florida, specifically to Miami, which became a very important pole for drug trafficking. Florida is still a gateway for Colombian drugs as shown by the seizures in the region. For instance, on the 15th of April 2014, 7,000 pounds of cocaine were sized in Miami transported by three Colombians (Clary, 2014).

5. 2. The role of criminal diasporas in the distribution of narcotics

In the context of drug trafficking, distribution involves the spread or share of narcotics in a determinate area. There are also two mechanisms of distribution: wholesale and retail. In the particular cases analysed in this paper, it will be argued that criminal diasporas, specifically the Mexican one, have an important role in both the wholesale and retail of narcotics in the United States.

According to Brophy (2008), in the early 1990s, US anti-drug operations began to focus on the dismantling of drug trafficking networks from Colombia to the US through the Caribbean. Consequently, Colombian DTOs diverted their traditional route and established direct connections with Mexican DTOs. This shift affects the distribution of Colombian drugs in the US and in turn the engagement of the Colombian criminal diaspora in the region. For instance Garzón (2013) notes that the fact that Mexican factions became the main distributors of cocaine in the United States encouraged the Colombian groups to seek new markets and expand their trafficking routes to Europe. In fact, Europe became an attractive pole to export narcotics for

Colombian DTOs specifically because it offered them better access to retail distribution (Garzón, 2013). The recent changes in the dynamics of drug distribution reflect the predominant role of the Mexican criminal diaspora in the distribution of narcotics in the United States.

As previously demonstrated, there is a strong link between Mexican DTOs and members of the Mexican criminal diaspora living in the United States, who enable a safer traffic of the drugs at the US-Mexican border. According to the National Gangs Intelligence (2013), US-based gangs cooperate primarily in drug smuggling activities. In fact, according to the available data, most gangs, specifically the ones from the criminal Mexican diaspora are involved in the wholesale and street-level distribution of drugs (National Gangs Intelligence: 2013).

Firstly, the Mexican criminal diaspora assists the wholesale distribution by sustaining links with Mexican DTOs to transport cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamines; secondly, the diasporic gangsters re-distribute in smaller quantities (street-level distribution) the narcotics across the US territory (National Gangs Intelligence, 2013). According to the available reports of the NGI (2010, 2011 and 2013), the main gangs that control the drug distributions are the Latin Kings, MS-13, Sureños, Norteños and Barrio Azteca.

Most of the gang members involved in drug distribution are linked with Mexican DTOs such as the Juarez, Sinaloa and Zetas criminal groups (NGI, 2013). The main diasporic characteristics of drug distributors are the following: first, they maintain a collective memory about the homeland and strong ethnic connections and second, they have a troubled relationship with host societies (Cohen, 2008:17). These two characteristics enable them to be more prone to work in alliance with Mexican DTOs to develop networks of distribution.

One interesting example that illustrates this argument is the case of Barrio Azteca. Barrio Azteca is a gang that has developed strong distribution networks mainly in the south of the United States (Burton, 2008). It has been argued that this gang receives discounts on drugs in exchange of providing tactical information and help to the Mexican DTOs to distribute drugs in the US (Burton, 2008). One particularity of this gang is that they have developed codes in Nahuatl, the indigenous language of the Aztecs (Guerrero Gutierrez, 2010). In addition to be useful to maintain secrecy and discretion, the use of Nahuatl reflects an attachment to indigenous and Mexican ethnic roots, which characterise the diasporic members.

Furthermore, the troubled relationship between the members of the criminal diaspora and the American society makes them more vulnerable to interact with Mexican DTOs. First, because they might feel excluded from the American society and second because they might not feel any sense of respect for the law, rules, and people in the US. Overall, the troubled relationship with their hostland and the lack of involvement in the American society are elements that make more prone the members of the criminal diaspora to interact with Mexican DTOs and develop distribution channels for narcotics both at the wholesale and at the retail level.

The involvement of the Colombian criminal diaspora in the distribution of narcotics in the American region has changed. Overall, the Colombian criminal diaspora has a discreet role in the distribution of drugs because of the evolution of the drug distribution networks, which enabled the Mexican DTOs and gangs to control the distribution channels (NGI, 2013).

In this chapter, it has been argued that the Mexican criminal diaspora has a predominant role in the transport and distribution of narcotics in the American region. Nevertheless, the Colombian criminal diaspora has still a very important role in the transport of cocaine, especially in the Central American region, where the Mexican DTOs travel to stock up on

narcotics. Both the Colombian and Mexican criminal diasporas have the means, desire and capabilities to develop networks specialised in the transport of narcotics in Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Honduras. Finally, it has been demonstrated that the Mexican criminal diaspora plays an important role in both the wholesale and the retail distribution of narcotics in the US. The number of Mexican and Hispanic gangs with members of the criminal Mexican diaspora as well as the reports published by the National Gangs Intelligence show the predominance of the Mexican criminal diaspora controlling the distribution channels of drugs.

CONCLUSION

This paper argued that both the Mexican and Colombian DTOs interact with the members of their respective criminal diasporas in the drug trafficking process. This study presents an innovative theoretical framework to study the relation between national drug trafficking organisations and members of their migrant communities who participate in these illicit activities.

The theoretical framework presented in this paper underlines the diasporic characteristics sustained over time by the Mexican and Colombian DTOs. As a result, it is argued that identity, ethnicity and ties with their homeland are key elements that sustain the relation between national DTOs and members of their diasporas.

This paper unpacks the drug-trafficking process in cultivation, production, transit and distribution. This clear-cut stages of the drug trafficking process enables an exhaustive analysis of the role of the members of the criminal diasporas. Overall, it can be concluded that the Mexican and Colombian DTOs are interested in developing and sustaining networks with the members of their criminal diasporas in order to guarantee their survival, security and access to intelligence.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that the role of the members of the criminal diaspora varies in each phase of the drug trafficking process. In fact, the role of the diasporic members in the whole process depends on their legal status, level of education and hierarchical status inside the DTO.

The results of this research highlight the relevance of integrating elements of the diasporic scholarship in the study of transnational criminal networks. With these elements, it can be

concluded that criminal networks are sustained by trust and interdependent relations derived from diasporic elements.

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