

**Cocaine Supply Chain Relationships in Colombia and their Impact on Citizen Security:
How Does the Narco-broker Come In?**

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Abstract

This paper explores how the “narco-broker” is relevant for cocaine supply chains and for the repercussions that they have on citizen security. Recognition by state leaders that the war on drugs has failed spurred a debate on how to more effectively tackle the illicit drug problem. While paradigm changes such as reinforcing a public health perspective, focusing on demand rather than supply and moving towards legalisation are on the table, the mechanisms that connect the links of the cocaine supply chain are little known and hence no immediate measures to countervail these mechanisms are considered. Furthermore, their citizen security repercussions seem to be ignored. Complementing the “big picture approach” with a zoom-in on transactional supply chain relationships allows analysing specific elements of the cocaine business: the brokers who constitute the “glue” that holds together the different links of the supply chain. Helping overcome distrust, the broker facilitates durable business links within the cocaine supply chain. While this mechanism is convenient for the involved violent non-state actors (VNSAs) interested in economic benefits, the implications for local communities are alarming yet little known: the communities face mistrust, exposure to violence and uncertainty regarding the VNSA-imposed “rules of the game”. Furthermore, economic opportunities generated by the cocaine business tend to come along with “shadow citizen security”, which can have serious implications for the state-society relationship and citizenship.

Introduction

The “solution to the illegal drug problem” lies at the core of the current peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the insurgent group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP). It figures as number four on the negotiation agenda included in the General Agreements that the two parties signed on 26 August 2012. The topic includes programmes to substitute cultivations of illicit usage, consumer preventive programmes and the “solution of the phenomenon of production and commercialisation of narcotics” (Government of Colombia, FARC 2012). Also globally, illegal drug trafficking has been recognised as a pressing issue. Already in 2011 the Global Commission on Drug Policy confirmed that current anti-drug policies had failed miserably. In line with this, in December 2012 Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos announced that he was open to revise alternative options (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2011; El Tiempo 2012) and in January 2013 during a visit of US ex-president Jimmy Carter to Colombia Santos and Carter jointly concluded that the war on drugs needs rethinking (El Tiempo 2013). Three actions are frequently advocated as important long-term steps in the scope of such a revision: first, a general shift from prohibitionist approaches to a public health perspective; second, a stronger focus on demand as opposed to the supply side; and third, the intensification of an international debate to explore the option of legalisation. While such “big picture” rethinking is necessary and welcomed, it fails to address the cocaine supply chain as such and the mechanisms that connect its links so successfully. Likewise, by typically focusing on cultivation or the market, current analyses and policies ignore the manifold security repercussions that the supply chain has on the local communities in which its intermediate stages are embedded.

This paper explores how the “narco-broker”—the glue that holds the different links in the supply chain together—is relevant for the functioning of transactional supply chain relationships and for the repercussions that they have on citizen security. I argue that two particular characteristics of the broker-mechanism have significant implications for local communities living in territories where transactional supply chain relationships take place: first, the broker helps overcome the problem of

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distrust among different violent non-state actors (VNSAs) such as rebels, paramilitaries or organised criminal groups in business deals, but not in a more general way; second the mechanism generates interdependence between the broker and VNSAs rather than among different VNSAs.² As I contend, these characteristics entail the VNSAs' distrust towards the local communities, the communities' exposure to sporadic waves of violence and their constant uncertainty regarding the "rules of the game" they should adhere to.

In spite of being alarming, the implications of the broker's role in transactional supply chain relationships for citizen security are underexplored. Scholars have researched specific links of the chain, that is, certain groups of VNSAs, and how they impact on security dynamics, rather than taking a holistic approach that considers the cocaine supply chain and its elements as such. The "civil war literature" for example explores how insurgent or paramilitary groups shape civil war dynamics including the affectation of civilians (Collier 2003; Stathis N. Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2006; Arjona 2010), yet without considering how exactly these groups are embedded in the cocaine supply chain. Also, these works tend to focus on easily quantifiable impacts such as homicide rates or mass displacements rather than hardly visible consequences including social control, fear and mistrust.

Certainly, little quantifiable repercussions on societies of living under VNSA presence such as distrust have been explored to a certain extent by another body of literature: fear of crime has been researched by psychologists, criminologists, economists and anthropologists since the 1960s (Hale 1996; Lee 2001; Farrall, JR, and Gray 2009) and a growing body of literature has also examined the concept of fear in the specific context of Latin American societies (Caldeira 2000), described by Koonings and Kruit (1999) as "societies of fear" or by Rotker and Goldman (2002) as "citizens of fear". Yet this literature is unconnected to the cocaine business work. Against this, those who do take a holistic approach and consider for example the global cocaine business such as Claw and Lee (1996) or Gootenberg (2008) do not look into local security implications.

Another body of literature concentrates on how policy responses to the cocaine business affect local communities, with a particularly extensive field being the research that has been conducted on the impacts of toxic fumigations implemented to eradicate coca cultivations (see e.g. Washington Office on Latin America 2008; Witness for Peace, Minga, and Institute for Policy Studies 2007), but again, the mechanisms that keep the supply chain going are ignored. Similarly, research conducted on drug violence, including Arias (2006) or Bergman and Whitehead (2009), go little into detail as to how the mechanisms that link the supply chain elements are relevant for local citizen security. Notably, some scholars have addressed the issue of the broker both in the Andean region and in other parts of the world (Tickner, García, and Arzeza 2011; Farah 2012). Yet the implications for citizen security remain under-investigated.

To sum up, exploring the broker's role in transactional supply chain relationships not only enhances understanding of the functioning of the cocaine business on which little research has been conducted so far, it also facilitates revealing citizen security impacts that are concealed in the literature that is available on these issues.

The methodology of this study is based on a multi-site case study design to which qualitative methods complemented by quantitative dimensions were applied. Various data sources and research methods were used. As the study forms part of a wider research project, over the period of twelve months (August 2011 to November 2012) I conducted over 430 anonymous, semi-structured interviews in the Colombian departments of Nariño, Putumayo, Arauca, Norte de Santander, Cesar, La Guajira as well as in Bogotá; in the Ecuadorian provinces of Carchi, Esmeraldas, Sucumbíos as well as Quito; and in

² Aware of the challenge of analytically distinguishing between "state" and "non-state", violent non-state actors (VNSAs) are defined as a set of at least three individuals who are i) 'willing and capable to use violence for pursuing their objectives'; ii) directly or indirectly challenging the state's legitimate monopoly of violence by using or threatening to use violence illegally; and iii) 'shaped through an organisational relationship or structure that exists over a specific period of time' (Schneckener 2006, 25; Schneckener 2009, 8–9).

the Venezuelan states of Apure, Táchira, Zulia as well as Caracas Interviewees included ex-combatants, displaced persons, community leaders, clerics, state forces, government officials, non-governmental organisations, United Nations staff and academics. The data was complemented by reviews of policy documents, media articles and secondary literature, as well as the evaluation of surveys and databases. Importantly, the sensitivity and complexity of this research topic raises three important challenges. First, the fieldwork has been conducted under extremely complicated circumstances. The risks and vulnerabilities of all persons affected by my research had to be constantly re-assessed to ensure the security of myself, my interviewees and everyone else. Second, since the research topic is associated with illegality, data are partly based on estimates and unofficial information. Data and methodological triangulation were employed to mitigate this challenge (Denzin 1970). Third, as noted by authors such as Lund (2007) and raised by several interviewees (*cleric, Ipiales (CO) 2011; *humanitarian organisation staff, Maicao (CO) 2012), the lines between “state” and “non-state” and “legitimate” and “illegitimate” are often blurred.³ Hence, categories such as VNSAs are meant to be considered in a broad way.

The argument will be developed in the following way: first, I contextualize the illegal drug business in the Andean region and outline how the cocaine supply chain has been addressed in security and anti-drug policies so far. Subsequently, cocaine supply chain relationships and the role of the narco-broker in Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela are discussed in order to afterwards analyse how the broker is relevant for citizen security repercussions of these relationships. Finally, some conclusions and policy implications are pointed out.

Counter-narcotics and Security Policies in Colombia: The Regional Context

In the 1970s Colombia arose as the world’s largest cocaine producer. During this period, coca was primarily cultivated in Bolivia and Peru, while Colombia was in charge of processing and trafficking after its market share in Cannabis had shrunk (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2010, 81). With the emergence of two major drug cartels in Medellín and Cali in the 1980s, Colombia’s role became more monopolistic. When the Cali and Medellín cartels were destroyed in the early 1990s and the cocaine market became more disorganised, the paramilitaries and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), two major actors in Colombia’s decade-old armed internal conflict, intensified their involvement in the drug business which constituted an important income source for them. While the paramilitaries became the protagonists in international cocaine trafficking, the insurgents expanded their activities to direct control, production and distribution (Sanderson 2004, 51; Bonilla and Moreano 2009). From 2003 to 2006 the paramilitary umbrella organisation ‘United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia’ (AUC), founded in 1997, was demobilised, accelerating the proliferation of a variety of paramilitary splinter groups and other criminal and drug-trafficking right-wing groups, subsumed by the Colombian government under the term BACRIM (*bandas criminales emergentes*, emerging criminal bands).⁴ These groups now engage in the illegal drug business as well, and enter relationships with other groups to enhance economic benefits (International Crisis Group 2010, 9).

Importantly, the cocaine business is not confined to Colombia. In fact, the entire Andean region is affected. To begin with, though they have shrank, coca cultivations are still widespread in Peru and Bolivia and also have been detected in the border zones of Ecuador, Brazil, Panama and Venezuela. The Andean border zones are also the site of coca processing. Apart from the cultivation and processing of coca, the provision of services connected to the cocaine business is common throughout the region. Due to its dollarization, Ecuador, for example, is supposed to be the focal point for money laundering and it also is the country of origin of chemical precursors that are required to process the coca leaves (Bonilla and Moreano 2009). Venezuela is important for the provision of cheap gasoline that is also essential for the production of cocaine. Finally, all Andean states are starting points of drug trafficking routes. One route, for instance, starts in Peru or Bolivia and continues via Colombia,

³ References marked with * are interviews.

⁴ There is a debate in Colombia as to whether the term “BACRIM” disguises the real nature of these groups. See Perez-Santiago (2012) and Arias Ortiz (2012).

Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands and Central America to the final destination, the United States. Another route begins in Colombia from where the cocaine is trafficked to Venezuela or Brazil and from there, via West Africa, to Europe (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2010, 85–105).

Closely linked to the country's security strategies, Colombia's recent drug policies date back to 2000, when Plan Colombia, a counterdrugs and counterinsurgency strategy backed by the United States, was implemented. Initiated as a counternarcotics programme that sought to reduce coca cultivations primarily by fumigating them, after 9/11 it focused more on the counterterrorism side. In late 2003 Plan Colombia's second phase Plan Patriota started: an intense military offensive in southern Colombia where coca cultivations were thriving. This Plan was succeeded by Plan Consolidation, designed to target areas where weak institutional state presence, high rates of violence, terrorist threats, illicit cultivations and drug trafficking converge. The Plan aims to consolidate state presence—first with a military and then a civilian focus—and to substitute coca cultivations with alternative economic development projects. Though the Consolidation Plan is still in force, it has lost momentum and never really moved from the military to the civilian components (Poe and Isacson 2011). Meanwhile, in 2012 another military strategy has been initiated, Operation Sword of Honour, which intensifies military pressure on the FARC, aims to cut their funding from the cocaine trade. While previously been dealt with by the National Police with support of the Navy, under this plan the military now combats BACRIM as well (El Espectador 2012).

The effectiveness of this counterinsurgency and counternarcotic *mélange* to solve the illicit drug problem has been modest. Targeting the links of the cocaine supply chain from coca farmers to traffickers did not significantly reduce the drug trade. Coca cultivations in Colombia have been reduced from approximately 140,000 hectares in 2001 to approximately 60,000 in 2011, and also in the Andean region in general, the cultivation area has declined (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2012). However, among others thanks to changes in the processing methods, the production of cocaine has remained fairly stable for the last two decades; every year, multi-tons of cocaine is seized (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2012). The FARC have been weakened militarily, but their income share derived from the cocaine industry seems to be unaffected since they simply change trafficking routes and business partners to keep the money flowing. Likewise, the fight against the BACRIM came along with the capture of various important group leaders. In 2012 for example, the three top leaders of the “Rastrojos”, a BACRIM heavily involved in drug trafficking, either were arrested or surrendered (Insight Crime). Nevertheless, the voids have been filled almost instantly by other groups and individuals, leaving the cocaine supply chain without any major interruptions. In brief, there is a trend of constant adaption and reconfiguration of VNSA groups involved in the cocaine supply chain.

Understanding Cocaine Supply Chain Relationships

Interdependence and overcoming distrust in the cocaine supply chain network

To understand how the enduring yet flexible and dynamic nature of the cocaine supply chain network is possible despite the involvement of different VNSAs with diverse ideological, political and economic motivations, it is useful to consider the features that characterise the arrangements among these groups. First, the relative stability of these arrangements suggests that the involved VNSAs accept a certain degree of interdependence. Being affected by the other party's actions and knowing that the actions of oneself have implications for the other one facilitates the institutionalisation of the arrangement. High institutionalisation is conducive to continuity, even if the arrangement is modified or certain groups are substituted by other ones: the “basics” of the arrangements, for example the agreement on who controls the territory where these arrangements take place, remain the same. The rules of the game do not have to be constantly renegotiated. Second, arrangements that are of mutual benefit to all involved parties normally presuppose that the groups overcome distrust.⁵ The extent to which the groups achieve overcoming distrust correlates with the arrangement's durability: the better the groups do at overcoming distrust, the more durable the arrangement. According to Gambetta

⁵ For the problem of distrust see e.g. Putnam et al. (1993) and Boix and Posner (1996).

(1990, 217), trust, one way of overcoming distrust, is “a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both *before* he can monitor such action (...) *and* in a context in which it affects *his own* action.”⁶ Trust arises in a “relationship with people who are to some extent free [and which] itself must be one of *limited freedom*...it must be possible...to refrain from action” (Gambetta 1990a, 219). Engaging in arrangements of convenience tends to rely on one or more of the four following mechanisms: shared economic, political or other interests; shared values such as ideological, moral or religious beliefs; personal bonds; and the power of one group used for coercion or the credible threat of it (B. Williams 1990).⁷ While overcoming distrust is essential in any kind of inter-organisational collaboration (Deutsch 1962; Thomas 1979, 217; Mishra 1996), due to the illegal nature of the issues at stake it is particularly critical in the case of arrangements among VNSAs (cf. Gambetta 1990b; 2009, 28). Though illegality is conducive to large economic benefits because it confers high value on a certain good or activity, the risks attached to it are also high. Since arrangements on illegal issues are by no means legally binding, the possibility of cheating, betrayal and treachery is omnipresent. Paradoxically, this increases the fear of reciprocity and, at the same time, the need for VNSAs to base their decisions on whether to engage in such arrangements on the other party’s trustworthiness (cf. Gambetta 2009, 30–77). In brief, if VNSA groups overcome the problem of distrust and are more interdependent, they seem to be more likely to engage in more stable arrangements.

Cocaine supply chain relationships in Colombia and the narco-broker

While in other types of stable arrangements among VNSAs interdependence and overcoming distrust are easily detectable characteristics, in the case of cocaine supply chain relationships things are more complex.⁸ This is because this type of VNSA arrangement is predicated on an intermediate figure, the narco-broker.

In transactional supply chain relationships VNSAs are at “arm’s length”; they are independent and on an equal footing. VNSAs typically respect territorial limits of influence within which each group exercises economic, social and/or political control. This territorial segmentation arises from the division of labour in the supply chain of an (illegal) product or service in which each group assumes one or several specific functions. Enabling all parties to draw on their comparative advantages, this specialisation maximises profits from the different stages. Though it usually leads to limited commitment between the groups, the VNSAs are indirectly connected through financial or material transactions. Important examples from the Andean context include the production stages of cocaine in Colombia’s southern border departments of Nariño and Putumayo, where coca cultivations are thriving. Consider the transactional supply chain relationships along River Mira in Nariño: local farmers cultivate coca in the area of Bajo Mira, they harvest the coca leaves and, often after the first processing stage, sell them to a local broker. In agreement with the FARC’s Daniel Aldana mobile column which is present in the region and protects as well as controls the cultivation and the first processing stages, the broker buys the coca paste and sells it to a group which transports the paste to the laboratories in Alto Mira and Frontera, apparently under control of the Rastrojos who seem to be in charge of further processing and transporting.⁹ Another broker negotiates with international organised criminal organisations such as the Mexican Zetas or the Sinaloa cartel, who buy the cocaine and ship it to the US market (Tickner, García, and Arzeza 2011).

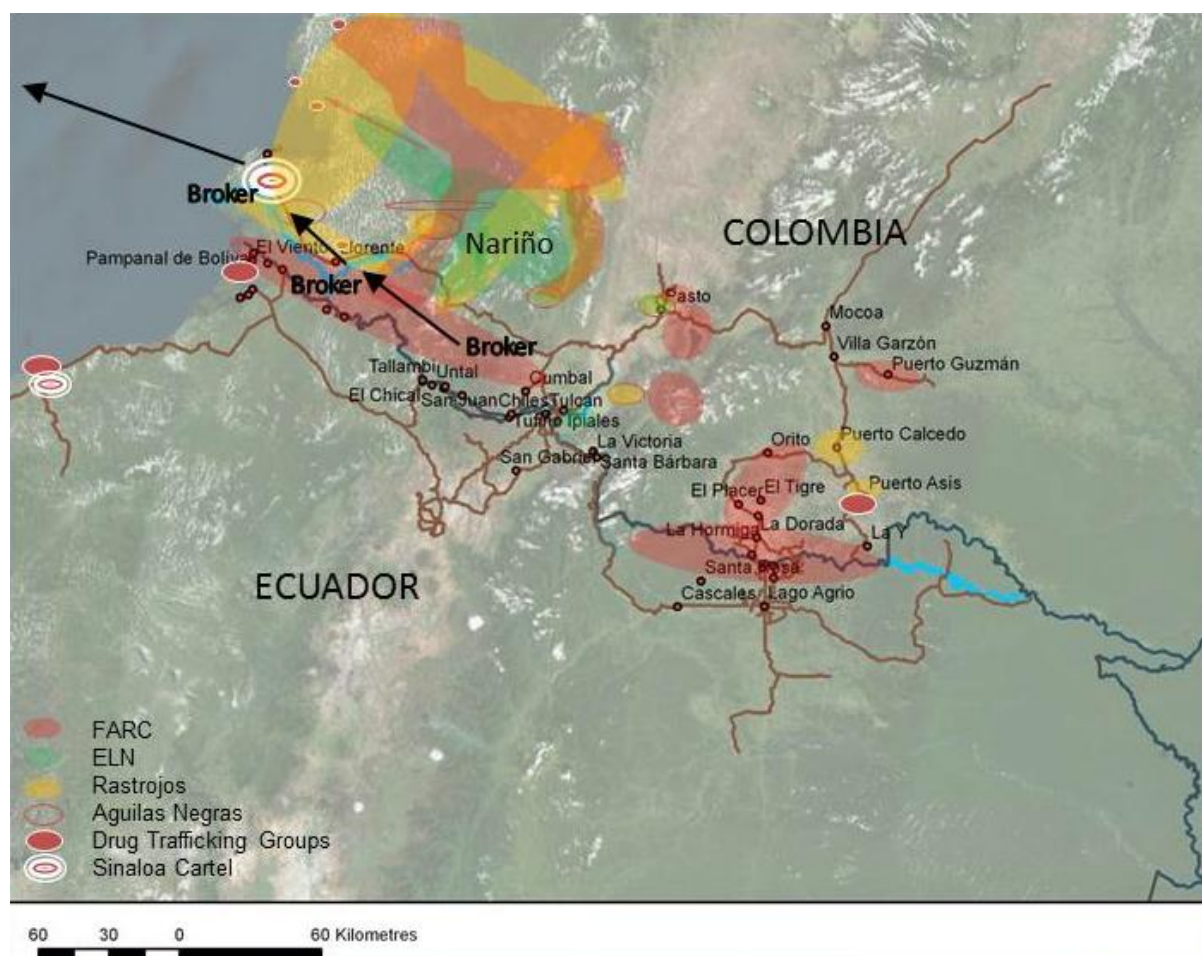
⁶ This definition of trust is founded on the agent’s vulnerability (see Deutsch 1977; Luhmann 1979; Barber 1983; Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman 1991).

⁷ The line between cases where coercion to enforce compliance falls under trust, and where it constitutes a substitute to it, is blurred: an arrangement might be based on the fact that Group A complies with the rules of the arrangement for fear of punishment from Group B rather than because of a trust-relationship between the two.

⁸ For a typology of arrangements of convenience among VNSAs see Idler (2012b). For other stable arrangements among VNSAs including strategic alliances, pacific coexistence and preponderance relations see Idler (2013c).

⁹ Williams (2002, 78) describes the broker role as “engineering” cooperation by providing “trusted contacts to facilitate communications and linkages among different criminal organizations.” Yet according to fieldwork evidence, the broker’s relevance goes beyond initiating cooperation; he or she ensures the upholding of the arrangement over large periods of time.

Figure: Cocaine supply chain relationships in Nariño, Colombia



Notably, the operational territories of different VNSAs often coincide with an urban-rural divide (Tickner, García, and Arzeza 2011; Laverde and Tapia 2009). The rebel groups National Liberation Army (ELN) and FARC are principally present in rural areas where coca is cultivated and the first processing steps take place. Cases in point in the Colombian-Ecuadorian and Colombian-Venezuelan borderlands are Bajo Putumayo in Colombia, and to some extent in the neighbouring Ecuadorian province of Sucumbíos; in Colombian Nariño and in neighbouring Ecuadorian Esmeraldas; in Catatumbo in Colombian Norte de Santander and to some extent in the neighbouring Venezuelan states of Táchira and Zulia and, formerly, in Colombian Arauca and to some extent in neighbouring Apure. Against this, post-demobilised groups tend to exercise territorial dominion in urban areas which are strategic for illegal drug trafficking routes, international shipment and other connected services.

The broker role described in this example is crucial for understanding the considerable degree of institutionalisation of transactional supply chain relationships.¹⁰ As an intermediary negotiating between groups, the broker allows for relatively stable relationships by bridging the “trust-gap” that might exist between the groups—particularly if they have different ideological or political motivations. Hence, instead of direct group interaction based on relatively high levels of trust as can be seen in strategic alliances among different groups and pacific coexistence of several groups in the

¹⁰ For a discussion of the broker role (“shadow facilitator”) in other cases including Liberia and El Salvador see Farah (2012).

same territory, in transactional supply chain relationships distrust is overcome by a broker. This might explain why insurgent groups have durable transactional arrangements with post-demobilised groups although their ideological and political motivations are diametrically opposed. It might also explain why in some cases rebels, such as the FARC, who protect coca cultivations and control the first processing step from coca to coca paste, suddenly switch “business partners” for the final processing into cocaine and the shipment: the broker might have found a higher bidder. The broker must be seen as a trustworthy figure by all parties involved, as the VNSAs are only likely to commit to the deal if the broker is perceived to be a reliable, impartial business partner.

Consider for example so-called Megateo, a former leading member of the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), who is supposed to be based in Catatumbo. He is an important broker who apparently engages in business deals with groups such as the FARC and ELN, but is also connected among others with regional politicians and the economic elite. With an influence sphere that reaches to the Venezuelan side of the border, he is the puppet master of many of the most crucial deals relating to the cocaine business in the region and has contributed to maintaining the division of labour within the lucrative illicit drug business over many years. Up to the present day, Megateo has managed to avoid being captured (Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris 2012). Importantly, the fact that his influence reaches beyond groups of VNSAs to state actors is pivotal for brokering arrangements among different VNSA groups. It increases his credibility as trustworthy mediator as these contacts help to avoid interference of the state through which the business deal might break. It is maybe for this reason that the limits between honest politicians and businessmen and shadowy figures involved in the illegal drug trade are not always clear. For example, Marcos “Marquito” Figueroa García has been accused to be a broker. Being closely linked to La Guajira’s regional government, he constitutes a well-known public figure to the local population, yet as of beginning 2013, he supposedly coordinates much of the regional drug and gasoline trafficking in the Colombian departments of La Guajira and Cesar (*civil society representative, Valledupar (CO) 2012).

In any of these cases, though the groups are not directly interdependent, interdependence between the groups and the broker is relatively high, and so is the institutionalisation of their arrangements. In this sense, though at first sight transactional supply chain relationships appear to be very different to other stable VNSA arrangements because inter-VNSA trust and group interdependence is replaced by a broker, the anomaly disappears when considering that all VNSAs need to place relatively high trust in the broker for the arrangement to be durable. Ergo, the correlation between interdependence and overcoming distrust on the one hand and institutionalisation or durability on the other hand holds. Still, while all VNSAs benefit from the fact that the broker helps overcome the trust-gap, the dependence upon the broker to purchase, sell or ship the illegal product can constitute strong limitations on their scope of decision making as regards the income they derive from cocaine. In essence, being a monopolist of the glue that holds together the transactional supply chain relationships, the broker leaves the parties to the arrangement at his mercy.

The existence of the narco-broker is not only significant to the groups involved in the cocaine supply chain relationships, it has also security repercussions on the local population. These repercussions are explored in the following section.

Cocaine Supply Chain Relationships and Citizen Security

The repercussions of cocaine supply chain relationships on citizen security usually involve the fuelling of distrust and a general sense of uncertainty among the population as well as the exposure to sporadic waves of violence. Therefore, they differ from repercussions that can be observed in areas where, though similarly exercising control over a certain territory, VNSAs are engaged in other forms of long-term arrangements.

As I use the term, citizen security refers to a citizen order in which a mutually reinforcing state-society relationship reduces violence. Following Bailey (2009, 274) I limit the violence component in this concept of security to “actual physical violence or the overt threat of violence intentionally

inflicted by one person or persons on another or others”. Conceptualizing the state-society relationship as a function of state capacity and responsiveness on the one hand, and social fabric on the other, accounts for the reciprocity of this relationship. Capacity refers to the state’s ability to exercise its functions; responsiveness requires responding to the citizens’ interests (Picciotto, Olonisakin, and Clarke 2010, 12–14). Social fabric is informed by the citizens’ respect, trust and a sense of community, premises for citizens to take collective action and establish a civic infrastructure that reduces insecurity. Covering observable facts such as homicides, *objective* citizen security is tied to the state’s capacity and responsiveness. Arising from people’s perceptions, *subjective* citizen security refers to the socially constructed concept of security; it is related to social fabric (Curbet 2009). Citizen security is rooted in citizenship, an institution that implies norms fostering loyalty towards the state in exchange for state capacity and responsiveness. Citizens accept rules of appropriate behaviour agreed upon by the state and themselves (March and Olsen 2008, 691–692).

If the state-society relationship is dysfunctional “shadow citizenship” may arise. It is based on a VNSA-society relationship in which the VNSA provides public goods and defines the rules of appropriate behaviour while citizens accept these rules and socially recognise the VNSA’s authority. Hence, shadow citizenship can be described as a cluster of illegal institutionalised organisational structures that guide behaviour in VNSA-controlled territory.¹¹ If the public goods include justice and security, few observable facts of insecurity such as violent crime, homicides and displacements exist, and the acceptance of VNSA-imposed rules is predicated on social recognition, the population experiences shadow citizen security (Idler 2012a). This is the case when, by filling the state’s governance void, VNSAs are able to win the communities’ respect. The rates of physical violence are relatively low; objective individual citizen security is not highly affected—provided they comply with the VNSA-imposed rules.

Yet when acceptance of the illegal authority is based not only on respect but also on fear, paired with psychological pressure, shadow citizen security is hard to achieve because *subjective* citizen security is undermined; that is, people’s perceptions of security. The implications are far-reaching. As Koonings and Kruijt (2004, 14) cite Rotker (2002, 16), “since violence can come from anywhere for whatever reason, citizens can become ‘potential victims’”. Constant feelings of fear and insecurity for oneself, one’s family and one’s friends can have psychological effects which contribute to the erosion of a society on the long run by undermining respect, solidarity and non-violent conflict management.¹² These feelings surface in aggressive mind sets, dreams and chronic illness (Koonings and Kruijt 1999, 19, 2; Torres-Rivas 1999, 288), and, as a media article review on Arauca has revealed, can contribute to the proliferation of adolescent suicides (La Voz del Cinaruco 2012). Hence, although the costs are harder to quantify than might be possible when only looking at physical violence (see e.g. Cohen and Bowles 2010), if translated for example into costs for the public (mental) health budget or citizen participation, subjective citizen insecurity has severe implications for the affected society (Pearce 2007; Médicos sin Fronteras 2011). Therefore, drawing on this concept of security highlights the facts that VNSA interactions not only affect security by causing violence, they may also have less visible security impacts, e.g. on the citizens’ social fabric and the mutually reinforcing state-society relationship.

Even if VNSAs are perceived to be legitimate, their justice and security services are a form of security that ultimately is only the “shadow” of it. Aiming to maintain what they consider order, VNSAs provide security with their own undemocratic and often violent means. They decide who is a threat to, or accepted as a member of, society, inform people with leaflets about types of behaviour they consider undesirable and warn of “social cleansings” against those who do not comply (*human rights

¹¹ For “rules of appropriate behaviour” see March and Olsen (2008), for shadow citizenship see Idler (Idler 2013a). As opposed to concepts such as Mampilly’s (2011) “insurgent governance” or Hall and Biersteker’s (2002, 216) “illicit authority”, shadow citizenship focuses on the citizen-side rather than the “VNSA-side” and hence is a convenient concept when exploring the repercussions on citizen security.

¹² For a discussion of economics and culture as reasons for a violent, disrespectful society see Waldmann (2007) and Thoumi (1995).

organisation staff, Lago Agrio (EC) 2012). In communities in the municipality of Tumaco, for example, the Autodefensas Nueva Generación, a group that apparently emerged after the demobilisation of the Colombian paramilitary organisation AUC, kill or threaten to kill “antisocial” persons, such as delinquents, drug addicts, prostitutes and homosexuals (Defensoría del Pueblo de Colombia 2008, 2). Certainly, in places like Puerto Asís in Colombian Putumayo, or Guasdalito in Venezuelan Apure, delinquency indeed is virtually absent, but this is because any delinquent would be killed by the VNSAs. Also the VNSAs’ way of solving problems might be more efficient than state justice systems, yet it tends to be based on radical, undemocratic means. For example, a betrayed man can talk to a VNSA leader about his wife’s affair and as a solution, the VNSA leader may contract a *sicario*, or contract killer, to get rid of the woman’s lover. The price of these “orders” reveal the economic desperation of the communities: in Ecuadorian Esmeraldas for example a human life is worth between 20 and 50 US dollars (González Carranza 2008, 221). The question then is under what conditions efficiency, and under what conditions democracy and the upholding of human rights, convey legitimacy and hence authority to the actor in control of a certain territory.

As the tension between people’s beliefs in the VNSAs’ efficiency and the varying cruelty of punishment for incompletion shows, the line between the citizens’ adherence to the demanded forms of behavior out of respect or out of fear is thin: while at times citizens approve of the VNSAs’ substitution of state functions, in other occasions they simply do not have any other choice than to accept it. So Kalyvas’ (1999, 260) argument that “typically, insurgent rule is based on a variable mix of consent and coercion” can be expanded to the rule of other VNSAs.

Generally, in zones of stable arrangements among VNSAs including the preponderance of one sole group VNSAs tend to establish alternative political and social orders and assume governance functions in the territories they control. This applies to the case of Colombia with regard to both paramilitaries (Duncan 2006) and insurgents (Arjona 2010) as well as to cases elsewhere (Wickham-Crowley 1987; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud 2008; Mampilly 2011). The provision of governance functions, especially the provision of public goods by VNSAs, is essential for the kind of relationship that VNSAs have with the local community and tends to legitimise the VNSAs. The level of legitimisation is influenced by various factors. As Lund (2006, 693) notes, “what is legitimate varies between and within cultures and over time, and is continuously (re-) established through conflict and negotiation.” Therefore, the provision of certain governance functions may enhance the VNSAs’ legitimacy differently, depending on the specific context. Also, the historical, political and cultural context of the affected community and the constellation of VNSA-provided public goods and services can play a role. For instance, communities may tolerate strict rules and undemocratic practices, if they are granted road infrastructure and health services. In the specific case of transactional supply chain relationships, one can note that they typically open up important economic opportunities for the local population of rural areas, which, depending on how desperate their economic situation is, can make up for violent means in the provision of security. Against this, citizens of urban areas which have experienced high violent crime rates might see the provision of security as a priority.

These considerations are important when exploring the ways in which citizen security is affected: the more governance functions are taken over by the VNSAs, the more difficult it is for the state to establish or maintain a state-society relationship that allows for citizen security. Such a situation can culminate in the above described shadow citizenship and shadow citizen security (Idler 2013a).

When analyzing the repercussions of transactional supply chain relationships on citizen security three points related to the broker role stand out: first, the VNSAs involved in these relationships tend to distrust the local population due to the persistence of inter-group distrust since the groups trust the broker instead, fuelling subjective citizen insecurity. This is different in other areas where VNSAs exercise control over the territory because the groups trust each other or, if one group is preponderant, mutual clarity on the ability of one party to enforce compliance by the other party whenever the need arises compensates for distrust. Second, regions where cocaine supply chain relationships take place experience sporadic waves of violence triggered by the elimination of big narco-brokers, contributing

to objective citizen insecurity. Such violence does not take place in other types of VNSA relationships that feature direct interaction rather than being mediated by a broker. Third, farmers in zones of coca cultivations face constant uncertainty over the prevailing rules of behaviour imposed by “small brokers”, so-called *financieros*, fuelling both subjective and objective citizen insecurity.¹³ Again, this uncertainty arises from the role that brokers play in cocaine supply chain relationships and is therefore less significant in more direct forms of VNSA interaction. Notably, a common thread defines these repercussions: their invisibility. Due to social control exercised by VNSAs, the normalisation of their presence and of undemocratic practices, these repercussions tend to be difficult to observe or quantify. Thus, they are little known to those outside of the area in which the supply chain relationships take place.

Given these characteristics, at first, shadow citizen security seems to be almost unachievable: with the VNSA-society relationship being undermined by distrust, the VNSAs are typically not responsive to the local communities which, combined with the fear arising from the threat of violence, reduces the VNSAs’ legitimisation. Nonetheless, this can be counterbalanced by (illegal) economic opportunities which arise from these relationships, entailing the citizens’ loyalty towards the VNSAs since it increases their “tolerance margin” vis-à-vis undemocratic rules of behaviour.

Persisting mistrust towards the population

As the section above outlined, in transactional supply chain relationships the broker is crucial for overcoming the problem of distrust among groups when engaging in business deals. Yet general mistrust persists, including towards the population. This sets transactional supply chain relationships apart from other stable and institutionalised arrangements among different VNSAs and aligns them with fragile short-term arrangements characterised by mistrust *omnium contra omnes* such as tactical alliances or one-off barter agreements.

While in other long-term arrangements infiltration by state forces is probably the main concern of the involved VNSAs, in transactional supply chain relationships the threat created by informants from other VNSAs must be factored in. These concerns entail false accusations that can lead to fatal confusions as well as fear and psychological pressure for the local community.¹⁴ The following example suggests that the VNSAs have reason for suspicion. An ex-*guerrillero* (*ex-guerrillero, Pasto (CO) 2011a) who in 2006 used to be supervisor in a cocaine *cocina*, a laboratory used for the first processing stages located in the Colombian-Ecuadorian borderlands, narrated: “There were infiltrators [among the civilians who worked in the *cocina* that I supervised]. We noticed that there were two guys who were different. Later they were killed.”

Another example demonstrates the mistrust of the VNSAs against even religious community members. In 2012 a cleric (*cleric, Carchi (EC) 2012) explained that the dominant VNSA had gathered eighty photographs showing him in numerous locations during different activities over the last six months, the time he had been living in the region so far. They claimed to have 1,120 pictures of a colleague who had been living in the region for longer.

Cleric: “They had pictures of me in City A when I was in the supermarket eating ice cream with two friends. They had pictures of me in City B and City C. I asked them: ‘Are you going to print a journal with this or what? Give me a copy because I don’t have these pictures.’ But they said ‘we can’t’. Pictures during a service in City D, during a service in City E.”¹⁵

Interviewer: “And why did they show you the pictures?”

Cleric: “To tell us that we are marked, that they did intelligence on us...and I was scared...this is a way of terrifying people, too, isn’t it?”

¹³ *Financieros* are brokers who buy the farmers’ coca leaves and coca paste, and sell it to VNSAs who further process or traffic the product.

¹⁴ As argued by authors such as Parks and Hulbert (1995), Walklate (1998; 1995; 2005), low levels of trust correlate with high levels of fear.

¹⁵ City names were anonymised.

Mistrust of VNSAs towards the population contributes to the “rule of silence”, a deliberately chosen means of self-protection (Koonings and Kruijt 1999; Delumeau 2002). It is considered an appropriate, if not imperative, behaviour in order not to arouse suspicion since one wrong word to the wrong person might be lethal: “Everything is handled in silence”(*cleric, Carchi (EC) 2012).

Note that the rule of silence tends to be stricter in countries that do not suffer armed conflict. While in a conflict zone VNSAs easily resort to violence, in non-conflict settings they are more concerned about maintaining a low profile because they use these spaces as logistical and financial hubs or recovery zones and hence try to avoid provoking aggressive state responses. Though arguably more pervasive, citizen security implications such as measures to prevent non-compliance, are less obviously visible on the non-conflict side. At the same time, since a state without internal conflict, for example Ecuador or Venezuela, tends to recognise VNSA presence only limitedly, citizens can expect little action from state institutions to support them. As the example of the cleric who had been photographed eighty times demonstrates, the result is “absolute silence”. Remarkably, he lived on the non-conflict side of the border and only occasionally crossed over to Colombia in order to carry out his work, but the VNSAs’ intimidation did not stop at the border. Therefore he urged me to take precautions (*cleric, Carchi (EC) 2012).

Here, absolute silence reigns. You will never get anything out of anyone... Here, people won’t tell you anything. People know who is helping with medicine, who facilitates support, which authorities are involved in these things. But they won’t tell you...of course other foreigners like you come here, it’s just that...be careful when selecting the persons because you could say what everyone’s doing. Therefore I told you: watch out!

The cleric continued: “Tranquility is a bad sign in this zone. This is like a person, a friend, who never talks, who always keeps quiet. This is no good.” The implications for subjective citizen security are clear: constant pressure and paranoia complicate people’s lives. Yet being isolated from those outside of the local community, the prevalence of mistrust and the VNSAs’ harsh measures remain unnoticed. Furthermore, with the VNSAs controlling behaviour and discourse, citizens are virtually unable to state their preferences and attract public attention. As a result, solidarity from outsiders is scarce. Instead, members of these communities tend to be stigmatised as VNSA collaborators, thwarting the mechanisms of state protection and assistance necessary to ensure citizen security. Even if members of shadow communities mingle “in space” with “the others” there seems to be an estrangement. In Venezuelan Zulia, for example, many inhabitants of Machiques claim that the guerrillas descend from the mountainous Sierra de Perijá to their village from time to time. However, as a staff member of a local humanitarian organisation (*humanitarian organisation staff, Machiques (VE) 2012a) argues, these are in fact Colombians who had to flee their country and now seek refuge in the neighbouring country. In the Venezuelan Sierra de Perijá these Colombians still live under VNSA control, but since they adhere to the rule of silence instead of sharing their experiences with the inhabitants of Machiques, and since many of the latter consider them with prejudice rather than solidarity, the Colombians and the population of Machiques do not bond with each other. Alienated from the state and from other citizens, the communities’ voices tend to fall silent. This suggests that, while the literature commonly points to the interrelation of violent conflict and the erosion of social cohesion (Colletta and Cullen 2000), non-violent social control by VNSAs seems to actually have more profound implications for a society’s social fabric because it leads to a fragmentation through which society as such loses its meaning.

In addition to promoting the rule of silence through spreading fear and terror, VNSAs employ a strategy of enchantment to make their social control invisible and overcome the problem of distrust. Since violent methods hamper the VNSAs’ social recognition, they camouflage and downplay their coercive power to make the VNSA-society relationship more “amicable”. In Machiques, for instance, the guerrilla asks the population to “collaborate” financially with them, yet in fact, the practice constitutes extortion (*humanitarian organisation staff, Machiques (VE) 2012b). A quote from a Colombian ex-*guerrillero* (*ex-*guerrillero*, Pasto (CO) 2011a) who used to work in Ecuadorian

Sucumbíos is even more instructive. He described his relationship with the local population in Ecuador the following way:

They are all friends. Most of [the locals] are friends. If there is someone who is an enemy and doesn't want to deal with me he pulls himself together, or he leaves, or he gets lost [NB: killed]. That's the way it is.

So it appears as if using accommodating language is a form of enchantment that essentially serves to consolidate control over a territory.

Sporadic waves of violence

In regions with later phases of transactional supply chain relationships the broker matters to citizen security even more directly. Occasionally, an important narco-broker is captured or killed, triggering power struggles over succession or acts of revenge. This entails sporadic waves of heightened violence that often lead to the death of innocents.

In April 2012 in Cúcuta, for example, “El Pulpo” was shot dead in a restaurant. Maintaining the façade of a successful businessman, he was said to be a powerful narco-broker. Shortly after his assassination, Cúcuta suffered two bomb blasts within one week in central areas. Locals assumed that they were connected to the death of “El Pulpo” and expressed concerns over an escalation of violence.¹⁶ Similar problems arose after the capture of “Loco Barrera” in the Venezuelan city of San Cristóbal in Táchira on 18 September 2012 (El País 2012). Allegedly having had his base in the Colombian Eastern Plains, but having operated throughout Colombia and beyond, he was an appreciated mediator between a number of different VNSA groups: he negotiated the purchase of the coca paste of areas under FARC control, had deals with groups such as the Popular Revolutionary Anti-Terrorist Army of Colombia (ERPAC) and Rastrojos and with international trafficking groups, mainly, to coordinate the selling of cocaine to the market in Western Europe (Insight Crime 2012). Also, he is said to have had control over some of the clandestine airstrips in the Venezuelan state of Apure, from which airplanes loaded with cocaine took off to the Caribbean and Central America which most likely occurred with the connivance, if not assistance of the Venezuelan public forces (*journalist, Caracas (VE) 2012). Given the considerable power that he had accumulated with these structures, disputes over who would inherit his “cocaine reign” were virtually inevitable.

In Ecuador Jefferson Ostaiza was captured after the operation “*Huracán de la Frontera*”, conducted in La Campanita in the Colombian-Ecuadorian borderlands in September 2008, in which 4,7 tons of cocaine were confiscated (El Universo 2009). Ostaiza can be cited as influential broker who moved aptly between the underworld and upper world. He not only had links to various VNSAs including the FARC Fronts 29, 39, 32 and 48, as well as Ecuadorian, Colombian, Mexican and Nicaraguan traffickers, but also to the then Ecuadorian Under Secretary of Government Jose Ignacio Chauvin and other politicians. His capture left a power vacuum that seemed to have been filled quickly, not without triggering conflicts over who would take over his position.

And finally, the capture of the Venezuelan broker Walid Makled in 2011, provoked struggles among both VNSAs and state officials: in order to coordinate different steps along the supply chain of illegal goods such as cocaine Makled had links with high ranking military officials. These links allowed Makled to use the harbour “Puerto Cabello” as an important starting point of international trafficking routes and hence helped him to be trusted by those who want their illegal goods to be shipped abroad and those abroad who want to buy the product (*human rights defender, San Cristóbal (VE) 2012). Given the wide-ranging network of actors involved, any civilians with voluntary or involuntary knowledge of the involved figures had to fear serious implications.

Certainly, the power struggles following a broker's capture or death are carried out among VNSA members or other related actors such as the military officials and politicians cited above; they hardly

¹⁶ Conversations with inhabitants of Cúcuta, Cúcuta, April 2012.

target the general public. Still, they do affect the population's objective and (arguably even more) subjective citizen insecurity to a certain extent and hence should be taken into account when exploring security dynamics in territories where VNSAs are present.

The financiers' role for citizen security

Financieros also challenge citizen security. This is primarily because of the dubious conditions under which they buy the farmers' merchandise. According to civil society representatives from Tibú in Norte de Santander (*civil society representative, Tibú (CO) 2012) and from Cumbal in Nariño (*civil society representative from Cumbal, Pasto (CO) 2012), coca farmers cannot choose their clients, but have to sell their production to certain *financieros*. This was confirmed by a female farmer from Bajo Putumayo (*displaced woman, Mocoa (CO) 2011): "They only sell to them. To no one else. If you sell to another person, they will punish you, punish you, punish you!" Whether they cultivate coca at all is arguably the farmers' choice: "The communities are not forced [to cultivate], but they are told: 'Okay, if you cultivate you have to sell to me, I am your only client and whoever wants to, can sell to this client'" (*international agency staff, Mocoa (CO) 2011). Given the financial profits and the absence of any comparatively lucrative alternatives, many see it as the only viable option to sustain their families. Yet, while the *financieros* compensate the farmers with money, they do not provide any protection for them. Quite the contrary: on the way from their plots to the village where the *financieros* buy the coca paste, the farmers sometimes have to pass numerous, often abusive, police or military checkpoints with the illicit goods. The temptation of gaining money despite risking one's security is illustrated by the narrative of a displaced woman (*displaced woman, Mocoa (CO) 2011) who used to cultivate coca in Bajo Putumayo:

...then you sell [the coca paste], you go to the village and the buyers come to the village, people arrive and say that in a certain place they buy the merchandise. So every weekend, they come. For example during one week everyone harvested....And on Sunday, everyone went to the village and there were the people, and the...money from Cali arrived. The money arrived in big burlap bags...they found the ways to make the money reach the village...Every Sunday we took out [the cocaine paste] to the village, but the women, not the men, took out the cocaine paste from the farms, because the police were there. Well, when they showed up, they searched the men, but not the women, and we stuck the paste here onto our body and we kept it there until the village and then we took it out and in the village we sold it and one gram of merchandise cost thousand pesos...and it was a thousand grams, one kilo is a thousand grams, right? So, this is a lot of money and a hundred grams are hundred thousand pesos...The women took them to the village. Of course the men did the work first; the women collaborated. We helped but the men did the work, it was very hard work, but the women, we sowed the coca, and we took the coca paste off from the farm, because there were always checkpoints with soldiers and the police, and they always searched the men.

Apart from being exposed to police and military controls, local farmers face accusations, persecution and death. Less powerful than "big" narco-brokers who operate at the intersections of later stages of the cocaine supply chain, *financieros* change more rapidly as a result of assassinations or captures, with multiple consequences for the local communities. First, when *financieros* are captured, the farmers who sold coca to them are accused of being collaborators. Second, new *financieros* tend to implement new rules, sometimes leaving the coca farmers without orientation as to what rules apply, how much money they receive for their product and when and where they can sell it. Third, confusion about the *financieros'* identity can cause serious harm. There have been cases where people came to a village pretending to be *financieros* sent by a prestigious group. Farmers sold them the product and once the "real" *financiero* arrived, they were punished for doing so (*civil society representative, Mocoa (CO) 2011). To sum up, the existence of *financieros* increases the local communities' uncertainty as to how to behave, and their exposure to abuse, undermining both subjective and objective citizen security.

The relevance of economic opportunities

The VNSAs' mistrust towards the population, sporadic waves of violence and the role of the *financieros* suggest that the VNSAs' legitimisation is hard to achieve and that therefore shadow

citizen security is difficult to sustain. This suggests that cocaine supply chain relationships undermine citizen security, but at the same time, due to the role that the broker plays in these relationships, also impede shadow citizen security.

Yet, as outlined at the beginning of this section, the constellation of the provision of public goods matters. Transactional supply chain relationships generally involve important economic opportunities, which are highly valued by citizens and hence may be a reason for them to tolerate shortcomings in other governance areas. In Bajo Putumayo, for example, where civil state institutions had never been widely present, the guerrillas promote an economy based on coca cultivation. Factors such as the region's wanting road infrastructure are conducive to this: many villages lack appropriate connections to nearby towns. Rather than growing cacao or bananas which have to be transported to markets, farmers prefer to grow coca which the *financieros* pick up and pay for in close by villages (*displaced man, Mocoa (CO) 2011). As a farmer stated at a community reunion, this increases their financial gains considerably and allows them to sustain their families' livelihoods.¹⁷ An employee of an international organisation (*international agency staff, Mocoa (CO) 2011) summarised the local farmers' perception as follows: "There are cases of multiple executions [...]. This only happens if you don't comply with the rules. I live under pressure, but I can live here, [...], I have my crops, I can eat." This demonstrates that people's margin for tolerating undemocratic measures can be widened by opportunities to sustain their livelihoods.

Note that the cross-border dimension of economic opportunities is significant. While coca cultivations on the Ecuadorian side of the border exist, but are not as vast as on the Colombian side, many farmers in Ecuadorian Sucumbíos cross the border to Colombian Putumayo in order to work on coca plantations and in rudimentary laboratories where they process coca leaves into coca paste (*ex-guerrillero, Pasto (CO) 2011b). The income serves to feed their families on the Ecuadorian side (*citizen, General Farfán (EC) 2012). In coastal areas, such as Ecuadorian Esmeraldas and Colombian Tumaco, the financial benefits resulting from illegal economic activities offered by VNSAs surpass those provided by the state and consequently are considered legitimate by many locals. According to an Ecuadorian academic (*Ecuadorian academic, Quito (EC) 2012), as of 2009, a fisherman in the coastal village of San Lorenzo in Esmeraldas earned 50 US dollars per week. If he opted to work in the Colombian border zone as a *raspachín* (coca leaf collector), he earned between 600 US dollars and 800 US dollars per week.

The importance of economic opportunities as regards the VNSAs' legitimisation is reflected in the fact that, as is the case with coca farmers, people take risks in return for VNSA-offered jobs. This is demonstrated by the example cited above in which women traffic coca paste in order to sell it to the local broker although this implies passing various police or military controls. Also, in Nariño and Esmeraldas, for example, young men are lured with high salaries to work in cocaine laboratories, but are often not allowed to go back to normal community life later due to their knowledge about the process and people involved (*adolescent, San Lorenzo (EC) 2012; *local government representative, Tumaco (CO) 2011).¹⁸ Another example is drug mules: local citizens who, for payment, traffic cocaine produced by one VNSA across the border to be sold to another VNSA in charge of international shipment. While for many locals this constitutes a lucrative business, it also potentially exposes them to punishment or harassment if detected by law enforcement officials. What is more, the practices themselves often put people's physical security in danger. At the Colombian-Venezuelan border shared by Norte de Santander and southern Zulia, cocaine has been smuggled hidden in tires, children's toys, dogs' stomachs, women's breast implants and inside the bodies of dead babies that are passed off as being asleep, among other examples (*head of local police, Maracaibo (VE) 2012). Given people's gratefulness for the "job opportunity", however, they often view cases of violence or death as the fault of mules rather than a VNSA-induced occurrence.

¹⁷ Community reunion in Bajo Putumayo, March 2012.

¹⁸ Often they are not aware of these consequences when accepting the work.

Regarding subjective citizen security, a final note related to the local context is in order. The repercussions of the VNSAs' violence derived from mistrust and punishments on subjective citizen security are influenced by the historical context. Consider for example the borderlands shared by the municipalities of Jesús Maria Semprún and Catatumbo in southern Zulia on the Venezuelan side and Norte de Santander on the Colombian side. Given the history of violence of Norte de Santander where, due to the presence of large coca cultivations, many VNSAs involved in transactional supply chain relationships operate, citizens are used to the logic of an illegal authority and violence has become a "normal" feature of life because armed confrontations have been common over various generations.¹⁹ The first of Norte de Santander's recent history were initiated by outraged farmers during the era of the "*violencia*" starting in 1948, followed by violent clashes between state forces and guerrillas in the 1970s. Para-state groups then engaged in cruel operations from 1982 onwards and, in the mid-nineties, brutal massacres were conducted by the officially constituted paramilitary groups. The rates of violence peaked in the years after 1999 when the AUC's Bloque Catatumbo ruled in Norte de Santander (Fundación Progresar 2010, 38–39). Between 2000 and 2004 in the municipality of Tibú, for example, an average of between three and five homicides took place per week (Vicepresidencia de la República 2004b; Vicepresidencia de la República 2007). Being used to such soaring rates of lethal violence, in 2012 people commented that things had been quite calm in the last two years,²⁰ that they would go out during the weekends to have fun and that life just continued as usual (*cleric, Tibú (CO) 2012).

Southern Zulia does not have such a history of violence.²¹ Starting in the mid-2000s, the presence of VNSAs engaged in long-term arrangements is relatively new, and adjusting their lives to the VNSAs' rules is not a "normal" behaviour for the population.²² Consider for example the Venezuelan village of Guayabo over which the paramilitaries started to take control in 2005, supposedly because it is a strategic point in the trafficking route towards the Gulf of Maracaibo and hence a key link in the later stages of the transactional supply chain relationship that starts in Norte de Santander (*humanitarian organisation staff, Machiques (VE) 2012b). The paramilitaries disseminated a "death list" and conducted selective killings—at the beginning, one or two killings per week—which seemed to hit anyone: one week a baker, another week a mechanic, another week a businessman and so forth. These people might all have been involved in activities seen as undesirable by the paramilitaries, but the apparent lack of a clear pattern spread panic and fear among the population, who had not experienced such a wave of violence before. They felt extremely unsafe, and the sense of uncertainty increased this subjective insecurity. So, objectively, the citizen security impact might be more pronounced on the Colombian side, but, subjectively, the citizens on the Venezuelan side seem to be more affected. An employee of a humanitarian organisation (*humanitarian organisation staff, Machiques (VE) 2012b) in Zulia summarised this as follows:

There is insecurity, but this is the feeling of insecurity that something might happen if I did something... To be more precise, fear is the feeling that we Venezuelans have because we do not understand the dynamics [of the armed conflict]. We think that, at any moment, the population could be attacked [...]

¹⁹ I conversed with inhabitants of Cúcuta the day a car bomb exploded in the city. People of three different generations commented: "Well, it's been quite a while since the last time we had a car bomb"; "Of course we go out tonight, this is nothing unusual"; "That's one block from here, here we should be fine... and if it hits us, it hits us anyway, so don't worry" (conversations with locals, Cúcuta, April 2012).

²⁰ In 2010 homicide rates were between one and two per month (Defensoria del Pueblo, Sistema de Alertas Tempranas 2011).

²¹ As of 2003, before the post-demobilised groups took control on the Venezuelan side, in Zulia the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 31.3 (CICPC 2008 calculated with numbers of the national census conducted by the INE in 2001). In Norte de Santander it was 104.3 in 2003 (Vicepresidencia de la República 2004a).

²² Both the Cartel of the Norte del Valle and the Cali Cartel had been present in Zulia since 1997 (Ávila and Guerra Ariza 2012, 361). However, they operated with a low profile rather than territorial dominion, hence, the population was not as widely affected as after 2005.

Overall, the provision of economic opportunities by VNSAs engaged in transactional supply chain relationships can help narrow the legitimisation gap that exists due to mistrust, sporadic violence and uncertainty provoked by the existence of *financieros*. Whether the economic opportunities weigh enough for the VNSAs' legitimisation to actually bring about shadow citizen security is debatable, not least because of the lack of alternative legal jobs. Rather than generalising, the communities' specific context needs to be factored in. Depending on past experiences of violence, for example, they may find the required behaviour in these circumstances "normal" and appropriate, and accept the VNSAs as legitimate "rulers", or, fuelled by subjective insecurity, reject them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by exploring the role of the narco-broker, this paper has enhanced understanding of transactional supply chain relationships such as the arrangements prevalent in the cocaine business. Employing the concept of citizen security against the two important features of stable VNSA arrangements—interdependence and overcoming distrust—has facilitated demonstrating how the narco-broker is relevant for the security dynamics of local communities in which cocaine supply chain relationships are embedded. This approach has shown that local communities face citizen security repercussions which are usually little quantifiable and hence tend to be overlooked: the VNSAs' mistrust towards the local population, the exposure to sporadic waves of violence and constant uncertainty regarding the prevalent rules of the game in VNSA-controlled territory. It also has revealed how the provision of economic opportunities can countervail these impacts and contribute to shadow citizen security instead.

These insights point to the fact that focusing on how and by whom the arrangements are enabled that link different VNSAs within the cocaine supply chain network is a convenient entry point to effectively to interrupt the cocaine supply chain. Having discussed both powerful narco-brokers and small *financieros* suggests that brokers of all levels should be addressed because they are the glue between the links of the cocaine supply chain that keep the business moving. On the long run, such an approach promises to be more effective than targeting VNSA groups involved in the drug trade which only hardens the trend of constant adaptation and reconfiguration of the drug business network. This is because brokers, especially the big narco-brokers, are difficult to replace because they require high trustworthiness based on a wide-reaching network of supporting and trusted actors in multiple sectors of society. Brokers also have to convince all parties of their trustworthiness and hence have to build a long-standing reputation of being honest to their clients, whereas the VNSA groups only require to be trusted by the intermediate business partners. Manipulating trust relationships among different groups by targeting the broker might therefore be a creative, yet useful option to address the illegal drug problem.

The analysis has demonstrated that addressing the mechanisms that make the cocaine supply chain work serves to detect "invisible" impacts on citizen security such as mistrust, fear and uncertain behaviour which ultimately contribute to the erosion of social fabric and of citizenship. Being aware of these repercussions is a necessary precondition to design measures aimed at fostering citizen security on the ground. Importantly, if these factors of subjective citizen insecurity are outweighed by the VNSAs' legitimisation through the community and shadow citizen security exists, the implications are more far reaching and hence more challenging to address. Shadow citizen security slowly undermines the state-society relationship since over time the VNSA-provided governance becomes more consolidated and considered "normal" by the local community, making it hard for the state to bring (back) in state institutions and convince the population of their efficiency. These dynamics foster a shadow community which orients its behaviour towards the VNSA-imposed rules and the opportunities provided by them, as opposed to the state-oriented citizenry of regions where the state supersedes or at least competes with another actor's authority. Winning back the hearts and minds of shadow community members is a difficult endeavour that a state is only likely to achieve with an adequate provision of public goods and services while being responsive to the citizens'

needs.²³ Certainly, this issue arising from cocaine supply chain relationships is not as immediately perceivable as drug violence, the consequences of toxic fumigations or public health in the drug market countries. Yet it is an implication that is relevant to society on the long run and hence deserves attention rather sooner than later.

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