

# Cocaine Flows and the State in Peru's Amazonian Borderlands

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*Abstract.* In Peru, eradication campaigns targeting coca crops in the Upper Huallaga have dispersed the country's drug trade over vast parts of the Bajo Amazonas region. In order to understand this dispersal it is necessary to map the relocations of coca cultivations or shifts in smuggling routes, but also to examine the array of micro-practices, relations, groups and networks that generate 'drug flows'. By following different key actors, this article explores the movements of drug lords, smugglers and producers who intersect frontiers, borders and borderlands. This empirical focus is combined with an analysis of the actors' social ties to other groups to discover the myriad ways in which illegal/legal forces are part of the power arrangements that form the foundation for Peru's drug flows.

*Keywords:* Peru, Amazon, peripheries, coca, drug flows, crime/state encounters

## *Introduction*

Iquitos prison, Peru: I stood nervously in a long line of people, whispering the name of the imprisoned drug baron I planned to visit. Usually, I would refer to him by his pseudonym, as did everybody else, but I was afraid the officers of the Instituto Nacional Penitenciario (National Penitentiary Institute, INPE, the state body that oversees Peru's prisons), sitting in front of an iron gate, would be suspicious if I did not know his real name. When it was his turn to be questioned, my companion started an argument with the INPE officer. 'Don't act as if you are a smart one because you are in the wrong

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place to pretend to be clever', I heard the officer respond angrily, when my friend stated he did not know why the drug baron was incarcerated since he had not yet been convicted in court. Trying to avoid another argument, I murmured '*narcotráfico*', when I was asked the same question. 'So, where did *you* meet this narco?', the officer inquired seriously. I stammered some dubious phrases, but he only yawned while pressing the required stamps on my forearm. Apparently, the drug baron had made an arrangement with the INPE commander so that I would be allowed to enter, even if I did not answer their questions.<sup>1</sup>

These fieldwork notes, describing the first visit I paid to a *patrón* (drug baron) from the Upper Huallaga imprisoned in Iquitos illustrate one of the possible outcomes when people involved in Peru's drug trade move to 'new' territories.<sup>2</sup> Despite the risks, *cocaleros* (coca growers), drug producers, smugglers, *patrones* and their *socios* (crew members) appear to routinely shift the location of their activities. Coca cultivation is currently dispersed throughout the Lower Amazon. This is in contrast to the situation during the 1980s, when cultivation mostly occupied a contiguous area of the *ceja de selva* (eyebrow of the jungle). Accordingly Peru's cocaine trade encompasses flexible and versatile spatial dimensions, comprising countless people who intersect peripheries and generate highly diverse 'drug flows'.<sup>3</sup>

Although the term 'flows' was originally used as a way of referring to different kinds of mobilities, it has become most strongly associated with globalisation. Some scholars regard the rise of criminal groups as a new, unwanted spin-off of these processes, pointing to the increased movement of people, capital and goods to cast light on the formation of 'global crime networks'.<sup>4</sup> An exploration of drug flows should move beyond this discourse, as anthropological studies reveal that most 'motions are not new; rather, flows build on flows build on flows'.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of Peru's drug trade into new areas of the Amazon is the latest development of a narco-economy that permeates vast parts of its jungle. Trafficking routes linking producers in the Upper Huallaga frontier with cocaine laboratories (hereafter 'labs') in the

<sup>1</sup> Fragment of fieldwork notes, 7 October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The Upper Huallaga is a sub-tropical region stretching from the Huánuco department to the San Martín department, which for a long time was the Peru's main cocaine-processing frontier.

<sup>3</sup> Following Scott, peripheries are defined as 'spaces of multiple sovereignties – spaces where different power holders struggle over control', James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Josiah McC. Heyman and Howard Campbell, 'The Anthropology of Global Flows. A Critical Reading of Appadurai's 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'', *Anthropological Theory*, 9: 2 (2009), p. 136.

Amazon borderlands and drug markets on the tri-border of Peru, Colombia and Brazil have existed throughout the history of the Andean cocaine trade.<sup>6</sup>

Much less has been written on the drug flows that presently link these peripheries. To understand 'illegal' flows, van Schendel and Abraham suggest an approach that clarifies 'how movement takes place and what meaning is attributed to movement, by those who are moving'.<sup>7</sup> The actors involved are engaged social actors/agents who strategically construct, shape, adapt and re-adapt their settings, activities, methods and routines to diminish the impact of anti-narcotics operations on their activities. The challenges may not lie in mapping the relocations of coca cultivation or shifts in smuggling routes but in examining the array of micro-practices, groups and networks that generate drug flows. Whereas research on the mobility of criminal groups is not new to criminology, ethnographic studies of *firmas* (Peruvian drugs-processing/trafficking groups) remain rare.<sup>8</sup> By drawing on scholarship which examines the ability of mafia-style criminal groups to move from their place of origin to other settings, this article explores how a patrón was able to relocate his firma and trigger new drug flows.<sup>9</sup>

When more people, particularly those branded as cocaine kingpins or large-scale drug traffickers, are moving, the government attempts to (re-)gain or uphold its sovereignty over the peripheries caught up in drug flows. The frontier, border and borderlands turn into spaces of state interference, although each region has its own dynamic relations with the drug trade and the state. A description of drug flows would be incomplete without an account of the state-led efforts to halt drug-processing activities on the frontier. Yet, it also requires an analysis of the degrees and variations of state presence in the tri-border and the borderlands to clarify the factors that drove the actors to these peripheries. Following Das and Poole who claim it is important to consider the spaces, forms and practices through which the state is experienced by the people and, also, the ways people come into contact with the state, this article portrays the shifts in crime/state interactions triggered by drug flows in different peripheries.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In this article the distinctions between the terms border, borderland and frontier are based on their geographic location.

<sup>7</sup> Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel, 'Introduction: The Making of Illicitness', in Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things. States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> See Carlo Morselli, Mathilde Turcotte and Valentina Tenti, 'The Mobility of Criminal Groups', *Global Crime*, 12: 3 (2011), pp. 165–88.

<sup>9</sup> This article follows Santino by defining mafia-style groups as a set of organisations that aim to obtain positions of power, using specific methods to exert and uphold their territorial domination which enjoy a certain local support. Umberto Santino, *Dalla mafia alle mafie. Scienze sociali e crimine organizzato* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006), p. 246.

<sup>10</sup> Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds.), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004).

To understand drug flows is to draw on many disciplines, including anthropology, criminology, sociology, history, political science and borderland studies. All these fields offer valuable perspectives. This article underlines the importance of following the tracks of different key actors to reveal that new insights on drug flows can be generated by observing their movements. The empirical focus is combined with conceptual analyses of the actors' ties to other groups to examine the myriad ways in which different (illegal/legal) forces are part of the surrogate arrangements of power that underlie Peru's drug flows.

*Ethnographic Fieldwork from a Frontier Zone, into Prison, to the Border(land)s*

Ethnographic methods are vital to grasp the arrangements and networks that shape drug flows since by looking at the particulars of mobilities, their key actors and participants, one can clarify the dynamics of these movements. Yet, fieldwork that centres on the drug trade's key actors is regularly considered too dangerous or inherently ambiguous. The social practices generated by criminal groups are regularly omitted in scholarly studies, although some anthropologists assert that studies on crime must focus on the people performing such crimes.<sup>11</sup> Another problem, as Carolyn Nordstrom notes, is that 'scholars, for the most part, are enmeshed in the world of the state'.<sup>12</sup> By talking, associating and travelling with producers, smugglers, patrones and their socios, following them on smuggling routes and repeatedly visiting some of them in prison, I grasped the meaning behind her concluding remark that 'if they did, research on the state and its power might be different'.<sup>13</sup> Exploring the narratives of these people provides as detailed an account as possible of drug flows. However, I also became aware that seemingly 'clashing' crime/state actors generate systems of order, status and rank through their social interaction.

During my previous fieldwork, I mainly resided in Mal Abrigo, the largest village of the Fósforo district, where most drugs produced in the surrounding hamlets were collected.<sup>14</sup> The district is part of the Tocache Province located in Peru's San Martín department. It retains a reputation as the dominion of narco-terrorists and cocaine kingpins, although from 2005 to 2011 the Control y Reducción del Cultivo de la Coca en el Alto Huallaga (Special Project for the Control and Eradication of Coca in the Upper Huallaga,

<sup>11</sup> Philip C. Parnell and Stephanie C. Kane (eds.), *Crime's Power: Anthropologists and the Ethnography of Crime* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Nordstrom, *Global Outlaws. Crime, Money and Power in the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 220.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Owing to the study's personal character, the names and pseudonyms of the key actors, the district and the main village have been changed.

CORAH) was continuously engaged in regional coca eradication campaigns.<sup>15</sup> These crusades provoked drug flows to the *Trapezio Amazónico* (the tri-border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil) and to the Amazon borderlands. Most individuals cited beforehand mainly operated on this frontier, yet, during my fieldwork from June 2009 to September 2012, some migrated to other production sites, while others smuggled drugs to the tri-border or were imprisoned.

Scholars often mention that establishing rapport with the people involved is decisive when conducting ethnographic research on the drug trade, but when doing multi-sited fieldwork on drugs flows, maintaining contact became even more difficult, since most key actors engage in 'illegal' activities while moving.<sup>16</sup> Only by following the actors' tracks for a prolonged period, could one witness the patterns and shifts in their moves, activities and routines. One of the first new places I visited was Iquitos, the capital of Peru's Loreto department. Owing to its location on a major smuggling route from the frontier to the tri-border, the drug trade affected this isolated settlement, though the city or its surrounding rural areas did not turn into drug-processing centres. Still, the Dirección Antidrogas (Anti-Narcotics Unit of the Peruvian police forces, DIRANDRO) detained many smugglers who were heading to the tri-border markets on the River Amazon near the city. Most of those arrested ended up in Iquitos prison. Among these inmates was a drug baron whose firma used to dominate the cocaine market in the district. Despite his imprisonment, El Adusto turned into an indispensable guide to gain access in the tri-border.<sup>17</sup>

On the Peruvian side of the tri-border, there is a small hamlet called Santa Rosa del Yavari (commonly known as Santa Rosa). The community consists of a few shops, bars and restaurants. Since only a small group of police officers is stationed in the hamlet, it remains one of the foremost entry points of (unrefined) cocaine that is smuggled to Brazil or Colombia. On the other side of the Amazon, there are two towns, Tabatinga (Brazil) and Leticia (Colombia). El Adusto revealed the locations of his favourite hangouts in both towns. On my first evening in Leticia I promptly encountered a smuggler from the district in a shop that offered cheap international phone calls, indicated by the imprisoned patrón. In spite of his astonishment at seeing familiar faces, the smuggler took us on a tour through Tabatinga, to the places where he

<sup>15</sup> This popular opinion was reinforced when an important remnant insurgent leader was captured in the district in 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia A. Adler, *Wheeling and Dealing. An Ethnography of an Upper-level Drug Dealing and Smuggling Community* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1993); Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect. Selling Crack in El Barrio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> The patrón's *chapa* (nickname/pseudonym) is altered not to reveal his identity. The use of chapas is widespread, for example, in the Fósforo district the residents only referred to the traffickers, socios or patrones by their chapas and rarely used their real names.



Source: Romina Mella, *Los clanes de la cocaína: El Uchiza del siglo XXI* (IDL, Lima, 2012).

and other migrants from the district regularly gathered. However, there was also a place where they refused to take me.

Since coca was traditionally cultivated predominantly in the *ceja de selva*, it was believed that the plant could not adapt to the climate of the Amazon. In order for a drug industry to be able to function, it requires a territory that is not, or at least not effectively, placed under state control, such as Peru's Amazon Lowlands of the Loreto department. Drug barons, producers and *cocaleros* took advantage of the weakness of regional state to establish coca fields, maceration pits and cocaine labs. Caballococha, a small town located on the Amazon only a few hours away from the tri-border, turned into a gathering place for those involved, while the surrounding indigenous Tikuna communities were transformed into one of Peru's most thriving drug-processing areas.

El Ajusto prevented me travelling to these borderlands arguing that he could not guarantee my safety because 'hay de todo' ('there are all kinds'; i.e., the number and variety of the people involved makes the situation too complex to grasp). Noticing my disappointment, he arranged meetings with the producers, his socios and other patrones who operated in the area, when they travelled to Iquitos, Tabatinga or Leticia. Occasionally, some migrants

visited the district where they talked more openly about their borderland activities. In Iquitos, I once met a group of familiar drugs producers on their way to Caballococha. I inquired whether they could take me, but they declined, muttering that El Adusto had warned everyone against taking me to this area. To understand the social ties between the patrón and the producers, it is essential to explore the previous linkages between the frontier, the border and the borderlands.

*From the Frontier to the Border: Transnational Connections Followed by Mafia-style Deals*

For centuries, Peruvians and foreigners alike portrayed the jungle as an unexplored, isolated and daunting setting. Both the ceja de selva and the Amazon Lowlands were characterised as merciless environments that constantly challenged explorers, pioneers and colonists, due to their extreme weather conditions, hazardous waterways and swarms of stinging insects. Together with their inaccessible environment, regional state fragility turned some of these areas into important centres of the drug trade. Gootenberg claims that the Upper Huallaga is home to the world's oldest cocaine industry.<sup>18</sup> As early as the mid-1880s, laboratories for *pasta básica* (coca paste) were set up in the area surrounding Tingo María, a gateway town.<sup>19</sup> In the early 1960s, after the completion of the Carretera Marginal (Marginal Highway), more people moved to the region's inner reaches, including the Fósforo district. By the 1970s, most migrants cultivated coca, while *firmas* controlled the unrefined cocaine production process and arranged shipments, using the river connections to the tri-border to sell the product.<sup>20</sup>

The growth of drug production in the Upper Huallaga coincided with more and more sophisticated undertakings of Colombian trafficking groups.<sup>21</sup> The *firmas* faced strong competition which created a division of labour, with the workforce largely separated into Peruvian producers and foreign transporters. The transporters established 'air bridges' between the PBC-processing frontier and the borderlands. Most cocaine labs were situated in the jungle between the Putumayo and the River Amazon, including Peru's Amazon Lowlands, while Leticia became a centre for drug transshipments to Medellín, Bogotá and Cali.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Gootenberg, 'The "Pre-Columbian" Era of Drug Trafficking in the Americas: Cocaine, 1945–1965', *The Americas*, 64: 2 (2007), pp. 133–76.

<sup>19</sup> *Pasta básica* is a semi-refined brown paste of coca leaves stamped in a pit with water and several chemicals. The coca paste is converted into a white mixture, called unrefined cocaine or PBC (pasta base de cocaína).

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Kay, 'Violent Opportunities: The Rise and Fall of "King Coca" and Shining Path', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 41: 3 (1999), pp. 97–127.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

In the Fósforo district, the airstrips remained part of the Carretera Marginal where small planes, bringing stacks of dollars, landed and left with the drugs within minutes.

In the late 1990s, coca cultivation experienced some ups and downs, but it was in the early 1990s that the ‘coca boom’ gradually came to an end when aerial interdiction efforts carried out by the Peruvian Air Force with the Drug Enforcement Agency’s assistance greatly increased the risks of smuggling PBC across the border.<sup>22</sup> International criminal syndicates, such as the dominant Cali and Bogotá-based ‘cartels’ responded by shifting coca cultivation to Colombia and were so successful in this endeavour that an oversupply of cocaine led to plummeting prices. In 1995, there was another fall in prices caused by overproduction in Peru and Bolivia, along with the upsurge of cultivation in Colombia. This ‘coca bust’ drove the transporters out of the frontier after which *firmas* took over their activities.

Most *patrones*, who headed the local *firmas*, were lower-class people who acquired wealth, knowledge and skills while working for the transporters.<sup>23</sup> During the ‘coca boom’, El Adusto worked in the tri-border drug trade for a trafficking group. After this border venture failed, he returned to the Fósforo district and began to cultivate coca. He contracted some men to gather the leaves from neighbouring *cocaleros*, which other *socios* turned into cocaine. Specific principles characterised these local *firmas*: namely their involvement in an array of production and trafficking activities, a mafia-style organisation, patronage networks with the producers and routine collaboration with other *firmas*.

The *firmas* were low profile, organised along somewhat informal lines and included only a small group of established *socios*. The *socios* consisted mainly of family members or friends, which reinforced the groups’ social cohesion and strengthened the trust among the crew members.<sup>24</sup> Most *firmas* had an internal structure composed of ranks, ordered by role specialisation and a division of tasks. In El Adusto’s *firma*, the low-ranked crewmembers manufactured the *pasta base de cocaína* (cocaine base paste, PBC) or carried out cocaine-processing activities. Other higher-ranked *socios* supervised the gathering of coca paste undertaken by the *acopiadores* (gatherers), managed the drugs labs’

<sup>22</sup> The air interdiction programme at the Santa Lucía base was supported by the US until 2002, when a US missionary plane was mistaken for a drug flight. Since more drugs are being transported by air, in August 2015, the Peruvian congress voted unanimously to authorise military planes to shoot down suspected drug flights.

<sup>23</sup> In the frontier, there are large disparities between the groups called *firmas*, which range from small collectives of drugs producers, to informal groups of smugglers, to complex narcogroups that concentrate their efforts on large-scale drug production and the transportation of the drugs across different borders. In this article, the term *firma* is only used for these narcogroups.

<sup>24</sup> Letizia Paoli, *Mafia Brotherhoods: Organized Crime, Italian Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

construction, arranged the transport of the materials and chemicals to the labs, controlled the labourers and the *químico* (chemist), transported the drugs to Mal Abrigo and packed up the PBC or cocaine. The *traqueteros* (traffickers) were the highest-ranked socios, as they transported large quantities of drugs. These men not only had to be trusted with the PBC or cocaine, which they transported to buyers in coastal towns, to Ecuador or to the tri-border, where they delivered drugs to fixed contacts, but also with the money, which they smuggled back to the district.

The local *firmas* shaped structures of power, authority and control over the drug trade, specific parts of the territory and its population.<sup>25</sup> The 'esprit mafioso', wherein the term *patrón* is not meant to typify the organisation, but refers to a 'form of behaviour and a mode of power' not only determined the socios' and *patrones'* conduct, but also formed the shape of the local drugs industry and its patterns, networks, thoughts and discourses.<sup>26</sup> Most *patrones* acted as local strongmen, arranging aspects of community life and fulfilling particular state functions through the provision of labour and credits. They exercised administrative oversight of the *firmas'* territory, people and resources and maintained the group's relations with other drug barons. Although the capacity to use violence is a core feature of *patrón* behaviour, everyday control was upheld through social bonds.<sup>27</sup> To avoid disputes and rivalries, the local *firmas* agreed on *pactos de caballeros* (gentlemen's agreements) that specified the territory under the *patrones'* control. The *firmas'* coordination and cooperation prevented rivalries and conflict, but whenever 'outside' competitors threatened the activities of these *firmas* the *patrones* reacted violently.

On the frontier, the *firmas* exerted more or less territorial domination, which rested on 'protection/transaction networks' with different state agents operating in the area, including local mayors, military commanders at the local base, officers of the *Polícia Nacional del Perú* (Peruvian National Police, PNP) in Tocache and public prosecutors in Tocache, Tingo María and Tarapoto. Despite these accommodating relationships, the *patrones* concealed their drug-processing/trafficking activities. To launder his 'dirty money', El Adusto created a transport company, which due to his success in the drug trade, turned into one of the largest corporations providing transportation throughout the Upper Huallaga and Campanilla, Juanjuí and Tarapoto. The state agents might have provided 'freedom of action' for the local *firmas*, but they could not have prevented what happened in May 2005 when the

<sup>25</sup> Alan A. Block, *East Side-West Side: Organizing Crime in New York* (Cardiff: University College of Cardiff Press, 1980).

<sup>26</sup> Ricardo Vargas, 'State, Esprit Mafioso, and Armed Conflict in Colombia', in Jo-Marie Burt and Philip Mauceri (eds.), *Politics in the Andes. Identity, Conflict and Reform* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), pp. 107–8.

<sup>27</sup> Diego Gambetta, 'Mafia: The Price of Distrust', in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 158–75.

CORAH undertook another eradication campaign. This impacted on the cocaleros, led to outbreaks of violence and disturbed the patrones' power, causing battles over production sites and the areas under the firmas' control.<sup>28</sup> Although there was a causal interrelation between the eradication and drug flows, the cocaleros were not the first to move.

### *'New' Drug Flows to the Tri-border*

When the frontier was not targeted by continuing eradication campaigns, most patrones were rather stationary, as they did not willingly give up their local dominance.<sup>29</sup> The foremost reason why El Adusto moved from the district was the shortage of coca leaves and the violent competition over what was left of the drug trade which mostly targeted his thriving firma.<sup>30</sup> Although El Adusto was 'forced' to move, he was extremely calculating in his choice of a new territory.<sup>31</sup> Attracted by the absence of eradication operations in the Apurímac-Ene River Valley (VRAE), the patrón attempted to relocate to this cocaine-processing region. His decision was based on various factors. The VRAE's drug industry was organised in a similar way to the Upper Huallaga's, and, at that time, violence was low and opportunities were abundant, owing to the emerging drugs market and the large absence of foreign competitors. During preceding eradication campaigns (2000–01), some of the frontier's patrones, including some of El Adusto's former associates, migrated to the VRAE. The patrón preferred places where he had established contacts, though this was no guarantee for an effective transfer.

Not all of the patrón's relocations were successful, because of the presence of local 'criminal competitors' in 'new' territories.<sup>32</sup> In Ayacucho, a gateway town into the large-scale coca-cultivating areas, the police seized one of El Adusto's company's vehicles while it carried a large amount of drugs. The patrón claimed he sold the vehicle before this seizure but, since he had bought the vehicles with 'dirty money', he lacked official papers to confirm a corresponding transaction. It was indeed unlikely that El Adusto or his

<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the aerial operations in Colombia, in Peru, the coca plants are dug manually out of the ground.

<sup>29</sup> Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Mirella van Dun, 'Exploring Narco-Sovereignty/Violence. Analyzing Illegal Networks, Crime, Violence, and Legitimation in a Peruvian Cocaine Enclave (2003–2007)', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43: 4 (2012), pp. 395–418.

<sup>31</sup> Federico Varese, 'Mafia Movements: A Framework for Understanding the Mobility of Mafia Groups', *Global Crime*, 12: 3 (2011), pp. 218–31; Carlo Morselli, Mathilde Turcotte and Valentina Tenti, 'The Mobility of Criminal Groups', *Global Crime*, 12: 3 (2011), pp. 165–88.

<sup>32</sup> Federico Varese, *Mafias on the Move. How Organized Crime Conquers New Territories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

socios carried out the transport, as the police could easily link the vehicle to their patrón. Probably, a local rival group that refused to allow the 'outside' firma to work in their territory framed the patrón. As El Adusto recounted:

Well, then I ran into that problem with the vehicle, the one that after the sale was captured with drugs ... In this instance, I was not involved. Long ago, I should have gone to exculpate myself from these false accusations, but there were only 15 days of investigation, nothing more ... It was the first time I had run into this kind of trouble. Afraid of losing everything I worked for, I did not attend the hearing in Ayacucho because I did not know anyone there ... I hoped it would just disappear.

(Personal conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 7 October 2009)

On the frontier, El Adusto could have easily dismissed such accusations but since the seizure occurred in Ayacucho, he lacked the necessary relations with the law enforcers. Fearful, he returned to the district and sent the secretary of his company to settle the case, but her efforts were futile. When the patrón failed to attend the hearing in Ayacucho, he became a fugitive criminal. Aware of his problem, the PNP officers in Tocache insisted on larger bribes to keep quiet about El Adusto's whereabouts.

Only after he failed to move to the VRAE, in order to escape the heightening alertness of the police, El Adusto relocated his activities to the tri-border. Since he travelled to the border with some high-ranked socios, they halted their drug-processing activities on the frontier. At the tri-border, El Adusto adapted his activities to the local conditions. Rather than acting like a patrón, managing the firma's territory, people, merchandise, and resources, at the tri-border, El Adusto sold drugs. Since larger groups dominated these border markets, he turned into one of many sellers. Owing to his familiarity with the area and the firma's lasting contacts with traffickers operating in Leticia, El Adusto could sell the drugs to familiar buyers. As most other suppliers smuggled intermittently, they were unable to form permanent relations or repeated contracts with the buyers. The factors that favoured El Adusto's relocation were the growing demand for (unrefined) cocaine, which his firma could provide regularly in large amounts, and the porous border, as merely crossing the Amazon entailed passing the drugs from Peru into Colombia or Brazil.

The patrón's relocation required an ability to control the activities of other groups, since his border undertaking completely relied on his former alliances in the district. Only by cooperating with different local firmas, could he provide the quantities of drugs his buyers requested. The collaborating firmas were mostly led by reputable patrones, who prior to El Adusto's move, routinely joined forces with his firma. Some of the firmas produced the (unrefined) cocaine which El Adusto sent for while other groups gathered in the drugs. When collecting drugs, the firmas' *acopiadores* ventured to various remote areas of the district. As the eradication campaigns mostly

targeted the fields in known cocalero communities, some producers had ventured into empty and inaccessible terrain to cultivate vast amounts of coca and produce large amounts of (unrefined) cocaine, which they sold to the *acopiadores*.

Smuggling drugs from the frontier to the tri-border was a risky business. Those involved faced threats not only from law enforcers but also from competitors and assaulters. The transports from the frontier to the tri-border markets were multifaceted operations. After the local *acopiadores* gathered and packed the drugs in Mal Abrigo, El Adusto's socios carried them from the village to Yurimaguas or Pucallpa, from where other higher-ranked socios sent the packages to Iquitos. From Iquitos, the firma's *traqueteros* delivered the drugs to El Adusto's contacts in Leticia or Tabatinga. One of the operation's most dangerous stages was overland smuggling, as ambushes laid for drugs or cash often occurred on the parts of the road where PNP officers were not present. Since such risks were prevalent, the socios could pretend to have been assaulted to steal the *patrón's* drugs or money.

Additionally, the socios had to avoid various PNP checkpoints on the Carretera Marginal and evade the patrols of the PNP's transport division. From Mal Abrigo, they passed through different towns, where DIRANDRO officers operated, including Juanjuí and Tarapoto to reach Yurimaguas on the southern smuggling route or Tingo Maria when travelling northwards to reach Pucallpa. To reduce the firma's reliance on such hazardous smuggling operations, El Adusto instigated a new drug flow to the borderlands.

### *Coca Flows to the Borderlands*

Contrary to scholarly claims that most mafia-style groups do not strategically plan to colonise 'new' territories, El Adusto's transfer entailed migration to a new drug-processing area.<sup>33</sup> The *patrón's* socios who operated on the frontier triggered the moves of some cocaleros. Due to enduring eradication campaigns, many residents searched for another outlying territory where they could cultivate large amounts of coca without facing the risk of eradication. The socios, who operated in the district during the firma's trafficking operations, promoted the Amazon Lowlands near the tri-border. To produce PBC or cocaine, one needed not only a large desolate terrain where state agents were basically absent but also many reliable workers who cultivated considerable quantities of coca, smuggled the chemicals and other materials needed for drugs production and produced (unrefined) cocaine. In the borderlands, the

<sup>33</sup> Federico Varese, *Mafias on the Move. How Organized Crime Conquers New Territories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

socios affirmed to some of the frontier's cocaleros that there was enough unexploited land to set up extensive coca fields.

Several cocaleros sold their assets and travelled to Caballococha, the location that El Adusto's socios pointed out. This small town became a gathering place for these migrants, from where they, together with the firma's socios, ventured into the adjoining jungle area. The patrón and his socios were not the first to arrive in this part of the Amazon. When the 'air bridges' were set up, several airstrips and drug laboratories had been located in the area. Due to the DEA-sponsored air interdiction programme, the borderlands were then abandoned. Driven by anti-drugs operations in Colombia (1998) and the recommencement of eradication operations after Peru's internal armed conflict (2000), 'new' strangers began to arrive, suggesting that the Tikuna set up coca plantations and offering considerable payments for their labour. Given that the borderlands were only connected with Tabatinga, Leticia and Iquitos through a network of rivers, the areas provided the ideal scenario for large-scale cocaine production.

Salisbury asserts that migrants adjust to the constraints and opportunities present in new regions, but, in this case, El Adusto triggered migration flows to improve his firma's prospects.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to other migrants, who mostly contracted the Tikuna men for the agricultural work, the patrón chose to cooperate with people experienced in coca cultivation and drugs production to ensure extensive production of high-quality drugs. Albini suggests that mafia-style groups, like the firmas, are based on 'a system of structured associations', which were rooted in patronage networks on the frontier.<sup>35</sup> These arrangements enabled El Adusto's socios to instigate the producers' migration. On the frontier, the socios selected the residents whom they informed about the lowlands. Most migrants were cocaleros, who owned extensive fields on the frontier and, in the majority of cases, produced (unrefined) cocaine which they sold to El Adusto's firma.

When the migrants arrived, they encountered a different reality from what they had come across years ago when moving to the Fósforo district. Contrary to the frontier, where new drifters simply occupied a vacant plot, in the borderlands the migrants encountered a Tikuna population with communal land rights. Through the frontier's patronage network, El Adusto's socios provided the migrants a safe place to arrive and access to land as they acted as intermediaries between the Tikuna and the migrants. As El Adusto stated: 'Previously, some cocaleros were tricked by the indigenous. They were granted the right to cultivate coca on the communal lands in return for a large amount of money.

<sup>34</sup> David S. Salisbury, *Overcoming Marginality on the Margins: Mapping, Logging, and Coca in the Amazon Borderlands* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2007), p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph L. Albini, *The American Mafia: Genesis of a Legend* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971).

The land they rented was not fit for large-scale coca cultivation at all, as it completely flooded during the rainy season' (Personal conversation with El Adusto, jail of Iquitos, 11 October 2009). To prevent such incidents that not only jeopardised the migrants' but also the patrón's activities, the socios, who established rapport with the Tikuna, assisted the migrants in finding available and suitable terrains, where they could cultivate extensive coca fields without instigating disputes with the local population.<sup>36</sup>

The firma's dealings with the Tikuna were conducted with great care, as the traqueteros relied on these men as boatmen or guides or to provide information on the safest smuggling routes to the tri-border and to guide the migrants to distant areas fit for large-scale coca cultivation. The producers relied on the Tikuna as day labourers, harvesters and porters. They prevented disputes as they were 'bad for business' and attracted the attention of law enforcers.<sup>37</sup> Both the socios and the producers recognised that conflicts with the Tikuna would lead to more unwanted PNP presence or, worst, a growing alertness of the DIRANDRO. Despite local cooperation, most migrants branded the Amazon Lowlands as an unreceptive place although this view derived from the problems they experienced when cultivating coca. Owing to the variation in soil and climate, the coca crop in the Amazon Lowlands needed more pesticides and fertilisers, which were expensive in these remote hamlets. After their first harvests, the migrants noticed that the leaves did not contain as many alkaloids as in the ceja de selva. To produce a substantial amount of drugs, they needed to cultivate larger fields, which the DIRANDRO officers could more easily detect. Regardless of the producers' difficulties, the borderlands turned into a major drug-processing centre.

The thriving drug industry in the borderlands triggered constant flows of people, some attracted by work opportunities since the producers needed labourers to cultivate the coca plants, harvest the leaves, work in the maceration pits and to produce coca paste or (unrefined) cocaine. When drugs production grew, more trafficking groups entered, as El Adusto illustrated:

In that area, you have to be careful with whom you speak. Well, it is better not to talk to anyone at all. You never know whom you will encounter. Do you think that a Colombian terrorist or paramilitary will tell you what group he belongs to? Some people might only pretend to be involved, just to scare you ... Others might not pretend ... I am telling you, it is too dangerous. There are many crazy people working in these communities and more crazy people arrive every day.

(Telephone conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 4 August 2010)

<sup>36</sup> The following images of the contact between the Tikuna and the migrants are based on the migrants' perceptions, not on the receiving people, who were confronted by different customs, as well as major transformations of their local economy.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Reuter and Kohn Haaga, *The Organization of High-Level Drug Markets: An Exploratory Study* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1989).

El Adusto's remarks were intended to keep me from visiting the borderlands, but most migrants affirmed his opinion.<sup>38</sup> In 2010, some local authorities commented on the violence, which, in their view was caused by drug traffickers.<sup>39</sup> To be more precise, the violence was often related to the rising competition over power, control and territory, particularly over those areas where many large-scale producers operated. The causes were part of an interaction among many factors influenced by the local context, a partial state vacuum, and the social utility and the economic advantages of violence.

El Adusto implied that members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) or paramilitary groups were present in the Amazon Lowlands.<sup>40</sup> This statement was part of the strategy he used to shield his firm's undertakings. When operating on the frontier, the associated firms reacted violently against competitors, but in the borderlands, his small group of socios could not prevail in a confrontation. Owing to the absence of law enforcers, there was a high demand for protection that could be exploited by the firm.<sup>41</sup> By adapting the frontier's patronage network to the new context, the patrón 'governed' the migrant producers, by offering 'protection' against 'outsiders' in this 'hostile' territory. By depicting Colombian traffickers as insurgents or paramilitaries, El Adusto prevented these associated producers from engaging in deals with such 'antagonistic' buyers and secured his access to some of the drugs produced in the borderlands.

The frontier's 'esprit mafioso' proved to be transferable and adaptable to the tri-border context. While on the frontier, the patronage networks enabled the patrones to control parts of the territory and people, the 'new' territory permitted El Adusto to shape a social space he could govern and control. The thriving drugs industry in the borderlands did not put an end to the drug flows from the frontier. However, the actors involved in these flows changed.

### *Shifting Smuggling Routines from the Frontier to the Border*

El Adusto's repositioning on the tri-border and the borderlands caused shifts in the drug flows from the frontier. After his initial relocation, El Adusto's socios carried out most of the drug transports to the tri-border. When their activities on the overland routes increased, the PNP officers patrolling these

<sup>38</sup> Their view was based on a common belief in the frontier, which entailed that only after the Colombians' entry the frontier's drugs industry turned violent.

<sup>39</sup> 'Pueblos de la frontera atemorizados por presencia del narcotráfico', *Diario La Región*, 26 April 2010.

<sup>40</sup> Although the Peruvian press now and then stated that Colombian insurgents or paramilitary groups operated in Peru's Amazon Lowlands, there are no reliable scholarly sources on such activities.

<sup>41</sup> Diego Gambetta, *The Sicilian Mafia: The Business of Private Protection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

roads became more alert. Owing to their recurring smuggling activities, the socios became easily identifiable to the officers, making them vulnerable to seizures and arrests, which would not only affect El Adusto's activities but the collaborating *firmas* as well. In most transactions, he did not pay for the cocaine but the *patrones* received their part of the profit when the drugs was sold at the border market. Losing the entire quantity of drugs was not something that El Adusto or the collaborating *firmas* could risk. To prevent seizures, the *patrones* contracted *bandas* (autonomous smuggling groups) to transport the drugs. By dividing the drugs among various *bandas*, the probability that the police would seize the whole amount or arrest El Adusto's socios diminished significantly.

When the producers in the borderlands supplied a large and secure amount of drugs, El Adusto stopped requesting (unrefined) cocaine on the frontier on a regular basis, resulting in a temporary decline in the local demand for PBC and cocaine. Given that the producers continued to manufacture significant amounts of drugs, other *firmas*, autonomous *bandas* and individual smugglers took over El Adusto's trafficking activities. Owing to the persistent flows from the frontier to the Amazon ports, the PNP patrols increased on the roads to Yurimaguas and Pucallpa, which generated changes in the smugglers' routines. Alterations in methods were common, as exemplified by the earlier movement of *firmas* from using the Huallaga River's tri-border linkages to aerial smuggling. When the Colombians left, *traqueteros* mostly transported the drugs overland. Consequently, the DIRANDRO reduced their river patrols but in some parts, including on the Huallaga River near Mal Abrigo, the officers abandoned this detection method. As a trafficker described:

Some time ago, I was taking *merca* [slang for cocaine, derived from the word merchandise] to the border of Tabatinga, Santa Rosa and Leticia. It was hard work; we left the harbour in Mal Abrigo and travelled on the Huallaga River. We concealed the *merca* under plantains. Only when the plantains ripened we had to stop at a hamlet. In these communities, we bought new plantains to disguise the *merca*. When the police stopped us, we declared we were transporting the plantains to sell them in the hamlets along the river. It seems like a lot of trouble but it is easier to smuggle the *merca* this way.

(Personal conversation with trafficker, Santa Rosa, 4 November 2011)

By raft, the journey from the district to the tri-border took roughly three weeks which explains why river smuggling was largely eschewed in favour of overland smuggling. Furthermore, the river's currents were hazardous and only *bandas* which included an experienced boatman could make the trip. While journeying along the Huallaga River one had to sail in the middle of the river to avoid the possibility of being heard by the police patrolling the Carretera Marginal. Larger towns, including Juanjuí, Yurimaguas and Iquitos, were commonly passed through at night to reduce the risk of being noticed by the

DIRANDRO, as these officers often caught smugglers on the Amazon surrounding Iquitos.

At the tri-border, most frontier smugglers offered the drugs to El Adusto's socios, whom they trusted to pay an honest amount and not to cheat them with the payment. The patrón gained an important brokering role but his socios executed these transactions with the utmost secrecy, preventing the smugglers from obtaining information about their border contacts, bypassing the firma and selling directly to the buyers. Yet, even the small-scale smugglers were highly attentive to alterations in global drug flows. Most autonomous smugglers who did not rely on El Adusto's socios aimed to sell the drugs in Tabatinga. The smugglers' preference was based on a large national drug market and the shifts in the transnational transports, which led to a rising demand on the Brazilian side of the border.<sup>42</sup> The Brazilian border town turned into a thriving drug market, where buyers were abundant. The presence of many independent buyers turned the drug trade in Tabatinga into an open market. To sell the drugs was relatively easy, as the smugglers did not need established relations with the buyers but there was a downside because groups battled over the control of a market share in this unstable market.<sup>43</sup> Confrontations between sellers and buyers over the payments were common since most transactions were not based on recurring contacts.

Because Tabatinga was plagued by drugs-related violence, Leticia became the safer option to sell the drugs as there was a stable drugs market where the transactions were 'conducted according to established routines and relationships'.<sup>44</sup> Since most drug deals in Leticia involved long-term, trustworthy relationships between sellers and buyers, violence was not often used as a way to solve conflicts.<sup>45</sup> As more police officers were present in this border town, Leticia became a closed drug market, where, to prevent violent clashes that would lead to unwanted police attention, the buyers only engaged in transactions with familiar sellers which entailed that independent smugglers could not sell their product without relying on a broker like El Adusto. Despite the risks, the drug flows persisted which resulted in more contact between the smugglers and the law enforcers operating in various settings along this major smuggling route.

<sup>42</sup> Formerly Brazil had been a transit country but after drugs consumption prospered in metropolitan areas, crack (called *paco* in Brazil) was being processed and sold in the country and distributed from Brazil to Argentina and Uruguay, among others. Cocaine was also being shipped from Brazil's coastal towns to destinations in West Africa, from where it was transported to Europe.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Friman, 'Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 52: 3 (2009), pp. 285–95.

<sup>44</sup> Henry H. Brownstein, Susan M. Crimmins and Barry J. Spunt, 'A Conceptual Framework for Operationalizing the Relationship between Violence and Drug Market Stability', *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 27: 4 (2000), p. 871.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Reuter, 'Systemic Violence in Drug Markets', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 52: 3 (2009), pp. 275–84.

*'There Is a Right Way to Act When Captured ... You Know'*<sup>46</sup>

An in-depth analysis of drug flows has to include 'a territorial dimension of law enforcement', as most law enforcers who 'make the arrests, receive the bribes, and bend the formal law to fit the decisions and conditions imposed from on high', act in accordance with their location.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, most smugglers adapt their responses according to the site of the seizure or arrest. Their strategies also depended on the amount of drugs they smuggled, whether they smuggled alone, in a group, were members of a *banda* or smuggled for a *firma* and their previous arrests.

Police officers can choose to profit from smuggling operations. When travelling on overland routes, most associated smugglers carried large amounts of cash to avoid detention, as one explained: 'Everybody knows that the *traquetas* [small-scale traffickers], when transporting up to 5 kilos of *cloro* [cocaine], have to carry a large bag of money. When arrested, they have to pay at least US\$ 10,000 to bribe the police officers' (Personal conversation with smuggler, Mal Abrigo, 10 October 2010). On the frontier, there were plenty of stories of how smugglers dodged arrest by paying the officers or by handing over the drugs. Law enforcers patrolling the outlying smuggling routes regularly accepted the money or drugs. The PNP officers based in Tocache, well-informed about the smugglers' connections, even more strictly refrained from actions that would jeopardise those smugglers who were contracted by a local *firma*, as they could establish profitable relationships with the *patrones* by 'assisting' or 'allowing' these operations.

Owing to drug flows, crime/state contact occurred more regularly on major smuggling routes to the tri-border. In larger towns on these smuggling routes, the tri-border towns or those close to Iquitos, the smugglers were more vulnerable to seizures, arrests and imprisonment as there were fewer strategies to deal with the urban police officers. When captured in these locations, the smugglers did not offer money, since law enforcers in these areas were said to be more 'law-abiding' and even asking for a deal could be taken as an insult. Most smugglers on the tri-border relied on another approach to prevent arrests, as one explained:

After our first successful journey, we should have stopped for some time, to gather a good amount of *merca*, to smuggle ourselves. Motivated by the prospects of earning some easy money, we did not ... We were on the River Amazon, close to the border with Colombia and Brazil, travelling in a *balsa* [raft]. We had passed the

<sup>46</sup> Statement of different drug traffickers during several conversations.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Snyder and Angélica Durán-Martínez, 'Does Illegality Breed Violence? Drug Trafficking and State-sponsored Protection Rackets', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 52 (2009), p. 257; Josiah McC. Heyman and Alan Smart, 'States and Illegal Practices: An Overview', in Josiah McC. Heyman (ed.), *States and Illegal Practices* (New York, Oxford: Berg, 1999), p. 15.

normal checkpoints. Suddenly we saw a flashing light, coming closer with a great speed. It was an anti-drug police force boat. We were in the middle of the River Amazon, so we could not escape. We could have jumped in the river but that was a certain death ... we would have drowned for sure ... The officers shouted 'Alto, somos DIRANDRO' and they shone their lights on our balsa, so all that was left was to surrender. There were about 20 heavily armed officers, two of them entered our balsa and detained us. After that, they towed the balsa to the riverbank and took it out of the water. The merca was hidden under the balsa in some barrels... It was roughly 100 kilos we had to deliver ... *Caballero no más*, prison was awaiting us.

(Personal conversation with banda member, Iquitos, 21 March 2010)

As seen in the quotation, the group travelled at night and concealed the cocaine under the raft but these precautions did not prevent their capture. As the banda member stated, smuggling with intermissions was perceived as an effective method to evade detection by police officers. After finishing a transport, most banda members returned to the frontier where they worked as drugs producers before smuggling again. They remained informed about alterations in the police practices on the routes, as most banda or firma members shared this information with the other associates. In the smuggler's opinion, his group overlooked this rule and therefore the DIRANDRO officers detained them.

Obviously, most autonomous smugglers did not have the money or the connections to the police officers to avoid arrests. Instead they relied on *buena suerte* (good luck), although they did use some creative ways to conceal the drugs or hide their identity as a smuggler. When smuggling, they disguised themselves as government officials, agricultural engineers working for alternative development agencies, Catholic priests or, if they were women, as nurses, to avoid detection. In the Peruvian media, despite the CORAH's continuous eradication operations, the district remained branded as an important drug enclave. Owing to this reputation, most smugglers, independent and banda members travelled with old and sometimes long-expired IDs, issued in their place of birth or former residence outside of the Upper Huallaga, to avoid easy recognition by the police.

In contrast to the *traqueteros*, who regularly transported the drugs to the river ports in *camiones cargados*, most smugglers preferred to travel in large buses.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, when travelling to the tri-border on the River Amazon instead of hiring someone to transport the drugs in a rapid motor boat, they opted to go for slower but larger boats. If the police found drugs in these buses or boats, the smugglers denied being the owner of the backpack or package. This strategy was more complicated when travelling in a *taxi colectivo patrón* (communal taxi), which transported fewer passengers. If these

<sup>48</sup> Literally, loaded lorries, vehicles in which large amounts of cocaine were concealed. Often, the firma's patrón bribed several police officers to give these large convoys free passage, without being searched.

passengers denied being drugs carriers, they were taken to the nearest police station and questioned until one of them confessed or another passenger betrayed them. When both the drugs were confiscated and the smuggler detained, most smugglers rapidly confessed and even repented. After a declaration of guilt, they were taken to a nearby prison.

When detained, most *traqueteros* and *banda* members declared they were autonomous smugglers. For associated traffickers, a strategy to prevent a longer prison term was to pretend that one was merely a self-reliant smuggler who travelled to the frontier to buy cocaine. One smuggler, a long-term resident of Mal Abrigo who was contracted by a *firma* to transport drugs to Leticia described his responses to the police below:

I stated that I bought the cocaine in Mal Abrigo. Then they started to ask who produced the cocaine. Mal Abrigo is famous, you know, even at the borders ... [laughs] 'What is the name of the producer?' they asked many times. 'I don't know,' I responded, 'when you arrive in that village, the people immediately understand you are coming to buy drugs because they know everybody only enters their terrible place to buy drugs ... that's why in that village everyone keeps on selling the stuff.'  
(Personal conversation with smuggler, Leticia, 18 May 2010)

Owing to the intensified fight against 'drug cartels', identification as a *firma* or *banda* member could result in a sentence ranging from 25 to 35 years, while most people convicted as first time small-scale autonomous smugglers received only three to five years.<sup>49</sup> Because of these dissimilarities, most *banda* members who smuggled small amounts of drugs pretended to be occasional smugglers without fixed contracts on the frontier or at the border.

Identification as a *socio* led to more inquiries about the group's structure, its members and particularly its leader. It is commonly recognised that high-ranked *socios*, as Paoli claims for the mafia, 'are obliged to keep secret the composition, the action, and the strategies of their group.'<sup>50</sup> On the frontier, when the smugglers were hired by a local *patrón*, no betraying was a common rule that served numerous purposes. Not only did it prevent other crew members or the *patrón* from being arrested, but it also helped the family of the detained smuggler. If an associated smuggler was caught, the *patrones* commonly hired their family members to work for them. In most *bandas* the practice of supporting a detained crew member was also common, as an ex-trafficker described:

<sup>49</sup> In the past years, legislation has been modified to increase penalties for leaders of 'cartels', members of *firmas* or smuggling groups, see Law 28002. The Transnational Institute Programme on Drug Law Reform argues that 'the penalties for drug-related crimes are relatively high and disproportionate, and infringe upon fundamental rights such as freedom, due process and other judicial guarantees', available at <http://druglawreform.info/en/country-information/peru/item/207-peru> (accessed 3 March 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Letizia Paoli, 'Italian Organised Crime: Mafia Associations and Criminal Enterprises', *Global Crime*, 6: 1 (2004), pp. 19–31.

You see ... after some time, your wife will leave with another trafficker who still makes money. When you are captured, these women, at first, will visit you daily, moaning to the officers about their financial problems. Eventually they just forget ... The ones who can really support you with these problems are those who were involved in the business with you. Well, they want to prevent you from turning into a *soplón* [tale teller] and they are the ones who try to bribe the judge or police officers ... When you cooperate with the police, even these people turn against you ... then you are left like one of those poor criminals.

(Personal conversation with ex-trafficker, Mal Abrigo, 5 April 2012)

In most prisons, the inmates needed money to buy the right to sleep in a prison cell, to receive enough food or to be allowed to work. Prisoners who did not have money to pay for a 'room' slept in the prison's public areas. In the above citation, the ex-trafficker portrayed these inmates as 'poor criminals' who committed only minor crimes but, owing to their lack of money, spent most time in prison and suffered most while imprisoned. Most detained smugglers who were a part of a *banda* or were contracted by a *firma* refrained from betrayal, since other *banda* members, the *socios* and the *patrones* could offer support to make their stay in prison more comfortable or even provide enough money to reduce the smuggler's prison sentence. Accordingly, when dealing with unfamiliar law enforcers on smuggling routes, most smugglers disguised their group membership or associations. As El Adusto's case demonstrates however, the *patrón* utilised his former leadership role in the frontier's drug trade to be protected while imprisoned.

*'And a Wrong Way Too...'<sup>51</sup> El Adusto's Perceived Inability to Deal with the Law*

In Leticia, El Adusto became accustomed to the extravagant lifestyle associated with the drug trade, as he openly spent large amounts of cash in shops that sold expensive watches, designer clothing and other expensive items. The *firma's* *socios* noticed the changes in his behaviour, as one described:

In the Upper Huallaga, he always operated with the utmost secrecy. Here El Adusto, instead drank the most expensive whisky, trying to look like a big shot in public while impressing his new Colombian friends ... You should have seen him when he tried it for the first time. He clearly was more accustomed, like most of us, to drinking beer. He claimed he was used to drinking the most expensive whisky ... [laughs].

(Personal conversation with socio of El Adusto's *firma*, Leticia, 8 October 2009)

In the tri-border, El Adusto, as a newcomer had to create a status. When associating with his contacts, the *patrón* acted like a cocaine kingpin; he drank excessive amounts of alcohol, visited brothels and gambled, which was perceived as irresponsible conduct by his *socios*, as was his preference to stay in

<sup>51</sup> Statement that some traffickers used to explain El Adusto's long-term imprisonment.

a luxury hotel in Leticia. Instead, most socios resided in Tabatinga in a house they shared with other frontier migrants and did not interact much with their Brazilian or Colombian counterparts. To prevent being exposed to foreign law enforcers, when the socios executed a drug deal in Leticia, they obtained the requested amount of drugs in Tabatinga or Santa Rosa, where fewer police officers were present. When transporting the drugs to Leticia, they habitually crossed the Colombia-Brazil border by motorcycle, delivered it and hastily returned to the Brazilian side of the border.

In the Colombian border town, El Adusto's firma had to find a balance between building a reputation and avoiding the law enforcers. His behaviour made him an easy target for the law enforcers, because he was unaware that funds had to be invested to minimise the risk of arrests in 'new' territories.<sup>52</sup> Owing to his disappearance after the hearing in Ayacucho and other pending charges, the Peruvian police issued an international warrant for his arrest but he travelled to the tri-border with a fake ID. In 2008, the Colombian police captured the patrón in Leticia, as he recalled:

They finally captured me in Colombia. At that time, I was travelling with false documentation. A friend told me they were searching for me but I did not think it would happen so quickly. I was spending time in the casino and there the police asked for my ID. They saw the documents and called the Peruvian police because they noticed my papers were false. 'You are XXX XXX XXX, aren't you,' they said immediately. Then I knew it was over.

(Personal conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 11 October 2009)

Upon detention, there existed eight charges, including the allegation of drug trafficking in Ayacucho, but all crimes were perpetrated in Peru. El Adusto was transferred to the Iquitos prison. Refusing to listen to the socios' advice to hide in the district, at least until the patrón's case received less media attention, his wife Ana, immediately travelled to Iquitos to visit him in prison. When leaving the complex, Ana was detained and transferred to Santa Monica women's prison in Lima. The couple were accused of heading an 'international cartel' because El Adusto's arrest occurred in Colombia. The patrón faced several drug trafficking charges while Ana was accused of running the cartel's money-laundering activities.

On the day of Ana's arrest, the DIRANDRO ran an operation that targeted El Adusto's possessions in Tocache. The officers confiscated some cars and arrested three men who were in El Adusto's transport company's office. In the press, the detained men were portrayed as high-ranked socios but they only intermittently executed small-scale smuggling activities or transported the materials and chemicals required to produce (unrefined) cocaine. Nonetheless, as the patrón's friends, they had detailed information on the

<sup>52</sup> Letizia Paoli, 'Flexible Hierarchies and Dynamic Disorder: The Drug Distribution System in Frankfurt and Milan', *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy*, 9: 2 (2002): pp. 143–51.

firma's socios and activities and, in order to keep quiet, they expected something in exchange for their silence. One of the men, Pedriño, called the patrón to request money to buy a room in the San Pedro prison.<sup>53</sup> As he remembered El Adusto mockingly responded: 'Why do you need to buy a room? Do you intend to live in prison permanently?' (Personal conversation with Pedriño, Lima, 10 October 2010). Pedriño spent several months in prison, while his family tried to raise funds to pay for a lawyer. Before the hearing started, he was released due to lack of evidence. El Adusto's response to Pedriño's request did affect the patrón's status on the frontier, because he had not supported his associates or their families.

El Adusto was unable to provide such assistance as he needed large amounts of money to improve his own situation. Among the inmates, one's place in the prison hierarchy and social pecking order depended on prior activities. As El Adusto denied the indictments, thought it was better not to talk about his drug-related activities and refrained from associating with other inmates, he was treated as a 'common criminal'. As he recalled:

They [the other inmates] regarded me as a fool; they stole my money, attacked me and beat me up badly. These foolish rats ... Imagine, I, who before controlled the whole Upper Huallaga [...] Gradually they noticed I was not just anybody ... that I still had important contacts on the outside. Even the INPE officers came to know my reputation.

(Personal conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 19 November 2010)

Once El Adusto had demonstrated to the other inmates that he had been an important patrón, who still had socios working on the outside, he could buy a room in a pavilion where other (international) drug traffickers were detained, which was the most comfortable and secure place in the prison. Once he confirmed his reputation among the inmates, El Adusto's interactions with the INPE officers changed. As their commander portrayed the patrón:

He is a nice man, you know, not like the other common criminals. Your friend appears to be well-bought up and educated; he does not misbehave and respects the officers

(Conversation with INPE commander, Iquitos prison, 16 November 2010)

The commander's division between 'common criminals' and 'educated ones' was also based on the inmates' former activities. Obviously, the officers only granted more liberties in exchange for money to 'educated prisoners'. The patrón's most valuable asset was a mobile phone, as thanks to this prohibited item he regained control over his firma's revenues.

In the Chorillos women's prison, Ana slept in the public corridor. Afraid that his wife might break down under these circumstances and confess, the

<sup>53</sup> The San Pedro prison located in San Juan de Lurigancho (Lima) is Peru's most overpopulated penal complex and the inmates' living conditions are terrible.

patrón was in desperate need for cash to get her released. El Adusto asked a socio to collect the money from a Brazilian drug organisation. His request resulted in tragedy, as he described: ‘When arrested I had been involved in a successful deal of US\$ 50,000 but they killed my socio. Because I was locked up in prison, after this incident nobody went to collect the money they owed me. They were left with the money and the drugs. But that’s life’ (Personal conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 11 October 2009). Aware of the patrón’s imprisonment, the Brazilian smugglers decided to cash in on the situation and killed the socio. His other crew members lacked the manpower to confront the murderers. Revealingly, El Adusto’s reaction demonstrated that he considered the death of his employee as a minor inconvenience or a hazard of the trade, while he did regret the loss of his money which he needed to maintain his costly room and to pay his wife’s lawyer. Since the socio had been a long-term resident of Mal Abrigo, many residents mourned his death and blamed El Adusto.

For over two years, El Adusto used his drug-related revenues to prevent a transfer to the departments where he was indicted, as he was convinced that he could leave Iquitos prison without being convicted of any of the charges. Surprisingly, his strategy nearly proved successful as he described:

One day in Iquitos, they told me to pack my things. I sold my room and I even gave some other stuff I did not need on the outside to the other prisoners. The next day I stood at the gate, smiling, with my suitcase, when the INPE commander told me to take care. [...] For a moment, I could not believe my luck. Then the commander looked at my papers again and said they could not let me go because I had other charges in Lima and Ayacucho. So that day I almost walked out of prison ... without a conviction ... Afterwards I had to enter the prison again ... Even the other inmates were surprised to see me again. I did not leave my new room for a week ... I cried.

(Personal conversation with El Adusto, Iquitos prison, 16 November 2010)

Only when the strategy failed, did El Adusto raise enough money for his transfer to Ayacucho where he was brought to court.<sup>54</sup> Although he claimed to be falsely indicted, he paid the assigned judge US\$ 50,000 whereafter he was found guilty but did not receive a prison sentence.<sup>55</sup> After this ‘trial’, the police transferred El Adusto to the Castro Castro prison in Lima, where other cocaine kingpins, assaulters and low-ranked insurgent members were imprisoned. In this prison, El Adusto had to wait another three years before his other offences would even be taken into consideration.

Although El Adusto’s imprisonment did not halt the firma’s activities, it increased mistrust among the rank and file on the frontier. Several of the

<sup>54</sup> To be transferred El Adusto not only had to pay his own travelling expenses but also those of the prosecution and his lawyer, a practice that is illegal.

<sup>55</sup> Personal statement of El Adusto’s sister who gave the money to the judge.

patrón's strategies to manage his captivity annoyed the frontier villagers, which undermined the firma's status in the district. When Cacao, the man whom El Adusto placed in charge of the firma's activities, visited Mal Abrigo to arrange a drug deal, the residents commented that he acted arrogantly. Some villagers interpreted Cacao's haughtiness as a sign of El Adusto's diminishing power over his socios and mocked the patrón. As a trafficker declared:

When they notice you are part of a banda or 'cartel', as the police prefer to call it, they will put you in prison for 25 to 30 years. During these years, you will spend your money on lawyers, judges, and the INPE officers ... it is like paying the taxes you have never paid before [smiles]. [...] If you keep on denying, you are in trouble and possibly never again leave the prison building. That's what happened to El Adusto, you know, he should have admitted that he was involved years ago, so that he would have left prison... But instead he continues to deny everything; he still sits in prison and only talks to the walls [laughs].

(Personal conversation with trafficker, Mal Abrigo, 8 September 2012)

In the trafficker's opinion, El Adusto was unable to deal with the law effectively. When he accused several frontier residents of causing his arrest, even more villagers became enraged. In response to this local resentment, Cacao refused to contract the men who had carried out the firma's smuggling activities, neglected previous alliances with the local patrones when collecting drugs and even contracted strangers to perform the firma's activities.

Owing to internal disputes, many long-standing socios were forced to leave the firma or, to avoid problems, voluntarily stopped working for El Adusto because they rejected Cacao's leadership. The higher-ranked ex-socios, who had detailed knowledge on the tri-border drugs trade, rapidly joined other firmas. After El Adusto's arrest, many firmas who had previously routinely collaborated with this patrón did not join forces with Cacao. Instead these groups formed a new alliance and dispatched a patrón with some socios to the tri-border to supervise their operations and activities. Ultimately El Adusto's imprisonment only triggered new drug flows.

### *Final Reflections*

In some literature, criminal networks are increasingly portrayed as unrestricted by boundaries, or as van Schendel states, 'illegal flows are presented as highly mobile, capricious, and unpredictable, improving new routes as they move across space.'<sup>56</sup> When comparing Peru's drug flows with earlier periods, it becomes apparent that the 'patterns of movement, trade, and exchange [...]

<sup>56</sup> Willem van Schendel, 'Spaces of Engagement. How Borderlands, Illegal Flows, and Territorial States Interlock', in Willem van Schendel and Itzy Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things. States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 41.

are long-standing.<sup>57</sup> The state's efforts to combat the drug industry on the frontier reproduced drug flows in the tri-border and the borderlands similar to those that linked these regions in the past. Then again, some changes occurred, as unlike before, the relocation of a patrón re-linked the frontier to the tri-border and triggered migration flows to the borderlands which turned the Low Amazon into one of Peru's main drug-processing centres. Despite these changing actors, the described drug flows were part of 'a rearrangement of an ever-present network of flows' connecting these peripheries.<sup>58</sup>

While the expansion of coca cultivation might appear spontaneous, uncontrollable and unrestrained, triggered by cocaleros who travel to out-of-the-way territories to reduce their vulnerability towards eradication campaigns, most were controlled, managed and arranged. Research on drug flows should underline the importance of 'the making and remaking of locations and social formations' which is essential for firms to put down roots in 'new' territories.<sup>59</sup> The 'esprit mafioso', including routine collaboration networks enabled the patrón to re-connect the cocaine-processing frontier to the tri-border drug markets. Successful relocation of the firma's drug-processing activities required an ability to install, transfer the frontier's patronage relations and rearrange them in order to be able to gain some kind of control over the borderlands' drug industry. The dynamic pattern of drug flows cannot be taken as a mere illustration of an enduring failure of the state to pursue 'territoriality' in vast parts of its jungle, since the patrón used a mafia-style form of 'territoriality' to gain control over 'new' territories.<sup>60</sup>

When moving, the patrones, socios, smugglers and producers encountered a range of spaces where 'contending forces battle over the meaning, value, and control of drugs'.<sup>61</sup> Confronted by rising violence, the frontier's patronage relations not only provided protection to the producers but also secured the patrón's access to some of the drugs produced in the 'hostile' territory. As a result of drug flows, crime/state encounters also occurred more regularly on major smuggling routes to the tri-border. The smugglers' adaptations in routines and adaptable strategies to deal with unfamiliar law enforcers provided a

<sup>57</sup> Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel, 'Introduction: The Making of Illicitness', in Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (eds.), *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things. States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Josiah McC. Heyman and Howard Campbell, 'The Anthropology of Global Flows. A Critical Reading of Appadurai's 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'', *Anthropological Theory*, 9: 2 (2009), p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>60</sup> 'Territoriality' is mostly defined as 'a strategy of the state to exert authority and control over social life in its territory'. Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderlands. Beyond State and Nation in South Asia* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Howard Campbell, *Drug War Zone: Frontline Dispatches from the Streets of El Paso and Juárez* (Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 6.

deeper understanding of the shifting crime/state interactions. Yet in most peripheries the boundaries between 'illegal and legal' actors proved to be permeable, although most state agents only facilitate particular 'criminals'. To understand drug flows, it is important to highlight the 'centrality of meaning, representation, and power in the contested construction of crime', as the drug trade shapes surrogate arrangements of power, order and control, which, while they contradict state law, rules and regulations, encompass many different actors, including patrones, socios, smugglers, producers, local residents, local authority figures, state officials, judges and law enforcers.<sup>62</sup>

### *Spanish and Portuguese abstracts*

*Spanish abstract.* En Perú, las campañas de erradicación de cultivos de coca en el Alto Huallaga han dispersado el negocio de la droga del país a vastos territorios del Bajo Amazonas. Con el fin de entender esta expansión es necesario mapear la relocalización de los cultivos de coca o un cambio en las rutas de contrabando, aunque también hay que examinar la serie de micro prácticas, relaciones, grupos y redes que generan 'flujos de droga'. Al seguir a diferentes actores clave, este artículo explora los movimientos de capos de la droga, contrabandistas y productores que se encuentran en las fronteras y tierras limítrofes. Este enfoque empírico se combina con un análisis de los lazos sociales de los actores hacia otros grupos para descubrir las formas tan complejas en las que los elementos legales/ilegales forman parte de arreglos de grupos de poder que cimientan los flujos de droga en Perú.

*Spanish keywords:* Perú, Amazonía, periferias, coca, flujos de drogas, encuentros crimen/Estado

*Portuguese abstract.* As campanhas de erradicação direcionadas às plantações de coca no alto Huallaga, Peru, dispersaram o tráfico de drogas do país sobre vastas áreas do Bajo Amazonas. De forma a compreender esta expansão é necessário mapear as relocações dos plantios de coca ou mudanças nas rotas de tráfico, mas, também, examinar uma gama de micro-práticas, relações, grupos e redes que geram 'fluxos de droga'. Acompanhando atores-chave distintos, este artigo explora os movimentos de barões do tráfico, traficantes e produtores que cruzam fronteiras, áreas fronteiriças e limites territoriais. Este enfoque empírico combina-se com uma análise dos laços de atores sociais com outros grupos de modo a desvendar as diversas maneiras pelas quais forças ilegais/legais participam dos arranjos de poder que formam a base dos fluxos de drogas peruanos.

*Portuguese keywords:* Peru, Amazônia, periferias, coca, fluxos de drogas, encontros crime/Estado

<sup>62</sup> Jeff Ferrell, Keith Hayward and Jock Young, *Cultural Criminology: An Invitation* (London: Sage, 2008), p. 2.