RUSSIAN *BIZNES* IN THE NETHERLANDS

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ARCHIEFEXEMPLAAR

!!! NIET MEENEMEN !!!
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The first alarm bells on the ‘Red Mafia’ in the Netherlands went off in 1994 when the Year Report of the Dutch Secret Service issued a serious warning to Dutch businessmen about to venture into Russia and predicted the Red Mafia's arrival in the Netherlands (Jaarverslag BVD 1994). Three years earlier, in 1992, the body of a murdered Russian was found in Amsterdam. Allegedly he was the head of a gang of Russian extortionists operating in Belgium and the Netherlands. Another early story about the Russian Mafia had come from The Hague in 1994 where the local underworld had kicked a Russian-speaking mob out of the Red Light district. When the Russians were leaving the scene they left a message behind: "We'll be back!" Later it appeared that although they had failed in The Hague, Russians did succeed in pushing out local criminals from other red light districts, especially in the south of the country.

With the publication of the BVD report a first official message was formulated: the Russian Mafia is operating in the Netherlands and presents a threat to the Dutch economy and democracy. What was the basis of this statement? First of all: official information from other countries, such as the United States, Germany, England, France and Israel, which confirmed that there was a potential threat of activities by the Russian Mafia outside the former Soviet Union in general, and in countries of Western Europe in particular. The sources of information were U.S. police investigations and criminological reports (cf. Finckenauer & Waring, 1997) referring to activities of Russian-speaking criminals in the United States. There were also reports from the French authorities on extremely rich Russians who were buying the most luxurious property on the French Riviera. Similar reports came from Tel-Aviv, Vienna, Berlin and Antwerp.

The international media reported that the transnational Russian Mafia operated not only in Europe and the United States. Latin America, Australia and Africa were confronted more and more often with the new Russian criminal organizations and their ways of operation. Thus, a branch of the Russian Mafia was reported to be active in Colombia and Ecuador. Russian criminal organizations exported drugs from Ecuador to Europe, according to an Ecuadorian intelligence report. Profits were made from drugs, but also from kidnapping and used to fund arms-running activities. There were also reports on the connection between the Russian Mafia and Colombian drug traffickers. According to the Colombian police, the Cali cartel had been supplying cocaine to Russia and was connected to the Solntsevskaya criminal organization. The media reported that Russian criminals were also forming alliances with Colombian criminal organizations in an attempt to widen their drug trafficking networks, especially for the marketing of heroine and cocaine in Europe, and sales of high-tech weapons.

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1 For more details about the liquidation of Tangis Mariashvilli, see chapter 5.
4 A 100-foot submarine under construction was found in the Andean village of Facatativa. It was probably built to smuggle up to 10 tons of drugs. The following investigation and calculations concluded that the submarine building was a mutual project of several small groups, which cost about 25 million dollars (Los Angeles Times, November 10, 2000). In 1995 Colombians tried to buy a used Russian submarine, but their attempt failed. In 1997, there were reports that Marxist guerrillas in Colombia bought Russian tanks, and in 1997—a Russian airplane.
5 The members of this organization distributed Colombian cocaine in Western Europe and laundered money in the Caribbean. They also delivered weapons to Colombia (Los Angeles Times, November 10, 2000).
in Latin America⁶. According to other press reports, offshore bank havens such as Antigua⁷, Aruba and St. Maarten were now the main target of money laundering activities of Russian criminals⁸. According to various reports Russian organized crime was now turning its attention to South-Africa as well.⁹.

Secondly, there were official reports and statistics on the growing activity of organized crime inside the former Soviet Union, its penetration into legal business and into the political and financial structures. The transnational character and ‘global’ intentions of these organizations also contributed to the idea of a worldwide threat (Gurov, 1995; Konstantinov & Dikselius, 1997; Dolgova & Diakov, 1996; Gilinskiy 1998, 2000). Russian criminologists and MVD¹⁰ officials especially, warned against the potential expansion of the Russian Mafia around the world, since the Soviet Union was too small a territory for their activities (Gurov, 1995; Konstantinov & Dikselius, 1997).

These signals from different countries became even more threatening with the arrival of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands. After the disappearance of the Russian Jewish businessman Boris Fastovski in 1995 the picture supposedly became even clearer: what happened in other European countries, was about to happen here. The Russian Mafia was on its way to the Netherlands, perhaps already active in some places. The wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union to the Netherlands in the years 1990—1996 and a series of liquidations and other criminal activities among the Russian-speakers gave rise to questions about the link between the immigrant community and the Russian Mafia. Dutch society seemed to be facing the presence of ‘Russian Mafiosi’, not just immigrants who happened to speak Russian.

Various institutions, including the police, the BVD, municipalities, press and media, financial and commercial organizations, etc. were alarmed about this new phenomenon. The two main reactions of these institutions were fact finding and scientific research. Numerous investigations have been subsidized by the Dutch government over the last few years with the purpose to estimate the real threat of Russian organized crime.

There is a theory in criminology about ‘media hypes’ or ‘moral panic’, according to which real problems can be made out to be far greater than they really are. Who would be in a position to do this? Obviously parties with the ‘power of definition’, like journalists, officials of the relevant institutions, politicians, etc. The Dutch press, the police and various

⁶ The most ‘transnational’ operation was stopped in 1993, when a ton of Colombian cocaine was found in a container of ‘Meat and Potatoes’ in Vyborg, a Russian city on the Russian-Finnish border. A Russian Israeli arrived to claim the shipment and was arrested. He was released, because though he was working for the Russian company to which the shipment was addressed, he had no connection with drug smuggling. The destination of the cargo was the Netherlands (Izvestia, February 26, 1993). According to Zaitch there is an increase in couriers of different nationalities who travel to Eastern Europe and are often arrested in Latin America’s airports with quantities of cocaine. Many shipments are destined for the Benelux countries (Zaitch, 2001: 79).

⁷ The population of Antigua is about 66,000 people, but there are fifty banks on the island, among which eleven belong to Russian criminal organizations. The European Union Bank (EUB), the first world internet bank, was established in Antigua (see chapter 6).

⁸ On these islands it is easy to establish a bank and there is no control on deposits and transactions. The minimum amount necessary to open an offshore bank is 1 million dollars, however no real checking is done into the background of the bank owners. On some Caribbean islands money laundering was never defined as a crime. St. Maarten in the Netherlands Antilles is a duty-free zone and an easy place to deposit cash, because of a lack of custom control (Washington Post Foreign Service, October 7, 1996). In 1997 it was reported that several Russian companies who were known to have connections with organized crime, opened at least fourteen banks in Aruba (Lawstreet Journal, October 2, 1997).

⁹ There were reports about old Russian airplanes arriving at small airports, loaded with prostitutes and drugs, and departing from South Africa with stolen Mercedeses and BMWs. These airplanes fly under the radar and land at airports where no custom or other controls take place (De Telegraaf-i, June 30, 1997): http://www.telegraaf.nl/cgi-bin/n.../teksten/buis.russischemaffia.html

¹⁰ Ministerstvo Vnutrennich Del (Ministry of Interior).
government institutions not only call attention to certain incidents but also gather, register and present the data, sometimes even proposing different solutions. The question is whether the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands is hype or reality. Criminologists know of examples of problems being underestimated, but there are also examples of problems being exaggerated (e.g. the threat of specific transnational criminal organizations). Sometimes there is a spiral of amplification.

Dutch media

Journalists all over the world have discovered that the Russian Mafia makes for great copy. ‘The world-wide image of Moscow as a centre of a global communist conspiracy has been replaced, almost overnight, by the myth of the Russian Mafia’ (Rutland and Kogan 2001:139). Everybody has his own interest in making the Mafia no smaller than it is. And like everywhere else in the world, the activities of the Russian Mafia were widely covered in the Dutch media. Here are just a few examples. One television program described drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Kirgizia and Russia into the Netherlands (Netwerk, 1 June 1998). Other programs and reports presented detailed information on contract killings (RTL – 4, Actueel, 25 September 1997; Parool, 18 January 1997, Trouw, 19 and 31 October 1996, De Volkskrant 30 July 1997). An article in Penthouse (Nr.12/December 1998) investigated the disappearance of the Russian businessman Boris Fastovsky and his connections to the former KGB and the Georgian Mafia. The magazine also featured the story of the Russian musician Victor Elmanov, allegedly connected to the mafia (see also in de Volkskrant, 17 August 1999). The profile of a Russian detective operating in the Netherlands is drawn in Vrij Nederland, 12 December 1992. Het Rotterdams Dagblad warns its readers about criminal profits invested by the Russian Mafia in the Dutch economy (14 May, 1996; 12 December 1997). Long articles in the business weekly Intermediair (23 June 1998) and in weekly Vrij Nederland (27 February 1999) discuss the sophistication and violence of Russian criminals. An article in NRC Handelsblad describes wealthy Russians who buy diamonds in Amsterdam (June 22, 1998) and New Russians who ‘buy’ European passports (NRC Handelsblad, 18 September, 1999). Such articles paint an image of corrupt Russian businessmen. De Telegraaf quoted representatives of the ING bank, who described the Russian Mafia in the West as an ‘aids of the economy’ (10 November 1999).

The composite portrait of the Russian ‘Mafioso’ in the Netherlands was slowly drawn up: a rich, sophisticated and extremely violent criminal. In the two-part programme made by the popular Dutch crime journalist Peter de Vries about the liquidations of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands (RTL-4, 25 September, 1997), the threat of the Russian Mafia became ‘real’: both the security and the democracy in the Netherlands are in danger! The central question was clear and simple: how could it happen?

Journalists usually play an active role in the process of calling attention to problems and re-defining them (cf. Vasterman, 1999). In this context the threat of the Russian Mafia, as described in the Dutch media, can be viewed as an example of a moral panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994), a critical situation, ‘characterized by the feeling, held by a substantial number of the members of a given society, that evildoers pose a threat to the society and to the moral order ’(p.31).

Journalists are not the only ones who thrive on sensational stories about the Russian Mafia. Other institutions can do so as well; politicians and even criminal organizations may benefit from a certain image of organized crime. The Russian presidents Yeltsin and Putin railed against the Mafia because it provided them with a good excuse for promoting their authoritarian rule. Reformers used the Mafia as an excuse to explain the slow pace of
economic recovery. The crime bosses benefited from the disseminated fear, because it is their stock in trade.

Police reports

While the press was collecting colourful stories about the bloodthirsty Russian Mafia, thereby creating a new ‘public problem’, criminal analysts and the police were asking questions about numbers, names and types of criminal activities. Statistics are of little help because of the small numbers of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands. However, other data, such as illegal activities or the emergence of new forms of crime, etc., provided enough material for a series of police reports. Here are some examples.

‘Rapportage wapenhandel vanuit het voormalige Oostblok’ (‘Report on weapons trade from the former Eastern block’), written by The Hague police (February 1995) described some incidents and routes of weapon smuggling from the former Soviet Union to the West, especially to Germany and Belgium. The report concluded that, although no evidence was found of weapons trade in the Netherlands from the former Soviet Union during the investigation and no proof was found of cooperation between the Dutch and the Russian underworld, ‘the phenomenon of the “Russian Mafia”, as it appears from the investigation, is undoubtedly on its way, based on signals out of the criminal milieu and reports from various regions’ (1995:21)

Another interesting report by the local police team in the district of Roosendaal pointed to an invasion of dubious Russian and Georgian persons in the region, who bought lots of property in the region and maintained intensive business contacts with local Dutch criminals (see also chapter 5).

In addition to local reports, a series of investigations, conducted by IRT Noord en Oost Nederland (IRT North and East Netherlands) appeared from 1995 onward on various criminal activities of post-Soviet criminal groups in the former Soviet Union and in the Netherlands. In one of these reports the authors conclude that the main criminal activity of East-European (mainly Russian) criminals in the Netherlands is extortion of their compatriots. In another report the development of women trafficking from Eastern Europe is described as a growing activity of Russian and other East European criminal organizations in the Netherlands, who are extremely violent against their victims. In their evaluation of the threat of Russian organized crime in the world and especially in the Netherlands the authors of another police report conclude that in spite of the fact that there is only a relatively small group of people from the former Soviet Union present in the Netherlands, there is growing evidence of confrontations between the Dutch police and Russian criminals (IRT, 1996). The main conclusion is that in the Netherlands, similar to other Western countries ‘de post-sovjet
The more recent police investigations provide us with a similar picture. In spite of the somewhat cautious conclusion in the report of the Kernteam Noord- en Oost- Nederland (KT NON) that ‘Oost-Europese georganiseerde criminaliteit in Nederland een ernstig, maar beperkt verschijnsel (is)’ (‘East — European organised crime in the Netherlands is a serious but limited phenomenon’) (1999:163)\(^{17}\), two years later the same team warns that ‘Oost-Europese georganiseerde misdaad in het Koninkrijk een ernstig, soms groot probleem is’ (‘East-European organised crime in the Kingdom is a serious, sometimes great problem’) (2001:172)\(^{18}\). Both reports are based on some quantitative data and analyse a few specific areas of activities of Russian (East-European) organized crime, such as car theft, smuggling, human and drugs smuggling and the illegal trade in cigarettes. According to the last report of the KT NON the most serious threat is in the area of financial crime and Russian investments of criminal money in the legal economy (2001: 173). Another serious problem, according to the authors, is crime-related violence in the Netherlands and Belgium. ‘Er lijkt sprake te zijn van een crimineelzakelijk netwerk binnen de Oost-Europese gemeenschap’ (‘It looks like there is a criminal-business network inside the East-European community’ (KT NON 2001:173).

When taking into account that the Dutch government invested millions of euros in these police investigations (in 1998 — 1999 about 30 of the best Dutch police investigators and detectives were employed to find out the truth about the Russian Mafia), the seriousness of the problem looks even greater. The result is that the image of the Russian Mafiosi in the Netherlands, already established by the mid-1990s, is confirmed by these recent reports: there is a threat and something has to be done!

The facts as presented by those who have access to information, including the police, relevant officials and journalists, have created the ‘reality’. Their data does not convey information about specific issues, but rather about the abstract ‘general’ situation. As a result, a ‘general’ image of the Russian Mafia is created and its presence and activity in the Netherlands is defined as a ‘public problem’, which demands a quick solution.

**Scientific reports**

Not much has been written about Russian criminal organizations, or about the involvement of Russian-speaking immigrants in criminal activities in European countries. More is known about Russian organised crime in the former Soviet Union and in the United States (Varese, 2001; Galeotti, 1992; 1995; Ruthland and Kogan, 1998; Williams, 1997). According to some media reports, seventy Russian criminal gangs are active in 44 countries, especially in the United States, Europe and the Middle East\(^{19}\). However, my attempts to find scientific literature on Russian organized crime in Europe yielded very little\(^{20}\).

In 1994-1995 a Parliamentary Fact-finding commission on police methods (Van Traa Commissie) allowed four university professors\(^{21}\) to analyse all the data on organized crime in the Netherlands collected by the police until then. The final report included 1100 pages of analysis of the data (Inzake Opsporing, bijlagen VII — IX). With regard to post-Soviet

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\(^{17}\) KT NON (Kernteam Noord en Oost Nederland), 1999, Oost-Europese georganiseerde misdaad: een bedreiging voor Nederland? Nijverdal.

\(^{18}\) KT NON (Kernteam Noord- en Oost- Nederland), 2000, Algemene Criminaliteitsbeeldanalyse Oost-Europa.

\(^{19}\) These data of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were presented in NRC-Handelsblad, 8 June 2000.

\(^{20}\) Articles of Rawlinson 1998 and Amir 1998 are the exceptions.

\(^{21}\) C. Fijnaut, H.van de Bunt, G. Bruinsma and F. Bovenkerk.
organized crime the authors came to the conclusion that the Russian criminal threat was approaching the Netherlands and in some areas Russian criminal groups had already been active in the country (Fijnaut et al. 1996).

Research by the RISBO\(^22\) on migrants from the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union and their link to criminality, combined quantitative data with interviews with key persons. According to the researchers: ‘De eerste indruk is echter dat beide zaken (criminaliteit en de bestaande migrantengemeenschappen) niet geheel los van elkaar staan’ (‘The first impression is however that both criminality and existing migrant communities are not totally disconnected from each other’) (Snel et al, 2000: 126).

Since the main suspects of Russian criminal activities were newly arrived immigrants and as a result of the international literature regarding the connection between crime and immigrant groups (Williams, 1997; Bovenkerk, 2000) the immediate question arose as to the possible link between the Russian Mafia and the Russian-speaking immigrant community.

The idea of the presence of the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands suggests that one powerful criminal organization, with its headquarters in Moscow, has sent its agents around the world with the purpose to widen its markets and spheres of influence. Going beyond the border means that the Russian Mafia is a transnational criminal organization (Williams, 1995). One of the countries in which these agents are supposedly active, is the Netherlands.

The Russian criminals are believed to use immigrants as partners or clients of these activities, similar to what happens in other immigrant criminal situations (see e.g. Bovenkerk, 2000). This is the idea, but what is the reality?

Present study

My research is one of many studies conducted during the last few years. But, while the interest of the institution subsidizing the present study\(^23\) is not different from other organizations, namely estimating the seriousness of the threat of Russian organised crime in the Netherlands, the purpose of my research - on which this study is based - has always been more than a description of organized crime among a group of Russian immigrants, or an analysis of statistical data.

My study deals with the Russian-speaking immigrants, and more specifically with questions of how they view and explain the activities of the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands. The main purpose is to understand the phenomenon called ‘Russian Mafia’ as perceived and explained by the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands themselves. I hope that a well informed inside understanding of the phenomenon will shed new light on the problem. This is actually one of the first attempts to study Russian organized crime empirically, from inside the community, by analysing perceptions and conjectures of the Russian-speakers on Russian crime and violence in their midst. While many researchers have dealt with the subject over the last ten years, none of them have concentrated on the insights of the Russian-speaking immigrants. They preferred to use police files, literature and interviews with the relevant officials. Rarely were the opinions of the Russian-speaking immigrants used as material for analysis. This study focuses on the Russian-speakers and examines how they view the Russian organized crime activities in the Netherlands and what the differences are between their perceptions and those of the Dutch authorities. A combination of inside and outside views may lead to the emergence of a more complete picture of this multi-faceted problem.


\(^23\) WODC — Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek en Documentatie Centrum — Scientific Research and Documentation Centre at the Dutch Ministry of Justice, The Hague.
The material derives from my own observations, observations of respondents and
interviews with officials interpreted in the context of personal experiences of respondents,
before and after their migration from the former Soviet Union to the Netherlands. These
attitudes and opinions deal with questions of ethnic identity, experiences with various
representatives of Dutch society, including government, police and justice officials,
journalists and others.

The data gathering for the research lasted from March 1999 to March 2001. Many
contacts with Russian-speakers, however, were established earlier, before the formal
beginning of the fieldwork. The core of my fieldwork is based on daily contact with twelve to
fourteen informants and their families, weekly meetings with about sixteen to eighteen others,
open conversations (interviews) with 38 Russian-speaking legal and fourteen illegal
immigrants and interviews with officials from the various relevant institutions and
organizations.

Although fieldwork is still not the most favoured method of research in criminology,
some empirical studies were conducted in this manner. Lydia Rosner, for example, has
studied Russian criminals in New York in the 1970s and provided an interesting analysis from
inside the community. I will discuss the advantages and limitations of empirical
criminological research in chapter 1.

During my research I came to understand that the results produced not just a
supplement to the existing body of knowledge, but actually its own reality. This reality is
created by the cultural and social backgrounds of the immigrants involved: the historical
heritage they brought with them to the Netherlands and their interpretation of it. That is why I
divided my study in the following chapters:

In chapter 1 I present my research questions, theoretical approaches and research
methods. I also deal with an explanation of such cultural elements as gossip and lies, which
were an inevitable part and sometimes an obstacle, both in getting access and in interpreting
the results of my fieldwork. I examine the social construction of various definitions of Mafia,
organised crime and violence and their relevance to the Russian case in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2 is focused on the historical development of Russian organised crime, as
presented in Russian culture, literature and folklore. It traces the historical origins of images
of crime among Russian-speakers, which allow for a better understanding of the construction
of such concepts as ‘crime’, ‘illegal’ and ‘immoral’. The images of criminal heroes and social
bandits have had an important influence on the New Russians and the new Russian criminal
organizations.

Chapter 3 deals with the emigration from the former Soviet Union to the West in
general, and the establishment of the Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands in
particular. I examine the construction of the immigrants’ identities in the new society, the
importance of ethnicity and various strategies that the immigrants employ in relationships
with the Dutch authorities. The ‘multi-ethnic post-Soviet community’ in the Netherlands is
also examined here with its various ethnic groups and their internal differences, the perception
of conflicts and relationships with other ethnic groups in the Netherlands, their connections
with the ‘homeland’ and their approach to the phenomenon of ethnic violence, as part of their
interpretation of identity. The social and cultural life of immigrants, the economic difficulties
they face in the Netherlands and the negative images and stereotypes that prevail in Dutch
society towards ‘the Russians’ are described here. There are several ways to react to this
stigmatisation; one of them is manipulating one’s ethnic identity, a process that will be
illustrated by several cases. Part of this chapter focuses on the economic activities of Russian-
speaking businessmen in the Netherlands. This group is the most influential in the Russian-
speaking community. Many businessmen maintain connections with partners and clients in
the former Soviet Union, among them those involved in criminal activities. I will present and
analyse a few specific cases of the activities of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands.

Chapter 4 is a detailed presentation and in-depth analysis of the interpretation of organized crime among the Russian-speakers: on organisation, criminal culture, its main activities, links between immigrants and criminal groups. But also their attitude towards relevant Dutch institutions, threat to the Dutch community, illegal immigration, etc. are analysed in a wider social context.

In chapter 5 I focus on reports on the activities of Russian organized crime in the Netherlands. The analysis is based on reports that appeared in the Dutch media, on interviews with police officials, representatives of various financial institutions, representatives of public, governmental and religious organizations, but also on the opinions of Dutchmen who have had contacts (business and/or personal) with Russian-speakers in the Netherlands or in the former Soviet Union. The Dutch impression of the Russian Mafia is coloured by a series of bloody liquidations - the image of the violent Russian Mafioso. Inside the Russian community the image of the Russian mafia in the Netherlands is totally different. The discrepancy between the two illuminates the differences in cultures and more specifically with regard to the function of crime.

Chapter 6 provides information, as presented by respondents on Russian criminal organizations in other countries, which are in one way or another connected to the Netherlands: international networks and business activities. I analyse the manner in which Russian criminals operate internationally and the role the Netherlands play in this context. Israeli, Belgian, German and Cyprus connections are explained. Contacts between Russian and Dutch criminals and the activities of Dutch criminals in the former Soviet Union are presented as well. The main question of this chapter is what role the Netherlands perform in this diaspora of Russian organized crime.

Conclusions and predictions about the future of the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands - as well as a more general, European perspective - will be presented in the last chapter. I will also apply the analysis of Russian organized crime in the Netherlands to a more general theory of organized crime.
Chapter 1.
Purposes of research and theoretical background

The aim of this study is to describe and analyse Russian organised crime as perceived by the experts on this matter: Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. Later (in chapter 4) I will also describe and analyse the construction of the ‘Russian Mafia’ in the Netherlands by the Dutch media, bureaucratic organizations and by Russian-speakers themselves. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the cultural approach, which is often used in contemporary ethnographic research and which appears to be well suited to criminology. Therefore I will focus on this approach in more detail.

1.a The Cultural Approach

Glasnost, one of Gorbachev’s most significant reforms, led to the exposure of many hitherto unknown and secret aspects of the ‘ideal Soviet life’. Pandora’s box was opened in the beginning of the 1990s and terrible political and economic crimes were revealed. The most sensational ‘news’ pertained to the existence of organized crime in Russia. A series of publications by Russian and Western commentators and social scientists followed this ‘discovery’ in an effort to analyse the specific features of this Russian phenomenon (Castells, 2000; Gurov, 1995; Hedlund, 1999; Kardyshev, 1998; Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997; Rawlinson, 1997; Romanov, 1999; Rosner, 1995; Shelley, 1997; Varese, 2001; Williams, 1997). In the chaotic mass of facts and figures that have emerged since then, three main approaches to explain the dramatic events can be distinguished: the ‘socio-economic’, the ‘historical’ and the ‘political’ approach.

The ‘socio-economic approach’ holds that in post-Communist society during the transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy, organized crime is a ‘necessity’, inevitable in the absence of state control. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the security agencies and armed forces were disorganized and legislation proliferated in disorder, while technological underdevelopment made it difficult to keep track of the movement of capital, goods and services across the vast territory. Local mafias took control of local situations. The period of privatization in the beginning of the 1990s is characterized by numerous programs and documents, which announced that the Communist Party no longer had a monopoly on state funds. These announcements were followed by the founding of new commercial organizations including banks, consulting firms and brokerages. This was a transformation from a command economy to a market economy, but without state control. The new policy of privatization was supposed to liberalize the economy. In reality nomenklatura, the KGB and other top-ranking officials took advantage of the new situation24. According to Castells, Russia now became part of ‘the network enterprise characteristic of the Information Age’ (2000:191). ‘It was through uncontrolled privatisation that all valuable assets in Russia were sold for ridiculous prices to whoever had the money and the power to control the transaction’ (Castells, 2000:191).

The followers of the socio-economic approach consider this period a breeding ground for Russian organized crime, fertilized by the social and economic polarization within the

24 Handelman mentioned that privatizatsia (privatization) seemed to turn into prikhvatizatsia (grabbing) (1995:104).
Russian population, the growth of poverty and the extremely high rate of unemployment. According to the Russian economist Voronin, ‘organized crime and corruption are the price that must be paid for Russia’s experiment with free enterprise’ (1997: 55). The Russian sociologist Gilinsky expresses an even more pessimistic view, arguing that ‘in the sphere of business and commerce, the idea of honest business practice is almost a chimera’ (1999:239).

The ‘historical approach’ has been formulated by authors who do not locate the roots of modern Russian criminal organizations solely in the period of reforms and privatization. They claim that organized crime always existed in Russia and that there had always been interaction between organized crime and the dominant Russian rulers. Thus, in different times Russian Tsars changed their attitudes towards social bandits. During the wars, for example, they used the services of Cossacks, while in different times they declared them illegal and imprisoned their leaders. The interaction between criminal groups and the Russian authorities has depended on the changing social conditions in Russian (and Soviet) society in the course of history (Gurov 1995, Konstantinov 1997, Romanov 1999).

According to the Russian criminologist Gurov, who was the first to mention the existence of organized crime in the former Soviet Union, there is a distinction between professional and organized crime. Criminologists focus on the first category. However, ‘despite the prevailing opinion the number of professional criminals was not so great’ (Gurov, 1995:72)25. Gurov describes how the specific conditions in Russia that led to the rise of organized crime, differ from those in Western Europe: Russia was an agrarian country with patriarchal traditions, the political-economic structure was based on serfdom, and even crime was ‘typically Russian’, based on ‘one of the oldest evils of Russia - drunkenness’ (Gurov, 1995: 74-77).

The historical continuity of the tradition of a criminal class of vory v zakone, who developed their own laws, culture and code of behaviour and occupied a special place in the political arena since the 1920s, is a unique phenomenon in the history of Russian organized crime (see chapter 2)26. No less important is the tradition of corruption, including the corruption of communist party members (more in chapter 2). In these specific historical conditions Russian organized crime has developed in its unique ‘Russian’ orientation.

The ‘political approach’ emphasized the political role of organized crime in the former Soviet Union. The main argument is that the weakness of the post-Soviet state and its institutions, corruption in law enforcement and security services provided perfect opportunities for organized crime (Rawlinson, 1997, Shelley, 1997, Waller and Yasmann, 1995). ‘The collusion of corrupt state institutions with crime groups makes many individuals vulnerable to intimidation’ (Shelley, 1997:136). As Waller and Yasmann put it: ‘The country’s ultrabureacratized administrative system, its lack of adequate laws, and its lawless sovietized culture have combined to merge rampant government corruption’ (1995). According to this approach, organized crime offers an alternative that the weak and corrupt post-reform Russian central government is unable to provide. Extortion in Russia, similar to what happens in other countries, became a way of economic regulation (cf. Gambetta, 1993). The demand for protection was rampant in the unstable state: ‘the more confused the legal framework of a country, the more incompetent the police, the more inefficient the courts, the more mafia will thrive’ (Varese 2001:5). However, the Russian mafia did not supply ‘protection’ in a legal and moral way, by recognizing the rights of people. On the contrary, it victimized its clients, often using violence and illegal ways of ‘doing business’ (Varese 2001:5-6).

25 All quotations from Russian sources in this study are translated by the author.
26 See also Varese, 2001, chapter 7.
All three approaches do not exclude each other, but emphasize different aspects in the development of organized crime in Russia. Sometimes they are interrelated. However, all three approaches have in common that they do not recognize one important element, namely the continuity of the cultural tradition of the people in Russia, which is a part of their great pride. When citizens of Odessa are automatically viewed by Russians as potential criminals, this could not be explained by any of the above-mentioned approaches. Or when a vor v zakone is praised as a hero, neither the socio-economic nor the political nor the historical approach would provide an explanation for this phenomenon. There is, however, another approach that looks for a cultural explanation of the development of organized crime in Russian society. This is done by the fourth, ‘cultural approach’, which mirrors cultural values and popular stereotypes.

There has always been a discrepancy in Russia between how state officials and politicians describe reality and how the local people view it. In the words of the sociologist Wertheim everywhere in the world: ‘Beneath the dominant theme there always exist different sets of values, which are, to a certain degree, adhered to among certain social groups and which function as a kind of counterpoint to the leading melody. In general these counterpoints only manifest themselves in some veiled form – for example, in tales, jokes and myths, which give expression to the deviant sets of values’ (1964:26). This unofficial and unregistered culture also has an influence in the post-Socialist period, when ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’, ‘true’ and ‘false’ often became inseparable and had a tremendous influence on the understanding of organized crime in Russia. To analyse the interaction between organized crime and the dominant Russian order it is important to explain how people themselves viewed the images of criminals and understood the crime in its specific social circumstances. In other words what was the link between culture and crime? For this purpose I will resort to the cultural approach as it is used by ethnographers.

According to this approach, to gain a better understanding of organized crime in Russia, one should not only study the dominant system, and analyse the historical events that have influenced the criminal structures, but also add a cultural explanation of the phenomenon by the common people. For example, in the 16th – 17th centuries in Russia the romanticizing of social bandits was especially strong during the process of state building and in nationalistic pro-Slav propaganda. Romanticizing social banditry and crime is a process of legitimisation and justification. Hobsbawm presented a picture of peasant societies, where outlaws and bandits got support and help from the local population and were praised as bearers of justice rather than violent criminals (Hobsbawm 1969:40). The local population often considers the bandits to do holy work. Other societies exhibit certain similarities. Among the ‘criminal tribes’ of India (the Dacoits and the Thugs), highway robbery was a religiously sanctioned vocation, handed down from father to son (McIntosh 1975:41). Wertheim describes the Balinese people and the tales circulating among them, ‘which give alert expression to their hostility to the Brahmin priests (Pedanda)’ (1964:29). At the same time, the tale of Uylenspiegel presents the priests in Europe in hilarious way. Wertheim explains this worldwide use of tales as having to do with ‘the fact that all the official values are turned upside down and that the popular hero ridicules and denies the formal hierarchy of his society and still gets away with it’ (1964:30). The images of these heroes have to do with cultural constructions, connected to the role of the state, since ‘for criminals to become social heroes – or, more significantly, for heroes to become criminals – there must not only be poor classes who resent the rich but also a political system claiming hegemony over both the rich and the poor’ (Austen 1986:89). Hobsbawm makes the relations between criminals and peasants central to his study, but the relations between bandits and other groups and authorities can provide an additional explanation of their role in society (see Blok 1972). As Sant-Cassia
writes, 'the myth of banditry, furthermore, is often not a reflection of reality, but, rather, may be employed by urban middle classes or peasants as a means of legitimising political strategies' (Sant-Cassia 1993:792). The cultural approach is also useful in analysing specific forms of social protest in Russian society against the dominant order and their contribution to the rapid social changes. Therefore organised crime can be viewed not as a new, but as an accepted concomitant phenomenon of cultural and social change.

When criminologists explain crime, an essentialist approach of culture and ethnicity prevails. There is however another possibility, if we apply for example the ideas of Geertz and consider people to be active players in shaping their own culture (1995:42-43), which allows us to understand symbolic representations in the world of organized crime. This cultural approach allows us to combine the perception and construction of crime. 'These perceptions are influenced by the different ways in which the interplay between criminals, apprehenders, and victims are socially and ethically perceived by ordinary citizens, criminal justice policy makers, those responsible for carrying out legal norms, criminologists, and the press' (Barak 1995: 147). Cultural criminologists study images 'as components in the perpetuation and expansion of both legal authority and "official" perceptions of crime' (Ferrell & Sanders 1995:301). They look at cultural practices and processes connected with them, such as for example criminalization or the manipulation of criminal identities. The cultural approach is used in social studies in different variations: symbolic interaction, constructionism, postmodernism, etc. (Barak 1995, Becker & McCall 1990, Ferrell & Sanders 1995). The common aim of these theories is to explore the link between culture and crime. Whereas the public image of the Russian Mafia and its threat to Dutch society took on more socio-economic and political consequences, the cultural approach might explore some other aspects.

Russian-speakers brought their ideas about Russian crime, which were constructed before their emigration from the former Soviet Union, to the Netherlands. In the process of adaptation, however, Russian-speaking immigrants either changed part of their old ideas or combined them with those learned in the Netherlands. Some confusion comes from the fact that activities that are perfectly acceptable in their country of origin, such fishing or mushroom picking, are sometimes illegal according to Dutch law. On the other hand, what is forbidden in the former Soviet Union, for instance drugs and prostitution, appears to be legal in the Netherlands. All this can be 'emotionally difficult' to accept. The cultural approach allows us to follow the process of the construction of new images leading to the formation of new identities by the immigrants in a receiving society. In this context Russian organized crime may be conceived in three ways: as transferred from the former Soviet Union to the Netherlands in its original form; as constructed in the Netherlands under the influence of Dutch press reports or popular stereotypes; or as a combination of the two, with elements borrowed from both cultures.

The confusion regarding their understanding of the concepts of corruption and business and the discrepancy between official and unofficial terms occurred in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet period people identified the state with the officials, *apparatchiks*, and considered them 'totally corrupted individuals who have covered the country with a network of mafias and who are ready to do anything in order to defend their legal and illegal privileges' (Shlapentoch 1989:228). According to Shlapentoch, the majority of the Soviet population believed, for example, that corruption was inevitable (1989).

Especially in the post-Gorbachev period the confusion about the terms and meaning of crime and law became obvious. The confusion surrounding the term 'business' did not disappear. Since private property and private business were considered illegal and anti-Soviet under socialism, it was difficult for many people to get used to a new meaning and interpretation of this term. Another term, 'corruption', is used in both political and daily
economic discourse. Russians view as ‘corrupt’ not only an official taking a bribe, but ‘also a peasant who sells tomatoes for 3,000 rubbles more than his neighbor’ (Coulloudon 1997:75). The term referred to moral qualities, such as dishonesty and inequality. These moral values led to the construction of the concept ‘corruption’, which has a different meaning in official juridical language as well as in other cultures.

According to the anthropologist Ries, who analysed daily conversations of Russians in the post-reform period, the Russian term *polnaya razrucha* (total breakdown) was constructed to explain all evils of the post-Gorbachev period: ‘...it was a discursive signpost which embraced the escalation of crime, the disappearance of goods from the stores, the ecological catastrophe, the fall of production, the ethnic violence in the Caucasus, the “degradation” of the arts, the flood of pornography, and other signs of immorality which some people saw everywhere’ (Ries 1997:46). In this context people who suffered because of it conceptualized change as ‘total breakdown’. According to many Russians this total breakdown led to the rise of prostitution, drugs and Mafia — immoral consequences of Gorbachev’s reforms. These reforms are blamed for the confusion concerning such previously forbidden issues as business and sex, which used to be synonymous to ‘illegal economy’ and ‘pornography’, respectively.

1.b Russian organized crime as a study of a community

Is there a link between organized crime and the immigrant population? When studying the views and images, the culture and the daily life of people, it becomes clear in what ways they are connected to criminal activities both in the Netherlands and in the former Soviet Union. Siegel and Bovenkerk (2000) discuss three different models in a theoretical approach to this issue: the *criminal export model*, the ‘*second generation*’ model, and the *model of mutual dependence*. In the first model, a criminal organisation sends its members all over the world with the purpose of establishing criminal ‘trade posts’. The Sicilian Mafia, for example, has established its branches in different parts of the world, but control and administration are taken care of by the centre – Palermo; the Chinese Triads have done the same, working from Hong Kong as their headquarters. This model has been often used since the ‘transnational criminal organizations’ were ‘discovered’ (Williams, 1995). The globalization of industry and trade has produced a concurrent expansion of the illegal economy. For this type of criminal enterprise an immigrant community is not needed, because the criminal organisation works on its own.

In the second model organized crime is viewed as an original creation of immigrants who have secured a niche in the underworld of the host country. The best example can be found in the American criminal organizations that operated in the period of prohibition of alcohol production and trade (in the 1920s), prostitution and gambling. These conditions offered opportunities for a second generation of socially disadvantaged immigrants whose prospects for legitimate upward social mobility were blocked or at least hampered. This second model or *second-generation social mobility crime project* presupposes the presence of a sizeable immigrant community and the availability of enough young people who are anxious to get rich. In this case, organised crime emerges from the immigrant community and the rackets are an integral part of the local ethnic economy.

The third model, the *model of mutual dependence* is a combination of the first two. The transnational criminal organizations follow the emigrants and exploit them. Turkish Mafia *baba* in Western Europe seem to have very little problems in recruiting personnel for the heroin trade among the second generation (Bovenkerk and Yesilgoz, 1998). In this model criminal organizations use ethnic minority groups or its younger generation. Their
international links provide opportunities for laundering money (underground banking) and
investing the proceeds of their activity without much risk.

Which model fits the interrelationship between the Russian-speaking community in
the Netherlands and criminal organizations both in the former Soviet Union and in the West,
according to the Russian-speaking immigrants? How do they analyze their own connection
with organized crime?

As it appears from my fieldwork the above-mentioned typologies have little to add to
a better understanding of the dynamics of the criminalization process newcomers may go
through. The problem is that organized crime and ethnicity are usually taken for granted.
Criminal organisations are usually described as structures with a certain number of
individuals, who operate according to specific rules and codes. But the Mafia has also been
regarded as a myth, constructed by those who had an interested in perpetuating it (Smith,
1990). Does the community consist of people who indeed maintain contacts with Russian
criminal organizations, or is this community nothing more than a myth, the artificially created
problem of the ‘Russian Mafia’? If this is so, what could be the reason for this creation and
what are the solutions? Which ones are suggested, and by whom? Some analyses and
explanations by Russian-speakers regarding the creation of the ‘Russian Mafia’ and the
‘Russian community’ are presented in chapter 5.

There is another aspect justifying the study of Russian organized crime as a study of
community. It has been recently suggested - on a more general level - that there might be a
link between ethnicity and crime (Bovenkerk, 2000; Zaitch, 2001; Bauman, 1995; Ferrell,
1995). The authors argue that concepts such as ‘culture’ and ‘community’ should not be taken
as the explanation, but as the subject that needs to be explained. However, explaining every
social phenomenon in abstract ethnic terms is not explaining, but rather ‘constructing
ethnicity’ (Eriksen, 1992). The concept of ‘ethnicity’ itself must be explained as a social
construction. Russian-speaking immigrants go through an extensive set of cultural
orientations from which, to a certain extent, they can choose their own combinations,
including cultural orientations towards their country of origin, cultural orientations in the new
country, such as specific subcultures of peer groups, social class, urban and rural
environments, and the ideas about them and images held by others. Creating your own culture
implies a process of adaptation to the new country.

Immigrants may find themselves pictured as ‘criminals’, and those among them who
actually engage in deviant behaviour may find their deviance stereotyped as ‘ethnic crime’. A
few or many immigrants may choose a criminal lifestyle or a criminal career but they also
have to decide how to react to perceptions of their ethnicity, and they can learn how to use
these to their own advantage. Self-defined ethnic criminals may choose their way of criminal
activity in accordance with the specific constellation of cultural orientations and the expected
reactions to their ‘ethnic’ behaviour. Ethnicity may then become an asset that can be used for
manipulation. Instead of explaining crime by ‘ethnicity’, however, I ask in this study how
immigrants construct their own ethnic identities in order to manipulate the situation to their
advantage or defend themselves against negative stigmatization. In order to understand ethnic
organized crime we are forced to go beyond the study of concrete criminal groups and to take
into account the entire process of ethnic group formation as well as the crime this group
produces. My intention is to demonstrate how the idea of the ethnic post-Soviet Mafia is
formed, how Russian speakers have undergone its influence and how they have responded to
it.
1.c ‘Mafia’, ‘Russian Mafia’ and other generalizations

The beauty of “Mafia” is its convenience for headline writers (Smith, 1975:7).

I shall now define a list of terms that I use in the present study. The term ‘Russian Mafia’ includes a specific Russian (Soviet) cultural element. In Russian usage ‘Mafia’ also means a ‘corrupt political power’. Political power, however, was never separated from economic power. Under Soviet rule it was always understood that the Central Committee of the Communist Party unified both types of power. ‘Mafia’ was a characterization for persons who were either in charge of various goods and services, or who controlled those in charge of them.

The definition of the term ‘community’ is situational as well. According to the anthropological perspective of Anthony Cohen the term is relevant only in the context in which the members of the community themselves describe and explain it (Cohen, 1985:12). The boundaries that distinguish one community from another are subjective. The social stratification and cultural differentiation, the educational level and the different positions occupied in the past and/or in the present – all these aspects require a rethinking of the term ‘community’. I will present several groups of Russian-speakers, of different age cohorts and social status, and with different contacts inside and outside ‘Russian circles’. Relevant questions are whether or not these groups form one strong ‘Russian community’. We shall also have to determine exactly what role criminal organizations play in this ‘Russian community’?

Concepts such as Mafia and community are problematic. I examine them here in the context in which the Russian-speaking respondents use them to gain an understanding of their reasoning. What are their perceptions of Mafia, community and other terms?

Finckenauer and Waring argue that ‘The Russian Mafia is neither Russian nor Mafia’ (1998:8) and: ‘There is no Mafia – Russian or otherwise – in the United States, nor is there one in Russia itself’ (1998:8). According to these authors the term Mafia is used as a romantic symbol by the media. Totally opposite views are presented by Gurov: ‘...Mafia exists, it breathes, snarls, and does not wish to give up its positions, it tries to intimidate anyone who dares to unravel its mysteries’ (1995:5). The ‘Russian Mafia’, according to Gurov is a political issue, it is not ‘Russian’, but multinational (1995:8, see also Varese, 2001).

Indeed, when I first heard the names of members of some ‘Russian’ criminal organizations, they sounded more Armenian, Georgian, Jewish, Ukrainian and Chechen than ethnic Russian. In this context I think a more suitable term would be ‘multi-ethnic post-Soviet’ criminal organizations instead of ‘the Russian Mafia’ or ‘the Red Mafia’. I will focus on this theme later in this study (chapter 7).

But the main question is why and how Russian-speaking immigrants use the term ‘Russian Mafia’ when they talk about the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands, in the former Soviet Union, or elsewhere in the world. When I put this question to Russian-speakers, I often received lectures on the etymology of the term in general; they would discuss the origin of the
term, but could not clearly explain how this term came to be applied to Russian organized crime. From my conversations with informants I concluded that they do not clearly distinguish between the terms ‘Mafia’, ‘organized crime’ and ‘banditism’. However, when I tried to analyze what Russian-speakers in the Netherlands perceive as ‘Mafia’ and as ‘Russian Mafia’ I decided to follow their own definitions. ‘Mafia’ is generally perceived by them as a criminal and invariably violent group (‘groopirovka’), or a combination of a few criminal groups operating for a mutual (mostly financial or political) purpose. These criminal groups are believed to share a criminal culture i.e. specific codes, argot, ways of behaviour and lifestyle. I will discuss these perceptions of the Russian Mafia later in this study in more detail (chapter 5).

Moreover, my informants themselves considered the term inaccurate. Russian-speakers always distinguish between the various ethnic Mafia’s: Georgian, Chechen or Armenian mean totally different things to them. There are some purely ‘Russian’ criminal organizations, but most groups are mixed: Jews, Ukrainians, Moldavians and others. In this context the term ‘Russian Mafia’ is symbolic (similar to the term ‘Italian Mafia’).

Comparing and combining all these definitions I had no other choice than to use the existing and probably most popular term among Russian-speakers. In this study ‘Russian Mafia’, or ‘Russian-speaking Mafia’ is a situational definition, the result of the specific social context in which it operates, culturally constructed by those involved.

I faced similar semantic problems in dealing with another term, i.e. ‘the Russian-speaking community’. I will use the general term ‘Russian-speakers’, but this description demands a more detailed explanation, since it includes people from all over the former Soviet Union, including republics that only recently gained their independence and where Russian is no longer the official language. There are also some groups in the Netherlands whose Russian is poor: young people from the Baltic countries and the Caucasus. Then there are Afghans and Indonesians who studied at Russian universities in the 1970s and 1980s, and who were always looking for contacts with other Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. The language is probably the prevailing ‘uniting’ element of the ‘multi-ethnic’ post-Soviet community. The other element is their heritage, their common memories of the Soviet past. Russian-speakers in the Netherlands do not share common geographical origins and various new socio-economic problems in the Netherlands do not provide a solid basis for a real community. Different groups of Russian-speakers and their contacts inside and outside ‘Russian circles’ will be discussed later on.

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27 For more than a hundred years attempts were made by scientists to find out the etymological meaning of the term ‘Mafia’. According to certain Italian hypotheses the word was first used in Palermo in 1863, during the performance of the comedy ‘i mafiusi dela Vicaria’ by Giuseppe Rizzoto. It is sometimes claimed that the term was in use much earlier and is derived from the Arabic word ‘mu’aafa’, which means ‘safety’, ‘protection’. The most recent hypothesis is that the term ‘mafia’ is of Palermitan slang, originally meaning ‘flashy’ (Fentress 2000:6).
1.d The research methods

Organised Crime as Empirical Study

'Why should a criminologist studying organized crime be afraid of getting killed more than an anthropologist studying tribes of cannibals is afraid of being eaten?' (Menachem Amir)

Anthropological fieldwork methods have seldom been used in criminology. To begin with, there is the problem of access to the field. Researchers have to be fluent in the language of the ethnic group they are studying or better still: they have to be 'one of them'. In the Russian community this may be difficult, since anyone who does not speak Russian is a 'foreigner' and therefore not to be trusted. This is a recognized cultural trait of the Russians, because Russians have always been acutely conscious of the distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and they have taken this attitude with them wherever they went (Mosking, 2001:17). My Russian background was an advantage in this regard. Secondly, there is the obstacle of how the group will react to the subject of study in hand. It is important to introduce it in a way the community understands. Acting on my existing knowledge of the general ideas about crime and illegality developed in Russian circles, I introduced myself by telling Russian-speakers that I was studying the Russian business community in the Netherlands. Thirdly, there is a problem of ethical restraint. Some criminologists have ethical objections to field research among criminals (Sutherland and Cressey, 1960:69). Trying to get closer to informants, however, does not necessarily mean identifying with them. The fourth reason why fieldwork is not very common in criminology is the problem of danger. Some criminologists have emphasized that the empirical study of organized crime is dangerous (Finckenauer and Waring, 1998:7).

Some of the best studies on organised crime are nevertheless of an ethnographic nature. They have been successful because they entail participant observation methods (Ianni, 1972; Polsky, 1969; Adler, 1985; Chambliss, 1975). Ianni emphasized the value of field research as follows: 'My training and subsequent field experience have convinced me that direct observation of human action is better than the collection of verbal statements about that action if one would understand how a social system functions' (1972:182). Polsky interviewed poolroom players, 'hustlers' and described their lives after years of participant observation. 'Experience with adult, unreformed, “serious” criminals in their natural environment … has convinced me that if we are to make a major advance in our scientific understanding of criminal lifestyles, criminal sub-cultures, and their relation to the larger society, we must undertake genuine field research on these people' (Polsky, 1969:115). Similarly Chambliss wrote that though field research is difficult, it is not impossible. 'It is possible to find out what is going on “out there”. We are not permanently stuck with government reports and college students’ responses. The data on organized crime as other presumably difficult-to-study events are much more available than we usually think. All we

28 In private conversation, July 1999, Jerusalem.
really have to do is to get out of our offices and onto the streets. The data are there; the problem is that too often sociologists are not' (Chambliss, 1975:39).

I have studied the images and perceptions of crime and criminals through participant observation inside the Russian-speaking community in one country: the Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam (with a majority of immigrants from Moscow) and Rotterdam (where St. Petersburgers have settled). It turned out to be not all that difficult to find informants. In fact, few topic of conversation seem to be more popular among Russian-speakers than Russian ‘business’, i.e. organized crime.

Field work among Russian-speakers in the Netherlands

My fieldwork started in March 1999. Before approaching Russian-speaking immigrants (some of whom I had met in previous years) with questions, I had to find a way to present myself and the subject of my study. It seemed clear to me at the time that it would not be possible to tell them about my interest in the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands. The most likely reactions would have varied from either refusal to talk at all to laughter or jokes (‘Do I look like a Russian Mafioso?’). The next best thing I could think of was to tell my potential informants that I was writing a book on Russian business in the Netherlands. This sounded like a very neutral idea; there would not be any focus on specific individual businessmen or criminal activities. I also decided that I would not ask for official interviews or even names. The reactions I received came as a surprise:

- ‘Oh, you write about business, you mean Russian Mafia!’
- ‘Shall I draw you a profile of a Russian Mafioso?’
- ‘Business? – You mean illegal business!’
- ‘Russian business does not exist – there is only Russian Mafia!’

Some respondents immediately tried to explain why they thought Russian business was suspicious or criminal. Usually their explanations were based on personal contacts with a specific businessman or businesswoman, either in the Netherlands, or in their ‘previous life’ in the former Soviet Union. There were also general statements to be heard, such as ‘All Russians here are criminals and bandits’, or speculations and noisy discussions about murder cases that had taken place in the Netherlands in the period between 1992 and 1997. Some informants had known the victims or their families personally, or they had heard about them in various stories told by other immigrants. My interest in ‘business’ was in many cases reduced by my informants themselves to ‘illegal business’ or ‘organised crime’ and the murdered businessmen were often used as examples.

Weekly visits to a Russian club/cafe, daily conversations with informants (and their family members), almost weekly visits to one ‘Russian’ social event or another (including concerts, performances of Russian-speaking actors, literary evenings, dinners, art exhibitions, birthday parties, children’s birthday parties, barbecues), shopping together with respondents (including ‘shopping trips’ to Germany and Belgium), visiting disco’s, restaurants and hotel-bars together with my informants – all these activities led to unique informal and relaxed relationships as well as trust. All my informants were fully aware of the fact that I was writing a book and that much of our joint activities would be used as ethnographic material. Sometimes I was asked ‘not to mention’ some information, or it was emphasized that something was confidential or ‘for your ears only’. In these cases I decided to respect their wishes, because of the importance of a relationship of trust with my informants. However, if
the same information arrived from two or more other sources, I considered it ‘open’ and used it in some cases when necessary.

The trust of my informants was vital in building relationships and gathering valuable information. I always promised discretion. In most cases they saw me as a ‘writer’ or a university researcher. My informants, who made the connection to cultural values they held in high esteem (education and erudition), always respected the academic background of the research. During many conversations they emphasized their own education and cultural interests. Sometimes I was asked whether I worked for the Dutch police, or the social services. In one case I was suspected to be an ‘agent’, a ‘spy’ even, of the Jewish community. I took my time to convince people that my interests were really purely academic and scientific.

In addition to participant observation I conducted interviews with representatives of official organizations. I visited the JMW (Joods Maatschappelijk Werk – Jewish Social Work Services) organization, which in the beginning of the 1990s was active in assisting Russian Jews to apply for Dutch citizenship. I interviewed the director of JMW and the co-ordinator of the ‘Russian’ department of the organization. In connection with information I received during these conversations I conducted telephone interviews with the director of a similar Jewish Social Work organization in Frankfurt, Germany, and with several orthodox rabbis in the Netherlands and in Israel. The majority of the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands is Jewish.

With representatives of the Russian Orthodox Churches I conducted long conversations over cups of tea. I also attended services at the Russian Orthodox Church in Amsterdam, especially on religious holidays and participated in processions on Easter and in christening-parties.

My visit to Moscow and conversations with representatives of the Russian Ministry for the Interior as well as criminologists from various scientific institutions, journalists and detectives contributed to the research. Another useful interview was conducted in Israel with one of the representatives of the Israeli Police. I also had an opportunity to interview Russian-speaking members of the Knesset and activists of ‘Israel be Aliya’, a Russian Jewish ethnic party, as well as businessmen and Russian-speaking journalists (one of them was investigated in connection to the 1994-95 Russian car-business at Utrecht’s Veemarkt).

Back in the Netherlands I interviewed police investigators, bank officials and financial detectives. In some cases, my contacts with police investigators were not limited to ‘official conversations’ in their office: I went with them into the field, in order to ‘see with my own eyes’ the places where crimes had been committed, or the houses bought by rich New Russians in luxurious suburbs of big Dutch cities. Though sometimes it was suggested I read the files, I preferred to interview the investigators about their cases and listen to their own story instead of using official documents made for prosecutorial reasons. Sometimes, however, I could not escape the horrible photos of the victims of murder cases. I often heard different versions of the same story from the Russian-speakers. The case-study method was very useful in this context because it allowed for a more close-up examination of personal stories. (In the social sciences description and analysis of particular cases can be of help when they are screened for their theoretical significance, all for the purpose of illuminating the main argument.)

In Amsterdam I established contacts not only with Russian but also with Georgian and Chechen immigrants (all business people) and I stayed in touch with a group of Russian teenagers (almost all of them drug users, call girls and students), some of whom came from Germany and were now - illegally - hiding in the Netherlands (pimps in fear of revenge from other criminals).
The Russian club/café ‘Oblomov’ in Amsterdam, which was in business until the autumn of 1999, became my ‘centre of information’. There I learned about the news and the rumours about Russian-speakers in the Netherlands (especially in Amsterdam and Rotterdam). In ‘Oblomov’ I used to meet six informants on a regular basis and they always gave me an up-date on events and news among the Russian-speakers. Near the end of 1999 the ‘information centre’ moved from ‘Oblomov’ to ‘Kalinka’, a new Russian restaurant near the Leidseplein in the tourist centre of Amsterdam. Two or three times a week I went there to meet my informants, listen to their stories and gossip, or participate in celebrations and parties.

Although I was explicitly looking for cultural interpretations of crime (and this includes a certain degree of subjectivity per se), one of the problems I faced during my fieldwork was that my informants often told me differing versions of the same event. In one case I heard seven different versions and interpretations of a murder story and the reasons for the victim’s death (from contract killing to leukaemia). In another case there were different versions regarding the ethnic group the offenders belonged to: some informants blamed Chechens, others Georgians, one informant mentioned Turks. The problem of getting reliable information remained a constant factor during the fieldwork. When informants who had given me conflicting information were all present at the same time, I sometimes tried to start discussions on the ‘true’ version of the story, but no agreement was ever reached in these conversations. I decided to collate with other sources of information. Faced with this I became convinced that it was necessary to delve into the subject of gossip in order to get a deeper insight into some specific themes regarding to the social life of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. I will turn my attention to this subject shortly.

Another problem I faced during the fieldwork was that many informants were not always able to tell where their specific information came from: their own experience, other people’s stories or the Dutch media. Similar problems have been discussed by Finckenauer and Waring in their study of the Russian Mafia in the United States: ‘it was often difficult for them (Russian immigrants) to identify where a particular piece of information or an impression had come from’ (1998:122). In such situations additional sources of information were vitally important.

Lies and gossip

‘A truth ceases to be true when more than one person believes in it’ (Oscar Wilde, 1894)

During my fieldwork two specific methodological problems presented themselves, namely gossip and lies. I shall illustrate these obstacles with the following example. Once I visited an older couple (Maria 70 and Alexander 75), who told me about their life in Russia and how they came to the Netherlands. Their 45-year old son was present during our conversation. At one moment, when describing how they were ‘mistreated by anti-Semitic bandits’ in their neighbourhood and what horrors they had had to face in Russia, Maria started crying loudly. Her son said: ‘Mama, this is not necessary, she is not from the Social Work Office’. Maria stopped crying immediately and continued with her story.

In spite of the trustful relations I had build with my informants, one problem remained all during my fieldwork among the Russian-speaking immigrants, namely how to get reliable
information. In many cases people simply made up their stories, or invented details. The next day they would not remember what they had told me the day before. In some cases I felt they tried to impress me with their expertise and erudition. Sometimes they were simply lying. This does not mean that their information was irrelevant. On the contrary, I tried to understand why they lied, and in what cultural context their lies and lack of trust towards each other should be seen. I wondered whether gossip really is an obstacle to scientific research, or whether, much the opposite, it demonstrates a specific cultural trait (for example mutual distrust), or the continuity of a tradition brought from Russia to the Netherlands, or even more importantly: the manner in which people construct reality. This is why I will focus more closely on lies and gossip, not only as an obstacle but also as a source of information, which could provide an additional explanation to the issue of how my informants arrive at certain perceptions of reality.

According to some authors the Soviet people have maintained a ‘tradition of lying’ during the seventy years of the Soviet regime: ‘People easily protect their private life because they are forced to lie regularly in their professional work, faking reports on their production activity, pretending to fulfil orders, and participating each day in the various rituals’ (Shlapentoch 1989:159). This explanation emphasizes the continuity, but it does not explain the reason why the lies persisted after 1991 or why citizens of the former Soviet Union would still be lying in a totally different country and social environment.

In Maria’s case, and in many other cases of immigrants who tried to get asylum in the Netherlands, lying was a means to reach a certain goal. Officials were perceived as an abstract category of people, to whom one simply had to lie. Maria repeated her lies even to her Russian neighbour, who knew the real facts about her situation: not only had Maria never experienced anti-Semitism, she was not even Jewish.

There are several categories of people Russian-speakers would lie to: authorities, other Russian-speaking immigrants, Dutch contacts. Lying to authorities has a clear instrumental character: it is done to get assistance, either in matters of political status, or in social aid. Lying to other immigrants is more subsidiary, ‘just in case the authorities will inquire for more details’; and in contacts with the Dutch it is done to promote personal interests, like getting assistance in everyday matters, translating, negotiating, etc.

Gossip as a way of communication is more often used. In a moral sense gossiping is considered a negative, but anthropologists have found that it can play a functional role in uniting people and in the exertion of social control. According to Gluckman (1963:313) gossip unites members of a group in such a way that outsiders are excluded. The exclusiveness of a group allows its members to fight for prestige. The right to gossip is ‘a hallmark of membership’ and therefore ‘a most important part of gaining membership of any group is to learn its scandals...’ (Gluckman 1963:313, 314). Participating in gossip does not mean everyone has to be active in discussing the subject. The fact that one is allowed to listen to a gossiper has a value of its own, because gossip is an important source of information, either on the object of gossip, or on the gossipmongers, or both. During my fieldwork gossip produced a wide range of interpretations given by Russian-speakers to their problems – from the intimate to political issues, all in an informal way. Thus, gossip can be viewed as an expression of the vision and attitude of the gossiper and of the listeners.

According to Paine ‘...sometimes a good gossiper plans on certain of his “confidences” being passed on; at other times the social costs to him of a leakage would be disastrous’ (1967:283). By gossiping one is able to manipulate the construction of specific images or ideas. In one case a former partner of Gennady, a successful Russian businessman, spread the rumour that Gennady was ‘mixing with some suspicious guys’, with the clear purpose of spoiling his reputation in Russian circles, and especially among his clients.
In another case the wife of Vladimir, another Russian businessman, almost divorced him, when "a good friend" told her that there were rumours of Vladimir using his extended business-trips to Russia as an excuse to stay with his mistress. According to another rumour Vladimir had a child with his mistress in Moscow. As Vladimir found out later, the gossiper was one of his former clients, who had promised to "punish him" for not living up to a business contract.

In these cases gossip created a lack of trust, but also valuable information on competitors and rivals. According to Gilmore, gossip is an expression of aggression and hatred (Gilmore, 1987:76). However, this conclusion does not explain the reasons behind these negative feelings. Gossip is more of a message, on the basis of which negotiation is possible; either with those involved in gossiping, or with the object of it.

Many Russian-speakers try to avoid being the target of gossip simply by not attending Russian tusovki (gatherings). However, they usually achieve the opposite effect, because by not contradicting rumours or not participating in 'small talk' (see Levin and Kimmel, 1977:169), they only confirm the rumours. 'There are negative consequences to not participating in gossiping, or worse still, not being included in the rumour circuit' (Andreassen, 1998:54). Not participating means being excluded from the community. In the cases of the abovementioned Russian businessmen the refusal to participate in gossip is seen as an expression of their wish to remain outside the Russian community.

In the Netherlands, however, it appears that this kind of social control can be reached only inside their own group, since contacts with the outside world are limited and vague. When Russian-speakers gossip about their Dutch neighbours and acquaintances, the message often includes negative comments about certain Dutch values or lifestyles. This message is usually directed towards other Russian-speakers with the obvious purpose to reaffirm their own cultural values inside the 'Russian circles'. In this context gossip has the symbolic importance of emphasizing competence in their own culture. The same happens when Russian-speakers try to emphasize their own value and embellish their own image to the detriment of others. This led me to conclude that although rumours and lies can be an obstacle to gathering information, they still play an important role in the process of the respondents' self-identification and construction of images. By lying or inventing stories they imagine what could happen in reality. I will discuss these stories again in more detail in the context of the relationships with the Dutch authorities (chapter 3).

For now the conclusion is that in a scientific analysis gossip and lies should not be neglected as 'unuseful material'. On the contrary, they can provide us with more insight and a deeper understanding of the cultural construction of images of crime among the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands.
Chapter 2.
FROM STENKA RAZIN TO YAPONCHIK – HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN ORGANIZED CRIME

Vicka, a 45-year-old unemployed nurse on welfare, who was looking for an apartment in a better neighbourhood in Amsterdam, told me she had been busy for weeks trying to find the ‘right official’ to give a bribe to make him help her find a new house. She was convinced that civil servants would not do anything for her without a ‘proper present’. To illustrate her point she told me stories from her past, when she ‘could get everything she wanted, because she knew “the right people”’. Another respondent, Masha, a Russian businesswoman, often complained to me that ‘the Dutch police are unable to solve crimes, because they are too slow and too polite’. The way she saw it, the police ought to be a powerful organization that demonstrates its authority in daily life, similar to what she had seen in Russia.

These are examples of ideas I have come across during this study and they evidently reflect the “cultural luggage” Russian-speakers in the Netherlands have brought with them from the former Soviet Union. These ideas and images are derived from literature, movies, school, the street, daily interactions, etc. In the Soviet reality these ideas were constructed on two levels: there was the officially propagated ideology on the one hand and the daily experiences of people and the influence of popular culture on the other hand. In every society ideas and images are cultural features, which have a certain continuity about the construction of crime. Which social conditions have facilitated their developments in a specific cultural direction? How did they change in the course of history and which of them survived and are used by Russian-speakers in their new socio-cultural context?

My intention here is to provide a brief historical analysis of the images of crime and criminality, which have prevailed in Russian (Soviet) society, in order to explain the way in which Russian-speakers in the Netherlands make sense of certain situations. The history of Russian organized crime is presented here for two reasons: firstly, it describes the ‘roots’ of what Russians believe to be their Russian Mafia and the unique conditions of its development; secondly, it analyses the specific ‘Russian’ view of crime, as it was taught to generations of Russian people in school, presented by the Soviet media and shared in interaction.

I have chosen to illuminate the historical development of Russian organized crime in its different periods, as presented in Russian sources, in order to explain the construction of the ideas and images that Russian-speakers brought with them to the Netherlands. Who were the heroes of my informants, which of their qualities were praised and which condemned in the former Soviet Union?

2.a History of Russian organized crime

Scientists tackling the problem of Russian organized crime have to go through the annals of Russian history, which define and redefine the problem according to the social and cultural circumstances of the time. As I already mentioned in chapter 1, the Russian history of organized crime is a history of numerous bandits and gangs. The formation of these criminal groups during various periods in Russian history depended on social circumstances and power relations within the state. Organized crime in Russia developed in an environment with a
strong patriarchal tradition and a unique legal system. Until the 18th century Russia had been economically far behind most of the European countries. Serfdom and violence prevailed. According to the literature on the historical development of Russian organized crime, some of the first gangs emerged in protest against the injustice of the existing social order and the political system in the 16th and 17th century, others were merely involved in robbery, fraud and other petty crimes (urban gangs in the 19th century) (Gurov 1995, Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997, Dyshev 1998). One of the characteristics of Russian criminals was their use of extreme violence. The authorities responded with cruel punitive measures. The history of Russia is often described as the ‘history of the Russian axe’, meaning violent crimes and no less violent punishments. ‘Whatever excursion one makes into the old times, in our enlightened time one finds abundant proof, which seems to be buried in antiquity, of a tradition of murder and methods for murder’ (Dyshev 1998:281).

The American criminologist Louise Shelley argues that the emergence of recurrent crime patterns, which developed in different periods of world history, should be seen as a response to the process of modernization. Comparing the crime patterns in various capitalist and socialist countries she followed their development in the changing social and historical conditions (Shelley 1981). Shelley distinguishes several phases in the historical development of crime: 1. pre-nineteenth century crime, committed by organized criminal groups in urban areas on the one hand and by social bandits in rural areas on the other hand, 2. criminality during the industrial revolution and concomitant urbanization in the nineteenth century, and 3. crime in 19th and 20th century associated with modernization in capitalist and socialist countries (Shelley 1981).

In Russia the process of urbanization and migration to the big cities resulted in an increase of criminal groups and their ‘professionalization’. These criminal organisations developed a hierarchy, discipline and leadership in the course of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century. Prisons have always been reputed to be ‘the universities of professional criminals’. Under the Soviet regime the Russian underworld (vorovskoi mir, world of thieves) created its own culture, laws and criminal elite. But the ‘golden time of the Mafia’ came during Gorbachev’s reforms in the beginning of the 1990s with privatisation and the opening of the borders.

An analysis of the historical literature from the sixteenth century razboiniki (bandits) to the contemporary Russian Mafiosi brings to light many common ‘uniquely’ Russian features, that can illuminate how the criminal organizations have developed in the country, and how the Russian Mafia since the mid-1990s has started to present a new world-wide threat. Under which specific socio-historical circumstances was the image of the Russian Mafia created? What was the influence of the cultural perceptions of justice, crime and punishment, including the mysterious ‘Russian soul’, of which many Russians are so proud and which still remains a puzzle to Westerners? In Russia we have for example the positive images of social bandits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, followed by the ultimate belief in courageous political bandits, better known as revolutionary leaders. On the other hand, there were images of vory v zakone and prisoners of the Gulag, immortalized in books by Isaac Babel, Demyan Bedny, Michail Zoschenko, Alexander Solzhenitin, Ilya Ilf and Evgenyi Petrov. These criminal heroes tried to beat the existing system, to create alternatives and survive without giving up their ideals. In a situation where the monopoly on violence was centralized in the hands of the state, this was a dangerous and often fatal task. In general, everything and everybody who stood up to the existing order in different periods of Russian history, from social bandits in the 16th century to political dissidents and vory v zakone in Soviet times, were perceived as ‘positive’, ‘good’, or ‘courageous’. In the following I will present some specific examples of such heroes in different periods. These images had a
powerful influence on the behaviour of the Russian people in general and on the activity of criminals in particular.

Following Shelley’s historical approach I will distinguish several periods in the development of Russian organized crime and characterize crime patterns in a wider socio-economic and political context. This historical analysis leads to some important conclusions concerning the ideas of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands, which will be demonstrated in the following chapters.

2.a.1 Crime and criminals in Russia in Tsarist times

Since the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century, the Russian Tsars followed a consistent policy of transferring political power from the nobility into their own hands. During this period of centralization of authority serfdom had increased steadily. By the 17th century, the Russian Tsars enjoyed autocratic rule over their noblemen. But, in return they were forced grant the noblemen more power over their serfs. In the code of laws, called Ulozhenie, completed in 1649 under Tsar Alexei Michailovitch, serfs were defined as the private property of the landlords, who were allowed to buy or sell them, lose them in card games, and punish them physically. There are numerous stories of violent, almost sadistic punishment, especially of women. This was one of the major reasons peasants escaped to the ‘free lands’ (forests and cities), tried to organize peasant revolts or joined the Cossacks.

The legendary Kudear is one of the first heroes of the numerous tales and songs about Russian social bandits in 16th century. Among such well-known criminal heroes of Russian history as Ermak, Razin, Bulavin and Pugachov (who appeared much later) Kudear was the one people sympathized with and loved the most. There are almost no documents on his life and activities, but plenty of legends and folk songs. Even his real name is unknown and the origin of his nickname Kudear is unclear. Legend tells that he once served as an oprichnik (guard) for Tsar Ivan IV, but disobeyed him in choosing his bride. After the Tsar ordered to kill Kudear’s young wife, Kudear devoted his life to taking revenge on the bloodthirsty monarch. Kudear stands out for his extreme violence and his military talent. His gang resembled a real army and his violence was praised as a necessity against injustice.

In the 17th and 18th century criminality was mainly attributed to the Cossacks. Historians and anthropologists have not been able to agree on a definition of the Cossack. Some consider the Cossacks a nationality or a sub-tribe, others contend they are a warrior caste or a military tribe. What is certain is that the Cossacks did not start out as the Tsar’s subordinates: in many conflicts they fought as allies. When they became subjects of the Russian Crown, they went into official military service. The relationship between the Russian state and the Cossacks has always been complex. The most famous leader of the Don Cossacks in Russia was Stepan Razin (Stenka Razin), who operated in the 1660-70s. In folk songs and legends, he symbolizes the insurgent leader of the Russian poor. The songs reflect a cultural image more than an actual documentation of his life; they deal with emotions and dreams about his heroism, not with a factual descriptions of his activities. The German concept of Rauberromantik (‘bandit romanticism’) can be applied to the Russian literary and cultural tradition which is filled with examples of brave ‘razboiniki’ (bandits). These figures were usually regarded as miraculous heroes, liberators, or even holy men. The local people who gave the razboiniki moral and material support saw them as defenders of justice against the local gentry and not as criminals. It was the Don Cossacks who led rebellions against the ‘boyars’ (feudal lords) along the lower Volga. Though they did recognize the authority of the Russian Tsar, they would not let the authorities arrest runaway serfs once they had been
accepted in Cossack communities. Their idea of freedom was formulated in two rules: 'There is no extradition from the Don' and 'We do not bow to anybody except the Tsar'. At the same time, if they felt that the Tsars were not just, they rebelled.

Emelyan Pugachov (Emelka), another Cossack, was considered the follower of Stepan Razin one century later. He continued the struggle against the local boyars along the Don and led a peasant revolt in 1772-73. Pugachov recruited escaped serfs and runaway outlaws to form his bands. Alexander Pushkin immortalized him in his 'Captain's daughter'. He also wrote an extensive history of Pugachov's uprising and collected public documents, personal reminiscences and popular folklore on the subject. Pushkin was widely acclaimed for 'his presentation of Pugachov as a talented, brave leader of the peasant revolt, his generosity and humanism towards simple people' (Petrov, 1949:xxii). Pugachov's Cossack background and the values of equality and fraternity were strongly emphasized: 'Near the table, covered with a tablecloth and set with shtofi (goblets) and glasses, Pugachov and ten Cossack commanders were sitting in hats and coloured shirts, heated by wine, with red mugs and shining eyes...' (Pushkin 1949:619)29. Both Emelyan Pugachev and Stenka Razin have been included in Soviet secondary school study programmes. Schoolchildren were encouraged to sympathize with these heroes and no critical comments or questions were permitted. I remember from my days in school that during our literature lessons we learned to appreciate and 'love' these 'fighters for justice', defenders of the poor and the oppressed in their struggle against serfdom and against physical punishment in the dark ages of despotism.

In the 16th and 17th centuries Cossacks formed communities of free peasant raiders that developed mobilization strategies for their campaigns. The profits were divided equally, and the atamans (leaders), or bat'ka-atamans (father-leaders) personally tested and recruited new members. They created fraternities on the basis of strong group solidarity. The legend was that some Cossack highwaymen would kill their wives and children before joining the gangs to make sure they would not be captured by the enemy (Handelman 1995:31). In one folk song Stenka Razin demonstrated his loyalty to his fellow bandits above his love for a 'beautiful knyazhna (noble woman)' by throwing her 'into the waves of the Volga'.

During the time of Peter the Great (1689-1725), thousands of grabdeli (robbers) lived on the outskirts of Moscow. There were villages designated 'criminal', because of the many criminals who lived there. According to some authors, such as Valery Chalidze30, this was a form of patriarchal Mafia, based on the Russian tradition of mutual protection (Gurov 1995:81). The distinction between 'good' and 'evil' was difficult to draw, and as in the cases of other famous bandits of this period (such as the haiduks in the Balkan or the haidamaks in the Ukraine), razboiniki were praised by the local peasants who interpreted their sins as virtues. Their violence and cruelty were viewed as noble and good. There are many examples in world literature of bandits who hold contradictory values: generosity and cruelty, mysteriousness and frankness (Hertzfeld 1985). Activities such as robbery or theft were viewed in a different light when committed by razboiniki or other (urban) bandits. In drawing the distinction between social and petty bandits (Sobnitchea 1984-86:10) based on the peasants' perception of them, it is clear that the folk idealization of a social bandit turned him into a mythical figure, whereas the petty bandits were disliked and distrusted and received no support. The latter were perceived as being ruthless to peasants and towards their fellow villagers. The image of social bandits in Russia in this period had to do with a situation of politico-economic instability. Their role was to create an alternative and meet the people's need for justice, which the state did not provide at the time. Petty bandits did not remain in the popular imagination, because they did not fulfil a social role similar to the one played by the

29 All translations (and therefore all responsibility) in this study are mine. (D.S).
social bandits. The image of Razin remained in the collective memory because people at the
time wanted to believe in his existence.

2.a.2 Urban criminals

In the 16th and 17th centuries criminal activity was mainly associated with social banditry,
which was justified by the local population as legitimate peasant protest. Just as in other
European countries, however, there were urban criminals active in Russia. ‘Urban criminality
has been a bastion of criminality for centuries’ (Shelley 1981:17). And similar to other
European countries, Russian cities were considered dangerous and violent places, which
required special measures from the local authorities. As in other European countries
pickpockets, forgers and swindlers operated in cities. These were communities of craftsmen.
McIntosh described the urban criminals in Europe as follows: ‘These are the crafts of picking
pockets, ... stealing from market stalls and from shops, stealing from inside houses,
counterfeiting money or other valuables, cheating at gambling games...’ (1975:35).
According to Shelley, administrative responses to these skilled and crafty crime patterns only
led to ‘changes in professionalism of the offender’ (Shelley 1981:17-18). As a consequence,
there emerged a new criminal subculture. ‘Only in a society where criminal activities are
clearly socially distinguished from others, both conceptually and in the way in which they are
treated, it is possible to speak of professional crime’ (McIntosh 1975:19). In Russia this new
criminal subculture included new relationships among thieves, a new argot (fenya), new codes
of behaviour and new criminal bosses. It is quite possible that since this time, banditry in
Russia came to be considered a profession. Young bandits married women connected with the

vory v zakone (‘thieves in law’) later strove to be. This organization and separation from
the outside world guaranteed them freedom, mutual support and independence.

In the 18th century, there were famous bandit heroes all over Europe, such as Janosik,
Rob Roy, Dick Turpin and Cartouche. The famous Russian petty bandit of the eighteenth
century was Ivan Osipov (Vanka Kain), a thief who later became a donoschik (police
informer). He did not receive regular payment in return, but was allowed to extort money
from the local merchants and from his former colleagues. His memoirs called ‘The life of
Vanka Kain, told by himself’ emphasized his merry character, his love of wine and women,
and most of all his talents as leader of a gang, as negotiator with the police and other officials,
and as a judge among criminals. In the long gallery of other famous criminals Osipov is
considered to be one of the first criminal bosses in Russian organized crime.

In 19th-century Tsarist Russia, dependence on the Tsar was too strong and the boundaries
between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ almost invisible. However, unlike the early revolts that were
conducted by peasants who lacked basic economic and political knowledge to implement
reforms, the 19th-century revolutionary ideas penetrated the minds of the noblemen31.
Tsar Nicholas’ successor, Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1861 and legal reforms
were introduced in 1864: trial by jury and peasant courts to judge small offenders in villages
according to customary law. In the Penal Code stipulating punishment by the knut (whip) and
branding iron was abolished. However, with new liberal reforms and rapid industrialization,
the power of autocratic Tsarist rule became fragile.

31 The best example are Dekabristy (the Decembrists).
2.a.3 Organized crime during the Soviet period

The political approach mentioned in chapter one would suggest/interpret the recurrent theme of 'rebelliousness' as stemming from the incapacity of the state to effectively monopolize legitimate use of physical force, and therefore explain the occurrence of organized crime. However, the socialist Russian government in the 20th century, which was characterized by its powerful state control, did not manage to prevent organized crime either. The cultural approach could explain how that might be possible, as I hope to demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter.

It is amazing that almost all revolutionary leaders in Russia have started their career as ordinary criminals. The operations of their illegal political organization were also very close to those of the social bandits of the previous centuries: smuggling, armed robberies of post offices, trains and banks, forgeries, etc. Stalin himself, for instance, was involved in several robberies, including the well-known bank robbery in Tbilisi (Tiflis) in 1907. According to Gurov the political parties of the social democrats, especially the party of the Bolsheviks, 'created in their inner structure in fact gangster organizations with the purpose of attacking banks or big enterprises, in order to replenish their funds' (1995: 88).

The beginning of the 20th century was a time of socio-political chaos in Russia. The situation got worse in October 1917, after the Bolshevik Revolution. In the first few years after the Revolution armed gangs, organized by the new leadership and their rivals, operated in the cities and countryside of Russia. This was a struggle for power: political opposition leaders were liquidated, thousands of peasants were sent to Siberia, Cossacks were killed and prisons filled up. Concentration camps, an institution unknown in Tsarist Russia, were created. The criminal world mirrored these developments. Inside the underworld two camps developed: 'pre-Revolution' professional criminals, and new criminals, namely those who joined the Russian underworld after 1917. Officially, however, the Soviet authorities (like the authorities in all other socialist countries) claimed that their specific 'form of economic development has made them exempt from many of the crime problems' (Shelley 1981:103). This was of course not the case.

I will distinguish between three forms of organized crime under the Soviet regime: 1. political criminals (revolutionaries), 2. economical criminals and 3. vory v zakone (thieves in law), meaning thieves who adhere to a code of honour. All three categories are characterized by their strict organization, discipline and specific code of behaviour.

2.a.3.1 Revolutionaries

One of the best-organized criminal groups at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century consisted of members of the illegal Communist Party. As in the peasant bands of the previous centuries, the association between criminal and political resistance remained strong. 'Highwaymen who robbed government functionaries were admired for striking a blow against state authority' (Handelman 1995: 31). The social banditry of pre-
Socialist times was rooted in social protest and solidarity with the hopes and values of the peasants. Similar to Razin and Pugachov, the communists considered themselves the defenders and liberators of the poor and the weak, imitating the heroes of Russian folklore. Stalin admired the Georgian brigands who defended the peasants and fought the rich, to the extent that he took a bandit’s name as his own nickname: ‘Koba’\(^{33}\). As in the underworld, nicknames were popular among the Bolsheviks, such as Kamo\(^{34}\), Iron Felix\(^{35}\) or Rook\(^{36}\). Not only their nicknames, but also the methods they used were very similar to those of the social bandits, such as robbery, smuggling, etc. Some of these tactics were given different, euphemistic names. Robbery was renamed ‘expropriation’ and the ideological excuse was that it was ‘in the name of the Motherland and the Party’. The party distinguished the illegal acts of the communists from ordinary crimes. They were only allowed within the framework of socialist ideology, and only against state property (Hobsbawm 1969:112). In addition, many criminals, released from prisons were recruited into the ranks of the Communist Party.

In the same period, political opponents, bands of counter-revolutionaries, sprang up all across Russia. The most famous ones were ‘Hurricane’, ‘Avant-garde’, and ‘Commune of Morozov’, described by the Bolsheviks as anarchists who were colluding with foreign enemies and destroying the young Soviet state. In a letter to Dzerzhinsky, the head of the Cheka\(^{37}\), Lenin wrote ‘on the organization of an extraordinary commission to fight counter-revolution’ (Cheka): ‘...The bourgeoisie has recourse to the vilest crimes and is bribing society’s lowest elements and supplying liquor to the outcasts with the purpose of bringing on pogroms. The partisans of the bourgeoisie, especially the higher officials, bank clerks, etc., are sabotaging and organizing strikes in order to block the government’s efforts to reconstruct the state on a socialist basis’ (December 19, 1917).

The original Cheka only had the power to investigate counter-revolutionary crimes. But it soon began a campaign of political terror against ‘enemies of the state’, including the opposition within the ranks of the Communist Party. This period of efforts to establish a strong dictatorship was also a period of numerous peasant revolts. The peasant movement of Nestor Machno in the Ukraine, which was joined mostly by anarchists, was much more popular than the Bolsheviks were. The Bolshevik leadership first tried to form an alliance with them, but then decided to fight Machno’s army and began executing officers and prisoners. All enemies of the Revolution were defined as criminals (or terrorists) and were executed. In this way the ‘enemy’ could be criminalized, and subsequently punished.

The years 1920-21 were marked by a discrepancy between what was promised by the Bolsheviks and what was achieved. The state machine was in the hands of the party now, open criticism no longer existed and party members were liable to be denounced as ‘counter revolutionaries’. The main concern of the people was the battle against famine. Thefts from the factories increased despite searches by the Cheka at the factory gates. Strikes broke out at the factories, there were 118 peasant revolts in February 1921 alone, and growing unrest in the Red Army. The sailors at the offshore Kronstadt base rebelled, demanding the release of

\(^{33}\) It is believed that Stalin chose the name Koba after the hero of the novel ‘Father Killers’ by the Georgian writer Prince Kazbegi. The hero of this novel, Koba, was a brave outlaw who avenged the death of his friends, a kind of Georgian Robin Hood. However there are many doubts about the name Koba. According to Brackman, the name was chosen after Stalin’s benefactor Koba Egnatashvili (who allegedly was also Stalin’s real father) (Brackman 2001:9).

\(^{34}\) Kamo – Semyon Arzakhovitch Ter-Petrosian was a tough Armenian terrorist who collaborated with the Bolsheviks and organised the Tiflis expropriation, though he himself never spent more than fifty kopecks a day on his personal needs (Hobsbawm 1969)

\(^{35}\) Felix Edmundovitch Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Cheka (ancestor of KGB), ‘Zheleznyi Felix’.

\(^{36}\) Another communist leader, Nicolai Bauman, nicknamed ‘Grach’.

\(^{37}\) Chrezvychainaya Comissiya (The Extraordinary Commission to Fight Counter-revolution, Sabotage and Speculation) existed between 1918-1922.
socialist prisoners and freedom for every left-wing socialist party. In response, Bolshevik leaders ordered the base attacked and hundreds of captured rebels were later killed. The use of extreme repressive measures, which was always a part of Russian history, reached its peak in the Soviet period. No other country applied the death penalty as widely as Soviet Russia. Bolshevik leaders continuously justified the 'Red Terror'. In one of the anti-Bolshevik revolts in Nizhnii Novgorod, Lenin's orders were to 'immediately organize mass terror, shoot and deport the hundreds of prostitutes, ...who are turning the soldiers into drunks' (Lenin, 1956:349). This kind of attitude gave Cheka the go ahead and acquire uncontrollable powers. The Bolsheviks openly encouraged brutality. The Tambov Cossack rebellion in 1920-21 was violently suppressed by the Red Army, which burned villages and executed their entire population.

The idea of 'all power to the Soviets' expressed the policy of attaining total power, monopolizing the bureaucratic appointments and exercise of violence, and proclaiming dictatorship. One centre (Central Committee of the Communist Party) gave instructions as to how the people were to act and think. The Soviet ideology became the guiding principle for all economic, social and cultural activities. Deviations were persecuted and suppressed as criminal acts. The Bolshevik heroes of Soviet propaganda fought 'traitors'; the Chekists were usually presented in Soviet literature as popular heroes and brave defenders of communism. Hundreds of books and movies on the brave communists of the October Revolution and the Civil War appeared in the Soviet period. In the years before the Second World War, these heroes operated in the midst of their enemies in Western Europe, the Baltic or Eastern countries. They were viewed as witty and intelligent spies who sacrificed their lives for the Party and their comrades (Morozov and Polyakov, 1968; Reskov & Tenyaksheev, 1976; Stan, 1976; Skubilin 1989; Ustinov 1989). In the popular movie Neulovimye mstiteli (Elusive Avengers), special effects emphasized the almost mystical power of the 'brave heroes', the young warriors against the Whites. The assumption was that in identifying with their leaders, the Soviet people, especially the children, inevitably also identified with their political ideological message. Generations of Russians grew up sincerely believing that crime and the Mafia are products of a foreign and evil capitalist world and that Soviet society was much more moral, advanced and human.

The Soviet media also praised the heroes of Russia's colonial history, and their stories were included in the schoolbooks. However, in the conquered areas, such as in the Caucasus and Central Asia, these heroes continued to be the most hated. 'Only in 1990 was permission granted to the local inhabitants to dismantle the statue of Yermolov, the most hated man in the Caucasian region' (Sahni 1997:244). The historical heritage and cultural values of the peoples that became a part of the Soviet Union were totally ignored. However, what the government could not fight was that the oral tradition continued and an unofficial, underground protest culture flourished (Samizdat is one example). 'It was inevitable that the epic, which was both a part of collective memory and an aspect of national consciousness would turn into an enemy of the totalitarian culture which strove to plant itself in that role' (Sahni 1997:236).

38 During the Civil War in 1918-1920, there were two 'official' armies: the Reds, who fought for the Revolution and the Whites, who struggled against it. The Reds were usually associated with the army of 'workers and peasants', while the Whites were noblemen and aristocrats, who were labeled in the official propaganda as 'folk enemies, imperialists and anti-revolutionaries'.

39 General Yermolov was the Commander-in-Chief of the military operations in the Caucasus. Though many Russian liberals, including the Decembrists, considered him a Jacobin and a liberal, the local population of the Caucasus remembers his cruelty.
The party Mafia structure was formed ‘only in the post-Stalin time after the time of collectivisation and industrialization’ (Kelly, Schatzberg and Ryan 1997:176). According to Finckenauer and Warring (1998:95-96) the Soviet Mafia can be seen as a product of the Communist Party. The Party was above the law, the members of the apparat (system) and nomenklatura used their positions for political and personal purposes. The officials who occupied high-level positions may be called, as Finckenauer and Warring suggest, ‘white-collar criminals’ (1998:96). The nomenklatura were the top officials, the ruling class of the former Soviet Union. They formed a very isolated society with special schools, hospitals, luxury shops, restaurants, sanatoriums and hotels in the Caucasus and Crimea. Their children were encouraged to marry inside their own circles. ‘Like Imperial Russia’s ruling elite, they often received their posts through connections’ (Wilson and Donaldson 1996: 48).

But there was an elite even inside this privileged nomenklatura that was placed above all: the members of the Politburo, about 15 people, who actually were the governors of the state. ‘Without restrictions, and completely free of charge, they get anything they want in any quantity’ (Simis 1982:46). They lived in palaces, with a complete staff of cooks, drivers, doctors, teachers, etc., guarded by armed agents of the Special Service of the KGB Central Office twenty four hours per day. ‘They are screened by high walls surmounted with barbed wire, by high-tension wires, and by a photoelectric surveillance system’ (Simis 1982:46). This structure can be easily compared with the criminal societies of the Russian underworld.

Vaksberg compared the mystery surrounding the nomenklatura with the Italian omerta (Vaksberg, 1991:200). The party leaders kept their secrets from ordinary members, who, in turn did not doubt the actions of their leaders. Orders were carried out without questions, disobedience, if occurred, was punished immediately.

This was an exclusive class, to which outsiders were not admitted. No details of their life were available to the public, since the mass media did not have permission to reveal any information. However, since the ruling elite employed an army of servants, maids and drivers, there was a trickle of information all the same. In other words, in the 1960s and 70s there was, on the one hand, the official story of the Communist Party and its ‘honest’ leaders, portrayed as ‘servants of the people’ whose needs are modest and who allegedly devote their lives ‘to serve their Fatherland’, and then there was the real world on the other hand: ‘corrupt rulers ruling over corrupt people’(Simis 1982:297). Simis claims that the whole ruling elite of the Soviet Union was corrupt and the KGB was fully aware of this. The author describes corruption in the Georgian Soviet republic, where an underworld millionaire could buy the position of Minister of Light Industry (1982:167-168). But not only in Georgia cases of corruption among the leaders were revealed. ‘High-ranking bribe takers are very frequently exposed in the Soviet Union, and it may be said that cases of their being truly punished are extremely rare’ (Simis 1982:52). Under Brezhnev $30 billion of oil revenues disappeared, while under Gorbachev 2000 tonnes of gold ingots was transferred to the West

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40 From private conversations with MVD officials, May 1999, Moscow.
2.3.3 Underground millionaires

The wealthy circle of the Soviet Mafia included not only Party functionaries, but also those who could provide them with whatever it took to sustain their way of life, i.e. the economic elite of the Soviet Union. The close links between political and economic crime become clear when we focus on the unique socio-economic situation created in the former Soviet Union.

Rosner argues that Soviet crime was not the crime of the landless workers and peasants or the inhabitants of the overcrowded ghettos, but a way of beating the socialist system (Rosner, 1986). Ostap Bender, the most popular image in Soviet literature, created by the writers Yilya Ilf and Evgenyi Petrov, can be used as an example of one who beats the system. According to the explanation given by the Soviets, Ostap Bender was a creation of the transitional period, when ‘capitalism was basically liquidated, but socialism had not ultimately won’ (Zaslavsky 1961:16). He was officially viewed as a representative of the old degrading world of the petty bourgeoisie. However, Bender was not the only person who was ‘bad’. Almost everyone he met on his way was viewed in the same light, including functionaries. In the chapter called ‘Blue thief’ in “Dvenadzat Stul’ev” (“Twelve Chairs) a zavchoz (administrator) of the home for the aged is described as a thief, who was ‘stealing and was ashamed of it’ (Ilf & Petrov, 1961:73). The image of Bender was only possible in a situation where cheating, gambling, and unscrupulous calculations prevailed. Bender did not want to adapt to the socialist way of life but dreamt instead of Rio de Janeiro, where millions of people were ‘wearing white trousers’, the symbol of glamour and the temptations of life abroad. Only if the readers identified with the social situation Bender operated in and with the alternatives he presented, could this ‘negative’ hero win their sympathy. (Forty years later when ‘The Godfather’ became a hit across the globe, the Soviet audiences still preferred Ostap Bender. The image of Vito Corleone was too mystical, unreal and too far removed from the Soviet social-economic conditions. Only in the late 1980s ‘The Godfather’ conquered the Russian public). Not unlike fictional characters like the Scotsman John Law, other charlatans of the fashionable salons and adventurers in the East and West Indies, Ostap Bender can be seen as a Russian picaro, who ‘does not have any redeeming social qualities, but his presentation in literature does serve a radical function of exposing both the amorality of egotism and the matching corruption of a society which collaborates in such behaviour’ (Austen 1986:99). While the readers enjoyed his image and his adventures, they were also made aware of the constraints on the picaro’s freedom: ‘he is inevitably forced to accept the limitations of his aspirations, thus implying that there is at least an idea of order which keeps the trickster from being the ruler’ (Austen 1986:99).

In 1927 Stalin launched his ‘revolution from above’ policy, which included rapid industrialization and collectivisation. When Stalin’s campaign against economic and ‘anti-state’ criminals took place, many of those involved in the NEP (New Economic Policy) as well as private entrepreneurs were considered part of the underworld. However, the centralized five-year-plans policy, which became the basis of the Soviet economy, failed (Simis 1982, Shelley 1981). Wages remained low, there was a shortage of products and their quality was poor. People had to invent alternative ways to survive: alternative sources of supply and better quality (usually foreign) products. Several specific elements were necessary for this alternative, such as blat (good connections) and krugovaya poruka (mutual support). Stealing from the state (usually from the workplace) was not considered a crime by Soviet citizens (Berliner, 1957, Rawlinson 1998, Simis, 1982). The unofficial economy employed spekulants (profiteers) and fartzovschiki (foreign currency and products dealers). In the 1970s, during the zastoi, the economic stagnation under Brezhnev’s rule, tzechoviki, the new entrepreneurs, underground factory managers, began to create their own association.
Some authors explained the image of the Soviet economy, image ‘of a giant kleptocracy, i.e. a system where the dominating features are force, extortion and tribute, rather than voluntary exchange on a market’ (Hedlund 1999:20). The example is the so-called na levo (on the side) model. The Soviet trade system, for example, involved a whole network of trade points: every shop paid tribute to the regional trade centre (torg), the regional centre paid to the Mostorg (Centre in Moscow), which distributed money to various government institutions and ministries (Gurov 1995:60). Thus, the extra revenues were divided: ‘one part for the employees, one part for the suppliers and one part upwards in the system, to officials higher up within the controlling bureaucracy’ (Hedlund 1999:20). ‘Crime has practically enveloped the whole country and the entire lower levels of the party-state apparatus’ (Simis 1982:82).

One of the most important economic crimes in the Soviet Union was private entrepreneurial activity, which allegedly jeopardized the socialist economy. However, many Soviet citizens knew that there were plenty of private enterprises, especially in the big cities: Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, Tbilisi and others. Private entrepreneurs installed modern foreign equipment and used cash to bribe political patrons who protected the shadow economy. Simis describes in his book how it was possible to become a millionaire in the Soviet regime: ‘The simplest way to become a millionaire is to become the owner of a factory or workshop that produces easily saleable merchandise: ladies’ underwear, meat-pies (pirozhki), brooches made of a couple of plastic cherries, or fashionable tailored artificial-leather jackets... you need one of two things – money or connections in the underground business world’ (1982:157). Another aspect of the schizophrenic Soviet reality is shown here: the idea of a state economy, on which the material life of Soviet citizens depends, in contrast with an underground private economy, which allows some people to become rich, independent of the state. The unwritten codes alongside the official rules allowed the authorities to manipulate their policy, to create a euphoria of liberalism and freedom, but with the shadow of possible punishment at any moment, the so-called ‘suspended punishment’ (Ledeneva 1998:77). ‘...it’s an attempt to create in man’s subconscious a psychological background that tells him that his very existence is unauthorised and even illegal’ (Zinoviev 1974:326, quoted in Ledeneva 1998:77). These social conditions led to many Soviet citizens trying to combine the unwritten and written codes. Especially for the underground businessmen this was an important task. This same attitude I have seen among the Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands (see chapter 3).

2.a.3.4 Economic criminals – crime for survival

The Soviet people faced more than ambiguities in the economic field. For many individuals there was an obvious discrepancy between the official ideology, norms and values and the difficulties of daily life. The mass media brought to light the stark contrast between daily life and ideology. Focusing on industrial themes, many Soviet movies created special ‘economic’ heroes: metalworkers and milkmaids who went beyond the targets of the five-year plan or secretaries of the local Party organizations (Gorkom or Obkom41) who uncovered plots against socialist property. The central idea in these movies was to teach the public how important it was to increase the productivity of labour, to uncover sabotage or theft of socialist property – usually the militia (Russian police) were the heroes - and to punish

41 Gorodskoi Komitet Partii – Municipal Committee of the Communist Party; Oblastnoi Komitet Partii – Regional Committee of the Communist Party
enemies of the Soviet nation'. The Russian tough guy was a *militioner* (policeman) who took on the world in terms of the socialist propaganda. These were the official messages, but what was the real meaning of crime in the Soviet Union?

Corruption, which the communists had been fighting in the days of Tsarist Russia, remained a reality in everyday life throughout the Soviet period, from the NEP policy in the 1920s until Gorbachev's reforms. According to Rosner, in the USSR crime was the basis of life: 'secrecy, corruption, theft and cover-ups are constant factors in day-to-day activity' (Rosner 1986:127). There were many ways to 'beat the system' without risking legal punishment.

The uniquely 'Soviet' crimes, i.e. crimes against socialist property, included burglary and theft from the state: ranging from a few nails from the factory to large-scale embezzlement. Another crime in the Soviet Union was 'parasitism'. Shelley indicates that there was always a potential for the misuse of the law against parasitism. It was often directed against dissidents or other 'political enemies'. In a 10-month period in the 1960s more than 6,000 individuals were convicted and sent into exile on the basis of this law (Shelley 1981:115).

The concept of the criminal was also ambiguous. There were what Rosner calls 'private' and 'public' criminals: those who act against the individual and those who act against the state (1986:37). 'The Soviet citizen will condemn criminal activity directed against individuals. Crimes against the person have a quality that permits universal condemnation. The other type of crime, that which permeates the USSR because it is "the land of Kleptomania", as Simis describes it, evokes only token social control' (Rosner, 1986:37). The Russian émigré writer Dovlatov described the reality in the former Soviet Union in his *Chemodan* ('Suitcase') as follows: 'They really steal. And every year more and more. They take away beef from the meat factory. Lenses from the cinema hardware factory. They carry away everything – plastic, polyethylene, electric motors, screws, radio valves, and glass. Sometimes it acquires a metaphysical character. I am talking about really mysterious theft without any logical reason. This, I am convinced can only happen in the Russian state' (Dovlatov, 1996:135). In this situation, as earlier in Russian history, the boundaries between legal and illegal were blurred. The gap between ideology and reality was too deep and images of criminals too vague. There were two simple dilemmas. The first one is universal: the world is corrupt, so is it wrong to violate its rules? The second one was uniquely Soviet: the state belongs to the people, and the people cannot steal from themselves. Theft from the state is not theft! "...The mass of the population does not look upon theft from the state as a real theft, as stealing someone else's property" (Simis 1982:253). The black market became an everyday reality in all spheres of life. The Soviet people developed a new perception according to which 'the moderate exploitation of power for individual interests improves the quality of life...' (Shlapentoch 1989: 218). The corruption and abuse of power came to be considered as something normal and in fact unavoidable and in no way illegal. The state itself was an organized crime, with its hierarchy and leadership in the political and socio-economic sectors.

This historical background allows us to better understand the examples presented in the beginning of this chapter. When my informants mentioned the bribing of officials or the weakness of the police, they based their judgement on images constructed in their past. In the social context they were used to a bribe was considered a necessity to survive and the power of authorities the only possibility to maintain order. Elena, a Russian immigrant in the Netherlands told me how she got 'free' medical help in Russia.

'**Medical treatment was officially free of charge for Soviet citizens. When I was sixteen I fell from a tree and broke my foot. The teacher called the First Aid, they put it in plaster and I was sent home. After some time, however, I felt pain and my mother started to worry. The general practitioner who came to see me could not find anything and suggested I turn to a**'}
specialist. She told my mother that she knew a good one, but that he was usually very busy. My mother paid her twenty roubles (in the 1970s that was a lot of money, when you consider the monthly salary of doctors was about hundred and twenty roubles) to "arrange" a meeting with the specialist. The general practitioner promised to call the assistant of the specialist, who appeared to be a daughter of her neighbour. The assistant called my mother the same evening and asked whether she could arrange two tickets for a performance of a famous Russian actor (My mother worked in one of the theatres). Of course my mother brought her the tickets and we went to the specialist, who received us at his home. Because he lived in another part of Moscow and I could not walk, we took a taxi, which cost us another seven roubles. For the consultation the specialist took forty roubles and for his wife my mother brought a bottle of French perfume. He sent me to his friend for an X-ray, which cost my mother another twenty-five roubles, silk Japanese scarf and taxi. All in all my mother paid almost a monthly salary and gave plenty of presents for a "gratis" medical treatment'.

For the ordinary Russian-speaking immigrants all of this constituted a kind of mafia and it existed in every corner of the Soviet society. A change of view can be expected to happen only when other possibilities and alternatives are available in a different social context. For my informants this change is part of their adaptation to Dutch society.

2.a.3.5 Vory v zakone

Alongside the politically organized crime described above, there was a non-political branch of organized crime, which rejected the dominant system in Russia after 1917. It consisted of members of the underworld. Those involved were, according to Varese, the ancestors of the contemporary post-Soviet Mafia (2001). According to Gurov vory v zakone were firmly established by the beginning of the 1930's (1995:104). I will borrow Gurov’s division of the developments in prestupnyi mir (the criminal world) of pre-reform Russia into two periods: before and after 1930s.

2.a.3.5.1 The Russian underworld before the 1930s

Before the October Revolution there were two centres of organized crime, Rostov and Odessa, called in argot 'Rostov -- papa' and 'Odessa -- mama'. The bandits of Rostov, a city on the Don River, the traditional Cossack territory, were well known for their organization and violence. Odessa at the beginning of the century was a trading post, populated by minorities (mostly Jews and Greeks). The well-known Sheindl Bluvshtein, alias Sonka Zolotaya Ruchka (Sonka, the Golden Arm) and her gang were running operations all over Russia at the time. As far as I know she was the most admired female criminal in Russian history. Not only her beauty and 'seduction skills' but also her organizational talent was praised in literature and the oral tradition. She was considered a 'godmother' of the Russian underworld. Another famous criminal was Sashka Seminarist, sadist and ataman (leader) of a gang operating in Moscow in the beginning of the century. The famous swindler Nicolai

42 Remnick describes how a woman had to arrange the burial of her mother, as 'a process that drained her as much as it enriched the "cemetary mafia" and its Party patrons (1994:184-185).
Maklakov operated in Petersburg during this time. These were professional criminals, known for their sophistication and organizational capabilities.

In the beginning of the 20th century, the figure of the criminal leader was highly romanticized. Thus Isaac Babel created Bennya Krik, based on the image of Yaponchik, the famous gangster of Odessa, and the Queen of smugglers Lubka Kazak. In Babel’s story, Bennya Krik was an organized crime leader in Odessa. Many Russians were hungry in the twenties, but Bennya’s wealth was spectacular: ‘Bennya was wearing an orange suit and under his cuff links a diamond bracelet was shining’ (Babel 1986:18). And elsewhere: ‘All the best of our contraband, everything this land is famous for, from one end to another did in that starry, in that blue night, its destroying, its seducing deed. The foreign vine heated stomachs, black cock from the “Plutarch” which arrived three days ago from Port Said and brought bottles of Jamaica Rum, oily Madera, cigars from Pierpont Morgan’s plantations and oranges from the surroundings of Jerusalem’ (Babel 1986:119). And the bandits, guests at Bennya’s sister wedding were: ‘Aristocrats of Moldovanka43, they were dressed in lilac waistcoats, red coats flung over their shoulders and on their fleshy legs cracked leather of a sky azure colour’ (ibid: 119-120)

Another writer, Michail Zochenko, like Babel, romanticized his heroes, who were thieves and prostitutes. ‘Theft, my dears, - is a complete and vast science’, he wrote in ‘Uzel’ (‘Knot’). In ‘Vor’ (‘Thief) he used satire to describe the bad economic situation, which also affected the criminals of the 1920s. ‘Vaska Tyapkin was a karmannik (‘pickpocket’), who operated mostly in trams.... But do not envy him, reader, the profession is nothing. Enter one pocket – dermo (‘shit’); it can be a lighter, in another – shit again, a handkerchief, or for example ten cigarettes, or let’s say, even worse – an electricity bill’ (Zochenko, 1994). The staryi blagorodnyi vorovskoi Sr (the old and noble world of thieves) was highly romanticized. There were many legends about the heroic deeds of professional criminals, who were supposedly not corrupt, who kept their word and behaved like nobles.

In the second half of 19th- beginning of the 20th centuries the fraternities of vory in Russia were known as arteli (guilds). These were criminal groups, which operated independently and usually competed with other arteli (Varese 2001:162-164). After the October revolution in 1917, the new authorities released many professional criminals. In Moscow alone there were 30 criminal gangs, of which the best known were the gang of the brothers Lopuchin, the ‘Chubarovtsy’, ‘the Black Crows’, and the ‘Souz Svetskich Hooliganov’ (Union of Social Hooligans). In Petersburg the gang of Lionka (Leonid) Panteleev was active.

The Soviets applied their own criminal methods to ‘beat the bandits’. For example, they could issue the death sentence for a whole gang without even giving all the names of its members. The Chekists ‘had a right’ to destroy the whole gang without any investigation (Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997:60). In these conditions a new type of criminal appeared: anarchists, persons who did not want to cooperate with the Bolsheviks, people with a proper education and organizational talents. Whereas in the beginning of the 20th century the leaders of criminal gangs were urkas (leaders of thieves), vozhaki (leaders of gangs) and various blatnyie (‘tough guys’), in the 1920s the new criminal bosses (zhigany) viewed their criminal activity as a social protest. They learned how to make use of the traditions of the pre-Revolutionary criminal world in a new reality. They emphasized the romantic aspect as well as discipline, which later became a law. In the underworld they were called ‘belaya kost (White Bone)’, because they were believed to come from a more noble origin (Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997:62).

43 A neighbourhood in Odessa, known as a place where many bandits lived and operated.
The culture of these criminal groups - their language, manners and ideas - is known as the culture of *vory v zakone*, who operated in Russia and other republics at the time. Their basic new idea was opposition to the Soviet state, where *vory v zakone* were not allowed to take part in the work of society, to take arms on behalf of the state or to work with the justice system (either as victims or as witnesses). They developed their own Code that regulated their leadership and daily behaviour, as well as their economic security. Years spent in prison were considered a badge of honour. Refusing to work in prison was strictly forbidden as well. The culture of tattoos, jargon, nicknames, songs, verses and sayings continued to flourish. This culture was only partly the property of their own society; in general it was also well known and admired outside the prison walls.

A *vory v zakone* was usually ‘crowned’ in prison with an oath. He needed at least two recommendations from other *vory v zakone* to be chosen. Those who recommended him were from then on responsible for his behaviour, and for the loyalty to the *vorovskaya ideya* (thieves’ idea). Tattooing usually completed the ritual of becoming *vory v zakone*. The tattoos were borrowed from the tradition of Russian icon painting, Russian landscapes with monasteries and birch trees, portraits of Russian political leaders, skulls and barbed wire and were transmuted into a clandestine social and political language that could be understood by other inmates and friends outside of the prison walls. For example, a cat tattoo represented a prisoner’s past as a thief: a single cat signified that the criminal was operating alone, and several cats together showed that the criminal was a member of a gang.

‘A crucial factor for the existence and the endurance of the *vory* was the Gulag system, as it developed from 1920s onwards’ (Varese 2001:165). The Gulag system provided the perfect conditions for the existence and the spread of rules and rituals of professional criminals. The Gulag ‘supplied a source of contacts for criminals and an opportunity to share experiences and devise ways of promoting common interests’ (Varese, 2001:164). *Vory v zakone* continuously controlled each other and were informed about the details of the members’ daily life, either in prison or outside.

Their idealism based on their unwillingness to conform to the Soviet system gave them a heroic status in the eyes of many Russian dissidents but also of ordinary youngsters. *Vory v zakone* were expected to be noble and honest. The daily life of this ‘criminal elite’, which included *vory v zakone* and *pachany* (crime bosses), their behaviour and their conflicts are described in detail in Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*. ‘What united these disparate groups, however, was not the strength of the *vory* but the brutality of the Stalinist regime...’ (Rawlinson 1998:40). The prisoners there included thieves and murderers along with political and religious dissidents. Conditions at the camps were extremely harsh. Survival itself was a heroic deed. Solzhenitsyn described the humiliation and physical and mental degradation in the camps, but there was also a lot of misery outside prisons and labour camps. Dovlatov, who told a story about a Russian prison camp (*The Zone*) from the perspective of a guard, noticed a similarity between what went on inside the camp and outside. He exposed corruption and decay in the Soviet prison system and Soviet society in general. Alcoholism, homelessness, disease – were all part of a reality never described in the ‘socialist realism’ literature. Authors were supposed to be members of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), founded in 1928, which developed a program for the control of literature. The authors were to obey socialist orders; literature, like all other spheres of Soviet life, was directed and planned.

In later years the poverty and misery of Soviet life formed the topics of songs by bards. In the 1960s and 1970s Vladimir Vysotsky, Alexander Galich, Yuri Vizbor and others expressed their emotions about real life in their songs and ballads. Many of them were not allowed to give public performances, but they were very popular at home parties or gatherings.
of friends. Unlike the mainstream poets and writers, who praised the greatness of the Communist Party, the bards presented their own political messages. They criticized Soviet reality and expressed their desire for a better, moral, honest and free world. Very often the hero of their songs was vor v zakone. Vory v zakone became the top leaders of the new criminal world in the period of the Soviet regime, a criminal elite. Later, in the reform period their position changed: 'harnessing vast economic and political influence, he (vor v zakone) will play a major role in the future development of Russia. Internationally, top vory v zakone are getting more ambitious, and establish extensive criminal networks between the United States, Europe and the former Soviet Union’ (Serio and Razinkin, 1997).

2.a.4 New Russians and the development of organized crime in the post-Gorbachev period

‘Often it seemed that Russia’s perverted value system rewarded any activity that victimized one’s neighbour; this criminal mind-set became so dominant that adhering to principles of honesty, decency, or law-abidance became equivalent to moral dissent’

(Paul Klebnikov, 2000:323)

Near the end of the 1980s radical changes took place in the Soviet Union, mainly as a result of the reforms introduced by Gorbachev, among them perestroika and glasnost, which allowed the private sector to become legal and to develop. The first private businesses were so-called ‘co-operatives’, which still had to deal with hostility and confusion toward ‘private business’. According to my informants these first cooperatives were still viewed by many people as illegal and criminal.

In 1992 the government announced a privatisation policy. Those who had accumulated funds were in a position to buy state enterprises for relatively little money. The giant machine producer ‘Uralmash’ was sold for no more than 3.7 million dollars. The Russian State Duma’s Policy Committee report (1996) stated that privatisation was conducted in a hurry, without any scientific approach or foreign advice and that this was the main reason for the criminalization of Russian society. The new rules of privatisation permitted trade with foreign companies. The most popular form of business with foreigners was the joint venture set-up. For many companies this meant the opening up of new possibilities for money laundering and illegal transactions with Western banks (see chapter 3).

A new type of ‘businessman’ was born in Russia and in the other former Soviet republics in the beginning of the 1990s: the entrepreneur who accumulated a lot of money in the period of privatisation. This new class of post-Soviet businessmen was (and sometimes still is) viewed as criminal. The reason being that for some seventy years private business was associated with illegal activity that carried a serious penalty. The conversion from ‘illegal’ to ‘legal’ in the first years of reforms led to a total disorientation of millions of Soviet people.


private conversations with Russian criminologists, April 1999, Moscow.
I will now focus on the process of the transition from a socialist to a market economy, which is based on property rights, ‘which include the clear definition of the title of property, the possibility to derive income (or pleasure) from goods owned and an apparatus for deterring crime’ (Varese 2001:24). My questions are: a. who acquired these rights in post-Soviet Russia? b. by what means was order maintained and protection organized during the transition to the new economy? It appears that there were several groups and actors involved in the transition process. In the beginning of the 1990s, organized crime in the former Soviet Union can be described as a ‘diabolical troika’ (Friedman, 2000:113). It consisted of old nomenklatura types, vory v zakone and those involved in the black market (or new entrepreneurs). In other words it was a three-sided pyramid, composed of governmental officials, businessmen and gangsters (Klebnikov 2000:3).

2.a.4.1. Nomenklatura and KGB

When Gorbachev’s reforms enabled the private sector to become legal, the former nomenklatura got a chance to increase their wealth thanks to the ‘privatisation’ policy. They ‘privatised’ economic enterprises in their sector and removed them from government control. The younger generation realised the opportunities to make money without specialized education or experience. The old nomenklatura was joined by new young entrepreneurs, who had no government money or contacts, but a lot of motivation and talent. Among them there were also ‘people with links to organised crime’ (Jensen 1998:6).

In the period of privatisation the old nomenklatura bureaucrats turned into bank directors or commercial company managers and they transferred the Communist Party’s money to their new private enterprises. Money and power did not really change hands. Many nomenklatura became wealthy new businesspeople through their connections and influential positions (Wilson & Donaldson 1996:48-49). The boundaries between the former Communists and the criminal vorovskoy mir (world of thieves) became blurred. The new conditions in post-Socialist Russia changed the attitude toward prison. Once a matter of pride and honour, it has now lost its glory among the criminals of the post-reform period. Other symbols of vory v zakone such as tattoos have also gone out of fashion. Driving foreign cars, owning several choice apartments, wearing expensive clothes, spending time in exclusive saunas, night clubs and casinos, sending children to the most prestigious British boarding schools – these are the most striking features of the New Russians’ lifestyle.

The role of the old government institutions and especially of the KGB was important in this context. KGB officers accumulated personal wealth during the Soviet period and in the mid-1990s they acted as coordinators between the old-style criminality and its successor in post-Communist Russia. The Russian successor to the Cheka-KGB, the Ministry of Security of the Russian Federation, has ‘carefully maintained the “chekist” legacy: glorifying the Cheka in the country’s history, continuing institutional reverence to Cheka founder Felix Dzerzhinsky, preserving the Cheka’s sword-and-shield crest and other symbols as their own (as has the federal State Procuracy), and pointedly referring to their own officers as “chekists”’ (Waller and Yasmann, 1995: 1). During Gorbachev’s years and in the post-reform period the KGB transferred about $600 billion out of Russia, thus guaranteeing its power and control over state property (Friedman 2000:112).

The first private businessmen did not always use the reforms for an ‘honest business’, corruption and extortion were an inevitable part of their activities, and this was the result of a change into privatisation without an effective regulatory system for property rights. The Russian political activist Lev Timofeyev is quoted in Remnick’s book: ‘unfortunately the
party officials will hardly become successful owners of land and industries. They lack the qualities needed for becoming honest entrepreneurs and this is why they are so terrified of those who have them' (Remnick 1994:197).

The reforms and open borders created the conditions for the activities of organized criminal gangs: it mainly allowed them to launder their money in the West. Later in this study I will discuss these activities in more detail (chapter 3).

The role of the Military should not be underestimated. According to the MVD sources, more than half the weapons in Russia’s black market came from army sources, many high-ranking military officials were dismissed from their post as a result of criminal activities, such as smuggling, corruption, etc. 46

2.a.4.2. New Entrepreneurs

In the period of transition a new group of extremely wealthy people, the so-called Novyie Russkie (New Russians) emerged in Russia. The New Russians are businesspeople who comprise a small but very influential sector of the Russian business-world. They are seen as pragmatic, professional, effective and individualistic. ‘The New Russian wants to do a deal now, with little research and scant paperwork. He does things his way, through connections and manipulation, and knows only victory – and great victory at that’ (Wilson & Donaldson, 1996:122). The anecdotes about the Kremlin leaders from the Soviet-era have slowly given way to jokes about super-wealthy New Russians. The term itself is a term of abuse and refers to somebody who lacks education, manners and moral values, with garish spending habits: ‘...there is not even a loose link between their education and wealth’ (Wilson & Donaldson 1996:122). Personal contacts played a very important role in the start of new enterprises. The informal networks and trust relations formed the basis for the first private businesses. Thus, ‘most “pioneers” of Russian business acknowledged that their registration documents were prepared by friends or contacts’ (Ledeneva 1998:184). It was quiet easy to solve financial difficulties through personal contacts. Goods, services and bank loans were also obtained through personal channels. The New Russians developed a very specific business culture. I will analyse it in-depth in chapter 3.

The transition period and the social environment in which the rapid development of private business in the former Soviet Union took place, led to several new social phenomena. Firstly a new class of rich businessmen, known as New Russians was born. This class is characterised by its strong Western orientation, a modern life style of luxury and a critical attitude toward the ‘Old Russian’ way of business. Secondly, the opening of the borders and the new laws allowed for an internationalisation of Russian business, new contacts abroad (joint-ventures) and the transfer of capital to Western banks. Thirdly, the appreciation of business in general started to change from something illegal and punishable to something that could lead to a new way of life and a desirable career. At the top of the new class of businessmen the ‘seven oligarchs’ appeared: the most influential and powerful entrepreneurs:

1. Boris Berezovsky, the leader of the ‘oligarchs’; a Ph.D. in mathematics, he developed into the richest man in Russia, a financial magnate and a key aide to president Yeltsin.
2. Mikhail Khodorovsky, the founder of the Menatep Bank and chairman of the oil company Yukos.
3. Vladimir Gusinsky, the founder of the Most Bank and NTV47.
4. Vladimir Potanin, the founder of the Onexim Bank and the MFK bank.

47 Russia’s first independent TV network.
5. Aleksander Smolensky, the founder of the Stolichnyi Bank (later SBS-Agro) (see chapter 5 for his connections with the Netherlands).
6. Vladimir Vinogradov, the founder of the Inkombank.
7. Mikhail Fridman, the founder of the Alfa bank.

The New Russians however are not the only businesspeople in Russia. There is a long history of ‘street business’. Though intensely persecuted by the authorities during the Soviet times, it did not disappear in the post-socialist Russia. Today it is called ‘beggar business’ or ‘business babushek’ (grandmothers), since it is often carried out by pensioners who are not able to survive on their meagre pensions. Street merchants will sell everything, from private items from their own homes, to homemade sweets and cookies, cigarettes and newspapers. They are still bothered by the militia, not for being spekulants (profiteers), but because they do not pay taxes. As one of them explained:

‘First of all every pensioner who decides to start trading should stop being ashamed and replace in his mind the word “speculation” with “business”. In addition one has to change one’s appearance. The idea is to look old, miserable and poor. This will attract more buyers and will somewhat diminish your problems with the militia’. 48

2.a.4.3. Vory v zakone

In the period of transition the traditional vorovskoi mir changed as well. During the perestroika there were about 600 recognized vory v zakone within the territory of the former Soviet Union, among them 400 from the Caucasus (Georgians, Armenians and Kurds) (Dyshiev 1998:28). Varese provides us with more detailed numbers on the post-reform period: ‘The number of vory went from less than one hundred in the late eighties to 740 in 1994, and then declined sharply to 387 in 1999’ (2001:167). The new opportunities of the transition period attracted large groups of people to the underworld, many of whom sought the ‘respectable position’ of vory. The previous requirements to become a vor changed, the new criminals had more than enough money to win over other criminals in their attempt to become vory”. Some of them realized the changing situation in the legal world; they entered criminal business enterprises, bought real estate, ships, publishing houses, etc. and became the leaders of criminal groups. Others lost their influence and prestige and descended into street crime (Finckenauer and Waring, 1998:109-110). The new role of vory was directly connected with the emergence of a new market situation. They became involved in the ‘business of protection’. In order to survive vory had to join criminal organizations that were successful in this ‘business’.

Each one of the categories I presented above is usually associated with the Russian Mafia. On the other hand, it is not just this ‘diabolical troika’ that can be considered the basis of Russian organized crime. According to Ledeneva (1998), for example, one very important aspect is underestimated in the literature on the ‘Russian Mafia’: ‘Organized crime in the 1990s should be viewed as an expanding network of recruits who did not inherit anything from the Soviet past: no money, no power, no connections; they were forced to use violence to make money’ (1998:190). In other words: the new bandits in post-Soviet Russia were individuals without any perspective, traumatized by the socio-economic Soviet conditions. This opinion only

48 ‘After the life’ in Dengi, no.31 (185), 19 August 1998
49 The fee for vory initiation was about $150.000 (Kommersant-Daily, 3 May 1995, quoted in Varese 2001:168).
partly reflects the reality, because without connections to politicians, the police forces and even the church no one could successfully develop any ‘business’.

The most conspicuous stereotype of the ‘new Russian gangster’ has to do with his appearance. It is a combination of clothes and accessories, argot and cars. The Italian Mafioso used to dress in a trench coat with an upturned collar and a fedora lowered to the eyes, but the new Russian Mafioso prefers a leather coat (the size depends on the importance of the person), sport shoes (‘Adidas’), gold chains and a cell phone. The black BMW (and later the luxury Jeep) has replaced the limousine of the ‘traditional’ Mafia. Early Hollywood movies set the style for the American and Italian Mafiosi, but the new Russian Mafiosi are inspired by the old Checkists’ dress style, combined with an image of the Western businessman. This uniform and particular means of transport sets the members of organized crime apart from the rest. Symbols and clothes are adopted for self-presentation and self-identity. ‘Shared styles define the social and cultural boundaries of criminal and non-criminal communities alike and give texture and meaning to the experience of membership in these communities’ (Ferrell 1995:182). In Russia if a person looks like a Mafioso, he is a Mafioso.

‘The Mafioso is a “man to be respected”, who does not tolerate injuries, and avenges insults and injustices by recourse to private violence’ (Catanzaro 1988:6-7). Handelman, who has had many private conversations with Russia’s gangsters, noted that ‘they were men of tradition, who put a premium on the values of loyalty to the group and on the preservation of order. Many, of course, were violent people, and they would have had no hesitation about ordering my death if I displayed a lack of “respect”’ (1995:9). Another characteristic of the modern new-style bandits is their krutost (coolness), which they demonstrate publicly. ‘Men with scarred faces, broken noses, thick necks, and bulging biceps were seemingly everywhere in Moscow’ (Klebnikov 2000:34). They also use a new blatnoi (criminal) argot, which is highly ‘economised’. The reason is that they are ‘in business’ now (Ledeneva 1998:191).

Today the criminal world is not only a ‘fast way to make money’. It also provides a kind of spiritual satisfaction and models of imitation for young people, because the image of the Mafia in Russia has overruled the powerful image of the state that existed for more than seventy years. Unreal and real, fiction and facts, historical heroes and real people – all these elements support each other in a glamorous view of the criminal world. The confusion that existed between the Russian ideas about business and crime is another important aspect in the Russian idea of the Mafia. Igor, a Russian businessman told me:

‘In Soviet times we were stealing, but we were not called criminals. Today people do not steal, they do business, but they are considered to be Mafia. This is all because the image of a fair businessman was never promoted in Russian culture; on TV we have only seen victims, prisoners or revolutionaries’.

To many Russians, the word ‘Mafia’ already has threatening and mysterious connotations. They do realize, however, that daily life in Russia is in itself far more dangerous than the abstract images on the screen. As one of my Russian-speaking informants in the Netherlands explained: ‘All these reports and articles in the press have only one purpose – to create a sensation, not to make politicians aware of a real danger, let alone make them fight it’.

The dominant view is that the economic chaos and the situation of lawlessness in the transition period in Russia made it difficult for any business to survive without state protection. The government was unable to provide economic order. The business came under the ‘krysha’ (roof), protection of one or another criminal organisation. Usually ‘krysha’ is associated with extortion, but that is not always right. Often Russian and foreign businessmen seek ‘krysha’ themselves, in order to assure the proper functioning of their companies. ‘The “krysha” model is a key component of a significant post-communist development in Russia – integration of the criminal and legal economy’ (CSIS, 1997:29). It refers to protection not
only against petty criminals, but also against competitors and ‘unprofessional racketeers’. Varese presents in his study some examples from the leading Russian newspapers, in which businessmen are advised to obtain a safe ‘roof’, which can guarantee their success in the business world (2001:59). This ‘roof’, can be provided either by criminal organizations (banditskaya krysha) or by the police (militseiskaya krysha).

One important connection between the economy and organized crime is the traditional perception of ‘business’ as a criminal activity. Corruption, the illegal trade in daily necessary goods, but also the negative images of ‘spekuliyanty’ (profiiteers) and ‘fartzovshiki’ (black-marketeers) of the Soviet period had their impact on the construction of the negative image of the Russian businessman in the post-reform period. The daily involvement in some illegal activity in the Soviet period, the hiding, bribing and lying, all these characteristics left their marks on the behaviour of businessmen in a situation where the borders between legal and illegal were not very clear. The change in perception and terminology from ‘speculation’ to ‘trade’ or ‘business’ was a result of changes in peoples’ economic practices. These changes were slow and uncertain; people still feared sanctions from the side of the authorities. On the other hand, new forms of economic activity and the development towards a free market economy did indeed take place. This post-reform period was a process of re-learning and re-considering the basic principles of life. Organized crime profited from the uncertainty and confusion in peoples’ minds about business. I will now focus more closely on the above-mentioned groups, on their organization and activities.

2.b The Present Situation

When trying to explain specific events or experiences in the Netherlands, the Russian-speakers often referred to present developments in the Russian criminal world. They made a link between the criminal images from their past and those in their present life. When they told me about a specific event or person they often mentioned his ‘address’, i.e. his district, meaning the criminal organization he belonged to. They connected every criminal figure to one of the famous crime bosses in Russia. In their view, Russian criminals never operated alone, they were part of the tradition of criminal gangs, based on loyalty and hierarchy.

In the following I will draw a map of the main criminal organizations in Russia my informants referred to. In addition to their information I will use references in the literature on these criminal organizations. The most important book on the Russian Mafia – and a basis for my analysis - is ‘Bandit Russia’, written by the crime journalists Konstantinov and Dikselius, who compare the Russian underworld with a mosaic, ‘each part of which is a separate criminal group with its fighters, corrupted connections, spheres of influence, commercial structures, etc.’ (1997:99). The leaders of these groups are interconnected. I will also use a book by the Russian criminologist Dyshev ‘Criminal Russia’ (1998) as well as Maksimov’s ‘Russian Criminal World Who is Who’ (1997). The most detailed list of the biggest Russian Mafia gangs in the former Soviet Union that I have found was the one presented by Dunn (1997). I will present a general picture of the criminal world in Russia and discuss in particularly those criminal gangs and criminal bosses my informants mentioned in one context or another during the fieldwork. It must be emphasized that there is ample speculation going on in regard to these data. My informants often referred to these groups as ‘real bandits’, they suspected them of ‘operating internationally’ and feared they could also be active in the Netherlands. However, it was only in a few cases, that my informants knew of organizations
that had actually appeared in the Netherlands and were indeed operating there. I will discuss these cases later in this study.

2.b.1 Numbers and size

The number of Mafia gangs in Russia differs according to various sources. In 1996 there were perhaps more than 8,000 gangs, according to a rough estimate. The number of active members in these gangs is unclear. Dunn gives an estimate of 120,000 members (Dunn, 1997: 63), while Finckenauer and Warring found 32,068 active members ‘uncovered by law enforcement agencies’ (Finckenauer and Waring 1998:115). Both studies rely on official reports of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and both question the quality of the official data of the MVD. Finckenauer and Warring claim that many small groups (of two to four people) are too small to ‘possess those characteristic – criminal sophistication, structure, self-identification, and reputation – associated with organised crime’ (1998:117). According to Dunn (1997) there are six main Mafia gangs in Moscow and about twenty smaller but nonetheless important gangs; four major gangs in St. Petersburg, two in Yekaterinenburg, and nine major gangs in Vladivostok. There are also a number of smaller gangs in these cities. These gangs operate not only in Russia, but also in most of the West- and East-European countries. Dyshev (1998:62) distinguishes between twenty local (Moscow), seven foreign (active in Moscow but not based there) and seven ethnic criminal groups.

2.b.2 Economic function

These gangs are large organizations with a broad range of activities. They have entered a variety of economic spheres and have developed links with high-level officials and members of the former KGB; their international criminal operations are on the increase. Since the beginning of privatisation the criminal organizations control a major part of the economy and their members have penetrated the political and financial institutions (different sources provide data from 40 to 80 percent of the economy as a whole). Former vory v zakone and top nomenklatura officials have taken control of criminal groups in many Russian regions and they are now moving into the international arena. The ‘business’ of the Russian bandits started with rackets. These first groups of racketeers emerged in virtually all post-Soviet cities and gained a foothold in the extortion market. Later, some of them achieved a higher level of sophistication and managed to penetrate the military, the government, the tax department and banks (Wilson & Donaldson 1996:115). One of the most ‘respectable’ enterprises in the criminal world is the protection of large international firms.

50 Unlike these authors I think that sophistication can be more important than size. Given the recent trend towards more modern types of crime (such as cyber-crime, financial and business crimes) it does not take a large criminal group to do serious damage. A group of a just few people can commit this type of crime and they would still be defined as a criminal organization. It is not the size of the group but the professional skills of its members that are important in the modern world.
2.b.3 Structure and organization

There are different accounts on the structure and organization of Russian organized crime. The criminal world of Moscow could be described as a mosaic, where each piece stands for an exclusive criminal group with its own military, spheres of influence and commercial structures. Russian criminal organizations are hierarchical and clearly defined: there is a leader at the top, beneath him there are deputies of various sections, team leaders and soldiers. The net of connections among bandits is called *bratva* (brotherhood). We find a good example of such a structure in Solntsevskaya, sometimes called the Solntsevskaya *brigada* (brigade) (Varese 2001:170). There are no special initiation ceremonies to join this *brigada*. The head of the group is *brigadir*, connected to the *avtoritet*51. A group of several *brigadi* constructs a larger unit, *zveno* (Konstantinov 1997).

Each organization has its own accounts, separate from those of the members. It is a new form of the traditional *obshak* (communal fund). The presence of soldiers or well-armed members is important for the survival of the group. These men are recruited from among the graduates of the ‘formidable Soviet athletic apparatus or unemployed members of the KGB or the Soviet army special forces – victims of the drastic reductions in military spending’ (Klebnikov 2000:34). Many wrestlers, boxers, weight lifters (for example from the Moscow Dinamo Club), gymnasts, hockey players and karate experts have joined criminal gangs (Klebnikov 2000:34, Varese 2001:227). Some of them were even members of the old Soviet Olympic Team. The total number of these highly trained ‘security guards’ is estimated at 800,000 (Klebnikov 2000:34).

2.b.4 Geographical location

At the end of the 1980s, the criminal groups were named according to the home location of their founders and first spheres of influence. Thus appeared: ‘Solntsevskaya’, ‘Izmailovskaya’, ‘Dolgoprudnenskaya’, ‘Luberetskaya’, ‘Podolskaya’ and many others. All these names stand for various neighbourhoods in Moscow. These days there are criminal groups in almost each neighbourhood in Moscow. Similar to Moscow St. Petersburg is also divided into spheres of influence by the various bandit groups. According to Konstantinov & Dikselius (1997) organized crime in this city has always been different from the *vorovskaya* (thieves) Moscow. Traditionally *vory* never had a strong position in St. Petersburg. The first extortionists in the city were ‘guys with bad luck, former sportsmen, former *afghantzy*52, simple people, who had difficulties in their life...’(Konstantinov & Dikselius 1997:177). The first criminal gangs in this city were also named after their location and their leaders: Kazanskaya, Tambovskaya, etc. In reality the ‘geographical’ name of a group is no longer important. The ‘*krysha*’ is provided to businesses with no connection to the location. Some groups are active not just in their neighbourhood, but all over the city and even abroad.

51 In terms of criminal structure this is the closest to *vor v zakone*.
52 Former fighters in the war in Afghanistan.
2.b.5 Main criminal organizations, activities and crime bosses in post-Socialist Russia (1990 – 2000)

**Solntsevskaya**

According to Dunn, the Solntsevskaya Gang has 3,500 – 4,000 members and is considered the largest and best equipped in Russia (1997:68). Dyshev estimates that it has more than 250 active *shtiki* (lit.: bayonets, i.e. ‘fighters’) (1998:63), but Friedman claims that it consists of more than 1,700 members (2000:124). Konstantinov and Dikselius describe this gang as very different from all other criminal gangs in Moscow, because ‘this is not one criminal group, but a combination of criminal groups, united by economic interests’ (1997:107). It is divided into brigades of ten to twelve members, each of which controls certain banks or business companies (Friedman 2000:124). They started out by extorting the new class of commercial businessmen, and they were among the first to open a casino in Moscow. The leaders of each group play the role of coordinator; they have extended their spheres of influence to many other Russian cities and abroad.

There are several leading figures connected to the group. The most influential is Sergei Michailov, nicknamed Michas, who, together with a few friends-sportsmen put together a criminal organization in Solntsevo, which at the end of the 1980s already controlled many important companies in Moscow, including banks and large restaurants. Later on their activities spread to Poland, Hungary and a few other East European countries, and then to France, Austria, Germany, Italy, USA and other countries, including off-shore zones in Cyprus. Michas obtained Israeli citizenship and was active in Europe. In 1996 he was arrested in Switzerland and accused inter alia of participating in a criminal organisation.

Finckenauer and Waring mention another founder of Solntsevskaya: ‘According to Russian law enforcement authorities, Yaponchik formed a criminal organisation (called Solntsevskaya) in approximately 1980’ (1998:111). Nicknamed Yaponetz (the Japanese) or Yaponchik (the little Japanese), Vyacheslav Ivankov is considered today as one of the most important criminal bosses of Russian organized crime. His name is connected to various criminal gangs in Russia, including Solntsevskaya. According to Friedman ‘a vor might control many Mafia groups simultaneously…’ (2000:113). This is probably the case with Ivankov – Yaponchik, who is involved in the activities of various criminal groups. He borrowed his name from the Russian criminal history in the beginning of the 20th century. The legendary bandit Yaponchik, Mischa Vinnitsky, was the criminal leader of the Jewish underworld in Odessa before the October Revolution. His gang was praised when they joined the Red Army and tattooed their chests with the Red Star. He was actually a prototype of ‘Benya Krik’, the hero of a silent film in Yiddish, written in 1926 by Isaac Babel (Friedman 2000:109).

At the age of fifteen, Ivankov, a new Yapontchik, was already known for his hooliganism and attracted the attention of the famous criminal boss Gennady Korkov, the Mongol, who became his teacher and trainer, and later crowned him as a *vor v zakone*. Ivankov’s team developed into the most sophisticated racketeering gang in Moscow. In 1974, however, he was arrested for extortion and sent to a penal colony, where he came in contact with the brotherhood of *vory v zakone*. Back in Moscow he took up extortion again, as well as armed robbery, and was arrested again in 1982. Back in prison he became the top *vor* and increased his power by controlling the Far East region and businesses in Moscow. There was
a spectacular campaign for his rehabilitation led by leading politicians, artists and scientists, which succeeded in getting him released in 1991. One year later Yaponchik left for the USA with a business visa to continue his criminal activity. There he was arrested by FBI agents in 1995. In 1996 he was found guilty of extortion.

Other leaders of Solntsevskaya are Victor Averin (Avera), Sergei Timofeev (Silvester), Sergei Kruglov (Boroda) and Yuryi Esin (Yura Samosval). The Solntsevskaya gang is the most popular gang in the press. ‘Any important (notorious) murder or razborka (confrontation) - not only in Moscow, but also in the regions – immediately caused suspicion that Solntsevskyi are involved’. The Solntsevskaya were reputed to be the most ruthless and violent gang. My informants often mentioned another leader of the gang, nicknamed Silvester. One of them, who once lived in the Moscow neighbourhood Solntsevo, told me that he is still ashamed to pronounce the word ‘Solntsevo’ because of its criminal connotation. He hastened to say, however, that he himself never experienced any crime there.

Podolskaya

Another criminal group, Podolskaya, is the one reputed to operate in the Netherlands (Dunn 1997:69). It imports and exports illegal goods; its main activities are believed to take place in the Netherlands, where its members are involved in the counterfeiting of brand name (food and drink) products for sale back in Russia.

Apparently the group consists of 500 to 2,500 members, and it is well known for its discipline and violence. Originating from the relatively big suburb of Moscow, Podolsk, it controls the street trade, several casinos and prostitution in the centre of Moscow. The leader of the group is Sergei Lalakin, nicknamed Luchok (small onion), who attained absolute leadership after liquidating his rivals Sergei Fedyaev (Psych) and Nikolai Sobolev (Sobol) in 1992 and 1993. There is a group of contract killers inside Podolskaya. They launder money through large American companies by donations to legal American businesses. Podolskaya members were the leaders of the Mafia-war in Moscow against the Chechen criminal organizations, which took place in 1993.

Pushkinskaya

Pushkinskaya is group mentioned in different sources in relation to the production of counterfeit Stolichnaya vodka in the Netherlands for resale in Russia. According to the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands, Pushkintzi (members of the Pushkinskaya gang) are operating mainly in Israel and Russia and not in Europe, because their leader resides in Israel. They are believed to ‘control’ several suburbs around Moscow and the Yaroslavskoe shosse (Yaroslav road), an important part of Moscow. It is remarkable that many Russian crime bosses either settled in Israel or obtained Israeli passports, which allow them to travel easily in Europe and USA. (See chapter 5).

21st Century Association

53 Maksimov, A. 1997, ‘Rossiiskaya Prestupnost’ Kto est Kto (Who is Who), EKSMO.
54 Silvester, or Sergei Timofeev was killed in 1994. According to some sources he was also leader of another criminal group, ‘Orechovskaya’ (see Konstantinov and Diksellius 1997:122-123, and Gurov 1995).
Another gang in Moscow that was mentioned by my informants on different occasions, was the 21st Century Association, and especially its bosses, brothers and avtoriteti Amiran and Otari (Otarik) Kvantrishvilli. The latter was a national sports hero, a European champion wrestler and chairman of the Russian Athletes Association (Friedman 2000:115). The original purpose of the 21st Century Association was to assist Russian athletes. But it also established banks, and other businesses. Otari Kvantrishvilli was killed on April 5, 1994 on leaving his office near the Krasnaya Presnys Bathhouses, not far from the headquarters of the Russian government. His killer was never found.

Kurganskaya

It was suspected that Kvantrishvilli was killed on the orders of another crime boss, the former police officer Alexander Solonik (Alexander Makedonsky), the leader of the Kurganskaya criminal organization. In an attempt to escape retribution for the Kvantrashvilli murder and in fear of other criminal rivals Solonik fled to Greece. A Greek passport was easy to obtain in Moscow for those who paid two to three thousand dollars at the Greek embassy, which granted documents to anyone who claimed he was Greek. After the case of Solonik the Ministry of Greece blamed the officials of its embassies in Eastern Europe for negligence. However, by this time thousands of former Soviet citizens had become Greeks, among whom many Kurgantsi. Solonik was allegedly liquidated in February 1997. There were many different versions of his murder: either he was murdered by relatives of one of his victims (Solonik was considered killer number 1 in Russia), or the Italian Mafia hired a Russian contract killer to murder Solonik, or his rival in Kurganskaya wanted to get rid of him, or finally, Russian special services killed him. The latest version is that he was not liquidated at all (Sekret, no.321, 25.06 - 1.07.2000). The Kurganskaya was mentioned in connection with the Balulis murder case (see chapter 5). Two suspects, members of the organization, both with Greek citizenship were arrested after they were deported from the Netherlands: one in Russia, the other one in Greece. The Kurganetz who was jailed in Russia, was murdered in his cell. During his stay in Greece Solonik committed several murders in Western Europe (Sekret, no.321, 25.06-1.07.2000).

Other criminal organizations from Moscow

Other criminal gangs often mentioned by my informants were mostly ethnic groups: the Georgian gang, though not only made up of Georgians, is also very much involved in economic and financial crime, the Azerbaijan group, which specializes in drug-dealing and controls the flower business (by extortion) and the Chechen group. There are three major Chechen organizations in Moscow – the Tsentralnaya, the Ostankinskaya and the Avtomobilnaya, who share the same obschak (shared fund). According to Klebnikov, however, there are seven main Chechen groups in Moscow: Central, Belgrad, Ukraina, Lasaniya, Ostankino, Saliut and the Southern Port (2000:15). All my informants talked about the continuous rivalry between the Slav and the Chechen criminal gangs, often blaming the ‘blacks’ for their cruelty. (On ethnicity and criminality see further in this chapter). The leading role in this anti-Chechen coalition was taken up by Solntsevskaya (Klebnikov 2000:20).
Tambovskaya

The criminal gangs in St. Petersburg were described by my informants as 'the most violent and criminal' within the former Soviet Union. The Tambovtsi, members of the Tambovskaya criminal gang are reputed to be the cruelest gang in St. Petersburg. According to Dunn, they deal in drugs and smuggle arms on an international scale, they smuggle cars and trade in raw materials (1997:72). Dunn also mentions the Tambovtsi as operating in the Netherlands (1997:72). After some problems with the Russian militsia, with rival gangs, and especially after an attempt on his life, the leader of the group Vladimir Kumarin (nicknamed Kum), left for Europe in 1994. He first lived in Dusseldorf, Germany, then in Switzerland, from where he continued to lead his group. In 1995 the main activity of Tambovtsi was extortion, they controlled the trade in wood, non-ferrous metals and operated joint businesses with Finland. In 1997 the gang was still considered to be the most powerful in St. Petersburg, in spite of numerous liquidations of its members.

Kazanskaya

Other major criminal gangs in St. Petersburg are Malyshevskaya and Kazanskaya. The Malyshevskaya gang is named after its leader Alexander Malyshev, sometimes nicknamed Malysh (Kid), who is well connected to criminal bosses in Moscow and launders money through legal businesses. My informants, however, did not know much about this group. Several informants who once lived in St. Petersburg mentioned the Kazanskaya group. The Kazantsi, members of the Kazanskaya gang, differed from the other St. Petersburg’s gangs in their orientation towards the criminal tradition of the vory v zakone. All its members considered themselves righteous Muslims and widely practiced obeti (vows) and oaths on the Koran. In spite of this, they used alcohol and drugs and were famous for their chic gatherings in St. Petersburg’s finest restaurants. They were also famous for their cruelty towards the businessmen who were under their own protection.

The Brigade of Haritonov

This Latvian criminal organization was described by my informants as a group of sportsmen, very influential in Latvian and Russian politics. It includes businessmen trading in oil and petrol. The members-businessmen have daughter-companies in the Netherlands, Germany and Greece. In 1994 the leader of the group, Haritonov, was arrested for extortion and released in 1998. In 1997 several high-ranking members of the group were murdered.

Many other gangs were mentioned, such as Luberetskaya, Kinoprokatnaya, Dnestrovskaya, Vorkutinskaya, etc. all over the former Soviet Union. The emerging picture is that of a criminal archipelago, where every small part of the country, neighbourhood or business is controlled by one or another criminal organisation. I will describe the international activities of Russian organized crime later in this study in the context of the connections between Russian-speaking criminals in the Netherlands in Israel, Germany, Belgium, Cyprus and the United States.
2.b.6 Multi-ethnic post-Soviet Mafia

'Our national business goes out to the international arena. And all kinds of money (babki) are going around there— Chechen, American, Colombian, you know. If you look at it just as simple money, it is all the same. But behind each babki in reality there is some national idea' (Pelevin 1999:175).

During my conversations with Russian criminologists they always emphasized that the term 'Russian Mafia' does not mean that this Mafia is necessarily made up of 'pure Russians' or ethnic Russians. The dominant idea among Russian criminologists is that influential ethnic groups control the overwhelming majority of the criminal Russian world, especially in Moscow. 'There is no Russian Mafia as such', claims Gurov. According to Russian criminologists, when emigrants first left the country for Israel and the United States in the 1970s, it was the 'Jewish Mafia' that specialized in smuggling art objects, fur, gold and precious stones. In Brezhnev's period the Uzbek Mafia was reported for a non-existent cotton production. When the case attracted publicity in 1983, it appeared that the top of the Soviet Central Committee, including the son-in-law of Brezhnev and Brezhnev himself were involved in the 'Uzbek affair'. During the Soviet period Georgian illegal businessmen were notorious for their wealth. 'Underground millionaires in Moscow, the Ukraine and the Baltic republics do not even remotely approach the Georgian life-style' (Simis 1982:170).

According to Gurov the ethnic aspect has always played an important role during the Soviet period and the 'Red Mafia' has come to fruition under these specific historical conditions. When we analyse organized crime on the territory of Russia today, we will encounter ethnically mixed gangs instead of a 'purely Russian Mafia' and we must be aware of this in a discussion of the post-Soviet criminal landscape. In addition to other factors mentioned earlier (such as geographical location, economic activities, size and structure of the gangs), ethnicity plays a very important role in the post-Soviet criminal world.

2.b.6.1 Ethnicity as an old problem in the Soviet Union.

The problem of 'nationality' has always played an important role in Soviet policy-making. The Jews were considered the most 'problematic nationality' (Salitan 1992:47) in the former Soviet Union because they undermined the effort by the Soviet authorities to promote the

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55 Conversation with Alexander Gurov, 30 April 1999, Moscow.
56 From conversations with the criminologists of the All-Russia Scientific Institute of Ministry of Interior of Russia, May 1999.
57 According to the five-year planning Central Asia had to fulfil its quotas, which were defined by the planning authorities. However, they did not take into account that after two or three successful harvests, the soil had to rest. The local high-ranking party officials continued to report huge crops and continued to receive payment. Moscow officials, who also got percentage from the profits, and who did not like to confess to a failing socialist agricultural policy, supported the local bureaucrats. After the case was revealed a few bureaucrats (scapegoats) were arrested and shot, a few others received jail terms. The investigation was terminated when it became clear that the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party were involved.
58 Conversation with Aleksander Gurov, 30 April, 1999, Moscow
USSR as a ‘paradise on earth’. Jewish attempts to emigrate from the country did not correspond to the image of ‘happy Soviet citizens’. Other non-obedient nationalities living in the Soviet Union were ‘Armenians, “ethnic Germans”, Japanese and Koreans’ (O’Keefe 1987:301). Many families from these ethnic groups had been separated during the Second World War and were later discriminated against in the Soviet Union (ibid). Other nationalities, especially those from the southern republics (including Chechens, Georgians, Armenians, etc.), were viewed by Russians as ‘primitive’, ‘uneducated’, ‘less cultured’, etc. Although the Soviet authorities emphasized the importance of assimilation and the forging of a new Soviet people from the hundreds of nationalities in the USSR, the famous fifth line, which indicated the nationality of a person, has never been deleted from Soviet passports. It was common knowledge that acceptance to the universities was subject to rules stipulating that ‘such and such percentage of Jews and local nationalities’ must be represented. It was also widely known that some universities, though not officially, did not accept Jews as students at all. Other ways of unofficial discrimination occurred at work, in school, in sport clubs, etc.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union ethnic sensitivities, national sentiments and sometimes ethnic rivalry (even wars) among different groups emerged. The ethnic origin became important not only to the members of ethnic criminal organizations themselves, but also to the members of rival gangs. Politicians were not immune to these sentiments either.

2.b.6.2 Ethnic criminality in theoretical perspective

There is an abundance of theoretical approaches in the criminological and sociological literature that try to explain the link between organized crime and ethnicity: the perspective on organized crime as an alien conspiracy (Cressey 1969); a focus on the strain between economic goals and a lack of legal avenues to achieve them (Merton 1938); or the explanation of organized crime in terms of ethnic succession (Ianni 1974). There are theories focusing on ethnic criminality as a reaction to the socio-cultural gap between immigrants and the majority of the population (Whyte 1943), or on ethnic subcultures (ethnic ties, family, clan) as structures which facilitate criminal activities and violence (Cohen 1955). Specific cultural explanations are sometimes used to explain the connection between ethnicity and criminality.

Bovenkerk (2001 a) reviewed various theories and explanations of the link between ethnic minorities and organized crime and found that there is indeed a strong connection between the two. According to Bovenkerk, however, there are three problematic aspects to this connection:

‘... (a) the term ethnic minority is inherently problematic and the product of a racially biased social construction or (b) the term organized crime is questionable and its definition inevitably leads to the stipulation of minorities as the culprits or (c) organized crime as an economic phenomenon merely follows the logic of the market regardless of the ethnic descent of the people engaging in it’ (Bovenkerk 2001 a:...).

Several studies were published in the Netherlands in the last few years indicating that there is indeed a relationship between ethnic minorities and criminality (Buiks 1983, Bovenkerk 2001 b, Werdmolder 1990, Van Gemert 1998, Van San 1998, Yesilgoz 1995, Zaitch 2001). One of the main problems to which Bovenkerk (2001a) has called our attention is the stigmatization of an ethnic community as inherently ‘criminal’, ‘violent’, or ‘dangerous’. During my fieldwork I have noticed myself that stereotypes are common in conversations about ‘Russians’ in general and Russian immigrants in the Netherlands in particular.
Stereotypes and racism

When the ‘Chechen Mafia’ caught the headlines in the Western press, it was probably for the first time the Western public learned about the Chechen folk. Among Russians, however, the image of criminal Caucasians was widespread; they were supposed to be engaged in illegal trade and other related economic activities. This image also included such elements as violence and cruelty. According to Konstantinov & Dikselius, Chechen criminal groups hold crucial positions in Moscow’s criminal world (1997:106). The ethnic character of several criminal organizations resulted in a nationalistic Slavic slogan: “Russian Mafia – for Russians”. Vory v zakone tried to put a stop to this kind of nationalism, but they did not succeed (ibid: 107). The influence of the ‘Caucasian’ criminal groups grew significantly. The hatred in Russia towards the so-called “blacks” (i.e. all non-Slavs) resulted in special policies to control and fight them. In August 1992 the municipal police of St. Petersburg joined with representatives of the local nationalist group to ‘fight the Mafia’. The police and the nationalists attacked all Azeri and Georgian traders, who either lived in the city or came from outside. There were similar reports from other Russian areas. In Rostov, for example, Cossacks confiscated contraband on the trains to Yerevan and “cleansed” the city of Caucasians. ‘Groups of young black-shirted toughs beat up prostitutes and homeless young men in railway stations’ (Handelman 1995:309). In Moscow in 1992 the ‘Operation Python’ took place, in which special troops of the Ministry of Interior and the Moscow police encircled the city, cutting off all traffic routes, with the purpose of damaging the Chechen trading networks in the capital. The main assumption of the Moscow authorities was that the Chechen criminals traded in weapons and were smuggling arms to Grozny. By expanding their arms trade they were also able to enter the world of financial crime. Journalist reports on the Chechens at this time mentioned arrests on the charge of counterfeiting or money laundering (St. Petersburg Press, 18 April, 1995).

From time to time conflicts between ‘Slavs’ and ‘blacks’ (especially those from Caucasian origin) led to the rise of nationalistic outbursts on both sides. The most extreme was operation ‘Tirek’, which was directed against the Chechen population after bomb explosions in the autumn of 1998. In 1998 several terrorist acts took place in the centre of Moscow, which the Chechens were believed to have planned and executed. The perception of Chechens as bandits and criminals running all ‘organized crime’ in Russia resulted in generalizations and a stigmatization of the community as a whole. To Yeltsin’s administration fighting the Mafia was equivalent to driving out the Chechens from Moscow and other Russian cities. Rumour has it that the traditional Russian hatred of Chechens was whipped up, supported by the Russian Orthodox Church (Margolis in “Foreign Correspondent”, 1996).

Ethnic violence

59 Varese describes the Cossacks and the Chechens as competitors of the traditional vory v zakone. The Cossacks have been granted the right to carry weapons by the Federal Government and ‘have been tacitly allowed to run protection rackets in exchange for some policing and military services in the border areas of the country and in some cities’ (Varese 2001:180).

60 http://www.amina.com/article/amer_abct.html
One of the most popular stereotypes that surfaced after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the emergence of different ethnic gangs is the specific use of ethnic violence. This stereotype demands closer attention here. Various rituals, observed in the Caucasus, are connected with the idea of ‘blood for freedom’. Thus, in the Cherkessk, Stavropol region, members of a criminal gang used to kiss a *kinjal*, the traditional Caucasian dagger, and ‘swore allegiance before a huge portrait of the crime boss, just as Soviet citizens regularly paid obeisance to the cult of Lenin and Stalin’ (Handelman 1995:32). The *Kinjal* has always been regarded as a symbol of loyalty and power in Russian and Caucasian culture.

Social scientists have tried to determine the characteristics of the diverse Caucasian ethnic groups and the specific patterns to their rituals. Police researchers in their turn believed that categorizing certain ‘ethnic’ habits in the use of violence would make it easier for them to find the criminals they were after. By discovering ‘general patterns’, criminologists hoped to understand the motives behind certain murders and they tried to identify ‘ethnic’ variations of lethal violence. There are many stories about the cruelty of specific ethnic groups. Chechen criminals for example usually cut off the fingers of the kidnapped persons and send them to the family by mail, as proof that they are still alive, but will be killed if the ransom money is not forthcoming. Cutting off the heads of victims is seen as a Chechen message that the same will happen to family members (or business partners) of the murdered victims. Some informants told me that they were convinced that because of their ‘sadistic nature’, the Chechens probably cut off their victims’ heads while they are still alive, to make them suffer more. According to other information, the head is then sent to the person who ordered the murder, as a proof of the fact that the murder was indeed committed. (See chapter 7 for the example of the murder of a woman and her grandchild from the north Caucasus in Israel). Kidnapping is often considered a typically ethnic ‘Chechen’ criminal activity. It is said that the victims are badly mistreated, especially when the ransom is not paid in time. For religious reasons, however, the Chechens believe it is improper to touch, let alone rape, the kidnapped women.

Ethnic violence has been widely studied by anthropologists. Violent Caucasian rituals, among others, are described in the literature. Thus, among Abkhazians ‘if a man thinks his wife is unfaithful, he may cut off a piece of her nose and send her home to her relatives, but he must prove his case in court before he can touch her’ (Benet 1974:47-48). The ‘Latvian method’ entails sticking a knife in the eye of a victim with the intent of causing brain damage. Former Russian KGB officials can be identified from their own brand of killing: the ‘control shot’ in head. Russian-speakers usually regard this as typical 'Russian professionalism'. Other evidence of this kind of professionalism is the gun left beside the corpse. Former commando fighters have their own ways of using a knife: they stick it in the temple of their victim.

There are plenty of cultural explanations for the use of violence (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967, Graham and Gurr 1969). In most of these theories cultural stereotypes are used to serve as explanation. According to these theories, violence is dependent on the cultural background and the character of a specific ethnic group. The idea, however, that ethnicity could be the decisive aspect in the use of violence, is untenable because this comes down to an essentialist kind of reasoning, based on stereotypes. There are many other social aspects more important than cultural heritage (Marx 1976), such as the violent reputation of a person or specific ethnic group and, more important, the manipulation of these reputations. Stereotypes are widely used by all parties, including the criminals themselves. Many informants told me that they are aware of their reputation in the Netherlands as the most violent criminals in the world. Needless to say they can also use this reputation to their advantage.
Theory and practice

So far I have demonstrated that there is a theoretical possibility of a link between ethnic minorities and criminality. The numerous negative images, stereotypes and political calculations could quite easily be used to ascribe a criminal reputation to one ethnic group or another. The next question is whether or not this theoretical possibility has a foundation in reality. Bovenkerk (2001b) provides us with three good theoretical reasons to argue in favour of a link between ethnicity and criminality. 1. Starting from the theory of relative deprivation we can explain this link as a result of the fact that some minorities under certain conditions are to be considered groups ‘at risk’. 2. Given the relatively isolated position of many ethnic minorities it is not unlikely that illegal organizations will develop. 3. The constructivist approach could explain how ethnicity and culture can be manipulated and how a criminal image can be exploited rather than contested (see also Siegel & Bovenkerk 2000).

There are indeed ethnic gangs in Russia. What they have in common is that all these gangs operate not only within their own regions, but also mostly in the big cities of the Russian Federation, the Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, and that they have recently expanded to the international market. ‘In Moscow 34 organized criminal formations are operational: 20 – originally from Moscow, 7 – from other cities and 7 – ethnic. The last means mainly Caucasians. They provide “roof” and protect more than 2000 compatriot criminals. They are organized in 116 criminal groups. Among them 30 - Azerbaijain, 20 – Chechen, 20 – Dagestanian, 17 – Armenian, 14 – Georgian, 9 – Osetian, 4 – Ingushetian. There are also other “national” brigades’ (Dyshev 1998:63). Konstantinov and Dikselius (1997) differentiate between ‘guest bandits’ – who arrive in the city and spontaneously organize specific criminal acts; and organized ethnic criminal groups.

It is not my intention to present all of the hundreds of ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union and analyse their involvement in post-Soviet organized crime. Similar to the previous description of the main criminal organizations in the former Soviet Union and their leaders, I will only give an overview of the ones that are well known and were mentioned by my informants, or with representatives of which I have had personal contacts during my fieldwork. Those are the Chechens, Georgians, Azeris, Armenians, Latvians, Jews and Russians.

Chechens

Beautiful landscape, mountains and wild mystery – this description of the Caucasus came to the minds of Russian and foreign travellers alike. The local people were described as ‘lazy, dishonest savages and thieves with no sense of morality’ (Pahlen 1964:13). The Caucasians were always viewed as the ‘enfants terribles’ of the Russian state, they were not to be trusted, they were cutthroats or simply cheyornyje (blacks). In Russian culture Chechens (like other gorzy (mountain people)) were usually presented as villains, the history of the relationship between Russia and the Caucasus is full of wars and bloody conflicts. ‘There is still an almost medieval sense of honour, yet banditry is admired; lavish hospitality is sacred... Freedom is considered a birthright and every extreme, including murder and war, has been used in its defence’ (Smith, S. 1998:9).

Today in Russia ‘Chechen’ is a synonymous with ‘criminal’. The Chechens are held responsible for all the evils in Russia, including the rise of barbarism and crime. They are viewed as extremely violent and without mercy. ‘They call themselves ‘free as wolves’,
having obligations to no one, only to their clan’ (Smith, S., 1998:9). Chechens occupy a special place in organized crime. They are seen as the elite of the Russian criminal world (Finckenauer and Waring 1998:130). According to Handelman, what distinguished the Chechen from other people was his ability to act as both a criminal and political force (1995:222). With the break-up of the Soviet Union the Chechens appeared at the new political top. Ruslan Chazbulatov, the rival of Chechenia’s political leader Dudaev was the head of the Russian Parliament. The Chechen criminal gangs were operating internationally before the Soviet Union collapsed. They were engaged in stealing cars in Turkey and Eastern Europe. With the economic reforms in Russia they widened their criminal business activities into Russia, Chechnya and elsewhere (Handelman 1995: 259). While the official economy in Chechnya in the beginning of 1990 was stagnant, the unofficial economy was booming. ‘Chechen opponents of Dudaev argue that his government is essentially an alliance between narrow but ambitious nationalists and the economic Mafia which prefers an economic situation which is not well regulated so that they can maximize their profits’ (Hentze 1992:112).

In Moscow the Chechens developed an interest in banking. ‘The Chechen’s capital’ was accumulated in smuggling operations (especially of oil) and the money was laundered in Moscow’s banks. Other activities involved gambling and the hotel business in the big Russian cities. The so-called ‘hotel nearby’ (okologostinichnaya), or street prostitution, was also controlled by Chechens. The most prestigious Moscow hotels today belong to them (Konstantinov & Dikselius 1997). Moscovites usually recognize Chechen-owned BMWs by their Austrian and German license plates. Russian police officers are often afraid to stop these cars, even when the car is probably stolen.

Chechen criminal organizations are very influential in St. Petersburg and the Far East, where they deal in gold and are involved in the smuggling of precious metals. Their position in Russia is secure; no one dares to seriously challenge their power. Chechen capital is more and more often invested in legal businesses (Konstantinov & Dikselius 1997). In the 1980s the leader of the ‘Chechen community’ was Nikolai Suleimanov, nicknamed Choza (or Ruslan). He headed a very united, mobile and powerful group, which specialized in stealing cars, kidnapping and robberies in hotels (Dyshev 1998:67). Another leader was Ruslan Lecho-Lysiy (the bald). He and Choza were arrested in 1991 and the unity of the group was broken down into several separate gangs. New leaders headed these formations61.

Georgians

If the Chechen criminal organizations are considered ‘number one’ in the modern Russian underworld, Georgian criminals have a reputation of ‘criminals with a rich past’. Traditionally many vory v zakone were of Georgian extraction. Georgian underground millionaires were known in the Soviet period for their ‘expansive hospitality, the same big spending, and the same open-handed life-style’ (Simis, 1982:170). Among the vory v zakone, who represent the criminal elite in the Soviet (post-Soviet) underworld two thirds were Russians (33%) and Georgians (31%); the others were Armenians (8.2%), Azerbaijanis (5.2%), Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Kazakhs and Abkhazians (21.9%) (Tandem 2000)62.

In 1995, Georgia came to be divided into three criminal areas, each of them engaged in drug-traffic operations (the smuggling of heroin into Turkey and the purchasing of opium and

61 Among them ‘Richard’, the Talarov brothers, Gennadii Arakelov and Sultan Balashikhinskii (Varese 2001:178).
There was also trafficking in arms from the former Soviet military in the Caucasus. In Russia, the Georgian criminal organisation is not nationally isolated, in its gangs there are representatives of all nationalities. It specializes in robbery, car stealing and kidnappings. They control a few commercial banks, markets, restaurants, they buy real estate. About 50 Georgian thieves-in-law live permanently in Moscow (Dyshev 1998:64).

During my fieldwork I have met Georgian criminals who 'control' their compatriots in the Netherlands and Belgium. According to my informant they 'force Georgian businessmen' to pay 'taxes' to them. From two Georgian immigrant-businessmen I heard that those who come to extort money from Georgian business people were not actually Georgians themselves, but members of a Latvian criminal organisation. A Georgian informant told me that Georgian immigrants in the Netherlands are either very rich businessmen (and this means Mafia), or pure intellectuals who live of welfare. The first group may be categorized as transmigrants whose families live in the Benelux countries, but who themselves travel to handle their businesses all over the world. They will not 'dirty their hands' with activities like extortion but will hire somebody else to do this for them. The second group is ambivalent: they are far removed from any criminal activity, but their close community links with other Georgians may bring them into contact with the first group.

Azeris

The underground business flourished in the Soviet period in Azerbaijan like anywhere else. Both in Georgia and Azerbaijan businessmen 'would operate more openly than in other parts of the country, these (business) meetings traditionally take the form of banquets lasting several hours, during which the decisions are made, business is discussed, and revenues are distributed' (Simis 1982:161).

The Sumgait Mafia, called after Sumgait, a city in Azerbaijan, controls the larger part of the Afghan opium traffic through Kirghizia. The opium is processed into heroin at Sumgait and then transported on the 'Caucasus route' to Turkey by Azeri Grey Wolves. The Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan is also one of the most frequented passages for opium networks. The Russian authorities consider Azerbaijan the second nest for criminal activities, after Chechnya. The Azerbaijan criminal organization in Moscow deals in 'drugs, car-business, gambling, swindle. It controls drug-bases in Cheryomushkino, Severnyi and Tsaritsinskyi markets. They own the trade in flowers and "colonial" goods' (Dyshev 1998:65). In 1993, 'Jamil', the godfather of the Azerbaijan drug ring in Moscow was arrested.

Armenians

Mafia-style practices have become institutionalised within Armenian society as well. In the capital of Armenia, Yerevan, extortion and murder became the daily reality in the mid 1990s, together with the display of wealth by some of the criminal bosses. The continuous dispute with Azerbaijan also contributed to an increase in the drugs trade (the combatants have

64 The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no.44, June 1995
become more and more addicted to hashish and amphetamines). The region of Achachkalat, near the Armenian-Georgian border, has turned into a hub where one can buy everything, including weapons, fuel and heroin. Armenian criminal organizations are very active not only in Russian big cities, but also mostly in Western Europe and the United States. The Russian Armenian criminal group, called the Mikaelian Organisation after the group’s leader, Hovsep Mikaelian, ran a black market diesel fuel network in California and was involved in extortion and fraud. Armenian criminal groups are also active in France, England and Germany.

Only twenty years ago the idea of a drug industry in the Soviet Union was unthinkable because officially there were no drugs in the Soviet Union. Today the region of Central Asia has become one of the most cultivated and attractive areas for drug bosses. There are vast fields of opium poppies in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and fields of cannabis in Russia and the Far East. Not only Turkish but also other traffickers in narcotics are making an effort to open up new routes in former Soviet Central Asia. Pakistani traffickers for example are taking advantage of the political instability, the technical knowledge and the industrial equipment in these former Soviet republics. The two main routes lead through Tajikistan and through the Pamirs in Upper Badakshan before reaching Kirghizstan. Two other routes are through Termiz, on the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, and through Merv, in Turkmenistan. All these routes end up in Bokhara, from which the narcotics are forwarded on to Russia, then to Poland and Western Europe.

Latvians

Whereas as the Central Asian republics and the Caucasus are mainly regions where drug trafficking and drug trade are the basic activities of the post-Soviet Mafia, the former Baltic republics have became famous as main transit points for Russian oil, metals, raw materials and military equipment. Human traffic also passes through the Baltic states.

In 1992 the Komsomolskaya Pravda published an interview with Baturin, the head of the Russian Ministry of Interior’s organized crime division, who stated that a Baltic crime syndicate uses the connections of its members (former KGB and police) to monopolize exports to the West. A few weeks later a number of government officials and army officers were investigated, on the suspicion of involvement in a ‘conspiracy to smuggle aluminium pipes from Russia to the Netherlands’ (Handelman 1995:249).

These days the Baltic, especially Latvian, criminal bosses have taken up residence in Western Europe (Germany, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Belgium). Latvian criminals are active in money laundering, racketeering and prostitution.

Jews

Jewish criminals are often perceived in a more global ‘international Jewish Mafia’ context. There are no purely Jewish criminal organizations, based on ethnic identity. However, there are many Jews who participate in, or lead criminal organizations in the former Soviet Union,

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65 The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no. 42, April 1995
66 The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no. 40, February 1995
67 Komsomolskaya Pravda, 4 July, 1992
and even more Jewish criminals operating all over the world. Many of them now hold Israeli citizenship, which allows them to pass easily through various countries.

Whereas in the West Russian Jewish criminals are believed to be part of the ‘Russian Mafia’, in the former Soviet Union nationalistic feelings and a long-standing tradition of anti-Semitism have resulted in the idea (at least in some peoples’ minds) that ‘Russian’, or ‘Slav’ Mafia is equivalent to ‘no Jewish members in this criminal gang!’ Just like the ‘blacks’ (Caucasians), the Jews are regarded by many Russians as the ones who brought all sorts of evils on Russia, on Russian culture and especially on the Russian economy. At the Ministry of the Interior, government officials told me that in the past Jews used to steal only some of Russia’s treasures: gold, icons, art. But since the reforms the Jews are stealing everything: capital, natural resources, and military equipment. ‘They call themselves businessmen, but they are nothing but bandits’, one official told me. The Jewish Mafia is sometimes called ‘the antiquarian Mafia’. According to Gurov more than 80% of all Russian icons were smuggled to the West (1995:324). There are specialized shops, which trade Russian icons in Germany, USA and even Africa. The diamond business, smuggling and money laundering connected with it, are also considered a ‘Jewish criminal area’.

Ethnic Russians

‘In the West they cannot distinguish between ethnic Russians and other nationalities. To them all criminals are Russian: Georgians, Chechens, Jews, no difference!’ one of the criminologists at the All-Russia Scientific Institute of the Ministry of Interior told me. To Russians, however, nationality is very important. ‘Although new ways to be Russian have developed in the post-Soviet environment, these are still widely disparaged by those who identify themselves with a mystic concept of Russianness’ (Ries 1997:27). Ethnic Russian criminals are active mainly in the European former Soviet republics. Abroad they are represented in most of the European countries and in the United States. They usually operate together with other Russian-speaking criminals, such as Georgians, Latvians and Jews.

2.b.6.3 Ethnic groups from the former Soviet Union in the Netherlands

The Dutch police and other governmental organizations are very much aware of the problem of ethnic criminality. In numerous reports the ethnic background of criminals or their country of origin is emphasized. Statistics indicating a level of criminality among migrants that is higher than that among the Dutch population, are usually used by the Dutch authorities to devote special attention to the various ethnic groups. In chapter 1 I referred to various reports on Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands. The established idea that criminality is, generally speaking, higher among the ethnic minorities in the Netherlands coupled with the ‘known facts’ about the Russian-speakers, such as their money laundering in Dutch banks, their specific criminal activities (see chapter 3), their acceptance of violence and corruption etc. seem to prove the link between ethnicity and criminality. But the criminal image sets a pattern of behaviour for some Russian-speaking immigrants, who discover ways to manipulate this image to further their own interests.

68 From conversations with officials of the Ministry of Interior, April 30, 1999, Moscow.
Yugoslavians and Chechens are considered the most ‘dangerous’ criminal ethnic groups among East-Europeans in the Netherlands. The Russian criminologist Gurov (1995) stated that the Netherlands serve as a place for the international mob to meet. Dunn (1997) reported the presence of the Podolskaya, the Pushkinskaya, the Tambovskaya and one of the Chechen gangs in the Netherlands. As I mentioned earlier, the Podolskaya is according to Dunn involved in the production of counterfeit food and vodka in the Netherlands, which is resold in Russia (Dunn 1997:69). The ethnic-Russian Pushkinskaya also produces counterfeit Stolichnaya vodka in the Netherlands (Dunn 1997:84). The Chechens are believed to be involved in women trafficking, prostitution control and money laundering. According to police officials, ‘Chechens are at the top of the post-Soviet Mafia’ in the Netherlands. The Georgians were described by the Dutch police as ‘very organized and violent’, they were held responsible for the kidnapping of Russian businessmen, contract killings, drugs smuggling and car theft. The involvement of Latvians in contract killings, fraud and the trafficking of women and drugs is also emphasized. The case of Russian Jews will be described in detail in chapter 3. Some of them were viewed by the Dutch police, and even by Jewish organizations, as ‘witty and dangerous’ bandits, who pretend to be businessmen. Official reports from other countries, including the former Soviet Union, also contributed to a sense of alertness towards Russian-speaking migrants in the Netherlands. The image of the Russian Mafia reached the Dutch public through the media and police reports.

2.c Conclusions

The official reports and media sensations led to a rising fear: the dangerous, violent, merciless ‘Russian Mafia’ is on its way to the Netherlands. Russian and Western authors and officials informed the Dutch about the coming threat: the former Soviet Union is too small a territory for the activities of the Russian criminal organizations, they are searching for new markets and their new victim is going to be the West. They are already active in the larger immigration countries such as the United States, Israel, Germany and Canada, where they kill innocent people, destroy the economy, penetrate politics and bank structures, in short: they are about to conquer the world. They are highly organized, professionally trained, well equipped and do not hesitate to use violence to achieve their goals. The Dutch reaction was predictable: somebody has to stop them. A number of serious notes, warnings, reports and debates followed. I have described some of these official documents in chapter 1. Credit must be given to the Dutch government: it did take these warnings seriously, millions of Dutch guilders were invested in research and investigations into Russian organized crime in the country; hundreds of specialists from different fields, from crime analysts to private detectives were hired in order to estimate the threat of the Russian Mafia operating on Dutch territory.

The Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands appeared to be much more ambiguous as well as critical in their approach to the noisy sensation of the ‘Russian Mafia’ in the Netherlands. The historical background and the construction of their ideas on crime and illegality, which I have presented in this chapter, were crucial in their estimation and appreciation of the problem. They based their judgement on images from their Russian past, on rebels and heroes who fought against absolutism. They had their own ideas about governmental corruption, based on their own experience in the past. They explained crime in terms of ways to survive and organized crime as a necessity to protect their lives or their businesses, or as an opportunity to make use of new chances and to make a profit under new conditions.
Two such radically different sets of interpretations and evaluations inevitably had to
result in an almost total cultural misunderstanding and in disagreement. There is an enormous
discrepancy between the Dutch image of Russian organized crime and the one held by
Russian-speaking immigrants. According to my informants, the Dutch authorities are very
much focused on petty crime and traditional criminal activities such as prostitution and drugs.
In the Russian-speakers' view, however, far more dangerous criminal groups are involved in
these activities in the Netherlands: Turks, Colombians, native Dutch, etc. Russians are hardly
represented in the statistics on petty crime. Russian criminals on the other hand, are
considered by Russian-speakers to be much too sophisticated and educated to be involved in
petty crimes: they are engaged in money laundering, investing in real estate and other
legitimate business. That is why they can go about their business almost unnoticed by the
Dutch police. 'Serious criminals are dealing with serious crimes', as one informant put it.
Serious crimes, in their turn are accompanied by serious violence, including kidnappings and
murders. The picture of the Russian Mafia, as presented by my informants, provides us with
much more colourful, detailed and better information than the picture that has been drawn in
the Netherlands until now.
Chapter 3.
THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING! – SOCIAL LIFE, COPING STRATEGIES AND THE IMAGE OF CRIME AMONG RUSSIAN-SPEAKERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

During the years of the Cold War the ‘Russian threat’ used to mean the threat of a Soviet invasion of the West. The term has acquired a new meaning since the opening of the Soviet borders in 1991: it is now the threat of the ‘Russian Mafia’. Outside Russia it was usually believed that in the Soviet period Russian organised crime would be contained by the Iron Curtain. Indeed, according to the Soviet authorities there was no Russian organized crime at all, neither in the former Soviet Union nor outside of it. Undisputable facts pertaining to the support of terrorist organizations, the supply of weapons and operations of the spetzsluzhbi (special services) with the aim of liquidating political enemies were overlooked or ignored (Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997:431-432). They were conducted by the authorities and not by private organizations, but these were criminal activities all the same and they took place outside the former Soviet Union. It was state-organized crime. After the official opening of the gates in 1987^69 not only the authorities but also private criminal groups expanded their activities abroad (see chapter 2). But was there really a criminal Diaspora? Were the Russian-speaking immigrant communities connected to the criminal organizations?

The emigration from Russia and later from the former Soviet Union can be divided into three periods: 1) between 1890 and 1920, 2) between 1967 and 1981 and 3) since 1987. The first wave of emigrants escaped from unrest, ethnic conflicts (pogroms) and the new regime. The emigrants of the second period either tried to rejoin their families, from which they had been separated during the Second World War, or to escape anti-Semitism. The third period may be characterized as a mass exodus: hundreds of thousands of people rushed away from economic and political instability and unclear future prospects.

Russian emigration policy from the end of the 19th century until the 1990s changed continuously. Although the citizens’ right to emigrate was recognized by the Soviet authorities, it was not often respected in practice: the policy was two-faced, officially the Soviets permitted emigration, but disapproved of it and tried to prevent it by repression and bureaucratic chicanery (Siegel 1998:5-8, Buwalda 1997: 47-57. The reason was that the Soviet authorities promoted a policy of ‘assimilation’ with the aim of creating a new Soviet people from the hundreds of nationalities in the Soviet Union. Emigration contradicted their ideological message and it ran counter to their efforts to create an impression in the West of the Soviet Union as a ‘paradise on Earth’. Despite of all the obstacles hundreds of thousands of people left the Soviet Union in various periods. They established communities in the USA, West Europe, South Africa, South America and Israel.

After a brief description of the main waves of emigration from the Soviet Union and various immigrant communities in the West I focus here on the community of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. I intend to describe their first steps, their relationships with Dutch authorities and their cultural life. I will then focus on the image in the press of the ‘Russian community’ and the problems of self-identification of various groups of Russian-speakers. And I will deal here with a theoretical explanation of the terms ‘community’ and ‘ethnic community’, as used in this study. This is important for a better understanding of the possible link between the Russian-speaking community and organized crime.

^69 In 1987 the Soviet Council of Ministers agreed to revise the regulations on entry to and exit from the Soviet Union.
3.a Emigration from the former Soviet Union

Until the end of the 19th century Russia was a country of immigration rather than emigration. The Russian Tsars often invited Italian and French architects, Dutch and German military advisers, British and French teachers and German doctors to come to live and work in Russia. There were also many foreign traders who settled there. However from 1890 onward the situation changed, as a result of violent ethnic conflicts and wave after wave of immigrants left the country.

a) 1890-1924

Of all emigrations from the former Soviet Union the Jewish emigration received the most attention of scholars and journalists, perhaps because it was the largest and most organised one. But there were other ethnic groups that were eager to leave the country (O'Keefe 1987). The history of emigration of some of these ethnic groups has yet to be written.

The majority of emigrants from the former Soviet Union were indeed Jewish. The first waves of Jewish emigration were direct results of anti-Semitic pogroms and persecution at the turn of the XX century. The best known were pogroms in Kishinev in 1903 and 1905, when thousands of Jews were slaughtered and their property stolen or destroyed. The emigrants' destination was the United States and other open immigration countries (Australia, Canada, Latin America). The first emigrants were mainly artisans and peasants and the majority of them were religiously observant. Hundreds of thousands of Jews travelled through Poland and Germany to the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp to continue from there to the United States or to Palestine (Buwalda 1997:10). Many scholars claim that the Russian immigrants who entered the United States between 1890 and 1920 were especially crime prone.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had allegedly liberated the Jews from persecution, but their emigration continued, although the principle of 'equality between various nationalities' was widely propagated. Emigration was considered an anti-socialist act and therefore condemned. The years following the Revolution were the years of emigration of political and ideological opponents of the new regime: aristocrats, anarchists and intellectuals. The emigrants chose Europe: France, Germany and England became centres of Russian émigré culture. They founded various cultural institutions and published journals and newspapers in Russian.

b) 1924-1981

In the whole period of Stalin's rule (until 1954) the borders of the Soviet Union were closed almost hermetically. During the Second World War, however, a group of ethnic Germans living in the Soviet Union used the war situation to move to Germany. In this period this was their only way to escape from the Soviet Union, since legal emigration was forbidden. Another exception was the Polish-Soviet Repatriation Agreement of 1957-59. Many Poles

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70 And probably because many Jews joined the ranks of the Communist Party in the beginning of the 20th century.
71 Though many Germans have chosen to stay in the Soviet Union for ideological reasons or as a result of intermarriages.
who lived on the territories annexed by the Soviet Union (parts of Ukraine and the Baltic republics) immediately after the Second World War were allowed to return to Poland. A few hundreds of Soviet Jews, mostly spouses of Polish citizens who lived on the Soviet territory could emigrate to Israel via Poland (many of these marriages were fictive). Officially, Soviet authorities justified emigration by the idea of family reunification, since many families belonging to these ethnic groups had been separated during the Second World War. This policy was convenient for the Soviets because it avoided political or ethnic connotations (Siegel 1998:5).

It was in Brezhnev’s period in the late 1960s and 1970s that the emigration really started. The direct reason was the international pressure on the Soviet authorities after the events in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Permitting Soviet Jews to emigrate, the Soviets hoped to restore their international image as respecting human rights (Salitan 1992, Chandler 1992). They had two more aims: first they hoped to gain economic assistance from the West in this period of stagnation, and second, they tried to expel ‘unassimilated’ Jews and dissidents (Siegel 1998:4). However, while they were allowing people to leave, the Soviet authorities still complicated the procedural requirements and created obstacles and confrontations with bureaucracy. Russian Jews described all this as ‘the ten circles of hell’, or ‘the Labyrinth’, (Buwalda 1997:47). Especially for the old people this procedure was very difficult, and perhaps this was one of the authorities’ strategies to prevent emigration, by bureaucratic resistance.

During the same period three other ethnic groups were allowed to leave — Armenians, ethnic Germans and Greeks. ‘It sometimes looked as if these groups were not really considered a part of the Soviet community and it was easier to allow them to go’ (Buwalda 1997:47).

Emigration offered different opportunities for crime: from selling visas for private profits by officials to black market activities among emigrants themselves. The emigrants in Brezhnev’s period faced various difficulties and complex bureaucratic procedures. They stood in constant fear of being refused visas and incurred very high expenses for various spravka (permissions), required by different institutions (for example for their education, scientific degrees, apartments, etc.) (For more details see Buwalda 1997). Using different prohibitions and limits of what must be left by emigrants in Russia and what was allowed to be taken with them abroad72, the underground industry of emigration developed, ranging from private enterprises which built boxes for emigrants’ luggage to smuggling by immigrants of gold and precious stones in clothing or specially built furniture. There were also Jewish brokers who bought Russian rubles, diamonds and art items from emigrants in the Soviet Union, promising to exchange the goods and pay them in Israel or the United States in hard currency through the brokers’ relatives or friends who lived there. Many immigrants never saw their money again. As one informant told me, the broker who bought his jewels in Russia for US $3,000 to be paid in Israel, gave him a non-existent address in Israel.

After 1979 the number of granted exit visas to Israel began to drop, in 1984 it stopped altogether. In general, in the period 1973-1983 about 250,000 Soviet Jews settled in Israel and about twice as many in the United States. I was one of them. I emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1980 after experiences of anti-Semitism and hatred on the street and at school in my native Kishinev, known as a ‘city of pogroms’. I had to deal with all the bureaucratic difficulties to leave the Soviet Union, the humiliation by schoolmates and teachers, who condemned me as an ‘enemy’ of the Soviet state which fed and educated me. There was the fear on the Soviet border, the body search, the cold nights in transit land - Chechoslovakia -

72 For example in 1978-1980 each emigrant was allowed to take with him/her not more than five articles of jewelry (shown clearly on the body); signed books, notebooks or photos were not permitted out of fear that they might include ‘secret information’ (from personal experience).
and the convoy through the airport of Vienna under guard of armed Austrian policemen to an El-Al airplane. And at last – Israel, where the moral and material satisfaction promised by the Israeli authorities turned out to be different from reality; it was much less sunny and happy than was promised.  

3) 1987-2001

With the liberal winds of the first reforms many Soviet people were expecting the possibility to emigrate. There was pressure from in and outside the Soviet Union: liberalization means freedom and one of the most important privileges is the freedom of movement. In 1987 a new perestroika policy ushered in a liberal change in emigration policy, which was the beginning of a mass exodus from the Soviet Union. Many Jews were afraid to miss the opportunity to leave the country; they distrusted the new reforms and faced open anti-Semitism. The dark side of glasnost was that it made it possible for Russians (and other nationalities) to freely and without punishment express their hostility towards Jews. The Liberal Democratic Party, an ultra-nationalist movement, headed by Zhirinovsky, won nearly a quarter of the vote in the Parliamentary elections of December 1993. Openly propagated anti-Semitism of Pamyat (Memory) and other ultra-right groups spread around in Russia and no law prohibited their activity. Jewish schools, synagogues and cultural centres were attacked. My informants told me that Jews in the beginning of the 1990s were beaten up and undressed in the streets, forced to get out of buses, etc. In a survey in 1992, increased anti-Semitism was indicated as a major reason for Jews to emigrate from the USSR (58%), after instability of the political situation and aggravation of ethnic problems in general (54.6%) and economic causes and the lowering of the standard of living (34.7%) (Aptekman 1993: 17).

At this time, most of the Jewish and almost all non-Jewish emigrants travelled to the United States, using Israeli visas (so-called dropouts). Usually the Soviet Jews obtained Israeli visas, though once abroad they changed their destination to the United States. However, in 1989 the American authorities decided not to grant entry permission to Russian Jews who had received Israeli visas and they were now forced to go to Israel (Siegel 1998:14). For many Jews this meant a great disappointment, since among these emigrants, who left for economic reasons and in search of political freedom, were those who had no Zionist sentiments. They feared the political and military instability in Israel and would have preferred to live elsewhere.

The emigration, nevertheless, continued. Notwithstanding the strict immigration policy of Western countries, Russian Jews formed relatively large communities in the United States, Canada, Germany, Italy, France, Austria and other European countries. The main reason for these countries to accept them was the threat of anti-Semitism in post-reform Russia. The largest Russian-speaking immigrant communities today are in Israel, the United States and Germany. There are also a few smaller communities, which aroused my interest, because of their connection to specific cases I studied during my fieldwork in the Netherlands, such as for example links between Russian-speakers with immigrant communities in Cyprus and in Belgium.

73 In 1996 I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on the Russian Jewish immigration in Israel, about social, cultural, political and emotional difficulties and confrontations with ideology and bureaucracy. My dissertation was later published, see Siegel 1998.
74 In January 1994 a fire destroyed the Marina Roscha synagogue in Moscow, after attacks on a Lubavitcher Jewish school and after the windows of Moscow's central synagogue were smashed (International Herald Tribune, January 12, 1994).
75 On the official procedures of immigration to Germany see Domernick (1997).
3.b Immigrant communities in the West and the Russian Mafia

During these years, crime became an important aspect of the new emigration and we have to deal with it here. Some criminologists claim organized crime is an aspect of immigration (Bovenkerk 1992, Amir 1996; Finckenauer & Waring 1998). They also argue that organized crime usually takes place among the immigrants at the first stage of their settlement. Successful immigrant businessmen, leading sportmen, politicians and other public figures become targets for kidnapping, extortion or other violent crimes. According to Friedman, many ex-Soviet hockey players in Canada and the United States ‘have been forced to buy a krysha’ (2000:177). There were also attempts to extort Sergei Bubka, the world champion in athletics, who lives in Germany (Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997:453).

When talking about the Russian-speaking Diaspora, my informants often referred to Russian sources. For example they showed me the leading Russian newspaper ‘Argumenti i Fakti’, which dealt with the question where Russians (ethnic Russians) live today. Its data rely on a report of the Russian Ministry of Federation, National and Migration Policy from 1998. There are more than 24,000 ethnic Russians resident in CIS countries (former Soviet republics) according to this report. In the USA 1,100,000, in Finland 25,000, in New Zealand 7,000, in Canada 300,000, in Argentina 40,000, in Germany 45,000, in Bulgaria 80,000, in France 100,000, in Belgium 7,000, in China 7,000, in Paraguay 6,000 and in South Africa 3,000. In the Netherlands, according to the newspaper, there are 6,000 ethnic Russians. I have only mentioned the largest communities but there are also small communities (less than 3,000) in Sweden, Island, Norway and Italy (Argumenti i fakti, July 2000).

According to another source, there were 90,544 asylum-seekers from the former Soviet Union in the period 1985-1998 in Germany and 16,855 in the Netherlands (Eurostat and EGC, quoted in: Snel et.al., 2000:27). Other sources indicate that in different years different ethnic groups from the former Soviet Union prevailed among asylum-seekers. Thus in 1997, the Russian/USSR group of asylum-seekers consisted of Russians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Chechens and Jews. In addition there were Armenians from Armenia, or Ukrainians from the Ukraine. According to this source the largest ethnic group of asylum-seekers in 1997 in the Netherlands were Armenians, followed by Georgians (IND source quoted in Snel et al. 2000:55). However, in 1992, the largest group were Jews (JMW source).

I have chosen to focus on a few countries in which Russian-speaking immigrants settled since the opening of the borders. These countries are especially relevant to my subject, either because of a direct connection to my informants in the Netherlands (Israel, Belgium), or because they can provide a clarification of the general picture as sketched by the informants during the study. There are roughly a few million Russian-speaking immigrants living outside the former Soviet Union today. The largest communities are in the United States, Israel and Germany. Each country is a part of the Diaspora puzzle and each part has its significance and role for Russian organized crime. I shall now briefly specify the importance of each of the chosen countries.

a. Israel

Since the beginning of the Great Immigration in 1987 more than a million former Soviet citizens have arrived in Israel. So far this has been the largest wave of immigration in the
short history of Israel. According to different sources\textsuperscript{70} 40 to 70 percent of the newcomers were not actually Jewish. (see also Siegel 1998). Many arrived with false documents, others as relatives or descendants of Jews. The immigrants of the 1990s were well educated and professionally independent, i.e. they did not apply for social assistance. They maintained their own way of life, introduced Russian culture into Israeli society and rapidly entered Israeli politics (Siegel 1995, 1998). Upon arrival they faced the negative stereotypes which already in use to stigmatise the ‘Russians’ who had arrived in the 1970s: the women are prostitutes and the men are Mafiosi. These negative stereotypes of the Russian community in Israel and the discrimination of Russian Jewish immigrants were used from 1996 onwards by the leaders of two political parties of Russian Jewish immigrants in their political campaigns (see Siegel 1995, Siegel 1998). The most remarkable case in this context was that of Gregory Lerner.

Lerner (who took the Hebrew name of Tzvi Ben Ari) was jailed in 1997. He did have a criminal record in Russia of fraud and involvement in murder. In Israel he was accused of attempts to bribe Israeli bank officials and politicians. The Israeli press wrote him up as a ‘godfather of the Russian Mafia’ in Israel and most Israelis subscribed to that view. Among the Russian Jewish immigrants however, Lerner meant something quite different. He became a symbol of anti-establishment propaganda and a hero of the Russian Jewish community. According to the activists of Israel-be-Aliya, a Russian immigrants’ ethnic party, the Israeli politicians used the Lerner case to taint the image of Russian Jewish politicians and businessmen. The Israel be –Aliya party is led by the famous refusnic Nathan Scharansky.

Israel Beiteinu (Our Home Israel) is a right-wing party led by Avigdor Liberman, the former adviser of Prime Minister Netaniyahu. Russian Jewish immigrants accused the Israeli establishment of harassment and stigmatisation. During the pre-election campaign of 1999, all Russian politicians felt obliged to visit Lerner’s family or at least to express their solidarity with this ‘victim of Israeli hostility towards Russian immigrants’. And though many immigrants had little doubts that he had been involved in criminal activities, both in Russia and in Israel, they also argued that ‘Israelis exaggerated the whole story and did not punish the really “big” Israeli-born criminals who live in Israel. Instead, they invented a sensational Russian Mafia’. When Israeli police officials reported in 1998, that as many as 32 alleged Russian Mafia bosses were counted as living in Israel\textsuperscript{77}, Russian Jewish immigrants vehemently denied the allegation.

Returning to the question of the connection between immigrant communities and organized crime, we’ll find that it is difficult to argue that there is specific ‘immigrants and organized crime’ connection in Israel. In such a huge Russian-speaking community, where large groups of immigrants are distributed all over the country, united only by one common language, all three models of the connection between immigrant communities and organized crime, discussed in chapter 1, may be applicable in different contexts and situations.

\textbf{b. USA}

The Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to the United State also has a chequered history. The newcomers settled especially in Brighton Beach in New York, but also in suburbs of New Jersey, Long Island and Philadelphia (Finckenauer and Waring 1998:68). The largest community of former Soviet citizens is in Brighton Beach, the neighbourhood known as ‘Little Odessa’. In the 1980s there were many press reports about Soviet mobsters

\textsuperscript{70} Interviews with representatives of the Israeli Rabbinate, 16 July, 1999, Tel-Aviv
\textsuperscript{77} One of them was Anton Malevsky, who was suspected of organizing several contract killings and dealing in drugs (Jewish Bulletin Online, 30 January, 1998, \url{http://www.jewishf.com/0k980130/itrying.html})
who had moved to the United States. Some of them reported that criminals slipped through among Russians between 1970 and 1980, by assuming the identities of dead or jailed Jews (Finckenauer and Waring 1998:72). According to the prevailing view, former Soviet criminals continued their activity in the United States. Prominent vory v zakone and avtoriteti (criminal leaders), such as Evsei Agron, Monya Elson, Marat Balagula, Boris Nayfeld, Semion Mogilevich and Emil Puzyretski continued their criminal career there. It is known (according to my informants) that Yaponchik was sent by the Russian mob to the United States to help organize criminal activities. However, Russian organized crime in the U.S. is not only the result of this kind of continuity between the former Soviet Union and the United States. It is also based on those immigrants who became involved in illegal activities after immigration with the purpose of upward mobility. According to Finckenauer and Waring ‘in contrast to members of other immigrant communities who may have turned to crime partly out of frustration at being blocked from other avenues for advancement, it seems that for some Russians crime is a chosen career path’ (1998:91). According to Abraham Abramovsky, the director of the Fordham University International Criminal Law Center, the ecstasy trade in the USA, for example, is totally controlled today by Israeli organized crime, combined with Russian criminal gangs. The headquarters of their activities are in the Netherlands. Jewish Agency officials however, insist that there is no Jewish involvement in Russian organised crime.

In both Israel and the United States there has been a great deal of illegal immigration of Russian-speakers. Therefore it is very difficult to estimate the real numbers of members of these communities. In 1992 for example, 129,000 visitor (temporary) visas were issued to persons from the former Soviet republics. Many of them entered the USA but never left (Finckenauer and Waring 1998:80).

c. Germany

Various West European countries also began to face the problem of illegal Russian-speaking immigrants in the beginning of the 1990s. After the break-up of the Soviet Union there were in Germany more than half a million Russian soldiers in the former Soviet Occupied Zone. It is often claimed, especially by Russian criminologists, that Russian organized crime was connected in Germany to the military staff. In 1994 two An-12 Cub airplanes landed near Wunsdorf. After German trucks with the load from the planes were stopped by German police, it appeared that instead of sporting guns, as indicated on the loading list, the content included ‘Makarov’ pistols. Among the arrested was a Russian Colonel, the director of the Wunsdorf Army Hunting Club.

When the military withdrew from Germany, the criminal groups remained. According to Konstantinov and Dikselius there are fifteen Russian vory v zakone living in Germany today (1997:454). The centre of Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany is Berlin. The activities of Russian organized crime however are registered in many other cities (Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Frankfurt, etc.). In the German case the export model connection between organized crime and immigrant communities may be applicable: criminal organizations send their representatives to Germany to conduct one or another activity. Thus, for example the

80 The location place of Soviet Forces.
Russian 'sport clubs' of the Dolgoprudnaya organization are investing profits of the drug trade and trafficking in art in real estate.

d. Cyprus

Another important country, which was often mentioned by my informants, is Cyprus. Actually it does not have the reputation of an immigration country, nor does it have historical links with Russia. The significance of Cyprus for Russians became obvious in the post-socialist period, with the mushrooming of new businesses and commercial structures. The advantages of the offshore status of Cyprus attracted Russian businessmen and in the beginning of the 1990s a community of Russian businessmen and their families was established there. Compared to the countries mentioned above, this community is relatively small. There are approximately 20,000 Russians living in the Greek part of Cyprus. The community life is very intense; there are many Russian restaurants, schools, newspapers and two TV stations that transmit two hours per week in Russian. The role of the Russian Orthodox Church is important, and Russians celebrate Greek Orthodox festivities together with Greek Cypriots 'out of solidarity'. The Russians on Cyprus are very affluent; there are many Russian companies and banks. Cyprus has been dubbed the Hong Kong of Russia (Elsevier, 7 February 1998).

The establishment of the community was accompanied by its 'criminal reputation'. The rich New Russians were ‘making a lot of money’ and the origin of their money was dubious. Several criminal incidents involving Russians took place in Cyprus. Thus in 1994, twelve Russians were deported from the island on suspicion of extracting money from Russian businessmen working on Cyprus. In 1995 there were bomb explosions in Limassol during razborki (confrontations) by Russian gangs. As a result of the illegal reputation of Russian capital, Cypriot authorities have refused to cooperate with the Russian Central Bank in granting licenses to Russian companies.

e. Belgium

Another important Russian-speaking community is situated in Belgium. It is mostly concentrated in large cities, Brussels and Antwerp. The majority are Georgian Jews, many with Israeli citizenship. Their main occupation is trading in gold and jewels. Historically orthodox Jews have played a dominant role in the diamond business in Antwerp and Amsterdam (van Agtmaal 1994, Schmidt 1994). Since the beginning of mass emigration from the Soviet Union many Russian and especially Georgian Jews have arrived in Belgium. They came with suitcases full of American dollars or Belgian francs and ‘made offers that could not to be refused’ to Jewish orthodox shopkeepers. Very soon the whole Pelikaanstraat in the heart of the Jewish neighbourhood was bought up by Georgian and Russian newcomers. They settled in the Jewish Orthodox area in Antwerp and most of them wear the black skullcap (kippa) indicating that they belong to the Jewish Orthodox community. Most of them have Israeli (or American) citizenship, some managed to get Belgian citizenship, others travel

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82 The entire population of the Greek part of Cyprus is about 650,000 people.
regularly from Belgium back to Israel. The majority, however, live in Antwerp illegally (Siegel 2002).

The social life of the Russian-speaking communities is vibrant, there are plenty of Russian institutions where they meet and entertain themselves. They maintain connections with Russian immigrants in other countries, especially with Russian-speakers in the Netherlands (for details of international connections see Chapter 6). The ‘Russians’ or ‘Georgians’ are often ignored by the Jewish community in Antwerp because of their criminal reputation. Official diamond clubs and organizations blame the Russian ‘gold-sellers’ for damaging the solid reputation of Antwerp as a world centre for the diamond trade by selling false or stolen jewellery and gold, falsifying certificates and smuggling diamonds. (Siegel 2002).

The ‘Russian’ areas in Antwerp are Falconplein and Pelikaanstraat, where they have small businesses and shops. They trade in electronics, textiles and food. According to my informants, the Russian Mafia is a part of Belgian reality today. The godfathers of Russian organized crime are active there. Monya Elson and Boris Nayfeld have lived and operated in Belgium, from where they both moved to the United States.

3.c The Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands

Dutch-Russian commercial and trade contacts existed since the end of the 16th century. In the 17th century they developed rapidly when the Russian Tsar Peter I travelled incognito to Zaandam in order to learn the art of Dutch shipbuilding. Back in Russia he introduced important technological, social and cultural reforms, and established a first Russian embassy in the Netherlands. He adopted the Dutch model in various fields and invited many Dutch specialists to come to Russia in the Tsar’s service. Another important Russian figure in Dutch history was the Tsaritsa Anna Pavlovna, who married King Willem II and became Queen of the Netherlands in 1845. Apart from diplomats and traders, Russians were not represented in the Netherlands in any significant number until the second half of the 20th century.

During the Second World War many Russian captives were taken to work in Germany. Most of them returned to the Soviet Union after the war, only to be imprisoned or send to the Gulag for treason. Some of them, however, managed to escape to other European countries, including the Netherlands, the so-called displaced persons. A very small number of Russian-speakers arrived in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly through marriages with Dutch citizens (whom they usually met in the Soviet Union), or on temporary work contracts (such as musicians and scientists) and decided to ask for political asylum. Several Russian women at this time organized the Russian group ‘Otchizna’ (Fatherland). They held regular meetings and organized various social events, such as the celebration of Russian holidays. There were also some Russian activities in the Russian Orthodox Church. But the main influx of Russian-speakers came after Gorbachev’s reforms.

The sociological literature tries to distinguish between different migrations. Thus, the emigration before 1992 is classified as ‘ethnic’, referring to Jewish, Greek and Armenian immigrants (Fassmann and Munz 1994). After that time this classification is too simple, because in the Soviet Union the ethnic problem was always also a political problem (thus the emigrants could be at the same time classified as ‘political migrants’). Similarly, these same immigrants may be defined as ‘economic migrants’, because of the economic turmoil in their motherland. It is also unclear why the pre-reform emigration is defined as ‘ethnic’, while the real ethnic wars started with the break-up of the Soviet Union. They last until today in
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, Moldavia, Georgia, and a few other areas. These new immigrants were ethnically and occupationally very diverse. It is makes no sense to point to one specific reason for their flight from the Soviet Union, because in almost all cases it was a combination of fear of political instability, ethnic unrest and economic difficulties.

The statistical data on the number of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands is not precise, because of the large numbers of illegal migrants. According to my informants the number of illegal Russian-speakers fluctuates between 30,000 to more than 70,000. Those who mentioned large numbers usually based them on 'abstract evaluations', such as 'in the centre of Amsterdam, you can hear Russian spoken everywhere', or 'all my schoolmates from Moscow migrated to Europe', or 'there are many “invisible Russians” in the Netherlands, they are everywhere...', etc. Other informants referred to the Russian audience during the performance of Russian theatre actors or other cultural events. It is totally unclear how they really count their numbers.

The immigration laws of most Western countries, including the Netherlands, prescribe that asylum can be granted only to persons who were persecuted in their homeland. Russian speakers who had first immigrated to Israel and then tried to re-immigrate to the West did not fulfil this requirement, because Israel is considered a democratic country, and Jews are not persecuted there. Usually Russian Israeli asylum seekers have therefore been sent back to Israel. For example in the summer of 1991 a group of 150 Russian Jews arrived from Israel to the Dutch city of Eindhoven. They requested asylum and claimed they were discriminated on the job market in Israel. Their request was rejected. The men in the group went on a hunger strike in protest against their expulsion. They built barricades at the Princess Beatrix Holding Center in Eindhoven. It emerged later that they had all paid US$ 3,000 to dubious agents in Israel, who smuggled them via Hungary into the Netherlands. In December 1991 the whole group was extradited (Siegel 1998:15, 21-22). Russian immigrants with Israeli passports who wish to live in Europe now realize that they have no chance of getting asylum. Therefore they go back to Russia first. They restore their Russian citizenship (some of them had never renounced it) and try to get asylum again in the West. These Russian-speakers, and those who arrive directly from the former Soviet Union are now viewed differently: they are no longer citizens of a democratic country, but discriminated or politically motivated asylum-seekers, trying to escape anti-Semitism or other ethnic dangers. In many cases they manage to persuade the Dutch authorities to grant them asylum. However, when rejected, the majority disappears to become ‘illegals’ and find employment on the ‘black’ job market. They often maintain contacts with other Russian-speakers, but avoid participating in social events that seem to them too ‘public’, like visiting Russian restaurants or participating in mixed (Russian-Dutch) events, such as literature evenings.

I will now turn to the following questions: how did my informants arrive and manage to stay in the Netherlands; did they indeed land in the well-organised Russian-speaking community; exactly what kind of community is this?

3.c.1 Immigration and first steps in the Netherlands

Most sociological immigration theories are focused on economic and/or political motives to move people; they treat their behaviour as resulting from a rational decision to move to another country. Thus the ‘push and pull’ theory focuses on immigrants as belonging to a group of people to explain why they leave their country. Motives like ‘looking for adventure’, getting a better education or improving one’s professional qualifications, comparing life styles
and cultures, etc. are rarely considered in these theories as important elements in the decision to emigrate. The best example, which will often re-appear in this study, is emigration as a way of escaping the Russian Mafia. This decision to relocate to another country in order to find shelter against criminals is neither economic nor political. Sometimes it is not even a decision of the potential immigrant himself, since the person can be physically or mentally forced by others to leave for another country.

According to IGD (Intergovernmental Consulting on Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies in Europe, North America and Australia), quoted in a RISBO report, from 1992 to 1998 there were 15550 applicants for asylum (‘asielzoekers’) from the former Soviet Union (2000: 49). Most of these came from the Russian Federation (3915 – 32%), from Armenia (3339 – 22%), Georgia (2545 – 16%), Azerbaijan (2034 – 13%) and Ukraine (1798 – 12%) (Snel et al 2000: 49).

According to procedure, individuals who decide to apply for asylum in the Netherlands must announce their intention to the Dutch authorities within 24 hours (since 1999 within 48 hours) from the moment of their arrival in the country. Some do so immediately in the Schiphol Amsterdam airport, others approach the local Foreign Police. Many Russian Jews first have approached the JMW (Jewish Social Work Agency) office in Amsterdam. One of the applicants tells the story:

‘We went to the hotel and then our friend drove us to JMW. They checked whether we were Jewish according to our documents and arranged a temporary dwelling for us. Later we moved to a holding centre (‘opvangcentrum’). There we spent a few months preparing ourselves for the interview (with a representative of the Ministry of Justice) and after the interview we moved to the camp (‘asielzoekerscentrum’ – centre for applicants for asylum’).

Another groups of informants came as tourists and decided to stay in the Netherlands two weeks after their arrival. They did not even inform their relatives and colleagues about their plans, before leaving for the Netherlands.

‘For some time we lived in a house of my cousin in Amsterdam. First we visited De Lairessestraat (JMW office) and then we were moved officially to the holding centre but we almost never lived there, we stayed with my cousin. Then JMW helped us to get a room in a ROA house (ROA – the shelter for asylum seekers) in Amsterdam’.

An Armenian family was not familiar with official procedures when they arrived in the Netherlands:

‘We had an acquaintance in Brabant, he told us that we had to inform the police about our wish to ask for asylum, which we did. We were sent to the camp (hotel which was used for asylum seekers) and we lived there for a few months. After the interview we were moved to another camp in the same area’.

According to my informants they could receive either A or C (VTV) refugee status: A-status meant ‘political refugee’ and was usually granted relatively quickly. Those who received this status were individuals from the ‘war regions’, such as Afghanistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The disadvantage of this status was that one could never go back to his native country. Most emigrants from the former Soviet Union left their parents, relatives and friends behind and hoped to see them once again. The second status (C) meant ‘humanitarian refugee’, a status

84 Vergunning tot verblijf – residence permit
that was granted to individuals who fled such problems as anti-Semitism, ethnic rivalry, repression, human rights violation etc. This was the most desired status among the Russian-speakers. Of all my informants, only one Russian Jew and two Armenians received the A-status. Then there is an official third status - VVT

**Applying for legal status: a lottery**

There has been much debate in the Netherlands about the conditions in asylum seekers' shelters, about the long procedures, about people waiting for a decision on their fate, unable to work or to live anywhere else, etc. One of the problems mentioned in the debate was criminality in asylum seekers' shelters and the criminal behaviour of minorities. In 1999 the mayor of the Dutch city of Groningen stated that criminality among asylum seekers was five times higher than among the Dutch population in the area (Azielzoekers crimineler? Groningen, December 1999).

Political debate and new research followed. My Russian informants brought to my attention some details connected to this debate and the problems of dealing with asylum seekers in the Netherlands, which I will discuss here.

When talking about their life in camps for asylum seekers (lagerya), Russian-speakers almost always complained about two problems: the behaviour of other refugees and the daily conditions of life in the refugee shelters, such as food, hygiene, noise, etc.

*When I look back now, my life in the camp was not so bad. But then I thought I would not survive. My son was five years old; we lived in one apartment with a black woman, a real whore, who was receiving her clients in her sleeping-room the whole day long. When the weather was not so bad we were out as much as possible, but when it rained it was really a nightmare. She was so impudent*.

Another Russian woman told me:

*The main problem in our camp was these “blacks”. We had to meet them three times a day in the dining room. Of course the “whites” tried to sit together, separately. These “blacks” are so dirty, they throw remains of food on the floor, but of course they are forced to clean it. They use their face towels for cleaning floors, and then they bring them to the washing machines, together with their gym shoes and underwear. When I saw this, I went out immediately to buy a few towels, and our own plates and spoons. I am a very fastidious person*.

Apart from the non-hygienic and immoral behaviour of other asylum seekers my informants also mentioned violent incidents.

*Once a month we received some pocket money in the camp office. The procedure was very long: we had to wait for one and a half hour. But this was no problem, we had nothing better

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85 Voorwaardelijke vergunning tot verblijf – conditional residence permit
86 An interesting detail is that the asylum seekers from the Balkan and Eastern Europe are strongly represented in cases of robbery and serious violence (De Haan and Althof, 2002).
87 In the former Soviet Union the term camps (lagerya) usually meant Labour camps. The immigrants used this term as a joke.
to do, the problem was that we had to wait in line together with the "blacks", there was always shouting and knife fights (ponazhevschina). You cannot imagine how they behave!

In Russia the negative attitude towards 'blacks' was reserved mainly for Chechens. In the Netherlands, Russian-speakers applied the term to all non-Westerners. They emphasized differences in life-style and attitudes.

'Our camp was situated in a very green park, near the lake. Our neighbours from Iraq and actually all other "blacks" were lying on the sofa the whole day to watch Dutch TV, which they could not understand anyway. But we (several Russian couples with children) went for walks in the countryside, to the lake, or we took a bus to the centre of the nearby city. We sat there in cafes or McDonalds. We did not have a lot of money, but we bought some fresh fruit and milk for the children every day. We had a good time.'

In most cases living in camps meant waiting for the interview with the official from the Ministry of Justice. All my informants emphasized the importance of this interview. JMW assisted its clients in preparing for it. They first listened to their stories, 'our legends' as one informant told me, then they explained which elements should be emphasized and which not. 'They did not teach us to lie, just told us what to say to the Dutch authorities and what not'. According to my informants, JMW officials sought out Jewish asylum seekers in various camps and 'prepared them for the interview'. The most frequent emphasis in all stories of JMW clients was on anti-Semitism.

'In the first camp we lived in one apartment with another Russian family. We talked a lot about the details that must be emphasized during the interview. I thought that their story was not convincing enough, they told me that they left because of anti-Semitism, that Russians cursed them 'Jid'. I knew that they were not even Jewish, but they had papers to prove their Jewishness. I helped them to make up a better story: that they were beaten up near the synagogue, that their child was discriminated at school, etc. Later, after the interview they told me that if they would not be allowed to stay in the Netherlands, they would try in Germany and they showed me other papers confirming that they were native Germans'

Another informant just invented his story, based on the experiences of other immigrants:

'I first tried to understand what others said in their interviews, what kind of mistakes they made, etc. I had to make my story very convincing. In our camp there were a few very stupid men who told the Dutch official that they escaped the army, because they did not want to clean toilets. They were deserters. Of course nobody took them seriously. I prepared my story very carefully. I confess now that not everything I told them during the interview was true. But who told the whole truth anyway? People made their story worse than it really was. Of course I did not experience some violent scenes, which I described during the interview. But if I had stayed in my native town, I told them, I would have become a witness of all these cruelties and even could have been murdered. We saved our lives, but believe me: I even started to cry when I talked. I took it very personal'.

One informant acknowledged that it was wrong of him to tell lies, but that on the other hand it was necessary in his situation: 'Our story was almost truthful, with some embellishments of course. But we had no choice, we left our jobs, property, parents, friends, everything, we could not go back to Russia. We had to pass this interview at any price'.
The immigrants also distrust and suspect other Russian-speaking asylum seekers:

'We were all very careful when talking with each other before the interview. We knew that we all lied. But how and to what extent? We could not talk about this. Nobody trusted anyone, even when we were in the same house 24 hours a day'.

The fact that many asylum seekers usually lie when they tell their story to officials is not unique to the Russian-speakers, nor is the idea for Russian-speakers to lie to the authorities, if necessary. The problem of the officials is that they do not speak native languages, have little knowledge of the political, socio-economic and cultural background of specific events and individuals in the countries of origin of the asylum seekers and therefore cannot easily distinguish between lies and truths. Knowledge of the cultural background and perceptions of people, up-to-date information about contemporary events, are required for reaching just and honest decisions about human fates. But this cannot be expected of Dutch officials who have been trained in law rather than in history and social science and who have to deal with many nationalities.

Many Russian-speakers told me that at first they received negative replies from the Ministry of Justice. Almost none of them could explain why.

'It looked as if all our papers lay in one closed box, and one or another official took one of the box and without even looking, announced: this man is granted the permit to live in the Netherlands, and the next one — not granted. Like a children’s game. We did not receive any explanation why we got a “negative”, and somebody else, with a similar story — a "positive": It was a lottery'.

Those who were refused a residence permit approached various Dutch attorneys. Jews had an advantage because there were several lawyers who worked with and were paid by JMW and specialized in their specific problem. On appeal a residence permit was granted to almost all clients of JMW. In 1992 the Dutch authorities decided to grant residence permits (‘verblijfsvergunning’) to those Russian Jews who arrived in 1991 and the beginning of 1992, ‘almost on a collective basis’ (Kooyman 1997:1).

The JMW case

Among the organizations that were actively involved in the life of Russian-speaking immigrants, many informants mentioned JMW, the Jewish Social Work Agency. The Dutch Jewish Social Services (Joods Maatschappelijk Werk - JMW) is a foundation that offers professional help to the Jews in the Netherlands in various areas: marriage problems, work, housing, refugees, AIDS patients, children, etc. To Jewish immigrants JMW offers social help (emphasized: no legal help) for the following problems: difficulties to integrate in the Dutch society (work, study, social contact), and integration into the Jewish society. In the Netherlands it is considered to be the most powerful Jewish organisation in the Jewish community after the Rabbinate.

The first group of Russian Jews arrived in the Netherlands in 1990 and their first address were the headquarters of JMW on De Lairesseestraat in Amsterdam. Some of them went there directly from Amsterdam’s Schiphol Airport. Those who first came in contact with the Foreign
Police were placed in centres for asylum seekers where they announced that they were Jewish and made contact with the Jewish Social Work Agency. To become a client and get assistance there, the Russian Jews had to prove they were Jewish. One of the coordinators at the agency made the following statement to the local Jewish newspaper in 1994:

‘If it is at all possible, we need to see the original birth certificates, passports and sometimes the religious marriage contract (ketuba) of their parents and grandparents. If there is any doubt we do not accept them as clients. Two or three years ago we did. But it slowly became known how advantageous it was to be Jewish, and a black market for documents developed in the former Soviet Union’ (NIW89, 18 Feb., 1994, p.16).

According to another social worker, shortly after 1990 if people produced a reference (spravka) from the official representative of the Jewish Community in the former Soviet Union that confirmed that they were Jewish, the Jewish Social Work Agency accepted them as clients. However, the translator (herself Russian Jewish) helped attract attention to certain details that were ‘not totally clean’90. For example in one passport date of birth and date of expiration were the same. In another passport the nationality ‘Jewish’ was added in different ink. Since then the officials at the agency started to ask for other papers or for more documents. They now paid attention to many details, such as the colour of the ink, yellow spots, dampness, etc. as applicants were now suspected of forgeries. As suspicion grew, the Dutch Agency consulted the sister organization, the German Jewish Social Work Agency in Frankfurt. In 1994 one of the social workers from the German Jewish Social Service came to the Netherlands to share her experience and teach the Dutch social workers how to deal with suspicious documents. According to the director of the German organization, the social worker who was sent to the Netherlands, told the social workers of the JMW to deal with these documents based on their own personal experience and intuition. Only if a case was very unclear did she suggest that they send the potential client to the police to have the documents examined by an expert. Neither the German nor the Dutch social workers at the Jewish Social Work Agencies had any professional education or training in identifying false documents. No expert from any professional organization was ever consulted. No papers have ever been sent to the police or to any other officials for expert examination. One of my informants told me that she personally asked an official at the Agency to submit her papers to a professional expert when he did not believe her. The official refused.

In 1994 the Jewish Social Work Agency decided to no longer assist Russian Jews in the application procedure for Dutch citizenship. At the time there had been headlines about the Russian Mafia in the Dutch press. There were also worrying stories from other European countries, the USA and Israel about criminal activities of Russian-speakers, including Russian Jews. It was in this atmosphere that the Jewish Social Work Agency decided to stop its assistance. According to its officials, it was ‘a well-known fact that Georgians were entering the country with forged documents’91. The decision to stop helping the immigrants was called for if the Jewish Social Work Agency was to avoid the impression that it was aiding and abetting Russian criminals. The Jewish Social Work Agency worked in close conjunction with other official agencies and was dependent on them financially. It did not want to lose the financial and moral help it was getting from the Dutch authorities as a result of their dealings with the Russian Jews.

In this case the bureaucratic organization used the image and dominant stereotypes of the Russian-speaking immigrants for its own purposes. At first it welcomed every Russian

89 NIW – Nieuw Israëlišch Weekblad
90 The role of the translator is still unclear since she refused to tell her version of the story.
91 From an interview with the director of JMW, Amsterdam, 1999.
Jew, without going into the details of his official documents, while later it refused to help any potential clients and generalized them into one negative category without differentiating between individuals and life stories. Actually the Jewish Social Work Agency stopped assisting all Russian-speaking clients because of the rumours about Russian Mafia. According to some of its former clients (Russian Jewish immigrants) the Dutch government was financing the Jewish Social Work Agency project on assisting Russian Jews, and the officials at the agency, as well as some lawyers who were involved, could get subsidies and use the money the way they decided was proper for them. They said that the agency made expensive repairs to the building on De Lairessestraat and purchased new furniture and modern equipment. Some of the Russian Jews accused the agency officials of using the money, reserved for facilitating the emigration process and the integration of the immigrants in the Netherlands for their own purposes.

‘Their attitude was based on whether they liked a person or not. There was a couple, about whom we all knew that they had not one drop of Jewish blood. However the man managed to convince one of the officials that he came to the Netherlands because he had no freedom in Russia. The official also knew that this Russian had nothing to do with Judaism, but he accepted him as a client of JMW. All this issue with Judaism they are telling everyone was nonsense. They took it on themselves to define who is Jewish and who is not. When we warned them about specific persons who used the services of JMW as non-Jewish they answered sarcastically: ‘Maybe you want to define who is Jewish’. We said that we were not competent, that they have to check every case personally, but they never asked for professional expertise’.

Another argument given by the Russian Jews is that as long as the Dutch authorities financed the Jewish Social Work Agency, it presented Russian Jewish immigration as an important and urgent issue, and did not discuss the value of documents. As soon as the funding was finished though, the agency looked for a reason to stop the project. That is when the officials started to stigmatise the whole community of Russian Jews as criminal and thus ‘remained loyal to the Dutch interest’, formulating new plans and projects. As the director of the Jewish Social Work Agency told me: ‘We represent the interests of the whole Jewish community in the Netherlands, and have other clients besides the Russians. Anyway Dutch Jewish opinion about the Russians is very poor’.

The relationship between officials of the Jewish Social Work Agency and their clients had become mostly tense. Russian-speakers accused them of indifference and contempt.

‘When we told the social workers that there were mice in our house they told us we better buy a cat, they did not send us any help’, a former resident of the ROA shelter for asylum seekers in Amsterdam told me. Another informant said that she only had one broken chair in her room. When she asked for help, the agency official told her that there was no money left. At the same time, the informant knew that there was suddenly new furniture at the JMW offices. There are also numerous complaints about the agency’s assistance in housing.

‘They based their help on non-objective criteria, on personal benefit or sympathy. We were refused a room at the ROA shelter in Amsterdam, in favour of another immigrant, who had better personal connections with JMW officials. They always gave priority to others, not to Russian Jews. In finding dwelling they first helped Iraqis. Maybe they thought that they were poorer, they did not know that they came with big capitals and we did not. And maybe they
thought that they were real Jews and that we were not, even when they lied to these officials no less than we did, because most of them were pure Muslims'.

At a certain point in 1993 the Russian-speaking residents at the shelter for asylum seekers in Amsterdam felt the agency was not paying attention at all to their interests, and wrote an angry open letter demanding that the agency help them solve the housing problem. They complained about the indifference of the agency officials to their personal problems, especially the psychological problems of their children resulting from being crowded in one small house for years and unable to develop properly. According to some of the Russian Jews who signed this letter, the Jewish Social Work Agency was angry with 'these ungrateful Russians' and this was one of the reasons why it stopped to promote their interests any longer.

3.c. 2 Is there a ‘Russian’ community in the Netherlands?

I shall now draw a composite portrait of the Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands. It includes various categories: legal and illegal immigrants, commuters, temporary workers, tourists and transmigrants, etc. and the question that arises from all these various categories is whether we can talk about a ‘community’ of Russian-speakers.

Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands are often considered by the Dutch as being members of one community. The immigrants themselves, however, claim that there is no single Russian or even Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands. They do not experience the existence of a ‘Russian community’, they consider it a rhetorical device to generalize common interests and values that are absent in reality. The distance they try to keep from other Russian-speakers is based on several motives, such as their wish to integrate in Dutch society - and therefore prefer Dutch friends - or the fact that they spend much time with Dutch at work or school, which leaves no time for social contacts with their own compatriots. However, one of the aspects of their negative attitude towards the general term ‘Russian community’ is association with the Mafia, which according to them is ingrained in this term.

‘I do not want to be linked with Russian criminals. Those who generalize all Russian-speakers in one category do not know what they are talking about. This immigration consists of the very elements, which I tried to avoid in Russia, and to be associated with them is the last thing I would like to happen to me. My good name is important to me.’

When community is viewed as a social organization it is difficult to apply this term to Russian-speakers: they do not have their own leadership or representation in Dutch political or public organizations. Neither do they openly express protest against discrimination and stigmatization. The fact that they deny being part of one community does not mean they do not use the image of a Russian community for their own purposes. Manipulating their identity allows them to promote their interests and achieve specific goals. To the outside world their ethnic identification is instrumental. For the Dutch public they are ‘Russians’, one monolithic group, with a threatening criminal connotation. Two social processes can take place among Russian-speakers as a result of this manipulation of the stereotype: ‘Russianization’ and criminalization. First they realize the privileges of being ‘Russian’ in achieving their specific purposes; on the other hand some of them adopt the stereotype and internalise it (see some examples later in this chapter).

The question remains: is there a community? To answer this it seems to me that approaching the Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands as a series of small social
units, different from each other, but interconnected situationally, is the most useful approach. In terms of the typology described in chapter 1 on links between the Russian-speaking community and organized crime it seems that the second model, i.e. second-generation social mobility crime model, which is applicable to large-size communities of immigrants, is irrelevant in our case. The other two models: the criminal exports model and the model of mutual dependence are still to be analysed, which is my purpose in the next two chapters.

When Russian-speakers talk about the Netherlands and Dutch people two general attitudes prevail. The first one is focused on the admiration of specific features of ‘Dutch’ behaviour, such as ‘keeping your word’, ‘arriving on time’, ‘openly expressing satisfaction (or dissatisfaction)’, ‘living according to specific rules’, etc. Russian-speakers who emphasized this ‘positive’ attitude usually referred to their colleges and neighbours. The majority of my informants, however, saw the Dutch in another light: ‘naive’, ‘infantile’, ‘undeveloped emotionally’, ‘uneducated’, ‘rude peasants who lecture everybody’, ‘they don’t know what hospitality is’, etc. A few told me that they would never trust Dutch doctors; one mother hoped her eighteen-year old daughter would not marry a Dutchman. Other parents have sent their daughter back to Georgia to find a husband, because ‘Dutch men are not good partners for Georgian girls’.

All my informants were critical about the education system, the level of teaching and the material their children have to study at school, compared to Russian (especially private) schools. The prevailing opinion (even among the followers of the first, positive approach) is that Dutch are not professional, not skilled and not erudite. This general attitude refers not only to medical doctors, musicians, or teachers, but also to lawyers, policemen and politicians. Politics in the Netherlands is considered ‘not serious’, without real ideological or practical differences between various political parties. The information sources vary from daily watching Dutch programs to reports on the Netherlands in Russian media. Some of my informants do not have a television at home, because they cannot understand the language anyway, others watch only Russian channels they receive on TV.

In terms of their ambitions, two groups can be distinguished among the Russian-speakers: those who emphasize their ‘Russian-ness’ against ‘Dutch-ness’, and those who adopt Dutch views about Russian-speakers (integration-oriented). The emphasis on ‘Russian-ness’ as a general identity may be also viewed as an expression of protest. In some cases, using the dominant criminal stereotypes, Russian-speakers present a positive image of themselves. In contrast to those Russians, who want to be separate in their own closed community, they (other Russian-speakers) have joined the Dutch society and have adopted Dutch views towards minorities. They themselves are ‘good immigrants’ who are well integrated in society. They also reinforce the potential fear of the Russian Mafia, expose the Russian ‘criminals’ in the Netherlands, warn the Dutch against the threat of the Russian Mafia (as in the case of Anna) and demonstrate how Russian immigrants are helpful in discovering and combating crime. The case that I present here can serve as an illustration to this distinction between ‘good’ (i.e. integrated) and ‘bad’ (‘Russian-oriented’) immigrants.

The case of a ‘good immigrant’

One example of a ‘good immigrant’ is Alexander, Russian immigrant and owner of a restaurant in Amsterdam. He met Victor, a Russian street musician, and invited him to play in his restaurant. Victor agreed, but in his time off continued to play with a group of Russian street

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92 For an analysis and more details of this case see Siegel and Bovenkerk 2000.
musicians in Amsterdam. Alexander thought it was bad for the reputation of his business and asked Victor to stop playing on the street. Victor refused. In addition he made Alexander jealous when he got a Dutch girlfriend. The relationship between the two soured. According to Victor, Alexander spread ‘bad rumours’ about him and accused him of threatening to kill Alexander and take over his restaurant. The story even appeared in the Dutch press. Victor was described as an illegal immigrant, a member of the Russian Mafia. By publishing the story Alexander exploited the prevailing ethnic stereotype in his personal relationship with an ex-compatriot. Using the image of Victor as connected to a Russian criminal organization, Alexander protested against the generalization that ‘all Russians are criminals’. His point was to present a positive image of himself, as an integrated immigrant who revealed the Russian criminal in the Netherlands, and by this demonstrated that ‘good’ Russian immigrants help to combat Russian Mafia.

The emphasis on integration is strong among the Russian-speakers, though the question of self-identification is more problematic. They continue to consider the Russian language as the only link between them. They make, however, various distinctions: between Europeans and Asian Russian-speakers, between Jews and non-Jews, between educated and ‘simple people’. The ambivalent situation is clear: though participating in various Russian events in the cultural life of the community, Russian-speakers often claim that no common characteristics exist between them. Various small circles of Russian-speakers exist, the members of which maintain contacts based on combining their common cultural values and norms with what they adopt in the Netherlands. There are Armenian and Georgian networks. Other Russian-speakers stay in touch with each other based on professional or business interests, such as musicians, street painters, businessmen. Many prefer to spend free time in Dutch company rather than in the company of their compatriots.

3. c. 3 Who is Russian among Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands?

The next question is which of the ethnic groups from the former Soviet Union are represented in the Netherlands? Is there any connection between immigrants from the Caucasus and criminal organizations from this area that operate on Dutch territory?

In ethnic terms the ‘Russian’ community in the Netherlands consists of Jews, ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Georgians, Chechens, and others. The largest ethnic group is Jews, who arrived in the Netherlands between 1990 and 1995 either directly from the former Soviet Union or after living some time in Israel. They settled in the Netherlands, hiding their Israeli citizenship. Hundreds of Russian Jews came directly from the former Soviet Union. Various Jewish organizations provide some statistical data, however these differ from one organisation to another. Russian Jews in the Netherlands maintain contacts with each other and with other non-Jewish Russians rather than mixing with the Dutch Jewish community. Many of them however, send their children to the Jewish elementary school Rosj Pina, or to the Maimonides high school in Amsterdam. The immigrants from the Caucasus do maintain contacts with other Russian-speakers and participate in cultural activities organized by Russian organizations. Some Russians have American or Australian citizenship.

According to Snel et al. (2000) from the University of Rotterdam on 1 January 1999 there were 19,695 citizens from the former Soviet Union in the Netherlands. From the Russian Federation there were 2800, Georgia – 655, Armenia – 600 and Azerbaijan –180

93 De Volkskrant, 17 August 1999.
The period between 1997 and 1999 indicates an increase of asylum seekers in the Netherlands from the Caucasus. The number of migrants from Azerbaijan increased by 300% (Zwirs, 2000:24). Remarkable is that all (100%) migrants from Azerbaijan, 94% of Armenians and 95% of Georgians entered the Dutch territory ‘illegally’ (Zwirs 2000: 33). Most of the migrants (2/3) paid in cash or in gold to be smuggled from the Caucasus to Western Europe (Zwirs 2000: 46). According to one of my informants:

‘Jews have the best chances. Then – Armenians, their stories are that they escaped the ethnic war in Baku (Azerbaijan). They get A-status more often. Others, for example Georgians, are not trusted; almost all of them are refused. They go to Germany. And lately Chechens are welcomed as victims of war’.

Members of ethnic minorities are ‘used to the idea of multiple identities even before migration and they choose identities according to the situation’ (Res and Drusry 1994:5). Criminal groups and individuals construct ethnicity in various ways as they manifest themselves as criminal for insiders’ and outsiders’ use.

The case of Vachtang

An example is provided by the case of Vachtang. The Georgian Vachtang arrived in the Netherlands with false documents, indicating that he was a Chechen. In the mid 1990s Chechens could get political refugee status easier than others, because of the war in the region. After two years of bureaucratic procedures Vachtang received his residence permit. In the evening he celebrated this with his friends in a Russian cafe in Amsterdam. The same evening he confessed to those who were sitting at the table that he was not Chechen at all. In the beginning he was still careful and said that his mother was Chechen but that his father was Georgian. When his Russian-speaking friends did not believe him he ‘confessed’ again, saying that he was one hundred percent Georgian. He also took care to spread this information among other Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. By announcing himself as a Georgian and by dissociating himself form the Chechens, he wanted to improve his image. He knew that Russians usually consider Chechens as criminals, potential criminals, or connected to criminals. For the outside world Vachtang used one stereotype (Chechens — war victim), but for the harmless Russian-speaking community he applied another ethnic identity (Georgian), which ‘made a better impression’. This was situational management of ethnicity. Similarly, the JMW (Jewish Social Work) claimed that many non-Jews presented themselves as Jews, by providing false documents, to receive their residence permit and get assistance from the Jewish community in the Netherlands.

Russian-speakers often mention their place of birth, emphasizing the cultural and educational gap between those who come from large Russian cities and those from provincial towns. But they make a further, more critical, distinctions between ‘Russian Europeans’, from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ukraine, Moldova, etc. and ‘Russian Asians’, from the Caucasus, Bukhara and Central Asia, dividing them into ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’, according to the level of ‘civilization’.
3. d. The professional occupation

Trying to answer the question whether or not there is a community of the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands it is necessary to discuss their professional position and occupation. The categories of Russian-speaking migrants in the Netherlands are of a great variety: asylum seekers, immigrants, illegal migrants, temporary workers, students, seasonal workers, refugees, commuters, tourists, transmigrants and spouses of Dutch citizens. Most of the Russian-speaking immigrants are urban professionals or internationally oriented businessmen. Business people represent the largest occupational group of Russian-speakers. Some change their official status, others belong to several categories at the same time or successively. Thus, temporary workers may decide to ask for asylum, and tourists become illegal immigrants. Russian-speakers often manipulate their legal status. In the following example a Russian immigrant told me how her mother changed her status from tourist to illegal migrant:

‘My mother came to help with our newborn child. She had a tourist visa, but she stayed, because I had to go back to work and we needed her to stay with the child. The only thing she was scared to do was shopping, because she would have to have contact with Dutch people then. For the rest of the time she walked in the neighbourhood, socializing with our Russian friends and even going out with them sometimes. She was not hiding, only from police’.

Many Russian-speakers are transmigrant businessmen, i.e. legal immigrant-businessmen, who usually work in Russia, but who have families in the Netherlands. In some cases they have two homes (sometimes also two families) and work in both countries. They live a few months here, a few months there. Others return once a month (or more often) to their families in the Netherlands. This way of life became especially popular after the 1998 economic crisis in Russia, when many Russian-speaking businessmen, who were already permanently living in the Netherlands, were forced to close down their companies, and use their connections in Russia to continue business there. Lately, since the revival of economic opportunities many businesses are re-opening in the West (see examples further in this chapter). One of the cultural characteristics of these transmigrants is their nationalistic and chauvinistic self-identification as Russians. They always emphasize that their homeland is Russia, that they posses the unpredictable ‘Russian soul’, and that they will never exchange Russia for any other country. They pass on this attitude to their children who live in the Netherlands. Some of the transmigrant businessmen speak only Russian, employing translators when doing business in Europe.

The category of commuters differs from that of transmigrant businessmen in that they never legalize their status in the Netherlands. They usually invest in real estate in the most luxurious and rich suburbs and prestigious quarters of large cities. Though their families live in the Netherlands and their children attend either a regular Dutch or an international school, they too never apply for asylum. Their main business until the 1998 economic crisis was the car trade. They travelled to the West on behalf of their clients to buy a specific car, and then drove it to Russia. Since 1998 the car-business became less popular, because the market for imported cars and car-parts became saturated in Russia and it became possible to buy in Russia itself any foreign car or any spare part. Being a commuter does not mean, however, that one’s situation may not change. Thus, one of my informants finally decided to apply for asylum. In 2001 my informants often told me about a new wave of Russian businessmen, without legal status, who come in the Netherlands. Once sitting in restaurant ‘Kalinka’, my informant pointed to a group of young people sitting next to us:
‘You have to look at these newcomers, they are very rich. These are not regular businesspeople; they come here for a "short business". They will not stay for more than a few weeks, go to the bank and then – back to Moscow’.

Though she did not say it explicitly, what she meant by ‘short business’ was actually money laundering from Russia. When I later talked with these young people they told me they did not want to live permanently in the Netherlands, because it is ‘boring’. They emphasized their international contacts and their professional ambitions, which ‘could not be restricted to one specific country’. The link between criminal activities and the category of commuters was also made in another case by my informants, in reference to a group of Russians who settled in the south of the Netherlands (see also chapter 5).

Temporary workers form another category. It includes specialists and professionals, who come to the Netherlands for a few years to work in universities or large companies. They get temporary residence permits. Some people from this category told me that they ‘like Holland, but they also like Switzerland or the USA’, i.e. they would be prepared to accept assignments in other countries as well. This is what one informant says:

‘The Netherlands is professionally interesting for me, so I came to work here, and this is what I am interested in, not the country itself, or a possibility to stay here, but to learn new things from the Dutch’.

Sometimes they try to extend their contracts, but in most cases they leave the country after completing their projects.

The category of foreign students is similar to the temporary workers. I do not mean to include the legal immigrant-students, but only those who came to the Netherlands to study for a few years. The majority of these students stay in the Netherlands after completing their studies (mainly technical professions), usually as a result of marriages with Dutch.

Then there is the category of seasonal workers. It includes Russian-speaking street musicians, artists and painters. Many of these decide to stay illegally for more than just a season. One of my informants for example, a street painter, gets his temporary residence permit for a period of three months, but always remains for 9-10 months illegally. He then returns to St. Petersburg and comes back next year for the same period.

A large group of Russian-speakers belongs to the category of illegal migrants. There are several ways to become an illegal migrant in the Netherlands. The first is to enter the country with a tourist or business visa and stay on, as in the above-mentioned case. The second is to have an asylum application refused and then simply ‘disappear’\(^94\). The third is to enter the Netherlands from neighbouring Germany or Belgium. There have been many attempts by social scientists to study illegal migrant communities in the Netherlands (Burgers and Engbersen 1999, Engbersen et al 1999). The methods vary from studying police files to a ‘snowball’ method. In case of Russian-speakers, police files produce little results, since the data refer to the numbers of immigrants arrested by police, while most illegal migrants are never caught, as my informants explained. The main problem with the ‘snowball’ method is the fact that Russian-speakers do not tell even their close friends what their real status is. In Russian-speaking circles it is considered impolite to ask about one’s status, because it is believed that ‘Russians have to help Russians anyway’; there is a solidarity without discriminating on the basis of legality. As mentioned earlier, when asked about their legal status, Russian-speakers would rather lie than jeopardize themselves. Or, as one informant told me: when a Dutchman asks him about his legality he usually answers: ‘What do you

\(^{94}\) To become so-called ‘met onbestemde bestemming vertrokken’ – departed without known destination.
mean illegal? We are freeborn people, which means we are legal everywhere. Or were my parents forbidden to make me?"

Russian-speakers who have been granted asylum in the Netherlands usually try to find work in Dutch companies, or legalize the documents of their professional and educational qualifications. Russian diplomas (e.g. those held by physicians and lawyers) are not recognized in the Netherlands. According to my informants, it is 'pure discrimination based on old-fashioned stereotypes'. This limits their opportunities. One informant, who had been working for several years as an oculist in one of Moscow’s leading hospitals, was made to return to medical school at a Dutch University and start from the third year. It took her five years to become recognized as a Dutch oculist. In another case, a mathematician with a Ph.D. degree received forty refusals from IT companies and finally had to attend a course for programming to get a job in a Dutch start-up firm. Similar obstacles exist in other immigrant countries, with slight variations in policies. Thus Germany recognizes Russian psychology degrees, while the Netherlands does not. Israel recognizes almost all degrees in technology and exact sciences, but not in medicine or law. The popular explanations are that 'many Russians come to Israel with fake documents'. One Israeli official told me that these restrictions had a long history, the Georgian Jews who had arrived in the 1970s had produced degrees in dentistry, because it was considered a very respected and well-paid profession in Israel. After investigation it turned out that most of them had never studied medicine and their documents were forgeries. The Israeli officials responded by introducing examinations for all immigrant Russian physicians.

Often the occupation of my informants in the former Soviet Union had been different from their present occupation. When talking about work, Russian-speakers distinguish between their 'previous life' and life after immigration. Those who could not find jobs in their profession in the Netherlands turned to business. My informants estimate that hundreds of small, and several middle-sized companies were established by Russian-speaking immigrants in the beginning of the 1990s in the Netherlands. Immigrant companies traded with companies in the former Soviet republics in chemicals, electronics, vodka, food and textile. Other immigrants work as translators, waiters, babysitters, piano teachers. Many immigrants consider re-training, some actually do attend courses to re-qualify or to learn new skills. Most Russian-speakers attend Dutch courses of different levels, from free courses provided by the Jewish school for foreign parents to expansive private lessons and courses at universities.

There is a group of Russian-speaking women, the so-called 'Russian wives', married with Dutch men, whom they met either in Russia or during their trips abroad. This group is especially active in organizing cultural and social events for the Russian-speakers, since they usually do not work and complain of boredom. Some of them, however, try to occupy themselves by selling Russian products, shopping, or participating in various alternative groups or sects (such as yoga, 'witches', transcendental meditation, etc). Some of my informants work for escort clubs or as independent call girl. One of the latter said:

'My husband is a good guy. But the cultural gap big between us is too big. He is working the whole day or watching football. We have a nice house, but what do I have to do the whole day, look at the walls? And it is always good to have some extra money, I used to dress nicely, but since we married I have to report to him on every cent when I buy something for myself. Now he does not have to know what I am doing during the day'.

The unhappy Russian women who could not find a 'common language' with their Dutch husbands were coping with their fate, looking for an alternative occupation (such as prostitution) and contacts with their compatriots, who allegedly 'could understand and identify' with their situation. In many cases I have heard from my informants that they
considered divorce or actually divorced their Dutch husbands, 'because of the lack of understanding'.

The complaints about Dutch husbands are not typical to Russian women only. Similar dissatisfaction was expressed for example by Colombian women, some of whom described their partners as 'being mean and tight-fisted' (Zaitch 2001:104). The picture of a Dutch man, as drawn by Russian-speaking women is that of 'non-erudite', 'dull', 'limited', 'uncultured', 'greedy', 'feminine' and 'infantile'. According to some informants, Dutch men have no manners: 'they never open the door a for woman', 'they don't give her a hand to support her when she gets out of a bus', 'they let a woman carry heavy bags', 'they lick their dirty fingers'. 'they are arrogant and lecture everybody on how to behave', 'they talk too much about themselves', or 'they ask too many personal questions'. They are egoistic: 'in a canteen they will leave a woman to pay for herself', 'they give cheap and “practical” presents, not what their partner really wanted and then tell them that this present is better (more useful) for her'. Dutch men are also non-masculine: 'they cry like small girls', 'they talk too much'. From all my informants married to Dutch men, no one was satisfied with her partner. Usually the explanation was 'cultural differences'. In the literature the cultural gap is described as a well known feature of mixed marriages and not typical to the Russian-Dutch intermarriages only. The cultural gap is used as an excuse, or an alibi, for conflicts between the spouses (Dienke Hondius 1999, Zaitch 2001). In the case of the Russian woman married to a Dutch man, mentioned above, however, the argument of 'cultural differences' is used to explain and justify her activities as a call girl.

3. e. The social and cultural life of immigrants and other Russian-speakers

There is quite an intensive social life in the Russian community: there are different Russian churches, Russian clubs and restaurants, a cultural centre that organizes concerts, literary evenings, lectures and performances by Russian-speaking artists and writers. There are also 'Russian' shops where products 'made in Russia' and imported via Israel and Germany are sold. Books, videos and audio articles in the Russian language are also available. The café 'Oblomov' offered an opportunity for Russian-speakers to meet but also presented cultural events and concerts. Since the end of December 1999 there is a new Russian restaurant, 'Kalinka', that constitutes a good example of the multi-ethnic Russian-speaking community: the manager is Armenian, the cook is Georgian, and almost every evening a Russian-Gypsy’s trio, or a Russian duet performs. There is however not one specific cultural centre where Russian institutions are concentrated.95

Russian-speakers usually tend to emphasize the 'common past' through celebrating holidays in the 'Russian way' (a Christmas tree is called a ‘New Year’s tree’, and Santa Claus becomes Ded Moroz), through Russian jokes, Russian songs, dances, etc. There is one Russian bookstore in Amsterdam, Pegasus, and there are different possibilities to order Russian books by mail from Germany or Israel. After visiting their homeland many Russians return with suitcases full of Russian books or videocassettes. There is a Russian pop group called Sputnik in Amsterdam. Russian 'mushroom picnics' are also very popular, though picking mushrooms is considered an illegal activity in the Netherlands.96 The most popular entertainment, however, are home parties (tusovki). Great amounts of expensive food are

95 Since 2001 there is a periodical ‘RUS’, which informs its readers about the ‘Russian-speaking community’, though it is unclear who is financing the journal; no information is available on its owners.
96 For a description of a mushroom picnic see Siegel and Bovenkerk 2000
served there, numerous toasts proposed, interrupted by dancing, singing and piano playing. Young people often consume a lot of alcohol and soft drugs, usually in another room or outside or on the balcony. Hard drugs are not acceptable during the home parties.

As mentioned earlier, many Russian-speakers consider themselves émigrés, as described in classic Russian literature, living in a foreign country. This image is especially popular among older people. They maintain links with Russia, often travel there and watch Russian TV programs via satellite. Actually the up-to-date information and news on what happens in the world, including the Netherlands, they obtain from watching Russian TV.

There are four different Russian Orthodox Churches in the Netherlands: the Russian Orthodox Church (Pravoslavnaya Tserkov), the Foreign Church (Zagranichnaya Tserkov), the Synodical Church (Synodalnaya Tserkov) and the Patriarchal Church (Vselelenskyi Patriarchat). The most popular is the Russian Orthodox Church in Amsterdam, where about a hundred people are registered, one third of whom are Russians. Twenty to thirty people attend the weekly service, mostly Serbs, Russians, Georgians, Dutch (and tourists). On major holidays such as Christmas or Easter hundreds of people attend the service and procession, which takes place along the Kerkstraat in the centre of Amsterdam. During some celebrations I noticed that Jews were also attending the service. Some of them told me that they had been baptized in Russia. Others attended the Church because they liked liturgy and Russian Orthodox rituals. There is also an Armenian Orthodox Church, however my Armenian informants were disappointed to find out that the services were held in Turkish. There is almost no contacts between Russian and Turkish Armenians.

Parents encourage their children to learn Russian, either in private sessions or by sending them to Russian Sunday school at the Russian Orthodox Church. There are about 40 pupils, between three and twenty one years old. Russian Jews celebrate Jewish holidays, such as Passover, Rosj Hashana (Jewish New Year) and Purim. They are usually invited by Dutch Jewish families or attend parties at various synagogues. Many, especially mixed couples (Jew and non-Jew), more often attend the Liberal Synagogue (in Amsterdam and The Hague). There are also Orthodox synagogues. Dutch Orthodox Jews organize courses on Judaism in the Russian language. Most Russian Jews now circumcise their sons. In the former Soviet Union they were not even familiar with this ritual. In the Netherlands, they feel free to express their Jewish identity by participating in Jewish rituals. Another celebration is Bar or Bat Mitsva, the introduction of the thirteen year old boy, or the twelve year old girl into the adult Jewish community. If circumcision is a symbolic statement of their Jewish identity, Bar or Bat Mitsva is also a manifestation of the economic and social position of the parents. Taking their lead from Dutch Jews, Russian Jews now organize feasts in luxury hotels, or at home, inviting hundreds of guests and entertainers. There are, however, Russian Jews who say that 'they have never been religious and all these rituals have no meaning' for them.

3. f. Facing up to the criminal image of Russians in the Netherlands

Upon their arrival in the Netherlands Russian-speaking immigrants encounter a negative criminal image prevailing in Dutch media and among large parts of the Dutch public. Authors writing about Russian émigrés in other countries have observed the same sequence of events. Rosner studied Russian emigrants in the Brighton Beach area of Brooklyn in the 1970s and

97 Hebrew word for 'lots'. The holiday is based on the Book of Esther and is usually celebrated by masquerade balls and children parades, drinking of wine is encouraged.
noted that the criminal stereotype was waiting for them when they arrived. There had been newspaper reports about merciless Russian gangsters and the Russian mob had been romanticized in novels and films. The American public found it ‘sexy to read about immigrants from the former Soviet Union who were involved in criminal activities on a grand scale’ (Rosner 1995). Amir has demonstrated the same mechanism operating in the case of Georgian Jews who came to Israel in the mid-1970s. From the onset of their immigration, the Israeli media painted a frightening picture of ‘special’ types of Georgian criminals who committed very serious offences (Amir, 1996:28). In Israel too, some immigrants similarly lived up to the expectations and the entire group of Georgian Jews was stigmatized. The same happened in the Netherlands. The case of JMW, presented above, is only one example of the consequences of the criminal image of the Russian-speakers. I shall focus now on the media presentation of ‘Russians’ in the Netherlands, its results and the reactions of Russian-speakers.

From the moment the Iron Curtain was lifted in 1990, the Dutch media focused continuously on Russian prostitution, document forgery, trafficking in drugs, forging of brand names, and the protection rackets. Sensational stories made headlines all over the world. The first sources of information were the United States police investigations and criminological reports (cf. Finckenauer and Waring 1997) referring to large networks of Russian émigré criminals. Germany, Austria and Switzerland were next: the Russian Mafia was coming! Then the news hit the press that Russians were buying the most luxurious property on the French Cote d’Azur. In France, Germany and Belgium, literature on Russian immigration contained sensational stories on Russian criminals. The criminal network seemed to follow the path of emigration. Nodal points became Tel Aviv, Berlin, Vienna and Antwerp, which seems to prove the first criminal export model pertaining to how the Mafia establishes criminal posts around the world.

Russian criminologists also contributed to the growing fear that the Russian Mafia was coming to the West, by continuously warning their Western colleagues against the Russian criminal organizations and their intention to conquer new markets in Europe. The numerous criminalistica writings from the former Soviet Union contributed to the construction of the stereotype. Not only the post-Soviet citizens but also the Russian media faced the confusion in terminology, especially in the coverage of activities of the Russian criminal organizations. In the former Soviet Union, however, the problem of presentation of Russian criminals is more serious, since the organized crime in the former Soviet Union has manifested its presence in various political and economic areas, and has also penetrated the sources of information sphere of the media itself (Rawlinson 1998). The affiliates of the criminal organizations in the media are interested in presenting the stereotype of the violent Russian Mafiosi, rather than go into the details of their real business: complicated financial and economic affairs, money laundering, computer crimes, etc. And this especially corresponds with the public interest in ‘sexy Russian Mafia’: a violent stereotype of Russian criminal culture. In Rawlinson’s words: ‘The greatest concern engendered by the media coverage of Russian organized crime is that once again we are being led down a path of mythical construction by fanning the flames of alien conspiracy theory’ (Rawlinson 1998:357).

In Europe, the image of mythical and extremely dangerous Russian Mafiosi spreads to all Russian-speakers who arrive there. The message is clear: the Russian Mafia is coming to the West and slowly becomes a threat to the European economy and to public security. To justify the stereotype of Russian Mafiosi, the activities of the Russian criminal organizations in Europe are perceived as a fact, as a reality. Criminal activities of the Russian Mafia range from fraud to trade in weapons and nuclear materials — a level of criminal sophistication organized crime never had before! The production of Russian synthetic drugs resulted in the fact that Russian criminal groups are now providing their own drugs to the West. Prostitution,
racketeering, smuggling stolen cars to Eastern Europe and Russia, the usual activities of
criminal organizations, are also included in Russian Mafia’s business. Specific ‘Russian’
criminal activities are the illegal trade in animal furs, stolen cultural objects or art-pieces.
How do Russian-speakers interpret the discrepancy between stereotypes as presented in the
Dutch media and their own views? Is the ‘Russian Mafia’ on the Dutch screen indeed active
in the Netherlands, according to the Russian-speakers?

According to media reports many Dutch officials feared that the Russian Mafia could become
a real threat to the proper functioning of financial institutions and legitimate businesses and
that it would jeopardize the safety of individuals (and not only Russian-speaking immigrants,
but also members of other ethnic groups, including Dutch). In general the popular images of
Russians are connected with Mafia. According to Rosner (1995) the American public,
fascinated with godfathers and violence, has discovered a new hero: the criminal Russian. The
same process is going on in the Netherlands. The ‘Sexy Russian Mafia’ provided the public
with a relative innocuous image of a sophisticated and highly educated criminal. According to
many informants, the real Russian Mafia does not deal with stealing. It operates on a much
higher level, in hi-tech fraud, computer crime, and other non-conventional Mafia activities.

The negative image prevailing in the Dutch media has directly influenced all Russian
immigrant communities and seriously hampered the individual life chances of many Russian—
speakers. According to all my informants they are discriminated on the labour market: Russian
academic qualifications and other formal documents are not accepted, as they are suspected to
be forged; Russian women are treated as harlots; some locations (such as Russian restaurants)
are considered Russian territory and therefore a place to avoid. Later in this study I present
specific cases of negative stereotypes: of a Russian woman as a potential prostitute (Case of
Anna), of the underestimated Russian-speaking specialist (The engineer who could not find
job). In chapter 4 I refer to a Russian businesswoman who decided to start her business only
because her education and experience were not accepted by Dutch companies (From We-East to
Natalia LTD).

In reaction to the negative images Russian-speaking immigrants can theoretically choose
one of the following possibilities: 1. They can organize to protest against discrimination and
stigmatization of the community, 2. They can ignore or even identify with the prevailing views,
blaming some individuals in the community and express thereby their integration in the host
society, 3. They can use a new alternative, namely, manipulate the prevailing stereotypes in
their own interests. I shall focus on these three possibilities in more details.

1. When a group of immigrants manages to accumulate power and when it possesses an
elite that provides leadership, it may organize to protest. In the United States as well as in Israel
(cf. Zionist Forum) the Russian anti-defamation movement has successfully campaigned for
respect. During the Gregory Lerner affair, the Israeli Minister of Trade Nathan Scharansky
openly accused the police and judicial institutions of pursuing a policy designed to provoke
anti-Russian sentiments98. In all the Russian-speaking media the so-called ‘Godfather of
Russian Mafia in Israel’ was presented as a national hero and a victim of a generalized
stigmatisation of the whole immigrant community.

2. When the immigrant group is small and fragmented and therefore almost powerless,
as is the case in the Netherlands, and in many other countries where Russian-speakers live, the
negative image is harder to fight. There is a chance that it may not only be applied to the group
as a whole, but also be internalised by its members. In the Netherlands Russian-speakers tend to
mistrust each other, preferring to keep a distance. The question sign is always there: is he or she
engaged in illegal activities in the Netherlands, in the former Soviet Union or both? Immigrants

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may only individually protest against the bad image and they do so by regarding the Dutch public and especially the police as naive and childish.

'I know they consider us as one monolithic group, who arrived from the wild country, ruled by KGB, and about which they know only that they drink vodka there and are involved only in prostitution and killings. I don’t blame them (Dutch people) for their poor education or lack of knowledge. But when they encounter live people, immigrants, who look like them, eat like them and even know something better than them, they are not open to change their minds, and for this narrow-mindedness they are to be blamed’, said Natalia, a Russian businesswoman.

Though I have heard many such complaints in conversations with the Russian-speakers, no organized immigrant protest has yet been voiced. Epstein emphasized that ‘a view of the ethnic group ‘from without’ in its external interaction needs to be supplemented by one ‘from within’‘ (Epstein 1978:xii). The creation of identity is a cultural process, in which Russian-speakers face new ‘discoveries’. They found out that in Dutch eyes they all belong (without any individual differentiation) to the single ethnic group of ‘Russians’.

In defining functions of stereotypes, Eriksen mentioned that ‘they can sometimes function as self-fulfilling prophecies’ (1993:24). A dominating image can influence the behaviour and perception of a dominated group by systematically telling that they are criminal, immoral, etc. How this image can be used for the benefit of this group will become clear from the specific cases I analyse in this study.

3. Manipulation of identity appears in many immigrant communities, but in the Netherlands it is the most characteristic way of behaviour of the Russian-speakers. They do not organize to contest their negative image openly, they also do not identify with it, but very often they use this image for their own benefit. Upon their arrival in the West, it did not take the Russian-speakers long to realize that their interests could be served by claiming their ‘ethnic rights’. While ethnicity had been suppressed in the Soviet Union, they came to societies with a multi-cultural policy, where ethnicity is basically respected. They quickly came to understand the power of ethnic identity, their ‘Russian-ness’. They defined their aims and their ethnicity played an instrumental role in achieving them. Various studies have described the manipulation of identity by ethnic groups (Siegel, 1998).

In ‘Red Mafia’, Gurov cites an anecdote. One night Militia General V. Ignatov was walking to his hotel in Rome with two female translators. It was hot, and he took off his shirt. Suddenly they were surrounded by Italian youngsters who tried to approach the women. ‘The General did not call the police. He went over to the youngsters and said ‘I am russo mafioso’, after which the racketeers disappeared’ (1995: 309-310).

The Red Mafia has a terrible reputation all over the world. Like elsewhere, most Russian-speakers in the Netherlands were horrified by the Red Mafia images. Very soon, however, immigrants discovered that a criminal image could be turned to their advantage. It has since become a manipulation asset. I will illustrate this theoretical point with several examples I came across during my fieldwork.99

The case of Anna

Anna is a forty year old blonde Russian woman, who arrived in the Netherlands with her husband-businessman and their teen-age daughter. Her degree as pediatrician has not been

99 More cases on manipulation of criminal identity among Russian-speakers in the Netherlands are analysed in Siegel and Bovenkerk 2000 and in Bovenkerk, Siegel and Zaitch (forthcoming).
recognized, but her experience as a model for Russian fashion journals was highly appreciated and she was often invited to pose for cosmetic advertisements in international journals. Anna, who always used to work in Russia, decided that it was too late for her to start medicine from scratch and tried to apply for work in travel agencies, after attending a short course of retraining, organized by the 'arbeidsbureau' (work agency). The three travel agencies she approached did not employ her, in the fourth she worked for some time, but, she told me that she was forced to leave because her boss called her 'my Natasha' and made constant passes at her. According to Anna her Russian background always resulted in immodest behaviour of her male employers.

'When they hear my Russian accent they change their attitude, I am not a woman any longer, but a whore, towards whom everything is permitted, like animals. They cannot even imagine that their stereotypes could be wrong. As my neighbour once sincerely asked me: Why do all Russian girls become prostitutes?'

One day, she told me, her patience was exhausted. She was sitting with her daughter in a cafe in Amsterdam and was approached by a man, who asked her whether they would like to 'make some money'. First Anna did not understand what he meant, but her daughter, who speaks fluent Dutch, explained that he offered them to work in his escort bureau. Anna asked him curiously why he thought they needed work, and he answered that he heard them talking Russian. She then answered that she was not Russian, but Polish. Her daughter whispered to her that it did not matter; Russian or Polish... for Dutch men it is all the same, but the man left.

'I discovered then that Polish women have a better reputation than Russian women, and since I had Polish blood from my grandmother's side I started presenting myself as Polish. I am now working; everybody at my workplace thinks I am Polish and nobody teases me as being a Russian whore'.

On another occasion Anna participated in a March 8th party in a Russian restaurant in Amsterdam. On this day International Woman's Day is celebrated in the former Soviet Union as one of the most important national holidays. She sat at a table with two friends. At another table there were several Russian women and three Dutchmen. When one Dutch man announced that he would like to invite 'this blonde woman there' (he pointed at Anna) to dance with him, two women who were sitting near him tried to talk him out of it, because 'she is a Russian prostitute', and 'you don't want to have problems with Mafia, do you?' Neither of these women were acquainted with Anna.

In the discussion of Anna's story I want to focus on several elements: the manipulation of ethnic identity, the link between ethnicity and sexuality, the adoption and use of negative ethnic stereotypes among members of the ethnic group, and the connection between ethnic and criminal image. Sexuality is an important cultural element in the formation of images and attitudes. The case of Anna shows that it is embedded in the construction of ethnicity. The generalization of the prevailing stereotype of Russian women was the basis for the way men treated her. According to Edelman: 'Repression of a group of people often entails attributing unique erotic qualities to the women of this group' (1988.83). The construction of the stereotype of Russian women as prostitutes defines the whole group in general terms. This affected her relationship with other people, both Dutch and Russian.

Anna experienced negative reactions towards her being Russian and chose another ethnic identity to avoid such reactions. Her choice for a Polish rather than a Russian identity was based on her own experience and her opinion of the relative rating of various ethnic
identities. Anna’s daughter, however, knew that Polish women too were stigmatized in the Netherlands, as were all East-European women in general. Sexuality is closely linked with ethnic labels. These stereotypes are adopted even by Russian-speakers themselves. They may use them cleverly for their own interest, as they know exactly what Dutch think about Russian women, and which stereotypes prevail in Dutch society. For they have either experienced the same negative effects themselves, or learned about them from others. This knowledge allows them to manipulate these general stereotypes. The media spread stories about girls who were promised jobs in Western restaurants and offices, but landed in brothels without any money and documents, being regularly beaten and threatened by their pimps. Almost nothing is known, however, about ‘voluntary prostitution’ of Russian women, who have opted for it themselves. There were Russian-speaking women I came across during the study who perceived prostitution as temporary work, or ‘economic necessity’, or even simply as an adventure. The following example illustrates this.

Russian call-girls

Twenty-year old Lena and her nineteen-year old friend Natasha came to the Netherlands in 1996. A few months earlier Lena had met Eric, a Dutch tourist visiting Russia, and she told him she would like to get out of Russia. She made an agreement with him to draw up a fictitious contract stating they were ‘living together’ (common law marriage) and she rented his house for a very low price. In Amsterdam Lena and Natasha met other Russian immigrants, one of whom told them they could earn money working for one of the Dutch escort services, but they were not accepted to work there since they did not have work permits. They decided to start their own business, as call girls. They got a circle of regular clients, the majority of whom were Russian businessmen, but also Dutch men. They worked for some time at home or ‘out’. Once they were approached by a local pimp. When he tried to ‘make a deal’ with the girls they told him that they already had ‘Russian Mafia protection in the Netherlands’. They never saw him again. After the economic crisis in Russia in 1998, the girls lost many of their clients and stopped working. They told me they had opted for prostitution only temporary, as an ‘economic necessity’ and they did not regret they made money in that way. They told me that because prostitution is legal in the Netherlands, they thought that ‘Dutch norms are much healthier than in Russia’. They also emphasized that many Russian girls would like to come to the Netherlands to work voluntarily as prostitutes to ‘promise themselves a better future when they go back to Russia’.

'I lost myself?'

I met Valentina at one of the tussovki in the beginning of my fieldwork in 1999. She was a good-looking blonde woman, about 50 years old, dressed in an exclusive chic Chanel dress, with a diamond ring on every finger and a heavy golden collier adorned with precious stones. She had already been five years in the Netherlands. On several occasions she told me parts of her story, each time slightly different, but always with the clear message that immigration had stolen her real identity. Other informants confirmed that her case was very special, because in order to settle officially in the Netherlands she had totally changed her personality. She

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100 The more detailed version of this story appeared in Siegel and Bovenkerk 2000.
presented herself as suffering from a deep psychological crisis and cursed the moment she decided to emigrate. She was very popular in Russian-speaking immigrant circles and was always invited to parties and gatherings. Highly educated and a good musician she was always the ‘soul of the party’, as my informants defined her. While Russian herself, she arrived in the Netherlands from the Caucasus. Her official version during the interview was that her husband and child were killed during the ethnic war, that she was raped and beaten and escaped to another former Soviet republic, where she led a miserable existence, having no work, no money and was reduced to begging in the street. There she was forced by local Mafia to distribute drugs and when she refused she was threatened. She escaped to another city, from where friends helped her to move to Poland, and from there to the Netherlands.

The unofficial version of her story was different: She had lived in one of the Caucasian republics with her husband (they had no children). When the tensions began they went to Moscow, where one of her husbands’ relatives had made a fortune in the privatisation period. He granted them the use of one of his luxury apartments in the city centre. Her husband worked in the office of his relative while she led a life of luxury, with vacations in France or Italy every year and frequent visits to Moscow’s finest restaurants and fanciest nightclubs. She wore expensive clothes and drove a BMW. But then the relative of her husband got into financial problems and he sent her to the Netherlands, where a friend of Valentina lived with her family. Her husband stayed on in Moscow, coming over from time to time to visit her in the Netherlands. When she was living in the ‘camp’, preparing for the interview with the Ministry of Justice, she decided it would be more impressive and convincing to claim that she never had the opportunity to study in Russia because of the war.

‘I thought it would be easy to convince them (Dutch authorities), if I presented myself as miserable. But now I have no chance to find work, and I am not young enough to start again with all these courses. I cannot even learn proper Dutch, because I convinced myself, as well as them, that I am helpless and pitiful. This immigration was the one big mistake of my life. I simply lost myself!’

In this case the combination of different elements was used in manipulating ethnic identity with the purpose of convincing the Dutch authorities to grant Valentina her immigrant status. Presenting herself as a victim of ethnic war as well as the Russian Mafia - two threatening and convincing images - Valentina hoped to prove she had a right to the protection and favour of Dutch officials. The criminal context played an instrumental role in this case in attracting the special attention to her situation. Using the prevailing stereotypes Valentina presented herself as a victim. In the process she reinforced the potential fear of the Russian Mafia. The story of Valentina is probably the most extreme case of lying, manipulation of identity and construction of a totally new self-image that I came across during my study. After her immigration she went through an identity crisis and used the image of the Russian Mafia as a compulsive element in the construction of a new identity.

The engineer who could not find a job

Igor was a successful engineer at one of the metallurgical works plant in Russia. In 1991 he arrived in the Netherlands with his wife and two children. He had no doubts that he would find work soon, because of his high qualifications (he also had Ph.D. in mathematics). He wrote to the largest metallurgical plants in the Netherlands, but they told him he was over-qualified. In his next letters he did not mention his academic status but was refused again. After a year of
fruitless attempts, he started to think about re-qualification, or starting his own business, like all of his new comrades did. But starting a business was not as easy as he had imagined. Most of the companies of his Russian-speaking friends traded with the former Soviet republics and the most prestigious business was the trade in metals or oil.

'I thought: who is the expert in metals: my friends or I? Everybody wanted to trade in metals, it was fashionable, but they had no experience at all, and I did. But they were the ones in business and they did not even ask me as a consultant, which would have been prudent. So, people who had no education in metallurgy dealt with metals, while I could not find a proper job'.

Then Igor decided to give it a try, together with his Dutch acquaintance Peter. They opened up their business, operating from the bedroom in Peter’s apartment. Peter was an unemployed historian by education, without any business experience. But he was Dutch, which made it easier to communicate with other Dutch companies and authorities.

The major obstacle to their venture was the competition between Russian mediating companies. Usually when one of them was looking for a buyer for a specific product, he would contact other mediating groups. But Igor was excluded from this ‘Russian network’. As he himself explained this, it was because ‘they swindled with the quality of products and I could easily find out the problem and lower the price, or demand a higher percentage for my silence’.

Igor had to come up with a specific strategy to enter the market. Among Russian-speakers it was well known that the export of metals from Russia was tightly controlled by criminal organizations. Metals sold to the West allow them to invest the income in Western banks. They have special ‘agreements’ with tax inspectors, banks and usually use joint ventures in the West where they keep the documents and contracts. In this way the Russian inspectors have no access to these documents. From his connections in Russia Igor knew which criminal organizations protect specific companies in Russia that trade in metals. He then spread the rumour among other Russian-speakers in the Netherlands that these organizations had asked him about the Russian immigrants who deal in metals. He did not mention any names of criminal bosses, who allegedly turned to him for information, but mentioned the places (regions) where they operated. This was enough, he told me, to make Russian businessmen understand with which bosses he was in touch, because Russian businessmen know all the details of the metal business and they know exactly who the ‘big men’ are.

When one of his business contacts from Russia came to visit the Netherlands, Igor decided to show up with him in the Russian cafe. The appearance of the man, an Armenian, and the fact that Igor did not join the company of other businessmen who were present there, but sat separately with his guest, created a kind of mystery about this connection. When Igor left the place, one of the businessmen asked him about the man and Igor said: ‘You don’t want to know’. Then he said that his contact was a Chechen, which increased the suspicion of the others. A few weeks later Igor was called by some of the Russian-speaking immigrants who traded in metals and received several business propositions. One of them even gave him a list of all his Russian and Dutch clients, without asking for a percentage for this information.

Soon Igor became the man known as the one who created a monopoly on the trade in metals with the former Soviet republics in the Netherlands and elsewhere. He showed me letter from one of the mediating companies in Russia, asking him for his protection in their start-up business in metals. ‘I became a godfather in this area’, he said. When he bought his first Mercedes and a huge house in one of Amsterdam’s suburbs, his reputation was firmly established. This reputation among Russian-speaking businessmen spread outside the community and he was approached by Dutch businesspeople who wanted to work with him.

‘This was funny! A few years ago they rejected me as if I were a small child, and now the biggest Dutch firms are ready to cooperate’. The manipulation of identity, the suggestion of
close connections with the Russian Mafia, allowed Igor to promote himself among Russian-speakers and later in the Dutch business world. He managed not only to continue practicing his own profession, but also to create a position independent from the Dutch employers. Igor carefully planned this manipulation. He used his knowledge of criminal activities and criminal organizations in Russia to create his own image as a powerful and influential businessman.

So far I have presented a general picture of the Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands, various social and cultural aspects relating to the construction of new identities of the immigrants, their integration in Dutch society and the problems they faced in the course of immigration and criminal images. Different categories, cases and examples served as illustrations. I shall now concentrate on one of the groups active in the Russian-speaking community and its perception of the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands.
Before the reforms in the Soviet Union legal international trade was limited and private business was prohibited and punishable by law. Nevertheless, the state could never fully control the black market. Illegal private businesses and the illegal trade, especially in 'pure Russian' items, such as art, icons, furs, caviar and vodka, have always existed. This trade was possible in the framework of the 'shadow' economy, which developed during the Soviet times and in the transition period. In addition to international trade in 'Russian' items there were small trade operations inside the Soviet Union, such as the trade in Western products and hard currency. However, even after perestroika these operations were considered by most of the former Soviet citizens as illegal or semi-legal. At this time criminal organizations took the opportunity to make easy and rapid profits (Sinuraja 1995:45) and started to develop these activities. In chapter 2 I have explained the social environment in which economic crimes became a necessity in the Soviet reality. In this chapter I take it a step further to the post-reform period and analyse the development of Russian business under the new conditions, especially when it entered the international arena. After providing a short background on business developments in the Soviet Union in the transition period I focus in-depth on specific cases of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands, their perceptions on legal and illegal and their connections with Russian criminal organizations.

Privatisation of the Russian economy.

In the period of economic stagnation under Brezhnev’s rule in the 1970s the state of the Soviet economy worsened. The failure of the five-year plan system, the irresponsible waste of natural resources, and especially the total corruption of the Soviet administration led to dramatic results: high inflation, a shortage of the most necessary daily products etc. In 1985, when Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the economic crisis in the country reached threatening dimensions. Similar to Lenin’s NEP policy in the beginning of the 1920s, Gorbachev’s reforms aimed to alleviate this dreadful economic situation.

In the years 1985-1986 the first steps towards privatisation were taken. The co-operative movement started in the Soviet Union. It ranged from very small co-operatives of one or two people to the huge criminal 21st Century Association, which I have described in chapter 2. Co-operatives were in fact the first private businesses, though presented and legitimised as situated somewhere between private and collective. Usually accumulated black money became the basis for the establishment of the co-operatives. Still officially controlled by the authorities, the organizers of the first co-operatives had to resort to ‘levyie’ (‘left’, i.e. illegal) methods to survive, for example the bribing of officials. From the beginning Russian citizens have viewed co-operatives as criminal organizations, not because they actually were (in the Western sense of the word) but because the old stereotype of ‘private business’ being illegal still prevailed in Soviet society.

Many co-operatives later became joint ventures. In 1987 the Law on the Joint Ventures was introduced, which allowed Soviet co-operatives to practice international trade activities. This law was followed by intensive legal trade between Soviet and Western enterprises. The law was enacted in the hope of attracting Western investments into the Soviet economy. It opened the possibility of international contacts with Western businessmen, who
were invited to invest in the Russian economy. At the time of the first reforms many Western companies were indeed interested in new East European markets and started their first attempts to approach them. These were usually intermediary companies, which co-ordinated the trade between Russian and Western firms. The idea was to attract foreign capital to Russia, however, the opposite effect has been reached: the money started to flow from the former Soviet Union to the West. It turned out that joint-ventures were used by Russian owners to transfer profits to their private accounts in Europe and the USA. Some criminologists claim that Russian organized crime is in fact an integral part of the joint ventures, which allowed a passage to the West for Russian-speaking criminals (Drozdova 1994:48; Sinuraja 1996/7:41; Rawlinson 1997:47).

In this chapter I examine this idea by addressing three questions. Firstly, do Russian businessmen who immigrated to the West, in our case to the Netherlands, conduct criminal activity abroad, and if they do what are these activities? Secondly, do they belong to Russian criminal organizations and what is their role? And thirdly, what impact do they have inside the Russian-speaking community in the Netherlands and in Dutch society in general? I have tried to answer these questions by interviewing Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands themselves, their partners, colleagues and spouses. I intend to show that their view of the connection between Russian organized crime and legal business in the Netherlands differs a great deal from the model that is presented by criminologists.

One businessman, partner-owner of a joint Dutch – Russian venture in the Netherlands explained:

‘In Russia, but also everywhere else in the world, the Mafia is like a wild animal: if you do not touch it, it will also not touch you (unless you are very rich)’.

Unless you are very rich? Although a new class of businessmen had come up in the mid 1990s there were only a few very rich businessmen in post-Soviet Russia. Russia became more economically stratified, more stratified even than the United States. Thirty-five percent of all Russians now live below the poverty line. Fifty percent are hardly making ends meet. Fourteen percent entered ‘New Business’ and less than one percent have become extremely wealthy through semi-legitimate business or organized crime (‘Fashion: The Likely Vlads ’ in Observer, Sep. 10, 1995). According to my informants’ estimation only 5-6% of New Russians were rich in ‘Western terms’. Other sources indicate that there were also many ‘losers’: ‘There are perhaps 1-2 million “New Russians, who earn more than $2000 a month, a middle class of 5-10 million people earning more than $500 a month; and some 80 million adults who make lower than that amount and who spend more than half their money on food” (Jensen 1998:7)\(^1\).

Becoming a businessman was fashionable for the younger generation in the Gorbachev and post-Gorbachev period. It was associated with a passage from ‘forbidden to permitted’, from ‘illegal to legal’, with a breach of Soviet taboos and with the construction of new identities. When I asked what it meant to be a businessman in the beginning of the 1990s in Russia, I was told:

‘It was cool. It meant nice Armani suits, or Chanel 5 for your girl friend. It meant many friends and chic restaurants and a big car, all that your parents could never have. It was real power and money!’

'Businessman was a new social status, elegant, rich, powerful and free. More so than politicians, and several times more than the intelligentsia, the group that was highly appreciated in the years 1950-1960. My parents wanted to be professors, but my brothers already wanted to be businessmen'.

Not only the financial opportunities and quick profits without investment intoxicated young people. 'The spirit of freedom', discovery of new countries, travelling around the world — all these factors influenced their decision to choose for the career of a businessman. They imitated Western business culture; some of the Dutch businessmen I met during my fieldwork, told me they were amazed to find expensive interiors in the offices of their Russian partners in Moscow and St. Petersburg, they mentioned beautiful paintings and sculptures and modern equipment to work with.

On the other hand there was a revival of the image of the Russian pre-Revolutionary kupetz (merchant). Persecuted and stigmatised in the Soviet period, the image of this rich and powerful merchant revived after Gorbachev's reforms. This was a particular kind of Russian businessman, who was associated with the past, with the 'Russian generosity', 'lavish nature' and 'mysterious soul'. This somewhat chauvinistic Russian interpretation of a business style was often emphasised in my conversations with the Russian-speaking businessmen. Vassili, who lives in Rotterdam and has been shipping second-hand cars to Russia since 1995, told me:

'My great-grandfather was a kupetz of the first guild. My father somehow managed in the Soviet period to keep his diaries. And I think that what he wrote then is relevant also today! He wrote that the difference between Russian and non-Russian businessmen is that a Russian will give his last shirt to anyone who needs it. Be it a friend or an enemy! And this is my main principle: to have real, loyal friends is more important than any business and any money in the world'.

According to another informant, Gennadi, owner of a small shop selling 'Russian' products in Amsterdam:

'There is no better place in the world than Russia. There you become a businessman not because of money, but because of a good life! There you make money to live, in the West you live to make money'.

In post-Gorbachev's Russia new identities of businessmen were created. The Western-style type of New Russians was set off against the 'Old Russian' businesspeople. The link to the mystical concept of the 'Russian soul' played an important role in this process of self-identification. Among the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands this Russian 'old-new' image is quite popular. Thus, the owners of a Russian restaurant in Amsterdam told me they tried to create the pre-Revolutionary atmosphere, which is apparently appreciated by Russian businesspeople. The emphasis on tradition and Russian stereotypes can be seen as a 'discursive strategy', which allows 'Old Russians' 'to defend, justify, and extol the value of their own identities and their lower socio-economic status in the face of the self-valorising stories of the Moscow nouveaux riches' (Ries, 1997:27). The new class of Russian businessmen mixes the 'old Russian tradition' of business based on friendship with a more flexible and Western style. Loyalty, friendship and mutual trust play an important role in their perception of 'business' and partnership. Being partners in most cases means 'being friends', 'drinking vodka together', sharing intimate experiences, etc. That is why the so-called 'cold'
approach of the European or American partners is often derided as ‘non-human’. Boris, a Russian businessman in Amsterdam, who trades in textiles and electronic equipment with companies in the Baltic countries and Ukraine, told me about his experiences with a Dutch businessman:

‘My Dutch partner was such a square, dull and pompous man. He tried to make an impression on me, it took me some time to “train” him to communicate with Russians. I took him to my house several times and to various Russian parties. I showed him how one can live. The best part was when I took him with me to Russia and he realised at last that all his pompousness was worth nothing. He is my best friend now; we drink with him for three days after every successful deal’.

In a warning to Western businessmen about the potential dangers associated with doing business in Russia Serio (1997) tries to explain why so many attempts to establish business contacts have failed: ‘After years of “reform”, a direct Western business approach usually does not work in Russia, a place where time and money play roles that differ from those in the West, particularly when considered in an environment built on personal relationship’ (p.94). Before they trust potential partners Russians ‘spend hours drinking, feasting and discussing subjects which have no apparent connection to business’ (Serio, 1997:94). Building a personal relationship or, better still, friendship, is the main condition for doing business in Russia. The same holds true for Russian businessmen in the Netherlands.

Despite the efforts of some Russian businessmen, especially Western-oriented New Russians, to improve their image in the West, European and American businessmen remain reluctant in their relations with Russians. In 1997 the Ministry of Economy of the Russian Federation issued a program on the International Image of Russia and the Russian Business Community, in which they tried to convince the West that all the negative stories published in the world press reflect a one-sided approach. Russia, according to this report, ‘is still largely perceived as a challenge or even a threat to the stability in Europe and the rest of the world’ (FIPC, 1997:3). One of the factors that shape the negative image of Russian business abroad, according to this report, is crime and corruption. According to Western economists Russia never had a free market, has no rule of law, ‘does not respect property rights and has been savaged by rampant corruption’ (Moore and Carter 1998). The prevailing conviction, for example, is that all Russian police officers are corrupt. However, the Russian understanding of corruption is not always similar to the one in the West. Russians do not view bribes or personal favours as corruption. ‘Because the responsiveness of police is frequently based on personal relationships, the question of corruption within the police and how it may impact its performance is rarely raised in Russian daily life. Corruption is a secondary issue’ (Serio, 1997:95). The most important issue is the ability of foreign businessmen to create these personal relationships. As Masha, a Russian businesswoman in the Netherlands, explained:

‘Each country has its laws. In some countries they are more developed than in the others. In Russia they are still very primitive. There are laws and there are human considerations. In order to survive you deal more with the latter. The only ‘hundred percent decent’ people are either very rich or very poor, because they have no ambition left in their lives. Most of the people, however, do have ambitions and therefore, in one way or another violate laws. This is a necessity’.

Nico, a Georgian businessman in Amsterdam:
'In Sovok I was imprisoned for speculation – selling my own video-recorder on the black market. Was there any logic in this law? No, there was no logic, but those were the laws of the system. I was a criminal! Now there is another system: I am an honest businessman, but I have to employ criminals to keep my business there going!'

Yuri, another Russian businessman, who has a joint-venture with a Russian company, told me that in trading with Russia one has to play a double game:

'In Russia there are different rules from those in the Netherlands: everybody is corrupt. There, one has no other choice, for example, but to have a “krysha”, it does not matter from which organisation: criminal or police. The moment you reach the border with the Netherlands these rules are no longer valid. It is perhaps true that the Mafia can reach you here as well, but those are exceptional cases. In general, everyone who makes deals with Russia must know that his Russian partner will be in one way or another connected with criminal organizations'.

Apart from this perception that all business is, in one way or another, connected to criminal organizations, there are some types of business which are in fact heavily criminalized, such as the car-business, the trade in oil and metals and the diamond business. The phenomenon called the ‘oil Mafia’ emerged through the ‘shadow economy’ and the rapid privatisation of oil enterprises. In the transit period these enterprises were able to create economic links with foreign companies. They sold Russian oil to the West much cheaper than others and made huge profits in a short time. But instead of investing capital in the Russian economy, the money was transferred to private accounts in Western banks. What happened to the oil-business was especially tragic for the Russian economy, because huge amounts of relatively cheap first-class oil were smuggled to the West.

Peregon (driving) of second-hand (cheaply bought or stolen) cars from Germany and Netherlands through Poland to Russia, reparation and the trade in car-parts are considered to be also fully controlled by criminal groups. Vassili, who specialised in selling and peregon of second-hand cars from the Netherlands to Russia explained:

'Anyone wanting to buy a car in Russia had two possibilities: travelling to Europe by cheap flight or bus and driving the whole way back himself, or approaching criminal markets in Russia. In both cases there was a danger of being cheated, or robbed on the highway by criminals. If you wanted to buy a second-hand car, you needed the right connections. The whole business is very much criminalized there'.

3.g.1 The image of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands

As I have mentioned earlier, the largest occupational group of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands is made up of businessmen. After the economic crisis in Russia in 1998 a number of them decided to return to Russia, but since the economic situation there is slowly improving, many of them come back to the Netherlands. Since the end of 1999 there is a new influx of Russian businessmen into the Netherlands. Two types of Russian-speaking businessmen can be distinguished: those who were already businessmen in Russia and those

102 Slang for the ‘Soviet Union’, also means ‘dustpan’.
who became businessmen after coming to the Netherlands. The first group came to extend their activities and look for new markets in the West. They came with money and often with contracts and established clients. The second category includes Russian-speaking immigrants, who first tried but could not find an appropriate professional position on the Dutch labour market and then decided to start for themselves in order not to remain unemployed, or to be dependant on social services. Usually they had no starting capital or clientele.

All of my informants indicated that being a businessman in the Netherlands was very much different from being a businessman in Russia. Even those who arrived with capital and connections discovered that the only business they could do in the Netherlands was to trade with Russia. Those who wanted to join the Dutch business community, or establish contacts with other countries, faced obstacles. Especially in the beginning of the 1990s the stereotype of a Russian businessman-Mafioso who brought suitcases with ‘dirty money’, prevailed. There was also the image of the ‘poor Russian businessman’, who allegedly has no money, and therefore in most cases ‘hundred percent pre-pay’ was demanded by Dutch companies in every deal with Russians and no bank credit was granted. According to my informants, in the beginning of the 1990s Dutch banks did not trust the first money transactions from Russia and underestimated the financial abilities of Russian newly created companies in the Netherlands.

On the other hand there was curiosity from the Dutch side about the possibilities to enter a new economic market in the former Soviet Union. There were reports from Americans and other Europeans on successful investments in Russia and many Dutch companies did not want to miss the opportunity. Large Dutch companies, such as Philips, could make direct contacts with the Russian authorities and open their representation in Moscow. However, small firms preferred either to employ Russian-speaking specialists, who could help them in establishing contacts in Russia, or to use the services of intermediary companies, which became very popular between 1992 and 1995. Michael, my informant, an oil engineer who could not find a job for almost three years since his immigration to the Netherlands, received four invitations in one month to work in Dutch oil companies. During all his interviews he was asked whether, considering his experience and connections in the oil industry, he could help to establish trade contacts with Russians.

The image of Russian businessmen in the Netherlands has changed slowly. When it became clear that clients in Russia were not as poor as believed earlier, but on the contrary, that they brought capital to the Netherlands, Russian intermediary companies started to enjoy more trust, which was also expressed in financial benefits, bank loans, etc. This, however, does not mean that the suspicion of the potential link between Russian businessmen and Russian criminal organizations has disappeared completely. Later in this chapter will I provide a few examples of the attitudes Dutch businessmen developed during their work or personal contacts with the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands.

The Russian perception of Russian businessmen, who moved abroad but worked with Russia, also underwent some interesting changes. In the Soviet and in Gorbachev’s periods, the image of ‘zagranitza’ (‘abroad’) was highly valued. The conviction was that those who managed to leave the Soviet Union and settled abroad enjoyed a much better life, especially from a materialistic point of view. In the 1970-80s ‘kult zagranitza’ (cult of ‘abroad’) developed especially among the Soviet youth, and the famous phrase of the literary hero Ostap Bender (mentioned in chapter 2) ‘Zagranitza nam pomozhet’ (‘The countries abroad will help us’) became a motto for many millions of young people. In the Soviet Union, the status of an individual was usually defined by his education, access to foreign cultures (and foreigners in general), connections and occupation.

Since the opening of the borders and the emergence of new classes, this heritage has gradually disappeared (Rutland 1997:2). According to my informants, in the beginning of the 1990s, when Russian-speaking businessmen from the Netherlands were visiting Russia, they
‘felt like kings’, because they received such a warm welcome and were highly esteemed. They were approached by many Russians who wanted to establish business contacts in the West, received hundreds of propositions and business plans, and felt they were respected if only for the fact they were living in the West. In the mid 1990s the situation changed, since those Russians in the former Soviet Union who did in fact manage to establish business contacts through joint-ventures, already had fewer illusions about their former co-patriots, some of whom were now considered ‘amateurs’ in real business. Many businessmen from Russia visited Europe and the USA and could by themselves establish the necessary contacts, without assistance from small intermediary firms. They also made their first large profits and became independent from the Russian-speaking immigrant businessmen. Many of the new Russian businessmen also received a high-level formal education in Russian universities in such subjects as business and management and were now more competent in their profession than their former compatriots who started businesses in the West because of financial necessity. Now they emphasised their professional knowledge and training and aimed to deal with professionals in the West, not necessarily with Russian-speakers. The highly respected image of Russian immigrant businessmen became less valuable and appreciated in their former Fatherland. I will focus now on individual cases of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands.

Cosmetics case

In 1988 Evgeni, a young university-educated Russian, decided to become a businessman. The area that attracted him was cosmetics and his first steps in business were to import cosmetic articles into Russia. The goods were taken in suitcases from abroad in small quantities. He discovered that the cosmetics were in great demand and the business had great potential. In 1990 the company ‘Beautiful World’ was established. He established excellent business connections with Dutch cosmetic companies. Although the trade was going well, there was not enough initial capital, which hampered the growth of the business. The typical scenario of getting initial capital in Russia at the time was the following: representatives of criminal organizations approached legal companies and ‘offered’ to invest money in these companies. If the companies agreed they would continue their activities, but now under the control of criminal organizations. All the parties profited from the arrangement, though the firms were forced to operate on the instructions from the criminal organizations: they had to pay ‘tax’ for protection, and often had to elect representatives of criminal organizations to the board of directors or to management.

Evgeni and his partners did not want to be completely and openly under criminal control. First, it was very risky as is any criminal enterprise (if they would violate the rules, dictated to them by their criminal protection, they could be liquidated). Second, the future of the cosmetic business depended on cooperation with western companies, who were strictly against criminal involvement of their partners. Therefore the company of Evgeni used other methods for gaining start-up capital:

1. The cosmetic articles were sent on a consignment basis, which means that the money could be paid back almost one year later, after the articles had been sold. The company, however returned the money not immediately after the goods had been sold but much later. The gap of one year between sale and payment to the producer was an operational norm. Although the western partners were not happy about such delays, they were anxious to enter the East European market and did not want to lose a successful wholesale partner.
2. Another method was to overstate the original price of product and launder the difference between the discount price and wholesale price. Some partners of 'Beautiful World', especially the ones with the biggest sales, gave discounts. These allowed the company to sell the cosmetics cheaper than their competitors. However, the profit margins on cosmetic prices were controlled by the state. Therefore in the contracts between the company and producers a non-discount price was stated and the whole discount was sent to the offshore accounts of the company owners.

3. The third method was to avoid tax-payment by minimising the profit. With this purpose millions of $US were sent as 'consulting and audit' costs to a company which was in fact its own offshore.

4. The fourth method was bribery. Export managers in Europe of the partner factories and bank managers, who provided profitable credits were paid by the company. Shop directors were given special benefits, such as free trips abroad, etc. These benefits were readily accepted. Thus, one of the Moscow shop directors regularly spent weekends with his mistress at one of the villas in Cyprus, owned by Evgeni.

After a few years the turnover reached ten billion dollars US per year and dozens of franchises opened all over Russia. Contracts were made with the largest firms in the world. 'Beautiful World ' became one of the leaders in its field in Russia. Its western partners considered it a 'Mafia-free' company, a prerequisite for engaging in business relations. However, as the business developed, the Russian Mafia became more and more interested in its activities. For the company owners this would mean one of the following options: to pay money or to take capital out of the till and run. In fact the owners of 'Beautiful World' used each of these alternatives at various times.

The abovementioned methods of capitalization still did not allow the newcomer 'Beautiful World' to overrun the competitors and to take a leading position in the market. The company applied a very ambitious strategy, in order to conquer the market in all big Russian cities. There came a moment that a gap in the balance could be filled only by using a very doubtful source of money connected to car-selling. In Russia the import of cars is fully controlled by the Russian Mafia. The car dealers got a share in 'Beautiful World' and in return provided it with enough money to cover the expenses and overcome the 'difficult period'. No western partners were aware of that deal with the Mafia and after some time 'Beautiful World' after 'clever' negotiation bought back the shares.

'Beautiful World', while viewed by its western partners as 'Mafia-free' in their country, presented itself as being 'very well protected' in Russia. This required organizing a special security department and finding experts, who were able to solve 'Mafia-related problems', which in most cases actually meant paying money to the 'right people'. Sometimes the criminals demanded more than the company was prepared to give. On one occasion, Evgeni and his partners, sensing the threat to their commercial independence had to flee to the Netherlands while their security department was negotiating a deal to 'solve the problem'. The shelter in the Netherlands (on the basis of the residence permits for some and business visas for others) was prepared in advance. The Russian Mafia was only one of the driving forces behind it. Another one was the Russian tax inspection and the risk to end-up in a Russian prison. If the Russian tax inspection had discovered that 'Beautiful World' was transferring millions to the private accounts of the company owners, they would probably have been prosecuted. Thus having reached a leading position in the market, the company owners started to work on plans for a retreat. They decided to move the centre of financial operations to another country and to set up a holding company there. This holding for the Russian side would be considered as a supplier of cosmetic articles. Therefore, the country for this holding should have a good and respectable image in Russian opinion. In addition, the
country had to be out of reach of, or at least less affected by, the Russian criminal organizations. It should also be close to Russia geographically. The choice fell on the Netherlands, where they also had personal contacts and had actually already settled their families.

Evgeni and his partners arrived in the Netherlands with a business visa and opened a new company ‘Cosmetic Everywhere BV’. This company was sheltering the offshore operations from the Russian side. As the director of this company they appointed an old acquaintance, a Russian immigrant, who lived permanently in the Netherlands. At the same time the ‘Beautiful World’ owners started to look for a western partner for a big investment. Such a partner – an investment fund – was soon found in Amsterdam. The directors of this fund were ready to invest 20 million American dollars in ‘Beautiful World’ in exchange for 30 per cent of the company stock. ‘Cosmetic Everywhere BV’ and the Fund organized a mutual joint holding of ‘Beautiful World’ on Cyprus. Obviously the owners of ‘Beautiful World’ had no intentions to pay taxes on the investment and devised another intricate scheme for that purpose. Evgeni decided to improve the money laundering system by organizing two companies with the same name: the Dutch ‘Cosmetic Future BV’ and the off-shore ‘Cosmetic Future Ltd.’ The account number on the invoices of the ‘Cosmetic Future BV’ was actually the account of the off-shore ‘Cosmetic Future Ltd.’. In this way, a ‘respectable Dutch’ partner was actually substituted by an offshore account. In the Netherlands, the company openly acted as intermediary and thus had no risks and very favourable terms of taxation. The fact that the ‘Cosmetic Future BV’ belonged to the ‘Beauty World’ owners was carefully hidden. Thus the ownership scheme of the ‘Cosmetic Future BV’ consisted of two offshore schemes.

The ‘visible BV invisible off-shore’ was used both for investing in Russia and transferring profit from it. Thus the Dutch ‘Cosmetic Future BV’ concluded with the ‘Beautiful World’ a loan-agreement for several million US dollars on a 5 per cent a year basic interest. In fact the whole amount was transferred from the offshore ‘Cosmetic Future Ltd.’ and was invested in Russia without paying income tax. In order to transfer money from Russia, ‘Cosmetic Future Ltd.’ made a ‘consulting agreement’ with ‘Beautiful World’. The money went straight to the offshore account and some money did not go through Russia at all. For example, all the discounts given by the producers to ‘Beautiful World’ went directly to ‘Cosmetic Future Ltd.’ as well. In order to legalize this construction under Dutch law, the firm used the expensive services of a Dutch International Consulting company. The Dutch contacts also proved to be useful in establishing a non-profit fund (stichting) ‘Beauty and Health’ which was supposed to implement a ‘healthy life style’ in Russia. The western cosmetic companies donated hundreds of thousands of US dollars to this fund. They also had plans to introduce new cosmetic selling concepts in Russia. In practice, however, ‘Beauty World’ used the money for its own trade purposes. In this case the Russian side misused the reputation of a Dutch non-profit organization, including some respectable Dutch businessmen.

All examples in this case illustrate how interconnected legal and illegal activities are in Russian business. Spinning between tax inspection and the Russian criminal organizations, the so-called legal Russian businessmen use any legal and illegal means to increase their profits. Having used the Dutch side for laundering money and pretending to have influential partners, they ultimately considered the Netherlands as a nice country of retreat, which allowed them to enjoy their gains and to stay out of the reach of their enemies. The ‘Mafia free’ country, the Netherlands, became a shelter for those who make illegal operations, and factually are connected to Russian Mafia. This is the irony of the situation: the Mafia comes to the Mafia-free land!
In 1992 the editorial board of one of the leading Russian periodicals spread the story of a wonder-doctor named Belyi. The editor-in-chief of the periodical knew him personally and had donated thousands of US dollars to his practice. He advised all his colleagues with health complaints to fly to the Netherlands and see dr. Belyi, at the expense of the periodical. The doctor was known for his ability to heal all kinds of illnesses, including cancer and AIDS. He was a genius, with great talent and extrasensory power. Other Russian newspapers also wrote about the Russian-Dutch phenomenon, a medical doctor by education and a herbal healer by profession.

Following the advice journalist Svetlana travelled to the Netherlands, and was deeply impressed by the doctor. So she brought her son and some friends to see him. The 11-year-old son suffered from frequent headaches, which Russian physicians had not been able to cure. One of Svetlana’s friends suffered from a liver disease, another one from an allergy. The doctor met the party personally at the airport, drove them to a hotel and invited them for dinner. Everybody was charmed by him, especially Svetlana’s son. After a few weeks of treatment, they returned to Russia. They had to follow a special diet. They also brought with them a videotape of the doctor’s face, which he had advised them to watch carefully daily for ten minutes. The result of this treatment was that the son of Svetlana became depressed, suffered from hallucinations and was at last treated by Russian psychiatrists.

Another patient told me that from the moment she entered Belyi’s clinic she was taken with him. He showed her his Medical Institute diploma and a diploma of the Ukrainian Academy of National Progress, and claimed to be an ‘Academician of Medicine’ (i.e. member of the Russian Academy of Medicine\textsuperscript{104}). She was surprised to see a doctor wearing a white cloak, since this is not usual in the Netherlands. Also the location of the clinic in the most expensive suburb of Amsterdam and its ‘ultra-modern equipment’ led her to the immediate conclusion that he was a very special, famous and experienced physician. She was slightly confused when he told her that she had a problem with her kidney, when she had always thought she had a gastric disease.

Not only Russians came to see Belyi. Several cancer patients travelled from the United States to see the doctor. Later it appeared that he wrongly diagnosed them. According to their relatives, ‘he lacked any medical knowledge’. He also had wealthy Dutch, American

\textsuperscript{103} This scheme was drawn by my informant to make it clear how the firm was cheating Dutch tax-inspection and Dutch business partners.

\textsuperscript{104} Allegedly the highest instance in this profession, a matter of prestige and recognition.
and Swiss patients, who eventually also invested in his clinic and in his business. These investments allowed him to open a small factory manufacturing the capsules of the herbal extracts. It appeared that in the Netherlands it was possible to open the herbal medical clinic and to produce herbal extracts without special licenses or certificates. However, these extracts were not allowed to be sold in the Netherlands.

In 1995 a Japanese company invested in a mutual company ‘Vitavin’, in order to market and distribute Belyi’s extracts in the USA. After some time ‘Vitavin’ accused Belyi of fraud and claimed that he caused them losses in excess of 1 million US dollars. Belyi was accused of embezzling company money to his personal accounts in a Luxembourg bank. The capsules on the shelves changed colour due to oxygenation two years before the manufacturer’s expiration date. According to ‘Vitavin’, it was also discovered that Belyi’s products had side effects and that a chemical process converted the herbal medicines into potent drugs. ‘Vitavin’ applied in American court for compensation for the losses and for damages claimed by patients who had been harmed by Belyi’s remedies. ‘Vitavin’ distributed an International Product Recall Notice for customers in the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Japan, Korea, Canada and Israel to return all recalled products (7 in all) to Belyi’s factory in the Netherlands. The markets in these countries were now closed to him. His only chance was to sell capsules to Ukrainian and Russian customers. For this purpose Belyi opened another company, subsidized by his patients in Russia.

In 1997 Belyi was arrested by the Dutch police but released soon afterwards. His property was seized. In the American courts some of the best lawyers defended Belyi. The legal expenses were paid by one of the biggest oil-companies in Moscow. In the Netherlands Belyi also had criminal protection, which he used, for example, to intimidate his former partners and colleagues. On one occasion he presented incorrect information to his criminal contacts, which cost him dearly. The criminals were offended and in *razborka* (negotiation) with representatives of the rival side, instead of ‘punishing’ the rivals, they forced Belyi himself to pay the major part of his incomes for the rest of his life to their criminal group.

Then he was blamed by one of his former patients, Irina, for damaging her health, and she told him that she would inform Dutch journalists about his practice. He responded by personally threatening her. Irina received telephone-calls with a warning to her that his friends would know how to find her kids. Suspecting him earlier to be connected with Mafia, as she told me, she was now convinced that he had *krysha*. Criminals could harm her even in the Netherlands. She considered it wiser not to turn to the press. However, other ex-patients did. A Dutch journalist had received from the family full information on their experience with Belyi, including information they received from his native city on his education and work experience. The journalist wanted, however, to hear the story of Belyi himself and made an appointment with him at his practice. Since then they never heard from him again and the story was never published. Elena suspected that Belyi had threatened the journalist, or maybe ‘he bribed him not to ask any more questions’.

Her further private investigations showed that Belyi never had had any medical training. He had graduated from a professional school of the Ministry of Household Services of Ukraine, specializing as a photographer. He had never had any professional experience at any medical facility, but had first worked in a photo laboratory, then in advertising and later in a boarding sport school. She also found some details of his activities after he left Russia. In 1989 he came to Germany, where he tried to open a private practice as a herbal healer, but was investigated by German police. He also lived for some time in Israel before he settled in the Netherlands, where he opened the private non-traditional (alternative) clinic with the help of one Dutch physician. The story of Belyi’s was exposed in the Russian TV programme Vremya on 1 August 1998. Also among Russian-speakers in the Netherlands he had now
acquired a very dubious reputation. However until his last days in 1999, Belyi continued to injure people with the herbal capsules that he personally manufactured in the Netherlands.

His death and funeral were considered ‘suspicious’ by some of his ex-patients. According to the official version, spread by his wife and close friends, he had suffered all his life and eventually died from leukaemia. He was buried according to a Jewish ritual, because this was his last wish, though he himself was not religious and was married to a non-Jewish woman. However, my informants presented a few other versions. The first was that shortly before his death he was severely beaten by a few Russian criminals for not paying his debts to them. According to this version, Belyi had close connections with drug-dealers and a Georgian criminal organization, who protected him both in Russia and in the Netherlands. Something went wrong between him and his ‘krysha’ and he was punished. He was then brought home and died in his bed.

The second version was that he was involved in a car accident in Belgium, got a heart attack as a result, and was hospitalised in a private Dutch clinic, where he died a few days later. The body was then brought home, which is unusual according to the Jewish ritual, since the body is always taken by the funeral company (Hevra Kadisha) to a special place, where it is washed and prepared for the funeral. In Belyi’s case, the coffin was taken to the cemetery from his own house. Some informants suggested that in the Liberal Jewish community the rituals are different (and allegedly Belyi was connected to some members of the Liberal community). Therefore the body was buried not exactly according to strict prescriptions. The version of his close friends was, however, that he was buried according to the Orthodox ritual and buried on Jewish cemetery according to strict prescriptions of Judaism.

Half a year later, when the rumours about the suspicious death of the wonder doctor stopped being the talk of the day, the ‘students of Belyi’ showed up, calling his former clients and inviting them to continue treatment according to ‘his method’. When Alexandra, one of his ex-clients, told them that Belyi was a charlatan and that he never had any students, they politely answered her that she was wrong, that his factory was flourishing more than ever, and that ‘she better be careful with such words’. Alexandra then went to observe his laboratory personally and became convinced that something was wrong. She called other ex-patients of Belyi and asked them if anybody had seen him shortly before his death. Nobody had. She the asked whether the body of Belyi had been observed by others, however, nobody saw him as well. The suspicion grew among the Russian-speakers, who now became convinced that Belyi was not dead at all and only bribed the relevant officials (doctor and/or those who arranged the funeral) to stage his death. This way he could escape the threat of the Mafia and continue his activities under a different identity. This version, however, was never proved.

The case leads us to several conclusions concerning Russian ways of doing business in the Netherlands. One conclusion in this case is that the Russian-speaking swindler and pretender, operated openly in the Netherlands, making profits on injuring people and producing harmful medicines, which, according to some informants were ‘out of date’ drugs. He operated internationally and his clients were not only Russian immigrants. He knew exactly that in the so-called ‘alternative medicine’ branch his activities would be tolerated in Dutch society and he used this for his own profits. Another conclusion is that by using the Russian criminal krysha system, he transferred these methods of ‘business’ from Russia to the Netherlands, thus introducing Russian criminal culture to Dutch business.
Since the end of the 1980s several attempts have been made to establish Russian restaurants in the Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam. The idea was not only to create a meeting place for the Russian-speakers, where they could enjoy Russian cuisine but also to provide a possibility for socio-cultural events, such as concerts, lectures and celebrations. In Russian history emigration is usually connected with a ‘chic’ Russian restaurant, it is often emphasised that there is no Russian classic literature without a dining table with all its symbolism. The way Russian-speakers are used to celebrate their holidays or family festivities is ‘za stolom’ (around the dining table) with lavish amounts of luxury food, innumerable toasts proposed in honour of the celebrated and his guests, interrupted by dancing, playing the piano, or singing (Siegel 1998:32).

In the beginning of the 1990s the Russian restaurant ‘Nes’ was opened in the centre of Amsterdam. The owner was a Russian woman, Victoria, then in her late fifties, famous in Russian circles by her close connections with former Soviet politicians, artists, writers and other public figures in Russia. Her idea of a ‘typical Russian restaurant’ was very idealistic, based on the image of Russian dissident immigration after the October revolution in 1917 in Paris, when intellectuals and aristocrats were spending long evenings in Russian restaurants discussing philosophical themes and planning anti-Communist plots. The reality in Amsterdam in the 1990s was different from Paris: the place was well situated but small, the kitchen was small and dark, the ventilation system did not work. The usual public were neither noblemen nor dissidents but Russian-speaking immigrants, most of whom were still waiting for their official procedures to be completed, many illegal migrants, Russian sailors and tourists. According to my informants this was the place for illegals to exchange information on possibilities of ‘black’ work and housing. The starting businessmen were gathering to celebrate their first successes or share information about products and clients. Remarkably, illegal migrants did not fear the police who could occasionally or on purpose visit the place. And this contradicts their perception that Dutch police will deport them the moment they find out that they were illegals. This discrepancy between their perception and the real law and regulations I will discuss in the following chapter. On of my informants, Josef, who often came to ‘Nes’, told me:

‘The Dutch police never came to the restaurant, because they were at that time (beginning 1990s) almost not aware of Russians in Holland. Though there were already stories in the Dutch press about the Russian Mafia, I am not sure the police believed this information. This was their mistake, because many “big guys” were coming there to “taste” Holland. And I am not talking even about all these illegals, who were “grazing” there all the time’.

After some time Victoria sold ‘Nes’ to another Russian-speaker, who promised to invest in the restaurant and make it more luxurious. However, this restaurant was not his main priority, he had a few other businesses in the Netherlands and left it to his relative and a Russian cook to manage the place. Most of the time the restaurant was empty, immigrants who received their residence permits felt they did not need to meet other Russian-speakers and preferred to spend their free time somewhere else, though illegals were still coming from time to time. After some time it appeared that the rent was not paid, nobody knew where the money had gone and the owner closed the restaurant.

105 Since 2001 a few other Russian restaurants opened in different cities in the Netherlands.
In 1997 another Russian-restaurant cafe, called ‘Oblomov’, was established in one of the quieter streets of Amsterdam. The owner was Valeri, who employed another Russian immigrant Oleg, as a cook and a barman. This cafe had an ambiguous reputation: many Russian-speakers considered it as a place of Mafia-meetings and avoided it. However, a few cultural events, which Oleg organised in the first year, attracted many immigrants, including those who had a negative attitude towards the place. By organizing concerts of Russian bards, lectures of Russian writers and Jazz evenings Oleg tried to improve the image of ‘Oblomov’. However, most of the time the cafe remained empty, and the weekly Jazz evenings attracted more local Dutch neighbours than the Russian-speaking public.

There were rumours that the cafe covered up money laundering operations, that there were ‘secret rooms’ on the second and third floors, in which stolen computers and electrical equipment was hidden, that it was protected by a Chechen criminal organisation. And especially that it served as a meeting place for Russian criminals who come to control their business in the Netherlands. In two cases, when I was sitting in ‘Oblomov’ with some of my informants, they showed me ‘Mafiosi’ who were sitting at another table. How did they know? They had seen them earlier in the company of Alex, a Russian-speaking businessman, the story of whom I describe later in this chapter. When I started to talk with the ‘Mafiosi’, it appeared that they were Georgians from Antwerp, who had come to Amsterdam ‘for business’, which was immediately interpreted by Galya, my informant, as members of a Georgian criminal gang which controls the diamond business in Belgium. In another case the ‘Mafiosi’ were Russian-speaking American tourists on their way to Israel. Anna, another informant, with whom I was in ‘Oblomov’ that evening explained that ‘they were wearing golden chains, which is a sign of their belonging to Russian gangs’.

There were also stories that Dutch men were coming there to look for Russian prostitutes. In several cases my informant Lena, a 24-year Russian immigrant, was approached by Dutch men, who simply invited her to come with them or asked ‘how much’? Another informant, a 56-year-old woman told me that she was approached by a Dutch man, who invited her to drink vodka with him and asked her whether she knew who of the Russian girls, sitting near the bar talking with Oleg, was ‘not too expansive’. Apparently the man thought that she was a ‘Madame’.

At one moment Oleg tried to buy the cafe from Valeri, but after they signed the contract he allegedly became incurably ill and simply disappeared, leaving debts he owed to many other Russian-speaking immigrants. All attempts to find him either in hospitals or at his friends’ houses, proved in vain. Different rumours were spread: that Oleg had leukaemia and was hospitalised somewhere in Europe, that he had AIDS and fled from his homosexual contacts back to Russia, that he was threatened by the Chechen Mafia, or that he simply did not want to repay his debts. The common story was that Oleg became ill and escaped with the money he lent from his acquaintances, leaving debts and threats behind. Until today nobody knows where he is and what has been the real reason for his disappearance. After he had left the cafe was sold.

‘Oblomov’ was still in existence, when the new Russian restaurant ‘Kalinka’ was opened in the centre of Amsterdam. In contrast to ‘Oblomov’ it did not pretend to become a cultural centre for Russian-speaking immigrants. Such a centre, which organised concerts and performances by artists from Russia, already existed. The owners of ‘Kalinka’ tried to create an image of a pre-Revolutionary style, a typical Russian kabak (tavern). Also the interior of the restaurant was in old Russian style, with one smaller room separated from the larger hall, ‘for more privacy’ and Chalyapin’s music in the background. In the beginning there was also a gypsy-trio that played every evening, but because of visa problems they had to go back to Russia. Since then there is life music performed by a Russian duo, with a repertoire that ranges from Russian romances to songs of popular Russian pop-singers. The manager, an
Armenian, emphasizes the ‘Russian’ image of ‘Kalinka’, though the cuisine consists mostly of Georgian dishes. The cook is Georgian; the musicians come from one of the former Soviet Asian republics. The public is different: from tourists to New Russians who ‘jump to Amsterdam for a weekend of shopping’.

On special occasions such as Old Russian New Year, 8 March (International Women’s Day), or the Russian Orthodox ‘Vera, Nadezhda, Lubov’ (day of three saints) celebration the restaurant is full with Russian-speakers. During the week it is almost empty, on weekends Russian-speakers come very late, after the non-Russian clients have left. Olga, a frequent visitor of ‘Kalinka’ told me:

‘This place is at least not so obviously criminal as “Oblomov”. The owners invested money in it, so Russians are not ashamed of coming here, and even bringing their guests. And still all these Russian cafes, restaurants, hotels and shops are only a shield. Those who make dirty money need places to launder it. They do not open these places to earn here, how much can you earn when it is empty all the time?!’.

As I mentioned earlier in this study, many Russian-speakers consider visiting Russian restaurants below their status. There are even some of them who feel offended to be invited there, as if they are ‘people from street’, i.e. petty criminals.

According to the information of some of my informants, there are many more ‘Russian’ places in the Netherlands, however nobody knows, because they do not advertise them. Especially in the centre of Amsterdam Russian-speakers buy hotels, restaurants and cafes. Thus, Russians buy even shawarma places and pizzerias, which are considered to be monopolised by Israelis or Egyptians. These ‘invisible’ owners are perceived by Russian-speakers as ‘pure criminals’. They do not even appear in the Netherlands, conducting their businesses from abroad, or employing local Russian-speaking businessmen to control the situation and manage their businesses in the Netherlands. These are, however, only rumours and there is no proof. All my informants mentioned only one specific big hotel in the centre of Amsterdam as a ‘Russian’ one, namely the owners were Russian-speakers.

During one of the house parties, the drunken girl-friend of a Russian businessman, whom all my informants defined as ‘Russian Mafioso’, boasted about the fact that her husband was going to buy the most expensive house in the Netherlands for her. When she was asked with what money, she said: ‘Come on, you know: girls and drugs’. He did indeed buy a very luxurious house in one of Amsterdam’s suburbs. Another informant, who knew him well, pointed at him as being a ‘very tough guy’. When I asked her whether she could introduce me to him, she answered: ‘do you want your children to become orphans? He is very dangerous!’ When I met him later at another party the man presented himself to me as a Russian businessman, a ‘HORECA’ man.

From We-East to Natalia ltd — International Russian business

Natalia arrived in the Netherlands with her family in 1990. Although she was a highly trained electronic engineer with a long experience at one of the leading electronic enterprises in Moscow, she failed to find a job in the Netherlands. After three months of intensive correspondence with all possible electronic enterprises in the Netherlands, from Groningen to Maastricht, she gave up. For a short period she cleaned the houses of rich Jewish families in Amstelveen. In 1991, however she decided to start her own business — a joint venture, together with her cousin, who lived in Ukraine. Natalia, together with two other Russian-
speaking partners, who already had Dutch passports, Igor and Elena, opened a small mediating company, the ‘We-East’ company. They tried to establish contacts with Dutch companies to sell products to Russia: textile, milk and meat products, cosmetics and sweets. At the same time they tried to sell Russian art objects, metals, and even old military equipment in the Netherlands.

The first year was very unsuccessful. Elena, disappointed with failures, left the company, and was replaced by other Russian-speakers who worked without salaries. The condition of Natalia was that if those Russian-speakers who worked at her office did not succeed after a few months, they had to leave, if contacts were established and could be used for mutual benefit, they could stay. After some time their first successful deal in textile was negotiated. This was followed by a second one in equipment for an agricultural factory, then a third in flowers, and so on. The new partner, Michael, who joined the company succeeded in making a deal in the oil trade. Because of this deal in three years the turnover of the ‘We-East’ company reached 13 million US dollars.

Several incidents took place during the seven years that the company existed, in the course of which the trust between the partners became less obvious. At one moment contacts were made in the Netherlands with a few Chechen businessmen, who traded in second-hand cars. Natalia lent a sum of money from them, allegedly for one of her new projects, which in fact she did not intend to. When the Chechens discovered this, they asked for their money back with percentage, but Natalia, who was at this time abroad did not respond ‘on time’. Their next step was to send her a warning fax, in which they doubted the good health of her 80-year old mother in Russia. At this time Natalia hastened to give back all the money. She did, however, ask ‘some friends in Russia “to take care” of those who threatened her’. As she explained to me later:

‘These guys are too dangerous; one has to take them seriously, even if they are not criminals. Who knows who is their uncle, or cousin, they are so connected with each other. People from mountains, you know. They understand only each other. I had to ask my Chechen connections to take care of those who threatened me’.

A few other businessmen joined the company for shorter or longer periods of time. Three of them (at different occasions) told me that they had left because ‘there were too many criminal links there (in “We-East”), that ‘Natalia will not die a natural death’, or that ‘She (Natalia) is a godmother of the Russian Mafia’. All of them were openly accusing her of having criminal connections.

In 1994 Natalia, together with Michael, started another business, which dealt in ‘financial operations and real estate’. She employed 12 people, most of whom Russian-speaking immigrants, and two Dutch secretaries. The core of the company now included two people: Natalia and Michael. Michael, who continued contacts with oil companies and bankers in Russia, provided the stable and intensive business contracts. While Michael spent most of the time working in the Netherlands, Natalia travelled abroad, mostly to Russia and Ukraine. She was also the one, according to her partner, who had the most expenses. Several times Michael expressed his dissatisfaction with her ‘too luxury way of life’ and with the amount of work she left him to do in the Netherlands. She bought houses, land and restaurants without asking Michael’s permission. One of the greatest conflicts took place when she ‘lent’ two million US$ to a potential business in Austria, which never came back to the company. Later it appeared that the loan (with royalties) was transferred to Natalia’s private account in

106 According to my sources the man, who had threatened Natalia, was liquidated in Russia.
Luxembourg. This conflict resulted in the resignation of Michael, who no longer trusted his partner.

Before the conflict, Natalia had shared her plans about new deals with Michael: she wanted to sell a small cafe owned by the Russian Mafia but registered in her name. She did not tell Michael how she had come into contact with the criminal organization, but she did have a letter from an attorney on the matter. Natalia wanted to make a profit from the sale, even if it meant cheating the criminal organization. This criminal organization had property in Amsterdam, including businesses in the P.C. Hoofstraat, a very expensive shopping area in the city. At first, Michael had hopes he could avoid an escalation between him and Natalia. He realized how dangerous it was to make deals with Russian criminal organizations, since they often appear in the Netherlands, mostly for razborki. However, when the conflict between the partners worsened, Natalia became afraid that Michael would tell somebody about her plans. There were two dangers: revenge from the side of the criminal organization that owned the cafe, and danger from the Dutch police, who could suspect Natalia’s role in the criminal organization. Mutual telephone warnings between the former partners took place. Both took these threats very seriously. A friend of the two partners explained that neither Natalia nor Michael were dangerous, but they have “bad friends” they could hire in Russia. And these guys are able to do everything. They are simply contract killers. They always had this kind of connections.

Other informants who witnessed the escalating conflict, suspected Natalia of being involved in illegal activities. One of them told me he would not be surprised if Natalia was investing in real estate in other parts of Amsterdam, where New Russians like to invest. This ex-partner of Natalia tried to analyse the situation:

‘Natalia herself is a small fish, shpana\textsuperscript{107}. She can bluff, but not bite. The real criminals probably use her for small things. That is why Michael is not taking her seriously. He knows her. But if Michael will talk, she will find herself in problems’.

At last Natalia fled the country.

Three main conclusions can be drawn in this case:
1. There were links between a Russian-speaking businesswoman and a criminal organization operating in the Netherlands.
2. The criminal organization was dealing in money laundering by investing in real estate and horeca.
3. The Russian Mafia buys real estate using ‘small businessmen’, based in the Netherlands. These businessmen become tools in the hands of criminal organizations. In some cases ‘small businessmen’ voluntarily choose to co-operate with Russian criminal organizations and in the case of Natalia even tried to cheat the Mafia and make money on these re-sales of real estate.

This case is based on observation of the links between a businesswoman and Russian criminals. The role of the criminals is important in determining the character of business: Natalia turned from regular trade with Russia to investment in real estate in the Netherlands. It was not her business as such that was interesting to the Russian Mafia, but its position in the Dutch business market: a legal company that could be used for money laundering. Her contacts in Russia (or other former Soviet republics) allowed her easy access to criminal organizations, to which she had offered her services. Is this a characteristic feature of the Russian-speaking businessmen, or also of Dutch businessmen who have business contacts with Russia? I will examine this question now.

\textsuperscript{107} Slang, meaning a person at the bottom of the Russian criminal hierarchy.
3.g.2 How Dutch businessmen view their Russian-speaking colleagues and partners

I was talking with Anna in a Russian restaurant in Amsterdam, when an acquaintance of her joined us at the table. After a short conversation and a few glasses of 'Stolichnaya' vodka the newcomer told us that this was his first visit to Amsterdam. To my question what made him come to the Netherlands he replied that he just came to do some shopping.

- What kind of shopping?
- Maybe a house or two (all this in a joking tone). One in the centre here (in Amsterdam), on the canal, another somewhere in Limburg.
- Are you going to live here?
- Oh, no! It's too cold for me here. I prefer San Francisco.

Anna told him that houses had become very expensive in the Netherlands. He then opened his black 'James Bond' case filled with American dollars to show us that there was no problem. This kind of story is common in Dutch business circles. Wim, the director of a flower company told me that he was approached by two beautiful Russian girls about 19 or 20 years old, who carried a suitcase full of cash and wanted 'to buy some flowers for business in Russia'. Another Dutch businessman, Henk, told me that three Russians, two men and a woman, once visited him in his office. Their visiting cards showed that they had an import/export company in the Netherlands. They wanted to buy 'some candies, sweets and chocolates' for a client in St. Petersburg, who owned several supermarkets there. Henk already had experience in doing business with Russians, who 'always paid too late'. He hesitated for a moment, but then one of his guests opened the suitcase full of dollars and said that there would be no problems with advance payment. Both Dutch and Russian informants told me similar stories about this manner of using cash to buy real estate, shops and cafes. According to Wim:

'I had a Russian partner, who was buying flowers from me for sale in Moscow underground's kiosks. The guy lives in the Netherlands, has a Dutch wife. He is a kind of a middleman, has a mediating company, not only for flowers, but also for food products and textiles. I think. He always paid in advance; I never had problems with him. But today I would not start working with Russians, everybody says that it is not secure, that they are very criminal and smart and can easily cheat you'.

Peter, the owner of a timber factory in Amsterdam tried in 1993-94 to do business in Karelia, famous for its woods. The joint venture he started with two Russian engineers in St. Petersburg made its first profits when a few guys, who proposed 'protection', approached them. Peter had heard earlier that this was a way to survive as a business in Russia, and was ready to agree. However, his partners were not convinced that the guys were the right ones. They disagreed on whom to approach for 'krysha': the security company or a specific criminal group. Peter, who lived at that time in Russia decided to return to Amsterdam until his partners, who were 'more competent in these matters' would find a solution. The criminals, however, did not have time to wait for the agreement and started to threaten. Back in the Netherlands Peter did not escape the threatening faxes. Under the pressure of his Russian wife he decided after some time to stop the business, though 'it had a very good potential'. Peter analysed the business situation in Russia as follows:
'The business in Russia cannot run without criminal involvement. I would not mind to have people to protect me there, but this ‘protection’ business is also a business. Violent, but a business! Some groups are better equipped and more influential than others, and much more expensive too'.

In general the prevailing opinion among those Dutch businessmen who tried to work with Russians in the former Soviet Union or in the Netherlands is that business and Mafia are interconnected and one takes a risk when starting to make deals with Russians. On the other hand the risk is often taken by Dutch businessmen. Ger, who left his academic position and started business together with his brother, providing Dutch dairy products to one of the largest networks of supermarkets in Ukraine, told me:

'It was an adventure for me: travelling there, meeting people. They were so different from what I used to know. My stereotypical image of Russians, which was created during all my life was broken at the moment I landed in Kiev. I realised that I could totally identify with their way of thinking and living'.

Ger said that he had never faced Russian Mafia, or any ‘krysha’: ‘Maybe our clients there have problems with criminals, but we never heard anything. To my opinion all these “Mafia horrors” there are very much exaggerated’.

According to Ger any Dutch businessman can do business with Russia, without fear of criminals. He himself established close contacts with Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands and even considered widening his business together with them. Another case is the one of Dirk, a Dutchman in his late 50s, divorced, who wanted to marry a Russian woman he met in Amsterdam. After a few unsuccessful affairs he decided to open a ‘Meeting Bureau’ in the Netherlands. Russian women were invited to send their photographs to him and he would find a groom for them in the Netherlands. He advertised in Russian newspapers and in a few weeks compiled several albums with photos and letters of Russian young women, who wanted to come to the Netherlands to meet men. To arrange their trip Dirk decided to employ Victor, the brother of a Russian-speaking immigrant in the Netherlands, who was supposed to take care of visas and tickets in Russia. After some time, however, Victor told him that in Russia this sort of business is usually controlled by criminals, and women who wrote to Dirk were probably prostitutes who wanted to emigrate and allow their pimps to enter the international market. Dirk was horrified.

Three reactions to doing business with Russians may be distinguished in this context: avoidance, prudence and denial. The first is expressed by those who avoid any business with Russians or Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands, convinced that they are either criminals themselves or connected to Russian Mafia. These Dutch often had one or more bad experiences, which had led them to this conclusion. The second reaction is less extreme: there is a potential in mutual business, but one must be very careful, since dealing with Russians often means dealing with special rules of the game, with which Dutch may be unfamiliar. These Dutch businessmen do not exclude the possibility to work with Russians if there is an opportunity, but only on very secure and safe conditions. They usually terminate the business when there is a sign that criminal organizations may become involved in one way or another. The third impression is that business with Russia is safe and all the stories about the Russian Mafia are very much exaggerated. This is similar to the ideas of my Russian informant,
presented in the beginning of the chapter: when you are not looking for the Mafia, the Mafia will not look for you.

3.h Conclusions

Emigration from the former Soviet Union and a spread of the threatening image of Red Mafia in the world provide us with a unique opportunity to study the process of ethnic organized crime. The emigration population from the former USSR included various groups in terms of ethnicity, education and occupation. In the receiving countries however, they are generally viewed as one ‘Russian community’. But as we have seen, in the Netherlands, Russian-speakers do not form a single organized community, because common geographical origins and new socio-economic problems in the Netherlands do not make up a basis for the organized community. Nevertheless, as everywhere else in the world, they are considered as one monolithic community of ‘Russians’. And not simply Russians, but also criminals, Mafiosi and prostitutes.

After their arrival and first steps in the country Russian-speakers realized that their image is strongly connected to that of a powerful monster: ‘Russian Mafia’. This image had very important consequences. On the one hand the criminal reputation was a reason for the authorities to treat Russian-speakers to their disadvantages in regard to jobs and study-opportunities. This negative reputation was a reason to even put a halt to further immigration as in the case of JMW. On the other hand, the Russian-speaking immigrants, including criminals among them, became actively engaged in a process of constructing and manipulating their own image. This process communicates with the ideas about Mafia and crime that they brought from Russia. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, they talked in terms of survival, protection of their lives and business and the opening up of new opportunities.

Manipulating their criminal image became a strategy of survival in the Netherlands. The Russian-speakers have chosen to exploit the prevailing negative stereotypes of their ‘Russian-ness’ and of their criminal image in their own interests. As to ‘Russian-ness’, the image used to provide a neutralization technique: How could they as Russians know that specific norms and habits that were absolutely ‘normal’ and ‘legal’ in the former Soviet Union, would be illegal or forbidden in the Netherlands? The pretence of connections with the ‘Russian Mafia’, on the other hand, serves to scare away economic competitors or can be advantageous against opponents. Especially for the Russian-speaking businessmen this ‘dangerous’ reputation seems to be useful in their attempt to succeed in the Netherlands.

As shown above, there are several types of Russian-speaking businessmen. The first is a group of ‘honest businessmen’, who sometimes becomes victims of the stigmatisation of the whole Russian-speaking business community and who, like other Russian-speaking immigrants, have to deal with the generally negative stereotypes. The second group may be characterised as a group of Russian-speaking businessmen who do not separate between legal and illegal activities, though they consider themselves to be honest businesspeople. The main misunderstanding is based on cultural differences or on special techniques of manipulating these cultural stereotypes. There is, however, a group of Russian-speaking criminals who use the new opportunity to present themselves as businesspeople, while they are in fact conducting criminal activities. In all three groups their understanding of what is business and how it can be connected to crime plays a crucial role.

The duality of views in Dutch society is obvious: Russian-speaking businessmen are usually considered by the Dutch as criminals in general, while Russians themselves view their
activity as pure business. These views as well are based on cultural differences. When explaining why an illegal operation was conducted in the Netherlands, Russian-speakers first emphasized that this operation were considered illegal only in the Netherlands, but not in Russia or other former Soviet republics. A different argument could be that specific activities may be considered to be against the law but they are not criminal. Several examples were presented here, in which Russian-speakers decide to ignore Dutch laws and apply specific manipulating strategies to reinforce their 'Russian' identity, which allegedly justifies their understanding of terms 'legal' and 'illegal' (see also Siegel and Bovenkerk 2000). This view corresponds with what Klebnikov argued in his study on financial oligarchs in the post-reform Russia: ‘Many financial operations that in the West would be classified as crimes (certain types of bribery, fraud, embezzlement, and racketeering, for instance) are not necessarily crimes in Russia’ (2000:3).

Another important conclusion I made during this study is that the Netherlands plays a unique role in the mosaic of the criminal Russian-speaking Diaspora in the world. The Netherlands are considered to be a ‘Mafia-free’ country, to which the Russian-speaking criminal ‘big businessmen’ come to escape the internal conflicts with other Russian rivals and to settle their families ‘away from problems’. The big crime bosses come to the Netherlands to have some rest from their mafia wars in the former Soviet Union. The Netherlands are not considered by Russian-speaking criminal businessmen a very attractive country for real business, such as Germany, Israel or the United States. The only attractive side of the Netherlands for Russian organized crime is its financial potential. I discuss this in chapter 5.
Chapter 4.
How the Russian-speakers view the Mafia and crime in the Netherlands

In this chapter I focus on how Russian-speakers view crime in general and Russian crime in particular, what their perception is of the Mafia, of immigrant connections with organized crime, how they understand Russian organized crime in terms of structure, organization, recruitment, connection with the former Soviet Union, ethnicity, fields of activity, etc., and what the main criminal activities in the Netherlands are. This analyses of their own interpretation will later be compared to official data from the Dutch authorities. Because they view certain criminal activities not as criminal, the ideas of the Russian-speakers can have consequences for their behaviour. Their perceptions can explain why they might engage in certain acts that are illegal or criminal according to Dutch law. To what extent does Russian organized crime present a problem for the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands? According to official reports, as indicated in the introduction, the Russian Mafia jeopardizes the security of the Russian-speaking community. But what do Russian-speakers themselves think about it? Does the Russian Mafia operate in the same way in the Netherlands as it does in the former Soviet Union, according to the experiences and judgement of the Russian-speakers? Do they think it poses a threat to themselves and Dutch society at large?

4.a Organized Crime as a Social Problem among the Russian-speakers

Most of my informants indicated that one of the reasons they left the former Soviet Union was the unsafe situation and crime. The criminality in the post-reform period increased and became a daily experience of many people. The immigrants were hoping that outside the former Soviet Union they would not have to deal with it. Especially Western Europe (more so than the United States and Israel) was seen as a safe place with low levels of crime and modern measures and techniques to protect the people.

'We immigrated to the Netherlands and not to Israel for two reason: first, because it was the best cultural choice for us. Russians are Europeans and cannot live in the Middle East. And the second is because of the Mafia. The whole Russian Mafia immigrated to Israel and to America, because they can easily hide there among millions of other Russian-speakers. In the Netherlands they would be too visible'.

These are the words of Mark, who had come to the Netherlands in 1990 together with his wife, both pensioners. Their daughter immigrated to Israel with her family while their son remained in Moscow, because ‘as a lawyer he has a very good position there’. Mark and his wife told me that the Russian Mafia was a daily reality in Moscow: they would shoot in the streets, they would enter a public bus and order all passengers to get out, because they needed a vehicle for their private purposes. Other informants often emphasized that the Russian Mafia was very active in the beginning of the 1990s. The newspapers were also full of reports on ‘street accidents’, shootings and liquidations of businessmen and politicians in Russian cities. People felt unsafe and threatened. ‘Now it is quiet in Moscow, because all Mafia is abroad’, Mark laughed.

While Russia is viewed by most of my informants as a ‘land of crime’, the Netherlands are considered by many of the Russian-speakers I met during my fieldwork, as a
country where the Russian Mafia ‘cannot be felt’, and as a safe and quiet place. Not because there is no organized crime, but because first, this crime is not Russian, which means not threatening to Russian-speakers per se, but happening somewhere else, among the Dutch or other minority groups; and secondly because Russian criminals are not affecting the daily life of other Russian-speakers, the way they used to in the former Soviet Union. Yulia, a Russian 18-year-old student in Amsterdam, told me that she is more afraid of ‘all these blacks or Moroccans’ than of Russians. In the underground she always looks for a place near a white person (regardless of where they come from) instead of sitting down next to these ‘frightening Negroes’. Other Russian-speakers told me that if they feel afraid of criminals, these are not Russians, but ‘Turks, Arabs and Negroes’.

The immigrants wanted to escape crime and danger in the former Soviet Union, but they never realized that the ‘quiet Netherlands’ are in fact not that quiet when it comes to crime. Of course the situation does not compare to the Russian scandals of corruption, money laundering, cyber-crime and daily contract killings, but the Netherlands turned out to be a country of petty crimes, meaning not just bicycle theft, but also burglary and violent crimes. In this regard it ranks high among other industrialized countries (Van Kesteren et al., 2000). The role of minorities in this area is prominent.

Since the Van Traa Fact-Finding Parliamentary Commission in 1994 it is undeniable that there are various forms of organized crime in the Netherlands. The debate on the seriousness of organized crime is still going on. According to Fijnaut et al organized crime in the Netherlands ‘is still mainly confined to the traditional illegal supply of certain goods and services – the list being headed by drugs followed by arms and women – and financial and economic fraud’ (1998: 203). According to criminologists the activity of foreign, migrant, but also Dutch criminal groups is continuously growing and more often manifesting itself in Dutch society (ibid: 217-218).

According to most Russian-speakers, however, there is no organized crime in the Netherlands at all. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter the Netherlands is viewed as a ‘Mafia-free’ country. The question is whether there is any Russian organized crime. In general most of the Russian-speaking immigrants with whom I talked during my fieldwork had ‘never had problems with Mafia of any kind’, ‘felt safe’, or ‘did not have contacts with criminals’. On the other hand they do consider the Russian Mafia a problem, but only as an abstract, a ‘product of Russia’, which they hoped they had left behind in the former Soviet Union, together with other problems such as anti-Semitism, economic instability, etc. Usually they mentioned ‘Mafia’ in the context of their past, their life in Russia. In the Netherlands, according to them, the situation was different: in Russia they could not avoid the Mafia, in the Netherlands it is only those who are involved with criminals that have contacts with the Russian Mafia. Grigori, a Russian engineer at one of the Dutch electronic companies explained:

‘There is of course Russian Mafia in Holland, as everywhere in the world today. But the Mafia always deals with Mafia; decent people do not mix with the underworld. I have never heard about extortion among honest Russian businessmen here. Extortionists stayed in Russia, they did not come to Holland’.

Yuri, a Russian businessman, is convinced that in ‘such an open society like Europe is, there is no way to catch the real Mafioso, because the authorities do not know whom to look for’. According to Yuri, a ‘normal businessman’ can be a criminal and nobody will believe that he has connections with Mafia.

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108 The high percentage of bicycle ownership, however, is an important factor dictating the high overall level of crime (Mayhew and van Dijk 1997:66).
Most Russian informants told me that there is Russian Mafia operating in the Netherlands. However, compared to other European countries, especially Germany, it operates on a small scale and it hardly influences the Russian-speaking immigrant communities. There were a few names and events, continuously repeated by many informants, on which they based their judgement. Most informants heard about the Russian Mafia through the Russian and Dutch media as well. The majority told me that they (or other immigrants) try to avoid contacts with these individual criminals, whom they suspect to be Mafia. Irina, a Russian engineer who later became a businesswoman:

‘When I came to Holland I lived in a small hotel. My neighbours were a Russian couple: a very athletic man and his young wife. They were very rich, but in the Netherlands they had to pretend to be a regular couple trying to get a refugee status. They had to hide their wealth. But once I saw her wardrobe: the most expensive dresses by Chanel and Versace. You can imagine how strange they looked in a small poor hotel-room. And then her jewels! Diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds – rings, bangles, and necklaces! In a glass jar, just like that! When I admired them, she said: “You don’t know what I had to leave in Russia. I took only the most important things, because we were in a hurry.” The day they received their refugee status, her husband bought a new black BMW, and a few weeks later - a big house in Amsterdam. I have never seen them again. They were real Mafia, I don’t know how many people he killed. I did not want any contact with them since then’.

Irina knew the ‘real Russian Mafia’ and based her argument on the suspicious connection between money and crime. In Russia ‘rich’ means ‘Mafia’ or at least connections to the Mafia’. Irina applied her Russian views to the Netherlands. The fear of the Russian Mafia operating in the Netherlands was often emphasized by Russian-speakers. For this reason many prefer to keep a distance from ‘Russian’ places such as restaurants, which are seen as meeting points for Russian criminals, or they avoid contacts with Russian-speakers altogether.

There is not a trace of evidence, neither in reports by the authorities nor in the impression of my informants, that there is one separate Russian criminal organization, which could be identified by Russian-speaking immigrants: neither newly formed in the Netherlands nor imported from the former Soviet Union. From the evidence of my informants I can conclude that there are representatives of various criminal organizations from the former Soviet Union (not necessarily just Russian) who appear in the Netherlands for ‘business’ or to visit family. But ‘business’ in this context can mean extortion (there was evidence of a Georgian criminal group that intimidated their former compatriots; members of a Latvian criminal organization and representatives of the criminal world of St. Petersburg), illegal operations (such as car theft or the smuggling of women) and razborki, which can lead to contract killings (more details in chapter 5).

For most of the Russian-speaking immigrants Russian organized crime presents no real threat. The social problems Russian-speakers face, however, have to do with being associated with the Russian Mafia, its mere reputation can create obstacles to their attempts to integrate in Dutch society. For some businesspeople, however, especially for those who work with Russia or other former republics, the Russian Mafia can present a problem, just like it would had they still been living in Russia. In this regard the Russian Mafia is truly a transnational phenomenon and not a locally oriented new criminal group.

If we turn our attention once again to the three models of interconnection between criminal organizations and immigrant communities, presented in chapter 1, it becomes clear that the first model – in which criminal enterprises work on their own and have no need for immigrant communities - is the most suitable in our case. According to my informants, even if there is extortion going on in certain areas of Russian business, it happens only among those
who are connected with the Mafia in Russia itself. Russian-speaking businessmen who avoided contacts with Russian criminal organizations were never victims of extortion or other violence from Russian criminal group in the Netherlands.

'There are two separate worlds: Russian immigrants who came to the Netherlands to start a new life; and the Russian underworld, those who came here to continue what they did in Russia: stealing, using drugs, or working in prostitution. These criminals are illegal here, they are not immigrants. These two worlds are too far apart, they cannot mix or have any influence on each other', as Yuri explained it.

In order to answer the question what the Russian-speakers mean by 'crime' and 'Mafia' I shall now focus on specific explanations given by my informants themselves.

4.a. 1 What is crime and what is not crime

The Russian-speakers arrived in the Netherlands with specific (Soviet) definitions of crime. In the former Soviet Union the prevailing ideology determined what was regarded as a crime. For example prostitution was a crime, but sex-education in general was also considered a crime: the crime of 'juvenile debauchery'. Speculation was another crime, but so was private trade or business. There was also the crime of being unemployed (the crime of 'parasitism') or the crime of being an 'enemy of the people', committed when someone told a joke which had any political connotations. Those were very specific Soviet socialist types of crime, based on the socialist principle that everyone has to contribute to society and that everyone has to identify with socialism, in other words: no criticism of the dominant Soviet ideology. Was murder similar to shouting anti-Soviet slogans? According to Soviet law both could be punished in the same manner: by the highest penalty. But did the Soviet people view them as similar crimes? There was at least an agreement about 'universal' crimes: murder, theft, rape, etc. In other words, anything that involved violence was considered a crime. To my informants violence, or more precisely 'zhestokost' (cruelty), constitutes an essential ingredient of crime. According to the Russian businesswoman Alla, for example, 'crime is the use of cruelty'. Another informant, Igor, a computer programmer, described crime as something that happens 'when blood is spilled'. When I asked him if he thought cracking or hacking was a crime, he answered:

'Of course not, this is a kind of chess game: who will beat his opponent? It is a contest of brains! One is programming, another is cracking. If the cracker succeeds, the program was obviously not good enough. Fair game! No cruelty!'

According to Alla,

'Money-laundering as an activity in itself is not criminal; the way this money was acquired is criminal, it could be anything: extortion, killings, and drugs. Those who launder money are not killing; they invest bad money in good things. They do business, but those who kill are criminals!'

Other informants indicated, however, that financial or computer crimes may present very serious problems for any society and can become a reason for violence against specific individuals. In the Netherlands, in any case, they had not heard of Russian-speaking
immigrants involved in these kinds of crime. According to them the Russian Mafia operates in Europe out of a Russian base and the only Russian criminals one can find in the Netherlands are contract killers, who are hired by 'big bosses' in Russia to 'solve their problems'. For Russian-speakers crime is by and large equivalent to a violent act, be it robbery or theft, but not verbal assault, intimidation or other non-physical threats.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, bribery is often viewed as a form of saying 'thank you' and corruption in general as 'a necessity' to survive. Several informants explained that they were ready to give a bribe to the right person (to get a better apartment, better medical treatment, in one case even to get a child into a better school in Amsterdam). The only problem, they emphasized, was that in the Netherlands they did not know whom to approach, they did not have the 'right contacts'. Another time I participated in a conversation about whether or not Dutch officials accept bribes. According to Yuri: 'they would like to accept, but nobody suggests it', to which another participant, Masha answered: 'o-ho! They accept bribes all the time, no less than we do, but we are outsiders, we do not know how to behave, how to slip it into their hands'.

Judging from these conversations, Russian-speakers seem to regret not being fully integrated in Dutch society, because they would like to know where to find and play corrupt Dutch officials. The idea that officials in general are crooked was taken for granted. This may be explained as a direct continuation of the image of officials that existed in their former homeland, which they still considered to be instrumental and useful in the Netherlands. Natalia, who was a lawyer in the former Soviet Union, explained:

'It was very difficult not to violate one or another law in Russia. There was a different reality there; everyone was kind of a "small criminal". If the authorities wanted to catch somebody for being unreliable, or not loyal, or whatever, they would follow him just for a few days. You know, on almost every public figure there was a kompromat\textsuperscript{109}. In the Netherlands it is not so simple. How many politicians here were caught for violating the law, or any delinquency?'

According to her, the continuity of perceptions of what is criminal or not is inevitable among the Russian-speakers, because 'their souls are soaked in Soviet education forever' and they have become 'homo-sovieticus' in all their deeds and thoughts. Natalia analysed the situation:

'It will take at least one generation of people to learn from other democratic countries, to delete the conviction of being the most wise, the most erudite and most progressive folk in the world. Only then will they be able to understand what is business and what is crime, or to make a distinction between sex and prostitution. The reforms only gave birth to the real education'.

When I discussed Natalia's predictions with a few Russian-speaking businessmen, they were critical. Vladimir reacted as follows:

'This is the typical presentation of the situation by criminal Soviet nomenklatura. They would like everyone to believe that Russians, like small children, must be educated, that they were brainwashed and cannot distinguish between black and white. But you better look around: the richest businessmen, the most prominent politicians, intellectuals... and big criminal bosses, of course! Could they have come so far in the world without a total change in their Soviet habits?''

\textsuperscript{109} Komprometiruiyuschi material – compromising material
Most of my informants agreed on the definition of crime as violence against individuals. They were, however, divided in their opinions on whether this definition should be restricted to physical violence or that verbal or other forms of violence should be included. Their views on changes in these ideas were also divided: some justified their old views about, for example, corruption or prostitution, others expressed their readiness to adopt new perceptions and norms. The most frequent was the combination of both, or the selective use of old or new perceptions, depending on the situation.

Ekaterina, a Russian translator, expressed one of the prevailing views on the policy of Dutch law enforcement agencies. According to her, Dutch officials invented the whole idea of the ‘Russian Mafia’ in an attempt to divert public attention from ‘their own Dutch Mafia’. As proof of this, Ekaterina pointed to the ‘strange coincidence’ between the ‘Fastovsky case’ and the ‘IRT-affair’. This was a case, investigated by the Parliamentary Fact-finding Commission known as the Van Traa Commission, in which police officials were accused of using illegal methods to investigate drug smuggling into the Netherlands. According to Ekaterina, this was a perfect time to tell the Dutch public that the Russian Mafia was operating in their country and that it was responsible for all sorts of evil. In this way the corrupt Dutch police officers did not attract too much public attention and were, of course, never properly punished. This ‘conspiracy approach’ explained, according to Ekaterina, the whole idea of the ‘Russian Mafia’ as an invention of the Dutch authorities. The general view is that the Dutch authorities have ‘no real problems’ in the Netherlands and invent them to justify the existence of many of their organizations and institutions.

The Dutch police are seen by Russian-speakers as ‘weak’: ‘they cannot even deal with these Moroccan boys in Amsterdam’, ‘they don’t know how to shoot’, ‘everyone laughs at them, even the Dutch themselves’. And even more extreme: ‘they are all gay’. One woman said that the only good thing about the Dutch police is their beautiful uniform. Many informants indicated that they would never report a stolen bicycle or a robbery on the tram: ‘a waste of time’, ‘no use’, ‘are you kidding?’ The impotence of the police was repeated several times in the context of Boris Fastovsky’s disappearance, after which many Russian-speaking businessmen were investigated. In this case the police used all its facilities to search for the body, including the help of helicopters and special equipment, but without any success. Other liquidation cases were also mentioned as ‘too complicated for Dutch police’. There are jokes as well, especially about the liberal way policemen treat prostitutes. The general conclusion among Russian-speakers was that this kind of police force is not able to deal with serious criminals, let alone the Russian Mafia.

Maria, a Russian piano teacher, was stopped by traffic police for a routine check. She did not have her seat belt on. Maria had to wait for an hour for her papers to be examined. She was in a hurry, on her way to a piano lesson, and became angry. She asked the policeman:

‘Is this how the Dutch government wastes money that should be used to fight criminals? The police is spoiled, you are not used to work effectively, and you don’t know what is important and who you have to fight against’.

When the policeman politely listened to her speech and then at last returned her documents, she became furious: ‘In Russia they would have arrested me already for offending Russian police agents, and here they are like a wall: nothing can move them’.

In another case, Masha, a Russian businesswoman, was brought in for questioning by the police after the kidnapping of a Russian-speaking businessman in Amsterdam.
'The first question the officer asked me was: "Where did you bury the body?" Incredible! Then I answered him: "And why did you rape your neighbour?" He looked at me as if I was crazy. I told him that this is exactly what I felt about his question.'

According to the Russian-speakers the Dutch police is not professional; they pay attention to unimportant things instead of dealing with real problems. According to them, however, 'they are not used to real problems in the Netherlands', compared to Russia or the United States.

Victor, computer specialist, presented one of the popular opinions:

'How can the Dutch police deal with money laundering or computer crime, if they are used to deal only with drug-dealers and pimps. How can they fight what they call "Russian Mafia", if they cannot distinguish between Poles, Serbs and Chechens?'

If the general opinion of Russian-speakers towards the police is negative or indifferent in most cases, the attitudes towards Dutch lawyers range from very negative to excellent. Those immigrants who saw their request for citizenship initially denied and then turned to the assistance of two immigration lawyers (both provided by JMW) were very satisfied with them. One of them however was described as 'very expensive', 'he likes presents', etc. Some immigrants suspected that he took bribes, but 'they had no proof'. One immigrant, Olga, was wondering why all Jewish Russians who were first refused their residence permits and who were assisted by one and the same lawyer, received these permits after all, without exception. In other matters, such as divorce where the husband had returned to Russia, immigrants told me that they could not find Dutch lawyers 'who have expertise in international law'. In almost all cases women had to employ both Dutch and Russian lawyers, who 'did double work' and 'cost a fortune'.

Some Russian-speaking businessmen complained that Dutch lawyers are too slow and not effective. One of them, named Grigori, waited for three days in a police cell under remand before his lawyer, one of the most famous lawyers in the Netherlands came to get his release. Grigori was furious: 'Why did it take you so long? Don’t I pay you a fortune?'

The perception of legal and illegal in the Netherlands is clear in the Russian-speakers’ view. In general they consider the Dutch drug policy as exaggerated, especially concerning the influence on young children and teenagers.

The research method I employed in this study allowed me to make an important discovery, namely, that there is a wide gap between ‘crime’ as Russian-speakers understand it and ‘crime’ as understood by the Dutch authorities and the police. Certain activities that are obviously crimes in Dutch eyes, such as corruption, economic crime, money laundering are not perceived in the same way by Russian-speaking immigrants, who consider these as unimportant and childish. Only cultural differences can explain this gap; it can lead to misunderstandings, which in its turn can have serious consequences for both sides, including mutual stigmatisation.

4.b Illegal Russian-speakers!? 

Much has been written about illegal migrants in general (Koser 1998, Soysal 1994) and in the Netherlands in particular (Engbersen et al 1999, Burgers and Engbersen (eds) 1999). This literature examines various aspects of the life of illegals in different societies: where they stay, work, receive medical care, etc. Less is known about the social and cultural life of illegal
immigrants and their own attitudes towards different aspects of their existence. In the Netherlands there is an ongoing debate on the link between illegality and criminality. Is it true that illegal migrants are more often involved in criminal offences than the rest of the population, does illegality automatically lead to criminality? Although there are studies on the link between illegality and criminality (Van der Leun 1999), no clear conclusions have been reached so far. What do Russian-speakers think about the problem of illegality and criminality in the Netherlands?

The Dutch immigration policy is considered wrong, ‘instead of bringing highly educated people from East Europe, the Dutch ministry is allowing entrance to ‘illiterates’ and aids-patients’. Thus, one businessman told me that ‘the immigration policy of the Netherlands will result in a catastrophe with all their liberties towards these criminal “blacks” they give permission to enter the country.’ According to some informants the Dutch authorities need highly educated immigrants to ‘enrich’ their own cultural life and to be able to compete with leading high-tech societies such as the United States or Germany. In this context, they have to be much more liberal in allowing East-Europeans, and especially Russian-speakers, to settle in the country, and they have to change their criteria when it comes to education, including official documents. According to my informants, Dutch people are still locked onto the old-fashioned stereotype of communist Russians, and they are not able to see the post-Soviet generation in a different light. Only when they have more truthful knowledge of the developments both in the Soviet Union and in the immigrant countries and learn more about Russian-speakers, will they be able to get rid of these old images, which, according to my informants, do not fit the new reality. The role of the Dutch media is important in this context.

According to my informants the number of illegal Russian-speaking migrants in the Netherlands ranges from 20,000 to 60,000 and even more\(^\text{110}\). How the Russian-speakers arrive at these numbers of illegal immigrants is not clear. Police files are of no use in this case, because only very small numbers come into contact with the police, either as victims or as offenders. The numbers of illegals that were caught, does not tell us much about the real picture.

The illegal immigrants are usually viewed by Russian-speaking immigrants as those who have the courage to change their lives even when they have no chance of establishing themselves properly in the Netherlands. In a way they are ‘heroes’, and usually they receive assistance from other Russian-speakers. They are the preferred employees of legal immigrants when it comes to babysitters, maids, private teachers and so on, not only because they are paid less, but also because of the ‘double-profit’: they are easy to communicate with and in this way the children can practice the Russian language (which is an important value in the Russian-speaking families). According to Mark:

‘Illegal immigration is something for young people. They are here today, there tomorrow. They have no responsibilities and are easy to move around. And they are not afraid of being caught. Our generation is still terrified of authorities, we need guarantees’.

The characteristics of illegal immigrants according to my informants are: youth (between 17 and 25), unmarried status, readiness to accept any job, mobility and flexibility

\(\text{"Illegality" is a very relative concept, it in fact contradicts the approach of freedom of movement, one of the basic human rights"},\) said Victor, who has lived in the Netherlands illegally for six years now. As a software specialist he has worked all these years (‘black’) on

\(^{110}\) These numbers were suggested by informants during my fieldwork, on basis of personal calculations and estimations (1999-2000).
reparations, together with his boyfriend, another illegal Russian immigrant. His only real concern is being caught by the police. Not being employed in the profession he was trained for is, according to him, the biggest price he is paying for living outside Russia.

Marina, a professional pianist, who does cleaning work for Russian-speaking families, was also very disappointed with the fact that she could not 'play professionally'. She was also afraid of the Dutch police. It took her and her husband a lot of money and physical effort to leave Russia. After two years of living in Amsterdam it would be terrible to be caught and extradited. She tries to avoid contact with the police. Once she rode her bicycle in Amsterdam and collided with another woman on a bicycle. It was not Marina’s fault and she was bleeding. But suddenly a police car stopped and they were asked whether everything was in order. ‘I wanted to kill this bitch, but instead I smiled and said: It’s ok. After they left I almost cried, I felt so helpless’, she said. Russian-speaking illegal immigrants provide cheap labour. And they are easy to find. Irina told me that as soon as her baby was born she was flooded with telephone calls from Russian illegals who offered their services as nannies and babysitters. She did not know who gave them her telephone number.

The establishing of unofficial contacts is important for illegal immigrants. They prefer these contacts inside the Russian-speaking circles, because of ease of communication, but also because they trust ‘ours’ (‘svoi’). In many cases I understood that unless someone is a Russian-speaker, they are considered automatically to be part of the Dutch establishment. The inclusion of all Dutch and other non-Russian-speakers in this category is equivalent to either ignoring ethnic differences (‘all of them are bureaucrats’), or on the contrary, emphasizing ethnicity and constructing stereotypes. The unofficial contacts are important for spreading information on work and housing opportunities. There are several ‘meeting points’ in the centre of Amsterdam where Russian-speakers can update their list of possibilities.

Igor and Larisa lived in Amsterdam illegally for eight years, working as house-cleaners for Russian-speaking families. Both highly educated software specialists, they managed to save enough money during this time to immigrate to the United States. They are not the only illegal Russian migrants for whom the Netherlands presents a transit point to another immigrant country. For some of them this is the reason not to hide or to be afraid of being caught. Alexei, another 20-year old illegal Russian immigrant, explained that if the Dutch authorities catch him, they will at least finance his trip to another country, be it back to Russia or to a third country. According to him possible confrontation with the Dutch police are not an issue, because ‘there are always ways to come back to the Netherlands’.

When asked about criminal illegals in the Netherlands, most Russian-speakers emphasized that criminals will always be ‘legal’, with false documents or business visas. Russian criminals do not mix with Russian-speaking illegals, because they do not need them for their activities; they prefer legal immigrants, like Russian-speaking businessmen. According to some informants, Russian-speaking illegals are not criminals.

‘Some illegal Russian teenagers maybe would like to make some money on drugs, but usually not with Russian criminals. There are enough Surinamers and Turks around’, said Larisa, who works with Russian-speaking teenagers as a psychologist, ‘Many Russian kids become addicted because of these “blacks”, and they are ready to do everything for them’.

Many other informants mentioned the drug problem among illegal Russian-speaking immigrants. Participating in house parties I observed that drugs (hash and cocaine) were often used. However, the favourite drug among the Russian-speakers are the so-called ‘evil mushrooms’. Access to drugs, according to my informants, is very easy, usually through non-Russian drug-dealers. I did not observe, however, any difference in the degree of drug consumption between legal and illegal immigrants, nor in their attitudes towards drugs.
In the Soviet period prostitution was officially considered a punishable crime. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, even old Russian-speakers adopted a more liberal approach. As Svetlana, a 65-year-old music teacher explained to me:

'As long as there is medical control, women can do what they want with their own bodies. I don't believe that 17 and 18-year old girls in Russia today are being forced by Mafia to work in European brothels, they are informed at a very early age about sex and prostitution. One who becomes a prostitute does it out of her own conviction'.

Another Russian-speakers, Boris, did believe that there is Mafia behind the illegal Russian prostitutes, if only for practical reasons. Someone has to organize their documents, trip and place to stay and work. According to Boris there are many illegal Russian prostitutes in the Netherlands. Most of them do not approach escort clubs or brothels, because the owners will probably refuse to employ them, since they have no valid documents. They work on their own, using their own unofficial networks, or simply in bars and hotels (see also the case of Russian call girls in Siegel and Bovenkerk, 2000).

Another phenomenon I observed during my fieldwork is that of 'fictive marriages'. Sometimes they are organized even before immigration. I talked with three women who told me that they met their 'husbands' for the first time in the Netherlands. All three married fictively and 'blind' with Dutch citizens (one of Turkish origin) through friends. They paid 15,000, 22,000 and 30,000 guilders to their fake spouses. Other illegal immigrants tried to marry after arriving in the Netherlands. In one case Inna, the sister of a legal immigrant, was introduced to Wim, whom she paid 10,000 guilders. He explained to her that she had to move in with him 'in order to avoid suspicion on the side of bureaucrats, at least in the first period'. Inna received her residence permit and hoped to get her Dutch citizenship (after 5 years). However, after one year, they split up, 'because of a cultural gap'. They remained registered as living together. After a few months Wim met a woman whom he wanted to marry. Inna demanded her money back for 'the arrangement', but Wim argued that 'they were living together, and this was not fictive' and claimed that the money was Inna's gift to him. In another case Elena, who was officially divorced in Russia, married fictively with Peter, but continued to live with her Russian (ex)-husband Oleg, who stayed in the Netherlands illegally. She hopes to re-marry Oleg, when she will get her Dutch citizenship. They paid Peter 25,000 guilders and they have a friendly relationship with him.

There are two general attitudes that characterize Russian-speaking immigrants: inside the Russian-speaking community they emphasize the fact that they live in the Netherlands illegally, in order to create new possibilities for jobs and housing. Outside of the community they hide their illegal status and present themselves mostly as visitors, guests of legal Russian-speaking families or temporary workers. They do not trust outsiders and view them all as 'Dutch officials', i.e. people who cannot be trusted. From different stories and conversations with illegal immigrants I conclude that they do not come to settle in the Netherlands for long, but usually aim to go to the USA, Canada, or even back to Russia, as their final destination. However, they claim there are two reasons to come to the Netherlands: first, the job market is better than in other countries; second there are open borders, which allow easy access to any other European country should they feel there is a danger for them economically or politically in the Netherlands.
4. c What is the Russian Mafia according to the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands

4. c. 1 On structure and organisation

- ‘Mafia — this is when everything that must be done - happens, but no ends can be found’, the 40-year-old wife of a Russian-speaking businessman told me.

- ‘Mafia is when it is beautiful! (‘Mafia — eto kogda krasivo!’). Russian Mafia is not beautiful! It is still too young, too inexperienced’, said another Russian-speaking immigrant.

- ‘Russian Mafia is everywhere, but you will never see it’, explained Yulia, a Russian-speaking student.

- ‘There is no Russian Mafia, there are simply extremely rich people who do not behave nicely!’ — these are the words of Daan, a Russian-speaking American.

These are some examples of how the Russian-speakers view the Red Mafia, which I heard during my fieldwork. The Russian Mafia was one of the favourite subjects almost at any social opportunity. Russian-speakers talked freely about Russian organized crime, analysed its structure and activity and provided detailed information on specific individuals in the Netherlands, whom they suspected to be connected to the infamous society. It is obvious that the term ‘Mafia’ in Russia — like everywhere else - is used broadly. And although Russian-speakers did like to discuss the differences and nuances in the various definitions, they always fell back on this generic term, perhaps because of its semantic ease. In this context I had no choice but to use their own term, though I did try to work out its primary meaning, and to refer to specific situations.

When Russian-speakers talk about business or crime, they use the term ‘Mafia’ interchangeably. There are two meanings that they attribute to the term: firstly, organized crime, and secondly, hostility towards high-ranking officials. Russian-speakers used the term ‘Mafia’ in reference to politicians, businessmen, nouveau riches, high-ranking officials and specialists, loose women, etc. In one case an informant accused professors of one of the leading Russian universities of ‘belonging to the Mafia’, in this case a kind of ‘secret society’ that decided who would be accepted to their faculty and who would not. And, of course, ‘Mafia’ means also members of criminal organizations, or street gangs. My conclusion is that there is a wide variety of meanings of the term ‘Mafia’ in the Russian interpretation.

During one of my visits to a Russian restaurant, I was a witness to some very strange, almost surrealistic behaviour by a few Russian-speakers. Six young men of about 20-25 entered the restaurant and sat down at a table. They were dressed in identical expensive suits and had a similar hair-do. One of my informants, with whom I was sitting at a separate table, whispered in my ear: ‘bratki arrived’.

When asked about the formal definition of the Mafia, the conception of my informants often seemed to corresponded to this structure. Usually they talked about bratva as hierarchical organizations with well-known leaders. Some informants showed me ‘bratki’ during some social events. Thus, at one house party, other guests identified three bratki by the way they were dressed and by the long gold chains they wore on

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111 *Bratva* means in Russian slang 'criminal fraternity' or 'gang', *bratki* (from the Russian word *brat* - brother) – 'members of this fraternity'.
their chests. On a few opportunities I have also seen siostry (sisters), women connected to
criminal organizations. In this context the role of a woman in criminal groups is usually
viewed by the Russian-speakers as passive, 'behind every strong man there is a woman', or
limited to very specific areas such as prostitution or just being the spouse of a criminal boss.
There have also been a few cases when women served as 'judges' or 'mediators' between
various criminal groups or individuals. The role of the female mediator demands respect. One
informant, who occupies this position in the Russian underworld, told me she felt she was
more appreciated than male mediators: first of all because of her reputation and position as a
'judge' and secondly, because she was a woman, which meant more consideration from the
men, more gentleman-like behaviour and none of the usual rude manners normally displayed
in an all-male setting during negotiations.

There is a clear distinction made by my informants between the 'normal Mafia' and
the 'tough Mafia'. Masha, a Russian businesswoman, made a following distinction between
three levels of Russian Mafia operating in the Netherlands:

'First, there are "occasional criminals", including drug- and alcohol addicts, or those
'forced' economically, or who became involved in crime because of circumstances. In this
way these Russian Mafiosi are very much like Antillians or Surinamers in the Netherlands.
Secondly, there is a "street Mafia", which includes drug-dealers, prostitutes and other petty
criminals and has no special 'Russian' characteristics. And thirdly, there is the "real Russian
Mafia", which includes those who undermine the Dutch economy. The Dutch police do not
look for them for two reasons: they do not know how to find them and they do not know that
they need to find them'.

According to Masha, the Dutch police are only looking for the 'occasional' and 'street'
Russian Mafia, but the real threat is the third category. The same opinion was presented by
other Russian-speakers. Vladimir, mathematician, who has lived in the Netherlands for five
years and works in one of Dutch Universities, explained:

'The Russian Mafia is a kind of iceberg, it consists of a visible and an invisible part. The part
that floats on the water is the "normal Mafia", which deals with extortion, robberies,
prostitution, drugs, etc. But there is also a part that is hidden under the water; it is huge, a
few times stronger and bigger than the upper part. This is the 'dangerous Mafia': a
combination of political, economic and criminal forces. This Mafia is ruling today in Russia
and in other former republics, it also penetrated the political arenas of other countries, Israel,
for example. And it is very dangerous for the economic and political stability in Europe'.

When asked about the organization of the Russian Mafia, most informants referred either to a
description of the old hierarchical structure of 'vorovskoi mir' (thieves' world), known to
them from Russian literature and movies, or to the leading criminal organizations, such as
Podolskaya, Tambovskaya, or others (see chapter 3), described in the Russian press and crime
literature. It must be remembered here that many Russian-speakers use Russian TV programs
for their information on events in Russia and in the rest of the world, including the
Netherlands. For some of them this is the only source of information, because they do not read the Dutch press and do not watch Dutch TV. The position of the criminal bosses is often described in terms of the position of ‘successful businessmen’, mythical heroes, and public figures, whose activities are closely followed by the immigrants on Russian TV. It was easier for them to talk about these ‘godfathers’, because the Russian media are saturated with sensational non-stop reports about them.

Other ‘ranks’ of criminals are more difficult to identify, according to my informants. There are many functions inside the criminal organizations and they include professionals such as financial consultants, lawyers, personal physicians, and so on. Only people who are closely involved can define them as ‘criminal’, because their services are used by the Mafia. From the outside they may appear to be honest. Some of my informants were acquainted with this kind of professionals, like Marina the pianist, who used to give piano lessons in Russia to the daughter of ‘a lawyer of one of the biggest criminal bosses of Russia’. The lowest rank, according to my informants is that of ‘boitzy’ (‘fighters’), who execute the orders of their bosses. They include former sportsmen, KGB-trained people, former Afghans (i.e. men who fought in Afghanistan), etc. The ‘fighters’ were characterized as athletic, strong, merciless, cruel, ‘intellectually weak’, uneducated people, ready to use their fists and weapon at any moment. These are the potential contract killers, extortionists, enforcers and bodyguards. Special status is attributed to the person known as the ‘guard of obschak’ (common fund). This traditional position in the Russian criminal world still has its important function and symbol. The person responsible for ‘obschak’ is a confidential representative of the criminal bosses. The murder case of Victor Balulis, which will be described in the following chapter, is an example of how the trust of criminals was lost, and what punishment awaits the person who dares to touch the ‘obschak’.

4.c.2 On criminal culture

The criminal ways of displaying masculinity and wealth have been reproduced in the Netherlands. The Russian-speakers often referred to the unique ‘Russian’ variation of criminal behaviour. Russian-speaking immigrants talked about the Russian Mafia in the post-reform period as the product of a ‘criminal culture’, the result of the corrupted and violent Soviet reality. In this concept they combined two elements: the illegal activities under the official Soviet regime and the violent measures with which the Soviets used to treat those whom they perceived as ‘criminals’, or ‘folk enemies’. My informant Victor, who was a lawyer before immigrating to the Netherlands, explained:

‘Both the “upper world” and underworld of the Soviet Union were criminal. And both were extremely violent. The first used official measures, including torture and death sentences; the second – unofficial, for example murders. Difference? None! Russians suffered so many wars, cruelties and injustice that they simply developed a criminal culture. Or, perhaps, this culture has absorbed too much crime!’

During the fieldwork I observed several fights between Russian-speakers where knives were used, in two cases there were also a few wounded. In one, during a ‘mushroom party’, three teenagers who were under the influence of alcohol and drugs had a fight about a Russian girl. Of course this kind of incident does not indicate any specific characteristics of ‘Russian’ criminals; this could happen in any other ethnic group. I have found in other cases, however, some ‘Russian’ perceptions of conflict or fight. For example, a Russian call girl collapsed
after an overdose of alcohol and she was carried out of the restaurant by her pimp. When a Russian visitor made an indecent remark about her, he was ‘invited to go outside’ by a few Russians, and then beaten up – the incident ended in the hospital. Nobody, however, volunteered to call the police. As one of the Russian-speaking bystanders explained: ‘They will solve their problems themselves. Nobody among Russians will betray other Russians, they are violent, but they are not ‘suki’ (‘bitches’). Being a ‘suka’ in Russian prison-argot means being a traitor, a term which has a long history in the Russian criminal world'. The use of criminal argot is very common among Russian-speakers. As Boris told me: ‘In Russia using criminal terms is in fashion today. Even Putin in his official speeches uses them’.

In the Netherlands Russian criminals have a reputation for being violent and for their ready use of lethal weapons and in this sense they only compare to, perhaps, Yugoslav criminals (‘Yugos’). This supposed penchant for violence among Russian criminals is explained by my informants as ‘a tradition’ of the Russian camps and prisons, the culture of vory v zakone, or the image of the New Russian, cruel, cold-blooded and intelligent criminal (see chapter 2).

Valentina, a Russian student, told me that when she meets Russian young men, they always appear to be either pimps or ‘petty thieves’, who steal from their own friends. Many of them are alcoholics or drug addicts. One evening she was in a Russian restaurant with two other girls and they met some other Russians. They came to Valentina’s house at night, all drunk, and tried to break into the balcony of her neighbours. Another time, when I was visiting her, her new boyfriend, a Russian immigrant in Germany, arrived with two of his friends in a new BMW. They were all 18-19-year old Russians, with gold chains around their necks and Rolex watches, which was the first thing they showed me when they entered the room. I asked them where they got so much money and one of them told me that ‘his father is sending him money from Russia’. The other told me that he earns money himself, but ‘it is not “good money”’. He also told me that Germany today is like Russia: everyone has protection, and the Russian Mafia controls Russian and even non-Russian business. In the Netherlands, according to them, there is not enough business to control, it is much more peaceful. Valentina, who was hoping to marry a Russian one day, soon became disappointed with Russian men because all they wanted to do was show their physical strength. ‘They fight and drink and drink and fight all the time’, said Valentina.

Their image is very important to Russian criminals. They invest a lot of money in ‘mulki’ (attributes, such as golden chains, Rolex watches, expensive clothes, etc.). Ludmila, a Russian businesswoman, told me that one of her clients used to wear a golden chain which was ‘falling from his neck to between his legs’. This was evidence to her that he was rich and therefore a desirable client. ‘If someone like him enters a bank in Russia, he will always get what he wants’. Clothes also have symbolic significance. Olga, the wife of Russian businessman, told me that clothes are the sign of one’s position in the criminal organization. One example, according to her, is the leather coat. In some groups the members who occupy lower positions, are not allowed to wear long leather coats. The higher one climbs the ladder of the organizational structure – the longer the coat. Ordinary ‘bratki’ also wear ‘Adidas’ sport shoes, while ‘bosses’ wear expensive boots.

Another important attribute is the mobile telephone. Irina, another Russian-speaking businesswoman, told me about her vacation in Egypt, one of the favourite places of the Russian mob:

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113 The period, known as ‘suchya voina’, ‘bitches war’, around the years 1940-50 revealed an ideological and practical disagreements between ‘vory v zakone’ (‘thieves in law’) and new leaders, so-called ‘Polish thieves’ (more in Gurv 1995, Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997, etc.).

114 Russian criminal slang.
‘All have the same face, zhlobs (tough guys) with frozen eyes. They twirl round in swimming trunks, even in the restaurants, but always with a mobile telephone. It is their culture: when they come to a restaurant, they have to put a mobile telephone near their plate. Otherwise there is no point!’

Ludmila told me a story she heard from one of her clients:

‘In Sverdlovsk, the second most criminal city after St. Petersburg, the Mafia orders coffins in advance – they must be made of good wood, of a nice colour, with lacquer, etc. The latest fashion is to install air conditioning inside the coffin. A matter of prestige, perhaps’.

The ‘tough Mafia’ (krutaya Mafia), according to Ludmila, is ‘untouchable’ in Russia. Thus, for example, the cars of the ‘tough Mafia’ are marked with symbols, an identifying ‘spot’ (‘klyaksa’). It means that nobody will dare to stop the car, even if they drive with high speed, or through red lights. When stopped, they might shoot.

The image of the powerful boss among Russian criminals includes sex. Having a mistress (or a few mistresses), preferably from a circle of models or actresses, is an indication of their masculinity. For the women, being the mistress of a Russian criminal boss means travelling with him around the world, wearing expensive clothes and jewels, spending time in the most expensive restaurants and nightclubs. Even when a powerful partner leaves his mistress for another girl, she will still retain her status of being an ‘ex-’, which is considered in the Russian criminal world prestigious and worthy of respect. In discotheques and nightclubs in the Netherlands I have seen Russian men, who were described by my informants as ‘Russian Mafiosi’, always surrounded by young Russian women. Elena, who after seventeen years of marriage discovered that her Russian husband-businessman had another wife and children in Russia:

‘This is very much in fashion among businessmen to have two or more women in different countries, sometimes they also have children from different women. They travel all the time, nobody can control them. There are also many cases of polygamy; they marry several times simultaneously. Often they do not even hide it from their other wives: you don’t like it – get a divorce! They know that their families are dependent on them, and the wife will prefer to share her rich husband with another woman rather than lose the economic advantages she gets from him’.

Elena also preferred to keep her marriage rather than sell her expensive villa in a suburb of Amsterdam and lose the opportunity to travel four times a year to the most fashionable resorts in France and the Caribbean Islands. Nevertheless the emotional stress was too much for her and in the last five years she was hospitalised several times, in the Netherlands and in Russia.

4. c. 3 On involvement of immigrants in criminal groups

All my informants criticized how the Dutch assume that there is a link between Russian immigrants’ and Russian organized crime. They felt that stereotypes dominated the reality, that Dutch authorities a priori suspect all Russians to be potential criminals. Masha told me:

‘When a Russian is murdered in the Netherlands, all Russian-speaking businessmen, and all immigrants who have even the slightest link to the victim, are being investigated. In the
Fastovsky case, old women and even children were brought to the police offices at night. Being Russian means being suspected by definition'.

The involvement of immigrants in criminal organizations was viewed by Russian-speakers as 'myth and fairy tale'. The prevailing opinion among them is that if the Dutch authorities criminalize them, they must have political reasons, regarding either their international relations with Russia or the immigration policy in the Netherlands. Elena, who is active in Russian-speaking circles in organizing cultural events and meetings, explained:

'They (Dutch officials) have no evidence that Russian immigrants are involved in criminal activities. They were never interested in the Russian-speaking community. They know nothing about us. We belong to East Europeans, according to them, to one monolithic group without any difference between people. There is no interest and no knowledge; we are all "Russian Mafia" for them'.

Elena tried to organize a centre for Russian-speaking immigrants and she wrote to all kinds of organizations asking for moral and material assistance. She sent thirty letters explaining what the Russian-speaking community is and what its cultural and social needs are but she received only one answer, from a Christian organisation that advised her to look for other financial sources. For this absence of interest in Russian-speakers from the side of the Dutch public and governmental organizations she offered the following explanation:

'If the Dutch government admits that Russians are not criminals, that they have other preferences in their lives than drugs and extortion, whom will they accuse of being Russian Mafia then?'

I have already mentioned earlier in this chapter and in the previous ones that Russian-speakers make a very clear distinction between the criminal world and the immigrants, which are, according to them, totally separated from each other. On the other hand, they did indicate that some Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands have links with Russian organized crime in Russia and in some former Soviet republics. I mentioned a few individual cases as an illustration in the previous chapter. The cases of liquidations of Russian-speaking businessmen will be described in the following chapter.

The prevailing opinion among my informants was that, in general, Russian-speaking immigrants are not connected to any criminal organization, that they have other purposes in the Netherlands, the most important of which is integration. They understand this as learning the Dutch language, finding work, preferably in their own profession (or undergo re-training) and helping their children to find their way in Dutch society by getting a good education and developing social contacts. They view the process of criminalization of their community as the main obstacle to their integration in Dutch society. The common opinion is that instead of conducting professional research on post-Soviet developments, the Dutch officials blindly follow the German, British and American media; that they are obsessed with the criminalization of Russians and exaggerate and even 'manufacture' the threat of Russian organized crime in this country. The sensational reports do not in any way reflect the real situation, according to my informants.
Chapter 5.
RUSSIAN CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The purpose of this chapter is to present and analyse information on the activities of Russian criminal organizations in the Netherlands as gathered by the Dutch authorities. Up till now I have based my analysis solely on the perceptions and views of my informants – Russian-speaking immigrants. In addition to this analysis I shall now use other sources of information: publications, interviews with relevant officials and police officers and government reports. The question is where the differences lie between the assessment of the situation by the Russian-speakers and the picture the Dutch authorities have put together of Russian criminal activity on the territory of the Netherlands. This comparison can be helpful in evaluating the 'real' threat the Russian Mafia presents to Dutch society.

5.a Reports on criminal activities of the Russian Mafia on the territory of the Netherlands

In 1995 the case of the kidnapping of Boris Fastovsky, a Russian Jewish businessman from St. Petersburg, confirmed suspicions that the Russian Mafia was now operating in the Netherlands. The police of Amsterdam launched an extensive search for the dead body but proved unable to retrieve it. The Police Unit started systematic investigations (which basically means bringing together all the cases and criminal information from the whole of the Netherlands in one database) on extortion, fraud and Russian involvement in prostitution. The Parliamentary Fact-finding commission (Van Traa) that reported in 1996 allowed a group of University professors the opportunity to scrutinize the criminal material known so far. They all reached the same conclusion: the first signs of Russian-speaking organized crime are there: 'Lastly, there is the Russian Mafia from Russia and other republics in the former Soviet Union. It, too, plays a role in a part of the drug economy, especially by supplying the raw materials needed for the production of synthetic drugs. Russian criminals also serve as drug buyers for the Eastern European market, although this is only of secondary importance to them... Neither the gangs from Russia nor former Yugoslavia have roots in Dutch society. There has only been a minimal number of Russian immigrants' (Fijnaut et al, 1996: 82).

In one of the IRT North and East Netherlands publications four main areas of Russian Mafia activity were identified: car-theft, trading in women, extortion and laundering money through buying real estate. The conclusion was that in spite of the small number of post-Soviet citizens living in the Netherlands, the Dutch police have to deal with Russian criminals more and more often. The trend was clear according to the IRT rapport: post-Soviet criminals are looking for new markets all over the world, including the Netherlands (1996). The Rotterdam University social scientists (RISBO) concluded in their study on immigrants from the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, their integration and criminal activity in the Netherlands, that Russian organized crime is a serious, but very limited phenomenon. Once again the areas of activities are described as traditional Mafia areas: car-stealing, car smuggling, smuggling of illegal migrants and fraud. They also predicted that the involvement of Russian criminals in these areas will grow in the future (Snel et al: 2000:vii).

In these reports a certain picture of Russian organized crime in the Netherlands emerges. However, the picture presented by my informants is often quite different. As I have
already mentioned, not only the crime bosses but many other Russian-speakers as well, view the Netherlands as too small a country to be considered appropriate for any activity of the ‘real Mafia’. The Russian-speaking businessman Alex, whom many Russian-speakers consider a member of one Russia’s criminal organizations, expressed it very simply: *The Netherlands is a one-bomb land, i.e. Russians can destroy it with one bomb. How can anyone consider this country important or strong enough to take it seriously?* As Victor, an informant who considers himself a Russian Mafioso, said it: *We will never do anything wrong in Holland. Here we bring our children, we will not jeopardize them!* According to Victor Russian criminal organizations operate in the Netherlands on two levels: a. conventional (drugs and prostitution) and b. more complicated (money laundering). Members of criminal groups who come to the Netherlands ‘for business’ usually invest in real estate or try to conquer new drug markets. Victor said, however, that drugs have no future for the Russian Mafia; investing in ‘girls’ is considered more lucrative. Following Victor’s scheme we will now concentrate on different criminal activities by the Russian-speaking immigrants. I shall focus on specific activities presented in the official reports and compare these with my informants’ data

5.a.1 Conventional criminal operations.

a.1. Trafficking of women and prostitution

The establishment in the Netherlands of small import-export companies by Russian-speaking businessmen and their Dutch partners allowed them to invite their partners and clients from the former Soviet Union to come to the Netherlands. In this framework it was possible to arrange group invitations and visas for Russian women, who came to the Netherlands as tourists and stayed on illegally.

The recruitment of women in the former Soviet Union is usually described by the Dutch press in heartbreaking stories where young victims are promised work in the Netherlands in flower factories or in restaurants, where they could earn a lot of money. In the RTL-4 News, for example, it was reported that even in big Russian cities like St. Petersburg, Russian women organizations have started information campaigns to inform Russian women about the ‘lies and seductions’ and the false promises made by Russian criminals (RTL-4 News, 17 May 2001). ‘Innocent girls’ were persuaded to come and make easy money in Germany and the Netherlands, but in reality they were cheated, beaten, locked up in brothels or massage parlours.

However, according to both police officials and my informants, there were many girls who knew exactly what sort of work they were going to do in Europe. Some of them later married with their clients or arranged fictive marriages to stay in the Netherlands. Some have started their own business. In a few cases, women who came to work in the Netherlands worked for a criminal organization. In places in Limburg, for example, they used a particular strategy to help Russian criminals enter the prostitution market: two or three good-looking girls would approach the brothel owner. They were easily accepted, even without legal papers. After some time a few Russian men would appear with weapons under their coats. They would ‘convince’ the owner to sell the place, because ‘there are Russian girls there’. In most cases it was easy to convince the owner.

In the Hague, however, Russian girls working in the ‘window-prostitution’ whose Russian pimps started to ‘make problems’, were sent away and according to police officials
there are no longer any Russian prostitutes in the Red Light District of the Hague. The police in Amsterdam do not consider Russian criminals significant competitors to Dutch pimps.

From my fieldwork I realized that in addition to the ‘established prostitution’ there are new variations of prostitution, invented by Russian-speaking women. The first one is ‘house’ prostitution, when one or two Russian-speaking women hire (or even buy) a luxurious house, in which they receive their clients, mainly rich New Russians who come to the Netherlands for business or just for the weekend. These women establish their contacts in Russia or through mutual acquaintances in the Netherlands, and in a few cases in other European countries (Germany, Israel and Belgium). The second variation is illegal ‘massage parlours’. This variation of prostitution is very popular in Israel, where women are employed in massage parlours or ‘alternative health care’ clinics that are in fact regular brothels. In 1995-96 two Russian women in a suburb of Amsterdam offered this kind of illegal ‘alternative cure’. Their clients were not only Russian-speakers but also Dutch men. The women registered their clients as patients.

Not just Victor but also some other informants told me that Russian organized crime ‘tries to enter the prostitution market’ in the Netherlands. They have to fight for it, according to Alexei, a Russian illegal immigrant who became a partner in a second-hand car-business in Rotterdam. According to him there are groups of Chechens in some cities in the Netherlands, who tried to buy the entire “Red Light District” in one of the cities in the north of the country and forced the neighbours to leave. There were also frequent conflicts between Russian and local pimps. From my conversations with police officials I understood that nothing is known about Russian involvement in the prostitution area. In a few Dutch cities, according to my informants, prostitution is mostly in the hands of Chechens, who ‘buy whole streets in the Red Light District’. Their tactic is apparently peaceful: they offer money to a house-owner, if he refuses, they double the amount and only after he refuses for the second time they threaten him. Another illegal migrant, Oleg, who lives in the ‘Red Light District’ in Amsterdam, thinks that Chechens are more active in the prostitution business than any other ethnic group from the former Soviet Union. He often talks with them on the street, and his impression is that there are no other Russian-speakers in this trade. Natalia told me that prostitution is not such an attractive business for Russians. According to her experience (she often works as a translator) Russians are sometimes arrested for ‘small things’ but Chechens and Georgians are the most serious bandits in the Netherlands.

a.2 Car-business

The stealing and smuggling of cars from Europe to the former Soviet Union is usually considered the main criminal activity of the Russian Mafia. These activities flourished especially before the economic crisis in Russia in 1998. The trade reached its peak in the year 1994, when the demand for second-hand German and Japanese cars in Russia was high. Since then, however, the dynamics of the inner market and the overflow of European cars (imported legally or illegally) in the former Soviet Union, led to a decrease in demand. According to my informants, it is obvious that since the economic crisis in Russia in 1998, fewer and fewer Russians come to the Netherlands to buy second hand Dutch and German cars. I observed at the Veemarkt in Utrecht that the main group of clients during the last two years (1999-2000) were Poles, while in 1995-96 years they were Russians or Ukrainians. During my conversations with Dutch and German car-dealers, they emphasized (sometimes complained) that Russians became rare buyers in the Netherlands after the 1998 crisis.
Another reason for the decrease in interest in Dutch cars is that there is already a huge market of foreign cars in Russia, imported in the previous years and still not sold (or resold). There is also a deficit in car-parts in Russia, or the parts are too expensive, which is another obstacle for the development of the market for European cars in the former Soviet Union. For the 'rich clients' there are also convenient possibilities inside Russia, since the large carmakers such as BMW AG, Mercedes and Audi have built assembly plants in Russia and established distribution companies of their own. For many Russians, it is a matter of prestige to have a BMW rather than a Lada or Moskvich. On the other hand, BMW is considered a 'gangster's car'. Therefore, wealthy new Russians sometimes decide to buy another brand 'in order not to seem like drug-dealers, hit men, or other underworld “untouchables”' (The Moscow Tribune, May 4, 1999). 

During my field work I found that in addition to regular car stealing, there is another scheme, which is much more popular among Russian-speakers: a car is ‘stolen’ with the agreement of its owner, who hopes to get his money from the insurance. At first this method was used only among the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands but it soon became popular among Dutch as well.

Smuggling cars is considered one of the most ‘risky’ businesses, because of the competition and the dangers on the way through Poland and Byelorussia, where Russian-Polish-German gangs operate together. They stop and ‘confiscate’ the cars, usually together with other smuggled goods. They often use violence against the driver. To make a car stop the gangs use beautiful women who will ask for a lift, or seem to be in need of help with their own car. The moment the driver stops to assist her, a few Russian men appear who will then ‘take care’ of him and steal his car. One of my informants told me that it happened to him on the highway in Poland, when he was driving his car loaded with electronic products for sale in Latvia and was stopped by Russian ‘highway bandits’. I heard this story from a few other Russian-speakers in the Netherlands. One of them told me he never drove through Poland alone, and that he always had a weapon with him.

According to Alexei, the car-business was a great success in the mid 1990s. Alexei and his partner sold many second-hand cars to Polish customers who drove them to Ukraine and Russia. But, as mentioned, it has become less attractive in the last few years because the market in Russia is now saturated. Though still trying to ‘survive on cars’, Alexei would like to find something more profitable. He made some new connections in Germany and his girlfriend Natasha told me that their apartment is always full with dubious characters who stay for months. One of their ‘guests’ is known as a pimp and he was obviously looking for shelter from his rivals. Though Alexei has not made her privy to his ‘secret plans’, she is convinced that he is trying to ‘enter the prostitution business’.

The car business was seen as one of the most important and dangerous criminal areas. Although Alexei predicted a gloomy future for the car-business in the Netherlands, other informants were more optimistic about it. For example Vassili, who has been dealing in cars since his immigration to the Netherlands in 1992. Together with his Dutch partner he runs a garage in a suburb of Amsterdam. In the years 1994-96 his main location of activity was at the Veemarkt in Utrecht, a basis for ‘Russian business’. Buses with Russian clients arrived on Tuesdays early in the morning. Hundreds of Russian brokers like Vasili were already waiting for them and offered their services as translators and advisors. These mediators received provisions from the Dutch garage-owners that were selling the cars at the Veemarkt. For the sale of one car an owner usually paid from 250 to 500 guilders cash to the mediator. However, the real business only started after the market. According to Vassili, all those who had not been able to find the right car then crowded the mediators, offering them

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115 http://www.russiatoday.com/rtoday/mostrib/article.html
all the money they had to take them to near-by garages. These Russian clients could not afford to stay another week and wait for the next Tuesday, because that was too expensive. This was the moment Vassili and other brokers were waiting for: they took from every client no less than 1 – 1.5 thousand guilders: first for fuel, then they offered them a bed at their own house (sometimes there were 5-6 clients in one room and even 2-3 in one bed, paying what they would have paid for a relatively good hotel-room). Garage-owners knew that these Russians were in a hurry and increased their prices to 20-30 per cent higher than what was asked at the Veemarkt.

Each client ‘belonged’ to one or another mediator, who carefully protected his property. Sometimes Vassili was approached by other mediators who claimed that he had assisted ‘their’ clients in buying a car without their permission, and that he had to give them half of the money. To avoid trouble Vassili usually paid them. He considered himself an honest broker. However, according to him there were also many ‘kydali’ (cheaters), who receive money in advance, bring their clients to a garage and disappear, leaving their clients either at a closed door too late in the evening or without an agreement with the owner of the garage, who will then charge the full amount to someone who is trying to tell him that he has already paid a mediator.

Vassili is a very successful mediator; he has contracts with tourist agencies in the former Soviet Union who send their clients to him, and Dutch hotels, translators and tour guides, who also pay him a commission. After the economic crisis in Russia in 1998 there are fewer car buyers who come to the Netherlands, but those who come are very rich and interested in new expensive models rather than in the second-hand cars he used to sell before the crisis. These New Russians are still very good clients; Vassili takes them to good restaurants and organizes excursions, escort-girls and entertainment for them.

a.3 Drug smuggling

The former Soviet Union did not participate significantly in the international drug markets as a supplier or consumer until the reform-period, but this pattern ‘drastically changed during the 1990s’. The former Soviet Union republics, especially the Middle Asian ones, developed into producers of heroine and opium, now well known all over the world. Their trade route goes through Pakistan and Afghanistan. The president of Tadjikistan has mentioned the on-going wars between criminal Muslim Afghan fundamentalists, who are trying to monopolize the opium production in Tadjikistan\(^\text{116}\), and the transfer to the West. According to the criminologist Paoli, who studied the drugs industry in the Former Soviet Union, the largest share of the heroin market is also in the hands of Tadjik dealers (2000:13). Kazachstan is also a supplier of raw opium and cannabis products, even more so than Tadjikistan (Paoli 2000:9). Russian criminologists told me about the growing number of illegal laboratories in the former Soviet Union in which synthetic drugs are produced. They warned that these drugs are now slowly entering the European markets, including the Dutch\(^\text{117}\).

The main activity of criminal organizations is, however, not the smuggling of Russian drugs to the West, but on the contrary, the import of soft and hard drugs into Russia. The seventeen-year-old son of one of my informants was arrested at Sheremetievo airport in Moscow carrying ten grams of hashish, which he took with him from the Netherlands. The

\(^{116}\) From the speech of Emomali Rakhmonov, president of Republic of Tajikistan during the conference of the United Nations in Vienna, April 2000.

\(^{117}\) From interviews with scientists of the Moscow Scientific Research Institute of the Ministry of Interior, May 1999.
final verdict is still unclear, but his lawyer estimates he could go to prison for as much as five to seven years. Paoli indicated that there has been an increase of drug users in Russia over the last ten years and these days Russians can easily buy the ‘same illicit psychoactive drugs that can be found in any Western European or North American city and that are imported from countries as far away as Colombia, Afghanistan and Holland’ (2000:5). The drug-couriers to Russia are usually young people who maintain contacts with Dutch criminals and try to make some easy money.

Police officials consider Russian criminal groups to be playing a very minor role in the international drug-trade. My informants however told me that smuggling drugs from the Netherlands is a very popular activity, especially among Russian teenage tourists. They also said that the Russian synthetic drugs industry is looking for markets in Europe. There are indications of new routes for the smuggling of drugs from and into Russia through Middle Asia and the Volga River Delta. Through Tajikistan, for example, Afghan heroin is increasingly smuggled into Western Europe along the ‘Silk Road’ (Paoli 2000:9). Other routes were described in chapter 3.

Russia is often used as a transit hub for airfreight drugs, with the biggest seizures occurring at Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport. Russian customs officials note that drugs are often sent by mail. Previously, the KGB checked any mail from abroad. However, there is almost no control left now, and private express-delivery firms appeared on the scene (The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no.23, September 1993). According to Natalia, it is mainly the Chechens who try to enter drugs smuggling, especially heroin from Afghanistan:

‘The Taliban already reached the Fergana valley, they terrorize the local population there: they destroy peoples’ houses and their harvest. Hungry people are ready to transport drugs in and out of Russia for a piece of bread. The Chechens are exploiting the situation. They control the routes to Europe’.

XTC is now the most popular ‘party drug’ in Russia, the same as in Western European countries and the United States. The area with the highest number of reported synthetic drug seizures is that around Krasnodar, a transit area between Central Asia and the Caucasus and St. Petersburg that is sometimes mentioned as the ‘drug capital’ of Russia. According to my informants there is also a very powerful Azeri criminal organization operating in Moscow, specializing in the trafficking of ecstasy from Western Europe. This organization was led by Timur Mamedov, who fled Moscow on learning of his eminent arrest in 1997. He had been running the so-called ‘Dutch’ network since 1994. His organization used Polish and Russian nationals to smuggle ecstasy to Russia from the Netherlands. Though Russian-speakers are involved in smuggling XTC to the former Soviet republics, their main destination is the United States (as it is for Israeli criminal groups).

a. 4 Extortion

In analyses of the links between organized crime and immigrant communities, extortion is the most common example in criminology as a first stage in the development of organized crime within the immigrant community. In post-Soviet society extortionists ‘graduated from simple “protection” rackets into more sophisticated schemes’ (Lowther 1997:26). Serio characterized

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118 This information is also presented in Europol Drug Unit, 16 March 1995; The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch, no.70, August 1997.
119 From interviews with MVD officials in Krasnodar Law Institute of the Russian MVD, April 2000, Krasnodar.
different types of extortionists in Russia: ‘the least threatening extortionists are the
khooligan, 17 to 20-year olds emulating gangs such as the Chechen obschina. They have
been more a nuisance that a serious threat. Shpana (unsophisticated thugs) are identifiable by
their preference for wearing athletic warm-up suits’ (Serio 1997:11). Extortion, however, was
one of the main criminal activities of avtoriteti (crime bosses) and vory v zakone (thieves in
law). One of the most influential Russian crime bosses, Vyacheslav Ivankov (Yaponchik), and
three members of his criminal group were found guilty by a New York court of attempting to
extort no less than 3.5 million dollars from an investment firm of Russian immigrants.

In the Netherlands it is suspected that there is extortion going on in Russian-speaking
immigrants circles. During the police investigation of the disappearance of Boris Fastovsky
(details see further in this chapter) it was concluded that he became a victim of extortion from
the side of a Russian Georgian criminal group. In another case, the murder of Vadim
Rozenbaum (details further in this chapter), one of the police conclusions was that he was
killed after refusing to pay money to a Russian criminal organization that included former
KGB members.

All the Russian-speaking businessmen with whom I had close and intensive contacts,
told me they had never experienced any form of extortion from the side of their former
compatriots in the Netherlands. On the other hand, they told me that they knew that ‘there are
criminal elements among Russian-speakers in the Netherlands who are in touch with criminal
groups in the former Soviet Union’. They emphasized that they had no links at all to the
specific people they mentioned and that they avoided any gatherings where they would be
likely to meet them. They were convinced that by keeping their distance from criminals they
could secure their own safety (more in chapter 4).

During my fieldwork I witnessed an attempt to extort Sasha, a Russian street painter in
Amsterdam. The extortionists were two Dutch young men, who spoke very poor English.
They quickly disappeared the moment they saw two friends of Sasha, a Russian and a Pole,
approaching. From my conversations with other Russian street painters and artists, it appeared
that no extortion is taking place in their circles, perhaps because they are always together in
groups of six to twenty people. They also stay in touch with other East-European colleagues,
Polish, Hungarian and Serbs.

Masha, the former lawyer, told me that in the Netherlands the Georgian criminals
represent the most serious criminal organizations of the former Soviet Union. They do not
deal in drugs or prostitution, but their main activity is extorting money from successful
Russian-speaking businessmen. Most of them come from the city of Suchumi and they belong
to criminal organizations that are active on the territory of the former Soviet Union and in
some European countries. They do not settle in the Netherlands, but come here for business
only. Among them there are contract killers. According to Natalia, however, the Georgians in
the Netherlands are the intelligentsia; they don’t work, don’t learn Dutch but live on welfare
‘because of circumstances’. They are not connected to the criminal Georgian world, which is
mostly operating in Antwerp. There the ‘Georgians’ are mostly Georgian Jews with Israeli
passports, ‘the same “speculators”, against whom the Kutaisi (Georgian city) police fought
for years’. These days, says Natalia, they have to face the Belgian police instead. They are
uneducated, very rich people, most of whom have Israeli citizenship. They stay for a few
months and then go back to Israel.
a. 5 Smuggling of human beings

In the last years of the 20th century the former Soviet Union started to play an important role in smuggling people from China, from the former Soviet Asian republics, Iran, Iraq and Somalia. The main routes are through Belorussia, Ukraine and Poland or from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey. In Russia several organizations operate that 'co-ordinate' the transport and facilitate the crossing of the border, which is arranged by bribing the relevant controllers. According to my informants, it took them from three weeks to two months to reach the Netherlands (from Azerbaidjan and Uzbekistan). The total costs they paid to their 'agents' were between 2,000 and 10,000 US dollars per person. Some of them also paid with gold and jewels. \(^{120}\)

The number of the people smuggled from the Caucasus and the Russian Federation to the Netherlands since 1996 has increased steadily, a fact that may be explained by the sophistication of smuggling strategies and the ‘import’ of the phenomenon from Germany to the Netherlands (Zwirs 2000:48). Some of my informants indicated other European countries through which they came to arrive in the Netherlands (especially Belgium and Germany). Others view the Netherlands as a transit point on their way to Great Britain, the USA and Canada. According to almost all of them, they needed help to get out of Russia, but the moment they found themselves in Europe, they were able to move freely and independently. This would support the thesis that criminal groups of smugglers in the former Soviet Union are in control but that there is no proof of their activity in the Netherlands. The usual means of transport is by truck, private car or mini-bus. Far fewer immigrants are smuggled through Schiphol Amsterdam airport. Those who succeed to enter the country by air usually use forged documents.

According to my informants ‘there is no “smuggling”, but assistance to those who have no other possibilities to reach the Netherlands’. Thus my informant Lena told me she wanted her 15-year-old niece to come and live with her in the Netherlands, where ‘she would have more chances to lead a normal life’. Her mother, the sister of my informant, was ready to send her daughter and tried to do it officially. But according to Lena, the Russian authorities did not permit the under-aged girl to leave the country as an emigrant. The only way to bring her to the Netherlands was the illegal way. The girl was transported in a small mini-bus together with a few other Russians with false papers. The driver of the car received 5,000 dollars for arranging the trip and supplying the necessary documents. The mother of the girl was so happy that she also sent him a few bottles of champagne as ‘a sign of gratitude’.

a. 6 Smuggling of weapons

In the mid 1990s the smuggling of weapons, and especially nuclear material, was considered one of the most serious ‘Russian’ threats. Dutch businessmen in the Netherlands were approached a few times with offers to buy nuclear material. According to experts, the material that some Russian businessmen are trying to sell in the Netherlands has no value. They are just hoping to make a profit on something that cannot be used for the production of weapons (Telegraaf-i, 10 April 1996\(^{121}\)).

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\(^{120}\) Similar data are indicated by Zwirs in her research on immigrant smuggling (2000:36-37).
\(^{121}\) [http://www.telegraaf.nl/cgi-bin/n...410/teksten/bin_wapensmokkel.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/cgi-bin/n...410/teksten/bin_wapensmokkel.html)
In the spring of 1996 two transports of rocket parts were stopped by Ukrainian security services. The destination of the cargo was the port of Rotterdam, through which it was supposed to continue to Libya and Yugoslavia. There were also reports on large amounts of weapons stolen from a military base in Ukraine, which were supposed to arrive in Western Europe through Rotterdam (ibid.).

In the beginning of 1990s, almost all new Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands were interested in the trade in weapons. Thousands of offers came from military bases in different areas in Russia, proposing all possible types of weapons deals: from tanks and submarines to nuclear weapon or materials. However, it appears that in almost no case actual deals were struck, according to my informants. There was a lot of noise but no action. An informant gave an explanation:

‘High-ranking Russian military officers want to make money on old-fashioned weapons, most of which have no value any longer. They can steal uranium and plutonium from their laboratories, but in what quantity? It will never be enough to build nuclear weapons. There are no fools in the West!’

These days the weapon business is in Israeli hands, according to one informant. Anyone wishing to buy weapons illegally must approach the Israelis, who are supposed to have Russian weapons, such as Makarov-pistols, as well. From my fieldwork it became obvious that nuclear material is not particularly popular among Russian-speaking businessmen. Conventional weapons, however, are still perceived as a good product for sale, because of the huge and outrageous offers on the market in the former Soviet Union. Russian weapons are very much in demand in certain countries because of their attractive pricing and availability (see also Beaty, Time, April 18, 1994; Turbiville 1995; Foek in Elsevier, August 1994; Greig 1995). This means that while this trade might be only marginal in the West, the situation could be different in other countries. In any case, weapons that are smuggled do pass through the West.

a.7 Smuggling of art

Another ‘popular’ criminal activity of the Russian mafia is supposedly the smuggling of art items. In the beginning of the 1990s the Russian authorities noticed that hundreds of art items were disappearing from local museums and especially churches: icons, paintings, gold and silver objects, etc. At first this massive theft seemed to occur primarily in provincial Russian towns and villages, but later it became apparent that art items were also stolen from important cultural institutions in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other big cities, and subsequently smuggled out of the country. The case of the Hardzhiev collection, which has its direct links to the smuggling from Russia to the Netherlands, was probably the most sensational, mysterious and complex case of the last years. The Dutch press reported on the case but it was also the subject of many conversations with my Russian-speaking informants.

122 In the Netherlands a licence is necessary for keeping and trading in weapons.
The Hardzhiev collection

Nicolai Hardzhiev had been an art collector for many years. He was especially interested in the Russian style of futurism in the period between 1910-1930. In the Soviet Union all kinds of modern art and literature considered outside the framework of 'socialist realism', were forbidden and persecuted. Nevertheless, Hardzhiev had continued to collect masterworks of Malevitch, Goncharova, El Lisitski, Khlebnikov and other Russian avantgardists, art literature, signatures, letters and other documents and he had compiled a catalogue that included a description of more than 1350 works of art (de Volkskrant, February 20, 1998). In the beginning of the 1990s Hardzhiev came in contact with European art specialists and gallery-owners, who became extremely interested in his collection. In 1993 Hardzhiev and his wife immigrated to the Netherlands. The German gallery-owner Kristina Gmurzinska succeeded in smuggling the entire collection out of Russia and delivered it to Hardzhiev in the Netherlands. For this operation she received six works of Malevitch (of about 2.5 million-dollar in value). Hardzhiev was a very old man (91) by the time he arrived in the Netherlands. He came into contact with Russian-speaking immigrants, some of whom he knew from his days in Moscow. He told them he was happy that his collection had come to Europe and regretted he was too old to see it in the Stedelijk Museum, where it belonged.

One of his contacts in Amsterdam was a Russian Jewish immigrant from Moscow. We will call him Akimov. I met him in the beginning of the 1990s, when he had just arrived in the Netherlands as an asylum seeker. In Moscow he was a movie producer, well known in Russian Bohemian circles, and he had hoped to continue his artistic career in the West. Though Akimov did manage to find work in Dutch cinema and theatre, these jobs did not satisfy his professional ambitions. Like many Russian-speaking immigrants at that time he became interested in doing business with Russia and got involved in the Russian business world in the Netherlands. Hardzhiev and his wife lived in a big house in an affluent part of Amsterdam. According to my informants he and his wife were very fond of Akimov: ‘he was like their son’. They knew him from Moscow and he was their friend and adviser in the Netherlands.

In 1996 Hardzhiev’s wife fell down the staircase and died, her husband followed her a few months later and died at the age of 93. Before their death the Hardzhievs had appointed Akimov as their only heir. He inherited their house and the collection. Hardzhiev had asked him to appoint members to the board of the foundation he established before his death. The Dutch notary C. Prive became head and only member of the board. This man changed the regulations of the foundation, which made it possible to sell works from the collection (to cover other expenses of the foundation, it was said).

Since the death of Hardzhiev and the appointment of C. Prive many publications have appeared in the Dutch newspapers, full of speculation on the fate of the collection. There were reports about embezzlement, about the sale of the main part of the collection to German galleries, and even about an attempt by the Dutch government to exchange the Hardzhiev collection for the Koenings collection, which has been in Russia since 1945 (de Volkskrant, May 28, 1999). It was reported that 34 valuable works were sold from the collection (probably in Germany) (de Volkskrant, May 28, 1999). These works would have cost about 30 million guilders and the money must have disappeared into somebody’s pocket, since it never came back to the foundation’s accounts. Akimov, according to these reports, has received 10 million guilders from the legacy (de Volkskrant, December 23, 2000). On 1 January 1998 Akimov emigrated to New Zealand. It was also mentioned that some Russian-speaking acquaintances of Akimov suspected him of taking possession of the collection (de Volkskrant, February 20, 1998). My conversations with those Russian-speakers who were
close to Akimov made it clear that the Dutch press was very careful in its language when mentioning his name. The versions of my informants differ in many respects from the one presented in the newspapers. I have also heard different versions of the circumstances surrounding the death of Hardzhiev's wife.\textsuperscript{124}

a.8 Contract killings and liquidations

According to my informants the most frequent and 'typically Russian' criminal activity of Russian organized crime in the West is contract killing. In Russia a 'killer' is surrounded by an aura of mystery, he is often seen as a professional, almost a hero. The victims of these professionals in Russia were politicians, crime bosses and journalists\textsuperscript{125}, according to Michael, a Russian journalist who has lived in the Netherlands for six years and has tried to establish a Dutch newspaper in the Russian language. The price for a hit, he says, varies from $10,000 to $30,000 (if there are bodyguards). Michael investigated a few cases of contract killings in Russia during his career as a journalist. He explained that Russian killers are cheap according to international standards. The cheapest among them are supposed to be the Latvians. There are special camps where contract killers receive their training: in Moldova, Ukraine, and a few other former republics. These are skilled professionals. There is always the "control shot" in the head, without which no Russian 'killer' would ever leave his victim. The evidence of their activity in the Netherlands is clear: almost all liquidations of Russian-speaking businessmen (described below) were carried out by professionals, almost all of whom were never found.

Liquidations or 'secret liquidations' are an important aspect of the professionalization of crime. In the period between 1992-1999 a few Russian-speakers, mostly businessmen, were murdered and kidnapped in the Netherlands. 'Liquidation' is the term used by the police in the context of the criminal world. In some cases, where the murdered person could not be identified, they referred to his death as a 'possible liquidation'. My informants regard all 'liquidations' as professional killings, i.e. contract killings, be they instrumental or expressive in motive (domestic problems, business conflict, etc.). The theoretical significance of this term and its cultural and social meaning is important in this context. The difference between an ordinary murder and a liquidation lies in its professionalism, according to the Russian-speakers. 'Murderers kill, professionals liquidate', they explained to me. Liquidation means no traces, no burial place, a control shot. It also means a message to the family or business partners. These ideas are a continuation of commando trainings and the methods of the former KGB. The conclusion is that liquidation is business, according to the emic language, and contract killers are businessmen. The difficulties of defining liquidation as a special category are discussed by Van de Port (2001). I have chosen to remain within the definitions of my informants in order to explain this kind of criminal activity in the following cases. I will however point to the differences in perception between my informants and the police investigators and analyse the context in which these differences appear.

I will now describe a number of cases that were covered by Dutch newspapers. I discussed them with my informants during the fieldwork. After listening to the Russian-speakers' version of the events I compared their story with the version of the police, and then confronted police investigators with differences in presentation and interpretation of the alleged same facts. Some of the stories about liquidations of Russian-speakers in the

\textsuperscript{124} I do not present these versions in the text to protect those who gave me the information.

\textsuperscript{125} Dmitrii Kholodov and Vladislav Listiev are the most famous Russian journalist who were liquidated by contract killers in Russia.
Netherlands I had to exclude from this study because they were too contradictory or vague. I was, for example, told the story of a Russian Jewish criminal boss who had been murdered in the Netherlands and was then brought on board a Russian ship to Odessa, where he was buried with all the honours due to someone of his position in the Russian criminal world. One informant showed me a clipping from a local newspaper but there were no references to the name of the newspaper or the date and no details on the author or the newspaper itself. Later, in an interview with a police officer he told me he had heard the story as well, but had no proof or records on it. Other similarly sensational stories I decided not to include in this chapter for the same reason: they were only based on rumours.

Tengis Marianoshvilli (murdered in 1992)

Tengis Marianoshvilli was the son of a Georgian clergymen who immigrated to Germany and started an intermediary business with Georgia. He had a wide network of business contacts in Europe, especially in Belgium and the Netherlands. According to German police he was the leader of a criminal gang that dealt in extortion among other Russian-speaking businessmen. In 1992 he was involved in a fight between two rival criminal Georgian groups in a pizzeria in Berlin and tried to escape, first to Antwerp, then to Amsterdam. In Antwerp he had contacts with Boris Nayfeld, one of the leading figures of Russian organized crime in Belgium and the United States, who is - together with his partners - involved in the trafficking in heroin. According to information from the FBI, Marianoshvilli was hiding out in Amsterdam in an apartment that belonged to Nayfeld’s girlfriend. He had a meeting with three Russian-speaking businessmen in a hotel in Amsterdam. According to the police these were members of a Chechen criminal organization. The same evening he was murdered. His body was dumped in a lake near Mijdrecht. The killers of Marianoshvilli have never been found. When he was shot, probably by a Chechen hit man, Nayfeld gave instructions to a gang member, who lived near the apartment, to get rid of any evidence before the arrival of the Dutch police.

Nobody among my informants has ever met Marianoshvilli. They only read about the murder in Dutch newspapers. One Georgian informant told me that he heard about the case when he was in Berlin, because Marianoshvilli was a known criminal figure among the Russian-speakers there. However, my informants could provide no further information. His activities were probably very ‘international’, as one of my informants explained.

Oleg Kononov (murdered in 1994)

In May 1994 the body of the 28-year old Russian Oleg Kononov was found in the dunes near Zandvoort. He had been shot several times and repeatedly stabbed with a knife. In his pocket there was an old Soviet passport saying that he was Russian, born in Ukraine in 1965 and living in Lipaya, Latvia. In this passport there was a forged stamp from Germany, where he probably had a legal status (based on a tourist visa). A few days earlier Kononov had travelled

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126 In Belgium Nayfeld headed a very big criminal network, which included drug couriers (see Siegel 2002).

from Germany to Amsterdam, where he stayed all the time. He had a tourist visa for Germany but not for the Netherlands. One version was that his killers probably brought him to Zandvoort from Amsterdam, where he was murdered earlier. Another version was that he was brought to Zandvoort and killed there.

During the investigation the main suspect was identified as a Dutch man, a 'petty criminal'. Kononov had had intensive contacts with him and allegedly tried to recruit him into his criminal activities. The contacts with this Dutchman gave rise to the suspicion that the murder was committed for 'romantic' reasons, because of a possible relationship between Kononov and the girlfriend of the Dutch man. This girl, a teenager, was a Russian and worked without a permit as a prostitute in various brothels.

However, according to another, unofficial version this romantic murder is too simple an explanation of what happened. Both the information of my informants and that of the police described Oleg Kononov as a member of a Latvian criminal organization, which operated in the Netherlands and probably in Germany in the years 1990-95. There was evidence that he was involved in smuggling women to Western Europe. There were also falsifications concerning the age of girls. Some of them knew what they were expected to do in the Netherlands, others were promised jobs as dancers of waitresses in Dutch clubs. These young women got their visa in Riga and were transported by mini-bus to the Netherlands, where they were sold to various brothel-owners. Kononov's activities in women trafficking were confirmed by other Russian prostitutes, whom he smuggled to Western Europe.

There were also suspicions that Kononov was involved in the illegal trade in cars. However, this could have been legal activity according to the police, who had no proof of car theft or car smuggling in Kononov's case. He was probably involved in 'stealing' with the agreement of the car-owners.

One informant, who analysed his activities, came to the conclusion that Kononov was a 'soldier' in a criminal structure with headquarters in Moscow and various divisions, including a prostitution division, in Latvia. The 'multi-cultural' composition of the organisation was evident since another member who also operated in the Netherlands, probably together with Kononov, was Georgian. There were two other members of the same organization with whom Kononov had business relations in the Netherlands. His identity and the fact that Kononov was connected to the criminal organization were confirmed by the Latvian police in a letter that was sent to the Netherlands. But the Dutch public prosecutor did not allow police officials to go to Latvia in order to look for additional information about Kononov's background and his connections with the criminal world there and in the rest of Europe. The reason was explained as follows: since the suspect is Dutch and the murder took place in the Netherlands, there are no grounds to go to Latvia. The real reason, however, seems to be the lack of trust between the two countries. As in other cases, this lack of cooperation and information exchange results in criminal cases remaining unsolved; this is not conducive to identifying and combating criminal activities of organized groups and the spread of Russian criminal activities in Europe.

Mysterious Moldovan (died in 1994)

In the same year (1994), a few days before Christmas and in the same area, the body of a 33-old man from Moldova was found near Bloemendaal. He was a sailor, who had probably left his ship to buy a second-hand car. In order to save the money for a hotel he decided to spend a night on the beach. He was wearing very warm clothes. According to the police, the man fell
asleep on the beach and was covered by sand, which suffocated him. Police investigation led to no other versions of events.

My Russian-speaking informants, however, were sceptical. They had another explanation: the man was buried alive in the sand by force. ‘He must have been terribly drunk to fall asleep without noticing a sand storm’, was their reaction to the official version they saw in the press. One of the favourite methods of the Russian Mafia to kill someone, according to my informants, is burying the victim alive, under a concrete road, earth or sand. Nonsense, according to the police: you bury someone horizontally but the Moldovan was found in a vertical position. He was probably standing on the edge of a dune, when a kind of sand avalanche came down and covered him. This was not a liquidation, but just a natural disaster; it had nothing to do with the Russian Mafia.

In both the case of the Moldovan and the case of Kononov, police officials did not interrogate members of the Russian-speaking community. According to one of them ‘ethnic belonging does not provide a basis for suspicion’. In other words, being Russian does not mean that you have contacts with other Russian-speakers, especially with criminals. A few months later, when Boris Fastovsky was kidnapped, dozens of Russian-speakers were interrogated. The suspicion that Russian-speaking immigrants were connected to Russian organized crime was growing.

Boris Fastovsky (disappeared in 1995)

On the morning of January 11th 1995, Boris Fastovsky, a Jewish businessman from St. Petersburg, left his house in Amsterdam to go to the Vreemdelingendienst (Foreign Police). This was the last time he was seen alive. Four days later his car was found at the parking lot of Schiphol airport, but there was no proof that he had left the Netherlands. Was Fastovsky kidnapped and murdered — the official version of the Dutch police, or did he take all his millions of guilders to leave the Netherlands and his enemies and start a new life somewhere else — the version of some Russian-speaking immigrants?

Boris Fastovsky was the son of a rich Jewish businessmen from St. Petersburg, one of the first who made a fortune during the privatisation period and became the owner of a large network of supermarkets in the city. In the beginning of the 1990s Fastovsky arrived in the Netherlands as an asylum seeker. He was assisted by JMW and got his residence permit. Together with his cousins he started doing business with Russia, supplying dairy products, meat, oil and especially vodka to his father’s supermarkets. ‘Vodka is death’, his mother said much later, meaning that since the moment he started to trade in vodka he entered a ‘criminal zone’. Boris exported ‘Tsar Peter’ and ‘Troika’ Dutch vodka to Russia. But his big success was ‘Black Death’, which he exported together with his partner in Luxembourg. Fastovsky left his cousins’ company and started his own business: Olympic International Trading. He bought a house in Amsterdam, and according to many sources led the life of a wealthy man. His great success in business was well known among Russian-speaking immigrants. There were various rumours about his lifestyle: that he was going out with rich married women, that he used cocaine and spent all his free time in luxury restaurants and saunas, but also that he was a ‘nice and decent Jewish boy, who was close to his parents’.

There are several versions to the story of his disappearance. The first is that after a business conflict between his cousins and other Russian and Georgian partners, Boris became the victim of an act of revenge, aimed at the family as a whole. Two people, one woman and a Georgian man, were considered by the police as the ones who arranged his kidnapping with the aim of extorting money. According to police, the woman was the leader of a Georgian
criminal organization, which had settled in the Netherlands and was involved in extorting rich Russian-speaking businessmen. These Georgians came to the Netherlands either as political refugees or as illegal immigrants. Many received their residence permits because of the political situation in Georgia at the time.

On the day of his disappearance Fastovsky called the Discount Bank in Luxembourg and talked with his permanent contact there. He asked to transfer 450,000 guilders to a certain account at the Banque General in the name of one Igor. This account was opened less than two weeks before the kidnapping of Boris. On 12 January the business partner of Boris, worried because Boris did not respond to his telephone calls, drove to Luxembourg and during his conversation with bank officials Fastovsky called again. He said he was staying ‘with his sister in Amsterdam’, meaning his cousin. The same day it became clear that five times money had been withdrawn from Fastovsky’s account. One day later another Russian called the bank asking if the money had been transferred to Igor’s account. Based on different sources the police suspects that Boris was kept in the house of a rich Russian businessman in Bloemendaal. According to the police this man was the one who gave the order to kidnap Fastovsky. The police, who listened to and analysed the telephone conversations between different suspects, came to the conclusion that Boris was killed after the money was transferred from the bank in Luxembourg.

The police arrested all Boris’ contacts, more than thirty people (more than seventy according to Russian-speakers). An F-16 airplane flew over Amsterdam-North and took photographs to try and find a body, without any result. The conclusion of the police was that Boris Fastovsky was the victim of a Georgian criminal organization involved in extortion and kidnapping that operated in the Netherlands. In this case they tried to take over the successful vodka business of Fastovsky. The money would be transferred to the Russian factory, which would import vodka from the Netherlands. In this way they could launder the money. This is the version of the Dutch police.

Russian-speakers came up with a different analysis of the case. According to them, the whole family, including Boris and his cousins, were not really innocent businessmen. My informants explained that no one running a successful businesses in Russia could ever hope to avoid contacts with criminal organizations; everyone needs ‘krysha’. That is the reality of Russian life. Any businessmen who thinks that he is sheltered from criminal influences in the Netherlands ‘pays for his naivety with his life’. Fastovsky was not careful, according to my informants; his life-style was too conspicuous and worse: ‘he had a big mouth’, he talked too much, he boasted to people he did not really know. His last girl friend was connected to Georgian criminals and she was the one ‘who sold Boris’.

The Russian-speakers presented two versions of his disappearance. The first one was that he was indeed killed by Georgians, because they were probably disappointed that he had less money than they expected and because he personally knew his murderers, who were his former partners. The second version was that Boris himself staged the whole event and faked his own kidnapping because he suspected that his rivals in the Russian-speaking community would make an attempt on his life. According to this version he took all the money he had and left for Canada (New Zealand, Australia, or South America, depending on the source). According to this version, he is still secretly in contact with his close family while leading a life of luxury under a new name. One informant told me Boris had undergone plastic surgery and was now unrecognisable. It is remarkable that many Russian-speaking informants believe in this version, based on the idea that ‘Boris was a business talent’, ‘a very clever man’, someone who would probably ‘smell’ danger from a distance. All versions remain unproven, because the body was never found. However the Fastovsky’s story was of great significance for the development of perceptions regarding the Russian Mafia in the Netherlands.
It also affected the reputation of the Dutch police among Russian-speakers. This has to do with the investigation after Fastovsky’s disappearance. The Dutch police considered the case the start of Russian Mafia activity on the territory of the Netherlands – a new and threatening phenomenon. The decision was to do everything possible to find out if there were Russian criminal organizations present in the country. It was especially relevant in the context of the Parliamentary Fact-finding Commission (Commissie Van Traa) going on at the same time. According to the police it was important to get inside the ‘closed Russian business world’ and they arrested dozens of people. An 83-old Russian woman was interrogated because the police found a weapon under her bed. During the investigation she was ‘acting’, - according to the police - as if she did not feel well and some policemen considered letting her go. When she was told that she was free her behaviour changed instantly. The same version was presented differently by Russian-speaking informants, who all complained about the ‘cruelty of the Dutch police who have no mercy for old people and children’. The Russians described the role of the police in this episode as only imaginable in a totalitarian regime, and they often called the Netherlands a ‘police-state’. Nevertheless, the case of Fastovsky confirmed suspicions that the Russian Mafia operated in the Netherlands and that there were links between some Russian-speaking businessmen and Russian criminal organizations.

Yuri Sentchugov (murdered in 1995)

Yuri Sentchugov, born in Saratov in 1952, arrived in Middelburg in June 1992. He was a specialist in laser technology and holograms. He said he had worked for the Russian Military and at one moment he felt threatened by his bosses, reason for him to leave the former Soviet Union. In the Netherlands he applied for asylum and first lived in Vlissingen, then in Groningen and finally in Rijssen. He found a job in a Dutch company near Rotterdam, specializing in laser-shows. At the same time he tried to start a business selling ornaments of holograms, together with another Russian-speaking immigrant. According to some, he also made cards with holograms used on credit cards. Shop-owners were, however, not interested in the ornaments. Sentchugov also tried to deal in computers, but all these activities were marginal. He had an excellent reputation as a specialist at his company and maintained friendly relationships with his employer.

This employer was the first to get worried when Sentchugov did not appear at the Christmas-dinner organized by the company. A neighbour who was close to Sentchugov, realized he had not seen him for several days. They warned the police. On December 28 1995 the police of Twente found Sentchugov’s body lying in bed in the house where he lived alone (his wife and child had stayed behind in Russia). There was no weapon found near his body and only after medical examination it became clear that he did not die of natural causes. He had been badly beaten a few days earlier. He had broken ribs, a fractured skull and internal bleeding. Computers and a video-player had disappeared from his house. His car was found a few days later in the McDonald’s parking, a few miles from his house. From the police investigation it became clear that his ex-partner was driving Sentchugov’s car. Sentchugov had telephone contacts with this person shortly before his death.

Similar to the other liquidations of Russian-speakers, there are two versions of this murder: one by the police and one by my Russian-speaking informants. The police version, based on investigations lasting two and a half months, was that this was not a planned liquidation. The ex-partner of Sentchugov had contacts with a criminal group in St. Petersburg, to which he supplied XTC pills. In 1995 he tried to cheat the group, by sending
aspirin tablets instead of drugs. Four members of the criminal group arrived in the Netherlands ‘to get their money’. It was not a large amount, about 1500 guilders, but he did not have the money. When the criminals pressed him, he told them he knew somebody who had money and brought them to Sentchugov. According to the police, the four did not plan to kill Sentchugov, they threatened him, beat him and then left him in his house. They took a few things and his car. Sentchugov later died in bed.

Dozens of Russian-speakers in Zeeland were investigated. One witness who knew both Sentchugov and his ex-partner told the police that this ex-partner was guilty of Sentchugov’s murder. Likewise other Russian-speakers were positive and respectful about Sentchugov but very negative about the ex-partner, describing him as ‘dubious’ and ‘criminal’. Some of them, however, thought that both Sentchugov and his ex-partner dealt in drugs. The ex-partner had contacts with Dutch criminals as well, one of whom was found guilty in another murder-case and sentenced to twenty years. No real proof of the ex-partner’s involvement in Sentchugov’s murder, however, could be found. Attempts to contact the Russian police for the fingerprints of the four St. Petersburgers did not produce any results. There was no communication and no cooperation between the Dutch and Russian police.

The version of the Russian-speaking informants who followed the investigation and personally knew Sentchugov, is different and much more sensational: Sentchugov escaped from the Russian Military and came to the West because he wanted to sell his knowledge. He knew military secrets from his work at the secret division of rocket troops. He also was able, allegedly, to coordinate between businessmen and Russian military who were interested in trading weapons with the West. In the beginning of the 1990s almost all Russian-speaking businessmen in the West tried to come in contact with army officers, because at that time ‘everything was for sale there’. According to the Russian-speakers Sentchugov was liquidated either by his bosses from the Army, who were probably not keen on selling the knowledge (perhaps they wanted to sell it themselves), or by former KGB officers sent by the Russian government to prevent the leaking of information to the West. My informants told me that many high-ranking military officers had contacts with criminal organizations and were cooperating with them. Russian-speakers did not provide real proof but based their version on ‘common sense’ and their knowledge of the situation in Russia.

The investigation showed that members of a certain criminal group form St. Petersburg were operating in the Netherlands, collecting their money from the Russian-speaking immigrants who settled here. The leader of the group, an Armenian, was a well-known criminal in Russia, who took shelter in South America for some time. The members of the group also visited the Red Light District and spent a few days in Amsterdam, before they went on to Germany. The lack of cooperation between the Dutch and Russian police, the distrust and inability to exchange the necessary information on certain criminals allowed the four to escape and freely move around in Europe, a fact which demands serious attention and practical changes.

Victor Balulis (murdered in 1997)

On May 19 1997 Victor Balulis and his wife were returning home from the Amsterdam Vondel Park, where they had been walking their dogs. Near their house at the van Eeghenstreet, Balulis was shot five times in his head and heart. The murderer disappeared in the Vondel Park on a bicycle. In a pocket of Balulis’ trousers police found a Smith and Wesson ladygun with eight cartridges. In Balulis’ house 100.000 dollars, jewels by Cartier
and more weapons were found. The police concluded from the investigation that Balulis (nicknamed Animal) had become a victim of his former business partner (nicknamed Klezz), to whom he allegedly presented an obstacle in business. Balulis dealt in oil in Latvia and Ukraine. He and his former partner bought houses in the same street in Amsterdam. One year before the murder they broke off their business contacts. According to police information Klezz had tried to take over Balulis’ oil business but did not succeed. This was the reason he hired contract killers to liquidate his ex-partner.

Information from the taxi driver led to the arrest of three suspects in the murder case: Maxim, Oleg and Vladimir, all with Greek passports. The Russian police informed their Dutch colleagues that Maxim and Oleg were known for committing other violent murders of members of criminal organizations in the former Soviet Union. Maxim and Oleg were transferred to isolation cells in one of Amsterdam’s prisons as ‘dangerous criminals’. The third suspect was set free, (‘too soon’, according to some police officials). Interpol in Moscow sent another fax to the Netherlands in which it indicated that Maxim and Oleg were planning the murder of high-ranking justice officials in Russia. The two had an alibi for the day of murder. On August 26 they were deported: Maxim to Greece, Oleg to Russia, where they were immediately arrested. The Russian police also announced that all three suspects were members of the Kurganskaya criminal organization. The murderer of Victor Balulis was never found.

According to police officials, Balulis was murdered as a result of a business-conflict with his former partner. Though some officials suspected him of having criminal contacts, his background and connections were never investigated in-depth. As in other cases of murdered Russian businessmen police officials indicated a lack of communication and trust with their colleagues from the former Soviet Union. In the Latvian newspaper Diena an article appeared, in which Balulis was described as one of the biggest criminals in the former Soviet Union. His criminal record included murder, which he committed from the window of his own apartment in Riga128, and his membership in a Latvian criminal organization. Among Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands, he was known as ‘Animal’, a dangerous and dubious figure. His wife, who was often seen at various social events organized by Russian-speakers, was described as ‘very clever and rich’ woman who actually made Balulis a millionaire, by providing him with starting capital. Her role in all that happened remains unclear.

There are two versions of the murder of Balulis among the Russian-speakers in Amsterdam, both different from the official one. The first version is that Balulis was well known as an obschak (keeper) of the Latvian criminal organization. In Amsterdam he bought real estate in the most expensive streets of the city, on the account of the obschak (or without permission from other members of the organization).

‘Balulis bought not only in the Netherlands. In Ukraine he was the owner of the whole Kreschatik (the main street of Kiev), with all its old houses and luxury shops’, according to one informant.

Many other members of his organization were killed one or two years earlier; allegedly ‘he was the last one’ in his group. According to several Russian-speaking informants Victor Balulis got his political refugee status in the Netherlands in spite of the fact that his police file was sent from Riga, in which it was indicated that he had a criminal record in the former Soviet Union. One of the questions the Russian-speaking informants think is still to be answered is ‘to which Dutch official’s bank account huge sums of money were transferred when Balulis received his political refugee status’. In other words: who was so generously

128 ‘Nosau Latvijas kriminalautaritati’ (Our Latvian criminal authority) in Diena, May 1997
paid in the Dutch municipality and the Ministry of Justice to let Balulis stay in the Netherlands?

The second version is that the Latvian Mafia ‘tried to enter the prostitution market’. Balulis, according to this version, was killed by local Dutch criminals as a potential competitor. This version was described by police officials as ‘absolute nonsense’ since there was no evidence of Latvian involvement in prostitution in the Netherlands and this is an area where the Dutch police have sufficient control and knowledge to be certain. Russian-speakers, however, think that the Russian Mafia is very active in Dutch and Belgian prostitution.

The gap between the official police version and the informal version of the Russian-speaking immigrants is obvious: while the police view this liquidation as the result of a ‘business conflict’, Russian-speakers are convinced that Balulis, himself a prominent criminal, was killed as a result of razborka (negotiation) inside Russian (Latvian) criminal circles.

Vadim Rozenbaum (murdered in 1997)

In 1992 the Russian newspaper Moscow News brought a story of a successful New Russian, the Jewish Vadim Rozenbaum, who described himself as a ‘typically “self-made” man’, who allegedly experienced all evils of the former Soviet regime: injustice, imprisonment, persecutions by KGB, etc. (Moscow News, February 27, 1992). In the beginning of the first cooperatives in Russia he joined one of them. This cooperative dealt in woodwork, construction and transportation. After some time Rozenbaum started his own cooperative, which was registered in 1988 as Fond (Foundation). In the same article Rozenbaum confessed that he had been arrested several times for various reasons; one time he was arrested together with the members of the Solntsevo group of racketeers (Ibid.). According to Russian information, Rozenbaum was a criminal, a member of the Solnetsevo organization and an intimate friend of its leaders, especially Sergei Mikhailov. He also had close contacts with politicians129 and leading Russian sportsmen.

In November 1994 Vadim Rozenbaum immigrated to the Netherlands together with his wife and children. He settled in Oirschot in Brabant and started his firm Lorit Trade ltd. On September 26 1995 Rozenbaum informed the Brabant police about extortion and blackmail. He gave the police in Eindhoven valuable information on the structure and activities of the Russian Mafia. Nevertheless the Dutch IND (Immigration and Naturalization Service) did not grant him a residence permit, while these were granted to two colleagues of Rozenbaum. It is not clear why, because Dutch partners of Rozenbaum like the management at Daf-Trucks, Breda-Oranjeboom and Grolsch wrote recommendations to the ND, in which they emphasized that the business activities of Rozenbaum were of great importance for the export of Dutch products to Russia. The IND asked for information from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and received negative advice three times in a row. The fourth advice was positive, but this time the Ministry of Justice decided to ‘check’ the background of Rozenbaum.

On 16 September 1996 Rosenbaum’s father was stabbed in Moscow. According to other information Russian criminals often threatened his father. After one such violent ‘visit’ he died from a heart attack (Yediot Aharonot, October 2, 1998). One month later the partner of Rozenbaum in Moscow, Titov, was shot near his house. Titov was director of Rozenbaum’s Russian company Tirol and the daughter firm Inpol. One morning Rozenbaum himself was found dead in his bed. He had been shot during the night.

129 According to him, he was personally acquainted with Raisa Gorbacheva, spouse of president Mikhail Gorbachev.
There were many paradoxes and much was unclear in the different versions of Rozenbaum’s life story. For example, Rozenbaum argued upon his arrival in the Netherlands that ex-KGB members threatened him because he supposedly refused to inform the former Russian secret service about the Russian Jews in Moscow who planned to immigrate to Israel. During my conversations with representatives of the Zionist Forum in Israel, and especially with activists of the Jewish movement and former dissidents from Moscow, there was nobody who had ever heard of Rozenbaum or his ‘Jewish activities’ in the former Soviet Union. Rozenbaum himself had written in the ‘Moscow News’ that though he was Jewish he had ‘never particularly pondered’ over his nationality (Moscow News, February 27, 1992). More proof that Rozenbaum and his family was far from Judaism is the fact that his father was buried according to the Russian Orthodox ritual in the church, while Rozenbaum himself was listening to the service by telephone. On top of that Rozenbaum was himself cremated, which is unacceptable in the Jewish tradition. The argument that the ex-KGB would take revenge for his refusal to co-operate on Jewish issues was not grounded. Obviously the real reason for his arrival in the Netherlands was similar to that of the other Russian-speaking businessmen (see chapter 4), i.e. the picture of the Netherlands as a ‘Mafia-free’ country, where the long arm of Russian criminal organizations cannot reach those who try to escape the Mafia. In the present case, however, Rozenbaum was wrong.

On August 10 1995, a 25-year old man, who presented himself as Konstantin, appeared at his house for the first time. He demanded ‘protection’ money of one million US dollars, half of which had to be paid in cash. According to Konstantin, Rozenbaum had smuggled hundred containers of beer to Russia, on which he allegedly earned two billion dollars, which the Mafia wanted to share. Konstantin told Rozenbaum that he knew that he also sold spoilit chicken meat in Russia and that fifty people had died of poisoning. He added that Rozenbaum also smuggled drugs and flowers to Russia. According to Rozenbaum, Konstantin was a member of the former KGB. Konstantin promised to be back in three days. After Konstantin returned to Russia he continued calling Rozenbaum, telephone conversations which were taped to be presented to the Dutch police. It was never cleared up who this Konstantin was, which criminal organization he represented and why Rozenbaum was chosen, as a ‘victim’.

Rozenbaum, however, had other dubious connections in Israel (he and his family had Israeli citizenship), in Poland, in Jordan and in offshore countries, especially in Cyprus. He also had shares in an offshore company called Unitax Services LTD in Panama. In the course of the investigation after he was murdered it became clear that Rozenbaum had contacts with a criminal organization in Poland, with which he was involved in the export of cigarettes. One of the police versions was that a Polish contract killer, who appeared in the Netherlands a few days earlier and left one day after the murder, after buying a car from a Dutch criminal in Brabant, shot Rozenbaum.

Another version, this one by my Russian-speaking informants who followed the case, is that the members of the Solntsevskaya group liquidated him, since they suspected him of being willing to testify in Sergei Michailov’s case, who was at that time arrested in Switzerland. According to this version Rozenbaum had a rich past connected to the Solntsevskaya. In 1989 Rozenbaum already was a witness against two members of this organization. However, after this betrayal he found protection by the criminal boss Pavel Zacharov, the leader of the Balashichinskaya criminal group in the north of Moscow. In 1993, before his immigration to Israel, a reconciliation between Rozenbaum and members of Solntsevskaya was arranged and he returned to their fold. He then established two criminal groups in Europe, involved in smuggling raw materials from Russia to Western Europe. He himself lived alternately in Israel and in the Netherlands. Certain criminals in Israel did not accept the reconciliation between Rozenbaum and the Solntsevskaya. They started to threaten
him and demanded money. Rozenbaum ‘made a mistake’, when he asked for protection from the Dutch police. The rumour was spread among the criminals that he was selling them to the authorities and they decided to liquidate him, according to the criminal rules of the game.

The third version based on the warnings by Rozenbaum himself, was that the ex-KGB member (Konstantin) was the killer, because Rozenbaum ‘refused to pay to the Mafia’. This version was also possible, according to my informants, because they believed that the ex-KGB members are ‘the real Russian Mafia’.

The Israeli police arrested four people suspected of the murder, but had to release them for lack of proof. The murderer was never found. The killing led to a debate in the Dutch Parliament, the main questions being why Rozenbaum did not receive his residence permit while his co-workers did; and which Russian organizations provided information that was considered by the IND in their decision on the residence permit. Did the Russian Mafia in the former Soviet Union have such an influence in political circles, that it could even affect the immigration policy in other countries, such as in the Netherlands? But the most important question was why Rozenbaum did not get police protection after the information he provided on the Russian Mafia, and after he informed the police about the warnings he received from the Russian Mafia.

Alexei (disappeared in 1992)

Alexei came to the Netherlands in August 1990 to try his luck in international business. In the period between 1990 and April 1992 he regularly called his parents in Riga, whom he told that he was staying in the centre for asylum seekers and intended to apply for a residence permit. He last talked with his mother on April 12, 1992. A few days later a woman, who presented herself as a girl friend of Alexei, called his mother to tell her that she had been waiting for Alexei to visit her but that he had not shown up. She also said that two days later she was called by an unknown man who informed her that Alexei was shot dead.

Two years later the mother of Alexei was approached by the son of her neighbours, Victor Balulis, who told her that he had bought Alexei’s apartment in Riga and came to take the keys. Alexei and Balulis knew each other and probably have met in Amsterdam. During the next eight years the mother of Alexei, Larisa, tried to find out what happened to her son via the Russian and Latvian police and Interpol. She also hired a Latvian private detective, without result. In 1999 she arrived in Amsterdam and tried to establish contacts through the Russian Orthodox Church to find out what happened. After all these years she did not believe her son was still alive. However she also could not get any clear answers about Alexei. The activists of the Russian Orthodox Church tried to help her, wrote letters to the Amsterdam police but to no avail. A careful reading of Balulis’ police file did not provide any results either. The name of her son was never mentioned in connection with the murder of another member of Latvian criminal organization, Oleg Kononov.

At one moment during her stay in Amsterdam she was approached by a Russian-speaking man, who told her he could find out where the body was and what exactly happened to her son. For this he asked her to pay an amount which she could not afford. Other Russians, who have heard the story, advised her not to believe the ‘suspicious’ Russian and ‘not to deal with criminals’. Larisa was terrified and refused to pay. She left for Latvia without result. The Dutch police could not find any evidences of murder. This was, according to my informants,

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130 In one of the Dutch newspapers an article appeared with the title ‘Communistische partij in Rusland heeft invloed op vreemdelingenbelied’ (‘Communist party of Russia has influence on immigration policy’), meaning the case of Rozenbaum in the Netherlands (Trouw, February 27, 1997).
another ‘mysterious liquidation’, which characterized the activities of Russian organized crime in the Netherlands. One of my informants even told me that according to him many liquidations like this are taking place in Russian criminal circles, and nobody, including the police, would ever know about them. He based his statement on the ‘high level of professionalism and sophistication of Russian Mafia’.

5.a.2 Other murders

The cases presented above can be defined as liquidations because they were performed professionally. As I have already mentioned Russian professionalism in liquidations means no trace, no burial place, just a message to business partners and family. ‘No emotions, no identifications, pure execution of orders’. Liquidation is business and contract killers, according to my informants, are businessmen. The victims of these professionals in Russia are politicians, financial and public figures, crime bosses and sometimes crime journalists. In the Netherlands they concern, as I demonstrated above, Russian businessmen. All those liquidated that I described, were Russian-speaking businessmen. But does this mean that all murders performed by Russian-speakers are liquidations and have a link to organized crime? According to my informants, a killing is not considered a liquidation when one of the conditions of professionalism is missing. In the following cases, I will describe ordinary murders, in which not professionalism, but ethnicity and economic motives become important. I intend to demonstrate that not every murder connected to persons with a ‘Russian name’ should be automatically explained in the context of Russian organized crime.

Murder in ROA house (1996)

In 1995-1996 four Georgians were living in the ROA house in Deventer, waiting for a decision of the Dutch authorities about their residence permit. Two of them were highly educated: one graduated from the Technological Institute in Georgia and the other was a professional artist. The Georgians told the Dutch authorities that they had come to the Netherlands for political reasons; they were persecuted in Georgia. Later they confessed they did not have any political problems.

One of them - I will call him Nico - did not really need an official status. He arrived in the Netherlands on a tourist visa and had enough money (after he sold his house and Mercedes in Russia) to ‘start a new life’. It was probably temporary that he lived in the same ROA house. According to others he behaved like a boss in the house, like a ‘dictator’, making others obey and serve him. He had a good story prepared in case the Dutch authorities would investigate the reason of his immigration to the Netherlands: he was supposedly a member of the so-called ‘Round Table’ political organization, in opposition to the present Georgian authorities. He was also a member of a sect close to Catholicism, which was not particularly favoured by the Georgian Orthodox Church. All these factors would indicate political-religious reasons for Nico’s stay in the Netherlands.

According to other Georgians, Nico was a well-known criminal, who specialized in extortion and ‘controlled’ shops in St. Petersburg that gave him protection money. He also had a rich criminal past in Russian prisons, where he spent 16 years and got his tattoos and his scars from encounters with other criminals. Nico had the reputation of a professional criminal and his photo from about twenty years ago, taken from the KGB archive, was published in the
book ‘Georgian Mafia’ (in Russian), which one of the Georgians showed to the police. It
could be that Nico was vor v zakone, in Georgian they applied the term ‘Kurdi’ to him. But
this is not likely since thieves in law usually stayed away from drugs and drug dealing and
Nico was dealing in heroin and cocaine in the Netherlands and was himself an addict. He was
also selling drugs to other ROA dwellers, almost all of whom became addicted to heroin. One
of them, here called Otar, had a debt to Nico. He had to pay him back but did not have enough
money: the social assistance which the ROA dwellers received was 445 guilders per month.
This was not enough to buy drugs. Another Georgian illustrated his difficult financial
situation by saying that he had to steal from shops to make ends meet.
In the early morning of June 18 1996 Nico was found dead in his sleeping room, wrapped in
brown paper, with knife wounds in his breast, neck and wounds from an axe on his head.
Later the axe was found in a canal near the house. Nico’s watch was found in Otar’s room.
According to Otar, Nico was killed by two Russian men, members of the Russian Mafia He
said he had seen them leaving the house. Later he confessed to the murder. He had to kill
Nico because he had a debt of 1200 dollars and Nico threatened him: ‘otherwise he would
have killed me’. After Nico was murdered, Otar took the drugs and the money he found in the
room. He shared the drugs with others. The body of Nico was sent by plane to St. Petersburg
to be buried there.

In this case the Georgians tried to use the image of the Russian Mafia to divert
suspicion. Otar invented a story about two Russians but there was too much evidence linking
him instead of two ‘mysterious Russians’ to the murder. Another observation coming out of
the investigation, is that there is a Georgian community in the Netherlands and that there are
strong links between Georgians who live in different centres for asylum seekers and ROA
dwellings. The Georgian community consists of people who were not acquainted to each
other in their former Motherland, but whose common country of origin and language became
a basis for intensive contacts in the Netherlands.

Georgians against Armenians (1999)

In 1999 two bodies were found in a field in the province of Twente. They were two
Armenian cousins living in the centre for asylum seekers in Enschede. In the same centre
there was a number of refugees from the Caucasus. It appeared that the two cousins had
contacts with a man and a woman from Byelorussia who had turned their apartment into a
store for luxury goods: clothes, shoes, perfumes, etc. These goods were suspected to be stolen
from Dutch shops and sold to Russian clients.

In March 1999 three men from Byelorussia came to the Netherlands to receive goods
ordered by clients in Rostov. These goods were stored in the flat in Enschede. However, the
Armenian cousins took the bags with clothes and shoes from the flat and refused to bring
them back. The angry Byelorussians hired three Georgians to ‘convince the Armenians’ to
return the bags. The Armenians hired a few Chechens as bodyguards, because they believed
that the Russians would be afraid of Chechens. All parties arrived in the apartment for
razborka (negotiations). However, the negotiations developed into a quarrel and then into a
fight. The men left the flat and drove to the near-by forest to continue their fight there. The
three Georgians planned to beat the Armenians, to frighten them and force them to give the
goods back. However, the Armenians were not impressed which made one of the Georgians
very angry and he stabbed one of the cousins with his knife, first in his throat and then in the
head. The other cousin rushed to help and was stabbed with a knife as well. The Georgians
panicked and ran away, dropping a knife and a mobile telephone.
The police investigation lasted six weeks, the Georgians were arrested and later sentenced to 8 and 5 years. The third Georgian was released. The murderer confessed that he had already committed murder in his former homeland, and because of that murder had left Georgia. He confessed that he had lied in his interview with IND officials. He also said that he participated in the war between Ossetia and Georgia, where he fought in the commandos and learned to use a knife (the way he stabbed his victim in the head he had learned there), and was suffering from a war trauma.

The Armenian community - consisting mainly of Turkish Armenians - that usually assists people in sending bodies to Armenia for funerals, considered the two cousins to be criminals and refused to help. The two cousins were buried at the Armenian cemetery in Almelo. One Armenian informant, with whom I analysed the case, explained that the main reason for the murder was the fact that the Georgians did not succeed in making the Armenians accept their superiority; they expected to see signs of fear, an important cultural aspect in the relation between the two groups.

"Fear is connected to showing respect, and when this is done, there is a rule: no more violence. When the cousins showed no fear they expressed no respect, and this is terrible. For not expressing respect one could be killed!" the informant told me.

For many years Armenians and Georgians were considered enemies in the former Soviet Union. This traditional rivalry did not disappear in the Netherlands. In this struggle, the Georgians came to help the Byelorussians, while the Armenians were looking for support from the Chechens, using another prevailing ethnic stereotype among Russians: that of the criminal Chechen. The same case could be viewed on the other hand as a quarrel where one of the Georgians lost control of himself and the quarrel turned into fight, resulting in the death of two people. This is the version of the police officials who were involved in the investigation. Has the case anything to do with the Georgian or Armenian Mafia? 'Hard to believe!' according to the police officials.

Murder of a Dutch criminal (1995)

Russian-speaking criminals are not only involved in criminal activities against each other; they also cooperate with other ethnic groups in the Netherlands, who sometimes use their services. One example is a Chechen, here called Ruslan, who was hired by Yugoslavians to kill a Dutch criminal in the region of Rotterdam. Ruslan, a young man, lived in a small town in the north of Poland. It later became clear from the police investigation that there is a large Chechen community in this area, which includes many contract-killers, who often offer their services in Europe. Ruslan was brought to an apartment in Rotterdam by his Yugoslavian contact, where he stayed for a few days together with a few Serbs, living in the Netherlands illegally. Ruslan was promised 10.000 guilders for killing John Smit, a well-known Dutch criminal, involved in drugs and extortion. He also was involved in a murder in Belgium. The murder of Smit was ordered by another Dutchman, who wanted to take revenge for the fact that Smit had sexual relations with his wife and daughter. The third motive was connected with money, which Smit allegedly had taken from him (about 800.000 guilders). John Smit had made a lot of enemies in the underworld, especially among Yugoslavians, but also among Moroccans and Dutch.

On April 20 1995 Ruslan entered a bar where John Smit was sitting; he was under influence of cocaine. Ruslan waited until Smit went to the ladies' toilet, followed him and
shot him in the head three times (one for the wife, one for the daughter and one for the money). After the murder, another Yugoslav brought Ruslan by car to Germany, from where he left for Poland. In this case contact was made with the Polish police and the Dutch researchers managed to locate Ruslan as well as another Chechen, who had been hired by the same Yugoslav to liquidate another criminal from the circles of illegal Yugoslavis, this time in a shop in The Hague. Ruslan was also involved in negotiations with another Chechen and encouraged him to go to the Netherlands. He told him he could earn 10,000 guilders for this murder. The Dutch police arrested the Chechen and the Yugoslav in June 1995, before the second murder was committed. Ruslan, who was arrested for assault in Poland later that year, was transferred to the Netherlands, where he was imprisoned for 14 years. Polish police warned the Dutch authorities that there might be a reaction from the Chechen community in Poland. My Russian-speaking informants perceived the case as more proof that the criminal world 'lives its own separate life, with its own rules of the game'. When the conversation came to Chechens involved in contract-kilings they only shrugged their shoulders: 'What do you expect from the wild folks?'

5.a.3 more complicated criminal operations

A very popular view among Russian-speaking immigrants on the criminal activities of Russian organized crime is that it is highly sophisticated and connected to the most complicated technological and financial operations. I am under the impression that the informants who mentioned the Russian Mafia as 'the cleverest and most educated' criminal organization somehow enjoyed this reputation and were proud of being more educated and erudite than others: Russians were not merely involved in 'simple drugs or robberies', but in high-level economic and political crime. According to Irina:

'Russians stand out everywhere because of their education, even in the criminal world. This is because of our Soviet schools: we were not allowed to discuss sociological issues because of the dominant Marxist ideology, which tolerated no criticism or other ideas. The only "free zones" were classical music and exact sciences, in which Russians could train without restrictions. And there they tried to reach perfection'.

According to Masha, the activity of Russian organized crime in financial and economic areas is the real serious problem for the Dutch authorities:

'I know a few Russians who could buy the whole of Holland, if they would like to. They are extremely rich! Those who buy real estate in Amsterdam and Limburg are "poor" people in comparison to them'.

Irina, another businesswoman, told me that many of her clients in Russia are interested in acquiring houses in the Netherlands, even when they have no intention to settle here. During one of my visits to the suburbs of Eindhoven, I have seen luxury villas, bought by Russian-speaking businessmen, that remained unoccupied and empty for months, or so I was told. The value of these houses was estimated by the local real estate agent between 1,5 and 2 million guilders, which is high for Dutch standards. The owners of the houses were young people, who came to the Netherlands with suitcases full of cash in US dollars. According to Masha this was real Russian Mafia, because even in the period of privatisation no one could earn that much in a short period of time.
When I asked my informants in Amsterdam and in Rotterdam whether they knew Russian-speakers in the south of the country, they either answered negatively or told me that they only knew that these people were not immigrants and did not mix with other Russian-speakers. Natalia told me that she had met a woman living in suburb of Eindhoven, during her flight to Moscow, and from conversations with her she got the impression that there is a very closed circle there. They send their children to Dutch schools, but they do not live there permanently. They also do not look for "Russian" contacts in the Netherlands. These are the children of very high-level politicians and bankers in Russia, and they are connected in one way or another to Russian organized crime. These are exactly the new entrepreneurs I discussed in chapter 2, who were looking for an opportunity to bring their huge capital, amassed during the privatisation period, to a safe place abroad.

Elena, a former psychologist who taught Russian in a University in the south of the Netherlands, told me that when Russian-speaking businessmen began to come to Limburg in 1993-94 there were many Dutch who wanted to learn Russian. According to her, the Russians who came to the southern provinces inspired Dutch businessmen to start doing business with Russia. After the economic crisis in 1998, however, the number of her students went down significantly and she had to stop teaching.

Most of my informants made a link between these Russian-speaking businessmen who buy real estate in the countryside and criminal organizations and money laundering activities such as starting Russian restaurants or sponsoring youth sport clubs (teams would be taken out to expensive restaurants; vacations for children would be organized abroad). Charity work by certain Russian-speakers was also interpreted by my informants as a way of laundering money. According to Alexander, the former business partner of Natalia (chapter 4), Russian-speaking businessmen invest huge sums of money in various religious organizations in the Netherlands and in some other countries. Where does this money come from? Nobody knows and nobody asks.

Criminal sophistication of Russian Mafia

For a definition of the term ‘criminal sophistication’ I will use the one coined by Finckenauer and Waring, which is ‘the ability to carry out complex, high-stakes (high-risk and high-return) crimes’ (1998:119). This definition includes technical skills, geographical scope, and political and other connections. Russian criminal organizations have employed hundreds of highly educated professionals, such as economists, chemists, computer specialists, professional soldiers and members of the former KGB. The unemployment in Russia was the main reason the Russian Mafia succeeded in the recruitment of trained technical personnel. The main targets of the Russian Mafia are banks. In 1994, for example, the Russian police arrested members of an organized criminal group that specialized in financial schemes in Russia. The leaders were Chechens and Ingush. The group had a huge computer centre with the latest software and a network of agents in the Central Bank, which provided the centre with banking forms and stamps

The European Union Bank (EUB), the first internet-bank in the world, was created in 1994 in Antigua with 1 million dollars invested by the Menatep Bank, one of the largest banks of Russia. Alexander Konanichin, Russian immigrant and banker in the United States, established the EUB together with Michail Khodorovsky, one of the tycoons of the business world in Russia. On an attractive website the secrecy of transaction operations was emphasized, which allowed money laundering via the internet. The office of the bank was located in the tourist centre of Antigua, but the computers were served by Russian specialists
from the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., situated near the White House. Sophisticated control was organized in the advertisement office of Konanichin, which was established in this hotel (Friedman, 2000:211, 214).

The record of Russian contributions to computer crime is one of the most significant in the world. In 1994 during a period of five months one young hacker from St. Petersburg shifted around 10 million U.S. dollars into overseas bank accounts for himself and for his friends. In 1995 the computer system of an Austrian bank was hacked (cited in Finckenauer and Waring 1998:119). In 1996 Russian hackers stole 11 million U.S. dollars from Citibank. 'With the extinction of cash a real possibility in the next decade or two, the black economy must find ways of using e-mails, cyber dollars, smart cards and credit accounts. This brave new economy, lubricated by binary bucks, has opportunities and pitfalls for major criminal organizations' (Anstee 1999131).

The sophistication of the Russian Mafia was especially emphasized by my informants when they talked about the financial and economic operations of Russian criminals. During the Soviet period banks were 'an accounting arm of the government' (Burlingame, 1997:47). After the reforms, the Central Bank of Russia (CBR), which followed the Gosbank, still tried to control cash flows. 'The result of these holdovers...though a shifting of credits on paper, dependent on vouchers and letters of advice. This system has been proven vulnerable to counterfeit, manipulation, and fraud' (Burlingame 1998:47).

In 1996 about 2,600 commercial banks were operating in Russia (Burlingame 1998:49). Many of these banks were used by criminal organizations for money laundering. Since the break up of the Soviet Union everyone could open his own bank, if he had 3 board members and 80,000 (later 120,000) dollars. The penetration of criminals into the financial business allowed them access to huge amounts of money, which in its turn leads to the expansion abroad. A report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States finds that 550 banks and financial institutions in Russia, i.e. half of the banking sector, are controlled by criminal organizations, which operate together with corrupted politicians and businessmen (INAF New Bulletin, 1 November 1998)132.

Through banks the criminal organizations laundered money, performed illegal transactions to their private accounts in European banks and received information about rich New Russians – potential objects of extortion. They also penetrated the boards of bank directors, sometimes by investing in a bank and demanding shares. As bank directors they could exercise total control over the money. When Russian bankers did not agree or contested their authority, they were killed. In the last ten years, for example, several dozens of Russian bankers were killed by Russian organized crime as a result of conflicts between them and members of the criminal organizations. Among them were the directors of leading banks, such as the Proftechbank, the Bank for Development of the Wood Industry, the Technobank, the Pragma-bank, the Eurasia-Bank, the Agroprombank, etc. None of these murders was solved. Then new forms of financial crime appeared, such as using bogus credit documents. But the criminals did not abandon their ‘traditional’ ways of money laundering and counterfeiting of both foreign and domestic currency. The counterfeit Russian rubles are believed to be produced in Chechnya and Azerbaijan133.

Corruption is a very important aspect of successful operations by criminal groups. Corrupt managers of commercial banks usually receive 30-40 per cent for forged letters of credit. Criminals also become shareholders. ‘Russian crime groups have control of a great deal of the banking system at home, and this is beginning to cause problems for global

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132 http://www.emu.edu.tr/%7Einaf/English/newsbul/011198.html

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financial institutions' (Lowther 1997:34). Possession of a bank allowed Russian criminals to launder money and buy legitimate companies. Western bankers indicate that 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid transactions in Russia that involve organized crime' (Lowther 1997:32). Often money is transferred abroad through import/export contracts. In some cases these contracts are simply fraudulent. Legitimate business, however, also allows laundering money. Another favourite method for money laundering is using offshore banking, mostly in Cyprus and in the Caribbean. It is against this background that the illegal banking operations in the Netherlands committed by the Russian-speakers, must be analysed.

**Bank operations in the Netherlands**

In December 1994 it became obvious to bank officials that an increasing number of Russians set up an account in a Dutch bank and deposit a million guilders in cash. The origin of money was never clear and there was no proof of involvement by the Russian Mafia. The Centrale Recherche Informatiedienst (CRI) established the Meldpunt Ongebruikelijke Transacties in Zoetermeer. The Nederlandse Vereniging van Banken organized a group of security specialists, who discussed the 'unusual investments, including those by Russians'. But it was far from easy to identify the illegal transactions or the cash the Russians brought to the Dutch banks. The Russians, according to the officials of one of the leading Dutch banks, always remained within the framework of the law, using the services of Dutch lawyers and financial advisers. Thus, if a Russian came into a bank with cash in his suitcase, he knew that he had to identify himself and his company, fulfil all the necessary requirements and prove that there was a real legal business, registered at the Kamer van Koophandel (Chamber of Commerce). He also was aware of the fact that any sum above 25,000 guilders would be reported to the Meldpunt Ongebruikelijke Transacties.

Sometimes the gut-feeling of the experienced bankers was decisive in not accepting a suspected Russian as a client in a specific bank. In case of suspicion financial specialists were consulted. Sometimes, according to the same officials, 'the stories of Russians' were too complicated even for them. Thus, for example, they did not know how to deal with so-called 'certificates for safekeeping', issued in Russia and used as a guarantee for transaction of 80 million US dollars. This kind of certificate was not known in Dutch banks, though written in English and probably known in the USA. When there is suspicion on the side of the bank officials leading to the decision not to accept a certain Russian as a client, information is usually transferred to other Dutch banks.

It is more difficult for Dutch banks to deal with transactions from legal Russian banks. There is no information on the source of the money that came into Russian banks, as well as on the activity or background of bank owners in Russia. There are no contacts between Russian and Dutch bank security services, mainly because the Dutch still do not trust Russian financial and police institutions. This lack of trust leads to an absence of communication. Russian criminals could take advantage of this situation.

All large Dutch banks have their offices in Russia, however there are not many Russian bank offices in the Netherlands. The best known is the Stolichnyi Bank. The Stolichnyi Bank was founded in 1991 in Moscow. Its starting capital was two billion rubles. Soon it opened offices in Vienna, New York and Amsterdam. In Russia there were many rumours about the reputation of the bank, it was suspected of dealing in drug money and weapon smuggling (Handelman 1995:139). In 1992 the Stolichnyi Bank became one of the

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134 Since 1997 the Stolichnyi Bank in the Netherlands is called SBS Agro Bank Nederland nv.
top five biggest banks in Russia. In the Netherlands the Stolichnyi Bank was established in November 1994 after the national banks of England and Luxembourg refused to allow a branch to be opened. The fact that Alexei Drovossekov, director of Stolichnyi Bank in the Netherlands, was a neighbour of the liquidated Victor Balulis gave rise to questions about a connection between the two. Drovossekov denied any connection to the murder (Het Parool, May 24, 1997). During the investigation the director of the Russian Agro Banking Group, to which the Stolichnyi Bank belongs, Alexander Smolensky, came from Moscow in the Netherlands and announced that there was no connection between the murder of Balulis and the Stolychnyi Bank in Amsterdam. In 1995 Smolensky had to answer questions put to him by the Dutch Bank (DNB) about some reports on his connection to an affair of fraud with international letters of credit in Austria. The Austrian police searched the villa of Smolensky’s wife in Vienna (Telegraaf-i, May 30, 1997).

All sorts of reports warned Dutch banks about Russian money laundering and the Nederlandse Vereniging van Banken (the Dutch Banks Association) fully cooperated with the IRT-research in 1999 (Kernteam 1999). They informed on bank accounts opened by Russian-speakers in the Netherlands, especially the accounts of Russian non-residents, among whom those who worked through foreign entities (for example via the Virgin Islands or Cyprus). This exercise did not deliver much: in chapter 11 of the IRT report there are theoretical contemplations about possible money laundering constructions or the attractiveness of the Dutch financial world and very broad numbers about money traffic. There are no specific suspicions and there is even less criminal research – the list was not very impressive. Some banks continue to warn about the criminal activities of Russian Mafia in the financial world of the Netherlands (for example the warning of the head of the security department of the ING bank ,Telegraaf 20-11-99), but there is no concrete proof.

The bank officials I interviewed during my fieldwork, expressed the opinion that there probably happens a lot more than they can actually see. There is an invisible Russian Mafia, which operates in the Netherlands; however, they could not provide significant data on Russian criminal activities in Dutch banking institutions. Officials of various Dutch banks pointed out that ‘in their bank nothing special happens that would prove the activity of Russian Mafia’. Each bank has experienced some incidents where the decision was made not to accept a specific Russian as a client; but their judgement was based on their personal feeling rather than on real evidence of criminal involvement. In the world of banking there is a lack of trust and cooperation with the Russian authorities and financial institutions, which leads to confusion and disinformation.

During my conversations with security managers of different Dutch banks it became apparent that the fear that existed in the mid-1990s about Russian operations in the financial area is over. There are many other problems that seem more threatening and demand more attention than the Russian Mafia. My informants were less optimistic about the financial (non) activities of Russian criminals. They believe that Russian criminal organizations are busy with money laundering in Western Europe, including the Netherlands, but, again, they are very sophisticated and there is no possibility for Dutch banks to trace the origin of their money. As one informant said: ‘The Dutch have to stop being naïve and they should actually suspect all banks in the former Soviet Union as criminal’.

135 DNB – De Nederlandse Bank
136 http://www.telegraaf.nl/cgi-bin/n...9970530/teksten/fin.dnbvoelt.html
Real estate

In 1995 the police of West-Brabant announced that there were signs of ‘infiltration by Russian Mafia’ in the region. Russian criminals were supposedly active in women smuggling, prostitution, car stealing and especially in money laundering. According to the police, they started to invest money in real estate in the region. Luxury villas and houses in suburbs of Roosendaal and in East Brabant were bought by large numbers of Russians (De Stem, 5 April 1995; NRC Handelsblad, 4 April, 1995). In the period between 1994 and 1995 24 houses were bought by Russian-speakers in the Roosendaal district. They used some of these houses to locate their import-export companies, others to live in. Some of these houses remained empty for months. Owners of one of the companies regularly invited clients from Russia and organized tours around houses that were offered for sale. The main question that puzzled the West-Brabant police was: are the ‘Russians’ who buy these houses regular businessmen or are they connected to criminal organizations? Some Dutch businessmen in the district used the opportunity to co-operate with Russians and do business in Russia. They even organized a Russian Cultural Centre in one village in Brabant. According to the police the main reason for their suspicions was the fact that some of these Russian-speakers could be linked to Dutch criminals operating in drugs, smuggling art objects and car theft.

Within a two-year period (between 1993-1995) Russian businessmen bought about thirty houses in Eindhoven and its suburbs. Why did they settle in this area? The argument that I have heard a few times during my fieldwork, was that in West-Brabant prices for luxury villas were lower than in other places, but this was not really convincing. After seeing the houses and comparing prices with similar houses in suburbs of Amsterdam, it appeared that they were not cheaper than in Amsterdam (the difference in price was around 100-150.000 guilders, which is not significant when the total amounted to 1.5 — 2 million guilders).

Another argument was more convincing, namely, that precisely this area, where no other Russian-speakers were living, was attractive as a ‘Mafia-free’ region. This argument corresponds to my informants (chapter 5) telling me that they have no contacts with Russians in the South. This, however, turned out to be not entirely true: at least in one case my informant, a Russian-speaking businessman from Rotterdam, confessed that he ‘had bought a vacation house in Brabant’, but never lived there.

In 1994 Vadim Rozenbaum came to the town of Oirschot, following other New Russians who had settled in suburbs of Eindhoven. Like most of the New Russians who had settled in this area, he was not looking for contacts with other Russian-speakers in the Netherlands; his partners were Dutch businessmen. He organized parties for them at his villa and invited them to chic restaurants. During one such event he spent hundreds of thousands of guilders just on spirits, according to a source. In interview with Dutch newspaper Rozenbaum said: ‘...my position cannot be compared with that of many other refugees (i.e. non-Western) who came to the Netherlands. I have nothing against these people, on the contrary, but they cost the Netherlands a lot of money. Not in my case: not only do I bring a lot of money to the Rijksschatkist, I also provide work opportunities’ (Trouw, February 27, 1997). In 1997 he was found murdered in his bed. According to the police, he was killed either by Russian contract killers, or other East European, hired by the Russian Mafia.

The story of rich Russians with suitcases full of dollars who buy villas and luxury houses in the most expensive districts of Amsterdam is by now familiar. According to my informants, the Latvian criminal organization to which Balulis (see liquidation case above) belonged, bought ‘half of P.C. Hoofstraat and van Eeghenstraat’ in Amsterdam. This is in addition to property in other European cities and former Soviet republics. For example, I was told that the same organization is the owner of most of the buildings housing the most
expensive shops at Kreschatik, the main street of Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. It also owned shops and houses in Italy and Latvia. In 1995 the police of Amsterdam mentioned in its policy plan that the Russian Mafia buys vast amounts of real estate in the Netherlands, including petrol stations, for the purpose of money laundering (De Telegraaf-i, 30 May 1997).

5.b Conclusions

From my interviews with more than twenty police and justice officials two opposing views on Russian organized crime in the Netherlands emerged: 1. There is no threat of Russian Mafia in the Netherlands, though there were a few incidents, such as liquidations, which have an international but not a local character. 2. There is a real threat of Russian Mafia invasion in Dutch society, especially in the economic area.

When discussing specific cases, I encouraged those interviewed to express their professional as well as their personal opinions. In a few cases there was a clear contradiction between the two: police investigators told me that though there was almost no evidence of the ‘Russian invasion’ in the Netherlands, their feeling was that Russian criminals are indeed operating in the Netherlands, in such a sophisticated way that the Dutch authorities are unable to locate and catch them. They referred to the massive buying of real estate, for example. One of them told me that ‘the Russian Mafia operates in the Netherlands behind the screen’. The other extreme was the opinion of a police official in a certain district who told me that he had handled only one case with a Russian involved, which means that the rumours about Russian Mafia are highly exaggerated and have no basis. According to him ‘the Russian Mafia is an invention of the Dutch press, hungry for sensation’. He told me that while investigating the case with a Russian man involved, he was approached by more journalists than ever before during his career.

According to another police official, the Dutch press is very interested in the Russian Mafia and often ‘attack’ the police, when there are rumours about Russian involvement in crime. However, ‘in his area he has no problem with Russians, compared to other minorities’. I have heard the same opinion from other police officials in various districts. It was also obvious that even if there was a case of murder or other crime connected with Russians, it was considered ‘local’ and no contacts were made with other districts to get a more general picture. Thus the murder of Kononov and the suspicion of him being a member of a Latvian criminal organization, or maybe even a division of multi-ethnic Russian organization with its headquarters in Moscow, was not checked in the context of other Latvian criminal activities in the Netherlands and with other murders, such as that of Latvian criminal boss Balulis. This absence of cooperation between different regions is an obstacle in evaluating the real threat of the post-Soviet Mafia in the Netherlands. According to almost all police officials I interviewed, they could not get a ‘real wide picture’ of Russian Mafia activities in the Netherlands.

Another great obstacle was the unwillingness of public prosecutors to create reliable contacts with Russian authorities and especially with the Russian police. Almost in all liquidation cases I presented in this chapter I was told that Dutch police officials were ready to cooperate with their Russian colleagues, but were either restricted or denied permission to visit Russia (or other former republics) and to investigate the background of the victims and suspects. In some cases police officials complained that the attitude of distrust displayed by

137 The financial section: http://www.telegraaf.nl/cgi-bin/n...9970530/teksten/fin.dnbvoelt.html
public prosecutors towards the Russian police and Russian information was one of the obstacles in their investigation. In the cases of Kononov, Sentchugov, Balulis and Rozenbaum it was lack of knowledge and information that set limits to the investigations, and made it difficult to solve the cases.

Another problem the police face in investigating Russian Mafia activities is a lack of money. Thus, in real estate investigation, both in Eindhoven and Rucphen there was not enough personnel and money to continue the research. Though the illegal elements in the sale of houses and the contacts between Russian-speaking and Dutch criminals were evident, the subject was not among the priorities of the high-ranking officials. In the case of Eindhoven this led to the end of the investigation. Links between suspected Russian-speakers and well-known Dutch criminals should demand special attention because this is where the possibility lies of growth in international criminal contacts and opportunities.
Chapter 6.
The Transnational Russian Mafia

The Russian Mafia has been identified as a case of transnational criminal organization (Williams, 1995; Williams, 1997; Shelley, 1997; Amir, 1996). The main assumption is that because of the opening of the gates and the mass emigration that took place after the break up of the Soviet Union, Russian criminals had an opportunity to organize criminal enterprises abroad and to create networks among immigrants and organize their activities all over the world. Each country served a specific function in the criminal activities of Russian-speaking gangs.

In order to examine the assumption that the Russian Mafia is transnational I will now focus specifically on five European countries that were often mentioned during my field-work as places where my Russian-speaking informants had connections. They said that these were countries where the Russian Mafia operates and that they knew about criminal activities of Russian-speakers taking place there. These countries are Israel, Belgium, Germany, Cyprus and the USA. In each of them I examine the connection between Russian criminal organizations and the immigrant community. What criminal activities are going on and what are the specific conditions for Russian criminal organizations? What are the characteristics of the Russian criminal picture in each of these countries? Is there a connection with the Netherlands? And what is the role and importance of the Netherlands for the Russian organized crime compared to other countries?

Activity of Russian-speaking criminals in different countries constitute proof for the argument that the Russian Mafia is a transnational criminal organization, or a set of various criminal groups connected to each other. While the Russian criminal organizations are apparently well organized internationally, the international coordination between the police forces of different countries is still problematic. Even in liquidation cases, which took place in the Netherlands but were obviously connected with suspects from other European countries, no real cooperation was initiated. It seems that each country has its own policy and regulations concerning various criminal activities like money laundering, drugs, extortion, etc., differ from each other.

The Israeli Connection

‘When Israel has prostitutes and thieves we’ll be a state just like any other’.
David Ben-Gurion

Israel has been one of the most important countries for Russian organized crime to find new markets and clients. With a Russian-speaking population (Jewish and non-Jewish) of more than a million immigrants, criminal gangs found the conditions favourable to widen their activities, which include extortion of their former compatriots, trafficking of women and illegal migrants, drugs smuggling, money laundering, etc. A wide range of conventional and sophisticated criminal operations by Russian organized crime have been mounted in Israel since the beginning of the Great Immigration (since 1988). Israel is also a place where crime
bosses organize their international meetings and they come for vacations and medical treatment, considered the best in the world.

When the first Prime Minister of the Jewish state said that criminals are an inevitable part of any normal society, he probably did not foresee that Israel might become a shelter for the most dangerous criminals from all over the world. Fifty years after these famous words, prostitution, money laundering, corruption and drug trafficking have taken on enormous proportions. Since the mass immigration of post-Soviet Jews (more than a million of them landed in Israel), the infamous Russian-speaking criminals contributed their part in creating a ‘normal’ Jewish state à la Ben-Gurion.

According to Israeli police several dozens of Russian criminal bosses, the so-called ‘list of 32’, were operating in the country by 1997. In this list the Russian ‘godfathers’ who had supposedly been deported from the country, were registered. This was an exceptional case, because the general Israeli policy is not to extradite its citizens (including criminals) to other countries. But the image of the violent Russian Mafia and its reputation as one that seeks to penetrate the financial and political institutions in the world, was enough for Israeli decision-makers to make an exception.

As I have already mentioned earlier in this study, many Russian crime bosses have obtained Israeli citizenship, though by no means all of them were Jews. Sergei Mikhailov, Israeli citizen since 1993, was a leader of the Solntsevskaya criminal organization. Viacheslav Ivankov (Japonchik) also had Israeli citizenship through his fictive marriage with a Jewish woman. The leader of the Podolskaya criminal organization, Leonid Palei, ‘Old Man’, who was shot in Moscow in April 1998, was also an Israeli citizen. Evsei Agron, one of the biggest criminal bosses in Brighton Beach in New York became an Israeli in 1975 on his way to the United States and even ‘hebrewised’ his name into Avishai Agron. Agron was allegedly liquidated by order of his rival Boris Nayfeld, who was also an Israeli citizen. Another famous criminal figure in the American Russian-speaking underworld was Monya Elson, born in Kishinev, Moldova, who was a vatik (old-timer) Israeli. In 1984 he was arrested in Israel for smuggling and trade in cocaine and he was imprisoned for six years in Beer-Sheva, a town in the Negev desert.

A Jewish identity or Judaism as a religion are not the reasons for Russian-speaking criminals to opt for Israel. They came because, firstly, the Israeli immigration policy is much less restrictive than in any other country – all it takes is a Jewish mother or a Jewish spouse to be accepted. With an Israeli passport one can travel in the world much easier than with a Russian one. Secondly, there are no regulations in Israel demanding disclosure of sources of money invested in banks and foundations. Israel needs foreign currency and encourages investments into its economy without ‘unnecessary questions’, which makes for perfect conditions for money laundering. In Israel Russian criminals invest in real estate, companies,

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138 In 1995 in Tel-Aviv, for example.
139 Nicolai Kovalev, the chief of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), who came to Israel to coordinate a common approach of organized crime, said in one interview that there is no list of names of Russian crime bosses in Israel and each case is investigated separately (Meridian, June 20, 1998).
140 In the years after the foundation of the state of Israel and until the last wave of Russian immigration in the 1990s, newcomers usually changed their original surnames and names into Hebrew ones. It was considered patriotic and a sign of willingness to integrate in Israeli society and to cut off their ‘shameful’ past as Diaspora Jews.
141 The immigrants who arrived from the Soviet Union in the 1970s-80s are called vatikim – old-timers, the immigrants in the 1990s are called olam hadashim – newcomers.
142 Many countries demand visa from Russian citizens. Russian passports are considered by Russian-speakers to be less prestigious than any other passport in the world; it often ‘means trouble’ and suspicion by the border control.
bonds, the stock market, etc. Thirdly, the large Russian-speaking population is a convenient place to hide activities such as extortion, trafficking in human beings, prostitution and other ‘traditional’ Mafia areas. And finally, Israeli authorities usually do not extradite Israeli citizens, even if they have committed serious crimes, to other countries. In special cases they could be prosecuted and jailed in Israel. Russian criminals also view the conditions in Israeli prisons as much better than the horrible Russian ones.

The Ministry of Absorption and Immigration was not physically ready for the huge influx of newcomers that started to arrive in the beginning of the 1990s (Siegel, 1998) and turned a blind eye to many details of the personal background of new immigrants. The authorities and the Rabbinate were busier checking the ‘Jewishness’ of people than their criminal past. There was no time and no money to get in touch with the Russian police or to acquire extra information on specific suspects. The result was that Russian criminals could easily enter, settle and continue their activity in the country.

In the beginning of the mass immigration the Israeli authorities did not believe that the Red Mafia would find a safe shelter in the Jewish state. The Israeli police did not take measures against the threat of the Russian criminal intervention. Only much later, a special unit was organized to fight the Russian Mafia in Israel. In 1997, however, a police spokeswoman said that the Israeli police would have to increase this unit fivefold to take on the Russian Mafia operations in Israel (The Associated Press, April 3, 1997).

One of the biggest operations of the unit was the investigation and arrest of Gregory Lerner (see chapter 3), which caused a clash of interests in Israeli society. The discrepancy between the official version that painted Lerner as the most important Russian ‘godfather’ in Israel, and the version of Russian immigrants, including their representatives in the Israeli Knesset, who blamed the Israeli authorities for stigmatising the whole community led to political struggle and ethnic rivalry between various groups in Israeli society and open protest from the side of Russian Israeli politicians.

The last weekend before he was murdered Vadim Rozenbaum spent in Israel. According to one of his employees he was engaged in intensive telephone conversations with Europe. He said that he felt threatened in Israel and was in a hurry to return to the Netherlands (Yediot Aharonot, October 2, 1998), proof that he considered the Netherlands a safe country where the Russian Mafia could not reach him. After twenty Dutch police investigators had tried to solve the murder of Vadim Rozenbaum, and after a hundred interviews inside and outside the Netherlands and interrogations of more than sixty people, four police officials arrived in Israel, claiming that all traces led to this country. They assumed that there was a Russian-Dutch-Israeli connection, which passed through Tel-Aviv, and that those who ordered the murder were hiding in Israel. Those were the members of the Solntsevskaya organization, to which Rozenbaum was directly or indirectly connected. According to the Israeli police many members of the Solntsevskaya organization had immigrated to Israel during the Great Immigration in the 1990s (Yediot Aharonot, October 2, 1998).

According to my informants there are many Russian-speakers in the Netherlands with Israeli citizenship. In chapter 3 I have demonstrated various strategies used by Russian-speaking asylum seekers to obtain their residence permit in the Netherlands. Many Russian-speakers with Israeli citizenship concealed their passports and pretended to be newcomers arriving directly from the former Soviet Union. They succeeded because the officials of the Dutch Ministry of Justice did not check their background. The authorities dealt only with the obvious cases, such as the one in Eindhoven that I described in chapter 3.

The only exception in Israeli history was Meyer Lansky.

143 Yehida Artzit le-Hasifat Psheiya Hamurim ve Beinleumit (Land Unit for Revealing Extreme and International Crime) in Petah-Tiqwa, in the centre of Israel.

145 http://www.nd.edu/~astrouni/zhiwriter/97/970440710.html
According to Israeli police officials, there are tight links between the criminal worlds in the Netherlands and in Israel. The Netherlands attracts Russian Israeli criminals because it is a country with open borders, relatively mild punishment and conditions in prisons that are not too unpleasant compared to those in Israel. ‘The criminals clearly figure out where there is less chance to be caught’, according to the chief of the Land Unit for Revealing Extreme and International Crime. 146 The Netherlands is such a country. The fight against the Russian Mafia is not a top priority there; other criminal groups are higher on the list.

There is a high degree of mobility of Russian organized crime in the world. Russian criminals do not stay long in one country; each country has its function. In Israel they launder money and come for medical treatment. The Netherlands serves as a transit point for their activities, and as a country where they can meet other members of Russian criminal organizations from Russia and Europe 147. But the assumption that there are contacts between Israeli and Russian criminal groups in the Netherlands is difficult to prove. Similar to the complexity of the term ‘Russian Mafia’, the term ‘Israeli organized crime’ is also too wide and abstract. Israeli organized crime consists of hundreds of ‘ethnic’ criminal groups, including North African Jews (originating from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria), Georgian Jews, Israeli Arabs, and others. Even ‘sabras’ (Israeli-bom) are divided into Sefardic 148 and Ashkenazi 149. The ‘Caucasian Mafia’ in Israel is considered the most violent 150. In general, however, Caucasian and Georgian criminals alike are included in one category, that of ‘Russian Mafia’.

The Belgian Connection

The transnational character of Russian organized crime is even more obvious, when we look at the place of Belgium and especially Antwerp on the Russian Mafia’s criminal map. Similar to the Netherlands, Russian crime bosses take refuge in Belgium when they are in danger somewhere else. However, if the Netherlands are considered to be a ‘Mafia-free’ land, Belgium has the reputation of an ideal location for Russian criminal networks. Drugs and women trafficking, money laundering and trade in stolen and false gold and diamonds – are the main activities of Russian criminals in Belgium.

All the main Russian-speaking crime bosses passed through or lived and operated in Belgium in the last decade. Boris Nayfeld (‘Beeba’, or ‘Daddy’), the former boxer and body-guard of Marat Balagula, the crime boss in Brighton Beach, New York, himself became the ‘godfather’ of the Russian Mafia in Belgium. He settled in Edegem, a suburb of Antwerp, after he escaped an attempt on his life. He also had his contacts in Berlin in connection with the

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146 From an interview with the chief of the Land Unit for Revealing Extreme and International Crime on 8 July, 1999, Jerusalem.
147 Ibid.
149 Jews of European origin
150 In different periods of war and unrest in Chechnya, many Chechen Jews immigrated to Israel, assisted by the Jewish Agency in the area. In 1995 two dead bodies were found in an apartment in the north of Tel-Aviv: a 66-year old woman and her 21-year old grandchild. Both bodies were headless, the heads were never found, they were probably sent to a person who ordered the murder as evidence. According to the father and the uncle, businessmen from North Caucasus, the murder was ordered by former business partners. The murder was committed by a relative of the family. He claimed that he had to kill because he was threatened. He was caught and imprisoned for two life-sentences.
Chechen Mafia. In Belgium he has built a strong network, including drugs smuggling on a large scale.

Another important figure in the Russian-speaking criminal world of Antwerp was Rachmiel (‗Mike‘) Brandwain. He was born in Ukraine and immigrated to Israel in 1966, when he was eight years old. In 1975 he left for Antwerp together with his wife. Through his business in electronic equipment with Eastern Europe he became close to the Solntsevskaya criminal organization. In Belgium he ran the M&S International trading company, which was alleged to have been used by Russian criminals as a cover for international drug smuggling and money laundering. According to an FBI report he was the leader of the Rachmiel Brandwain Organization, one of the Mafia groups, which was responsible for roughly a hundred murders. He was also connected with criminals in Berlin, where he helped to transfer money of Russian Military officers to secret accounts in the West (Trends, October 24, 1996). According to Israeli information he was also close with the crime boss Alimezan Tochtachonov, ‗Taiwanchik‘ (Yediot Aharonot, October 2, 1998). Brandwain was never prosecuted, supposedly because he agreed to cooperate with US intelligence services on information about the Russian Mafia. This was probably the reason for his liquidation. Brandwain was shot in the middle of the day in the centre of Antwerp on July 17, 1998 by a contract killer who did not forget the fatal ‘control shot’ in head of Brandwain (Yediot Aharonot, October 2, 1998).

The name of Semion Mogilevitch (‗Seva‘ or ‗Clever Don‘) is also connected to the Falconplein, where allegedly every type of illegal merchandise is for sale: stolen goods, false jewels, guns and ‗defence‘ weapons. Mogilevitch‘s organization has allegedly delivered illegal goods and prostitutes (HUMO, May 11, 1999). Semion Mogilevitch, born in Kiev, Ukraine, graduated from the University of Lvov in economics. Mogilevitch, a former KGB high-rank official and Israeli citizen, lives in Hungary and is known as a crime boss who surrounds himself with trained specialists and who operates in sophisticated criminal activities, such as financial and computer crime, art fraud (including theft from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg), and others. He operates internationally in the United States, Canada, a few European countries, including the Benelux, Israel and Russia. Boris Birshtein, Sergei Michailov and other crime bosses also have their basis in Antwerp. The main activity is trafficking in drugs. ‗Supplied from Riga, Latvia, this network deals in all sorts of narcotics, and is reportedly part of a connection that moves methylene dioxy-amphetamine (MDA) from Latvia to the Benelux countries‘ (The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no.16)\(^{151}\). The investigation showed that the ‗Russian-Jewish Mafia‘ in Antwerp made the city a Western European centre for receiving and selling contraband goods, by melting precious metals and reselling cut gems (The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch, Annual Report 1997)\(^{152}\).

Many Georgian immigrants in the Netherlands have relatives and/or friends in Antwerp. A few times I joined my Georgian informants when they visited their contacts there. Most of the Georgians, who have small shops in the Pelikaanstraat, are Georgian Jews, or married to Jewish women. Almost all of them have Israeli passports and they emphasize their Jewishness, for example in most of the shops there are portraits of the famous Rabbis and brachot (blessings, religious texts in Hebrew). The trade in gold and diamonds in the Pelikaanstraat, however, is not considered fully kosher. It is often claimed that the shops sell false jewels and gold. It is also argued that the shops are used to launder criminal money of the Georgian Mafia\(^{153}\). It is also said that the shops are in the hands of and are controlled by Russian organized crime using Georgians as a cover for their criminal activities. One shop-

\(^{151}\) [http://194.6.128.189/gb/30EBEAIA.html](http://194.6.128.189/gb/30EBEAIA.html)

\(^{152}\) [http://194.6.128.189/gb/30EBEAIA.html](http://194.6.128.189/gb/30EBEAIA.html)

\(^{153}\) Interview with Patsy Sorensen in HUMO May 11, 1999.
owner told me that these rumours are ruining his business. He said that in Antwerp he can sell
golden jewels of 24 karats\textsuperscript{154}, which he would never sell in Israel.

\textit{‘Here Europeans understand what quality is. In Israel they buy 18 and 14 karats, they are
not interested in good quality. Unbelievable, they are Jews, aren’t they? Jews must know what
they buy. European Jews at least do. Gold is a good investment. But the most stupid are
Americans. There, in New York I sell items of 8 karats’, he told me.}

Another famous ‘Georgian’ place in Antwerp is the Falconplein. When I visited one of
the shops, two Israelis were openly talking in Hebrew about delays in the delivery of pistols.
When I asked whether I could buy tear-gas spray, the shopkeeper apologised he did not have
it in his store at the moment, but he could order it for me. And when I told him that I lived in
the Netherlands he explained where I could buy it from his Israeli Russian-speaking friend.
There are close contacts between Russian-speakers in Belgium and the Netherlands. The
proximity and open borders between the two countries allow them to visit and to do business
with each other easily. Open borders can also mean easy murders. On April 21, 2000, a
Russian-speaking immigrant from Belgium was murdered in the Netherlands. The kidnapped
businessman Boris Fastovsky had connections in Antwerp. The liquidation of Marianoshvilli
(see chapter 6) also demonstrates the criminal connections in Russian-speaking circles
between the two countries. In addition to Georgian criminals there are also Latvian and ethnic
Russians, who are mainly involved in women trafficking and drugs smuggling. According to
my Latvian informant: ‘The most dangerous Latvian bandit choose Antwerp, they feel free
there, nobody dares to challenge their authority’.

The German Connection

While Belgium and the Netherlands are viewed as a ‘shelter’ and relatively safe haven for
Russian criminals hiding from other Russian criminals, this is not a case in Germany. Because
of a large Russian-speaking immigrant community it is very difficult to avoid contacts with
other Russian-speakers. Germany, similar to Israel, also serves as a place where the ‘local
Russian crime bosses’ receive their ‘international guests’ – representatives of Russian Mafia
from other countries.

The largest Russian-speaking immigrant community in Europe was established in Germany
after the break up of the Soviet empire. It included ethnic Germans, Jews, ethnic Russians and
Caucasians. However, the historical conditions in which the establishment of this community
took place differ in Germany from any other European country, because more than half a
million Soviet troops were based in the area of the Soviet occupied zone. Russian organized
crime had established a very strong and stable basis among the Russian military troops
(Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997:454). The agreement between Germany and the former
Soviet Union on the withdrawal of Soviet troops provided a convenient condition for
smuggling, because it allowed Soviet Militaries a duty-free importation of goods. The
German criminal police, Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) proved that Russian criminals bribed
German custom officers and civil servants during the last 5-6 years. BKA reports stated that
in 1994 alone there were thirty cases heard in German courts of corruption among German
politicians, businessmen, law officials and media personalities. These cases involved

\textsuperscript{154} The highest level of value of golden articles.
smuggling, fraud, large-scale investments in real estate and front companies (The Geopolitical Drug Dispatch no.41, March 1995)\textsuperscript{155}.

The top of the Russian criminal world arrived and settled in Germany: there were about 15 Russian-speaking \textit{vory v zakone} who lived in Germany in 1997, among them `Taiwanchik', who had obtained a legal residence permit. According to my informant, who often visits Germany, and whose relatives live there permanently, Germany became a lair of `Russian Mafia'. The crime bosses who settled there entertain Russian-speaking criminal \textit{avtoritety} from other countries, including Russia, Israel and the United States. One of the leaders of Russia's Thieves World, Rafael Bagdasarian, `Rafik Svo' often visited Germany to buy weapons (Konstantinov and Dikselius, 1997:454). When he was liquidated in Russia in 1993, airplanes with members of different criminal organizations arrived from Turkey, the United States, Germany and Italy to attend his funeral in his native Yerevan, Armenia.

The capital of Russian organized crime in Germany is Berlin, where branches of 10-12 Russian banks are located that are officially registered. The second `Russian criminal' German city is Cologne, where, according to my informants, probably the most influential Russian-speaking criminal gang in Germany operates, known as `Kiolnskaya group'. Another big criminal organization that operates in Germany, is Dolgoprudnenskaya, which I have already mentioned in chapter 3. There are also small independent, ethnic groups, which are known to operate in Frankfurt, Dusseldorf and Hamburg. The ethnic criminal groups in Germany include ethnic Russians, Chechens, Latvians, Georgians, Armenians and Azeris.

In Dusseldorf, where I went with one of my informants, Russian-speaking immigrants told me that `our bandits already control the night-life and prostitution'. In one of the Russian cafes the owner told me that there are `a few permanent clients, sportsmen, who take care that there will be no troubles' in his business.

The trade in illegal weapons is probably one of the main activities of Russian-speakers in Germany. There are also rumours about smuggling of nuclear materials. Their information, however, is based on sensational press reports in 1993-94 about various types of radioactive materials offered for sale by former Russian soldiers in Germany (Reuters, August 18, 1994; \textit{Literaturnaya Gazeta}, January 20, 1993), which turned out to be a hoax. Trafficking in women and prostitution is another field where Russian-speakers are active in Germany.

During my fieldwork I met Russian pimps who escaped from Germany, because of problems with other Russian criminals and who took refuge in the Netherlands (see chapter 5). The murdered Georgian Marianoshvilli also fled Germany because of a fight he was involved in in Berlin. He went to Antwerp, and then to Amsterdam (see chapter 6). In both Benelux countries the criminals are supposed to have reliable contacts. They usually know each other from their past in the former Soviet Union, or via friends and relatives, who live in Europe.

The mobility of illegal prostitutes from the former Soviet Union is connected to these three countries: Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. When the girls or their pimps `feel danger' of getting caught in one country, they move to the other where again they have their networks.

Russian criminal organizations are also active in smuggling art and antiquarian articles. The route of smuggling of art items passes through Latvia to Germany. Members of an international organization, which included Russian-speaking immigrants, were arrested in 1993. They were smuggling icons and Russian antiques to Germany and Italy, by direct orders of their clients there (Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997:434). According to my informants, the smuggling of art from Russia is very popular in the Netherlands. The smuggled items are usually sold to German galleries and antique shops. The Hardzhiev collection, which included masterpieces of Malevitch, Khlebnikov and other Soviet avantgardists, was smuggled by the Russian-speaking immigrant Hardzhiev and his wife to

\textsuperscript{155} http://www.ogd.org/gb/41EALGTA.html
the Netherlands in 1993. They were assisted by a German art gallery-owner Kristina Gmurzinska and a Russian-speaking immigrant in the Netherlands (see chapter 6).

One of the most important criminal activities and links between Dutch and German Russian-speakers is smuggling (and stealing) cars. There were reports on common Russian-German and Polish-German gangs of Russian-speakers, who attacked drivers on their way from Germany or the Netherlands to Russia, and violently ‘confiscated’ the cars, leaving the drivers behind on the road. During the last five years, similar to Israel, the German police has put together a special unit to combat Russian organized crime, which is called ‘Taiga’ and is situated in Potsdam156.

The Cyprus Connection

Compared to the countries mentioned above, each of which has multifunctional significance for Russian organized crime, combining such roles as a place for vacation, a place for crime bosses to meet each other or enjoy medical treatment, a place to settle their families, or a place to commit crimes, the role of Cyprus is much more straightforward: Cyprus is a country where Russian organized crime launders its money.

When I mentioned Russians who went on a vacation to Cyprus, my Russian-speaking informants usually smiled. To them Cyprus meant financial affairs and money laundering. One informant said: ‘Any self-respecting Russian company has an account in a Cyprus bank or offshore daughter company. This is the best place to escape from taxes and to launder dirty money’. The convenient geographical location, its proximity to Israel, its importance as a place for business contacts, its proximity to Egypt and Greece, its tourist attractions, its pleasant climate, and especially its banking system — all these attract Russian criminal groups to Cyprus.

The dynamic economy of Cyprus has attracted Russian criminal organizations: more than 12 Russian banks and thousands of offshore companies (many are nothing more than a mailing address) have bases in Cyprus. The city of Larnaca has always enjoyed privileged economic relations with the Soviet Union, but after the reforms New Russian businessmen flooded the offshore island with their investments. Large communities of Chechens and Azerbaijan settled in the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, where they invested in houses and hotels (Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997:452). The wife of an informant, a Russian-speaking businessman who lives in a suburb of Amsterdam, travels to Greek Cyprus several times per year. She told me that she would like to settle there permanently because she enjoyed the society of people; she experienced common standards when it came to education and cultural preferences. ‘They are all Russians who attend the same Russian Orthodox Church, travel to near-by Israel for a good classical music concert, send their children to an International school and fly to Paris for shopping. They know how to make money and how to spend it right’. According to her the elite of New Russians is living at Cyprus at the moment.

156 This is a symbolically important fact, according to my informants, because in Potsdam Germany signed the Act of Capitulation in 1945. They associate this with the capitulation of Germany to the Russian Mafia.
The USA is similar to Israel and Germany: the Russian-speaking immigrant population is huge and offers a wide range of possibilities for activities of Russian organized crime, either conventional or more sophisticated or a combination of both. In the United States there is a large Jewish community, but also the Ukrainian, Chechen, Armenian and Georgian Diaspora are the largest in the world.

The Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands keep intensive contacts with their compatriots in the United States. Russian Jews have relatives there, similar to Israel and often visit the United States for business or family events. Because of the distance between the Netherlands and the USA and the restrictions and demands concerning import and export of goods, Russian-speaking businessmen do not consider the USA a country where they prefer to trade. There were rumours about the involvement of some Russian-speakers from the Netherlands in illegal petrol trade and money laundering. Sophisticated criminal activities are generally viewed as the specialized fields of Russian-speakers (Konstantinov and Dikselius 1997: 459). In the last few years there were cases of Dutch and Belgian Orthodox Jews, among whom also Russian Jews, who were involved in smuggling XTC to the United States 157. The names of a few liquidated businessmen in the Netherlands were mentioned in connection with their illegal business activities in the USA (Balulis and Rozenbaum).

Conclusion

When we compare the role of the Netherlands in the international network of Russian Mafia to other countries, it becomes clear that each one has its own role and place in the general picture of the Russian-speaking criminal diaspora. The Netherlands play several different roles: first as a transit point for criminal activities around Europe, second as a meeting place for various criminal organizations from all over the world, third as a place to relax, a place where they can hide from rival members of Russian organized crime. Israel is a place where crime bosses of Russian organized crime from all over the world organize their meetings and enjoy medical treatment. This is a convenient country for criminal business with its liberal banking system and a huge Russian-speaking immigrant population.

Belgium is a country where post-Soviet criminal networks operate in conventional criminal activities and money laundering. Germany is a European centre for activities of Russian-speaking organized crime (the other two centres are Israel – in the Middle East and the USA). With a large immigrant population and proximity to East Europe it became a perfect place for many criminal activities, including women and drug smuggling, cars theft and contract killings. Cyprus is the country where Russian organized crime launders money. The United States, similar to Israel and Germany, offers post-Soviet criminals unlimited possibilities for new markets and clients and chances for widening their influence and control.

The evidence of the different ‘specializations’ of each country in which Russian criminals have operated since the beginning of mass immigration, proves the transnational character of Russian organized crime. It corresponds with what some of my informants argued during the field-work: Russian-speakers regard criminals as cosmopolitans: it makes

no difference whether they were born in Russia, in the Netherlands, or elsewhere in the world, their activities (and state of mind) are the same.
Chapter 7. Russian Organized Crime in the Netherlands?
Conclusions

In the beginning of this study I asked whether Russian organized crime in the Netherlands is media hype or reality. The answer turned out to be much more complicated than the question itself. It looks like there is not just one, but instead several 'realities', such as the reality of officials, or the reality of Russian-speaking informants.

My argument is that there is indeed a discrepancy between the official presentation of Russian organized crime in the Netherlands and its image among the Russian-speaking immigrants. While the Dutch police and media are looking for traditional Mafia activities in the immigrant community, such as drugs and prostitution, Russian-speakers think of the real Mafia as a sophisticated transnational organization dealing in economic and financial crimes. Petty crimes (in their view), especially the ones where no apparent violence or blood is involved, are not viewed as connected to organized crime; some are not even considered to be crimes at all.

The idea of a criminal is usually connected with violence, threats and killings. This idea comes from a long and rich tradition of images and codes of behaviour, which developed in Tsarist, Soviet and post-reform Russia. Russian organized crime is not a recent development stemming from the period of reforms, as some scientists claim, but a deep-rooted social and historical phenomenon. The social banditry as protest against the Tsarist regime in Russia and later the development of the corrupt system of Soviet economy and politics, created specific norms and rules in which unique perceptions on crime and organized crime evolved. This set of perceptions made a distinction between violent crimes against the individual and mass crimes against society. The Soviet people had to 'beat the system' in order to survive. Since there was a discrepancy between the official ideology and the difficult conditions of daily life, stealing from one's work, corruption and abuse of power were not considered crimes.

In the times of Gorbachev there was even more confusion about the ideas surrounding business and crime. The old nomenklatura bureaucrats and former KGB officials became bank directors or businessmen. However, also vory v zakone and other criminals entered the business world. The criminal groups took advantage of the confusion and uncertainty of people. The line between business and crime was thin.

Russian-speaking immigrants brought some of these perceptions to the West. These include for example the idea that government officials must be corrupted in the Netherlands as well as everywhere else. Or that illegal migrants are 'heroes' who have the courage to challenge the official policy. Based on their own perception they developed, for example, the theory that the 'invention of the Russian Mafia' was a strategy by the Dutch authorities to hide their own 'Dutch Mafia' during the Van Traa Commission. They were also convinced that the Dutch police is not able to deal with the Russian Mafia, because it is not strong and authoritative enough, unlike the police in the former Soviet Union.

The majority of the Russian-speaking immigrants in the Netherlands, however, are trying to integrate and build their new identity by adopting Dutch codes of behaviour and Dutch culture. At the same time they keep their own cultural baggage, such as language, literature, Russian values, etc. In this context, the illegal migrants occupy a special place because according to some sources their numbers are two-to-three times higher than legal immigrants. My conclusion is that for many illegal Russian-speakers, the Netherlands present a 'transit point' to other countries. It is a temporary stop, where money needed for the next step can be easily earned, since the black job market is well developed. Russian organized
crime does not mix with illegal migrants; they prefer contacts in legitimate businesses where their former compatriots are active.

Though the numbers of immigrants are not large compared to Russian-speaking communities in other immigration countries, the media images of Russian-speakers in the Netherlands are not different from those in the United States, Israel, Germany, etc. Russian speakers are pictured as Mafiosi, prostitutes and criminals. These images have a direct influence on the immigrants, especially on their chances on the labour market. In their attempt to ‘find the Russian Mafia’ the Dutch authorities and media have been criminalizing the immigrant community. This process of criminalization is undoubtedly a great obstacle to their integration in Dutch society. Lacking leadership, pressure groups or strong Russian institutions, the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands do not fight against stigmatisation. Using the prevailing stereotypes and ‘basking in the fame’ of the violent and sophisticated Russian Mafia they found ways to manipulate these images for their own purposes.

The Russian speakers do not consider themselves members of one single ‘Russian speaking community’. One aspect of their negative attitude towards this generalization is the association with Russian Mafia, which is included in the image of the community. My conclusion is that the Russian-speaking world in the Netherlands consists of a series of small social units. There is also a very strict distinction the Russian-speakers make between the immigrants and the Russian underworld in the Netherlands. The separation between the two is, however, not absolute.

I have demonstrated that the Russian-speakers often do not distinguish between ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ in business. They are often interconnected. Business in Russia (or with Russia) is considered to be connected with the Mafia, protection is viewed often as a necessity. Some types of business are perceived as ‘exclusively criminal’: car-business, trade in oil and metals and diamond business. Russian-speaking partners in the Netherlands are sometimes used by criminals for laundering money and escaping tax-inspection in Russia.

The Russian criminals see the Netherlands as a ‘Mafia-free land’, where they can safely settle their families while they themselves continue to operate internationally, with their headquarters in Russia. They buy expensive houses for their families, finance the education of their children, they provide them with all they need and see to it that they are financially and materially secure. They come to the Netherlands to relax, to invest money, to meet with other partners, and in some cases to escape problems in Russia, such as rivalry with other criminal groups. Some of them consider the Netherlands as too small and not worthwhile for Mafia activities.

The general view among the Russian-speakers is that the Netherlands is a safe and peaceful place, because the Russian Mafia does not affect the daily life of the Russian-speaking immigrants, as they did in the former Soviet Union. Russian-speakers are much more frightened of other ‘ethnic criminals’, especially Turks, Antillians and Arabs.

The idea of relative quiet in the Netherlands does not mean that Russian criminal groups are not operating in the country. From the analysis of the findings I have concluded that there were specific cases in which these activities have been manifested: contract killings, cases of extortion, money laundering, fraud, etc. I have also mentioned specific criminal groups whose members took part in these activities. The idea of Russian Mafia presence in the Netherlands still exists. It is based not only on official information and rumours, but is connected with a real fear, expressed by Russian-speakers who avoid intensive contacts with other Russians or avoid going to specific ‘Russian places’. This idea is also taken from Dutch media reports and adapted in the views of the Russian-speaking immigrants.

My conclusion, based on information from my informants, is that there is no evidence of a single Russian criminal organization, either emerging from the Russian-speaking
community or immigrated to the Netherlands, which could be identified by informants as connected to Russian Mafia. Russian organized crime in the Netherlands may be characterized by small groups (2-10), representatives of different criminal organizations in the former Soviet Union, who show up in the country to visit family members or to settle quarrels (razborki).

Russian-speakers also clearly divide between ‘normal Mafia’ and ‘tough Mafia’, where the former is associated with traditional criminal activities such as extortion, prostitution and drug dealing. The ‘tough Mafia’ is trying to penetrate legal economic and political structures. This kind of Mafia presents a real danger to Dutch society and the personal security of Dutch citizens. This kind of Russian Mafia is also considered by Russian-speakers as highly sophisticated and connected to the most complicated technological and financial operations.

The Russian-speakers agree in their perception of crime as a violent act, but they were divided in their opinion about whether verbal assault or non-physical threat is crime. On the other hand illegal financial and computer operations are considered as ‘problems’, but not real crimes.

Russian-speaking businessmen who have chosen to settle in the Netherlands, sometimes have contacts with Russian criminal organizations. In general the group of Russian-speaking businessmen can be divided in three sub-categories: honest businessmen, semi-honest businessmen and criminals. The first group includes the majority of Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands. The second group sometimes applies illegal ways of doing business. However, there is a third group, the smallest of the three, which consists of some businessmen who are voluntarily looking for contacts with criminal groups in the former Soviet Union to do business with, usually money laundering through buying real estates and horeca. Russian restaurants have a reputation of being Mafia meeting places. During my research, however, no informant could show me Russian criminals who attended these places regularly. According to many informants, Russian business is ‘invisible’ in the Netherlands. It is usually conducted by Russian criminal groups from abroad.

There is a duality of perception in Dutch society: Russian-speaking businessmen are usually considered criminals, while they themselves view their activities as pure business. The image of the Russian businessman in the Netherlands was created in the process of a change from ‘not to be trusted and penniless’ to ‘Russian millionaires’, a development which had an impact on the attitudes of bank officials and governmental and commercial partners.

This is the reality of the Russian-speakers. What then is the reality of the officials, what are the facts of the police? First of all, in the Netherlands Russian criminals have a reputation of being extremely violent, though Russian-speakers consider other ethnic criminals much more violent than Russians. The involvement of Russian-speaking immigrants in criminal activities or their participation in criminal organizations are situational. From the interviews with officials on specific criminal activities of the Russian-speakers in the Netherlands the conclusion is that Russians in the Netherlands are involved in such criminal activities as smuggling humans, car theft and smuggling to Eastern Europe, women trade and prostitution, smuggling drugs, illegal financial operations.

The Russian-speakers do not regard these operations as large-scale activities of Russian organized crime. The sophisticated financial operations, however, are the real activities of Russian criminals in the Netherlands, according to them. For Dutch banks it is difficult to trace the sources of money that is transferred from legal Russian banks. The background of Russian bank owners is also usually unknown. There is no cooperation between Russian and Dutch bank security services, mainly because the Dutch do not trust Russian financial institutions and security services. This lack of contact and information
exchange is convenient for Russian criminal organizations and presents an obstacle to the prevention of criminal money investments in Dutch banks. In the Netherlands Russian-speaking clients always remain within the framework of the law and legal regulations when making investments. In the province of Brabant, which is considered by Russian-speakers an even more safe and 'Mafia-free' area than big Dutch cities, many Russian businessmen invested massively in real estate. However, the police could trace neither the source of the money, nor their connections to Russian organized crime. Police officials in Roosendaal told me that there were close links between Russian businessmen who settled in the region and Dutch criminals. However, the low preference of investigating Russian Mafia and a deficit in manpower and money did not allow for a continuation of the research in this specific case. The same happened in the area of Eindhoven, where police research on Russian investments in real estate was quickly terminated. According to some police officials, however, the Russian threat in the Netherlands is underestimated. In addition, all police officials that I interviewed in this research, emphasized that they do not have a 'real wide picture' of Russian Mafia in the Netherlands. Some of them, however, were convinced that Russian Mafia is an invention of Dutch media. They based their judgement on the situation in their specific regions and on the absence of information exchange with other regions.

Bank officials also talked more about their intuition considering the 'invisible' Russian Mafia and they did not present significant data indicating Russian criminal activities in Dutch banks. According to my informants, the fact that the Dutch authorities are not able to trace the 'sophisticated Russian Mafia' proves the high level of professionalism of the Russian-speaking criminals, and not the fact that 'nothing serious is happening' in the Netherlands.

The contract killings are considered by Russian-speakers as the specialization of Russian Mafia. Liquidations are perceived as a general definition of violent murder. In all liquidation cases that I presented in chapter 6 common features can be outlined: the killer was never found, which indicates the professionalism of Russian Mafia, all murdered men were in one way or another connected to Russian organized crime. Some were members of Russian criminal organizations; others kept direct contacts with criminals, or were involved indirectly in illegal activities.

In all cases the official version (of police and media) differs from the version of Russian-speaking informants, especially when the background, or 'Russian way of thinking' is emphasized. In all cases the Dutch and Russian police contacts were limited, there was distrust and a lack of cooperation, which were real obstacles to solve the cases and catch the criminals.

My conclusion is that Russian-speaking contract killers are hired abroad (in East Europe and the former Soviet Union) to commit murders in the Netherlands, including on Dutch citizens. However, there is no special Russian criminal organization that offers its services (such as protection, or contract murders) the way it happens in other countries (Russia, Israel, United States).

The research found that there is cooperation between Russian-speakers, Dutch, Yugoslavs and representatives of other ethnic criminal groups in the Netherlands. I examined the connections between the Russian-speaking criminals in the Netherlands and in other countries (Israel, Belgium, Germany and Cyprus).

I found that there are many Russian-speaking Israelis in the Netherlands, who cheated the Dutch authorities and obtained Dutch passports. The links between criminals in the Netherlands and in Israel are very strong. For Russian organized crime Israel is a country to launder money and enjoy medical treatment, while the Netherlands serve as a transit point in
Europe and a meeting place for members of Russian criminal organizations from around the world.

Similar to the Netherlands, the Russian crime bosses take refuge in Belgium when they are in trouble somewhere else. Many Georgian immigrants in the Netherlands have contacts in Antwerp. The proximity and open borders allow Russian speakers to easily conduct their business in Belgium as well. In some liquidation cases there were close links between Russian-speaking criminals in Belgium and the Netherlands. Illegal prostitutes are often moved between the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, when one place is no longer considered safe.

The Netherlands recently became a shelter for Russian criminals who get into problems with rivals in Germany. Russian criminal organizations in the Netherlands cooperate in car stealing and car-smuggling with their former compatriots in Germany. Art smuggling is also a mutual activity. Cyprus is the favourite place for the Russian-speaking businessmen in the Netherlands to establish offshore companies, money laundering and vacation.

The conclusion is that the Netherlands play an important role in the activities of Russian organized crime in West Europe. The main paradox is that because the Netherlands is perceived as a ‘Mafia-free’ country, Russian criminals prefer to come here either for their families or for refuge from other criminals. In many cases the perception of the Netherlands as a safe country, where all its citizens are defended from crime and violence can be wrong.

The last conclusion follows from the way this research was conducted, namely based on empirical methods inside the Russian-speaking community. The main method I used in this research was participant observation. Though ethnographic research is often considered ‘dangerous’, difficult or even unnecessary, this was absolutely not right in this case. Russian-speakers talked about Russian Mafia, analysed its structure and activities and provided detailed information on specific individuals in the Netherlands they considered to be connected to criminal organizations. One of the most important conclusions in this context is that ethnographic research on the connection between criminal groups and immigrant communities is necessary for an in-depth analysis and understanding. This kind of empirical research from inside the ‘dangerous’ communities can provide us with the unique insight and knowledge of the people involved. It can also analyse the inner social dynamics of establishing links with criminal groups. But most importantly, the research ‘from inside’ the community can show the discrepancy between official attitudes, including prevailing stereotypes, and the emic, unofficial images of crime and Mafia.
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