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Abstract

This contribution shall focus on corrupt Port of Rotterdam employees who fulfilled a role in the illegal drug trade by being involved in so-called *rip-off* cases. By ‘rip-off’ is meant the use of legitimate cargo and containers to hide bags of drugs, whereas the traditional rip-off consists of a buyer being deceived by a drug seller (e.g. purity of drugs is halved). To understand the reasons for their corruption, an in-depth qualitative thematic analysis of official police files took place in 2014. Although law enforcement agencies explain that port employees are solely financially motivated to assist in rip-offs, this study shows that their financial motivations are intertwined with social justifications construed by port employees during their interrogations. Their self-justifications are focused on illegitimately pursuing the legitimate goal of taking care of family, amplified by criminal seductions coming from colleagues. Implications for an evidence-based port policing aimed to police corrupt port employees, and with it, the illegal drug trade, shall be considered as well.

Keywords: drug trafficking, corruption, evidence-based port policing, port security

Word count: 8940

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Introduction

Between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2014, more than 30 tonnes of various types of hard drugs were seized at the Port of Rotterdam by agencies collaborating in the Hit and Run Cargo (HARC) team. The policing agencies working in this collaborative venture are the Rotterdam-Rijnmond Seaport Police (ZHP), the Dutch Customs, the Fiscal Information and Investigation Service (FIOD) and the Rotterdam Public Prosecutor (Openbaar Ministerie Rotterdam, hereafter OMR). These seizures consisted largely of cocaine: 3,600 kilograms in 2012; 9,800 kilograms in 2013; and 7,575 kilograms in 2014 (OMR, 2015). As becomes clear when compared to the other years, throughout 2013 most of seizures were made. Moreover, that year over 70 people were arrested (OMR, 2014). Amongst these people, several port employees were arrested for assisting during a specific and, for smuggling, new modus operandi; the ‘rip-off’ (see below). Ever since, law enforcement agencies, the Rotterdam municipality, port authorities and port companies have problematized the involvement of corrupt port employees, because it sustains illegal drug trafficking “from within”, leading to serious personal harms and society-wide damages. Since 2012, therefore, these public-private partners have taken their social responsibility to police this issue together in the *Port Integrity Programme*¹ (OMR, 2016, 2012). The programme creates awareness amongst port companies and employees about the security threats involved in drug trafficking and it has introduced new port security procedures, while stimulating exchange of intelligence between law enforcement and private parties. Next to putting ‘hard measures’ in place, the programme additionally commenced a study to understand the reasons *why* port employees can engage in the illegal drug trade. Therefore, the study was set up to answer the following research question: Why does the port employee perform corrupt acts in the Port of Rotterdam? This paper will provide an answer by firstly elaborating on the context of the Port of Rotterdam and the ‘rip-off’. Secondly, methodology and data (gathering) shall be considered, followed by the main results of the study. Afterwards, the implications of this study results for policing policies shall be considered and recommendations will be made.

Context

The Port of Rotterdam

Although the 2008 financial crisis had a negative impact on the overall international seaborne trade, the containerised cargo, accounting for half the value of the global

¹ Translated from Dutch: het Integere Haven Programma.

seaborne trade, grew from 2010 until 2012 (UNCTAD, 2014). The most recent observations available show that the '[container] volumes on the Asia–Europe and trans-Pacific container trade lanes (peak leg) reversed trends and recorded robust growth during the year [of 2014]' (UNCTAD, 2015, p. 3). As one of the world's 20 leading ports (UNCTAD, 2013, p. 88) and the most important European port (ibid., p. 98), the Port of Rotterdam has a crucial role in the international transport of containers. The largest proportion of ships over 500 tons, plying the world's sea routes, make their first and/or last port of call in the Port of Rotterdam (Eski and Carpenter, 2013). In the last couple of years, well-over 7 million containers entered and left the Port of Rotterdam, accounting for the lion's share of container throughput in Europe (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2015). Next to its logistical importance in the international supply chain, it is an important hub for cargo and metal theft, as well as the illegal transport of contraband cigarettes, human trafficking, wildlife and the illegal arms trade (Eski, 2011). Criminal organisations operating in seaports throughout the world, have been active in the Port of Rotterdam as well, and they have exploited ports for their logistical position, especially in relation to the illegal drug trade (Bovenkerk *et al.*, 2003; De Jong and Voskuil, 2010; Farrell, 1998; Fijnaut *et al.*, 1998; Gratteri and Nicaso, 2008; Gruter and Van De Mheen, 2005; Kleemans and Boer 2013). Zaitch's ethnographic study focused on the cocaine trade between the Netherlands and Colombia (2002) and he explored how Columbian traffickers in the late 1990ies made sense of their line of illegal trade, also in the Port of Rotterdam. An interesting finding was how the size—approximately 6000ha (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2014)—and the enormous volume of cargo that comes through the Port of Rotterdam consisting in 2015, for example, of Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2016), lowers 'the risk of interception [by authorities], since the illegal merchandise was easier to conceal' (Zaitch, 2002, p. 243). Given this strategic advance for smugglers, the Port of Rotterdam can attract criminal networks to use its spaces for drug trafficking, such as the 'rip-off'. But what is the 'rip-off'?

The 'rip-off' in port security

The 'rip-off' in port policing and security should not be confused with a popular explanation of a 'rip-off' in the drug dealing domain. The 'rip-off' tactic as defined by the World Customs Organization (2008) differs from the 'rip-off' encountered in the drugs trade. In the latter case, a dealer would rip off his customer by selling fake or the wrong type of drugs for the same amount of money one would pay for the expected drugs (Jacquesa *et al.*, 2014). Drug trafficking modus operandi and criminological studies of them are numerous (cf. Paoli and Reuter, 2008; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Reuter and Haaga, 1989; Zaitch, 2002). However, the 'rip-off' is a new modus operandi of transporting drugs, and thus hardly researched (Den Dekker, 2012; Smits, 2014; Van der Laan, 2012).

In the domains of port security and law enforcement at the waterfront, the term ‘rip-off’ should be understood as a global phenomenon with respect to it being a *modus operandi* for the smuggling and illegal transportation of contraband, especially illegal narcotics, worldwide. A ‘rip-off’ then is defined as ‘contraband placed inside the container near the doors and without the knowledge of the shipper/consignee’ (World Customs Organization, 2008, p. 29). The method thus entails the use of legitimate shipments as camouflage to traffic drugs from the country of origin to the country of destination (UNODC, 2016). Both shipper and consignee do not know that their shipment is used for drug trafficking though. The trafficked drugs—mostly cocaine—is packed in carryalls and placed in a container with the legal goods. Once the container arrives at the port of disembarkment, the carryall is taken out by “couriers” (Den Dekker, 2012). A crucial element of the ‘rip-off’ is the little amount of time and effort invested in getting the carryall(s) out of the container. The ‘rip-off’ has a high(er) success rate by having complicit parties in the country of origin, the transshipment port *and* the country of destination (National Crime Agency, 2014). These complicit parties can include port employees who are approached by criminal networks to work for them and become corrupt. Initially, they are asked to assist for which they receive money; the second time, pictures of family, relatives or friends are shown. For example, a father would be shown a photograph of his child at the school yard; this way a port employee is blackmailed by third parties.

Port employees are crucial for criminal networks, because they can operate incognito and move around unchecked rather easily at the port facilities. Their stealth is increased in case they work at a port facility for a shorter time. Moreover, when they routinely change in shift crew set up, it is harder to determine who might be involved in a ‘rip-off’ (Den Dekker, 2012). What makes port employees especially vital for the ‘rip-off’, is their easy access to confidential information about container stack positions and ship origins, arrivals and departures (Smits, 2014). In ‘rip-off’ cases, generally, port employees use a day off, the weekends or breaks during work to move around at the port facility to (help) fulfil the ‘rip-off’ (Van der Laan, 2012).

Given their freedom of movement and access, three types of criminal behaviour have been identified. A port employee can 1) be actively involved by breaking open the container and take out the carryalls; 2) place the container at a more convenient spot for others to retrieve the bags from the containers; or 3) lend out one’s ID card or pass on relevant secret information to others who complete the ‘rip-off’ (Smits, 2014; Van der Laan, 2012). Due to the immense size of container terminals, finding a specific container is like looking for a needle in a haystack; criminal networks simply cannot operate without insider knowledge, meaning, a ‘rip-off’ cannot happen without the involvement of a corrupt port employee.

How many ‘rip-off’s have been completed in the Port of Rotterdam is hard to determine, but estimations strongly indicate a relatively small number of cases. For

example, it is known the Rotterdam HARC team got confronted in 2013 with 47 ‘rip-off’ cases, yet a dark number remains (Smits, 2014). Therefore, (the conceptualisation of) the ‘rip-off’ phenomenon comes forward from specific cases, meaning, it is difficult to provide a precise and significant calculation of the number of occurrences and thus further (investigative) research is required. Still, what is known is that the amount of involved Rotterdam port employees, as a threat from within, has grown since 2010. However, instead of focusing on the quantitative dimensions of the ‘rip-off’, and given that corrupt port employees are critical to the ‘rip-off’ tactic, this study focusses on what motivates them—or what they say motivates them—to understand the nature of the involvement in the ‘rip-offs’.

Corruption, the port and port employees

The port employees who feature in this study work at port facilities in Rotterdam, as well as at law enforcement agencies operational in the Port of Rotterdam. During the analysis, it became clear officials of law enforcement agencies too have been involved in ‘rip-off’ cases, however, due to issues around breaching confidentiality and the limited information available about these cases, those files have been left out of the analysis. Nevertheless, given recent cases of corruption at departments of the customs agency operating in the Rotterdam port (NOS, 2015), it is strongly recommended that future research should consider these specific employees operating in the port. Hence, it is important for security and law enforcement agencies in ports around the world have a greater awareness of authorities being involved in the rip-off.

There are many types of port employees, ranging from crane operator to stevedore, and from team manager to straddle carrier drivers. They all have access to the port facilities. They have specific (and for criminal organisations valuable) knowledge of the territories and the logistical processes taking place there, which they have used to assist in the ‘rip-off’. Their corrupt behaviour, being that of an exchange of favours and eventually an illicit gain and an acquisition of income position (cf. Hough, 2013). In line with criminological attention for occupational crime and corruption in the Netherlands (Cools, 1994; Van de Bunt *et al.*, 2011; Van Erp *et al.*, 2011) and due to investigative research on ‘rip-off’s in Rotterdam (Dekker, 2012; Smits, 2014; Van der Laan, 2012), criminological interest in corruption (by port employees) in Rotterdam has been sparked and initiatives have been undertaken to explore this type of criminal activity (OMR, 2016).

Hoekema’s unique socio-legal study (1973) focused on port employees involved in cargo theft in Rotterdam, late 1960s. His findings revealed that port employees had different thoughts about what property (rights) are; they denied others’ ownership of the goods and anticipated some goods would get destroyed or written off as ‘damaged’. They considered it justified to take ‘unsaleable items’ away. Their shift work patterns led to legitimisation of such practices, to the extent that it would be considered strange and

deviant if a port employee would not steal cargo. In fact, *not* stealing would go against their social rules. Also, in case theft would be detected, port companies tended to avoid reporting it to the port police out of fear of getting a bad reputation within the industry, sustaining further (cultivation of) theft by port employees.

Zaitch (2002) too looked at corruption of port workers and officials in Rotterdam, and their involvement in Columbian drug trafficking. According to his informants, 'harbour employees were [...] easily involved' (Zaitch, 2002, p. 253). Still, compared to the Netherlands, 'other countries such as Russia, Spain or Italy have better conditions for the development of collusion between the State, local powers and illegal enterprises' (ibid., p. 254).

The Netherlands has witnessed an increase in the number of corruption and fraud investigations from 2003 (N = 135) until 2010 (N = 301)² (Slingerland *et al.*, 2012), and the stand-alone cases in the Port of Rotterdam imply that corruption amongst port employees exists. However, more recent critical research and international scrutiny by NGOs still indicate that corruption in the Netherlands is not as prevalent as it is in other countries (and their ports) (Chatwin, 2016, p. 7; Transparency International, 2016, p. 6).

Methodology

Rotterdam has a prominent position in the international supply chain and there is a risk that it can be exploited as a drug trafficking hub (Bovenkerk *et al.*, 2003; De Jong and Voskuil, 2010; Eski, 2011; Fijnaut *et al.*, 1998; Gratteri and Nicaso, 2008; Gruter and Van De Mheen, 2005; Kleemans and Boer, 2013; Paoli and Reuter, 2008; Zaitch, 2002). Although there have been a relatively small number of cases, the Port of Rotterdam therefore presents an important case study for researching the nature and impact of corruption of port employees through their involvement in the 'rip-off' technique and for examining how evidence-based policing solution could be put in place. This study focused specifically on port facilities that cover most of the container handling in Europe (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2015). More importantly, at these facilities, almost all registered 'rip-off' cases took place. The registered 'rip-off' cases were qualitatively analysed, using files of detailed closed criminal investigations by the port police and customs agencies. These files formed a rich source of data, consisting of various demographics (age, gender, addresses and length of employment³) of the convicted port employees, witnesses and victims. Transcripts of police interview and telephone taps, as well as pictures of key sites were included. Also, bank account details, information about products bought with the illegally obtained money, details of ships, locations and containers were recorded. The analysis was undertaken by reviewing transcripts of police

² These are the most recent official statistics available on Dutch corruption and fraud cases.

³ Due to anonymisation, no information here is shared about the age range, locations, companies, dates, times, and an exact number of specific type of employment.

interviews in which port employees made their statements. In particular attention was paid to the thematic variety *of* and similarities *between* statements of port employees on their reasons to assist during ‘rip-offs’. Data was additionally retrieved from the investigation and trial files, again from port employees’ statements. Several major themes and subcategories arose, as shall be explored in the following section. Moreover, all the other aforementioned sources (telephone taps, pictures, witness declarations) were used to provide a broader knowledge of each case.

Although policing authorities in the port have been occupied with ‘rip-off’ cases for several years now, it has to be mentioned here that this study has been the first criminological attempt to retrieve *a structured overview of* and *understanding of* ‘rip-offs’ in the Port of Rotterdam. Therefore the study has faced several complexities and limitations. First, police files and cases, generally, are limited depictions of events that happened, exactly because they are constructed by a specific group of people (Clarke *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, this research should not be misinterpreted as fully representative of the ‘rip-off’ complexity and corruption in ports, even more so because of the effect of police priorities can have on starting investigations (Kleemans, 2013). Second, for some cases access was not granted due to ongoing investigations or the researchers’ level of security clearance was insufficient. It was therefore difficult to immediately retrieve an overview of the registered ‘rip-off’ method cases. In fact, a list of suspect and convicted port employees simply did not exist, because the term ‘port employee’ was absent in most files. It led to a demanding inventory of cases. Third, another difficulty was how police and customs interrogators did not always have a strong (investigative) interest in port employees’ reasons for getting involved. In those instances, statements from other suspects and witnesses were collected to still gain insight in motivations. Also, transcriptions phone taps turned out to be a helpful alternative to find and understand motivations. Complementary to this, was an analysis of ‘rip-off’ cases described in annual reports of the Rotterdam HARC team. Moreover, experts at relevant law enforcement agencies and amongst private stakeholders were anonymously interviewed and specifically asked about their knowledge of relevant ‘rip-off’ cases, leading to more cases in which port employees were involved. A selection of ‘rip-off’ method cases was made based on the following core criteria:

- There had to be at least one port employee actively and/or passively, but always knowingly involved;
- A port employee worked either in paid employment or as a temporary worker;
- The ‘rip-off’ was the means of drug trafficking;
- The drugs had to be transported in(to) and/or out of the Port of Rotterdam.

Eventually, based on those selection criteria, 22 cases were selected, in which 51 involved port employees played a role. In the end, 14 cases with 40 involved port employees were

qualitatively analysed, of which 24 port employees and 9 relevant others are mentioned and quoted directly in the key findings section (see Table 1. for a detailed overview). The quoted material comes from the police reports that were made available to the authors. These reports contained predominantly transcripts of police interviews, investigation reports, and trial files, as well as telephone taps, pictures, bank account details, information about products bought with the illegally obtained money, details of ships, locations and containers were recorded. From the key findings, we will retrieve lessons for a possible evidence-based port policing approach (Sherman, 2013). Evidence for such an approach result from that analysis and is presented in the following section.

Table 1. Sources analysed		
Source	Justification for rip-off involvement	Source of information
Port employees⁴		
Adelin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Drug addiction (cocaine) 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Aldrick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting family • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Arnaud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approached by family members involved in rip-off • Drug addiction (cocaine) 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Aubin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting family • Financial gain/greed 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Augustin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Gambling addiction 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Baptiste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Gambling and drug (cocaine) addiction 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Beauvais	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial gain/greed • Drug (cocaine) addiction 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Bellamy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off • Financial gain/greed 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Briand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off • Jealous of colleagues' gained riches out of rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Campbell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors

⁴ The names used throughout the article are fictional names.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drug (cocaine) addiction 	
Casijn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Supporting family • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Cheval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting family • Alcohol and drug (cocaine) addiction 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Dureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Supporting family 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Emilien	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Evian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting family 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Florian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
François	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Gaillard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Supporting family 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Gaspard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Guifford	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Supporting family 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Kylian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Leroi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol addiction • Financial gain/greed • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Milo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Convinced by colleagues involved in rip-off 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Reynaud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and drug (cocaine) addiction • Shop addiction • Financial hardship 	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to port employees 	
Amélie	Briand's partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors

Gabrielle	Gaspard's partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Genevieve	Adelin's partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Jean-Marc	Arnaud's brother-in-law	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Justyne	Beauvais' partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Maroly	Arnaud's partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Merlion	Member external criminal network	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Odyle	Casijn's partner	Police report (2013) made available to the authors
Rique	Former Arnaud's brother-in-law	Police report (2013) made available to the authors

Key findings

Addictions

One of the main reasons why port employees become involved in 'rip-offs' revealed in this study is the need to feed a drug and/or other addictive habit. As one defendant, for whom we shall use the pseudonym, of 'Baptiste', explained:

I've been a drug addict since I was 16 years old. XTC and coke, amongst others, at parties. After that I smoked joints for a while, but the last six months I haven't used anything. I think I took coke for a year. At the moment, I sometimes use it at a party. During [a festivity] for example, I got a half a gram pack of cocaine. I snort the cocaine. I did look for getting help [at a clinic] in quitting (Baptiste).

It should be noted here that, although most of the convicted port employees (presented themselves to) have genuine reasons, as the following section on family will show, some of them who got involved in the 'rip-off' have done so to feed their drug habit. So, the first, and smaller category of justifications used by port employees was focused on (former) addictions, as port employee Baptiste declared during his interrogation (*see above quote*). He, like the other port employees, assisted during 'rip-offs', because his drug addiction got him in financial hardship. This type of combined criminal behaviour is not that different from drug use and, for example, getting involved in drugs dealing and (gang-related) violence (Fagan, 1989). In some cases, port employees started to use

cocaine again (or more of it) because of experienced stress resulting from the fear of getting arrested:

A week before [the ‘rip-off’], we knew the container [with drugs] would arrive, however, on the day itself, as soon as the ship is moored, the guys can see whether the codes are on [the container] or not. If there are codes attached to it, the guys won’t touch it. So, on the day [of the ‘rip-off’] itself, I know if it’ll take place. I was at Gaillard’s [another port employee] place in December [...] I think it was in the afternoon. The night before, I remember, I used some coke, ’cause I was so nervous (Casijn).

The study indicates that, next to drug addiction, a gambling problem may be the next most prevalent cause of financial hardship, at least on the basis of the suspects interviewed, eventually leading to port employees participating in ‘rip-off’s as well:

I had gambling debts at illegal casinos. [...] I’m not sure how much debt I had, but it was a lot. I think it was, at least, €XX.XXX⁵. I paid off this debt with the profits from my cocaine dealing (Guifford).

Or as Augustin explained:

I was gambling in a casino [...] I lost €XXX in a game of Blackjack. [A recruiter from a criminal network] was playing and saw I lost that €XXX. I was fed up about losing my money. It’s rather normal to find out if any familiars could borrow money from. Or you look around to see who’s doing well and you’d ask that person. I saw [the recruiter] was having a good night, [given] the way he was betting, he must have had at least €XX.XXX on him. A gambler sees that. I had a chat with him and at a certain point I asked him if he could barrow me some money. I got €XXX, under the condition I’d pay him back the next week. I also lost that €XXX and went back home (Augustin).

Later, Augustin would get involved in a ‘rip-off’ via that recruiter. His debts would get cleared if he would assist in the crime. Therefore, port employees justify their corrupt behaviour by telling about their drug and/or gambling addiction. This is a combination of deviant behaviours associated with problematic and criminal behaviour, as previously

⁵ For reasons of anonymisation, there are no precise amounts reported as they make criminal cases and those involved identifiable.

observed in literature (Bensimon *et al.*, 2013; Le and Gilding, 2014). Another justification to assist in ‘rip-offs’ is not necessarily to get rid of addiction-based debts, but to have enough money for their family. This turned out to be one of the main justifications.

Family

My wife is more religious than I am. It’s because of her I started praying more. [...] I’m a family man. I’m happy with my wife and kids (Evian).

Evian, a port employee for over eight years, argued he enjoyed his job, is religious and is blessed he has a loving family life. The portrayal of the benevolent *pater familias* was given by many more port employees, communicating they would do anything for their family. This role makes them feel pressured to solve a financially problematic situation at home, with parents or siblings, it was argued, leading to participation in ‘rip-offs’. For example, port employee Gaspard and his wife Gabrielle took a second mortgage that was becoming impossible to pay off. To solve it, Gaspard assisted during a ‘rip-off’ once; he never let Gabrielle know though, he emphasized. Port employee Florian was in debt to his family, friends and neighbour, and his partner had debts at several boutiques; he felt it was time to do something about it, by which he justified his ‘rip-off’ complicity after-the-fact. Casijn justified in a similar fashion:

I wanted to live a normal life with Odyle [Casijn’s partner]. Odyle partakes in a debt relief scheme. She gets €XX a week to live off. That’ll last for one and a half years. We also want to have a baby. It was the reason to do something stupid. [...] She had a debt of about €XX.XXX. I just wanted to get rid of those debts and make a new start, with a little one (Casijn).

According to Casijn, Odyle helped him to get rid of his cocaine addiction and gave him a stable life, and purpose. He felt he had to give something in return, even if that would mean doing something illegal. Dureau too thought one ‘rip-off’ would give him the means to support family, in this case by paying off alimony through which he wanted to offer his son a (better) future. Some port employees explained they felt the need to discuss it with their partners:

I discussed it with my girlfriend and decided to do it that way, to get away from troubles. I had no more faith at that point. I was scared my relationship would get destroyed because of debt and saw no more solution for the misery (Baptiste).

It happened that family got drawn into the port employee’s complicity (unintended), by enjoying the financial riches that were earned by assistance during the ‘rip-off’:

During my holidays [...] I took an amount of about €XX.XXX in cash from [country A]. Of this amount, my fiancée already took a few thousand euros from [country A] to [B] (Guifford).

Still, most port employees kept it secret to their family that they were (actively) involved in ‘rip-offs’, like Adelin:

I didn’t tell my girlfriend [Genevieve] I was being watched [by the police]. I was burying my head in the ground. Genevieve did know I’d get money from [his colleague] Campbell. I told Genevieve [the trafficking] was about cigarettes and not cocaine. I also told her she didn’t have to worry about anything (Adelin).

Adelin did not have to do it for the money, because together with his partner, he had a decent income. To still justify his involvement, he felt the need to lie to his partner. In similar fashion, port employee Briand told his partner Amélie it was about smuggling gold. Aubin stated that his daughter never knew how he earned his money, only that Aubin had a little business in trading jewellery, watches and art. Whether family was made aware or not, the fact port employees claimed their loved ones were not told (entirely) about their involvement, is a sign they want to keep family safe from prosecution by authorities and retaliation by the criminal network. However, in a few cases, partners were fully aware, like Malory, Arnaud’s partner:

During opening and tasting the cocaine, I, [colleague] Beauvais and [Beauvais’ partner] Justyne were there. Malory was in the kitchen at that moment and did not really want to get involved. Obviously, she learned about it and saw what happened. She was pretty pissed off at me about what happened that night (Arnaud).

Malory did not participate in the eventual ‘rip-off’, and tried to deny Arnaud’s involvement, Arnaud explained. Gabrielle, Gaspard’s partner, too tried to deny Gaspard’s involvement but eventually accepted his role:

Well, it was his job and I think Gaspard did it in the wrong way, because what you can do rightfully [handling containers], can be done wrongfully too. They made of Gaspard a stooge, to find out where the container [with drugs] was located and whether he could take it away. [...] I became complicit in it and denied it (Gabrielle).

In one case, and therefore exceptional, a partner experienced severe trauma:

[We had] two people visiting us. One of them was 2 metres high, had a gun. They were shouting ‘We’ll do this! And we want that!’ When they left, my wife took a hit to her ribs and [got] three broken toes, because [one of the two] stamped on her feet with his heel. Later on, she was beaten up by Merlion [Emilien’s colleague] (Emilien).

So, as much as the port employee tried to safeguard family by doing something criminal for once, a harmful situation can develop for that very same family.

Next to being a good partner and father, port employees declared to be a good brother or son, arguing they got involved to help out their relatives. Cheval regrets he does not see his parents as often as he did before, because he worked a lot:

My expenses are below €XXXX. I could easily live off of [my income], but I support my parents, because they got a mere €XXX worth of pension [...] I just wanted to do good. To get my parents on a holiday, spoil my brother. They deserved it (Cheval).

Due to his feeling guilty for not being a good son or brother, he felt the need to have more money, for which he saw no other option than to participate during a ‘rip-off’. Another way for port employees to justify their corruption, was by arguing family got them involved in drug trafficking:

About a year ago, I was approached by Rique, a former brother-in-law of mine. Rique asked me to get certain containers out of the port, that would then go to [another port company], under the guise of [a certain legal activity]. In reality though, out of these containers goods [drugs] had to be taken out. [...] I obviously refused back then. It would have been containers from South America and I did understand it would be related to smuggling cocaine (Arnaud).

Although Arnaud ‘obviously refused’ to participate, a couple of years later, he took a different path when he was approached by a relative:

Jean-Marc, my [current] brother-in-law, was with me when we delivered this container with cocaine in XXXX. When the bags were taken out of the container, he remained in the [truck] cab. I saw that Jean-Marc looked into the mirror of the truck when François [another port employee] walked behind the truck with the suitcase [with drugs]. I assume he must have seen François walking with those bags. We never talked about it again, but when we just left, I did say to him: ‘I

think they were friends of Rique.’ I can’t recall how Jean-Marc responded to it. We sort of kept our mouths shut about it actually (Arnaud).

Indeed, family members could be the very motivators for their corruption (cf. Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972). They would also explain colleagues involved in ‘rip-offs’, who could therefore be considered “deviant peers” (Warr, 2002) at work, would motivate them to assist as well, as the following will explore.

Colleagues

Evian worked as a port employee for 8 years. Bellamy 10 years. Augustin 12 years. Emilien 22 years. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, the longest established, most successful and most highly regarded employees feature strongly among the offenders. This strong connection is also reflected in their close personal ties with some of their colleagues, who they would meet outside work and would know each other’s partners. Their colleagues, port employees of this study declared, introduced to the world of drug trafficking and ‘rip-off’ deals to them. Colleagues as companions in corruption generally is common (Anand *et al.*, 2004; Warr, 2002), also corruption and its connection with drug smuggling (Carter, 1990). As one port employee, Baptiste, told:

I knew [port employee Campbell]. I knew he was a lasher at the docks. [...] I know him for almost two or three years now. I was out of touch with Campbell but got back in contact with him afterwards. That happened through a friend of mine, [port employee] Adelin (Baptiste).

Casijn provided a similar justification when he was asked about how he got involved:

[Former port employee] Gaillard approached me around that time [in December]. He worked for three years at [the company]. He was the one from whom I know he would lend out his access card or would himself pick up the illegal goods. [...] There’s talk about “bags”, but everyone knew it was about drugs. Gaillard left the scene end of 20XX or start of 20XX. He didn’t have an access card [of that company] anymore. First he fixed someone else’s access card. That guy got fired and that’s when Gaillard approached me, I think two weeks ahead of it. He got in touch with me at a bar. We also saw each other outside of work once and a while. [In the bar] he and the other guy started about [the access card]. The guy gave Gaillard his card when Gaillard left that company. [...] While they were emptying a container, getting the bags, [port employee] Kylian saw the customs and cancelled the deal. I think they dropped some stuff as well. They lost the drugs

and the guys were left with a debt of €X million. How this debt was paid off, I don't know. I heard this from Gaillard somewhere in December 20XX, when I was good friends with him and I was given a bigger part [in the 'rip-off'] (Casijn).

Port employees were not usually approached by any random colleague, but they would often know them very well:

It happened [...] via a former colleague. [...] I ran into him in a bar in XXXX. [...] I was pretty drunk, snorted [cocaine] and thought I had to do it [the 'rip-off' deal]. I made a mistake by not saying no (Leroi).

Port employees stated their colleagues promised all kinds of riches they could retrieve by participating, by which port employees implied they were seduced to become complicit (cf. Katz, 1990):

When [port employee] Baptiste took that XX kilos [of drugs out of the container], I was told the day after it was a success. [...] It's easy money with not so much risk involved and it happened a lot around me anyway (Adelin).

Port employees would also see the riches their colleagues gained, and therefore, once more, be seduced:

About a year ago, I noticed Guifford apparently owned a lot of money. He bought [an expensive car of brand A], [another expensive car of brand A] and [an expensive car of brand B] rather shortly after each other. The last time I saw Guifford, he was driving in an [expensive car of brand C]. In the meantime, he drove around in an [expensive car of brand D]. [...] The last time I was there, while picking up the €XX.XXX [...] I saw he made some major refurbishments where he lived. I spotted a new kitchen, and new furniture. I thought it was weird he refurbished so much in a rental house (Briand).

Port employees claimed they were lured into the 'rip-off' because their colleagues would know about their debts (as a result of their drugs and/or gambling addictions). Their colleagues who tempted the port employee to participate knew that those port employees were in trouble and would therefore be more willing to assist. Reynaud, for example, explained he was asked by his colleague Milo firstly about his personal difficulties regarding his debts, before Milo would convince Reynaud to participate. So, whereas the port employee reveals to have given into 'the desire for status [in this case 'having no debts'] in the eyes of one's peers' (Katz, 1990, p. 147), the colleague here is thus

(presented as) a serpent that exploits that desire and seduces the port employee into corruption.

Port employees’ reasons for ‘rip-off’ participation: some considerations

Justifications:	Underlying causes:
Addiction and gambling problems	Financial hardship
Support and protection of family (values)	Financial hardship/strong family bonds
Lying to relatives about involvement crime	monetary gain/strong family bonds
Pressure and seduction by colleagues	Strong collegial bonds

Table 1: overview of justifications and underlying causes.

Here, we shall briefly consider the main reasons to behave corruptly and engage with the ‘rip-off’, based on the above table. Overall the findings have revealed that their financial motivation is connected with other justifications that have less to do with monetary gain. First of all, to be motivated to assist during ‘rip-offs’, port employees would refer to their histories of drug use and/or gambling to point out how they were financially deprived before. Secondly, they argued they felt compelled to participate and complete a ‘rip-off’ deal, because of pressures to safeguard and live up to family values and expectations. It shows they experience an existential fear of losing family (values), as a result of not being able to provide a (financially) safe and secure habitat for partner, children and relatives. It might explain why during interrogations they aimed to protect family by explaining that in case they would inflict possible harm on their family by sharing (too much) information with the police. It could lead to the criminal network behind the ‘rip-off’ operation to retaliate, threatening and targeting family members. Then again, family was also used to justify one’s corruption, by claiming family members approached them to help them out during a ‘rip-off’ deal. Thirdly, and finally, port employees became corrupt, because, they would explain, they were seduced by (former) colleagues who introduced them to the quick-fix riches that can be gained. In their experience, the ‘rip-off’ was (presented as) a possible way out of a deprived domestic situation. Seemingly problematic is whether they lied about their motivations or not, because it is difficult to discover and evidence if justifications (or neutralization) took place before a criminal act (Maruna and Copes, 2004). So, it is not certain whether the port employees justified before they participated during ‘rip-off’s. What is certain though, due to this study being an analysis of declarations post ‘rip-off’, is that their justifications are ‘after-the-fact rationalizations rather than before-the-fact neutralizations’ (Hirschi, 2009, pp. 207–208).

Recommendations

The evidence provided by this study can be used for an evidence-based port policing approach (cf. Lum and Koper, 2014; Sherman, 2013) to the ‘rip-off’ and wider corruption in ports, offering several “what works” implications for port security, policy and practice to police the illegal drug trade and port employees who are (motivated to be) involved. We will therefore provide our key recommendations here. First of all, for several preventative measures through policing corruption in the port, in particular the employers, vis-a-vis the port companies, play a significant role. This starts at the job application stage, where employee background checks ought to be put in place, and specific attention should be paid to the financial circumstances, past convictions, drug-related incidents and/or gambling problems. Connected to this is the screening of personnel who perform their duties in key positions where container information—information that is highly valuable for criminal networks—is shared and who have access to handling the container throughput. This can be done by consulting organisations in the logistics sector responsible for the registration of employees who have violated their occupational integrity before. As for those employees with key positions, it becomes important for port companies to re-evaluate and restrict who should know what exactly and who should have access to what type of information. A compartmentalised way of information sharing, on a need-to-know basis, would be worth integrating (Smits, 2014). Another preventative measure is to create and stimulate employees’ integrity awareness, by having policing authorities and security professionals deliver workshops about the risks of getting involved in the ‘rip-off’. It might be worth considering to develop these workshops by having a(n) (ex) detainee who used to work in the port and has been convicted for a similar offense, to talk about his experiences. As one of the port employees of this study said:

I’ve been very stupid and find it hard, this entire process. I’m absolutely not happy about it. On the other hand though, I’m grateful for some reason that I’ve been caught, because it put me on the spot. It gives me a lot of time to think about things. I’ve deserved a punishment and I hope that during the time I’ll have to do, I can repay society. I don’t want to rot away in a cell, ’cause that’ll benefit no one (Aldrick).

These workshops and these experiences should lead to the shaping of a culture amongst port employees in which people motivate each other to resist the temptation becoming complicit in the ‘rip-off’, and instead, to look for alternatives to deal with (financial) struggles differently. On top of this, employers ought to have a more pro-active role, meaning, port companies should pay more attention to their working staff by detecting these struggles and offer means to a way out, such as providing assistance in a debt-relief

scheme, or rehabilitation centre in case of addiction issues. Moreover, port management should pay more attention to alter the shifts periodically, which means, port employees should circulate more frequently between shifts, in order to prevent the establishment of a clique that incorporate and stimulate corrupt intentions and behaviour.

Next to restricting access to information, providing workshops and supporting employees, port companies ought to enforce a stronger regulated access control of their port facilities, by having it more thoroughly check which port employees come in and at what time and who they might be having in their car. Especially in case employees arrive long before or after their shift hours, it should trigger security services to ask (more) questions about their presence. Finally, as a preventative measure, shared information and surveillance could lead to better intelligence for the policing authorities, as well as for the port companies itself. The port business community should retrieve (more) feedback from the authorities, and the authorities, such as a port police organisation, could benefit from up-to-date information on port employees at risk.

When looking at measures that can be taken repressively, the following implications have presented themselves. As the evidence presented here strongly indicate, policing 'rip-offs' and wider corruption in ports require reconsideration of police investigative interview plans. During the investigative interviews, much more attention should be paid by police officers to the social background of the suspect, because intelligence could be gathered this way about (former) addictions, gambling problems and conflicts in the private sphere. It will help to orientate on the deeper background of the financial struggles port employees may have, but also, it would provide a better picture of the types of (leisure) environments port employees reside (e.g. casinos, bars or clubs) and whether criminal networks are active there, which in turn leads to better focused investigations. This way, by having an interest in the social backgrounds, the suspect may consider the police to be interested in their lives, and it could also generate data for future research and thus an evidence-based (port) policing of drugs and corruption could be shaped. It became clear from the motivations of port employees that family, especially (ex-)spouse play a bigger role than initially is expected. During the investigations, the partners deserve more attention as their (amplified) spending pattern could reflect an increase in 'rip-off' gained riches as well, given that some port employees explained they wanted 'give their family more to enjoy'. As much as family should be focused on more during investigations, also the ties with colleagues of the port employees deserve better attention, as it turns out a port employee never acted on his own. In relation to this, is the focus that should be stronger on those organisations and professionals who might not be employed in the same port company, but those who they do work together with on a daily basis (e.g. truckers, shippers, waste-disposal, and organisations providing other sorts of transport).

Conclusion

In this contribution, employees of the Port of Rotterdam who fulfilled an important role in the illegal drug trade by being involved in ‘rip-off’ cases were considered. Based on an in-depth qualitative thematic analysis of official police files of closed criminal investigations, the study has shown that port employees have several justifications for their corruptive behaviour; justifications that extend beyond mere financial motivations. It is most important for them how they are considered by the law enforcement agencies to enjoy some if not full impunity, stressing that their (various) addictions, feelings of responsibility to support and protection of family (values), and colleagues at work caused pressures and seduction to become corrupt and complicit in the ‘rip-off’. It has to be emphasised once more that the convicted port employees (presented themselves to) have, they claimed, sincere motivations to get involved in the ‘rip-off’. However, it may be the case not all those reasons are as genuine as they have explained to the port policing agencies. Therefore, future research should further explore the justifications of port employees who become corrupt and get involved in not just the illegal drug trade, but various types of port crime, in order to adapt and advance (preventative and repressive) port policing strategies and operations. Recommendations for preventative and repressive measures have been presented as well that indicate a key role for port companies in prevention and that law enforcement should have more awareness of the personal circumstances and social ties of port employees.

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