‘Diving for dope’: Identity in submarine drug policing at the ‘maritime gateway to Europe’

Yarin Eski
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract
This article offers an ethnographic account of everyday identity (re)configuration in submarine policing by the Dutch Customs Diving Team (CDT) officers of illegal underwater drug trafficking in the Port of Rotterdam (PoR). In so doing, it explores what it means to perform drug inspections that depend on international collaboration and intelligence sharing, and also depend on the cooperation of ships’ crews, enabling the CDT to deal with challenging submarine circumstances. The findings emerge from a qualitative analysis, using an Othering framework, of data collected during fieldwork in 2011 in the PoR. The main argument of this contribution is that to prevent drug trafficking from entering in the port (and its European hinterland) and by legitimately interrupting the trade flow, the CDT must become a justifiable intervention itself. However, given the low number of drug seizures since the CDT’s inception, its legitimacy and efficacy are called into question at a time of hypersecuritization on the one hand and austere policing on the other; a bifurcating context in which CDT officers feel the need to (re)configure a superior policing Self through an inferior policed Other for which (discriminating) stigmas that exist about drug trafficking, maritime shipping and (counter-narcotics) policing are (unwillingly) used and amplified.

Keywords
Submarine policing, Port of Rotterdam, Customs Diving Team, drug trafficking, identity, port security

Introduction
You have to deal with it . . . You can’t ehm . . . make it 100% [water]proof. It’s not possible . . . You can never get something 100% secure. That’s an illusion. (Customs Diving Team officer 1)
Recent years have seen a rather stable prevalence of drug trafficking globally, yet it remains one of the most persistent and multifaceted types of illicit trafficking today, increasingly leading to more, and sustained by, serious organized crime (UNODC, 2014). The most recent official statistics indicate that the cocaine market is thriving globally, with a 30 percent increase between 2013 and 2015. Cocaine consumption in Europe increased by 30 percent during the period 2011–16, while seizures of cocaine increased by 35 percent in Europe (UNODC, 2017: 16).

The maritime domain has ‘potentially the greatest impact on the total quantities of drugs smuggled, as well as on trafficking flows and the availability of illicit drugs at the global level’ (UNODC, 2015: 230). Functioning as transnational hubs where increasingly licit flows of people, technologies and goods and the illicit flows of illegal trafficking, corruption and terrorism intersect, ports are key sites for drug trafficking (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2017; Zaitch, 2002). Interventions in maritime shipping rarely happen at sea, and for this reason must take place in ports. To perform the interventions effectively, a multi-agency of port police, security services and customs agencies work together during their everyday inspections and (covert) operations (Eski, 2016). By having to be the very disruption they ought to prevent from entering ports (Urciuoli et al., 2010), port policing multi-agencies, in a way, could be considered a necessary evil to safeguard and assist the global supply chain while protecting the wider society from substance abuse.

At the biggest European port, the Port of Rotterdam (PoR), interventions and seizures of large quantities of drugs are made on a daily basis by the Rotterdam customs agency (Chalfin, 2007). Most of the inspections are done on deck, in cabins, amongst crew members and in containers (Belastingdienst, 2017; Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2017a). There are, however, also inspections done ‘under the water line’ by the Dutch Customs Diving Team (CDT), which is a unique border policing phenomenon in Europe (De Heus, 2017). This article explores the identity (re)configuration of the CDT that secures PoR against illegal submarine drug trafficking in challenging circumstances while accommodating the global flow of licit goods through an international transport hub. The context within which the CDT operates is presented, followed by a detailed overview of the CDT and the fieldwork carried out amongst the team. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings. Finally, the article reflects on how, at a local (micro) level, an (occupational) identity – a superior policing Self (Brons, 2015) – is (re)configured through a policed (inferior and risky) Other (Hudson, 2009; Said, 1979); an identity (re)configuration that is embedded in the tension between, on the one hand, keeping their port efficient and, on the other, keeping it safe from (criminal) disruptions by becoming a (lawful) disruption themselves (Urciuoli et al., 2010). This tension between balancing security with economic efficiency was intensified after 9/11 by the rise of maritime and port logistics and securitization through the International Port Facility and Security (ISPS) Code (Cowen, 2014). It has also been intensified by the age of austere policing (Levi and Maguire, 2012), which had effects on PoR and drug control by the Rotterdam customs agency on which the next section will focus.

The Port of Rotterdam, the ISPS Code and drug control

Listed as one of the world’s leading global maritime ports, PoR fulfils an important role in international transport and is the major gateway to Europe. According to the latest
records, about 30,000 sea-going vessels and 105,000 inland vessels entered and left the port in 2016. From there, various goods – over 461 million tonnes of cargo annually – are delivered to its hinterland, which covers the living area of approximately 500 million European consumers. PoR is the largest European port, consisting of 12,500 ha of land and water; the port extends about 40 km from city centre to shore, and it provided more than 93,000 jobs and an added value of over €21 billion (3.1 percent of Dutch GNP) in 2016 (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2017b).

After 9/11, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) legislated the ISPS Code, which is aimed at standardizing risk assessment and enabling governments ‘to offset changes in threat with changes in vulnerability for ships and port facilities’. Since 2004, ports have to comply with the ISPS Code ‘to perceive and manage security threats through integrating local/domestic threat-levels into a global awareness-level’ (Bichou, 2004: 328). In achieving security standardization, the ISPS Code does acknowledge that every port and port facility may vary. If a port is not compliant, it cannot receive any passenger ships and cargo ships of 500 gross tonnage and above that are engaged on international voyages, including mobile offshore drilling units.

PoR, in compliance with the European Regulation 725/2004 for ISPS Code implementation (European Parliament, 2004), obligates shipping agents ‘to register a ship’s security pre-arrival information at least 24 hours in advance’ which can be done via Portbase (2017). This way, information can be risk-assessed and shared amongst European policing agencies and security organizations to estimate whether a ship needs to be inspected by authorities, such as the Dutch Customs Agency. Guaranteeing port security in this way ought to prevent crime and terrorism from happening in European ports. Yet this is not always the case.

Next to its logistical importance in the international supply chain, PoR is an important European hub for cargo and metal theft, as well as human trafficking, transport of contraband cigarettes, forbidden wildlife and illegal arms, and environmental crime (Hall and Antonopoulos, 2017; Marks and Van Sluis, 2010). Various global criminal organizations, such as the Italian ‘Ndrangheta, the Columbian traquetos and the Chinese Triads, and more recently the Albanian Mafia Shqiptare, run their illegal businesses – sometimes collaboratively – in PoR (Bovenkerk et al., 2003; De Jong and Voskuil, 2017). Of all the illegal trades, one has remained the most prevalent in PoR: illegal drug trafficking of, especially, cocaine (Eski and Buijt, 2016; Gruter and Van De Mheen, 2005; Zaitch, 2002, 2003). PoR attracts criminal networks to use its logistical position, because its size – approximately 6000 ha of its landside – and the vast numbers of containers coming through PoR decrease the chances of being caught by local authorities (Zaitch, 2002: 243). In other words, PoR enables drug trafficking because smugglers (think they) operate invisibly.

Still, their activities do not go completely undetected. Seizures in PoR happen often, ranging from 50 kg to 3000 kg of drugs discovered in containers, false bottoms of and in ships, and ‘cocaine bags’ carried out by corrupt port employees (Eski and Buijt, 2016). Cocaine is seized most often, whereas marihuana and heroin are less frequently detected. Drugs seem to be either brought aboard or placed underneath vessels leaving South America, disembarking mostly Colombian and Ecuadorian ports. The most recent numbers show that the Dutch Customs Agency carried out over 1.2 million varied inspections
across the country in 2016, ranging from checking luggage to duty taxes declarations, to container scans, which, altogether, led to the seizure of 15,581 kg of cocaine (Belastingdienst, 2017), of which 13,000 kg of cocaine were caught in PoR (Mainport, 2017). Therefore, the customs department in PoR fulfils a vital, glocal role in policing trafficked cocaine at maritime borders that form a unique stage of the (European) War on Drugs, in that the trafficked drugs move across international waters into state borders, rather than from state to state.

The PoR department of the customs agency, called Port Customs (PC), has a 24 hour, 7 days a week responsibility to control the releasing of goods that enter or leave Europe through PoR (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2017a). PC operates under the auspices of the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration, which is a part of the Ministry of Finance, and has fiscal tasks, comprising the monitoring of the import, export and transit of goods, and non-fiscal tasks, such as the safeguarding of public health and safety, the economy and the environment. In 2016, PC monitored 12.4 million containers handled in PoR, of which policing illegal drug trafficking is a vital, non-fiscal task (Belastingdienst, 2017; Chalfin, 2007). PC works closely together with the Rotterdam Seaport Police Force and the Fiscal Intelligence and Investigation Service. Together they take part in the Hit and Run Cargo Team Rotterdam that is responsible for most (covert) operations leading to larger drug seizures and criminal investigations (Marks and Van Sluis, 2010: 4). Whereas the port police investigate and arrest people, and security services privately police their clients’ port facilities and daily businesses, PC controls and confiscates cargo, and gathers and shares intelligence through the Customs Information Centre and the Customs Control Centre (CCC). Most inspections by PC are based on CCC’s risk analyses, using X-ray scans of containers so that cargo remains unopened to prevent the need for time-consuming and costly procedures (Port of Rotterdam Authority, 2017a). In addition to X-ray scans, PC carries out on- and off-board inspections of containers and the cargo they carry, the ship interior (for example, cabins), and ships’ crews and their possessions. PC’s specialized units include a sniffer dog team for locating drugs (Ritzen, 2016), as well as the CDT.

The Customs Diving Team

Although defence, fire fighters and (border) police organizations everywhere have their own diving teams, it is unusual for customs agencies to have a diving team. From what is currently known, there is a very small number of specifically customs diving units across the world. France, Latvia, the Netherlands and New Zealand have such teams of between 10 and 20 officers. However, underwater inspections of ships for illegal trafficking do happen in other countries as well, usually undertaken by frogmen from the army, police diver teams or hired professional diving companies in Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, England, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Jamaica, Norway, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and Venezuela.

In the Netherlands, the army, police and fire brigade have their own specialized diving teams (Arrestatieteam, 2015; Brandweer, 2015; Ministerie van Defensie, 2017), and, for a long time, PC required assistance from the police diving team in particular to seize underwater drug batches. However, as one CDT officer explained, ‘the [police diving]
team is generally too busy, and for them diving is not a main task, but a side-issue’. For this reason and because the Dutch Customs Agency wanted to send out a strong preventative signal to smugglers who want to use Dutch ports, the Ministry of Finance considered it necessary for the Customs Agency to have its own diving team and to work almost entirely independently within PC. Also, their diving operations do not depend on police divers, nor do they conduct joint operations.

Commenced in 2005, the CDT is a clear expression of the Dutch Customs Agency’s aim to invest ‘in the pursuit of physically tangible knowledge about the objects crossing the maritime frontier’, establishing ‘a diving team trained to inspect the undergirth of ships and cargo thrown overboard in pursuit of drugs, torpedoes, and the like’ (Chalfin, 2007: 1617). The CDT started with 4 shippers and 14 divers but, at the time of my fieldwork (in 2011), 4 shippers and 11 divers remained. All divers in the CDT have had medical training and all possess a boat licence in order to command the RHIB (rigid-hulled inflatable boat). Their backgrounds range from having previously worked in the navy, to commercial diving (for example, underwater construction), or to other (specialist) inspection units of the Customs Agency. In 2017, they kept their 4 shippers but were left with 6 active divers; at the time of writing, the CDT was awaiting 2 divers being trained, in addition to the 6 that are left in the team.3

Since 200–250 ships enter and leave PoR daily, CDT officers explained that it is impossible to check each ship, every day. Therefore, CCC’s risk analyses determine which ships are most likely to carry drugs below the waterline. The elements that are risk-analysed are the ship’s last and future ports of call,4 the vessel’s origin, the flag it flies, its cargo, and its ships crew. Until 2017, the CDT had 15 submarine seizures and 50 instances of finding clues to underwater drug trafficking. They went from inspecting three ships a day, to two ships a day, and, since 2017, they effectively inspect one ship a day (De Heus, 2017).5 Their main task is to detect and confiscate illegal goods that have been transported under water, either on the ship’s hull or inside ship’s spaces that can be reached only from underneath. Although they encounter all types of smuggled goods, such as (fake) gold artefacts (De Heus, 2017), it is specifically drugs, and especially cocaine, that they discover. There are several possibilities for hiding the drugs underneath a ship: behind the propeller, near the rudder, or in bow thrusters. The most prevalent underwater trafficking modus operandi is fixing a torpedo-shaped pipe stuffed with smaller packages of cocaine to the hull or the keel with strong magnets or screws. It was pointed out that most of the time the captain and crew are (or pretend to be) unaware that they are transporting drugs under water.

In contrast to the Dutch Customs Agency’s 962 drug seizures nationwide in 2016, of which 73 occurred in Rotterdam in that year alone (Ministry of Finance, 2017: 4), the average of not even one seizure a year by the CDT makes them the least successful intervention by Dutch Customs in transport, delegitimizing their utility, and with it their identity. Their identity – their Self – as a strong, drug-controlling and crime-fighting local unit in the global War on Drugs thus requires significance, which can be retrieved by defining oneself through a (weaker) Other.

In December 2011, six years after the CDT was founded, I participated during inspection activities of 6 CDT officers (1 team leader, 1 diver, 1 back-up diver and 3 shippers). They were part of a group of 15 CDT officer (11 divers, of whom 2 had team-leading
tasks, and 4 shippers), running, at that time, inspections in two to three shifts throughout the whole day and night, because ships come in and out 24/7 (De Heus, 2017). When deployed – most often in Rotterdam but also in other Dutch ports – a shift consists of two divers (one who actually dives and one as a back-up), one team leader, one shipper who sails on an RHIB and two shippers who command a Stan Patrol vessel. The team leader and two divers arrive in a van at the ship to be inspected, bringing along the necessary scuba gear, communication equipment and other material for the diving inspection. Before the actual dive, an instruction meeting takes place to lay out the diving plan and meet safety requirements for the diver. These opportunities to participate in inspection activities with the CDT, as the following section explores, enabled a rich understanding of the team’s work, group dynamics and attitudes.

An ethnographic study of identity and Othering

For this study, occupational identity formation is theoretically framed as ‘Othering’ (Lacan, 2007; Said, 1979). This Othering framework as an analytical tool, and ‘the role of othering in interpretation, in understanding the other and ourselves, should be of equal concern to analytic philosophers interested in interpretation, to empirical social psychologists, and to theorists of rhetoric and argumentation’ (Brons, 2015: 70). The main theoretical assumption of Othering is that we all need a (group of) Other(s) who need(s) us too to mutually acknowledge each other’s identity; it is a relational dialectic. It indicates that how we define the Other unveils narratives about ourselves/our Self and our morals and values, as much as a definition of us by the Other tells something about that Other; they are each other’s flipsides (Said, 1979). So, an inferior Other leads to a meaningful superior Self that is (re)constituted as legitimate and ‘normal’ (Young, 2007). Those in criminal justice and the wider security sector in particular define a legitimate policing Self through inferior, risky policed Others (Hudson, 2009; Loyens, 2009; Reiner, 2010), a division that is usually amplified in crisis times (of global austerity) (Joffe, 2012).

The Othering framework developed before, during and after fieldwork that took place from 2011 until 2012 in which the CDT was a part of a larger participant group consisting of operational port police officers, security officers and customs officers in the ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg whose frontline identities and realities were studied (Eski, 2016). Admittedly, the data are relatively ‘old’ and, as described in the previous section, changes have occurred since the data were collected in terms of the shrinking of the CDT. Nevertheless, the data and findings distilled from them that are presented here are still relevant now, because the themes (teamwork and trust; international collaboration, speculation and domination; and relying on Other(ed) ships’ crews) are timeless and universal; they still play a role in the CDT as they do in other (private) policing fields and other locations (see Eski, 2019: 8–13; Lamb et al., 2018: 6–12; Manning, 2018: 127–31).

All participants were accompanied during their everyday work where I was ‘walked through’ their (professional) experiences, interpretations and practices (Carpiano, 2009). Fieldwork took place at port facilities, port police stations, customs offices and security companies, in cars and on ships. I would participate in daily water and car (‘land’)
patrols, giving emergency assistance, resolving port community conflicts and disputes, checking port traffic by conducting vehicle or vessel inspections, and maintaining close contact with the port facilities about security measures, prevention of environmental wrongdoings and possible criminal activity (for example, drug transport and theft) and terrorism. Immigration and ISPS Code checks were also undertaken. Next to policing activities, nine different port facilities handling containers, ferries, mass dry and wet bulk (for example, sand, oil) were visited to do fieldwork with security officers who did facility patrol, alarm response and on-board visits.

There was enough methodological flexibility to move around and talk with people, utilizing a list of pre-formed ‘sensitising concepts’ (Blumer, 1954). During day-long fieldwork (up to 24 hours), in-depth interviews took place that could lead to (participant) observations and vice versa, showing that fieldwork ‘was negotiated with subjects of study, invented or reinvented on the spot’ (Ferrell, 2009: 12–13). I was often actively involved in many of the practices carried out by the CDT, not just observing from the side-lines but also actively carrying out CDT tasks. Therefore, fieldwork consisted of going back and forth between ‘observing participants’ or ‘participating observer’. During this process, I experienced what Meško et al. (2008) described as the similarities and differences between participant observation in criminological research and doing undercover policing in crime investigations. Meaning, to a certain degree, I ‘became’ a CDT officer. During this manoeuvring gradually between distant observant and involved participant, I took into account my ‘appearance of a high level of detachment or of “objectivity” which those who use this method are in fact lacking’, and reflected ex ante on the ‘facade of detachment masking a highly involved approach’ (Elias, 1956: 240).

Through snowballing in the ports (see Zaitch, 2002), a participant network was established. At a certain point I received an access card to a port facility, resulting in up-close and personal everyday interactions with participants and others (for example, colleagues, managers, ships’ crews, truckers, as well as other police, customs and security officers). It provided ‘thick descriptions [that] are deep, dense, detailed accounts’ (Denzin, 1989: 83).

Out of the eventual participant group (\(N = 85\)), fieldwork was done with 11 CDT officers, of whom eventually 6 CDT officers shared most of their stories. This is a very low number of participants, however, because of the existence of an estimated 80 customs divers in the world, arguably, the fieldwork with the Rotterdam CDT officers is not only unique owing to the small size of the worldwide customs divers community; the number should therefore also be considered representative of that customs divers community itself. Fieldwork with the CDT was done during their activities in Winter 2011, allowing me to become a critical spectator of the front- and backstage (Goffman, 1959) of submarine counter-narcotics policing; angles from which (re)configuration of their policing (and Othering) attitudes, identity and practices played out in a fluid, dynamic manner. Eventually, fieldwork led to 200 hours of recorded material and a document of more than 2000 pages of raw data that was thematically analysed through the Othering framework. The analysis-based findings of specifically the CDT on international collaboration and everyday interactions with ships’ crews, by which they (re) configure their identity – their Self through the Other – will be explored in the following section.
Findings

Teamwork and trust

Trust is absolutely vital and sensitive for the CDT. The PoR river water is murky because of oil spills and ship activity, which creates zero visibility and increases the risks and stress for the divers, including fear and subsequently stressful intake of air. Thus, high standards of personal safety, teamwork, and various precautionary measures and advance planning are required (Van Tilberg, 1994). Such advance planning takes place by using the ship’s General Arrangement Plan (GAP) and Shell Expansion Plan (SEP) as a map for ‘hot spots’ where drugs may be borne by the ship. Sometimes hot spots are covered in seaweed; therefore, counting the welded joints of a ship helps to identify where the diver should descend for inspection. The seawater inlet valve and the bow thruster are such hot spots. By counting the number of frames in-between the welded joints, they know where to dive and swim to instinctively, mostly based on touch. Besides mapping out the diving plan, precautionary measures are discussed in detail. For example, in the event of loss of communication, they switch over to line signals (pulling the communication cord). If there is oxygen stagnation, the diver must appear at the free side of the ship and make as much noise as possible. The CDT has a dedicated port communication channel, and, in the event of a hazardous situation, the port facility can be reached immediately and CDT shippers dial the emergency number. First Aid, if required, is done by the back-up diver. Team leaders are in charge of any necessary neurological examination. The precautionary measures are well structured and everyone knows exactly what to do when, where, how and with whom; in dangerous and unpredictable environments, anticipating for and with each other strengthens solidarity amongst them, as much as it does for those in policing in general (Loyens, 2009: 470–1).

Inspections are carried out by the diver performing the actual underwater inspection and communicating with the instructor above the waterline, and the RHIB shipper, who moves along with the diver under water. The diver is well equipped with a range of personal safety equipment for below the water line, wearing Surface Supplied Equipment, meaning that the diver receives air from the surface, combined with a communication cord, called the umbilical, which is about 1.20 metres long. Literally every corner and gap underneath the ship is checked by the diver, mostly by touch and with clear instructions from the team leader through the umbilical cord. Their communication involves a lot of patience and short, clear, coded-language interaction, as the following short interaction between CDT officer 2 (above water) and the diving CDT officer (under water at that point) illustrates. The diver is not called by his name but referred to as simply ‘diver’:

CDT officer 2: When ready, proceed to other side.
Diving CDT officer: Rodger.
CDT officer 2: Between the [higher and lower sea] chests. Diver to other side. [. . .] Diver at other side sea chest.
Diving CDT officer: Average of the two [sea] chests, 9.9m.
CDT officer 2: Yes.
Diving CDT officer: Fully covered [with seaweed]
CDT officer 2: Fully covered.
The diver describes where he is located and, by using the SEP, he is followed by the team above the waterline. Any exceptional situation under water is reported. The team leader also instructs the RHIB shipper to stay close to the diver, because the umbilical cord is only 1.20 metres long. The noise that comes through the headphones resembles highway traffic, as if you are right next to it. After inspecting the hull and specific hot spots, the cord is pulled back up and the diver reappears above water. The dive itself usually takes about 30 minutes, being ended by the diver saying: ‘Diver coming up!’

After the inspections are done, the CDT officers collect their equipment and clean it, then return to the customs patrol vessel for debriefing and paperwork. On the vessel, they make a report of the inspection, and they also, as importantly, keep a strict log of the amount of pressure the diver experienced under water. The deeper you go, the less air there is in your lungs; it is halved every 10 metres you descend. Therefore, when you go back up, you need to be careful not to surface too quickly to avoid barotrauma (for example, decompression sickness, sinus and lung injuries from excessive pressure). The longer a diver has stayed under water, the more slowly he must go up. They use a depth table, which calculates how long a diver has been under water, the amount of time they can remain, and how slowly they must surface. Overall, the least time of the inspection was spent on diving itself, which was 30 minutes, and most of it on establishing documented safety, pre and post dive.

From the way they communicate during the inspection, but also given the very strong focus on safety and communication, the team members must fully trust each other. They must do even more so than is usually observed in policing, because their submarine policing is, by definition, affecting their health, whereas such risks are usually the exception and not an inherent component of everyday policing (Reiner, 2010; Waddington, 1999). Therefore, their ‘close interdependence entails a sense of responsibility for each other’s safety’ (Sanne, 2008: 625) and the CDT team’s trust and spirit must therefore be, and therefore is, stronger:

We’re a rather close team, definitely. We all trust each other and if we have a diver in our team we don’t trust, so to speak, a person. . . . A person can be a cool guy, but under water, if he . . . if people don’t feel safe around someone. . . . Everyone [on the team] will admit to that. We’ll discuss [the untrustworthy person] openly. That kind of stuff [distrust amongst colleagues] is something that you cannot have in a team like this. It becomes more a matter of whether we’ll help you to get to the right level [to dive] and you feel comfortable under water and we can trust you. Or, will you admit honestly to yourself [you cannot do it] and you choose to move on, do another type of customs work or leave customs completely. (CDT officer 1)

Here, team work is emphasized, reflecting the idea that ‘if performers are concerned with maintaining a line they will select as team-mates those who can be trusted to perform properly’ (Goffman, 1959: 95), by making jokes to criticize each other’s performance but not to make their colleague(s) feel really bad about it. This has been termed inclusionary putdown humour, which fosters group identity and cohesion (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). If mistakes are made, as has happened before, you have each other’s back and do not rat on each other to management (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002), reflecting the police’s blue code of silence (Skolnick, 2002) and the broader policing ‘social world with its in-group isolation and solidarity’ (Waddington 1999: 287). Moreover, the close interaction is
influenced by their vessel’s small spaces to walk around, to sit in and to take a break. In passing one another aboard, they have to hold (onto) each other to pass, and there is not much room for privacy, apart from the toilet. Also, the fact that a diver needs help from colleagues to get the suit on and off additionally reveals physical closeness and tight-knittedness amongst the group. Moreover, there is no strict hierarchy within the team and they support each other in their (job) ambitions.

After inspections and administration, they return to their barracks, where they store and maintain their equipment and do their planning, and where their shift rotation moments take place. It is a place of refuge for them with a canteen culture (Waddington, 1999) where, through their (heroic) storytelling (Van Hulst, 2013), next to their equipment, their collegiality is maintained as well. As in any other policing organization, the CDT officers are storytellers who ‘recount to each other stories about what they encounter on the job as a means of entertaining each other, of making sense of their experience, of coming to terms with often troubling/traumatic situations, of warning others about the dangers inherent in police work, and of initiating and maintaining group identity and cohesiveness (Fletcher, 1996: 47). So, sharing their stories (even heroic ones are about vulnerabilities), they maintain trust as and in a team, through which they additionally (re) configure a meaningful Self (Wilson, 1978: 73) and group identity, with and through each other – but only during work hours, because, as one CDT officer said: ‘It’s not like at some fire fighter stations, like we go for a pint after work, or whatever.’ The CDT officer meant that people who work in fire stations have to trust each other all the time because they work all hours, whereas CDT officers ‘clock off’.

**International collaboration, speculation and domination**

It should be clarified here that the CDT does not itself collate, analyse and share information gathered during dives. They must hand it over to the CCC, which runs risk analyses and shares them within the wider Dutch Customs Agency and its partners abroad. However, CDT officers do have their (Othering) attitudes toward intelligence sharing. A recent and relevant development is how the CDT, through a covenant, will be deployed in the Port of Antwerp between 2017 and 2019 (Gazet van Antwerpen, 2017). Even in 2011 during my fieldwork, it became clear that Antwerp is one of the many ports CDT officers actually distrust:

> Antwerp, that’s where inspecting is zero. The whole surveillance staff of Antwerp consists, I believe, of 8 people, and here 150. (CDT officer 5)

CDT officer 2 also admitted that ‘[it] is there where the biggest leak is [for drugs trafficking into Europe], in Belgium’.

Overall, CDT officers consider the internationally networked ports as consisting of, as they implied, trustworthy ports and untrustworthy ports.

When it comes from the Port of Hamburg, we won’t dive [underneath ships] any more, because you got police diving teams there . . . And yeah, at a certain point you need to draw the line, as in, ‘After how many ports in Europe do I still need to dive underneath it here?’ Look, for the
time being, there haven’t been any clues [that drug traffickers] let [drugs] come in via multiple ports in Europe, [and then] eventually to [PoR]. For now, every time, it went straight to Rotterdam, or another port in the Netherlands, and not via a huge detour. But hey, there’s a first time for everything . . . Spain, France, they’ve got diving teams, Germany has one. (CDT officer 2)

Although the CDT officers were, overall, satisfied with international intelligence and information sharing, it still requires improvement and international harmonization, according to them:

We’re actually one customs. That’s how it should be, but it’s not the case of course. We all have our own ways of working. However, it would be nice if those risk databases complemented each other, but it’s not the case yet. And sometimes that’s a shortcoming, because if there were [a fully internationally integrated risk database] we could see which country has dived underneath the ship and stuff. It would enter the Netherlands and would have been inspected in Spain, for example. At the moment, it’s still a matter of having to phone a lot, miscommunication, and things sometimes go wrong . . . It’s streamlined though, but you got language barriers you have to deal with and ehm . . . some countries are somewhat slower with entering [data] into systems . . . I won’t say which [countries] but you got ehm . . . yeah . . . some countries. . . Look, when we got a boat. . . Yeah, sometimes it’s just not going to take place. When I get here at the station at 3 am, and I’ve just returned from a boat [inspection], then I will enter [the record of that inspection] perhaps the next day, but the ship will still set sail that same night to [the other port of this research]. The next day, the [customs information centre] still doesn’t know that I did [inspect the ship] and perhaps [the other port’s customs officials] have called us, and another inspection will take place [at that other port]. If all of that [information] had been in one [international] central database, everything would function better. Perhaps it’s something for the future, I do think that. More and more systems are centralized, and I think, I assume that’s going to happen on a European level. (CDT officer 1)

The officers indicated that they collaborate intensively with the Port of Hamburg in particular. They have full confidence that the police diving team there ‘gets the job done’ and that the information received from them is accurate and trustworthy. Here, their confidence in the Other is reflective of the Lacanian idea that the CDT too ‘finds its meaning in the other’s desire, not so much because the other holds the keys to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other’ (Lacan, 2007: 222), making their Self desirable, thus meaningful and legitimate.

They know about seizures made in other EU countries, but they often emphasized that there are very few diving teams. CDT officers 1 and 3 explained to me that, because customs agencies in other countries still work with diving teams from other authorities (for example, police, navy), as used to be the case in Rotterdam, they are not always capable of doing the specialist drug control-related underwater inspections that they undertake. He also admitted that he is not sure whether all countries have adequate diving capacity and (technological) equipment:

Latvia has a diving team. Hamburg works with police divers, that’s how it is. Norway has its own divers, I believe. Denmark is working on it, but ehm . . . there always needs to be some cash made available, I think. You see the phenomenon [of diving teams] spreading. In Spain
they got the ehm . . . what are they called again? . . . that is a special la Guarda Civil as coastguard, so to speak, but they do that work alongside it. . . . [I]n Belgium, there is, I think, well, no diving whatsoever. That’s how you see how important it is for a country. In England you got a team, but that’s not customs . . . they cannot do as much as we can. (CDT officer 1)

In portraying their trust in the ‘good’ ports that have their own diving teams in place and despite some collaboration difficulties experienced with those ports, they were less confident about EU countries that have a lower GDP than the Netherlands has:

If you look at Europe, there are countries that are simply less wealthy, and that invest less in technology. There are those that have fewer customs officers who do less about port security. 'They aren’t all raised to the same level. And the weakest link is the danger for the rest of Europe, because there are no internal borders any more . . . And that’s the issue with a unified Europe . . . yeah . . . it has become more dangerous, I think. (CDT officer 1)

They revealed their distrust of other ports, especially in South America and the Caribbean. Ships from there that had Ports of Call before docking at Dutch ports were deemed untrustworthy:

There is no guarantee of course, that as soon as [a ship] is dived-off in a foreign country, there’s nothing underneath it. We experienced it many times, how a ship is was dived-off by governmental divers and that over here, there was just something underneath it. How easily someone is bribed, right? In those [South American] countries someone is quicker to be bribed of course than when you’re here. . . . So, it does not necessarily mean that [the ship] is indeed free of smuggled goods. I also saw recordings a couple of times, made under water. They take pictures and make recordings all the time, and yeah, at a certain moment it comes to the point when you need footage, right? And suddenly it’s very vague, or it’s not there [on the recordings], you know? So ehm . . . it doesn’t really mean anything [when you have a form saying the vessel has been inspected under water somewhere in South America]. (CDT officer 2)

In fact, they distrust anything coming from South America, in particular intelligence provided from an unknown party. They believe that most tips from anonymous callers are mafia that give intelligence about other mafia gangs so that their own ‘shipment’ will not be inspected:

Sometimes, from South America, you get ehm . . . within those . . . within those mafias you got several, right? You got Eastern Bloc mafia, Italian mafia, Colombian mafia, and sometimes they try to rat on each other, by ehm . . . when they are aware of a shipment from one, then an anonymous phone call comes in. I don’t know how it goes exactly . . . [W]ith such tips, you got to deal with it carefully. It could also be tips from, ehm, the Colombian government. (CDT officer 1)

So, next to drugs smugglers tied to mafia, it is the South American port authorities who may be corrupt in their intelligence sharing, because, he argues:

[O]ver there [in Colombia] you can buy drugs just like that, on every corner of the street. They’re standing there like they would be standing here with Milky Ways and M&M’s in a box,
you know? They carry around drugs like that. If you don’t carry a gun there on the streets, you’re an outsider. I saw pictures of the boys [his colleagues]. Well, they’ve been there for 14 days, every day they had to be escorted by police, and they were guarded. So, yeah, pretty badass. And when you hear they take a mere 10 percent of the entire export of hard drugs. . . Last year that was 80,000 kilos, well, and if that’s just 10 percent, the rest of it leaves the country. (CDT officer 2)

CDT officer 2 continued to discuss South America as a cradle for corruption related to the drug trade and the existence of mass production through large cocaine labs. He described it to me as like an episode from the crime series ‘Breaking Bad’:

One lab is blown up or burnt down, and another lab pops up . . . It’s ridiculous [the amounts of money made]. One time I saw pictures of one of the big names in Mexico who got caught. He had a villa, entirely made out of wood. All the nice details in the house, carved by hand. He had pets, white and black panthers, crocodiles. A tropical swimming pool! Made under his house, in a cave-like style. He also had . . . almost 150 million dollars, only bills. . . . That’s what they had over there in closets. And weaponry, 1500 weapons were seized. From AK’s [AK47’s] fully gilded in gold to hand guns made entirely out of platinum. Yeah, and when you see that, you think like ‘and we don’t know even half of what is going on’. It’s really CRA-ZY, man! (CDT officer 2)

Afterwards, CDT officer 2 and his colleague talked about how a professionally made tunnel between Mexico and the US, approximately 360 metres long, enabled smugglers to smuggle loads of drugs for quite a while. Earlier that week, the tunnel had been discovered and about 2700 kilos of marihuana were found (Buckland, 2011). CDT officer 2 did not have his facts straight, and admitted he might be wrong, but still talked, instead of 2700, about 150,000 kilos of cocaine. The CDT officers laughed aloud about the seizure and discovery of the tunnel: ‘Hahaha! Isn’t it amazing, right? Look at how it pays off.’

They confide in ports of certain allied countries, from which they expect to receive ‘clean’ ships. Simultaneously, they expect to receive ‘dirty’ ships from Othered ports, in particular those that have been targeted by US foreign counter-narcotics policies (Kubálková, 2001). In establishing its policing Self, the CDT obtains legitimacy by sustaining certain (racially) polarizing discourses in the War on Drugs, particularly in South America (Mutimer, 2005). On top of this, owing to their unique skill set and experience, they are deployed to the very countries they (dis)trust to share intelligence with, but predominantly to train diver units, delivering presentations about their own superior knowledge and experience. They have been to Belgium, Colombia, France and Venezuela. These and other countries, including China, Dutch Antilles, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey, have also visited them in the Netherlands to receive presentations and training. In teaching and training ‘best submarine policing practices’ to those who are considered ‘inexperienced’ and ‘uneducated’ in predominantly developing nations lingers the danger of further (discriminatory) Othering (Goldsmith and Dinnen, 2007: 1096), from which their superior policing Self results. That Self through intelligence superiority reflects ‘the dual connection between the intelligence process and the new mediated forms of self-identity formation’ (Sheptycki, 2007: 76) in policing and
further aggravated in neoliberal governance of policing through austerity (Millie and Bullock, 2012). The inferior Other in comparison with the superior Self of the CDT revealed itself not only during international ‘exchange’ missions but in particular during their interactions with and attitudes toward (having to rely on) ships’ crews.

**Relying on Other(ed) ships’ crews**

In order to carry out underwater inspections to preventively secure the port against the risks of drugs as a health issue for the wider society (Gilmore and Betts, 2012), the CDT, especially the divers, expose themselves on daily basis to several submarine health and safety dangers involved in swimming under water in ports. To minimize risk and dangers during underwater inspections, the water has to remain as still/wave-free as possible, because any type of water activity can seriously disrupt an inspection. To create a still and safe underwater environment, the ship must temporarily halt its main activities, and this can be done only by a captain, because (s)he is the highest-ranking officer on deck. It is in the captain’s best interest to cooperate with the CDT and have the underwater inspection carried out as quickly as possible. The safe and still underwater environment is made official by having negotiated a ‘Safe to Dive’ certificate, signed by both the CDT team leader and the captain of the ship.

CDT officer 2, responsible as team leader one night, and I boarded a vessel that was subject to an inspection. Upon entry of the captain’s cabin, CDT officer 2 addressed the captain in a commanding way:

Okay captain, we’re from the Customs Diving Team, and we’re going to do a diving inspection underneath the ship, so for the safety of the divers, we have to discuss some points that have to be arranged before we can start. . . . Maybe you have already some paperwork for me? I need the Port of Calls, ship’s particulars and the crew list.

Although CDT officer 2’s communication in English is quite clear, that of the, as turned out, Russian captain was not as clear. Clear communication is considered essential for creating a safe underwater situation. CDT officer 2 was happy that the chief engineer was present as well, because ‘he can help with some of the technical stuff, he can support immediately, because the captain doesn’t know everything’, he explained. It became obvious that much of the establishment of a safe underwater environment is, although documented, mostly based on mutual, unspoken understanding and inherent trust. CDT officer 2 waited for the captain to hand over the ship’s GAP and the SEP, because ‘all the hot spots are on there for us [to use] under water’ (CDT officer 2).

Having the Safe to Dive certificate completed and agreed on took about 45 minutes; no diving had yet happened at that point. Then the actual instructions followed to which the captain had to adhere, otherwise the diving inspection could not take place. The captain had to deactivate the main engine, lock the anchors and switch off the boat thruster. He also had to hoist flag Alfa.7 CDT officer 2 told him (did not ask him) that during the inspection there would be two customs officers on board; one on the bridge and one in the engine control room to make sure the captain and his crew indeed complied. Finally, the captain had to inform his crew via intercom that diving activity was taking place. The
The captain wanted to know when the diving inspection would be finished, to which CDT officer 2 replied it would be 7 pm, meaning the inspection would take approximately one hour. The captain then nervously said, in poor English, that he hopes he can report back to the shipping line (his employer), that ‘everything about our whole night is no problems, haha . . . If we have stuff [drugs], no no of course, I hope nothing’.

After the certificate had been signed, CDT officer 2 shook hands with the captain. Returning to the RHIB from where the diving inspection would take place, CDT officer 2 explained that ‘[s]ometimes there are seriously 5 to 6 different nationalities aboard . . . Look, such a Russian, well, not sure where he’s from, but such a captain is of course more expensive than when you put a Chinese captain on there. . . . Wages there [in China] are much lower . . . Sometimes, I see captains who do not know a single word in English.’ (CDT officer 2)

Russian and Ukrainian captains, first officers and chief engineers are generally subject to Othering by the CDT. While preparing for the inspection, the CDT officers were joking about Russian captains. CDT officer 4 started to sing a Russian folk song ‘Kalinka Malinka’, which caused some excitement and led to enthusiastic storytelling about earlier encounters with Russian captains. CDT officer 6 started to talk about how CDT officer 1 was invited to join a Russian captain for a vodka:

CDT officer 6: Wow, he [the captain] was drunk, man . . .
CDT officer 1: That dude was so drunk, he stumbled through the hallway, hitting every wall. That guy was shitfaced. I said ‘I’m okay with whatever, but I’m not going to dive under this boat, I don’t trust that guy one bit’. That one was really, he was really, completely plastered.
CDT officer 5: Yeah, not a sober Russian . . .
CDT officer 4: Then you fell for it [CDT officer 1]? You fell for it again!

What CDT officer 4 means is that the (seemingly) drunk captain made CDT officer 1 not trust the captain to work with him to establish a safe underwater situation underneath the ship. The inspection was thus cancelled and the captain may have got away with transporting drugs underneath his ship, probably because the captain seemed to have lived up to the stereotype of being a drunk Russian (whether he actually was or not), which may have tricked CDT officer 1, CDT officer 4 indicated.

Their Othering reflects what has been considered the (re)configuration of the European superior Self through a Russian inferior Other, narrating stereotypes of ‘[t]he people of Russia [being] characterized by poor etiquette and high tolerance of exposure to the elements and to alcohol’ (Hall, 2001: 103). Their Othering comes about from frustration at having to depend on others for their personal safety, to which the CDT at times reacted with an authoritarian power display toward Other(ed) ships’ crews, making the maritime border zones an ‘ideal breeding place for excessive suspicion and mistrust, which could in an excessive form result in witch hunts, inappropriate searches and needless display of power’ (Loyens, 2009: 474). However, the power display helps the CDT gain ‘strength and identity’ (Said, 1979: 3), although it also upholds superiority fed by societal racism, which places ethnic minorities disproportionately in those strata and situations from which the policing agencies derive their “property” (Reiner, 2010: 131). In times of
austerity-based anxieties (Gottschalk, 2011), and taking place in a context of hypersecurity (Buzan, 2004), this desire for a (more) meaningful and superior policing Self through an inferior Other, as the above indicates, becomes stronger.

**Discussion**

Uniquely positioned in the local War on Drugs in PoR, the CDT (re)configures its everyday (occupational) identity in policing and protecting ‘the vulnerability of the just-in-time production systems and so too the centrality of logistics infrastructure and its protection to the political of our present’ (Cowen, 2014: 116). Yet they are the disruption of that commodity flow, forming the very threat to transport itself, delivering a lived experience of being powerless and inferior; they additionally had to shrink in size because of (too) low a number of seizures. However, due to Othering ‘on the job’ while continuously balancing logistical and security needs, they must recover a superior policing Self through inferior “‘others’ [who] may only be welcome as cleaners, landscapers, domestic workers, and in other kinds of disciplined, casualized and precarious employment [such as ship’s crew] to service the lives of elites’ (Cowen and Bunce, 2006: 436).

The global flows of licit goods and commerce that the CDT must protect from illicit flows and disruptions by having to become the very, justified, disruption of flows itself, makes CDT officers a necessary evil that operates in the unique underwater domain of border policing and drug control. For their disrupting operations, they require particular intelligence-led policing and sharing, as well as collaborative ships’ crews, to prevent specific health dangers from occurring. The sharing and collaboration that take place on the micro-level frontstage (Goffman, 1959: 13–19) reveal the underlying backstage (Goffman, 1959: 69–86), shaped by the macro-level age of austerity in policing (Levi and Maguire, 2012) and intensified by ongoing port securitization post-9/11 (Cowen, 2014).

First, neoliberal austerity governance policing in a hypersecuritized context leads to an increasing need for the CDT officers to maintain, even amplify, a meaningful policing Self as a justifiable intervention in maritime transportation flows, and thus of their right to exist. They do this by (re)configuring a (group) identity and Self through teamwork and trust, resulting from putdown humour, storytelling and guaranteeing each other’s safety during inspections. They also foster a meaningful (group) Self by delivering (perceived) superior submarine counter-narcotics knowledge and expertise when sharing intelligence and best port security practices with the inferior Other (abroad). However, this knowledge can be considered as ‘comforting, simplistic illusions and unexamined assumptions about the effectiveness of various [drug]-control measures’ (Walker, 2015: abstract), delivered to border policing authorities, in particular in South American countries where coca is cultivated by poor farmers under threat by exploitative criminal organizations (Hinteregger, 2017); border policing authorities that would rather accept pleasant than ‘unpleasant facts about the real roots of crime and the impotence of the criminal justice system in addressing crime’ (Walker, 2015: abstract), which is poverty itself. Therefore, the CDT (unwillingly) upholds ‘the myth that it is possible to win a war on drugs . . . giv[ing] the illusion that we can eradicate illegal drug use from our society’
(Buchanan and Young, 1998: 220), through which simplistic and Othered, stigmatizing imaginaries are also upheld.

Second, the superiority–inferiority Othering happens in the maritime domain which demands increasingly cheaper employment, leading to ships’ crews consisting of workers from low-cost countries (Liang, 2011). These include predominantly Russian, East-Central European and Filipino captains and first officers or able seafarers, as well as South American port workers who are perceived as inferior (see Fajardo, 2011). Considering ship crews as inferior policed Others, the CDT ‘translates’ ships’ crews’ possible transport-disruptive behaviour ‘into something like a criminal act’, which ‘in turn justifies the kind of investigation into one’s personal life that would normally befit only a criminal investigation’ (Van Oenen, 2010: 89), as is more generally typical of the ‘hypersecuritization’ of the War on Drugs in PoR as the main, glocal (cocaine) gateway to Europe, in which ‘exaggerate[d] threats . . . resort to excessive countermeasures’ (Buzan, 2004: 172).

In conclusion, being uniquely positioned as a specialist submarine counter-narcotic policing organization at a local level that is tasked to protect the global flow of commodities coming through PoR, the CDT is ingrained with attitudes and practices of Othering that do not solve their own root causes of frustration, namely maintaining self-legitimacy at a time of austerity politics of policing. In fact, they locally and unwillingly sustain the socio-economic divisions and exploitation brought about by a failed War on Drugs, on which only the (criminal) powerful few feast and thrive (Rogers, 2007).

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ORCID iD
Yarin Eski https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6447-7850

Notes
1. See the IMO website, Maritime Security – URL (accessed 25 October 2019): http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Guide_to_Maritime_Security/Pages/SOLAS-XI-2%20ISPS%20Code.aspx.
2. Personal/email communication with the World Customs Organization and CDT representatives in October and November 2017. Both representatives indicated there are no lists of customs diving teams.
3. Based on personal communication, November 2017.
4. The previous, current and future stops of ships at en route ports.
5. Based on personal communication, November 2017.
6. I was not given any detailed information on how integrated intelligence is being used to target risky vessels, and how exactly that is shared with other global agencies owing to the need to safeguard strategic and operational advantage.
7. Flag Alfa indicates that there is a diver beneath the ship, according to the International Code of Signals.
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