

Actors, conflicts and income: The Cultivation of Cannabis in the Northeast of Brazil

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ABSTRACT: -

The proposal of this study is to analyse the main reasons for the expansion of cannabis cultivation in the Vale do São Francisco region, Northeast of Brazil. The aim is to explore the differences of cultivation in Brazil in relation of other countries with extensive outdoor plantations, considering the key difference that production supplies internal demand. Based on original qualitative research, this study shows that the growth of agricultural activity resulted in the construction of an illegal network that included small-scale farmers and actors who were already involved in other criminal activities, and increased violence in the region

Keywords: *Brazil, Drugs, Cannabis and conflicts*

1. INTRODUCTION

Illicit plantations as an expression of inequality:
Some international experiences

In recent decades, illicit plantations have gained some relevance as an income alternative for significantly large populations in all continents. These plantations, however, compose a scenario of political and social instability, increasing violence in countries where financial and territorial control of plantations has been the target of disputes among groups in conflict. Coca, poppy and cannabis cultivation has become an extremely representative agricultural activity for farmers encountering survival difficulties and the health of economies in regions with serious development problems.

In countries like Afghanistan, Burma and Columbia, the relationship between illicit cultivation, armed conflict and precarious development conditions has resulted in escalating violence, institutional instability and serious human rights violations that mainly affect the rural population (Laniel 2001;

Labrousse 2004). According to Chouvy and Laniel, (2006) these countries are inserted in a global network based on two contradictory and complementary modalities that are directly related to the illicit drugs and transnational illegal goods market and the military and security apparatus that represses the trading and plantation of illicit psychoactive substances and their raw materials.

The impacts of resources in the illicit drugs economy can be equally evaluated as a result of other illicit activities that have not managed to include rural workers in the legal work market or have expelled them from the productive process of legal crops. The economy of illicit plantations has been consolidated within a wide range of difficulties imposed on farmers of Asian, African and Latin American countries in the scope of sanitation, environment and/or public financing, becoming the centre of the problem from the standpoint of cause and consequence. Regions of extensive poppy and cannabis cultivation were affected by several often dramatic difficulties, such as low rainfall rates

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uncompensated by irrigation resources; soil depletion due to monocultures for export; and by damages accelerated by extensive deforestation due to the absence of environmental policies (Chouvy and Laniel 2006).

In contrast, the disastrous effects of forced eradication using chemical sprinkling, namely on illicit coca plantations, in the scope of the repressive process, have compromised the health of rural populations, negatively affected cattle farming activities and other legal agricultural cultures. These actions do not produce the desired long term effect of significantly reducing illicit production, which transferred to other regions or returned after a period of absence or lesser repression to the regions that were previously evaluated as fully or partially free of illicit plantations (Meza 2006; Toumi 2001).

In this respect, eradication actions are evaluated by specialists (Rossi 2010; Guevara 2010) as being responsible for producing effects that are contrary to their objectives, expanding illicit plantations to areas where they have not previously been recorded, implicating more people and involving new actors to link of illicit activities and by intensifying new productive cycles after an unproductive period in the previously existing areas. Even plantation replacement policies have proved ineffective as a portion of farmers that chose this initiative have returned to illegal cultures due to the lack of competitiveness of licit cultures in the market or projects that have not fulfilled all the foreseen phases (Maldonado 2009).

According to Labrousse (2005), coca, opium and cannabis plantations are the raw materials of highly valued goods supplied to the international market, allowing access to credit for many farmers, such as the salaam system of Afghanistan, and for illegal opium to be acquired by merchants one or two years in advance so that farmers can plan upcoming harvests. The

illegal drugs market benefits from this important advantage while the offer is inelastic and the supply is elastic.

Of the three most cultivated illicit cultures, cannabis has the highest consumption rate and, paradoxically, knowledge on the expansion of this culture is the most abstruse (UNODOC 2006). Reasons for this lack of knowledge may be related to both the extensive and INDOOR modalities, present in almost all countries, and because coca and poppy cultures get more attention from anti-drug organizations and alternative plantation replacement projects of development agencies, resulting in greater analysis in international literature (Chouvy 2005). The African continent, however, is acknowledged by specialists as the main producer of the plant for export and replenishment of the European market, namely providing raw material for the production of hashish from Morocco, becoming the leading global provider of this resin.

Consequently, Africa participates in the globalized drug market as the main provider of cannabis for the external market. The culture of cannabis in Africa emerged as a development alternative, contributing to certain social and financial stability and ensuring a certain status quo in many regions (Laniel 2004).

Cannabis appears in this context as a compensation culture in regions that depend heavily on income cultures for export and zones that suffer degradation of ecological conditions and reduction of farmable surfaces, or both. The cultivation period of cannabis in these locations generally varies from three to six months, comprising a comparatively short cycle that allows a quick return on investment and is considered a more attractive product for the market. In the Republic of Cameroon, the culture of cannabis compensates the trading difficulties of traditional cultures, such as beans, corn and potato.

Gueye (2007) conducted a study in the region of Bignona, in Senegal and additionally observed that degradation of living conditions and chronic food insecurity suffered by the population are determining factors for the expansion of cannabis cultivation. The short culture cycle of around 50 days, the limited financial resources required for cultivation and low levels of deterioration that facilitate storage and trading conditions, make this plant a solid alternative for local farmers.

In another study, Laniel (2004) observed that cannabis culture is traditional in South Africa, where it is part of the farming culture of ethnic groups especially in Lesotho. The reprise of modern trading of the plant led to the involvement of new actors in the productive cycle. The extensive use of land for cultivation of grains for the external market in the 19th and 20th centuries resulted in the depletion of mountain lands, transforming the culture of cannabis into an alternative for production.

On a global scale, cannabis production in the continent accounts for financial imperatives more than strategic imperatives, being that the role of culture is minimal in terms of armed conflict in this region as opposed to Afghanistan and Burma, in the case of opium cultivation, and Columbia, in the case of coca cultivation for illicit purposes (Chouvy and Laniel 2006). The role of the plant in African conflicts is less related to financial resources than as a consumer product chosen by the actors in conflict. Consequently, in Sub-Saharan Africa the presence of cannabis culture is perceived as a symptom of the presence of financial, political and ecological instability issues and not as the cause of these problems (Laniel and Perez 2004).

The relation between cannabis production and social, financial and political stability were perceived in Morocco by Afsahi (2009). The Rif region, where most cannabis plantations for export are located, is also the poorest region of the country, with a population density that is

three times higher than the national average. This mountain region has serious problems in developing a sufficiently commercial legal agriculture, with the aggravating factor that the region has suffered from total neglect by the central government for decades, expressed in the absence of effective public policies to tackle the serious agricultural problem. Cannabis cultivation is present in 75% of the villages and mobilizes 96000 families (Afsahi 2009). Cannabis allows the fixation of effective population in the region, thus avoiding migration to other regions, and moderates financial and political resentment of neglect.

Finally, in the various African regions, adaptation of cannabis to a wide range of degraded and poor ecological environments has permitted the valorisation of areas that are inappropriate for other illicit cultures. The characteristic of cannabis as a feasible culture for a large number of farmers has established cannabis cultivation as a highly significant alternative (Chouvy and Laniel 2006; Chouvy 2006; Afsahi 2009).

In the American continent where the presence of cannabis is relevant as an alternative product, México and Paraguay are leaders in production, which basically supplies the exterior markets. In these countries, as in African countries, precarious living conditions of the farmers have led a significant increase of cannabis cultivation in the last decades. Criminal groups, however, the so-called Mexican cartels that control cultivation and trading of cannabis in regions along the border with the USA and mountain regions, the manner in which these groups act and the conflicts caused by territorial control, have brought the actors involved in cultivation closer to violence.

Since 1985, cannabis cultivation in Paraguay has intensified (Gallardo 2006) namely for the illicit and therefore non-traditional market. This country became a leading cannabis producer

among Latin American countries due to the expansion of cultivation in the 1990s and 2000. Paraguay does not have a large internal market for cannabis so production expanded to supply neighbouring countries with the most expressive consumer markets, such as Argentina, Chile and, mainly, Brazil. The characteristic of production for the external market encouraged large estate owners in the bordering regions to invest in illicit cultivation as a mechanism to increase income and improve agricultural results. Land located in the bordering regions also attracted Brazilian drug dealers who, in recent years, have acquired glebes of land to plant and export marijuana to supply the Brazilian market (SENAD 2009).

A significant number of farmers involved with cannabis cultivation adhered to this culture due to the lack of governmental incentives for the agriculture of traditional products such as corn and cotton. They receive seeds from the supplier, money in advance for the harvest and are fully responsible for the product commercialization.

According to Gallardo (2006), the Paraguayan farmer is poor, generally of indigenous origin, and has an arduous working day. Culture is mostly consolidated in areas where land property is not vindicated by anyone. A producer receives an estimated 3-5 dollars per kilogram of marihuana, which is a low albeit better remuneration. In recent years, the dispute of groups for control of these areas has led to increased violence at the borders, which has not effectively disseminated to date (Rocha 2010).

Mexico targets most of its production to the US market despite its significant consumer market. According to the Report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) (2010), illicit cannabis production smuggled from Mexico to the USA comprises the leading source of drug-related income for Mexican cartels, totalling US\$ 8.5 billion or 61% of their income.

In spite of the strong repression of the Federal Mexican Government in recent years (INCB 2010) leading to the incarceration of around 35,000 people and 28,000 homicides from 2006 to 2011, cannabis cultivation increased 35% from 2008 to 2009, especially in the west of the Sierra Madre. In 2009, production reached its peak in relation to the last 20 years and, although cannabis is cheaper than drugs such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines, high production compensates the price as there are production and trading bases on both sides of the USA-Mexico borders.

In the valleys and mountains south of the State of Chihuahua, between the states of Sinaloa and Durango, an estimated one-third of the population survives from the earnings of cannabis cultivation (Johnson 2010). Low production costs attract the small-scale farmers who, as in the case of farmers from African countries mentioned in this article and farmers of Paraguay, find it extremely difficult to survive in a dignified manner from the cultivation of traditional agricultural products. Production costs basically comprise seed bags, a small amount of fertilizers and a primitive irrigation system that requires low-cost rubber hoses. Blossoming occurs from three to five months after planting.

Cannabis cultivation in Mexico is controlled by the so-called cartels at various links of the national drugs production and supply chain. This centralized control of the cartels, which is fragmented by the existence of more than one group disputing territory and business, also involves other illicit activities such as people trafficking and contraband.

The studies mentioned above conducted by several specialists allow an understanding of the multiple dimensions of relations between the populations that live in the regions converted into illicit plantation territory with other actors such as the State, criminal groups formed

around the drug business that generally monopolize stages of trafficking and cultivation and, in some regions, the relationship between farmers with groups in conflict.

Maldonado (2009) emphasizes the need to conduct deeper anthropological and sociological studies to comprehend the forms and mechanisms used to historically and structurally establish certain territories for illegal global or local cultivation. According to the Mexican anthropologist, it is essential to understand the complex factors that convert certain territories into locations for the development of illegal economy zones, verify the structural elements that constitute the region, and the political, legal and social conditions. Secondly, he adds, studies should discuss the regional construction process by analyzing the role of local communities and their migratory movements in locations where illegal cultivation is flourishing and, finally, analyze community responses to control of their traditional cultivation areas by criminal groups that organize the illegal business, the army and other armed and/or paramilitary forces in a global and national context.

The cultivation of plants used as raw material for the production of illegal drugs comprises a range of dimensions although expansion involves the consolidation of markets that are established around their sustaining network, and the actors that integrate the network in differential and complementary links and locations. Evidently, the cultural, structural and relational contexts of each country or region define the cohesion or fragmentation of networks, levels of violence and corruption that surround the relationship between the actors and greater or lesser tolerance of authorities and the general population to the activities required for cultivation.

2. CANNABIS CULTIVATION IN BRAZIL: THE CONSOLIDATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY

In Brazil, cannabis production mainly occurs in the poorest regions to supply the growing internal market (Fraga 2006). Unlike the African and Latin American countries mentioned previously, cannabis production in the Lower Middle São Francisco region targets the urban market of the main north-eastern capital cities that are not very far from the production region (Fraga and Iulianelli 2011). Pioneering studies on cannabis cultivation in Brazil (Bicalho 1995; Bicalho and Hoefle 1999) show that the key internal markets of marihuana consumption, namely the cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte, are the main destinations of most local production, and there are signs that the plant already has an external market. Studies conducted by the author of this article² have found no circumstantial evidence or information that production of the Lower Middle Region is directed towards the key national consumer centres or for export. On the contrary, information from former planters and the Federal Police indicate that production is targeted at the consumer market of the Northeast Region. Materialization of a market near the production area and consolidation of a

² The studies are: *Plantios Ilícitos na Região do Submédio São Francisco e a relação com as culturas legais na formação da renda do trabalhador rural: Um estudo exploratório* (in progress with resources of the CNPq); *Homicídios em Pernambuco (1990-2003): Uma Análise descritiva de Eventos Violentos* (concluded with the resources of the CNPq) and; *Jovens construindo políticas públicas para a superação de situações de risco, no plantio de maconha no Submédio São Francisco* (concluded and funded with resources of the Ministry of Justice). The interviews were conducted in the scope of research and the names of interviewees in this article are fictitious in order to protect their identities.

well-organized distribution network of cannabis from Paraguay, of a better commercial value and produced in closer regions, supplying the main cannabis consumer markets of states in the Southeast and South regions of the country, have directed cannabis production of the Lower Middle Region to the main north-eastern capitals.

Whilst cannabis has been present in the region for many years (Pierson 1954; Burton 1977), an increase in production is linked to three fundamental factors: the consolidation of the agribusiness of tropical fruits; the family farming crisis in the region due to the construction of the Itaparica dam and an increase of the marihuana consumer market (Fraga 2006; Bicalho 1995).

Construction of the Itaparica dam occurred within the scope of ascending development programmes funded by the World Bank at the start of the 1980s and 1990s. During construction of the dam dozens of thousands of small-scale farmers were directly and indirectly affected when their land was flooded by the waters that would form the water course for the hydroelectric plant. Scott (2009) observed that initial planning of the venture did not observe the displaced families as victims but as beneficiaries of special programmes that relocated families in 21000 hectares of irrigated land in projects located in various points along River São Francisco. Between 1988 and 1994, however, the families received 2.5 minimum wages under the Temporary Maintenance Budget (VMT), which was insufficient to support most families and relegated an entire generation of farmers from their agrarian origins with serious consequences on the socialization of the children of these farmers (Iulianelli 2000). According to Scott (2009), these farmers suffered incalculable losses as they were stripped of the technical development references of irrigated agriculture at the river margins and the inhabitants of supplier and client cities.

Consequently, the construction of dams was a dramatic moment for most rural workers of the flooded region, whose production was based on family farming. As observed in a previous report by the Companhia Hidrelétrica do Vale do São Francisco CHESF (hidroeletrctric Company of São Francisco, HECSF), the hydroelectric company responsible for administration and maintenance of hydroelectric plants that were built with the waters of River São Francisco, the population relocation process was badly planned and time-consuming, leading to serious problems for rural workers with or without land in the region.

With the prospect of change, CHESF determines the deactivation of small farms and establishes July 1988 as the expiration date for installation of the irrigation system. After deactivation of small farms of the compensated property owners, the displaced communities that worked in third-party properties, usually as sharecroppers (according to information of the registry prior to relocating 60% of the population), are the first to feel the proximity of the hunger foreseen by the population for post-resettlers. The idea of suspending cultivation in small farms and the delay in relocating caused a huge time gap between these occurrences, which deepened the state of poverty of several families living in the flooded areas. (CHESF/FUNDAJ, 1996: page 11)

The relocated population was greatly affected by the flooding of their properties and, in the case of landless employed rural workers, by the lack of working conditions. The small properties that also consisted of traditional onion, tomato and cotton crops that cannot be harvested or planted were also unable to raise goats and birds that are essential elements of the family income composition.

Characteristics of the 1988s include the difficulties faced by the population, especially the most impoverished segments, due to delays in the CHESF relocation timeline. By the month

of February of this year, several rural families were still waiting for relocation (practically 50%).

Deactivation of cultures and the consequent unemployment deeply marked this period. The climate of unrest is generalized for the relocated families and the other half of the population that will be relocated in the following months.

It is true that the staple food baskets that CHESF decided to distribute among the farmers who were verifiably without crops lessened the deprivation in this area, but the faults verified on delivery (that is, incomplete baskets, irregular distribution, inability to reach all the impoverished families) and the needs of non-relocated families contributed to the onset of claims movements in this period.

Family income is practically restricted to 2.5 minimum wages established in the CHESF/Polo Agreement. At the start of relocation, the issue of the “**grant**” – which is how CHESF refers to the 2.5 minimum wages in this period – is very confusing for the relocated families given the uncertainties in relation to payment day and the exact amount of this “wage”. Its sufficiency or insufficiency in terms of assuring the livelihood of these families seems to depend on the size and financial organization of each family. (CHESF/FUNDAJ, 1996, pg.22)

The coexistence of irrigated areas and non-irrigated areas triggered the growth of cannabis plantations during the cotton crisis in the 1980s. Expropriation of irrigated area in the context of the Hydroelectric Dam of Itaparica was, however, one of the main driving forces behind the dissemination of cultivation in the *caatinga* and river margins (Bicalho 1995). In the municipalities that were affected by the floods caused by the dams, specific areas for irrigation were scarce and the return of dry land agriculture, previously practiced and disseminated, was not a feasible solution due to low productivity levels (Bicalho 1995; Iulianelli 2006). Given the lack of better financial options

for small-scale farmers, cannabis cultivation became a feasible alternative, allowing more substantial earnings.

Lots of families that left this place were divided, many were separated. You would see fathers going one way, sons going the other, it dissolved the families. It separated everything. To this day, when I talk about it I feel like crying. The dam was good for me. It brought some good things later on, but I lost a lot. I lost my direction. The family resettlement process was very sad. They were used to planting in a specific land, they knew this land and they had to move to another city, Orocó, Santa Maria to live, to plant there. But they didn't know the land. I'm telling you, shameless. I started to plant the herb because it was the only way to support myself, and onion didn't pay much in those days. There is nothing in the caatinga, you can't plant there. Just marihuana. And I planted because I had water, seeds and I also had the market. Today, I stay away from all that. I'm scared, lots of people died. Killed by criminals or the police. Lots of people suffered, but lots of people that were lucky also made lots of money. (Farmer, former planter, in October 2010)

The agribusiness of tropical fruit established near the main plantation areas in the 1970s contributed to the consolidation of the cannabis culture business, according to the evaluation of many local actors. The agribusiness of fruit attracted a significant number of workers that were intermittently employed. This contingent of workers settled in the region and many did not adapt to a work tradition based on the model of family farming. Part of these workers comprised an important body for the labour required in cannabis plantations (Iulianelli 2000; Iulianelli et alii 2006). The formation of a labour force, without the family farming tradition, available to work under the production model that resembled agribusiness standards was important to strengthen the conditions for a more effective implementation

of illicit cultivation.

The implementation of agribusiness in the region, however, enabled distribution of cannabis production as illicit cultivation benefitted from the improved roads and infrastructure provided to meet the needs of the tropical fruit business. According to the statement of a worker that declares to have participated in cannabis cultivation activities in the start of the 1980s, the transport flow also facilitated the expansion of illicit activity in the region.

In the 70s, production in River São Francisco was rice and onion, but with the arrival of the mango and other tropical fruit, and the obvious potential, marihuana was also included. Because marihuana was inserted in fruit farming. Because with the improvement of transport, flowing to the large centres, it made it easier. Mango was transported and as it had a really strong smell, it was easy to include the marihuana in the cargo. The smell of the mango covered the smell of the marihuana.

Production also got easier because there was a lot of land in the islands of River São Francisco that only had one owner and he herded around 20 goats that only left the land after harvesting, so they would not denounce him. But the problem is that it didn't stop there, with the land owners. The workers that felt oppressed at work realized that they could also make some money.

In the 80s, there was a boom. The municipality of Orocó is an example. At one point, everyone was planting: owner, politician... everyone planted. The municipality had nothing, but everyone had a car, a motorbike. And fruit farming facilitated the transportation.

The community even joked and called it the city of Oroconha because of the huge number of plantations there were there. Even today, the plantations are huge there, but less than in the 80s.

(Statement of a retired farmer, in August 2010)

During the 1980s, expansion of plantation areas, the use of the isles of River São Francisco, with

fertile soil, the incorporation of a greater number of people in the different links of the plantation chain and, later, allowed the first generation of resettlers and those who lived in precarious working conditions in agribusiness to participate actively in several activities. They were present in the plantations, as crop guards, and in product transportation. Below, the statement of an important religious authority made to the author of this article, a protagonist of claims related to youth recruitment for cultivation and a witness of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) of Drug trafficking of the Chamber of Deputies.

I have been here for 14 years and lived through most intense plantation period and I remember the first years with I came to visit these communities, there were no motorcycles, but in 2 or 3 years there was everything, and it was the young people who managed everything because their dream was to plant, sell the marihuana and buy a motorbike, transport was not a problem, they survived. So you noticed that it was all normal, that, that the young people asked if this was a sin, it was normal. They would go to church and do their first communion and confession. I asked myself if there wasn't another way, like planting beans, but there was no water, for example, and marihuana only needs a little water and with beans it's impossible, how many hectares do you have to plant without water? So it was calm, there was no persecution because the trade was well protected and people were well protected. Some man from the Comando Vermelho (a criminal organization) of Rio de Janeiro came here and he was arrested here, I don't know his name, but he was arrested here, rented a house here and controlled everything, you just have to go to his house and ask who rented it, who he was, to find out about the mafia there is behind everything, because the CPI (parliamentary inquiry commission) wanted to get the big fish, we want deputies, that gave rating, the CPI did not

get the mafia. I think that nothing improved, things will get worse, I think it will increase and I hope some other type of drug does not appear because, sadly, there is no policy that solves this drama experienced by our youths. (Religious authority)

The 1970s and 1980s were characterized as periods of the institutionalization of illicit cultivation in the municipalities of the Lower Middle São Francisco region. New relations were established and new actors emerged that transformed the landscape and the scenery of the *caatinga*. The statements of several agents who personally experienced the entire period indicate that this moment was defined by the creation of illicit networks that allowed the expansion and stability of the business that would be intensified at the end of the 1980s and, mainly, in the 1990s.

Expansion of the criminal network that is established to enable the business is made possible by two different but complementary fundamental factors. Firstly, the migration of disputes and quarrels of certain families for political control and local power that enables the consequent control of the illicit activity that generates income and wealth and, secondly, greater repression of authorities responsible for containing illicit production activities and the drug trade. Knowledge of the region, the background of certain families in other illicit businesses like land grabbing, political crimes, homicide, corruption with public funds and other crimes linked to local bossism were important factors to establish criminal networks for product distribution, as observed by a former rural worker:

Everyone here knows who is behind the entire marihuana business and in Cabrobó, it's the Aracuãs (. I am saying this because it's nothing new and four of them were incarcerated two years ago in the same operation of the Police of

Bahia³, it was in the newspaper and everything, everyone talked about it here. They were incarcerated in Juazeiro. And it's no news to anyone that in Floresta, the Novaes and the Ferraz dispute the marihuana cultivation to see who makes more. I'm telling you, messing with the Aracuãs is a death wish. They kill mercilessly, they are really bad people. I have already worked as a

³ The interviewee is probably referring to the arrest that occurred on 12/12/2007 of members of the Aracuã family in the municipality of Senhor do Bonfim in the rural inlands of Bahia. According to an article in the online version of the A Tarde newspaper, the events occurred as follows: “Twenty-five people involved with drug trafficking were arrested by the Civil Police in Senhor do Bonfim (375km from Salvador) of which 11 were caught in the act for drug trafficking, racketeering and illegal gun possession.. Among the arrested dealers, four men were members of the Aracuã family, from Cabrobó, inlands of Pernambuco, who have an extensive background in crime, including assault, homicide and drug trafficking. One of these individuals, Antônio Gomes de Sá, was arrested in Sítio Umburana, a farm in the region of Bonfim. Guns, drugs and money were found at the location. In addition to Antônio de Sá, other individuals were arrested, such as José Cícero Gomes de Sá, who was wanted for the murder of Daniel Joaquim de Souza, committed in 1998, in Campo Formoso, Wellington José da Silva, Lourival Batista de Souza and Michel Santos da Silva. “Given the high level of dangerousness of these criminals, we decided to send them to the capital to avoid contact with the inmates here and a possible rescue attempt from other members of the group”, explains the regional police chief of Senhor do Bonfim Lúcio Ubiracê.

Total apprehensions taken to the police station include approximately 30 kilos of marihuana, 24 crack rocks, 17 small cocaine papers, a bag of marihuana seeds, seven fire arms, including a 44 caliber rifle, a motorbike, vehicles and around BRL 6 thousand in cash, the possible result of drug sales. The following individuals were incarcerated in the Public Jail of Senhor do Bonfim: Anderson Alves da Silva, José Oliveira Monteiro, Luiz Carlos Nascimento Silva, Irlânia Gomes de Araújo, Jota Messias Conceição da Silva Santos, Carlos Ferreira dos Santos and Heleno Conceição Monteiro. Most of them were incarcerated in the so-called „Beco Fino”, near the bus station with difficult road access. (Drug Ring is dismantled in Senhor do Bonfim in: <http://www.atarde.com.br/brasil/noticia.jsf?id=814847>)

marihuana planter, I'm not going to lie to you, but I don't do that anymore.

But did you work for the Aracua's?

That, I can't say. I can just say that they control everything, but they didn't pay my wages. (Former planter, August 2010)

3. THE EMERGANCE OF ACTORS AND THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF NEW PRACTICES

Authors (Iulianelli 2004; Ribeiro 2000) classify cannabis cultivation in the north-eastern inlands as the agribusiness of the illicit, as a reference to the forms of illicit culture organization. These specialists observed that characteristics in the cannabis culture organization in the region share similarities with agribusiness such as submission to the production of small-scale farmers to those who organize commercialization stages and define prices; distribution of seeds and infrastructure that assure production and the wages of workers that get paid for a specific workday.

There is a perceivable centralization of commercialization and cultivation activities in the hands of groups that control various levels of the process of cultivation, production and transportation of marihuana forcing rural worker without land or restricted to family farming to sell production, in the case of the latter, or endure long work hours under a semi-slavery regime of full permanence in the work place, in the former cases. This process became increasingly worse from the moment in which cannabis production intensified in the region to the present day.

This production method is dominant in the region, generally controlled by people or groups that are organized in terms of controlling cannabis production in certain locations. In the last two decades, there has been a change in the manner of production and of the actors involved in the different production stages. In the 1980s, when violence was not so acute and less actors were involved, the greatest repression resulting

from growth of the activity, the migration of cultivation resources to other illicit activities such as bank robberies, car theft in motorways and, to assure some money in times of greater repression especially from the successive operations of the Federal Police (Fraga 2006; Fraga and Iulianelli 2011) at the end of the 1980s, allowed the involvement of new actors that, until then, were not connected to illicit activity.

In spite of the control of production and specific stages of production and sale by a given group, as mentioned above, other production modalities such as the association of workers for shared production can also be perceived, which generally occurred in public or unclaimed land. An example is the case of Eunice. Daughter of a rural worker of Belém de São Francisco, her family always lived from the resources of family farming. Although the activity did not provide very comfortable living standards, it ensured a dignified life for the family, according to her own evaluation. She grew up thinking she would not dedicate her life to farming, which she always considered gruelling for her parents, farmers of onion, peppers and cotton, but the lack of options of a more profitable activity led her, as her parents before her, to become a family farmer. She told us that their greatest problem is selling their products at low prices in the local CEASA (municipal food market), which is usually insufficient to cover the costs of harvesting.

When she was invited by friends to adhere to a business venture based on the purchasing of cannabis seeds for cultivation in a land in the *caatinga* area, she eventually decided to accept after some initial thought. She worked in this activity for two years and never had problems with the police or groups that controlled cultivations activities in her town. She sold the product to a "*boiadeiro*", the name given to the intermediary who resells pressed marihuana for other people to commercialize the product in

locations where higher prices are paid. According to Eunice, she managed to save a reasonable amount of money that she applied in durable consumables. Her fear of being arrested or targeted by members of the illicit network forced her to abandon the venture, with the hope of returning one day if necessary.

Pedro is another family farmer who adhered to cannabis cultivation. A long drought period caused him to lose almost all his crops. As he endured the subsequent hardship and heard about acquaintances that had already adhered to illicit cultivation, he decided to venture into this illegal activity. He maintained his onion and cotton crops and used them to conceal cannabis seedlings, later selling production to an intermediary. The maintenance of illegal crops in his own property is a knowingly risky activity, but it is a risk people like Pedro are willing to take. If his plantation is discovered, he runs the risk of being arrested and losing his glebe of land for agrarian reform purposes without the right to indemnity.

The discovery of illicit crops in his property by the police immediately turned him into a victim of constant persecution and bribes. He had to buy the silence of law-enforcement agents in cash or in electrical appliances. The situation got a lot worse when he tried to abandon the activity and received threats from the police officers who would lose their income source. He only managed to rid himself of the problem when he moved to another city in the region.

These two reports show the difficulties faced by farmers who decide to adhere to cultivation outside the network of "illicit agribusiness". To initiate this activity without submitting to the scrutiny of the bossism of key agents of cannabis production in certain locations results in serious risks in the form of sanctions both from the criminals and the police. It is possible to cultivate illicit crops without being tied to the traditional links of submission to the traditional criminal scheme that regulates relations and

organizes criminal activity, as in the case of the *boiadeiro*, but the resulting tension forces many farmers to abandon the activity.^a

The modalities of adherence to cultivation observed in the conducted field work allowed the perception of how this activity is organized. In addition to the case in which farmers plant in the family farming model, involving or not involving other family members, there are cases in which the farmer is inserted in the productive process as an employee, that is, he receives an amount in cash, generally paid in the form of daily wage for specific daily tasks, but which is only paid at the end of the cycle. Another very common modality is the sharecropper in which the farmer receives seeds and is responsible for a glebe of land that is awarded for planting, generally with abundant water. In the last two cases, the farmers are in the most common composition of permanence in a link of the network.

5- Final considerations

Cannabis cultivation in the Lower Middle Region of São Francisco developed as a consequence of a combination of historical, structural and international factors that allow the formation of a criminal network that is maintained by the omission of development and public safety policies. As in the case of other countries and regions that coexist with illicit cultivation, especially cannabis, farmers of the north-eastern inlands use cannabis cultivation as an income alternative, not as a culture of compensation, but as a culture of substitution.

The increase of local violence should therefore not be analyzed from the standpoint of the existence of plant cultures but from the standpoint of the restructuring of conflicts that triggered new disputes resulting from the possibility of maintaining power and new forms of bossism. The activity brought more resources to some cities, living improvement possibilities, and even covered study expenses (Fraga and

Iulianelli 2011). However, the institutionalization of the activity and new relations between the emerging actors of the established criminal network involved new actors that were previously excluded from conflict and disputes.

An understanding of these complex processes instituted around the activity is fundamental for the obtainment of deeper knowledge on illicit cultivation in general and Brazilian cannabis production in particular. The relations that are established between illicit and licit activities and the thin line that separates these activities is the key element to understanding the underlying dynamics.

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