

Rationality of the repression of illicit cannabis crops in Brazil: public drug policies and strategies of repression

Abstract

The intention of this article is to analyze the initiatives carried out by the Federal Police (FP) in recent decades, to combat illicit cannabis cultivation in Brazil. The article seeks to discuss police measures as a reaction to the external criticisms to government initiatives regarding drug policy adopted in the country. The measures which sought to diminish illegal cultivation were concentrated in a fundamentally repressive manner, on the forced eradication of cannabis plants, the elimination of seedlings, and the destruction of processed marijuana. There is no sign during this period, in which the eradication measures were intensified, of a program aimed at the replacement of the illegal plantations, or of an incentive for traditional farming, a situation which reinforces the arguments of a policy of eradication focused on repressive action.

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Introduction

Successful in terms of breaking up the gangs, and in the reduction of homicide rates in the municipalities of the region, in combination with other public security measures developed by the Government of the State of Pernambuco, the eradication measures did not manage to diminish the most consistent forms of cultivation, which resisted through a change of format and organization, by starting to include more agents in its production circuit.

Discussing these historical, legal, and sociological aspects, the article is based on the conclusions of research carried out by the authors, which received financial support from FAPEMIG and from CNPq.

Drug laws in Brazil and the treatment of the question of illicit plantations

Brazil has a history of laws dealing with questions related to the use, trafficking, and production of psychoactive substances, which were always in line with international norms and regulations. The Law n°.11.343 from 2006, currently in place in the Brazilian territory, instituted the National System of Public Policy on Drugs (SISNAD), prescribing measures for the prevention of undue drug use, and attention to and social reintegration of users and addicts. It established procedures for the repression of unauthorized production of psychoactive substances, of the cultivation and illicit traffic, as well as defining the respective crimes. The New Drug Laws, as they came to be known, are a target as much for criticism as praise, be it owing to their determination of the severest penalties for the crime of trafficking or for innovation in the judicial treatment of the carrying drugs for personal use, with use being exempted from a sentence of deprivation of liberty. It also includes however, legislative gaps, such as the absence of objective criteria for the differentiation between the figure of the user and the trafficker. To the contrary of what the Law n°. 6.368 of 1976 indicated, which was previously in force, the New Drug Law inaugurates the determination of crimes and their respective sentences with the description of conduct referent to the carrying of

drugs for personal use: identifying the conduct correspondent to drug trafficking, as well as similar and complementary conduct. During the period of the Penal Code 1940, the article that dealt with the sale and production of drugs underwent numerous alterations, for example: the Law n° 4.451 from November, 1964 added the practice of planting any narcotic substance and the Decree n° 385, 1968, included the practices of preparation and production, still including on the list of controlled substances those able to create physical or psychological dependency. Beyond this, the definition of narcotic substances as illicit was realized by the National Service of Medical and Pharmacological Oversight. In 1967, the referred body began to adopt the list of narcotics contained in the Principal Convention on Narcotics, considered more complete than the list from the article I, of the Decree-Law n° 891, 1938.¹ Later on, the Law n° 5.726, of October, 1971, which maintained the classification of conduct related to production, sale and consumption in the rules from the article 281, from the Penal Code 281, but elevated to the maximum sentence of 05 (five) to 06 (six) years, introduced the crime of the formation of a gang specific to said "traffic", indicating the possibility of its formation by as few as two people, with a sentence of 02 (two) to 06 (six) years of confinement.² There is an innovation in the New Law, owing to the indication of preventative and educational measures for those who come to acquire, keep, have at their disposal, transport, or carry on their person "illicit drugs for personal use", or come to sow, cultivate, or harvest plants used as primary material for the "production of small quantities of narcotic substances" as well as for personal use. The norms which deal with the cultivation of narcotic plants and the extraction and purification of their principal active agents were determined in the Decree-Law n° 4.720, of September, 1942.³

It is important to add that, since the 1940's, when the Code for the first time determined a sentence for cultivation, there was no discrimination between the sale and cultivation of psychoactive substances, if not that the plantation was intended for consumption, which had a differentiated treatment as was previously considered, as in the New Drug Law.

The production of cannabis in Brazil: its characteristics and the actors involved

In Brazil, production of cannabis is concentrated in one of the poorest regions with production growing to deal with the expanding internal market.⁴ The plant's cultivation in the Valley of São Francisco Region, in the North East of Brazil, up until the present day seeks to supply the urban markets of the main North Eastern capitals and the midsize cities of the states. Therefore, it was destined for locations not so distant from the place of production.⁵ Pioneering studies about cannabis plantations in Brazil⁶ argue that the destiny of marijuana production from the Valley was the Southeast region, going to cities such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte, with signs of plantations also already having markets outside the country. Other studies however,^{3,7} did not verify this account. To the contrary, information from ex-producers, about agents involved in the drug distribution chain and the Federal Police themselves, indicated that the production from São Francisco Valley was destined for the consumer market of the Northeast region itself. The emergence of markets close to the area of production in the Northeast, and the consolidation of a well organized cannabis distribution network in the South east, for marijuana coming from Paraguay of better commercial value and produced in regions closer to the principal consumer markets such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, directed cannabis production of the Valley region toward the main Northeastern capitals.

Though the presence of plantations in the region is of long date,^{8,9} the increase in production was tied to three fundamental factors: the consolidation of the industrial agricultural production of tropical fruit in the Region of São Francisco Valley; the crisis in traditional agriculture in the region due to the construction of the Itaparica dam, which dislocated populations; and an increase in the country's consumer market for marijuana, specifically in the Brazilian North East.^{3,5}

Authors^{4,10} noted that in Brazil, the centralization of sale and cultivation activities in the hands of groups who controlled various steps of the marijuana cultivation, production, and distribution process, submitted rural workers without land, or connected to familial agriculture, to the commercialization of this product in the case of the later. In the former case, they submitted them to the fulfillment of work regimes of a semi-slave nature, with permanent residence at the place of work. This process intensified across time, between the beginnings of the growth in production of cannabis in the region in the 1980's until, at least, 2000. Currently, there is a tendency for decentralization of production into smaller farms, since the repression, which became more intense in the 2000's, led to the breaking up of the large previously existent groups. Despite the control of the specific steps in sale and production by determined groups as previously noted, it is possible to observe other modalities of production, such as the association of workers for production in partnership, generally on public lands, or lands whose ownership rights are undetermined.⁴ The distribution of marijuana already processed for consumption however was centralized with specific gangs. In Brazil, the combating of illicit plantations has been undertaken without authorities considering the relations that establish themselves between a lack of income alternatives for rural workers, and the growth of plantations in recent decades in a market avid for the product.¹¹ Repression had as its immediate consequence the extension of the plantation area that spilled out of the so-called Marijuana Polygon and established itself in nearby areas, such as the State of Piauí and in the South of Bahia, where a great number of plantations have already been encountered in recent years. The increase of cannabis production

in the São Francisco Valley region, in recent decades allowed the incorporation of new actors into the productive circuit of cannabis, as it is possible to trace generations of farmers who based themselves in illicit production. Industrial agriculture of tropical fruits, which established itself nearby the main plantation areas already in the 1970's, contributed significantly to the consolidation of the cannabis cultivation business.¹² Industrial agricultural production of fruits mobilized a significant contingent of workers in the region who were variably employed and unemployed. Many workers did not align themselves with the tradition of work developed on the model of familial agriculture, given that a portion of them made up a significant proportion for work in farming cannabis.¹³ The implantation of industrial agriculture in the region allowed, unsurprisingly, the growth of cannabis production, since illicit cultivation made use of the improvements in the highways and infrastructure that were established to deal with the tropical fruit business.¹⁴ Throughout the 1980's, the expansion of cultivation areas, the utilization of fertile soil from the islands of the São Francisco River, and the incorporation of a greater number of people in the diverse processes of this illicit activity, allowed the integration of youths from the first generation of displaced and those in precarious working conditions in industrial agriculture.³ The 70's and 80's therefore, are characterized as periods of institutionalization of illicit cultivation in the municipalities of the Valley of São Francisco. New relations were established, and new actors emerged which transformed the landscape and the scenario of the caatinga. The reports of various actors who experienced this whole period from close quarters, indicate that in this moment illicit networks which allowed the expansion and stability of the trade which would be intensified at the end of the 80's and principally in the 90's were drawn up. The amplification of the criminal network was possible due to two distinct, but fundamental factors, which complemented each other. Firstly, the migration of the struggles and confrontations of certain families for control of politics and local power, for domination of the illicit activity, which was beginning to generate income and wealth and, in second place, the significant repression by the organizations responsible for the containment of the illicit activities of production and commercialization of drugs. Knowledge of the region, the history of certain families involved in other illicit trades through the appropriation of land, political crimes, murders, corruption of public money, and other consequences of the local hierarchy, were important factors in establishing criminal networks to spread production.

The structural elements that facilitated the growth of cannabis cultivation with the intention of marijuana production in the São Francisco Valley did not differ from characteristics, which led populations in other parts of the world to involve themselves with illicit cultivation. As the UNODC itself recognizes (2014), around the world, illicit cultivation is driven by factors combining vulnerability and opportunity. For various families, subsistence and survival itself depends exclusively on resources taken from the cultivation of plants to be used for the production of illegal drugs. For this population, illicit cultivation is particularly attractive, despite the risks resultant from the question of illegality. It creates a durable product, with a good final price and a good market for sale, understood in relation to other traditional agricultural products. Generally, all illicit cultivation has rapid gains, from less perishable products, being cable of being stored for longer periods and in locals where the infrastructure is precarious for the development of other cultivars. In this way, in dealing with regions with development difficulties for other agricultural types, marked by poverty, but with a significant number of families, illicit cultivation allows the development of an illicit economy and the creation of institutionalized relations of the actors around the illegal

economy (UNODC, 2014). Despite these shared characteristics of the development of illicit cultivation, generally in diverse realities, cannabis plantations in the São Francisco Valley involved specific personalities forged in inter-subjective relations of social groups from the region. In this structure, a lack of public investment in agriculture, serious water problems, and an exclusionist economy based in industrial agriculture for fruit for exportation, with low social impact, predominated.

The repression of the illicit plantations and the role of the federal police

The increasing development of marijuana production, the formation of criminal networks, many migrants from other illicit activities with violent incursions which increased, mainly at the end of the 1990's, the local homicide rates and other violent criminalities, led the Brazilian government to act more forcefully in initiatives which could significantly diminish the problem. Beyond this, Brazil felt pressure from multilateral organizations to intensify the repression of drugs in the country.¹⁵ Before this period, however, still in the 1940's, the federal and state governments, mainly in the Brazilian Northeast, had already mobilized forces and studies aiming to diminish cannabis production. While still presenting at low levels, it already preoccupied authorities however, being viewed as a public health sanitation problem, demanding repressive measures. In 1946, a type of consortium was formed, constituted by state commissions from Bahia, Sergipe, and Alagoas, which nominated itself the Interstate Marijuana Agreement, and sought to implement collaborative measures to prevent and restrain practices tied to the use, sale, and cultivation of marijuana. The report from the meeting recognized the southern zone of São Francisco, in the states of Sergipe and Alagoas, as one of the biggest cannabis production regions in Brazil, together with Maranhão and Pará. Representatives from the civil police, the secretaries of education and health of each state, as well as representatives from the federal government, participated in the Agreement on that occasion.

At the end of three meetings of the referred commission, 19 measures were suggested to be adopted in the three states. In relation to the repression of the plantations two points stand out: 1) Destruction of the marijuana plantations, excepting its production for medical and industrial ends; 2) small plantations, under the inspiration of the State Commissions of Oversight of Narcotics (SCON), with the aim of studying marijuana, from pharmacological, clinical, psychological, and sociological points of view. This meeting inspired, in the following year the National Commission of Oversight of Narcotics to establish norms that would be followed by all of the CEFE in relation to the eradication of marijuana ordiamba plantations, throughout the whole national territory, that is to say:

- a) The marijuana ordiamba plantations found in the national territory will be destroyed by police authorities, under the technical supervision of the Agriculture Ministry, requiring these authorities to give immediate notification to the National Commission of Oversight of Narcotics;
- b) In the case of there being no representatives from the Agriculture Ministry in the local where the plantation was encountered, the destruction could be undertaken by police authorities in conjunction with the sanitation authorities or by functionaries from the state agricultural services, with the technical capacity to proceed with the identification of the narcotic plant;
- c) Samples of the plantations destroyed or to be destroyed will be

taken by the authorities referred to in the anterior item, which will be sent to the closest state or federal establishment, where its botanical characterization can be carried out;

- d) The authorities who carry out the destruction of the marijuana are obliged to immediately send to the National Commission for the Oversight of Narcotics, a detailed report of their conduct, indicating the place, the report regarding the plant's classification, a sample of the plant appropriately authenticated, as well as other details referent to the case.

Brandão² observes that the creation of the SNFE was an initiative of doctors who dedicated themselves to combating *diam bismo* or *machonismo*, denominations attributed to habits of marijuana use. For these doctors, and other members of the sanitation agencies, and even for the police authorities of the time, drug addiction was viewed as an elegant habit, with the exception of marijuana use, which needed to be combated. Marijuana use was understood by sanitation and repressive agents as an addiction of the lower classes, resultant from the ignorance of this population, and, owing to this, restraining it was equally to preserve public health. The creation of the National Commission for the Oversight of Narcotics (NCON), in 1936, was the first effort to regulate conduct and seek to legalize transactions with drugs. The NCON, in this first stage, was directly subordinated to the Ministry for Exterior Relations. This connection should be understood as an initiative to bring Brazilian governmental norms and measures into line with those defined in the international sphere.

Police repression during this period was the domain of the state civil police and of the Federal District. Despite all the efforts of the NCON, the initiatives for the eradication of the plantations was sporadic, carried out mostly on small plantations. The caution and preoccupation of the authorities with addiction was disproportionate to its preponderance. What most called attention was the fact that, in the 1940's though there was a preoccupation with eradicating cannabis plantations, the sanitation and agricultural authorities had a say in the process and the question was dealt with in the public health sphere. The regional police acted under the coordination of the Agriculture Ministry in their eradication initiatives. This does not mean that repression was absent, but what oriented the eradication was not so much criminal questions as much as principals of public health care. Only in 60's and 70's, when marijuana use disseminated throughout the middle classes in the sphere of the counterculture of the epoch,¹⁶ did the eradications become somewhat more frequent, and under the supervision of the Federal Police. The problem begins to have a more deleterious treatment, in the expansion of the criminalization of habits typical of the Military Dictatorship installed in the country in 1964. In Brazil, starting from the 1980's, though the military police, an entity of a state character, could undertake repressive measures on illicit cultivations and commonly did act in this manner, owing to strategic questions and because frequently the areas of cultivation and the network of marijuana distribution included more than one state, the Federal Police operated more intensely in the restraint of the cultivation of cannabis.

The FP originated in 1944, through the federal government's Decree-Law 6.378, which altered the denomination of the old Civil Police of the Federal District to the Federal Department of Public Security (FDPS), in the era in which the federal capital was Rio de Janeiro. At the time, the new powers destined for the FDPS, centered more specifically on public security services, as well as on policing maritime, airport, and border security procedures. With the move of the federal capital to the city of Brasília, the entity incorporated other

police departments from the new city. In 1967, the institution changed its name, assuming the name that it maintains until today, with its expanded attribution of functions. The federal police in Brazil is a policing body subordinated to the Justice Ministry. Its main role is to act in the function of the judicial police of the Union. It possesses many functions such as investigating penal infractions against the political and social order or in detriment of goods, services, and interests of the Union or its autarchic entities and public enterprises. The FP acts, also in crimes and infractions whose practice has interstate or international repercussions and demands a coordinated approach. The institution exercises, equally, functions of policing maritime and airport borders, being responsible for the prevention and repression of drug and contraband trafficking. Finally, it acts in the regulation of private security, patrimony, control of chemical products, and of the National Arms System. It is present in all the units of the Federation and in the Federal District.

The FP, therefore, in recent decades, led the actions of repression of the cultivation of marijuana, in the context of the biggest investment of the Brazilian government in combating the production of marijuana and drug trafficking in the national territory. The preoccupation of the national and regional authorities was with interstate trafficking and the cultivation of marijuana.

The growth of cannabis plantations in the São Francisco River Region starting from the 1980's, led to a reaction from the Brazilian government that intensified the repression of the cultivation. If in the 1970's, the Federal Police already acted in a nonsystematic way, in the sense of arresting people who were involved in the production of marijuana, subsequently these measures would be more methodical and ordered. Described the serious violations of human rights in the 1970's that characterized these operations of localization and eradication of cannabis plantations with the intended for marijuana production. Brazil was under a military dictatorship and, beginning from the second half of the decade, the government began to direct more resources and a greater contingent of people to combating the use and trafficking of drugs in general, and more specifically illicit cultivation. The operations however, were on a small scale, representing isolated actions without overarching planning. These repressive initiatives generally took place when there were reports and, from there, the personnel was mobilized to arrest those involved and eradicate the plantations. In one of these actions, in the State of Maranhão, on the lands of the Guajajara Indians, police agents tortured Celestino Guajajara, which led the Indigenous Missionary Council (IMC) to denounce this act to the press and to the legal authorities during the epoch.

In the 1980's, operations of eradication proceeded along the same lines of action but began to be intensified and undertaken with greater frequency. In this period, beyond the growth in repression, one sees a denser growth of the plantations. In relation to the previous decade, the quantity of plants eradicated, of processed marijuana ready to be sold, and the quantities of seedlings apprehended, grew. It was not uncommon for 50 thousand seedlings or cannabis plants to be found¹⁵ in one single local of cultivation. Starting from the 1980's, despite the end of the authoritarian regime, there was no significant change in the *modus operandi* of the Federal Police in relation to eradication operations for the plantations and for the repression that continued to lead to operations contravening legal procedures. In research carried out into situations of people accused of participation in activities of illicit cannabis cultivation, it is notable that between 1974 and 1985 in two counties of the region, around 20% of the processes presented some type of irregularity such as illiterates who signed confessions, preventative prison without a legal basis, and allegations of confession under torture, amongst other problems.¹⁵

In the 1990's, the operations for the eradication of illicit cannabis plantations became more frequent in the Valley of São Francisco Region, taking on two more operations in only a few years. The production, which continued to grow, called the attention of the authorities, with the escalation of violence during the decade reaching alarming levels. In 1997, out of the ten cities with the highest levels of homicide for every one hundred thousand inhabitants in Brazil, three were from the Valley of São Francisco Region: Floresta (112.6/100,000), Belém do São Francisco (98.0/100,000), and Terra Talhada (86.4/100,000). The growth of violent occurrences had a direct relation with the organized crime of the plantations and the increase of production for drug trafficking sales. In this period, the gangs, which organized themselves around illegal cultivation, had a strong connection with the struggles of different families, which aggravated the situation. The other factor that drove the increase of homicides was the greater presence of heavy arms in the region such as rifles, and submachine guns.

The strategy of implementing the operations was to execute them close to harvest time, aiming to cause damage to those who financed the cultivation, with the aim of its not being possible to gain financing or to recuperate the investment, due to not collecting the harvest and not distributing the merchandise. The apex of the operations that took place in the Valley of São Francisco Region in the 1990's was the execution of operation Mandacaru. This action of eradication lasted 53 days, the longest up until that time, mobilizing a significant contingent of agents. The balance of the operation (Table 1) and its form of operationalization, however, generated liabilities for the federal government itself. The operation cost 7.5 million reais (around 3.8 million dollars in the era), an unprecedentedly high expense until that time for an operation of this type which mobilized 1500 agents from various repressive organizations of the Federal Government. The coordination of the operation was not the responsibility of the Federal Police, but of the National Antidrug Secretary (NADS). The NADS had been created by the Brazilian government during the leadership of the President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, as a consequence of pressure from the Organization of the American States, and as a result of the Brazilian adhesion to the Directive principals of the Reduction of Demand for Drugs.¹⁷ The creation of the NADS represented, therefore, a political strategy by the Brazilian government to show to the international community a posture of repression for the use, production, and trafficking of drugs as a government priority.

Table 1 Numbers of Operation Mandacaru

eradicated marijuana plants	544.424
plantations located	255
seedbeds destroyed	294
seedlings destroyed	223.598
marijuana seized	612,3 kg
flagrante arrest.	188
arrests warrant	16
inspected vehicles	109.475
seized vehicles	155
repossessed vehicles	9
people dragged	242.054
firearms seized	257
Other weapons seized	105

Source: Institutional Security Office of the Presidency of Republic.

The change of the coordination of Operation Mandacaru to the NADS generated protests from the FP which alleged that with a more efficient use of resources, 85 thousand reais (44 thousand dollars), the agency had eradicated more individual plants and been able to mobilize fewer agents, in previous repressive operations. The NADS alleged, in the era, that the reaction of the FP occurred because the institution manipulated resources with their origin in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) of the USA, given directly to the FP to help combat trafficking. The money, beyond helping to buy equipment was distributed amongst the police. In Operation Mandacaru it would not have access to this resource. The operation intended on passing control of the defined measures of plantation eradication to the Government of Pernambuco. Despite the Federal Government having made the transfer of equipment and resources however, the FP continued in the leadership of the plantation eradication, a situation that continues up until today. The question put by the superintendence of the FP was that the NADS would not have the power of the police and that the coordination of the eradication actions by the secretary would be unconstitutional. The controversy led to the fall of Justice Ministers, realized, in the last instance by a decree signed by the President of the Republic changing the attributions of the NADS.

In the years to come, the NADS lost its police like character, from the coordination and actions of direct eradication of illicit plantations. In 2011, it was made part of the structure of the Justice Ministry. In the sphere of its competence, its principal objectives changed to become the proposal and consolidation of the National Drug Policy, acting, also, in support of the actions of a prevention of the use of drugs. In the last decade, under the coordination of the FP, eradication operations for illicit cultivation began to occur around 4 times a year, seeking to coincide with harvest times, and being initiated by the Federal Police delegacy in the city of Salgueiro, in the region. The implementation of this equipment was determined in the epoch of the Operation Mandacaru. The idea was that the coordination of the operation would not be centralized in Brasília, but rather in nearby the plantations. This period was characterized by the breaking up of important gangs through the intensification of these measures, which began to encounter increasingly more plantations with a reduced quantity of cannabis plants, but with a greater number of cultivars. According to the report of the police officer who worked sometime in the repression of cannabis cultivation in the region, the increase in the eradication of illegal plantations in recent years, coordinated through the use of technological resources such as the use of satellites for the identification of farms, provoked the concentration of production on the islands of the São Francisco River. It occurred principally between the cities of Santa Maria da Boa Vista, and Cabrobó, modifying production on “continental” land, that is to say, land along the river. In other words, at the time, production on the “continent” was broken up and in place of large plantations smaller plantations came into existence, in an attempt to impede the localization of cultivation. This has changed the configuration of the networks created for production and its expansion.

Today, few plantations are encountered on the continent. And another thing which is also interesting is that the farms diminished in size. They prefer to plant a small farm here, plant another smaller one there. It is difficult to find a plantation of forty thousand plants, which we had already considered to be a big farm. This year we only managed to find one big farm, of more than forty thousand plants. You asked me how the calculation is made. What happens generally is that in each hole, (we call them holes), they plant from 3 to 4 plants of marijuana, right? Previously we made the following calculation, 3 marijuana plants generates about 1 kilo of marijuana at the time. Today each plant will give 700 grams. Now, the size of the plant then

increased a lot. So, why did the size of the plant increase so much? Because they are using follicular stimulants, the fertilizers, right? So today each hole manages to produce more or less 3 kilos of marijuana, 2 and a half, to 3 kilos of marijuana.

Interviewer-that is to say, it increased the productivity, is that it?

Police officer-Exactly. So in this way, they diminished the quantity of plantations, but the productivity is either the same or perhaps greater. So the count is more or less done in this way.¹⁸ A consequence which could be observed in the interview is that this strategy, beyond moving the production off the “continent”, increased the participation of agriculturalists or poorer rural workers, also leading the families who planted in smaller quantities to be integrated into the productive process. Police officer-We observed that, every day more people became involved in the cultivation on the marijuana farms Interviewer-Increasingly more? Police officer-Always more, right? We don’t have any more big producers in the region. Interviewer-Sorry. Big cultivators you would call people who are like what? Police officer-It would be a clan, a family. Interviewer-Which were the first to get into this business, is that right? Police officer-Exactly. Interviewer-The first to work with the plantations in the region. Police Officer-So like this, today you will no longer find clans that are directed toward gigantic farms. We have a photo here in the station of a marijuana farm, where there was gunfire on one side of the farm. Those on the other side of the farm could not hear the gunfire. This marijuana plantation was that big, understand? Today you don’t encounter this anymore. You just don’t see it anymore.¹⁹

Between 2005 and 2014, a reduction in the quantity of plants eradicated could be seen (Table 2). This does not signify however that there was a stabilization lower down, since between 2012 and 2014, there was an almost 100% increase of plants eradicated. Logically, the quantity of plants eradicated would depend on a series of factors such as information obtained, the size of the plantation, the number of days of the operation, and the number of operations realized in a determined year. What is important to analyse in this process, is how, despite the breaking up of the groups which acted in a violent manner as occurred in the 1990’s, a consequence of the very eradication measures of the police was the involvement of more people in the production process which could lead to greater risk and to the vulnerability of people who had never previously had contact with criminal life.

Table 2 Cannabis plants destroyed in forced eradication of the Federal Police operations (2005-2014)

Year	Number of forced eradication operations	(cannabis plants million)
2005	2	1,822
2006	3	2,095
2007	1	0,131
2008	3	2,131
2009	4	1,652
2010	4	1,026
2011	3	0,847
2012	3	0,537
2013	3	0,719
2014	2	1,080

Source: Federal Operations.

Final considerations

Brazil is not considered a big producer of illegal narcotic substances. In the national territory, the only plants that are cultivated on a large scale seeking to supply the internal market is cannabis. Directed, specifically to overcome local marijuana demand, Brazilian production supplies only around 30% of the market. The repressive measures undertaken for the eradication of the plantations only gained greater scope starting from the 1990's, despite the legislation of the country determining action since the 1940's. There was only greater preoccupation from the authorities, owing to greater international pressure to intensify national production. However, only with the entry of the Federal Police, as the principal organization for combating the practice, with greater resources and planning, could more specific intelligence strategies be undertaken. The result of two decades of more intensified repression was the breaking up of local gangs, significantly reducing the big plantations and diminishing greatly the homicide rates in the regions of larger plantations. However, there are indications of a migration of plantations to other states outside the Valley of São Francisco Region such as Piauí and Pará; an increase in productivity with the utilization of chemical fertilizers to accelerate the growth of the plant and escape from the repression which directed itself against natural maturation and; greater involvement of smaller farmers in greater numbers than before, by the fact that production had broken itself into smaller sizes.

The Brazilian government has not been able to offer income and cultivation alternatives for a large part of the farmers from a region beset by extensive draught periods. In this way, the merely repressive strategy produces the potential for new illicit plantations in other areas and does not eradicate illegal cultivation. Beyond a revision of the drug laws proposing new forms of dealing with these plantations, the federal government needs to more intensely support small farmers who see in the cultivation of cannabis an option for a better life.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares there are no conflicts of interest.

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