

Moral Networks: A Sociological Study on Illicit Self-Cultivation of *Cannabis* for Psychoactive use in Brazil

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Abstract: The use of psychoactive drugs is a social practice commonly observed in all societies. This article aims to present the moral grammar of actors who grow marijuana for their own use in Brazil. This study employed a qualitative methodology based on direct observation and semi-structured interviews. Regarding research ethics, all institutional principles were considered, like obtaining informed consent and guaranteeing the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of information. We found that these actors establish a *sui generis* morality through their practices. From this perspective, it can be conjectured that this network of actors who grow their own marijuana configures a specific moral grammar through the language devices they mobilize in response to the judgments, criticisms and moral accusations they face, whether formal or informal. Moreover, through the interviews, it was possible to verify how the relations of mutual assistance in this moral network of actors who grow their own marijuana are shaped by the actions, interactions, associations and moral aggregations among them. In this way, the relations of reciprocity and cooperation among these moral actors configure a kind of solidarity specific to this network. Therefore, the home cultivation of marijuana is analyzed as a legitimate moral feeling of liberation in relation to the formal and informal repressions faced by these actors.

Keywords: Cannabis, moral networks, self-cultivation, psychoactive, use, Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

The use of psychoactive drugs is a social practice commonly observed in all societies. The progressive prohibition of certain substances with psychoactive properties, notably throughout the 20th century, led to different strategies on the part of actors who used proscribed drugs to avoid legal punishments and social sanctions (Becker, 2008). In recent years, however, several countries and some US states have revised or relaxed their drug laws, decriminalizing the use of all drugs or regulating the growth and sale of *Cannabis* (Fraga & Carvalho, 2019). However, most countries continue to have laws restricting the planting and sale of drugs, including marijuana.

Cannabis, throughout the 20th century, has gained prominence as an illegal psychoactive substance whose consumption spreads with modern and urban consumption patterns (Fraga & Carvalho, 2019). In historical terms, the dissemination of production and consumption implied changes in the pattern of use, incorporating new populations and groups who were not previously consumers (Booth, 2005). Social networks and the internet helped make knowledge widely available and accelerated the learning process for new users (Bouchard & Dion, 2009; Potter *et al.*, 2015).

In many countries, the development of new moral conceptions and individual and associative practices has progressed domestic cultivation for individual consumption (Decorte, Retter & Bouchard, 2011). Bouchard (2007), in a study of illicit *Cannabis* cultivation in Quebec, revealed that outdoor cultivation was eradicated more frequently than domestic cultivation. However, the possibility of growers' legal detention was higher among those who cultivated *Cannabis* indoors. Another comparative study of domestic growers of marijuana for psychoactive and medicinal purposes in Belgium, Denmark and Finland revealed that, despite differences in legality and more or less repressive drug policies, as well as the risks involved in illegal activity in each of the countries studied, home growers did not intend to stop cultivation (Athey *et al.*, 2013).

Decorte (2010), in a pioneering study with domestic growers, argued that small-scale planting or domestic amateur cultivation already constituted a relevant segment of the *Cannabis* market, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and pointed to significant differences in the objectives of those who carried out this type of cultivation. The results of this study showed that many actors were motivated to start their gardening practices due to dissatisfaction with the marijuana they consumed, which they considered too strong and chemically enhanced, and that they wanted a softer, healthier and organic product.

In recent years, therefore, several studies (Hakkarainen *et al.*, 2015; Hough, 2003; Potter *et al.*,

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2015; Veríssimo, 2017) have analyzed the increase in home cultivation, whether for medicinal or psychoactive purposes (or both), with various analytical and methodological perspectives and in various social contexts (Hakkarainen *et al.*, 2017). Thus, knowledge about the networks of growers, the motivations for investing in the activity and the relationships established between legal and illegal *Cannabis* related activities is expanded. In this way, the present research intends, within the scope of studies on domestic growers, to investigate the main arguments and criticisms of social actors in Brazil who grow their own marijuana in their homes for psychoactive use.

METHODS

The present study used qualitative research to investigate how certain actors produce the world around them (Flick, 2018). An exploratory study (Gil, 1991) used direct observation and interactions to analyze collective actions (Jaccoud & Mayer, 2014), in order to provide an accurate account of the information gathered during fieldwork, which included both the subjects' arguments and conceptions and the researcher's inferences (Malinowski, 2013). This study focused on specific actors and their particularities, not on generalizations (Whyte, 2012). Nevertheless, this work is based on the perspective of symbolic interactionism proposed by Blumer (1986) to examine how these actors who grow their own marijuana attribute meaning to what they think and do.

The mapping took place through in-person and virtual fieldwork (Angrosino, 2007), lasting approximately ten months, including six months through social networks such as *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, which approached a netnography (Kozinets, 2012), and punctual visits to some actors to enter the field of research and generate trust. After this brief approach, one of the authors of this article resided in *Greenville*¹ for four months to conduct interactions, direct observations and qualitative interviews. In this city, five actors who cultivated *Cannabis* were initially mapped, and through them, we were introduced to many other actors through the snowball sampling technique, as this technique facilitates the study of actors who are difficult to access, especially when the research deals with delicate, private issues and requires knowledge of actors connected with each other through non-probabilistic reference chains

(Vinuto, 2016). However, only four more growers from the same network agreed to participate in the research by granting an interview, resulting in a total of nine interviewed actors.

The number of interviewees was smaller than previously expected and did not reach the exhaustion of the *snowball technique*. First, Veríssimo (2017) preliminarily verified that the number of actors who grow their own marijuana is very small compared to the number of those who only consume it, since planting, harvesting and consuming their own marijuana is not an easy job and only a few of those who try this practice are successful. Another reason for the small number of participants may be due to the fact that one of the actors who had been previously contacted and who had agreed to participate in the research was charged by the police. This presumably alarmed other actors previously interested in collaborating with the research by granting interviews.

Despite these difficulties, fieldwork through direct observation and interactions continued – at parties, “legalize” places (Veríssimo, 2017), bars, and other spaces – and finally won the trust of some actors who agreed to give interviews for the research. Regarding the interviews, we sought to make a sociology of the vocabularies of motives, that is, to analyze the reasons that were given to explain the meaning of actions, examining how a set of ways of talking about actions tries to make them acceptable (Werneck, 2013).

Of the nine actors interviewed, eight were men, and only one was a woman. These actors were between 20 and 50 years old, and all were university students, both undergraduate and graduate, belonging to the middle class and living in neighborhoods with good urban and transport structures in *Greenville*. Of this small group of nine respondents, three were experienced in cultivation, two were intermediate and four were beginners. The researchers attempted to reach a satisfactory saturation criterion in the actors' responses, that is, repetitions of the same answers with no new issues introduced. However, as previously mentioned, this saturation was not achieved. In this way, given the small number of actors who grow their own marijuana for psychoactive use compared to the large number of people who only consume it and do not plant it, we conjectured some generalizations based on the arguments that appeared most in the qualitative interviews.

Regarding research ethics, all institutional principles were considered. A close enough relationship was established with the actors that they could talk about

¹All names of actors and places will be fictitious names to address real places and actors and, in this way, protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the identities of the direct and indirect participants of this research.

sensitive topics (Flick, 2009). In addition, some basic principles for ethically sound research were taken into account: (1) obtaining informed consent; (2) not misleading the respondents; (3) guaranteeing the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of information; (4) ensuring the accuracy of the data and their interpretation, with no omission or fraud occurring in the collection and analysis of data; and (5) respecting the actors themselves (Flick, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The use of networks to characterize a wide variety of phenomena or objects is currently popular and widely used in common, academic and political language (Mercklé, 2004). To understand the actors who grow their own marijuana for psychoactive use, this study employs the concept of *moral networks*. "The network is a suitable image to describe the way in which one can link or enumerate disparate entities without making assumptions about levels or hierarchies" (Strathern, 1999). Here, a network is thought of as a Cartesian plane in which the map of associations between certain actors composes a social world, and these actors must be followed to describe their marks and tracks produced in this plane through the map of their associations (Latour, 2007). Individuals who share common ideas, interests, feelings or occupations not shared by the rest of the population may be attracted by their similarities, enter into relationships and form restricted associations within society, deriving specific moral lives from these associations (Durkheim, 2013). Consciously ignoring the controversies between the aforementioned authors, we think of moral networks in terms of several unlimited aggregates, as well as the peculiar movement of reassociation and reaggregation that permeates the relationship between formal and informal rules, cultivating moral actors and the *Cannabis* plant.

A morality can be learned through direct or indirect association with those who already hold this morality by a process known as differential association (Sutherland, 1940). Various actors can associate with each other and, from these particular moral associations, can develop various moralities. The moralities of these associations are not limited to individual interest, and associative interest develops moral systems capable of absolving reprehensible acts, as the limits between prohibited and permitted, as well as fair and unfair, are no longer fixed, thus undermining an unnecessarily discordant rule (Durkheim, 2013). In this way, the relationships that *Cannabis* growers form

with each other are configured by the close communion of ideas, feelings and interests, making them work together to live up to these feelings, even if this is in opposition to informal moralities or institutionalized formal moralities, such as the laws of the state.

Thus, moral networks are understood as social connections that interconnect actors who are involved in relationships of similar morality, and from these associations, specific and heterogeneous moral lives, that is, plural and distinct moralities, emerge across societies (Castro, 2019). In these networks, relationships are flexible and discrete, and various actors may or may not know or interact with each other, but the relationships they establish have a direct influence on these networks (Barnes, 1954). In this sense, the idea of a relationship characterizes specific configurations between two or more social actors that maintain connections marked by the same reason, logic, interest and feeling.

A moral network, or rather a specific morality, can be understood as a kind of social action, that is, an action whose meaning is attributed to and guided by the behavior of other individuals (Weber, 1978). Individual differentiation is a central element of human activity, and the most diverse impulses of individuals lead them to associate with one another. Association is the way in which these actors, due to their interests, develop together toward their achievements (Simmel, 2010). From these associations, restricted aggregations arise within societies, and specific moral lives emerge from them (Durkheim, 2013).

Brazil's legal responses to the crimes and penalties of the production of illicit drugs, especially when the crime is associated with so-called "drug trafficking", can be applicable in some cases of the home cultivation of *Cannabis*. Article 33 of Law 11,343 states that anyone who prepares, produces, manufactures, stores, transports, or carries drugs without authorization or in violation of legal or regulatory provisions may be penalized with imprisonment from five to fifteen years, in addition to the payment of a fine of 500 to 1,500 days, emphasizing that the same penalties are incurred by those who sow, cultivate or harvest plants that constitute raw material for the preparation of drugs (Brasil, 2006)².

²It is worth noting that Brazil (2019) changed Law No. 11,343, of 2006, to Law No. 13,840 of June 5, 2019, but the change did not bring significant changes to the previous law and only defined the conditions of care and treatment for users or drug addicts and deals with the financing of these policies.

However, what is considered a transgression of formal and informal principles today may anticipate a morality of tomorrow, as such actions have a direct relationship with the moral changes and the rights of the most different societies (Durkheim, 1982). Prostitutes, people with drug addictions, delinquents, criminals, gypsies, tramps, gigolos, lesbians and gay men, and beggars, among others, are thought to engage in a kind of collective denial of social order, as they are considered to lack morality (Goffman, 1986). However, it must be considered that living in a society, when faced with situational challenges, necessitates actions in certain situations to overcome certain obstacles (Werneck, 2013). Considering again the coexistence and intersection between aggregation, interaction and action, actors who practice moral transgressions, such as marijuana growers for psychoactive use, play a special role in their societies, as their practices and social actions are sources of new moralities and they provide an alternative model of moral living for those who hold to so-called normal morality, being able to evoke the sympathy or even the acceptance of some.

From this perspective, it is important to emphasize the similarities between the characteristics and natures of what is considered moral and immoral (Durkheim, 2022). In other words, it can be argued that acts punished as immoral are not different in nature than acts considered moral, since they are acts of the same kind and, therefore, acts considered immoral do not produce disaggregation, but a reaggregation; that is, they form a new moral aggregation around acts punished as immoral. Furthermore, an accusation of immorality is the result of a conflict, usually unequal and asymmetric, between different moralities (Magalhães, 1994). Therefore, applying the label of deviant, abnormal or criminal to actors who plant marijuana for their own consumption, in this perspective of symmetry, would be to accept the values of the moralities that formulated such judgments.

“Conflict will always be centrally a question of morals” (Werneck, 2012:35). The conflicts started by rule transgressors, in regard to the social order and its antithesis, give rise to political conflicts because politics is related to any intentional and strategic action that involves power, whether formal or informal, making certain actors meet their eventual accusers in a political conflict (Magalhães, 1994). Therefore, there is an intrinsic political aspect to the phenomenon of being able to plant one's own marijuana for psychoactive social use, and this aspect emerges from the conflicts

that are established in this relationship between imposition, subjection and transgression of formal and informal codes and from these moral dissidences. These actors use the formal and informal constraints they experience to configure a *sui generis moral life*, that is, a specific morality, different from actors who only consume marijuana and do not cultivate it.

In this sense, the issue of people growing marijuana for psychoactive use highlights a problem of public attention in Brazil (Brandão, 2014), especially the recognition of a new right, as it is a new moral force. As an example of the demand for a new right, the Marijuana March in Brazil can be seen as a collective action morally undertaken to reverse the stigma associated with the uses of the plant and with the marchers and to normalize their practices. (Brando, 2017). However, the regulation of the possession, cultivation and distribution of both commercial and noncommercial marijuana in Brazil remains a legal paradigm of harm reduction (Vidal, 2009).

RESULTS

As previously mentioned, one of the authors of this article spent four months in *Greenville* interacting with and contacting people who were home growers. Interviews were the most important sources of information. The first to be interviewed was John, who, after several interactions, both face-to-face and via social networks, was contacted on the day he indicated as favorable, and one of the authors went to his house for the first interview of this research. When asked about the beginning of his activities, John told us:

“It will be a year since I started to plant; I have harvested few plants. In addition, it doesn't make sense to buy, because there are two poles of illegality: If I'm buying, I'm participating in trafficking, so between staying in this or staying in the other illegality, which is planting, and getting out of this illegality that is trafficking, I prefer to plant”.

Considering two classic operators of social accountability, justification and excuse, justification is presented here as a linguistic device in response to the judgments, criticisms and moral accusations that this actor faces (Werneck, 2013). John knows exactly what he is doing and presents in his narrative the motivations of growing his own marijuana, which basically involves the objective of not resorting to illegal

trade to meet his demand for daily psychoactive *Cannabis* consumption.

Furthermore, John criticizes Brazilian drug law:

“The Brazilian drug law is already very old, it doesn't even meet the population demand, because we have a very large number of drug users, and I think the law is already outdated, because there is no purpose to prohibit something that has a lot of users, so you will only overcrowd the prison system and will not solve the problem. I think it makes no sense for you to forbid a plant to grow.”

For João, the formal rules do not make any sense, and he considers the law to be unfair in prohibiting and repressing the cultivation and psychoactive use of marijuana. In this sense, the law is a device that allows for discursive practices of transgression and, consequently, a counterpower, because in the processes of objectification, subjection and subjectivation, there is resistance against disciplinary power and biopolitics (Foucault, 2010).

Additionally, John talks about his relationships with other cultivators:

“When it gets into a vegetative state, I take it to the outdoors [outside the house], but always semi-in and semi-out, you know? Then, in the case of outdoors, third parties do the blossoming phase for me. So it turns out that my gain from the plant is always lower than if I had put it to flower here in the closet [indoor]. I always split my plants in half, I've never harvested a whole plant for myself. Sometimes a plant gives 30 grams and I only keep 15 grams of it, because half goes to the person who flowered it for me, because he also runs the same risks”.

Regarding mutual assistance relationships, it was possible to verify that there is a sharecropping system different from the one identified in Fraga's research (2006), in which the farmer planted *Cannabis*, the boss sold it and then they divided the money between them. In John's report, it was possible to see how a sharecropper system of dividing marijuana for personal consumption among these users-cultivators is configured. Some of these practices were also directly observed, especially between him, Ronald, Gilbert and

Joaquin. When John was asked if he knew more actors who cultivate and how he related to them, he explained:

That's why we meet people and growers. If we didn't know each other and identify ourselves, we wouldn't expand the network. In addition, we don't necessarily just exchange information, but sometimes we exchange plans, because many have to start, there are many people wanting to start, and I think these people need guidance if they are following the same behavior as I am.

Like a *sui generis* matrix of moral life, moral associations configure relationships of mutual assistance, since they allow common feelings, interests and ideas within societies to aggregate around a moral life and constitute a specific morality (Durkheim, 2013). The reciprocity of situated practices can generate solidarity, although there is not always consensus among the actors on the coherence of their social actions (Garfinkel, 2016). In this way, the moralities that are rejected by societies configure connections of interests between certain actors and create networks of mutual assistance between them, which constitutes an organization between the actors involved, since this is a normal characteristic of the common life between individuals involved in relations of moral similitudes.

The next interviewees were Ronald and Gilbert; they shared a farm where they lived together, and they also grew and shared their own marijuana between them. On the day of the interview, the atmosphere was tense, as they were concerned about participating in the research by granting an interview. We noticed that the presence of the audio recorder was an element that caused them great discomfort, as if the interview were the confession of an illegal activity, and this also occurred in other interviews. Gilbert argued:

“I think after a while smoking you realize, because of the experiences and living in a favorable place, that you want to try something natural, something that is real marijuana; it is not mixed with anything, it is not 'pressed'.³ Things are not added to it”.

³“Pressed” is how these actors call the form of marijuana compressed in a press, which usually comes from Paraguay and is sold illegally.

Ronald added:

"I think that when we first came into contact with marijuana planted at home, we were interested in planting it, and then you realize that it is a pure thing and I thought: 'I want to plant it there and not have to buy it in the hills or favelas.' But I'm really scared, because it depends a lot on the occasion. I've never sold drugs [said knocking on the table], I'll never sell drugs [continued banging the table], and that's my issue [beating his chest], that's my personal issue [tapping the table a few more times]. I don't have anything to show that I've sold it, so there's no way to prove anything I've ever sold. But I think that if they got here and if I had my plants, I would certainly be oppressed, they would take my plants, take me to the police station, file a report. After they knew my story, I would probably be released, but what about the inconvenience I would go through just to be planting inside my house and smoking my marijuana? I find it very heavy."

"Acting in the social, in this way, becomes facing situational challenges and competently using things of the world to account for actions/situations" (Werneck, 2013:707). Gilbert and Ronald present the argument of not getting involved with the illegal trade, but they are afraid of the Brazilian law. Concealing the cultivation of *Cannabis* itself appeared in all interviews as a self-preservation strategy, as these actors morally place themselves in conflict with formal and informal guidelines (Becker, 2008).

Furthermore, in the statements of these two interviewees, it was clear that they were motivated to cultivate marijuana after learning through their social networks that this type could be grown at home, which relates to the proposition of Becker (2008) in his study on how people become users of marijuana. However, they also made an effort to disassociate their images from that of a drug-dealer. This was evident when Ronald hit the table and his own chest, stating that he plants only for his own consumption and not for the illicit trade – he plants so he can avoid acquiring marijuana from the illegal trade.

Regarding reciprocal assistance in the practice of cultivation, Ronald explained: "I know some friends,

and we exchange information on how to better handle the plant. Certainly, knowledge has to be passed on." Gilbert, who lives with Ronald, added: "We exchange information to be able to plant and have a little better income." It can be seen in their speeches that sharing knowledge about cultivation is relevant for success in practice, and in this sense, it can be observed that cooperation is present in their relationships with other actors with the same moral conduct.

Joaquin's interview would have been at his home, but for convenience, the interview was held at the University of Greenville, as the class he had that day was canceled and he had free time. Therefore, we looked for an area with low levels of foot traffic because we did not want to be interrupted. Joaquin reported:

"I started planting when I came to *Greenville* in 2015, and it was bad to depend on trafficking, and the harm that it brings to other people, and farming is something that is linked only to me, to my use, and maybe to the people around me, who use it too, but I don't need to involve third parties in this process, so I decided to plant it because of that. Today I don't have a product that fully meets my needs, so I end up having to resort to 'pressed' to use daily. And the big disadvantage is this, the risk I run of being incarcerated. The legislation doesn't forgive us because we only have two or three plants, because justifying and proving that it's for our own consumption is a lot of work."

In this justification, there is an attempt to deny the pejorative qualification of an act because in this case, the criticized/accused considers that the criticism/accusation was made unfairly and based on some principle that does not correspond to the one he uses to make his action effective (Werneck, 2013), and this could be observed in all the interviews. In Joaquin's interview, the motivations that led him to plant his own marijuana are evident, including the same desire to not get involved with the illegal trade. The moral grammar of this network is constituted through a process of moral learning that leads, through different levels of tensions and conflicts with formal and informal rules, to conditions of trust in an underlying moral commitment so that collaborative social action is possible.

For actors to be accepted in a circle of moral reciprocity, trust is required, relevant and indispensable

(Garfinkel, 2016). Joaquin also replied that he interacts and relates with other actors who grow their own marijuana:

“Yes yes! I know! I even joke with people that we are starting something that we have in Uruguay, which are *Cannabis* clubs, that people get together to be able to plant for community and collective consumption. And here we have that kind of thing; a few other friends and I plant, and we know that everyone plants. So we exchange information, something that goes wrong with one and works with another, we cross this information on the use of the indoor grow, lighting time, ventilation, exchange of plant seedlings, etc. So we create a very collective system for exchanging information, seeds, and seedlings to help those who are willing to take the same risk. Because we think, ‘I am doing this,’ and we think, ‘I’m doing it too’. So we are together! And when I saw there are five or six that do; sometimes they live together, sometimes they don’t. So we kind of start [to] make a society there of people with the same purpose, right? Everyone running the same risk, but with the same intention of getting out of this idea of trafficking and being able to have their own sustenance through their own planting”.

It is important to point out that the risk intrinsic to the practice of growing marijuana also appears as a characteristic that can be seen as one of the sources of cohesion among these actors (Durkheim, 2013). Although this network of solidarity is constituted among a reserved group of actors, it is characterized by mutual trust and the sharing of common moral principles. On this topic, the next interviewee, Anthony, stated:

“Yes, we exchange information. Like this friend of mine that I mentioned earlier who is from my city, who planted and such. He planted in a very crude scheme, and he even made some materials for us to read and see everything he did. So we shared a lot of information. Then he stopped planting, stopped smoking, then I don’t exchange information anymore, but if I ask, he will know how to help me and will

answer. And here in Greenville, there are people who plant too, but I don’t think they keep talking about what they plant. But one or another person I know who plants, and we share information. But it’s still a very restricted thing, because nobody keeps talking about what plants and such. Then you see how illegality reflects on that, and if it wasn’t illegal everyone would talk, share information, share plant species, varieties, etc.”

James and Mary Jane were later interviewed. Arriving at their house, as soon as we entered, we came across a carless garage full of plants, including three *Cannabis* plants camouflaged among other plants. Mary Jane made us some coffee, and we went to the living room to have coffee and record our interview. These actors are also unable to sustain the daily use of marijuana through the cultivation itself and, therefore, still resort to illegal trade, which was evident when Mary Jane explained:

“We plant to smoke from time to time, because we don’t have a crop program to do all the stages of the plant and harvest all the time. We can’t do that; just like today, we have three pots, and when we harvest, they will be harvested at the same time, and even having others takes a while and we end up consuming the ‘pressed’. We can be arrested at any time just because we grow a plant and be sentenced and imprisoned with other people who kill, rape and I don’t know what, which doesn’t even compare, just because the country doesn’t allow planting”.

Actors in common relationships and situations who are doing things together or who have a practice in common have to coordinate their actions when they realize that something is wrong and that it has to change, expressing discontent and taking joint action to do so (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999). In this sense, Mary Jane reports how she establishes her relationships of reciprocity and cooperation with other actors connected in the moral networks of marijuana cultivation:

“I usually exchange information, even though I don’t have much knowledge about planting. So I ask more people I know, especially those who have been

planting for longer, and I have many friends in agronomy who understand a little more about the composition of soils and such, and they give some tips. But I have little knowledge about [the subject] and I'm always exchanging ideas; for anything that happens, we ask those who have more knowledge so we can orient ourselves”.

James added:

“I think that's it, the exchange of experiences and species, genetics. I remember that this was bigger, especially when I lived on a farm, when we had the indoor system there, we could use the clones a lot, and then there was a lot of change, because if you can make one clone, you don't even know which one will succeed, but if you make ten and give five of the same species, you don't need five plants of the same species. Sometimes you go and exchange clones with other people, or even seeds. So it's nice to see this issue, not only with us, but we see that this happens a lot, because when I was in Holland, I had tried a cultivar there that I think is very good, called Hawaiian Snow. It's a very good cultivar and we didn't have it here at the time I planted it with these people at the farm, and I came back here and we already had it, and I smoked with one person; it took a while, and everyone had a plant in the city who did not have one before. This happens because one person plants, the other goes and clones and passes it on to the other, who passes it on to the other, and when you go to see there is already a cultivar running throughout the city”.

Emmanuel is one of the few interviewees who is able to consume only the marijuana grown by him, and he argued:

“Often you have to go up a hill to look for it, get involved with things that transform the thing. I showed you the size of the space I use to grow my plants. What does that take away from here in my backyard? What risk is this offering to the society around me? If they have pots of plants

there, it makes life easier for me; it's been eight years since I got involved with drug trafficking, going up the hill, or going there with the guy, calling the other circle. I have the entire process here in my house. And then they say that you are the one who finances trafficking. It is ridiculous for a person to say that; what finances trafficking are laws that prohibit it and create this gap for there to be a parallel market for a product that you could be producing in your garden. Brazilian law is a very stupid law, because the same thing can happen to different people, and they can be treated very differently, so I think Brazilian law is ridiculous, and I think it needs to evolve urgently”.

In his notes, Emmanuel shows how the relationships of collaboration and mutual assistance take place through the exchange of information, plant genetics and other cultivation experiences:

“I think it's become popular nowadays; there are a lot of people doing it, much more than when I started. And it's cool nowadays because people exchange information, exchange plant genetics, exchange experiences and such. It's a lot easier these days to get access to that sort of thing, isn't it? If a person wants to start today, they always have a friend there that they already know, do or have done, so nowadays it is much easier”.

The conversation with Joseph was the most in-depth. When we started recording the interview, in less than two minutes he started to stutter, practically froze and could not even talk about the first question. Suddenly, he said, “Man, I'm afraid to record this interview and the police will come to my house because of it”. However, after we talked and even pointed out that he did not need to participate in the interview if he preferred, he calmed down and decided to continue the conversation. Regarding his relationships with other actors who also plant, he pointed out:

“Man, I know a lot of close friends, I have a circle of friends who plant too. And we exchange some information from time to time, and suddenly someone says that he produced a beautiful one. 'Give me a

green over there so I can smoke'. The relationship is an exchange of information, of shrimp, and that's it. Like, some are close friends, but I also know there are other people".

Here, competent agency appears as a moral agency that takes the form of a logical operator, competence, and from this practical agency, it can be seen that there are several languages of justification (Werneck, 2013). These languages constitute a grammar through a process of moral learning that passes through different levels of moral struggles and conflicts (Honneth, 1996). From this perspective, it can be conjectured that this network of actors who grow their own marijuana configures a specific moral grammar through the language devices they mobilize in response to the judgments, criticisms and moral accusations they face, whether formal or informal.

Additionally, although the argument that these actors intend to consume better quality and less unhealthy marijuana appears in all the interviews, referring to pressed marijuana originating from the illicit trade — that is compressed in a press and usually comes from Paraguay — the justification commonly mobilized in all the arguments is that of not acquiring marijuana from the illegal trade and, consequently, not financing it. This common grammar can be seen in all the interviews of this moral network of actors who grow their own marijuana: the attempt of these moral actors to detach their images from that of actors labeled drug dealers.

The pragmatics that seek to separate the image of the users-cultivators of their own marijuana from the traffickers can be analogous to the attempt at symbolic cleansing proposed by Machado da Silva (2008), which postulates the moral and symbolic separation that favela residents make of themselves from actors labeled traffickers, as the moral disapproval of the former in relation to the latter constitutes moral and symbolic boundaries, although the boundaries between what is considered moral and immoral are porous, tenuous and permeable (Telles & Hirata, 2007).

Fraga (2012), in a study developed with rural workers involved in extensive *Cannabis* plantations, also analyzed the narratives of growers who sought to differentiate their activities from those they classified as criminals, claiming to be working and not harming anyone, although they recognized the action as illegal. Therefore, the attempt at symbolic and moral cleansing

that permeates the grammar of this network seeks to separate its images from the actors labeled drug dealers. However, most are unable to meet their daily consumption with their plants, and the discourse that combines cultivation itself with the practice of not feeding the illegal trade and seeking better quality marijuana comes up against the production limits of users-cultivators who are unable to obtain their own supply, given the low production, and who resort to what they condemn: the illegal trade and pressed marijuana.

Nevertheless, through the interviews, it was possible to verify how the relations of mutual assistance in this moral network of actors who grow their own marijuana are shaped by the actions, interactions, associations and moral aggregations among them. In this way, the relations of reciprocity and cooperation among these moral actors configure a kind of solidarity specific to this network. The main objective of this collaboration is to offer assistance to each other and, mainly, to offer a guide to beginners, that is, a path for those who are willing to start in the same conduct considered illegal and immoral. Therefore, these actors form solidary relationships and awaken societies of friends through their moral networks, especially in their enthusiasm to help those who are willing to take the same risk when entering the practice of cultivating their own marijuana.

CONCLUSION

The transgressions of formal and informal rules characterize all societies, because while they form collective feelings to prevent any moral dissent, they are relevant to proposing new moralities and conditions for social changes, as well as demanding changes in norms, morals, rights and duties as institutionalized in laws. The home cultivation of *Cannabis*, or the green one, as it is categorized by the interlocutors of this research, presented itself as a source of change in morality. From this perspective, the generalizations made in this article concern only the small universe of actors observed and interviewed. However, we consider the possibility that they are also valid for all marijuana growers for recreational self-consumption in Brazil.

In the moral networks established by these actors, through the practice of planting their own marijuana, interests and moral feelings are awakened by the confluence of actions, interactions, associations and aggregations that they configure. From this

perspective, the meaning attributed to this practice is connected to other actors who already plant their own marijuana. When they come into contact for the first time with the bud, from their actions, interactions and associations, the volition to enter into the practice of growing their own marijuana is awakened. In addition, this practice presented itself as a moral feeling not only of conflict but also of liberation in relation to the formal and informal repressions that these actors face, and this makes them establish relationships, such as mutual assistance, reciprocity, cooperation and solidarity, from their associations in moral networks.

Their motivations, which permeate a specific moral grammar, are presented as foundations for these other social relationships, such as relationships of mutual assistance and cooperation, since all interviewees collaborate by exchanging knowledge, experience and information on how to deal with plants, including a lack of experience, successfully. Furthermore, in Vila Verde, these moral actors also exchange seeds, seedlings, clones, fertilizers, plant genetics and even the marijuana ready for fruition. This was evident in the interviews about the proliferation of plant genetics in Vila Verde among growers, especially about how it became popular and is increasingly accessible, as there is an increasing number of actors adhering to the practice of growing their own marijuana to avoid resorting to illegal trade.

These actors consider marijuana to be a normal plant, or rather, they consider it a plant like any other. As it is, for them, an innocuous practice, they establish a peculiar morality when growing their own marijuana, distinct even from those who only consume marijuana. There is an understanding that knowledge about growing marijuana for personal consumption must be passed on and disseminated to other actors with the same interests, feelings and ideas, especially inexperienced actors, so that they have a guide to start practicing and obtain success. Therefore, when these actors meet others who also grow their own marijuana, as well as friends who want to start growing, they identify with each other, gain mutual trust and are willing to help each other.

Thus, such entangled actors configure *sui generis* moral relations, as well as relations of solidarity, reciprocity and cooperation with the actors that are associated with their moral networks, building societies of friends from their differential associations, incidences and moral dissidences. Moral dissensions with formal and informal rules point to a demand for changes in

institutionalized law. Therefore, as significant changes occur in the rules structured in laws, especially in regard to the acceptance of new moralities, as in the legal changes on the psychoactive use of *Cannabis* in some federated entities in the US and in other countries, such as Uruguay, Canada and Israel, there are also changes in the moral networks of actors who find themselves under these constraints, as their moralities are accepted and recognized by the new legislation instituted, and their practices can eventually be considered normal by the society in which they live.

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