

Agricultural drug economies: cause or alternative to intra-state conflicts?

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Abstract Through case studies selected among the world's main drug-producer countries and regions (Afghanistan, Bolivia, Burma, Colombia, Morocco, Peru, and West Africa) this paper depicts the global scene in order to improve understanding of how agricultural illicit drug economies may foster the emergence of intra-state conflicts, help prolong intra-state conflicts or, conversely, prevent some crises. The paper thereby examines the complex connections between agricultural illicit drug production and intra-state conflict in the all-important context of underdevelopment and globalisation.

Because it is illegal, drug production may affect international security, above all through the armed violence it creates and the uses to which resulting profits are put (financing of armed groups and criminal organisations, and even – as has been recently though mostly erroneously claimed – terrorist organisations [4, 5]). However, it is important to avoid restricting the question of drug production to security issues, and instead to examine the phenomenon overall in an analysis encompassing everything from the causes of the recourse to an illegal drug economy to the effects of official responses.

Through case studies selected from the main regions of illegal agricultural drug production (Afghanistan, West Africa, Burma (Myanmar), Bolivia, Colombia, Morocco and Peru) this paper aims at improving our understanding of how such production might foster the emergence of conflicts, ease their prolongation or, conversely, prevent crises in certain situations. These three questions require examining the connections between the agricultural economy of illegal drugs and conflict in the all-important context of underdevelopment and of globalisation.

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The diversity of local drug economies

Many of the regions where cultivation of opium poppies, coca or cannabis takes place suffer from varying degrees of food-supply deficiency, and sometimes do not benefit (the Wa region in Burma), or no longer benefit (destruction of irrigation canals in Afghanistan), from irrigation techniques or the means to implement them. In Morocco's Rif Mountains, the tendency towards single-crop cultivation of cannabis, an economic "godsend" in this ecologically fragile region, has led to progressive abandonment of food-producing agriculture, with all the resulting adverse effects.

But besides these factors, which specifically relate to agricultural methods and systems, the recourse to an illegal drug economy is also encouraged by the special characteristics of drug markets at the local, national and international level. Farm-gate prices for opium, coca and cannabis are generally far higher than those of food crops (wheat, rice, barley, maize, yucca, yam, etc.) or even licit cash crops (cocoa, coffee, tea, bananas, sugar cane, citrus fruit, olives, etc.). At any rate, in the contexts of underdevelopment in which most regions find themselves, licit agricultural products rarely allow the inhabitants to be self-sufficient in food or, when needed, to buy foodstuff. Furthermore, unlike other agricultural crops opium and cannabis derivatives (marijuana and hashish) keep for a long time and can therefore be stored by farmers, for whom they often represent an essential form of savings.

In contrast, once harvested, coca leaves rapidly lose most of their active properties. Therefore they must be quickly sold off or transformed into "coca paste" (an intermediary product from which cocaine is then refined) by a simple chemical process, which in many cases has been carried out by the farmers themselves for the last 10 years or so. Thus, coca farmers are often more than just farmers: they are involved "one step further" in the illegal economy, and therefore are a little more dependent on it. Moreover, coca (unlike "paste" or cocaine) is not an illegal commodity in Bolivia and Peru because it also has legal and valued uses in Andean societies as a whole, while playing a central role in the culture of indigenous Quechua and Aymara people, to mention only the two main groups. As a commodity which is both legal and illegal, coca's ambiguity makes the question of its cultivation in Bolivia and Peru all the more intricate [28].

Opium, coca and cannabis, as high-value, sought-after products, are also a special case in that they allow many farmers access to credit – as in Afghanistan, for example, where the *salaam* system has opium being bought by negotiators a year or two in advance, or farmers being able to borrow on forecasts of future crops. Moreover, at global level, the illegal drug market, at least as far as heroin and cocaine are concerned, greatly benefits from yet another advantage which makes its perpetuation easier: the fact that while supply is elastic demand is not. As Becker and Murphy explain, "‘elasticity of demand’ is a term economists use to describe how sensitive consumers are to price. If consumers are more price-sensitive, this indicates that demand is elastic; if consumers are less price sensitive that suggests demand is inelastic" [1]. Drug supply is elastic because drug producers and markets are very price sensitive: when opium, coca, or cannabis production dries up in one country because of law enforcement, falling prices, or climatic vagaries, other sources of supply emerge (and vice versa). Drug demand is inelastic because drug consumers are not price sensitive: levels of drug consumption are not related to price. While forced eradication raises the price of drugs at the farm gate and ends up being an incentive for increased production, the drug war only slightly affects prices of consumed drugs as traffickers and dealers often alter the purity of heroin and cocaine instead of raising the price.

The varied and complex consequences of recourse to an illegal drug economy

The consequences of the recourse to an illegal drug economy are extremely varied and highly complex. For example, consequences on the environment and on human health are among the negative dimensions of such a recourse: fast degradation of forest cover (deforestation by lack of arable land, unsuitable or excessive slash and burn) and soil potential (soil erosion and depletion); ground and river pollution (by waste from chemicals used to produce heroin and cocaine); increased consumption of opium, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and hashish along with increased addiction rates and the spread of HIV/AIDS through intravenous injection in unsanitary conditions; and persecution of users. The public policies of forcible eradication by spraying chemical herbicides also have adverse effects on the health of people and livestock and on legal agricultural production. Generally speaking, spraying of this kind runs counter to basic environmental protection. Worse, if used, the biological defoliants (mycoherbicides) that are already being tested risk even more negative consequences.

From a socio-political point of view, the consequences of the recourse to an illegal drug economy are not less significant. In Afghanistan and Burma, for instance, opium, long the sinews of war, has become one of its main stakes, conditioning economic development to obtaining peace – and vice-versa [3]. In Bolivia, the serious social conflict between Indian coca producers in the tropical Andean foothills and the Creole government in La Paz supported by Washington, has taken on socio-economic, ethnic and geopolitical dimensions and is clearly not just an agro-economic issue. In Morocco, a history of contention between Riffian Berbers and the state has done much to encourage the latter to leave the farmers in peace and to tolerate the illegal cultivation of cannabis that is taking place in the Rif Mountains. By contrast, in West Africa it would appear that cannabis cultivation is a socio-political response by local elites to structural setbacks (especially exhaustion of forest reserves) affecting the main legal export agricultural products, cocoa and coffee [22]. In Morocco and in West Africa, cannabis production thus seems to contribute to the perpetuation of an economic, social, and political status quo.¹

In what conditions, then, and to what extent, does an illegal drug economy lead to perpetuation or prevention of conflict when economic development or the very survival of some sectors of the population is at stake? And what are the effects of agricultural production of illegal drugs depending upon whether producing countries are in conflict situations or not?

The role of opium in the transition from war economies to peace economies in Asia

War and drug production: how symbiotic a relationship?

In Asia, the internal peace of a number of countries has been affected, sometimes even conditioned, by the existence of illegal agricultural production and the ensuing illegal trade. However, through loss of politico-territorial control, conflicts in certain states has made possible and even encouraged the development of such agricultural production and trafficking. Significant systemic effects have long existed between guerrilla economies and

¹ In this paper, the term “status quo” is used to denote the absence of change, the permanence of a given, stable or unstable, political situation. We use the term “stability” to denote the absence of armed conflict or of major civil unrest.

civil war economies on the one hand, and the economies resulting from illegal activities on the other. War economies and drug economies have a long common history, in Asia and elsewhere [19].

In Burma, as in Afghanistan, the opium economy has been partly responsible for financing the war efforts of some of the opposing factions. But if opium has clearly been one of the sinews of war for Burmese and Afghan guerrillas, it often subsequently has become one of the stakes of war. Understandably, the strong synergies existing between civil war economies and drug economies have therefore weighed upon the two countries' potential for political and economic development. As well as allowing and even encouraging prolongation of conflict and making any resolution of crises all the more difficult, the conflict/drug "synergy" has also laid the foundations for criminalization of these countries' peace economies, so potentially compromising their internal peace and security.

Through these connections with the war economy, the opium economy has certainly had a destabilising effect in the recent histories of Afghanistan and Burma. But while the opium economy has surely helped perpetuate the Afghan and Burmese conflicts, it did not cause them, and the current politico-territorial and economic crises in the two countries do not result from it – at least, not directly. Nor did the opium economy simply finance some of the parties at war to a greater or lesser extent. It also enabled some of the two countries' farmers to survive as best as they could during long periods of economic depression.

State building and opium suppression

At present, both Afghanistan and Burma strive at making gradual and fragile transitions to peace economies and have to face up to the many legacies of their respective armed conflicts. For instance, both countries have to address opium production, major underdevelopment and extreme poverty, especially in rural areas. Despite considerable differences, the two countries do have a number of characteristics in common, two of which are of particular relevance here: opium production, and precarious and relative peace situations.

Being at the planning stage or currently underway, projects for accelerated suppression of the opium economy are the main common factor between the two countries and risk compromising the food security of producers and destabilising transitions to a peace economy.

In Afghanistan, where a fragile peace but a deteriorating security imply a gradual and difficult state reconstruction, and in Burma, where ceasefires between the junta and the rebel armies have multiplied over the last 10 years, the question is now whether or not their respective opium economies threaten to destabilise these early stages of transition. The question is further complicated since it is also necessary to determine whether solutions such as opium poppy eradication or abrupt prohibition of its cultivation might in themselves lead to economic, social and political violence.

In Afghanistan, the arduous installation of a democratic regime, however imperfect, is in contrast with the continuation, even reinforcement, of Burma's dictatorial military regime, which means taking a different view of the threat represented by the opium economy. In Afghanistan, the main threat is said by many, including the Afghan President Hamid Karzai, to reside in the opium economy, with its capacity for financing Taliban resistance and international insecurity – not to mention terrorism – as well as the state corruption that it engenders. In Burma, where local conflicts have continued since the country's independence in 1948, the main threat is more political and military in nature since the

long xenophobia and isolationism of the ruling junta could well threaten the ceasefires agreed with ethnic groups in outlying areas of the country. Deterioration of relations between the junta and the autonomist and powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA), for example, would in all likelihood have an impact on the fast process of opium suppression currently imposed by the UWSA in the border areas it controls and where most of Burma's opium was produced until recently [7].

However, both countries share more than just opium production as they face major pressure to suppress their respective opium economies using very similar means: whether from international organizations and donor countries, as in Afghanistan, or from the junta and certain autonomist groups, as in Burma. The opium economy is said to have been equivalent to 46% of Afghanistan's GDP in 2006, and therefore may well have contributed to one third of the overall Afghan economy, one of the world's poorest. In Afghanistan as well as in Burma, while all the rural poor do not systematically resort to opium production, it nonetheless constitutes one of the rare viable coping strategies of some of the poorest. Considering Afghanistan's highly and increasingly volatile context and Burma's fragile cease-fires and deepening economic and humanitarian crises, it is therefore all too possible that hastened and unbalanced opium suppression projects could constitute a grave risk of destabilisation – if not of the states themselves, at least of the construction of their peace economies [6]. Afghanistan is especially at risk, for people and government are still in the difficult process of recovering from over 20 years of war and complex and destructive partisan divisions, while endeavouring to recover from one of the world's worst economic situations.

The opium economy clearly fosters corruption in Afghan society at large and provides resources for parties opposed to state reconstruction. Above all, it seems to increase corruption in the central government and provincial authorities. However, opium cannot directly be blamed for corruption and opposition to state reconstruction. In the same way that the opium economy resulted from the Afghan conflicts, it is now perpetuated by the country's extreme underdevelopment, and as such it is a consequence of Afghanistan's political and economic crisis. Therefore, if there is a challenge to be faced up to in Afghanistan, in addition to sustaining peace, it is economic development.

Risks of forcible eradication without economic compensation

While being far more serious in terms of national, regional, and international security threats, the risks faced by Afghanistan are similar to those created by the recent opium suppression experienced in Burma even if the two situations bear significant differences. On the one hand, in Burma the issue is not state-building but the illegitimacy, and therefore the fragility, of the state already in place. On the other hand, the ruling junta has for years tacitly authorized certain autonomous ethnic groups, sometimes heavily militarized (UWSA), to resort to the production and trafficking of opiates in order to be able to agree on and maintain ceasefires with them. It is common knowledge that, in Burma, opium has long played a major role in strategic negotiations. On that ground, during the very last years the significant reduction in production, against the background of the junta's inner crisis, represents a serious risk of economic, social and political instability, since the inadequately or insufficiently prepared opium suppression programmes were not supported by sufficient development programmes that offered alternative revenue for the targeted farmers.

In Burma, the food crisis that has already struck the Kokang region and that now threatens the Wa region stems directly from the ban on opium production proclaimed by the local ethnic groups and their armies (MNDAA and UWSA, respectively). Even though the

Wa Central Committee has planned for the ban since 1990 and has implemented three 5-year development plans that have somewhat improved health, education, infrastructure and agricultural enterprises [21], hundreds of thousands continue to lack the means to make up for the money and food deficits that the ban has caused. The geographical and political isolation of the Kokang and the Wa regions, worsened by Burma's international pariah status, has led to there being very little early international intervention to offset the dual deficit now bound to occur: structural deficit in rice and lack of money to buy rice, with no obvious way out [6].

Within such contexts, abruptly implemented programmes that do not show much concern for economics are a security threat, since they may generate economic, social and, a fortiori, political trouble. Opium production in Afghanistan and Burma is clearly no longer primarily an issue of military security but rather a question of food security, and therefore an economic and political problem.

The history of the 'war on drugs' in Asia and Latin America clearly shows – as highlighted by one of the latest World Bank reports on Afghanistan [38] – that the banning and eradication of opium poppies are counterproductive if they are not preceded by implementation of development programmes leading to substitution of one economy for another and certain ways of life for others [17].

Thirty years of reduction in opium production in Thailand illustrate to a certain extent that sustainable success can be achieved in this field. Even though the Thailand results may not be perfect and lend themselves – as do some of the methods and means deployed – to controversy, it has to be admitted that large-scale commercial opium production has been suppressed in a sustainable manner in the kingdom. This success is largely due to the fact that, since the beginning of the implementation of poppy growing suppression programmes, the king of Thailand made crop substitution and integrated development of the country's highlands a prerequisite to any forcible eradication. Initial introduction of crop substitution in opium producer areas took place in the early 1970s, before rural integrated development projects took over in the 1980s, to be followed by participatory alternative development in the 1990s. Each phase provided lessons to be learnt concerning errors previously made, so helping to correct adverse effects. It is worth mentioning that it was only in 1984 that the Thai authorities started to resort to forcible eradication, once the development programmes and projects were largely underway [26].

The case of Thailand, like that of Pakistan – where production was also virtually suppressed, but under different conditions – has therefore shown that suppression of illegal opium production can be achieved in a sustainable manner if the most appropriate and logical development measures are implemented some years before law enforcement is applied. Both examples also show that sustainable suppression of illegal crops takes time and requires forced eradication only as a last resort, once economic development has taken place and law enforcement is needed. This, however, was a lesson evidently not learnt in Burma and in Laos where accelerated suppression of opium production over the last few years put many opium farmers in a situation of great hardship.

Results in Thailand and Pakistan were in any case only relatively successful, since the falls in their respective opium production were compensated for, regionally and worldwide, by increased production on the territory of some of their direct neighbours, Afghanistan and Burma especially. Although known and foreseeable, this "balloon effect" phenomenon is never taken into consideration at the design and implementation stages of programmes for reduction in illegal agricultural drug production and is often yet another adverse effect added to those caused by hastened suppression. In addition to causing serious food insecurity for drug-producing people, forcible suppression of such farming activities causes systematic

hikes in opium farm-gate prices, making production all the more attractive. Moreover, in phases of transition from a war to peace economy, abrupt suppression and eradication without economic consideration sow the seeds of potentially violent social unrest.

Worse, eradication without compensation also creates a number of other risks with multiple adverse effects: expansion of predatory economies, especially trafficking in human beings, prostitution, illegal trading of timber, protected species, antiques, weapons and contraband. It is therefore potentially destabilising, while rarely enabling targeted crops to be permanently suppressed or curbed, and does not address the economic causes behind the resort to illegal drug production in the first place. On the contrary, it makes these causes more acute since it increases the poverty and underdevelopment of drug-producing countries and peoples, which are already amongst the world's poorest.

Cannabis in Africa: an alternative to development?

Necessary production that is more economic than strategic

Although cannabis appears to be very widely cultivated in Africa, the poorest continent in the world with a post-colonial history marked by a succession of armed conflicts, knowledge of the cannabis economy is at best fragmented. A study by United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) states, "There is little reliable information on the extent of cannabis cultivation. Though cannabis is the most widely abused illicit drug, actual knowledge of the extent of production is much more limited than for other narcotic plants" [29]. The widest gaps in knowledge probably concern the African situation, as there are very few field studies on cannabis production south of the Sahara. In world literature, opium poppy production and coca production are the subjects of more frequent and in-depth studies than cannabis: so much so that Asia and South America are the focus of all the attention of anti-drug organisations and alternative development projects of aid agencies.

Nevertheless, cannabis production in Africa may provocatively yet adequately be thought of as a possible "alternative to development," where the cannabis economy enables many African farmers to make up for the underdevelopment that they have been faced with for several decades. The cannabis economy would thus contribute to maintaining a certain level of stability. At least, it helps guarantee a socio-economic status quo in many places. Based on the few studies available, it may be estimated that illegal cannabis production in sub-Saharan Africa has boomed over the last 25 years, due to the implementation of structural adjustment programmes.

This increase may be explained – at least in part – by the deterioration of national economic situations and the eruption of armed conflicts, since falling living standards and war stimulate both demand and supply of cannabis in Africa south of the Sahara. A significant proportion of the African population views marijuana as a stimulant that helps to increase performance and endurance at work or to "get courage" in dangerous situations. As a result of this "utilitarian" social representation of cannabis, it is highly likely that the number of cannabis consumers and the amounts of cannabis consumed have strongly increased in Africa since the 1980s, when the continent entered a series of crises leading to a considerable hardening of living conditions. The survival strategies implemented by Africans have frequently implied increasing individual workloads, and it is probable that many people have resorted to the "utilitarian" effects of marijuana in order to cope with the extra efforts required to survive, especially since retail prices for marijuana are generally low (For details, see [14–16]).

Starting in the late 1980s and well into the 1990s, another phenomenon has stimulated the demand for cannabis in Africa – war. Although, as far as is known there are no studies on the subject, there is little doubt that cannabis use is extremely widespread among African fighters, most of whom are young males and child soldiers. The mushrooming of violent conflicts in Africa has led to more African fighters using cannabis in search of its “utilitarian” effects on courage and endurance.

In addition to increased domestic demand for marijuana, other factors have contributed to an expansion of the agricultural production of cannabis south of the Sahara. The fall in prices of licit agricultural raw materials on world markets, the deregulation implemented in many sectors, especially agriculture, and ecological setbacks have often resulted in a very sharp drop in the revenue of many players in the agricultural as well as the trade and transport sectors. State coffers, and the civil servants that informally “tax” economic activities, have also suffered a loss of income due to the crisis of agriculture.

Because cannabis can adapt to a wide range of environmental settings, even to degraded or naturally poor quality soil, it may be grown on lands unsuitable for other crops. Given this “performance,” it may be integrated into agricultural production systems practically regardless of the agro and economic criteria normally governing them, namely access to land, capital and workforce. This means that cannabis cultivation is accessible to a wide range of farmers and, under present conditions, it seems to be imposing itself as an alternative crop of prime importance in West Africa as well as in Central Africa and Southern Africa [22].

Generally speaking, cannabis production in Africa is more of an economic necessity than a strategic one since little revenue from cannabis is used for financing armed conflicts, unlike opium in Afghanistan and Burma, and coca in present-day Colombia. Cannabis certainly has a role in African conflicts, but probably less as a financial resource than as a stimulant for individual fighters ([23], especially pp. 132–135). It seems clear that development of cannabis cultivation in sub-Saharan Africa is more a consequence of the continent’s economic, political and ecological problems than one of its causes.

Cannabis in the Moroccan Rif: limits of a status quo

Whether cannabis production can be a factor of prevention of armed conflict is also at issue in North Africa, precisely in Morocco, where the first United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) survey was conducted in 2003 in the northern Rif Mountains [30]. UNODC confirmed the long-suspected extent of cannabis cultivation in Morocco, estimating that at least 130,000 hectares of cannabis were under cultivation in 2003 – the same surface dedicated to opium poppies in Afghanistan in 2004. The issue of the role and place of cannabis within the Moroccan context can therefore be raised in terms very similar to sub-Saharan Africa: how do cannabis crops presently guarantee stability and what are the economic and social consequences of the likely forthcoming failure of this system [8].

The Rif is not only a region of intense cannabis cultivation but also one of the poorest in Morocco, with population density three times higher than in the rest of the country and one of the highest demographic growths. Within such a context, where natural conditions make it difficult for its largely rural population to produce sufficient food and cash crops, the cannabis economy can subsidise basic needs. As the region’s economic development has never featured among the Moroccan state’s priorities, cannabis production has progressively become the region’s main economic activity – 75% of the villages, totalling 96,000 families or 800,000 people, resort to it. Cannabis has clearly kept the population within the region while mitigating economic and political resentment.

Morocco is now highly likely to be the world's main source of hashish, which is largely exported to the European consumer market. The Rif economy and therefore the socio-economic and political stability of the region depend on this production – a fact that poses a major problem for both the Moroccan state and the European Union, since hashish production and consumption are illegal in Morocco and in the countries of European Union (EU).

Following the publication of the first United Nations survey on cannabis in Morocco, the Moroccan state, which has long condoned cannabis production in order to make up for its inability and lack of political will to promote Rifian development, can no longer ignore the region's economic and social problems. Likewise, the EU and its members will now have to act on a massive problem, which it is hard to believe that they had hitherto been unaware of. Moreover, overexploitation of the environment by a rapidly expanding population does indeed represent a grave risk of ecological crisis and eventually, within this largely agricultural context, of serious economic and social crisis. Increasingly confronted to hashish trafficking and international migration issues, the EU and its members now also have to address what has long been ignored.

The Moroccan state's tolerance of what is an illegal agricultural production partially stems from the region's cultural and political context, with past rebellions (1921–1926; 1954; 1984) of the Rif Berbers lending weight to their claim to the right to cultivate cannabis. Tolerance may also be explained by the potentially explosive outcome, in economic and social terms, of any effective prohibition of cannabis within the region and, by way of migration, across the Mediterranean Sea. Since the contraband economy and illegal migration, or *harraga*, already act as safety valves for the Rif region and Morocco at large, the economic shock provoked by the suppression of the cannabis economy would most likely increase south–north migration movements at a time when the toughening of European immigration policies has already spurred illegal migration and human smuggling, progressively turning Morocco from an emigration country to Africa's migration passage to Europe. Therefore, the agricultural cannabis economy not only significantly regulates employment in the Rif region, especially for young farmers, but also emigration flows to Europe. Driven by poverty, leaving the areas with no or little water and arable land, as well as villages subject to recurrent checks by the authorities, many farmers from the Rif region still have to migrate to other regions of Morocco in need of labour. In this overall context, cannabis, which can grow on otherwise unproductive land, and even on non-irrigated land, allows part of the population to stay in the region by affording them a living.

There is little doubt that cannabis cultivation has stabilised the economy of a region all but excluded from national development. However, the Rif remains faced with a fragile ecology, loss of traditional farming know-how and international pressure demanding elimination of drug plants in southern countries.

In all likelihood, Morocco will have to reduce cannabis crops in the Rif and find a viable and sustainable economic alternative, if not because this crop is illegal and the cause of increasing international pressure, then at least because the region's ecological–economic balance is threatened in the very short term. An increasing population, along with the divvying up of land-holdings that this entails, cannot cope with limited availability of arable land and its rapid and intense degradation. The complexity of the Rifian context in economic, social and ecological terms requires that the situation be promptly and reasonably managed with a view to development. The challenge of cannabis in the Rif is of sustainable economic development for one of the country's poorest regions, where socio-economic stability is under threat.

From Morocco to South Africa, it is the whole of Africa that is concerned by the cannabis economy and the alternative to development that it represents. Clearly stemming

from socio-economic inequalities and underdevelopment, the cannabis economy raises two significant issues on the African continent, one ecological and the other legal, that only appropriate political and economic measures can solve without large-scale economic crises resulting in major instability.

Coca in South America: palliative of underdevelopment and political lever

Legal and illegal production

Coca is not the only “drug plant” cultivated in South America, but it is the one that gives rise to the most numerous and acute questions in terms of conflict, given the scope and intensity of the political demands that it generates or helps channel. Neither cannabis, which is also produced on a very large scale in Brazil and Paraguay (and in smaller ways in other South American countries) nor even the opium poppy, which is grown in Colombia and Peru, occasion so much controversy and conflict, or lead to the expression of so many demands.

However, it must be stressed that, in terms of connections between coca economies and intra-state conflict, the three Andean countries – Bolivia, Colombia and Peru – although similar in some ways, currently diverge in two crucial aspects.

Firstly, fairly large quantities of coca leaves are produced quite legally in Bolivia and Peru, and their transformation (mostly into tea) and marketing are channelled through above-board producer associations and private firms (Bolivia) or a state monopoly (Peru). Despite the existence of a number of “bridges,” this legal production is historically, geographically and socially separated from production of “excess” leaves (so called because they exceed the quotas fixed by national legislation for licit uses), which government programmes seek to eradicate. In Colombia, a number of indigenous groups grow coca, using the leaves for themselves, and their activities are tolerated by the authorities. It is rarely referred to, but this traditional production does exist even if it is nothing compared to the total Colombian output of coca leaves (bridges also exist here). Supplying cocaine laboratories, most of the coca grown in Colombia and the “excess” coca grown in Bolivia and Peru is labelled “illegal” and targeted for eradication.

Secondly, only Colombia, by far the leading world producer of coca leaves, is presently the scene of an armed internal conflict, fuelled to a large extent by cocaine trafficking. Development of this conflict may affect illegal agricultural production, not only in Colombia but also, due to the aforementioned “balloon effect,” in Bolivia and Peru.

Coca as “frontier crop”

The causes and stakes of the conflict in Colombia, which will be reviewed below, refer to a problem common to all three countries: control of territory and the legal and illegal resources stemming from it. Peace in all three states has been affected by the existence of illegal coca production. This latter, however, has come about specifically in territories where states, although nominally sovereign, have been and still are effectively absent.

Furthermore, these outlying areas, once considered “virgin” (but in fact populated by indigenous people), on the eastern foothills of the Andes (and the plains lying beneath them) – the Amazonian slopes of the Cordillera, where coca has been cultivated for at least 2,000 years – were termed “agricultural frontiers” by the governments of the 1970s. Tens of thousands of internal migrants settled there in the 1980s and 1990s. In Colombia, these migrants were fleeing the violence raging around land rights in their home territories caused

by absence of agrarian reform in a context of highly concentrated land ownership and population growth. They found refuge in the Deep South Amazonian departments of Caquetá, Guaviare, Putumayo, Vaupés, and recently Nariño. In Peru, they hoped to escape the ravages of unemployment and galloping inflation resulting from the debt crisis, by settling in the Selva Alta (High Forest), where they sometimes fell victim to the Shining Path. Finally, in Bolivia the debt crisis and structural adjustment led to closure of tin mines, the country's main employer, and to mass migration to the Tropic of Cochabamba region, a.k.a. Chapare, of former miners become coca growers. To this date, the endemic poverty that has characterised many areas of rural Bolivia for decades continues to fuel migration to the Chapare.

The recent migration waves to these Amazon pioneer fronts were more or less encouraged by all three states, for which they acted as “safety valves”. A “surplus” population could be drained off, which the formal economy (and informal urban economy) could not (or no longer) integrate, and which would have most likely ended up by producing political trouble had it not been evacuated in this way, at least temporarily. It was a safety valve that the said states rapidly decided to forget about. The development infrastructure (roads, electricity, piped water, schools, dispensaries, etc.) promised by the governments rarely materialised, and the only practical living to be made in these areas was and is by growing illegal crops. Most of the time, the crop of choice has been coca, which is easily transported as “coca paste,” an intermediary product whose price pays for the producer's work and investment.

The pre-existence of economic underdevelopment in Bolivia and Peru, coupled with civil war in Colombia, goes a long way to explaining the expansion of coca cropping since the 1980s – an activity that prolongs both underdevelopment and armed conflict, but which is not the cause of either.

The US factor

This is not, however, the diagnosis which has prevailed in Andean governments and even less so in Washington, where illegal plantations are viewed as a major factor of Andean instability and a threat to the national security of Andean states and the USA. The Andean governments have subordinated their policies, especially on drugs, but often also in matters of economics and trade, to the wishes of the USA for 20 years at least. Such submission may doubtless be explained by the intransigent, even intimidating stance adopted by Washington. The USA would now consider that “a causal link (exists) between instability anywhere in the (western) hemisphere and a threat to USA security,” and proclaims itself ready to counter “non-territorialized threats coming from ‘hostile’ or ‘disruptive’ governments and regional political players” ([25], quoting [18]). American interests do not necessarily agree with those of all sectors of Andean societies. In particular, the free trade agreements that the USA has signed or hopes to sign with Andean countries may become factors of instability – if, for example, they lead to replacement of certain national agricultural products (grain, especially) by subsidised US imports².

² On 26 June 2006, the Peruvian parliament ratified the Free-Trade Treaty it signed with the USA in December 2005 in spite of the disagreement of trade unions and some Peruvian bosses, especially from the agricultural sector. Upon implementation, the treaty will “eliminate duties on 80% of US exports of consumer and industrial products to Peru. An additional 7% of US exports would receive duty-free treatment within five years and all remaining tariffs would be eliminated within ten years of implementation.” A similar free-trade treaty was signed by Colombia on February 6, 2006 and is at the ratification stage, see [12]. Officially, Bolivia is continuing (in January 2007) to negotiate a free-trade treaty with the U.S. in an attempt to obtain more favourable conditions than Peru and Colombia.

Programmes of forcible eradication of coca fields are underway in Colombia and Peru, while in Bolivia the suppression of “excess coca” is now effectuated in cooperation with coca growers under a policy officially known as “rationalization of coca crops”. The programme with the most immediate conflict potential is implemented in the south of Colombia, in the context of Plan Colombia and, after it came to an end in September 2005, its successor – Plan Patriota. It has come together with an unprecedented military and paramilitary³ offensive aimed at taking back territorial control from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla movement, which has launched a counter-offensive.

While the Colombian military by and large has succeeded in imposing its authority on areas where guerrillas once made the law, they have not altogether managed to set up meaningful forms of governance in them. With the military in place, the remainder of the state apparatus has failed to make itself felt in these remote areas. This is one of the bitterest lessons to be learned from Plan Colombia: while it is not too difficult to capture a territory once held by insurgents, governing it is another matter altogether. The latter requires mobilisation of non-military resources along with strong political will, two conditions that have been largely lacking here. The present Plan Patriota offensive is taking the same road (see [11]).

As a result, as far as the inhabitants of these areas are concerned, the state – which has historically been absent – is now present but only as one more armed group, and with no stronger legitimacy than the others. This same state is also responsible for destruction of coca plantations (read: the main source of revenue for the local population) by aerial spraying of herbicides that also often destroy food crops. Meanwhile, alternative development programmes, supposed to compensate for the disappearance of coca fields and its consequences, have turned out to be altogether insufficient. Aerial spraying, a measure inspired by the USA and put into effect by US companies under contract to the Pentagon, de-legitimises the Colombian state, since “rather than contribute to the strengthening of democracy and respect for human rights, these [aerial spraying] programs reflect an authoritarian stance and the undermining of national sovereignty through the open and unrestricted intervention of the USA in Colombia’s economic, social and political affairs” [25].

The ironical paradox of this situation is that loss of legitimacy and sovereignty is justified by a proclaimed need to restore good governance, stability and order. The paradoxical irony is that Plan Colombia and subsequent programmes have not succeeded in reducing the overall surface area under coca cultivation – quite the opposite. This surface area is increasing and plantations are now dispersed in much of Colombia’s territory, according to recent data⁴.

Criminalised peasantries get organised: the cocalero movements

Forcible eradication programmes undertaken in Peru and Bolivia have not officially resorted to use of chemical products with little-known effects. They have been implemented

³ On the paramilitary offensive in southern Colombia since 1999 and its consequences on coca and cocaine production, see [13].

⁴ The surface area under coca in Colombia expanded from 80,000 ha in 2004 to 86,000 ha in 2005 (or 8% more), even as the surface area sprayed with herbicide increased by 2% in 2005 (up from 136,500 ha in 2004 to 138,775 ha in 2005) and 31,285 ha of coca trees were uprooted manually in 2005 (2,589 ha in 2004). Coca was cultivated in 12 of Colombia’s 32 departments in 1999 compared with 23 departments in 2005, see [36], p. 6 and 7.

manually by military units and paramilitary police trained according to concepts coming directly from the USA, often with accompanying finance. Programmes implemented since the 1990s were followed by a reduction of the surface area under coca in the two countries (while it was expanding in Colombia), but there is nothing to suggest any reduction will be sustainable in the long term. Such uncertainty is largely due to the fact that reduction has been achieved at the price of multiple violent confrontations with increasingly well-organised coca growers.

In Bolivia, Aymara and Quechua growers of “legal” and “excess” coca, cashing in on a long experience of trade-unionism and corporatism inherited from the 1952 “revolution,” are particularly well organised and pugnacious. They have shown that they can resist eradication, by force if necessary, and that they can express their demands strongly although it may cost them their freedom and sometimes their lives [27]. In a context of major social, ethnic and political discontent and grave economic problems in the poorest country in South America, the Bolivian cocalers have been able to build a vast political coalition around themselves – Movement to Socialism (Movimiento al socialismo, MAS). MAS has won the general election of January 2006. Its leader, Evo Morales Aima, an Aymara, the head of the Chapare federation of coca growers’ unions, became the first Indian president of a country which had always been governed by white or mixed-race Creoles, although its population is largely Indian.

The MAS nationalist and pro-Indian political platform combines rejection of the “American empire” and its neo-liberal policies with the moulding of a modern indigenous identity. The symbol of this identity is none other than the coca leaf, cultivation of which Morales intends to legalise altogether while making it one of the components of his government’s economic and political strategy – “development with coca” (*desarrollo con coca*). This entails developing the manufacture of coca-based products, such as coca flour and tea, which could be exported abroad. The new president is dreaming of reforming the international drug legislation forbidding the trade in coca beyond Bolivian borders. In order to prevent coca leaves from being used to manufacture cocaine inside Bolivia, Morales wants to give control over agricultural production to the cocalers’ *sindicatos* (unions).

This is a risky strategy since the USA is opposed to the nationalist options of MAS and adamant against any change in international drug laws. Moreover, other geo-strategic factors may come to bear on the Bolivian–US conflict over coca. The nationalisation of Bolivian oil and gas implemented by Morales in May 2006, although it affects mainly European and Brazilian firms, was not welcomed in Washington, and neither is the diplomatic and economic rapprochement between La Paz, Havana and Caracas (Hugo Chavez’s “Bolivarianist” regime is disliked, to say the least, in Washington). Morales hopes that Cuba and Venezuela will be the first legal importers of Bolivian coca products, if he succeeds in legalising international trade in the “sacred leaf.”

In Peru, the 50,000 coca farmers of the Selva Alta still lag behind their Bolivian counterparts in matters of organisation, while seeking support and inspiration from them. Potential for violence exists especially here because many of these farmers were part of the *rondas campesinas*, rural militia set up by the Peruvian military to fight the Shining Path rebels during the 1990s. The cocalers therefore hold a tenacious grudge against a state that used to enlist their help against its Maoist enemy, but which now is eradicating their coca fields and imprisoning their union leaders. The roadblocks and demonstrations periodically organised to protest against eradication are occasions for them to remind the government that they have kept some of the weapons that the state distributed to their militias.

In Colombia, the cocalero movement that had taken shape in the southern Putumayo Department in the late 1990s no longer exists – another victim of a civil war that has been

especially cruel with workers' and peasants' organisations. The cocaleros could not impede the hijacking by the FARC of their movement and its demands, which were expressed especially strongly during mass demonstrations in 1999, and most of its leaders have now fled the region, been imprisoned by the authorities or murdered by the paramilitary [24]. At present, coca production in Colombia is almost entirely supervised (and taxed) by armed groups.

Rapid assessment of 25 years of “war on drugs” in Colombia

Twenty-five years and numerous fruitless eradication and alternative development programmes later, the total surface area planted with coca on Colombian pioneer fronts has seemingly never been larger and farmers living off them never more numerous. Conflict has not come to an end in Colombia, but redoubled its intensity. Colombia remains by far the leading world producer of coca leaves and cocaine. Its internal conflict has become a three-sided war, of which at least two sides – the rural guerrilla movements and the paramilitary forces combating them – finance themselves by “taxing” coca (and opium poppy) production and cocaine trafficking, where they are not purely and simply their organisers. Drug revenue continues to fuel a historically widespread corruption among police and armed forces (as in Bolivia and Peru).

Recent negotiations between paramilitary forces (i.e. the camp most heavily involved in drug trafficking) and the Uribe government have resulted in the adoption of a so-called “justice and peace” law, which seeks to demobilise extreme right-wing militia. At first sight, this process could mark the beginnings of transition from war economy to peace economy in regions of Colombia most affected by the conflict (including those in the south of the country where most coca is produced). But the law appears to ratify the *de facto* political power that paramilitary warlords have built up in many Colombian provinces, and to strengthen their economic power, which is mostly based on concentration of agrarian property and revenue, along with trafficking (including cocaine) and predation of natural and state resources. It must therefore be admitted that this newfound stability – which may not yet be called “peace” because the guerrillas have not disarmed – is built upon impunity granted to small authoritarian regional fiefdoms feeding off an economy based largely on trafficking and predation [10].

It is uncertain that such a form of “illegitimate stability” could be politically durable, as it silences but does nothing to resolve the claims and problems that are at the heart of the conflict. Likewise, it is doubtful that the model of “development” that it promotes – exploitation of trafficking rents and predation of natural resources in connection with the world market – is sustainable.

Toward a typology of the connections between drug production and intra-state conflict

The countries under study may be numbered among (some, indeed, are) the world's leading producers of agricultural raw materials (opium, coca and cannabis) used in the manufacture of the three families of illegal drugs of natural origin most consumed worldwide: heroin; cocaine and crack; and marijuana and hashish. Although very different from one another, all are among the poorest countries on the planet and hold a large rural population. Their respective governments are signatories to the major international agreements and treaties on drugs and as such are implementing – according to the means at their disposal – policies combating illegal production in their territories. In addition, they are beneficiaries of

bilateral and multilateral aid programmes for the training and equipment of their security forces for anti-drug operations. These countries therefore belong to a worldwide dual transnational network working both for and against illegal drugs: the markets for illegal goods and the military–security complex involved in their suppression.

However, the countries and regions under consideration may be differentiated by the armed conflicts they suffer or relative social peace they enjoy, these situations being diversely affected or prolonged by the recourse of a proportion of their peasantry to agricultural production of illegal drugs. It is clear that, from at least the 1980s, drugs have played crucial roles in these regions, which are marked by agricultural, social, economic and even identity crises that have led to or risk leading to violence or full-blown armed conflict.

But it is also quite clear that this resort to illicit crops has not had the same effects everywhere. In Afghanistan and Burma, opium, which became one of the major stakes in civil wars that it initially “only” contributed to support economically, presently poses the problem of the survival of poor sectors of the population faced with one of the consequences of peace – the suppression, at the risk of conflict, of economies that were largely imposed on them and on which they now have become dependent. It is the durability of coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia, and of cannabis in Morocco, and thus of the way of life of tens of thousands of families of farmers, that is at stake in conflicts where degrees of violence seem to depend at least partially upon the suppression strategies adopted (forcible and/or concerted eradication and alternative crops). In West Africa (as probably in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa), recourse to cannabis has emerged as an effective response to setbacks essentially to do with land (exhaustion of forest reserves) and environmental degradation (increased soil salinity, desertification, erosion due to human activity, etc.) that threaten a social peace largely bankrolled since independence by cash cropping for export.

In political, economic and even geopolitical terms, agricultural commodities like opium, coca and cannabis weigh heavy in the scales of local negotiation. In the absence of development, the fragile stability of Afghanistan depends to a large extent on resources and revenue from opium production.

A similar situation applies for coca in Bolivia, where a conflict between a new government catering for the interests of the cocaleros – “rationalization,” “development with coca” – and the USA – “eradication” – is a new configuration but one that remains conflictive. In Peru, the negotiations between groups of coca growers and the government of Alan García installed by the May 2006 general election have not made much headway, although it must be noted that the vote gave the hitherto criminalised cocaleros more legitimacy and strength by allowing two of their leaders to become members of parliament. They are presently promoting the adoption of a new Peruvian coca policy resembling Bolivia’s. Yet the outcome of Peru’s socio-political conflict over coca remains as difficult to forecast as ever [2].

In Burma, the ruling junta has long given tacit authorisation for production and marketing of opium by some of the rebel armies with which it has signed fragile and no more than temporary ceasefires. In Morocco, maintenance of economic and socio-political stability in the largely Berber region of the Rif is also partly due to state tolerance of cannabis cultivation there, which has expanded dramatically in recent years. Finally, in West Africa, cultivation of cannabis is cushioning the crisis, but by supporting licit cash cropping for export, which is experiencing severe problems.

Of course, illicit cash crops are usually far more profitable than local food crops (rice, wheat, barley, maize, potatoes, beans, yams, yucca, etc.) or even other possible, licit, cash

crops (saffron, rubber, tea, cocoa, coffee, fruit, palm, citrus, etc.), and it is tempting to explain that people resort to them simply due to economic considerations. But illicit cash crops proliferate above all in contexts of armed conflict (Afghanistan, Burma, Colombia) or social and political open or rampant crisis (sub-Saharan Africa, Bolivia, Morocco and Peru). They are not only and perhaps not mainly the result of economic problems, but instead thrive in political contexts marked by the use and consequences of force, and by complex and often transnational power struggles [9].

Through the interplay of a range of national and international parties and the configuration of power relations over territory and the illegal crops growing on it, and also because of illegal cropping itself, illegal drug economies have taken on truly geopolitical dimensions in such politically and territorially different contexts as those of Central and South-East Asia, Andean America, North Africa and West Africa. Thus, the multiple scenarios brought into play by recourse to a drug economy by parties caught up in these power struggles may lead to prolongation of conflict, generation of conflict situations or, contrarily, maintenance of relative social peace – all depending on context.

Yet the contexts and issues at stake in illegal drug economies in the countries at hand are not solely geopolitical, and their study requires taking other factors into account. While it is reasonable to assume that the emergence and development of illegal agricultural production on such a scale⁵ have been made possible by political–territorial conflict, it is clear that levels of development and environmental backgrounds are also determining factors. It follows that the issue of illegal drugs goes far beyond questions of security alone, or at least that they should be viewed as belonging in a wider concept of security that includes, in addition to the obvious health aspect, food security and what we call “environmental security”. These aspects are seldom taken into account, to say the least, in national and international drug policies.

The present overview would not be complete if it failed to mention the “war on drugs” initiated by the Nixon administration in the early 1970s, which affects and may even compromise social peace in the countries concerned. For the last 30 years, US policy has kept reduction of drug supplies in producer countries as the main objective of international anti-drug efforts. Eradication campaigns have been the order of the day across all five continents, whatever the context and despite counter-productive consequences and adverse effects.

Thirty years of “war” have accompanied an expansion of surface area planted in coca bushes and opium poppies and also, judging from the single example of Morocco, under cannabis cultivation. And despite a total estimated cost of US \$150 billion (this is the estimate of [20]), it has not only failed to reduce surface areas dedicated to drug crops and quantities produced, but also expanded and dispersed illegal agriculture worldwide, while doing much to contribute to the militarization of many areas of production.

⁵ In 2005: 25,400 ha in Bolivia; 48,200 ha in Peru; 63,400 ha in Burma; 104,000 ha in Afghanistan; and although this is less known and decried, 120,500 ha in Morocco (in 2004); these figures are from five distinct UNODC reports issued in 2005 and 2006 (see [31–37]).

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