DRUGS AS A SOCIAL CONTROL DEVICE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA AND CRACK IN THE BRAZILIAN PRESS

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ABSTRACT. Drugs are one of the predominant cultural archetypes in the daily life of urban societies, and their ubiquitous presence in almost all cultures. Historical records show a wide variability of substances that at one point were classified as the social danger of the time and at another time trivialized or typified as harmless. Thus, this study aimed to analyze how different psychoactive substances are constituted in the press as a social risk at different times. For this, we collected 4,227 articles of newspapers Folha da Manhã, Folha da Noite and Folha de São Paulo, that addressed issues related to alcohol (1920), marijuana (1930s to 1960) and crack (1980s to 2005) and performed a Thematic Content Analysis. The results indicate that the central defining characteristic of all drugs examined in the different historical moments is the social risk it has. The drug is constituted as a risk to users while establishing them as a figure of social threat. When referring a substance as a drug, senses are activated that denote to a situation of decadence and crime.

Keywords: Drugs; social representation; press.

A DROGA COMO DISPOSITIVO DE CONTROLE SOCIAL: UMA ANÁLISE DAS REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DO ÁLCOOL, MACONHA E CRACK NA IMPRENSA BRASILEIRA

RESUMO. As drogas se consolidam como um dos arquétipos culturais predominantes no cotidiano das sociedades urbanas, sendo sua presença ubíqua em praticamente todas as culturas. Os registros históricos apresentam ampla variabilidade de substâncias que em dado momento eram classificadas como o perigo social da época e que em outro se tornavam banalizadas ou tipificadas como inofensivas. Assim, esse estudo teve como objetivo analisar como dispositivo droga que se consolida em diferentes períodos históricos. Para isso, foram coletadas 4.227 matérias dos jornais Folha da Manhã, Folha da Noite e Folha de São Paulo, que abordassem questões relativas ao álcool (década de 1920), maconha (décadas de 1930 a 1960) e crack (década de 1980 a 2005) e realizada Análise Temática de Conteúdo. Os resultados permitem afirmar que a característica central que define todas as substâncias analisadas nos distintos momentos históricos é o risco social

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que ela apresenta. A droga se constitui como um risco aos usuários ao mesmo tempo que os institui enquanto uma figura de ameaça social. Ao se referenciar uma substância como uma droga, são ativados sentidos que remetem a um quadro de decadência e criminalidade.

Palavras-chave: Drogas; representação social; imprensa.

LAS DROGAS COMO DISPOSITIVO DE CONTROL SOCIAL: UN ANÁLISIS DE LAS REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DEL ALCOHOL, LA MARIHUANA Y EL CRACK EN LA PRENSA BRASILEÑA

RESUMEN. Las drogas se consolidan como uno de los arquetipos culturales predominantes en la vida cotidiana de las sociedades urbanas, y su presencia ubicua en prácticamente todas las culturas. Los registros históricos muestran una amplia variabilidad de sustancias que en un momento se clasificaron como el peligro social de la época y en otro momento se trivializaron o tipificaron como inofensivas. Así que este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar cómo diferentes sustancias psicoactivas se encuentran en la prensa como un riesgo social en diferentes momentos. Para ello, se recogieron 4.227 artículos del periódico Folha da Manhã, Folha da Noite y Folha de São Paulo, que abordasen temas relacionados con el alcohol (1920), marihuana (1930 a 1960) y el crack (1980 a 2005) y se realizó un Análisis Temático de Contenido. Los resultados muestran que la característica definitoria de todas las drogas examinadas en los diferentes momentos históricos es el riesgo social que presenta. La droga se constituye como un riesgo para los usuarios mientras los establece como una figura de amenaza social. Al hacer referencia a una sustancia como droga, se activan sentidos que conducen a un marco de decadencia y criminalidad.

Palabras clave: Drogas; representación social; prensa.

Introduction

Drugs are one of the predominant cultural archetypes in the daily life of urban societies, with ubiquitous presence in almost all cultures. The purpose of the uses differs, as does the meaning that this object acquires in the most diverse social contexts (Acioli Neto & Santos, 2015).

In this sense, all cultures sanction at least one substance that causes psychoactive changes and, invariably, prohibit others. Historical records show a wide range of substances that at a given moment were classified as the social danger of the time and which at another became trivialized or typified as harmless (Escohotado, 1996), as was the case with alcohol in the 1920s.

At that time, there was one of the first records of a prohibitive nature, resulting from the Temperance Movement, in the United States, which made the consumption of alcohol illegal. This substance was characterized as inherently and inevitably addictive (Reinarman & Levine, 1997), being related to urban violence and criminality, in addition to poverty and family disconnection (Levine, 1984), just like crack, nowadays. With that, a constitutional amendment banning alcohol was developed, the National Prohibition Act (Volstead Act), which had the expectation of eliminating social problems, emptying

prisons and asylums, reducing state expenses and guaranteeing prosperity. This ban was strongly influenced by the Temperance Movement, one of the most vigorous mass movements in the late nineteenth century in the United States. This movement blamed alcohol for the main social problems of the time and considered abstinence the only solution (Levine, 1984). Brazil, in that period, had regulatory mechanisms that reflected this method of treatment in the United States, based on the health laws in force.

In 1937, still in the USA, it was the turn of marijuana, by the Marijuana Tax Act. This federal law prohibited the consumption of this plant and was based on media constructions that presented causal determinism in acts of violence, exemplified by several crimes of homicide occurring in that period: it was the 'killer herb'. In Brazil, the ban took place in 1936, anticipated by several racist campaigns, which appealed to the African origin of marijuana, attributing a threat to the Brazilian race to its effects. With that, surveillance and control practices started to govern the way of dealing with the black population: any black person was considered suspect (Macrae & Simões, 2003). It is interesting to note that, in the United States, marijuana, known as a promoter of violence, started to be considered dangerous from the 1970s onwards because its users became apathetic, giving up their lives (Reinarman & Levine, 1997; Himmelstein, 1983).

These examples illustrate how over time some psychoactive substances were demarcated around some negative characteristics that make up the social object drug. When a substance is classified as a drug, senses related to social danger seem to be activated, constituting a threat to society.

Therefore, these discourses are related to the construction of stereotypes, which end up acting as tools of informal social control, necessary to legitimize formal social control, whose maximum expression in the field of drugs is the legal regulation. However, for them to be consolidated as modalities of social control, there is a need for legitimation processes, 'explanations' and justifications of the institutional order, conceiving their function of producing new meanings through other meanings already established in the social order, which are interceded by the mass media. Thus, these processes make such discourses objectively accessible and subjectively plausible to members of a culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). In this way, the media institutes realities, based on the disclosure of certain objects in a culturally shared matrix of meanings, which conform to regimes of truth (Foucault, 2010).

Media channels are built in a process of correlation of forces with various social fields (political, economic, cultural, religious), assuming the task of communicating about and to society about all these instances (Mari & Santana, 2018). More broadly, it can be indicated that the media has an omnipresent insertion in the scope of Brazilian society, penetrating all social spheres.

The information defined in the repertoire of a media vehicle is decided by the audience. It is the acceptance or rejection of the public that guides the content disseminated by the press. However, this does not mean that there is a purely neutral media action. It should be noted that the information disseminated by the media is not always impartial. The means of communication act as mechanisms for expansion and dissemination of measures that can be used to guarantee the maintenance of specific ways of being and acting, often corroborating the interests of media conglomerates and other productive sectors. Given these aspects, it can be said that the media not only reproduces events in society, but also seems to play an important role in the construction of realities (Moscovici, 2012).

These realities, therefore, acquire meaning, among others, through the production of social representations. In order to interpret, name and define the different aspects of

everyday reality, social representations are built, which allows decision-making and the possibility of taking a stand in this social universe. When constructed, representations start to compose a repertoire of meanings that subjects can use to understand and make sense of the world. In this way, social representation promotes the elaboration of an object by the community with the purpose of communicating and acting (Moscovici, 2012; Wagner, 1998).

An object is understood as any material, imaginary or symbolic entity that people name, assigning characteristics and values and, consequently, becoming able to talk about it, always being an object for a group, society or culture (Wagner, 1998). This object is involved with the values shared with others and which are materialized in belonging to a given culture.

In the current context, the issue of crack deserves to be highlighted, conceiving the controversy of the information disseminated by the media. These discourses often claim that every user becomes dependent or addicted, in addition to being a criminal (especially the poor) and that women end up prostituting themselves to support consumption. These symbolic productions have an effect with the ability to establish and/or maintain standards of morality around the drug user as a delinquent or as a patient (Romanini & Roso, 2013; Rodrigues, Conceição, & Iunes, 2015; Zanotto & Assis, 2017).

Nevertheless, despite this delimitation, the crack user is not restricted to this symbol. It should be noted that users with a controlled/functional consumption pattern are commonly identified in the most diverse contexts and socioeconomic classes, indicating a counterpoint to the hegemonic view of the individual nullified by crack (Acioli Neto & Santos, 2014, 2015; Henriques et al., 2016; Medeiros, Maciel, Sousa, & Vieira, 2015; ++Richwin & Celes, 2017).

The issue is presented as a problem of individual pathologies resulting from a malignant drug, diverting attention from the more general conditions in which most of the affected population lives (Macrae, 2013). The debate is restricted to specific phenomena, such as the use of crack among a portion of the population that lives on the fringes of society, without access to basic social goods. Located in a condition of poverty and vulnerability, this population layer is considered intolerable by society as a whole, which gives it a devalued and stigmatized social status (Acioli Neto & Santos, 2016).

Based on these aspects, the question is: what makes a substance an object of threat to society? How were alcohol and marijuana represented in other historical moments and what are their similarities? In this sense, this study aimed to analyze how the drug device is consolidated in different historical periods.

Method

This study is characterized as documentary research, more specifically, a comparative analysis of three newspapers, in different historical periods, on the topic of drugs. In total, 4,223 articles from the newspapers Folha da Manhã, Folha da Noite and Folha de São Paulo were selected, about alcohol, marijuana and crack.

Procedures

Data collection. The collection was carried out through the online database of Folha Acervo. For this, the following descriptors were used: alcohol (962 articles, throughout the 1920s); marijuana, cannabis, weed, hemp (1,760 articles, covering the 1930s to 1960s) and crack (1,501 articles, from 1985 to 2005). These epochs were selected from some outstanding events in each period. Alcohol, in the 1920s, was the object of government repression in the United States, and it is possible to observe the consequences of this policy in Brazil, which happens with marijuana, in the 1930s. Crack has been analyzed since its emergence in the Brazilian press (the first article on the drug dates from 1985) until the implementation of the National Policy on Drugs (2004), which instituted harm reduction as an adequate intervention for users, resulting in evident changes in the way marijuana is represented (reducing damage to crack).

Folha de São Paulo was selected because it is characterized as one of the newspapers with the widest circulation in Brazil. From the 1960s onwards, this media channel began to replace Folha da Manhã, Folha da Tarde and Folha da Noite. However, due to the unavailability of Folha da Tarde in the Folha Acervo, this newspaper was not included in the analysis.

Data analysis. After collection, articles were pre-analyzed, organized in a spreadsheet, and those in which the descriptor appeared but was not related to the theme 'drugs' (fuel alcohol, hemp fibers) were discarded. Thus, the selected documents were reduced to 196 relating to alcohol, 1,034 relating to marijuana and 315 relating to crack, totaling 1,545 articles.

In order to understand the meanings in the articles, a Thematic Content Analysis of the information obtained was carried out, which can be defined as a set of analysis techniques aimed at describing the contents immersed in the communications and which allows inferring knowledge related to the conditions of production and transmission of this knowledge, through the dismemberment of the text into categories, followed by a reclustering by analogies (Bardin, 2009).

These procedures were performed using the Atlas.ti software. This choice resulted from the possibilities of systematizing the analytical categories offered by the program. In addition, Atlas.ti has some advantages in relation to the techniques used in Content Analysis, such as annotations and comments resources, the elaboration of reports, memos, organization of data in tables and matrices, etc (Justicia, 2005).

It is important to highlight that the analyses performed in the software were manual, in the sense that there were no automated procedures for categorization or interpretation. Atlas.ti acted as an organizational tool, facilitating this process.

Results and Discussion

From the analysis of the selected articles, a categorization was carried out, in which the attributes that were common and that organized the newspapers' discourse about alcohol, marijuana and crack were highlighted. With that, we identified the existence of relatively stable elements that gave the sense of 'drug' to these social objects.

From this perspective, the central characteristic that defines all these 'drugs' analyzed in different historical moments is the risk-social control binomial they present. This risk is made up of three components: 1) users; 2) effects produced, whether social or organic; and

3) context of use, markedly evidenced by decadence. Thus, social control is justified by the risk that the drug offers and, at the same time, it gives meaning to such threats. There is a complementary relationship between these two elements of representation.

Social risk: threat, decay and contagion

The drug constitutes a risk to users at the same time that it institutes them as a figure of social threat. This subject is characterized by becoming violent, with their ethical competences lowered, becoming a social threat for being involved in criminal actions, such as robberies and murders, always resulting from the action of drugs. When consuming, the subject develops a relationship of dependence, a term that becomes more evident with crack, also appearing as drug addiction, disease or addiction, the latter being more typical in relation to marijuana and alcohol. The excerpt below illustrates this threat character.

> Completely altered by marijuana, José Bezerra da Silva (28 years old, single, Rua José de Almeida, 102) was arrested yesterday afternoon after a violent physical fight with crews of 3 patrol cars. The pot smoker who is suspected of having been the author of a homicide, was on the corner of Rua Solon and Rua dos Italianos, threatening several people with a knife (Folha de São Paulo, Primero caderno, 26/11/1963).

As can be seen, after nearly 30 years, similar arguments are now used to refer to crack:

> In São Mateus, most addicts are poor, but they have a home and family. Study and work. They enter marginality by acquiring the addiction. Boys from 9 to 17 years old drop out of school and disappear from home. They start robbing and stealing to buy drugs, and living together in small shacks. [...] Crack drives people to delinquency, in the same way that marijuana and cocaine have always done (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 25/05/1992).

It is possible to verify that this naturalization strategy (Romanini & Roso, 2012) is frequently developed in the media, when trying to associate drug use with situations of violence, simplifying a complex phenomenon that involves historical and structural issues. Thus, the responsibility is attributed to the social object drug, materializing a threat: "The relationship between crack and violence is naturalized, reinforcing relations of exclusion, that is, relations of domination" (Romanini & Roso, 2012, p. 91).

In the same perspective, in a research carried out by Rodrigues et al. (2015), the first social representation found for the drug was as a "scourge of society", which has its meaning elaborated from the scenario of "[…] violence, death and destruction that the drug leaves in its foundation" (Roddrigues et al., 2015, p. 120). Also, in the work of Souza and Oliveira (2009), the prevalence in the discourse of journalistic articles of the association between illicit drugs and violence in the state of Bahia is evidenced.

Thus, the dangerous character that the user acquires and the relationship of their threat with the effects that the drug produces is evident. By presenting the user as a violent patient, their actions are described as something that goes beyond the crime they committed, making them part of their behavior, a way of being. It is observed in these materials an unfolding of the elements in the same scene. Discourse is characterized by the double meaning it creates, making it possible to veil meanings around certain ambivalences (Foucault, 2010). The drug, therefore, is objectified as violence itself and, consequently, the user is presented in a stereotyped way as someone threatening.

In this way, the press plays an important role in the construction and reconstruction of stereotypes. In the process of creating and strengthening these stereotypes, the media

show a typical characteristic of a person and a group, extending it to other people in a community. With this, the subject who consumes the drug becomes, through discourse, the tangible expression of terror, oscillating between the victim and the executioner. One problem is demonized by hiding others (Olmo, 1990).

It is through controversy, social panic, that drugs establish themselves as an evil of society. They configure themselves, through the media discourse, with their epidemic, contagious character. It is the decadence of its users that stands out as a matter of public concern. This sensationalist narrative tends to incite panic, leaving users' vulnerability in the background and prioritizing questions of a personal nature to those who use drugs (Wurdig & Motta, 2014). The degeneration of the subject entails a risk to the social order. These aspects stand out in the articles below, regarding alcohol, marijuana and crack: three substances with very different pharmacological characteristics, but always treated in the same way, as a drug.

In the first article, alcohol, in the 1920s, presented as the 'greatest scourge of humanity', is compared to the plague, hunger and war and acquires the typification of causing more social damage than these events. In addition, it is defined as a drug that is directly involved in the practice of crimes and triggers madness and physical degradation in addicts.

> Next week will be dedicated to a campaign against the use of alcoholic beverages [...]. Alcoholism causes greater devastation than the three historical scourges, famine, pestilence and war: more than hunger, it devastates; more than war, it kills. It does even more than killing, it dishonors [...]. Of the incarcerated criminals, 4,300 committed the crime under the immediate influence of alcohol (Folha da Noite, 12/10/1928).

The second article alerts the population about the danger of contagion from the "plant that kills", describing marijuana because of the drug's toxicity and the threat that its effects produce to society. According to the article, the "devil's smoke" is beginning to spread in São Paulo, despite being widely used in the Northeast (where it originates) and Rio de Janeiro. Thus, its users can feel drunk in different ways, becoming "prostrate", excited or aggressive and dangerous. The "pot smokers" always end up in the asylum or sanatorium for tuberculosis patients and marijuana is described as more harmful than any other narcotic, such as cocaine or morphine (Folha da Noite, 12/05/1947).

Finally, one of the first articles about crack in the country: "it lands in Brazil, in a homemade version, the most seductive, potent and deadly drug of the end of the century". Described as 'criminal chemical', crack is presented as a cheap drug, extremely strong, with a very high power of destruction and dependence. Users practice compulsive consumption, a few months after trying the drug, they end up abandoning everything they have, breaking their social bonds and showing symptoms such as seizures, memory loss, paranoia, suicide, in addition to violent behavior. It is a 'bizarre ritual', typified by marginalized groups, coming from a poor region and markedly situated by race and poverty. The bizarreness seems to be much more an effect of the characteristics of these subjects and their authoritarian demarcation than the ritual practice.

> Lands in Brazil, in a homemade version, the most seductive, potent and deadly drug of the end of the century: crack. Production here still does not meet the industrial scale on which the drug is manufactured in the United States, but this smokable and devastating version of cocaine has already registered its first local victims (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 01/02/1991).

The articles use the same approach, whether alcohol or crack, highlighting that the involvement with drugs made possible the insertion of the subject in criminality. The

development of the drug in violence or decadence persists in practically all the subjects throughout the analyzed period.

> The Vagrancy Repression Police stopped a few days ago in a bus from the Lapa line, the minor LA, who had tried to steal a passenger's wallet. In his possession, marijuana was found, and he was referred to the Police Department. This is a good example of what the pothead can do to get weed. The unfortunate who lets himself be dominated by addiction, sooner or later, becomes a criminal, willing to steal and kill to get marijuana (Folha da Manhã, 30/07/1955).

> Almost 60% prisoners at the São Paulo House of Detention said they had used drugs at some point in their lives. Less than 15% admitted to having tried the drug in jail. The majority (62%) stated that the drug appeared in their lives before the crime (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 07/07/1991).

Therefore, what stands out in the media discourse does not seem to be the substance and its neurochemical properties, but the discourse that is built around it, the representations that are created about it. The 'drug' (and not the drugs) creates a grouping in a single category, making it possible to confuse and separate them according to convenience, which also allows the inclusion in the same discourse not only the characteristics of the substances, but also of the actor: consumer or dealer (Olmo, 1990).

The idea of the risks of drug contagion in society deserves to be highlighted. The decadence ends up conforming around the 'liberation from moral control', which, in addition to the criminal actions committed by these subjects, favors sexual approaches without precaution. It is interesting that, with this way of dealing with the issue, another development is evident: the drug is aimed at poverty.

> In the popular class, potheads are numerous. Drug abuse produces hallucinations and artificial paradises like opium, and the effects on health are often deplorable (Folha da Noite, 11/06/1931).

A nuance stands out, when addressing the harm that the drug causes. Its threat is to the middle class, conceived as 'the future of the country', therefore, the portion of the population that deserves priority care.

> The psychiatrist (Claude Olievenstein) defends priority care for the middle class in drug and AIDS prevention campaigns in countries like Brazil. [...] "The middle class must be prioritized because the future of the country rests on it", he says (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 31/08/1992).

> The drug (crack) has been sold for over two years and was previously consumed by residents of the outskirts. Now, most users are aged between 14 and 33 years old and are from the middle and upper classes (Folha de São Paulo, Folha Nordeste, 18/10/1993).

In this context, particularly when analyzing crack, it is poverty that demarcates its contexts of use, making the understanding of a causal attribution between the drug and poverty ambivalent. This ambivalence creates the sentence of use that leads to poverty, spreading the idea that low socioeconomic conditions are explained by the decadence of those who fit this profile.

> Crack replaces toxic glue and addicts street kids in São Paulo. Crack-addicted children aged 9 to 14 gather in slums in the São Mateus region (eastern part of São Paulo) to use the drug. They consume 20 to 50 paper bags per night, each [...]. Everything they manage to steal is to be given in return, if you don't have money. Boy trades stolen mortadella for drug (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 02/02/1992).

The risk promoted to society and to the individual who consumes (depending on their social class) establishes and justifies the tireless efforts to combat drugs. As for the poor, it is up to the State to eliminate their presence in the social environment, considering that they represent a vector of contagion to the decadence of the middle and

upper classes. For the 'future of the country', treatment equipment is built to 'exorcise' these subjects from the risk of the 'devil in the form of smoke'.

It should be noted that despite this being the predominant mode of drug presentation, at all times analyzed, oppositions were pointed out, always discreetly, when not disqualified. However, what prevails as a typical discourse is the characterization carried out.

Social control: regulation, combat and treatment

Social control is the other discourse that prevails in the analyzed articles. In this category, the measures taken to deal with the threats that drugs pose to society, interventions, police repression, treatment are grouped together. However, what stands out is the discourse of combating drugs, which has a markedly repressive nature, regardless of the substance and the historical moment analyzed. In this sense, alcohol has distinct characteristics, considering that it was never formally banned in Brazil.

> Last night, inspectors from the Regional Police arrested Abílio Pinto, a seafarer; Benoni José da Silva, João Soares Nepomuceno, Manoel Affonso and Ismael de Oliveira. All of them, drunk, caused disorder on the public highway (Folha da Manhã, Caderno Único, 08/10/1929).

> Four people were arrested and fined in the act, yesterday morning and afternoon, at the Criminal Misdemeanor Precinct, as a result of having been surprised by investigators from that specialist holding small amounts of marijuana. [...] They are: Rubens Wilson do Espírito Santo (28 years old, single, rua dos Protestantes, 173), Carlos Eduardo Guimarães Costa (23 years old, married, rua Oliveira Lima, 664), Lazaro Honorio da Silva (29 years old, married, Rua Tamandaré, 177) and Francisco Inojo Fernandes (31 years old, Rua Maria José, 127). They were arrested when they smoked marijuana cigarettes and carried 8 pacaus (Folha de São Paulo, Caderno Único, 02/09/1958).

> One of the most degraded areas in downtown São Paulo and the main point of sale and consumption of crack woke up yesterday taken by 220 police officers. The police offensive, called Clean Operation, will keep until Friday in 'cracolândia' a force in the region that once sheltered the coffee farmers elite and which, in the 1990s, became a stronghold of drug dealers and prostitutes, the result of continuous degradation since the second half of the last century (Folha de São Paulo, Cotidiano, 09/03/2005).

The prevalence of arguments in favor of repressive policies in relation to drug users is also addressed by other studies on how the media spreads information (Sousa, Santos & Apostolidis, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2015; Wurdig & Motta, 2014; Romanini & Roso, 2012). According to the authors, there seems to be a search for the sanitation of society, through social exclusion and hospitalization practices as the most suitable solution in these cases, and little is said about activities to encourage health promotion.

Drug use is treated similarly to alcohol, marijuana and crack. With alcohol, it is the disorder caused by its consumer, alerting the police, but that is explained by the ingestion of the drug, an indirect way of repressing consumption, considering that there was no prohibition at the time. Marijuana and crack are fought without the need for justification. The drug and its user threaten, degrading the 'elite' for a 'stronghold' of decadent people. These stories indicate the existence of a class cut, although it is not explicit. As can be seen in the article below, the use of marijuana only incriminates those who do not have a recognized family.

> Arrested as marijuana addicts with no incriminating evidence. The inexplicable attitude of the components of a Radio Patrol vehicle – the detainees, including Meneghetti's son, are workers and do not have a criminal record (Folha da Noite, Caderno Único, 23/03/1954).

Selectivity of justice is also presented by the way in which the people involved are distinguished. As can be seen below, they are 'the playboys' corrupted by the 'dealer'. Although the article initially indicated the arrest of all, only the woman who sold the drug was arrested. The children of the 'future of the country' just testified.

> Five 'play-boys' and a drug dealer arrested for dealing in marijuana. Five young people were arrested the day before yesterday, in Praça D. José Gaspar, inside building 76, on suspicion of marijuana trafficking. After being heard, the youth volunteered to indicate to the authorities the place where they had acquired the marijuana. In a diligence carried out afterwards, with the indications of the detainees, Enalá Nascimento Pereira (25 years old, single, Rua Adolfo Gordo, 119, back) was arrested in the act (Folha da Manhã, Caderno Único, 21/03/1958).

On the other hand, for those who do not fit the 'elite' profile, repression is taken with all its severity. Fighting drugs or the poor?

Therefore, it is possible to verify the construction of accusation categories, assigning to some groups the place of the 'abnormal', those who diverge from what is socially expected. Society is divided between the 'good' and the 'bad', creating a mechanism for exorcising those who do not fit the standard considered 'correct'. These categories become a strategy for manipulating power and organizing emotions, delimiting borders of possibilities: the guilty and the acquitted (Borges, Santos, & Porto, 2018; Caravaca-Morera & Padilha, 2015; Nasser, 2018; Azevedo & Souza, 2017; Santos, 2018).

The repressive logic also appears frequently through the seizure of drugs, not just the arrest of drug dealers and users. These are matters addressing police actions or legislative changes aimed at controlling the circulation of drugs in Brazil or combating consumption. Often without much information and associating subjects involved with weapons and other crimes. The subtlety of how the user and the dealer differ is evident.

However, individuals charged and arrested for drug trafficking conduct are characterized as extremely poor people, in general, detained with drugs without carrying any weapons and/or association with criminal organizations (Zaccone, 2008). According to data from the National Penitentiary Information Survey carried out between January and June 2020, by the National Penitentiary Department, the imprisonment rate (number of people imprisoned for each group of 100,000 inhabitants) was 61 in 1990 and in 2020, it jumped to 323.04. Furthermore, the majority of this population (66.31%) is mixed race or black, male (93.66%) and is between 18 and 29 years old (41%) (Levantamento Nacional de Informações Penitenciárias, 2020). It should be noted that every repressive policy in force is aimed at combating a social 'enemy', in this case the drug dealer. But is this 'enemy' the problem tackled by policies aimed at drug issues?

Despite the existence of this distinction in the Brazilian legislation, this distinction leaves gaps by not specifying the processes used. According to legal criteria, this distinction is made considering the quantity, nature (or quality) of the drug, location, among other objective circumstances. But, it is also based on the agent's evaluative sieve, when considering antecedents, social and personal context. Due to this lack of clearly established criteria that are difficult to implement, this differentiation is carried out by the first authority that the accused contacts, whichever is their opinion. This mode of action violates the constitutional principles of legality and proportionality (Boiteux, 2014).

This problem becomes even more serious when considering the contingent of black population in Brazil in poverty. According to data from the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada [Ipea], 2017), this population group corresponds to 51% total population, of which only 20% have a family income above 10 minimum wages, the racial issue also assumes a political and economic character, encompassing, in addition to race, people in socioeconomic conditions of poverty (Ipea, 2017). These data are extremely relevant when looking at the profile of crack users in Brazil and the prison population in the country. Who, therefore, is arrested as a 'drug dealer' in Brazil?

It should be noted that the discursive specificity of each epoch is recognized. The way in which some articles were written would be organized and elaborated from other linguistic resources and (other forms of prejudice) if they had been published today.

Final considerations

Based on the analysis carried out, it can be stated that the discourse on drugs is based around the consolidation of a given object as a social threat. When referring to a substance as a drug, senses are activated that refer to a condition of decadence and criminality. The comparison of the discourses given in relation to alcohol in the 1920s, marijuana in the 1930s to 1960s and crack nowadays, allows to verify how the meanings around drug do not change. By replacing the term marijuana with crack, in an article from the 1940s, for example, similarities in the representations of these drugs in their media diffusion are evident.

What is stated, therefore, is not that drugs can be generalized, as if they included several psychoactive substances with some characteristic in common. It is noteworthy that using the term 'drug' in common sense constitutes a matrix in which these substances are typified with a specific social effect: the harm caused to subjects and society.

In this sense, the production of representations with these characteristics and the elaboration of a social danger and its consequent confrontation, becomes the mark that defines the way in which the drug is established in newspapers. Furthermore, this construction does not have a neutrality. The representation of an object as a 'social evil' masks the stereotype of some groups, in this case, notably the poor. And with that, it allows some repressive measures to be triggered. Poverty is masked in a coating that enables its rejection, its exclusion from the framework of social visibility.

Therefore, media channels also act as a differentiated exclusion mechanism. These modes of existence are exterminated by their disqualification as subjects. Through developments, the drug corrupts the 'character', making its user an abnormal, something that does not deserve to be conceived as human. By associating this stereotype with groups with low socioeconomic conditions, the reclusion or elimination of these people is legitimized, through symbolic murder or exclusion from society.

The formulation of statements by newspapers can produce discourses with the statute of truths, with normative effects that establish themselves in the constitution of their own types of subjectivities and in the demarcation of a figure of striking alterity. Likewise, the newspaper does not act in a unified way dealing with this social object, but the hegemony of a strongly repressive discourse as predominant in these productions is remarkable. These representations acquire symbolic efficacy and are aimed at the drug

war and in the production of this figure of remarkable alterity. It is important to emphasize that the printed media has the characteristic of circulating information and defining the subjects to be discussed, also enabling the circulation and creation of new representations. The newspaper, therefore, should not be situated only at the place of producer of these representations, but rather as a channel that refracts the prejudices and stereotypes of a given culture. What worries is that it seems that this journalism becomes oblivious to reflections on divergent aspects of this predominant logic, not pointing out scientific discussions that place an opposite direction and, in this sense, expand the vulnerabilities of subjects who use drugs.

In this sense, discourses about drugs end up, therefore, being a reflection of society, becoming a way of expiating other problems, making invisible the serious situation of inequality and precarious living conditions of most of the population. The user and the substance are blamed, making them responsible for all social ills.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the material analyzed in this article concerns the content expressed by a Brazilian media channel with strong national coverage and diffusion, and cannot be generalized to all journalistic media. In this sense, it is suggested that further research be carried out in different media channels.

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