
RESEARCH

Development of the Brazilian Drug Market Toward Africa: Myths, Evidence and Theoretical Questions

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Using existing research and original data, I discuss the development of a transatlantic drug market between Brazil and West Africa and its implications on Brazil's development and drug trafficking value chain. After establishing milestones of the history of this traffic I show how a global market of protection and transatlantic networks emerged from the alliances between Latin American criminal actors and high level elites in West Africa. The second part of the article focuses on the high concentration of capital created by exportations of cocaine. I show how these global markets affect the actions of drug traffickers, namely their strategies and use of violence by analyzing the development of maritime trade and the centrality of ports in this economy. The last part of the article analyzes the market for drug mules in Sao Paulo and how the strategy networks adapt to balance their risks of failure with low cost Nigerians migrant mules. Finally, the articles shows how this market attracted cultists groups from Nigeria and connects Brazil with other illegal markets.

Keywords: Markets; development; protection; patronage; drug mules; transatlantic

Introduction

Little scientific research exists regarding drug trafficking between Brazil and the African continent.¹ One of the obvious reasons for this dearth is the lack of publicly available data on the issue and the impenetrability of the groups organizing this trade. Another reason is probably that there is no or little access to ports and airports for ethnographers and sociologists who would have tried to connect the dots between the two sides of the Atlantic. These physical constraints led to a lack of studies on the economics of this illegal markets and had consequences. First, it let space for imaginaries regarding new African migrants in Brazil accused of being traffickers. It gave room to a criminalization of street level individuals who were the most visible and vulnerable. The second consequence of these constraints on knowledge production is the reliance on institutional data, particularly data produced by the UNODC regarding illegal market dynamics. International institutions and state agencies organizing the war on drugs have tried to assess the importance of drug trafficking in countries, measuring their share in GDPs² and the UN regularly evaluates of volumes of drugs circulating from a region to another. But these statistics are based on self-declaration by the states³ which are prone to over or under assess the flows. While arrest data could also be an indicator, they reflect the politics of trafficking and generally focus on street level individuals with little responsibilities.

Two overlapping reasons account for the growing interest of international institutions in observing this trade to Africa: firstly the concern with Guinea Bissau, called a 'Narco state' (Chabal, Green 2016), although scholars do not agree with the use of the notion as it does not take into account the role of this income

¹ This paper uses data collected during fieldworks and anonymous interviews in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Dakar, Paris, Lagos and Benin City between 2014 and 2018.

² For instance the United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, considers cannabis production in Maroc could account for 23% of the gross GDP of Morocco (United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs 2017).

³ Interview in Dakar December 2016.

and the involvement of state, hence pointing to very different situations in Afghanistan, Colombia, Guinea Bissau, Morocco (Chouvy 2016). The last phase of this interest is fueled by the narratives of global 'narco terrorism' in West Africa that the UNODC is pushing. There seem to be no evidence regarding these connections between drug trafficking and Al Qaeda or the ISIS (Lacher 2014; Tinti 2014) but it is likely that the institution uses this narrative to attract resources and legitimize its action.⁴

Rather than discussing the volumes, this article will focus on the theoretical issues raised by the transatlantic trade and will discuss the role of Brazil and Africa in the transformation of global drug markets. Studying the development of cocaine market in Colombia, Thoumi (2005) argues that the main factor in the development of drug trafficking was not the low costs of production of coca or poverty. It is corruption and the generalized disrespect to state-made-laws. Authors such as Beckert and Wehinger (2013) also determined that illegal markets rely on personal relations, with actor reputations being key to guarantee predictability as there is little price transparency. But do these findings apply to Africa? Do they imply that economic rationality and risk cost/benefit strategies are not at the core of smuggling strategies? The reflection on market mechanism does not tell us neither 'how' these global markets affects actors' practices and their strategies. I will hence focus and try to answer two sets of questions.

First, are the two regions merely transit routes and to which extent can we talk about a transatlantic market? Is there a global protection market for transatlantic drug trafficking? If so, does the appearance of new intermediaries and networks challenge the existing organization of trafficking? What is the dynamic of the relation between established entrepreneurs and 'newcomers'? What are the capacities, skills and resources these newcomers offer and rely on to develop their strategy? How different are they from the established entrepreneurs? The skills required to work within ports or airports, to recruit foreign mules or to transfer and launder money from the other side of the Atlantic might be different from the one needed in 'bocas' drug selling points.

After a brief historical overview on the development of drug trade between Brazil, Latin America and Africa the first part of the article will show how a market for transatlantic protection emerged. These protections explain the development of different strategies and contributed to the inclusion of the transatlantic drug trafficking into the global economy. From a transit point amongst other, West Africa became a market and the development of the circulation included Brazil in the global market of drugs such as methamphetamine or heroin. The second part of the article focuses on maritime transport and drug mules between Brazil and Africa as case in points to discuss the effects of this new momentum in the globalization of illegal markets. It raises questions for the study of the impact of exportation activities on Brazil's development and drug value chain. Focusing on Nigerian mules as commodities, the last part of the article shows how new connections between Brazil and Africa and important profits created a market for the recruitment of drug mules in which Nigerian criminal entrepreneurs acted as sub-contractors before taking a more central position.

The globalization of the market and development of transatlantic protections *Brazil and Africa as routes to the world*

The history of drug trafficking between Latin America and Africa has yet to be documented. However, some milestones may show that Brazil has been used a hub for drug exports by foreign criminal actors since the beginning of the 1990's when the cocaine market in Sao Paulo started to structure itself (Da Silva Telles 2014). While the economical dimension of drug trafficking has been discussed in different works such as Biondi's (2010) or Feltran (2010), the implication on the development of criminal actors studied nationally (Misse 2010) and the role of cocaine exportation markets in Brazil have not been studied.

The presence of Nigerians traffickers and mules in Sao Paulo is mentioned in a 2001 article by Guaracy (2010). In 1997, Peter Christophe Onwumere, a major Nigerian drug kingpin, was arrested after he imported cocaine from Bolivia to Sao Paulo where he had lived for the last 7 years. But reports and documents attest that other foreign criminal actors had been using Brazil as a base to export drugs, including Serbian groups based in Sao Paulo smuggling cocaine through Espirito Santo (Rizzo 2011a). In 2002 the *Policia Federal* identified a group based in Campinas, in Sao Paulo State, smuggling cocaine from Peru through Brazil. The group had the cocaine shipped to South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the operation finally led to the arrest of Nelson Yester-Garrido, a Cuban national claiming to have been serving as a KGB agent (Majova, Mgibisa, Brümmer, Sole, Dawes 2007). Diplomatic cables published by *Wikileaks* recall a drug seizure of a ship from Ciudad del Este, Paraguay to Cameroon in 2005, and the consequent arrest of a Nigerian national showing different

⁴ As expressed by a UN senior servant interviewed in 2017.

networks had settled despite various arrests (US Embassy in Assumption 2005). Other investigations have also documented how Sicilian Ndrangheta is using West Africa as a transition hub for cocaine en route from Sao Paulo to Europe (Anesi, Rubino 2017). Recent arrests confirm the PCC developed connections with Cosa Nostra (Policia Federal, Agência de Noticias 2018). In this outlook Brazil and Africa have been on the map of international drug trafficking for a long time and are merely hubs to avoid controls and dispatch larger shipments while accessing higher profit margin.

Making it lawful: the emergence of a transatlantic protection market

In an attempt to circumvent US controls in the Caribbean and to balance the fall of cocaine consumption in the US, the Norte del Vale cartel may have been the first Latin American criminal actor to develop its own route to West Africa to access the European market. To do so, they allied with top level political and state forces elites.

Shaw names precisely Guinea-Bissau's president, Lino Vieira who came back to power in July 2005. He is said to have invited some Colombian contacts he met in Portugal with the help of Guinean president Lansana Conté and Francisco Barros a Cape Verde intermediary also called 'Chico' (Shaw 2012). Another story I was told by a former *insider* is that trade links developed particularly with the help of West African consuls and ambassadors, who initially organized it for their personal benefits. Some arranged with intermediaries to buy and import larger quantities and sold their protections for networks and to use their countries to access Europe with the involvement of local police forces and armies.⁵ This interpretation could echo different cases involving Equatorial Guinea officials and diplomats buying cocaine in Brazil and exporting it to Europe or Asia in the beginning of the 1990's (Observatoire Géopolitique des Drogues 1994) but it is not clear if these were parallel networks or if traffickers used both channels and would require more investigations. In any case, in 2005 Colombians and Mexicans were arrested in Guinea Bissau and investigative journalists reported they had built a landing site for small planes in islands (Champin 2010). In Guinea Conakry, traffickers were said to be protected by the red berets of the presidential guard at least until 2008 (US Embassy in Conakry 2008). Apart from the narco state Guinea Bissau was said to have become, traffickers used different routes and developed relations with top level elites in different West African countries.

A transatlantic market for patronages appeared with different producers and intermediaries relying on networks in competition with each other. The ability to establish protection became key. As a European custom officer puts it, 'Each time controls intensify the roads and strategies adapt', potentially taking any trajectory to make sure the load arrives to its destination.⁶ The development of regular flights between Colombia and West Africa through Venezuela could have been a consequence of this strategy, with Colombian entrepreneurs based in Venezuela such as Daniel Barrera Barrera considered to be at the core of the business (InSight Crime 2016). This also became obvious with the so called 'Air Cocaine' incident in Northern Mali. In November 2009 a Boeing 727 landed in the middle of the Malian desert. After few hours when the soldiers arrived, they found the plane empty and burned, left with few traces of cocaine. The Boeing had left Caracas after arriving from Colombia and disconnected his radio over the Atlantic Ocean. It is believed that it was transporting about 10 tons of cocaine aiming to the European market and could not have been possible without the high level connections local barons had with government officials (Thiolay 2015).

The development of this market challenges the distinctions between legal and illegal activities, contributing to the what Bayard, Ellis and Hibou called the 'criminalization of the states' (Bayart, Elis, Hibou, 1997). But it also shows how much drug trafficking is embedded in the functioning of global economy and how this illegal market relates to legal market and is the product of complex interactions. The 'Air Cocaine' Boeing had been registered in Saudi Arabia but had been identified in Guinea Bissau with another registration number obtained with the help of the Senegalese branch of a Spanish company. The Boeing would have been spotted flying between South America and Mali without any action taken by local air authorities (Coulibaly 2016). Another case in point is the story of the *Holgam Company* lead by Juan Carlos Sanchez, a Venezuelan arrested in Gambia in 2010. Sanchez had spent the last precedent years in Guinea-Bissau where he had settled a dummy company of fishing owning various boats. The company had recently been granted fishing license in Gambia (African Blog 2013). His arrest in a joint operation between the UK's Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and local Gambian police raised questions about the protection he had received from local authorities (Champin 2011). Along with his associates he rented an entire island to

⁵ Interview in December 2016.

⁶ Interview in Dakar in 2016.

develop 'an eco-resort complex' where investigators found money and guns legally owned. In one of its other properties, the company had also settled an underground bunker where 2 tons of cocaine were found. More recently, the Panama Papers revealed how famous drug trafficker used Mossack-Fonseca services to launder money of cocaine trafficking between Peru and the Netherlands (Chittum, Bernstein & Hudson 2016). This shows that these activities trade also relied on demanding financial and judicial skills that were provided by legal companies.

Developing markets of consumption and production in Africa

After being used as a transition zone, a local market for cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine developed itself in West Africa along with the parallel increase in 'substandard drugs' such as tramadol and codeine (Klantschnig and Huang 2018). Quoting press articles Ellis wrote that in 1983 'a Nigerian newspaper [...] reported the existence of what it called 'a tiny cocaine world' in fashionable Lagos society' (Ellis 2009:177). Years later there are evidence that this market expanded, with the number of cocaine consumer believed to have reached 3 million in West Africa in 2013 as compared to 1 million in 1998 (Lasusa 2016). In 2014, the West African Drug Commission published a report entitled 'Not just in transit: Drugs the State and society in West Africa' (West African Commission on Drugs 2014). This demand can also be explained by payment of intermediaries in drugs and tourism/expatriates. In hotels and nightclubs in different cities of Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal the author of this articles visited between 2013 and 2017 there were a regular availability of cocaine and synthetic drugs. Another consequence of the development of this market is that crack consumption spaces appeared in major Africa cities such as Abidjan or Johannesburg (Ghalia Kadiri 2017). Data regarding cocaine consumption are not reliable although in Ghana according to the ONUDC, in 2016, 2,9% of youth between 13 and 25 had consumed cocaine over the last year. In a recent ethnographic exploration of heroin market in Kisumu, Kenya, researchers unexpectedly documented the development of a cocaine market which had been used by 76% of the individuals they surveyed on their use of heroin. Users were pooling to buy cocaine from Mombassa although it was seen as a powerful and expensive drug (Syvertsen et al. 2016). Regarding production, some methamphetamine laboratories run by Colombians were dismantled in Lagos in 2013. Another was dismantled in Delta State in 2016. It was run by Mexicans affiliated with the Sinaloa cartel and with a production capacity of over 3 tons per cycle (Sahara Reporters 2016).

There is still research needed to determine to which extent the production boom of coca in Colombia combined with the increase of transatlantic circulation can produce a decrease in drug prices and protections in West Africa. It is possible that these drugs or their derivatives as crack become more accessible with an alignment of African prices with Latin American prices? On the other hand, meth or heroin derivatives coming from Mexico or Asia could also replace cocaine and challenge cocaine.

How globalization of markets transform cocaine trafficking business

Brazil is currently considered the first country for cocaine transshipment to Europe, Africa and Asia: according to the 2018 UNODC's annual questionnaire to states, Brazil was the second most mentioned country of origin for cocaine seized in Europe (16% of the mentions), just after Colombia (20% of the mentions). Brazil is the first and unique country mentioned for seizure on the African continent, the first regarding the Middle East and Asia. These dynamics are likely to change Brazil's internal drug market, but also to influence the local economy. Taking the economics of cocaine trafficking into account, more research would need to be done on how the development of new international value chains affects all related activities in Brazil. It would be particularly interesting in the case of transport, transfer of load from other countries, storage and retail, money laundering... How does it affect local informal job markets for poor youth? Does it change the relations between criminal organizations and their socio-political environment? I will raise some questions focusing on evidence from researches on Nigerian drug mules and maritime circulation which accounts for the biggest part of Brazil exports to Africa.

Questions on the impact of growing maritime trade on local markets and development

The biggest drug circulation happens through maritime trade, including cargo, either dissimulating cocaine in legal shipments, or pirating containers within ports (called 'rip off'). The second tactic implies to have the capacity to unload the shipment before the container is taken out of the arrival port. A first implication of this for Brazil's development is that the extraversion process of drug trafficking produces an extremely fast accumulation of capital.

As pointed out in the first part of the article, there is nothing new in this circulation of cocaine although the volumes of drugs seized tend to augment and confirm that drug barons at the center of drug trafficking

in Brazil are directly involved. In 2014 for instance, a shipment of 874 kilos of cocaine heading to the Democratic Republic of Congo was seized in Puerto Fénix in Paraguay. It belonged to Jorge Rafaat Toumani killed in 2017 by the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) (ABC Color 2014). The development of this trade relies on access to major ports. In the South of Brazil where most of cocaine is said to come from Peru and Bolivia, the ports of Santos, Paranagua, Itajai and Rio Grande became central in the export of cocaine and are controlled by the PCC and PCC businessman affiliated.⁷

In his famous *Narconomics*, Wainwright (2016) finds that local drug markets are much less profitable than exportation ones. This idea stand in line with the findings of Buxton (2006), Bergman (2010, p 30) and Fabre (2002) who all conclude through different cases, products and period of research that the highest benefits do not come from the coca or opium producer and laboratories but from the wholesale exporter in charge of the transport and logistics to the wholesaler in the consumption zone (between $\times 10$ and $\times 15$), also much higher than retail margins (approximatively twice the price). One of the implications of these findings is that the evolution of drug trafficking networks in Brazil depends on these incomes and on actor's capacity in securing their access. This value chain could explain why, in some circumstances there could be surges of violence has it has been the case in Mexico at the border of Cidade Juarez to have access to the American territory (Wainwright 2016, p. 52–53). While the PCC has contributed to a decrease in urban violence (Pires Ferreira, Sérgio de Lima, de Carvalho Bessa 2009) in Sao Paulo and is credited with having pacified part of the street code of the city (Feltran 2010), the competition for this income could also explain symbolical and spatial dimension of violences between factions since January 2017. The Primeiro Comando da Capital and the Familia Do Norte (FDN) along with the Comando Vermelho (CV) are competing to control major port and hubs areas such as the one in Fortaleza that are used to send cocaine to Cabo Verde and Europe, either through sailboats⁸ or cargos. The massacres in Manaus have been global explained by the competition for the control of the 'Solimoes road' but it could also be ignited by the need to secure access to the port of the city.

In West Africa, the development of competition for protection and control of the value chain is believed to have ignited or contributed to various violent conflicts. Northern Mali and the competition between tribal groups and the Azawad touareg insurgency that lead to 2012 rebellion against the Bamako government could be an example. Ellis and Shaw suggested that the conflict was mainly driven by economic rivalries for the control of cocaine convoys going North and subsidized goods going South from Algeria (Ellis & Shaw 2015). In Guinea Bissau the rivalry and competition would have been concentrated within the army corps (the Navy), the police and different political networks, contributing to the instability of the country (Shaw 2015). The need for stability and constant protection to guarantee the circulation of goods tends to favor actors with access to these patronages. But on the other hand, new sub-contractors or intermediaries can arise from the development of new channels of circulation and markets. They can change the value chain and rely on the development of protection markets to create their own businesses. Mozambique seems to be a case in point of the disruption of monopolies. In this East African country, recent empirical research shows that the 40 tons of heroin passing annual by the country from Afghanistan and Pakistan are not anymore in the hands of the Frelimo officials and related families in power since the end of the civil war (Hanlon 2018). They are circulating through multiplying channels and networks with concurring protections.

Regarding impact on development, Bergman (2010) found that in Mexico, the inflow of foreign currencies in Mexico had a direct impact on the legal economy and competitive of local companies. In the case of the development of export market in Peru, the share of coca cultivation related jobs came to represent as far as 15% of the workforce of the country (Buxton 2006: 106). In Brazil, Christian Geffray showed how the development of illegal cocaine precursors trade between Rondonia State and Bolivia paved the way for a boom in cocaine circulation in this state in the 1990's. Criminal and political entrepreneurs then laundered their benefits in local coffee agriculture, creating an incentive for production underneath national markets prices and what World Bank officials called the 'Rondonia coffee miracle...' (Geffray 2009). It is likely the export boom of cocaine is currently producing similar effects on development.

Risk profiles on the market of drug mules

Nigeria's centrality in this the mule economy is nothing new. In the 1950's networks of heroin trafficking organized between Lagos, Abidjan and Beirut were identified in the US while in the 1960's Nigerians and Ghanians exported cannabis to Europe and heroin trafficking soared, sometimes with the help of the CIA

⁷ Interview with custom officer, Sao Paulo, November 2016.

⁸ Interview in Sao Paulo, July 2018.

(McCoy 1991). Nigerians and Ghanians smugglers then switched to cocaine in the '80s (Ellis 2009). As Ellis recalls 'The West African trade route to these destinations appears to have been largely in the hands of people from southern Nigeria from its inception. It is therefore interesting to note that, in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia already figured prominently on the list of countries where Nigerians had been arrested for drug offenses, in third place behind the USA and the United Kingdom. The transport of illegal drugs by Nigerians to the Middle East, including under cover of the *hajj*, is far more likely to involve people of northern Nigerian origin than the North Atlantic trade, given the historic links between northern Nigeria and the Muslim world' (Ellis 2009: 175). At that time Ellis also recalls that Nigerians smugglers, including some Nigerian Naval officers based in India were credited for inventing the technic of packing South American cocaine or Asian heroin in condoms that would be ingested by mules. In the following years the Babangida regime (1985–1993) is still known as booming time for drug trafficking and number of Nigerians detained abroad for drug trafficking soared (Ellis 2009).

While only a thousand African-born citizens were living in Brazil in 2000, their number reached 30.000 in 2012 (Vilarinho 2014). As Brazil had welcomed less than a thousand asylum seekers in 2010, the movement of refugees from Haiti, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria increased this figure to 28.670 people in 2015 (Noel 2018) I became aware of the presence of Nigerians in Sao Paulo this same year when social activists and one of the municipal officers in charge of helping African migrants explained me they were dealing with refugees of the Boko Haram insurgency.⁹ After some interviews it became clear most of the Nigerians I was meeting were Igbo people who had spent their lives living in the South of Nigeria.¹⁰ Most people I spoke with also believed that Nigerians were drug smugglers and expressed a form of prejudice or racism similar to the one against Black people in Brazil. Brazilian mainstream television programs may also have contributed to the fame of 'international traffickers' depicted in sensationalist ways.¹¹ With this outlook, drug mules embody the characteristics of black criminal migrants who came to smuggle drugs, they became the more visible individuals behind this transatlantic trade.

Relatives of mules I have met shared with them a common trajectory. It tells us another story. Most Nigerians and Senegalese had paid thousands of dollars to be able to settle in Brazil after they had flown to Equator without visas and crossed the Brazilian border illegally. Others had requested a temporary visa before arrival. At their arrival in Sao Paulo most of them had expected to find a job, especially in the view of the 2014 football World Cup. They ended up working on a daily or weekly basis for major building and civil engineering works companies¹² or helping fellow countrymen to run small businesses. Some of them had gathered and socialized around evangelical churches and rooms occupied by other Nigerians, others were informally renting beds in dormitories where they were asked to pay a monthly rent between 600 and 800 BR for a single bed which was highly above their salaries.

Individual profits of these mules are low as compared to the risks they assume. Interviews in Sao Paulo suggest that most of the mules recruited by Nigerians are not only Nigerians but Brazilians, South Africans, from the DRC or Senegal¹³ and could be considered as 'low cost' mules. Some of the drug mules are longing to go back to their countries after their experience in Brazil. While some know what they are doing, it is likely most do not know they risk prison or death, whether because of implosion of the drug capsules or death penalty in some Asian or Middle East countries (Phipps 2015). Instead of being criminalized, those mules could be regarded as victims of a form of human trafficking. They are offered a trip back to their country along with 1000 dollars and have to transport a luggage or items in their own luggage. The 'business model' behind these mules is to employ many individuals with higher risk but gambling on the number of them being caught.

In past years this activity boomed and the broad volume of drugs they help circulate cannot be disregarded. In 2013, the federal police proceeded to a control of all the passengers of a flight to Luanda and realized more than 20 of them were transporting cocaine, mostly Nigerians coming from Brazil.¹⁴ Some African officials reported that the UNODC forced companies to close flights between Sao Paulo and West Africa due to the high number of mules.¹⁵ French judges in Cayenne in French Guyana also estimate that there are

⁹ Interview in Sao Paulo, May 2015.

¹⁰ While it is true there are small minorities of Igbo people in the North East of Nigeria, Boko Haram insurgency stand more than a thousand kilometers North to the 'Igboland'.

¹¹ See for instance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiBBXYcpB_Y.

¹² Interviews with Nigerians and Senegalese who settled in Sao Paulo between 2013 and 2016.

¹³ Interview with police officers in July 2018.

¹⁴ Interview with a custom officer in Sao Paulo in 2016.

¹⁵ Interviews in Dakar in December 2016.

around 10 mules in each daily flight to the metropole and possibly in flights from Fortaleza to Europe.¹⁶ But Nigerian mules probably only account for a small part of drug mules which are more visible and probably more easily targeted by the police or foreign authorities operating in Brazilian airports. For instance, in 2010, 362 people were arrested for drug trafficking at the Guarulhos airport, including 53 Brazilians, 53 Nigerians and 46 Angolans (Rizzo 2011b). Police data obtained from Lagos airport in 2015 show that during the first six months of 2015, 75 people were arrested arriving or departing from Lagos Airport. Out of the 75, 15 of them had a document with an address in Sao Paulo and they were all Nigerians. Most of the addresses of their identity document refer to the center of Sao Paulo or to the Zona Leste (Itaquera, Guianazes) and were born in the Southern Nigeria states.¹⁷ These data could reflect how the police focuses on mosgt profile, especially individual mules with little investigation: very few of the individual listed are identified as part of a broader network.

The cost of these mules must be compared to the costs of other 'higher profile' mules. For instance, the niece of former president of the 'independent Biafra', Odumegwu Ojukwu, was arrested in 2015 with a NDLEA (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency) officer as she was landing from Sao Paulo Guarulhos (through Dubai) and delivering him 2.4 kg of cocaine (Etegehe 2016). Another case is that of Okolo Emenike Kingsley, a businessman who was smuggling 9.15 kg of cocaine in his shoes hidden in his luggage. According to interviews with police officers, those mules are considered to have a lower 'risk profile' and are part of a diversification strategy. They carry more drugs with lower risk and accordingly are paid more than the average mule, earning between 5,000 and 8,000 dollars.¹⁸ Other profiles researched are foreigners, diplomatic passport holders, frequent travelers...¹⁹ This strategy confirms that depending on levels of risk, recruiters rely on different networks and capacities. With this outlook it seems there are different mule markets.

Drug mules as an attractive commodity involving new intermediaries and Nigerian criminal networks

The case of Nigerian mules in Brazil shows how the development of exportation markets created a new commodity (mules) and opportunities for new criminal entrepreneurs. The recruitment of drug mules became a business with different profiles of risk and with criminal actors who are increasingly interested in exploiting cheaper and more vulnerable mules. The Nigerians criminal entrepreneurs have taken a new centrality and seem to have increased their market share and are now important subcontractors for Brazilian and PCC related entrepreneurs.

In the recent years Nigerian criminal actors settled in Brazil and particularly in Sao Paulo. Some of the Nigerians organizers of the traffic are said to circulate extensively between Asia, Nigeria, Brazil and Venezuela. They meet their recruits in the center of the city (Centro) or at churches which play a central role in the communities.²⁰ One Nigerian patron is famous for running a legal business between Sao Paulo and Lagos. He is said to buy around 6,000 euros a kg of cocaine in Sao Paulo (hydrochloride, 90% purity)²¹ that would cost between 14,000 and 18,000 euros on the West African Coast.²² It is not possible to assess if these price differences can be explained by availability or lower operating costs but accordingly, with one mule costing 1,500 dollars, he would earn more than 8,000 euros per each kilo a mule carries. This explains how having some mules caught in all flight does not necessarily represent a problem and is balanced by very high margins. Even with little success there are very limited economic risks for entrepreneurs involved in this business.

These potential profits have attracted at least one criminal organizations, the *Neo Black Movement* (NBM), a Nigerian cultist group also called *Black Axe* movement, or *Aiye*. Nigerian cultist groups, sometimes referred to as confraternities, were initially selective university student associations based on the Oxbridge model. The first confraternity was created at the University of Ibadan in 1952, initially for the promotion of Yoruba identity. In few years these kinds of secret organizations multiplied. As they were manipulated by the military juntas in order to fight left wing or pro-democracy organizations on university campuses, they progressively transformed into secret groups involved in arsons, markets taxations, drug trafficking and human

¹⁶ Interviews with French officials in 2015 and 2018.

¹⁷ Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Delta, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo.

¹⁸ Interviews in Lagos in 2016 and 2017.

¹⁹ Interview with custom officer in Lagos in 2016.

²⁰ Interviews op cit.

²¹ Prices collected in 2018 from two different sources, prices collected in Sao Paulo between 2015 and 2017 were between 4,000 and 5,000 euros for a kilo.

²² Prices collected in Senegal and Nigeria between December 2016 and June 2018.

smuggling.²³ The NBM was created in 1978 at the University of Benin City, current Edo State as a reaction to the development of the Pyrate confraternity. It is based in Lagos and Benin City. Testimonies and internal documents of the NBM confirm that over the last years this group established at least one 'temple,' a headquarter in Sao Paulo and another one in Venezuela. While members do not necessarily need to be at proximity of a temple, the creation of a temple in Sao Paulo implies the existence of a broader community and organization of affiliated members. Each 'temple' is responsible for a zone which is administered by a 'zonal chief' (called *chief priest*) who is supported and monitored by different bodies, a 'zonal council of elders', a 'zonal Executive Council'.²⁴ The chief priest collects contribution of all the members, and he is also responsible for organizing the activities of the cult and supporting the members in need. He relies on a treasurer and a chief of security. These organizations have the leverage to organize and mobilize their worldwide network and to work with local Brazilian and Nigerian entrepreneurs to take care of the logistics of mules and of the organization of larger deals.

While their implications in drug trafficking needs to be studied further it is likely cultists developed partnership with local actors and will have a stronger implication on the globalization of Brazil's drug market. For instance, in 2016 rumors that Nigerians and Tanzanians tried to introduce heroin to the 'Cracolândia' began to surface. (Toledo 2016). The diversity of departures and arrival destinations of the mules arrested in Lagos in 2015 also underlines this dynamic. Amongst Nigerians arrested in Lagos some were en route to Istanbul, Dubai, Johannesburg, Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Beijing. Some other mules arrested during these months were arriving from these same airports. They transported cocaine but also heroin, methamphetamine, ephedrine and cannabis. In this outlook the development of these connections and the use of Nigeria, but also Casablanca or Dubai, as a hub allows Brazil to progressively integrate into a larger illicit global market of drugs. In Italy, starting with lower profit activities such as drug street distribution and mule recruitment, the cultists organizations and specially the NBM became a partner of Cosa Nostra mafia at least since 2011 (Tondo 2016) now taking care of drug networks and human trafficking for sexual exploitation of women from Edo State. Recent trials in France showed another cultist group, the Supreme Eiyé, also called Air Lords created in 1963 is involved in human and drug trafficking between the continents also thanks to the agreements with Italian criminal groups.

Conclusion

While African-born migrants were criminalized as Afro Brazilian are, the development of a transatlantic drug market between Brazil towards Africa relied on high level protections within states and on the emergence of a protection market putting different armies, polices and governments protections in competition in Africa. The internationalization of the market and intensification of cocaine crossing Brazil has not been studied but there is evidence that this global market and international dynamics are shaping Brazil's internal drug market and trafficking actors because of the intense capital concentration and competition wholesale exports create. As seen with the case of Nigerians mules some of whom are actually vulnerable migrants, there is evidence that new traffic related activities are emerging and that these activities were an opportunity for new players. The Nigerian networks also connect Brazil with new illicit markets. Nigerian individual entrepreneurs were at the core of this business which may have attracted new actors such as the NBM.

The questions raised by the development of a very profitable exportation market in Brazil are threefold. The first question concerns the impact of the competition for export points on the use of violence, how to assess it and to which extent can it explain social and spatial determinants of violence. The second question opines how such globalization affects the value chain in local markets? Do the two markets overlap? Do they create less availability locally? Can higher exportation margins account for the lower prices of cocaine derivatives within in Brazil? Finally, engaging with the existing literature on other cases, we must question how the development of new value chains affects all related activities (transport, transfer from other countries, storage, blending, selling, money laundering) and how global market variations affect these political economies? Could they affect the relations between these actors and local institutions? For instance, in rural areas where large shipment transit, have traditional activities such as farming or castling been marginalized? What is the impact of trafficking on the job market? Can we make the hypothesis that such professions have since become less attractive to the youth? To what extent does this market absorb part of unemployed youth in some areas while crippling other legal activities?

²³ Interviews with students and members in Benin City in December 2017.

²⁴ Interviews with a researcher in Benin City in December 2017.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Cohen, C. 2019. Development of the Brazilian Drug Market Toward Africa: Myths, Evidence and Theoretical Questions. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 1(2), pp.134–144. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.27>

Submitted: 26 November 2018

Accepted: 19 March 2019

Published: 04 June 2019

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Journal of Illicit Economies and Development is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by LSE Press.

