

Illicit Crop Frontiers: Colonialism, Commodification, and Countermovements

Serena Stein and Katie Sandwell

Keywords: coca, khat, kratom, “war on drugs”, prohibition, development

Zones of cultivation for plants like coca, khat, kratom, and cannabis are thriving, in some cases despite protracted, violent, and lethal attempts at containment through state re-territorialization -- and often, state terror. These plants straddle the borders of legality in many places where they are grown, participating in the cultivation of agriculture frontiers characterized by uncertain and unpredictable openings and closings, and changing distributions of harms among plants and human communities. Scholars and activists question the ideology and efficacy of transnational and state programs to eradicate crops and criminalize farmers, bringing new attention to these commodities and the impacts of their contested legal status. There is also a rising appreciation of Indigenous and traditional cultivation of these and other plants, and of the importance of decolonizing their uses against backdrops of botanical speculation, piracy, colonization, and trauma. Finally, these illicit agricultural frontiers stand to be dramatically reconfigured in the face of changing drug law regimes.

Coca (*Erythroxylum coca*) is a plant native to northwestern South America. The practice of chewing and brewing coca leaves has a long history among Indigenous peoples in the Andean region, who use this mild stimulant to suppress hunger, thirst, pain, fatigue, and altitude sickness. In the 1860s, scientists isolated and synthesised cocaine for use in manufacturing medicines, beverages (like Coca Cola), and tonics. Coca leaves were declared an illegal substance in the *1961 UN Convention on Narcotic Drugs*.



Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a plant native to the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The practice of chewing khat leaves and shoots reaches back to the 12th century, becoming more widely spread in the 14th, and concentrated today in Yemen and east Africa. Khat production and use has spread, and in some cases transformed. Leaves are processed into two distinct compounds - Mephedrone and methylenedioxy-pyro-valerone (MDPV) - which are illegal in several jurisdictions, including the US (where they are sold as “bath salts”) and in the UK, where they are generally snorted or ingested.



Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) is a plant native to, and grown in, Southeast Asia, especially Thailand and Malaysia. People in the region have long used kratom to relieve pain and reduce fever, either by chewing or brewing the leaves. Today kratom is increasingly sold as a commodity in the US and elsewhere - in powder form, in capsules, and as a tea - as a novel psychoactive stimulant or sedative, and to treat opiate addiction.



For this essay, we invited three scholars to comment on the frontiers of coca, khat, and kratom where they have long been embedded in research: **Asmin Fransiska** in Indonesia, **Lisa Gezon** in Madagascar, and **Kristina Lyon** in Colombia. We, the authors, edited these comments, and put them

into a conversation exploring illicit¹ crop frontiers today; what is shared and distinct among these frontiers, the frictions and countermovements within them, and their actual or potential connections to broader agrarian movements. As we relay the commentaries, we offer a few contours of what *(il)licit crops frontiers* bring to our understanding of the uneven histories of capitalism. We offer three propositions about (il)licit crop frontiers, and draw out key dynamics for ongoing study.

Proposition 1. Illicit crop frontiers tend not to be exhausted, but remade. They may appear transient and unstable but are cultivated over long histories of colonization and failed attempts at state control. Rather than occupying zones of progressive appropriation, they often escape incorporation and slip in and out of legality, and of state and transnational control.

Asmin Fransiska is a human rights advocate and an expert in drug law, international criminal law, and women's and children's rights. She notes that illicit crops have been central to empire- and nation-building and development, carrying farmers along in the tides of the shifting legal status of crop plants. Coca, for instance, was an important colonial commodity in Indonesia from the mid-19th century. Fransiska states that "coca plantations dominated Bogor, West Java, making the island a noted global producer of coca, even compared to Latin America. By 1912, Indonesia exported more than 1,000 tons, which was more than the rubber export." Motivating the export boom of coca and other medicinal and traditional plants were nation-building efforts: "[The] Indonesian government exported cannabis, to gain money toward restoring places that were ruined in the war of independence."

Yet, there remained a vacuum in policy regarding the cash-cropping plants that were lucrative, but growing controversial worldwide: "Over time, coca was prohibited. The legal consequences of cultivating grew increasingly punitive: farmers were detained and punished in the criminal justice system, and [the government] even imposed a death penalty under a draconian, but still unclear law." Under threats of violence, some farmers changed to less problematic crops, sometimes entering into highly exploitative markets such as tea in Java, or palm oil on Sumatra Island. Moreover, many farmers were caught up in

competitive regional and international economies where they competed with nearby agricultural booms.

More recently in Indonesia, kratom has become an important export crop for farmers in places where small-scale gold mining and rubber plantations have dominated. According to Fransiska, farmers cut into ancient forests to plant kratom trees, and the most successful among them are driving the latest models of motorcycles. Hundreds of tons of Indonesian-processed kratom, in powder and pill form, is estimated to leave the country monthly, and is sought after by people around the world seeking pain relief beyond pharmaceutical industry opioids that easily lead to dependency.

While kratom teeters in US regulatory decisions (it is currently legal at the federal level), local consumption in Indonesia is prohibited. Fransiska emphasizes that there are multiple kratom frontiers across Southeast Asia where laws concerning its production and consumption are treated in separate spheres, leading to inconsistent stances on the plant, and inconsistency across the region: A proposed Indonesian law would ban exportation, even as other countries are amending narcotic acts to formally legalize the plant.

Legal ambiguity also surrounds khat. Lisa Gezon, a cultural anthropologist, discusses how in Madagascar, protracted ambiguity

¹ The term "licit" can be controversial, because it carries legal weight beyond that in "illegal," and because even crops and substances subject to strict regulatory control and prohibition generally have some "licit" or permitted uses (e.g. medical cocaine and heroin). However, the interfaces between national and international scheduling and regulatory regimes can make common language challenging. Finding a shared category is further complicated by the interplay between *de jure* and *de facto* policies that render parameters of "licitness," "legality," and "controlled substances" obscure. The use of 'illicit' here is used to capture a wide spectrum from quasi-legality to tight regulatory control and prohibition targeting substances and crops, and does not represent a moral judgement about the qualities of these plants, their production, or their consumption.

surrounding the legal status of khat is an enduring situation that periodically disrupts frontiers of production but does not usually halt cultivation. That is, when a crop is 'not illicit,' farmers can ultimately find themselves in an enduring, stable frontier of production that exceeds cycles of opening, closing, and abandonment that mark other commodity frontiers, such as mining.

Gezon explains, "khat is officially legal to produce and consume in Madagascar, but my interviews and casual conversations revealed that many people are unclear about khat's legal status. Some are concerned that its legal status may change, as there is vocal opposition to it in many places in Africa." This, perhaps, lingers from the British colonial period in northeast Africa and Yemen when there was outright prohibition of the stimulant plant (Gezon 2012).

Gezon continues, "In Madagascar today [khat is] mainly cultivated by smallholders on less than 2 hectares." Many smallholders can profit from cultivation. However, as many farmers² have substituted the production of staple food crops with khat, concerns over regional food security - primarily that of urban consumers in the capital city - increasingly shapes legalization debates. "The legitimacy of concerns about regional food supply became particularly apparent during the political crisis of 2002, during the civil upset surrounding a presidential election. People realized the extent of their dependency [on farmers]" and seemed to panic over the threat of khat, not to public health as a stimulant, but to political stability amid potential food shortages. "Legitimate concerns about food supply are entangled with stigma attached to the crop, with pressure from international actors pursuing prohibitionist regimes, with political-economic factors like the presence of export markets for other commodities, and with ideological beliefs related to development."

Trajectories of frontier making in the Andean region are also intimately tied to colonialism and ongoing public and policy debates surrounding the cultivation and legality of coca. In her work accompanying citizen-led and community-based agrarian and environmental initiatives in the western Amazon of Colombia and the Andean-Amazonian foothills and plains of Putumayo over the last 17 years, Kristina Lyons shows how the dynamics of armed conflict, narco-trafficking, extractivism, and colonization have profoundly shaped this landscape.

Lyons explains, "Interethnic rural communities are often caught between economic options based on illicit crops, cycles of deforestation, extensive cattle ranching, other unsustainable agricultural models or employment with extractive industries, having little access to appropriate technical assistance based on local Amazonian ecosystems and ancestral and popular knowledges." Lyon describes Putumayo's ecologies as "diverse with a range of soils, microclimates, wetlands, torrential and meandering rivers, varied forest cover, medicinal plants, agrobiodiversity, strategic watersheds, biological corridors, foothills and plains." Here, the histories of illicit crops cannot be abstracted from the broader history of colonization, imperialism, and capitalist expansion. "The role of illicit crops within these processes is neither simple nor unitary. They can serve to consolidate or undermine state power; can fuel violence and dispossession or provide much-needed lifelines for small-scale producers; and can be inserted into large-scale international commodity markets, or relatively isolated from them."

Militarized geopolitical interventions and Andean-centric policy making often create conditions for the presence of illegal armed groups and illicit economic activities: "The inextricable links between agrarian and environmental histories and political violence helps us to understand how and why different

² In writing on farmers and their grounded realities across disparate frontier settings, the authors are cognizant that the rights, welfare, and aims of various agrarian communities and cohorts are not homogenous nor have unified interests in agrarian struggles with government agencies, NGOs, legal regulation, and international markets. Additionally, when referring to 'farmers,' we do not mean to exclude the array of people involved in cultivation, including landless laborers, women (who often provide unpaid labor), traders, and transporters who are not necessarily seen as 'farmers' or 'growers' but have livelihoods, however precarious, based on farming and the agricultural sector.

groups came to settle in these territories, as well as the lasting influence that processes of

colonization have had on the region's indigenous peoples and small farmers.”

Proposition 2. Illicit agricultural frontiers are made up of crops whose dangers to producers and consumers are uncertain. Incomplete, contested, and shifting state control often leads to the violent repression and eradication of illicit crops co-existing with passive tolerance of their traditional and medicinal use.

Producers of illicit crops and their communities exercise different political strategies in relation to the regimes that shape their livelihood possibilities. Where producers of illicit crops have supportive relationships with the broader communities in which they are embedded, this can support discussions of the role that illicit crops play in society, development, and livelihoods. However, the narratives of “the war on drugs” continue to present profound challenges for producers, whether through stigmatization and marginalization, or the threat and reality of violence, criminalization, and forced eradication.

Shifting and sometimes capricious legal regimes have major impacts on the lives and livelihoods of producers of illicit crops. In Fransiska's words “Indonesian society lives under fear of a ‘war on drugs’ narrative. Most people are lost in the conversation since the government imposed a single narrative upon an array of drugs as being ‘dangerous.’ (Yet local populations have different histories with the plants). Aceh province has a unique history with cannabis, using it regularly for cultural and social activities.”

The Indonesian government has limited research on illicit crops, making it harder to gather evidence about potential medicinal and other uses. “This law impacts many other types of drugs, including but not limited to khat/kratom and coca. Therefore, the first thing to do is revise the law to allow the researchers to work under health and social fields, in the process also encouraging society to talk about drugs. Open civic safe spaces are urgently required.” These kinds of discussions can be important for society on the whole, and especially for producers of illicit crops: “The agrarian communities face too high [a] risk when their activities relate to the (il)licit economies.”

Where crops are not formally illicit, a contested or marginal status still has major impacts on political economies of production, and on producers' lives. In Madagascar Gezon highlights how local/national regimes are impacted by the international drug control regime: “The government of Madagascar has to answer to international actors, too, including the WHO and governments where khat is illegal and upon whom Madagascar is dependent.” In a previous publication she argued “This label of illegality has a concrete effect on the lives of Malagasy (and any other khat-involved) people. Even though khat is legal in Madagascar, the government of Madagascar receives millions of dollars in funding from the United States and other lenders. Its leaders cannot afford to upset them by embracing a substance they find deplorable. People in Madagascar feel the hegemony of the WHO indirectly, then, as they must please lenders who accept WHO pronouncements.”

“The government is also under pressure to earn hard currency, to grow its GDP, which khat does not help it do. Although khat is a major means of subsistence for northern Madagascar it circulates almost entirely outside of the purview of government record keeping and tax collecting. It is grown for consumption mostly within the local province of Antsiranana, with some going by plane to other regions of the country. People do not sell khat in large quantities internationally, even illegally. As in other countries where it is grown, khat receives little to no attention from agricultural extension agents either at the national or international donor level.”

Yet, in the absence of formal recognition or support, growers and people who consume Khat are willing to defend its position in their communities: “In 2008, a rumor spread that the government was considering making khat illegal, and I was told that it nearly incited a riot.” Khat chewers are aware of the

contested and unclear legal status of the plant, and, in Gezon's research, spoke heatedly about actively protesting changes in law if necessary.

In Colombia, Lyons notes that "the latent threat that aerial fumigation with glyphosate ... as well as the continued forced eradication of illicit crops are a constant risk for coca growing communities, and exemplify the state's non-compliance with the country's peace accords. As a friend in Putumayo recently described it, 'we are experiencing a regression without precedent.' The lack of the most basic respect for life and guarantees for social leaders is an enormous challenge that impedes advocacy work, community organizing, and oppositional politics. By this, I am not suggesting that people have stopped organizing, defending, opposing, and enduring. I am highlighting the enormous difficulties that rural communities, ex-combatants, and social leaders face right now

in many regions of the country that were epicenters of decades of war. One of the greatest challenges of the post-peace accord transition is the level of environmental degradation that is occurring in territories that were left vulnerable to new arrangements of armed actors and the incursion of extractive industries after the official demobilization of the FARC-EP. Furthermore, the peace accords did not structurally change the country's highly concentrated property regime or national development model that is reliant on intensifying industrial mining, oil drilling, and industrial/plantation forms of agriculture."

The spectrum of state responses, from violent repression to passive tolerance, condition the possible forms of resistance and political action available to growers of illicit crops, and shape emerging illicit plant frontiers.

Proposition 3. Illicit crop frontiers are dynamic sites of agrarian countermovements that partially intersect with broader agrarian movements, but also provoke tensions among groups.

The contexts of kratom, khat, and coca production provide powerful illustrations of countermovements unfolding in response to repeated repression, environmental destruction, and living with regulatory uncertainty. In what follows, our contributors share their thoughts on mobilisations.

Kristin Lyons

"There are many examples of rural mobilizations, including dispersed and networked efforts of local communities and citizen-led initiatives to transform the socio-environmental conflicts and political instability plaguing the Andean-Amazonian region. Many of the alternative proposals frame their efforts in terms of cultivating and recovering Andean-Amazonian identities, memory, territorial ordinance, alternative agriculture, ecological restoration, defense of water, food autonomy, anti-extractivism, *buen vivir* (living well), autonomous communities, as well as the defense of human rights, guarantees for social and environmental activists, and the implementation of the country's peace accords. These accords were signed in 2016 between the national

government and FARC-EP guerrillas to officially end over fifty years of armed conflict between these actors. Unfortunately, key components of the peace accords, such as the National Plan for the Integral Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), integral agrarian reform, and Development Plans with Territorial Focus (PDET) have not been upheld or successfully implemented. These components are vitally important for so many municipalities of the Amazon and other frontier regions of the country that were epicenters of violence and that continue to be immersed in conflicts.

Moreover, the geopolitical pressure exerted by the United States and its role in the cocaine supply and demand chain continues to be enormously influential in Colombia. The war on drugs is extremely lucrative not only for narco-trafficking and money laundering organizations, but also for the military industrial prison complex of the United States. Ethnically diverse rural communities, urban, and peri-urban residents have different strategies in terms of their advocacy efforts and relations with the state. Most, if not all of

the regional examples of transformative policies and respect for constitutional and human rights, the limited recognition of the rights of nature, and municipal autonomy in the defense of ecological and social patrimony, have been a result of citizen mobilizations, political protest, strikes, and community organizing.

There is a protracted legacy of agrarian movements in Putumayo that have protested repressive antidrug policy and proposed alternatives to the current logics of the war on drugs. Many community organizations and networks in Putumayo are attempting to multiply agroecological and Amazonian agricultural practices, create opportunities for scientific tourism, *bien vivir* and ecotourism, and recover and reactivate local economic practices that do not only rely on commodification or capitalist-based forms of exchange. While they may seek to intervene in public policy debates, these counter-movements are not necessarily state-centric in their approach to achieving change.”

Asmin Fransiska

“In Indonesia, there is an urgent need for political discussions that encompass not only the rights and perspectives of people who use drugs, but also of producers of illicit crops. Public discussions tend to be dominated by a narrow set of specialists, especially law-enforcement, with civil society and affected communities rarely represented. The survival of the growers will be maintained when the local government protects them. The local government knows their own society better than officials. But, these plants become ‘5-year issues’- that is, too politicized during elections.” This dynamic shapes the governmental approach to kratom, with the perspectives of growers not necessarily well represented, for example, in discussions about a potential ban on kratom exports from Indonesia.

“We need more time to advocate for other perspectives or other sides of drugs in our society. The agrarian communities face too high risk when their activities relate to the (il)licit economies. The greatest challenge for advocacy is current Indonesian drug law: We need to revise and open the discussion not only for the user or consumer of drugs but also to the farmers or prospective farmers.”

Lisa Gezon

Ideological tensions are linked to visions of development in Madagascar in a self-intensifying loop. In short, khat is not part of the formal, regulated global capitalist economy because it is not formally traded. Therefore, it does not generate export earnings for the country. In other words, it does not provide a country with a way to earn hard currency or to increase their GDP. Despite the considerable revenues it provides to small scale farmers, it does not fit into formal economic development plans and is therefore discouraged or ignored. Yet, this marginality can also be understood as a kind of resistance to specific ideologies of development. I have argued that the khat economy could be seen as a public secret. It is an economy that can be interpreted as alternative to the global capitalist economy because its aims are more oriented toward continuity and subsistence than toward expansion and capital accumulation. The case of Madagascar does not reveal a neat tale of either participation in or defiance of global capitalism. The cultural economy of khat embraces its own set of goals, motivations, and rewards—ones that do not always line up with the Weberian work ethic that is an important contributor to growth-oriented capitalism.

Despite their lack of financial power, marginalized people around the world negotiate the conditions of their lives in significant ways. Understanding khat as operating outside of the workings of the formal economy and the logic of accumulation is valuable not only because it exonerates the supposedly lazy 'natives' from the 'crime' of irrationality: it also points in a direction that some argue could save our planet because of its orientation toward holistic wellbeing and localized, subsistence-oriented resource use. This resistance, however, does not often take the form of organized or formal political action, as Malagasy farmers remain quite independent. I would say that the biggest challenges to advocacy would be the lack of organizations that provide the opportunity to come together and make a unified voice. Beyond that, even if there were such an organization, there is not much compelling anyone with any authority to respond to them.

The best chance they have is actually reactive: any attempt at undue enforcement of things that have a negative outcome for farmers (or consumers) will meet with tremendous resistance. As long as khat is not actively suppressed, farmers will continue to grow it and people will continue to chew it. Farmers' independence and ability to react nimbly to changing conditions keeps them resilient."

Kristina Lyons

"Right now, it is ever more crucial for the creation of broad alliances versus sectorial or identity-based politics. Socio-ecological conflicts are not separate from struggles over the violation of human rights. Violence against the territory and guardians and defenders of rivers, land, and forests are integral and intersectional problems. Alliance building between indigenous, Afro-descendent and campesino shared rural realities while respecting ontological differences and particular colonial genealogies is an important step toward building interethnic territorial ordinance and conviviality. When consumers in cities or towns support surrounding rural producers, they begin to repair ruptured metabolic relations between urban areas and countryside and support the defense of territories from

extractive industries and systematic forms of dispossession. Urban residents who care for and defend their water sources with the rural communities that act as guardians of these waters create the possibility for new water accords between all residents and beneficiaries of a watershed. Urban consumers can reactivate local economies and agrobiodiversity by purchasing food from local farmers and engaging in just economic practices and modes of exchange.

In Colombia, coca, marijuana and poppy growers have long engaged in debates with the state over legalization. Taking inspiration from Peru and Bolivia, coca growers have proposed that the state purchase coca derived products from them for medicinal, cosmetic, and nutritional uses. However, these proposals have not materialized vis-à-vis structural-level policy changes or the democratization of drug policy. As I mentioned before, what I have learned here in Putumayo, is that alliance-building extends far beyond only human-human relations and begins with attending to intra-dependencies, capacious empathies, and ethical shifts in the relations between all beings, elements, and processes that compose and decompose life in a particular place or territory."

Conclusion: Toward Comparative Crop Frontiers

This exploratory conversation highlights some of the complexity and comparative potential across illicit crop frontiers:

- i. the legal status of the plant (from marginal but tolerated, to criminalized and actively repressed -- often with different regimes alternating and coinciding
- ii. the insertion (or not) of the illicit crop into global commodity chains
- iii. the presence of powerful non-state actors who may have competing territorial interests, which may in turn be linked to the marketing of illicit crops
- iv. the presence or absence of other commodity frontiers (mining, energy, etc.) which may be in competitive or complementary relationships with the illicit frontier.

The commentaries also highlight a range of dynamics that provide a basis for ongoing study:

- How do producers of illicit crops face similar struggles to other small-scale agricultural producers including marginalization, lack of access to resources, and limited representation in state decision-making? Are there significant differences between producers who are interested in pursuing a development trajectory based around export-oriented commodity production at an increasing scale (whether licit or illicit) and those aiming to pursue alternative livelihoods based around principles of autonomy, local (food) sovereignty, and ecological harmony and stewardship?
- Illicit crops can provide a lifeline to small-scale and near-landless farmers, offering comparatively high returns from very small parcels of marginal land. Because of their durability and high value relative to volume, how might illicit crops avoid some obstacles which limit access to markets for other cash crops produced in remote areas?

- Here we see that in Madagascar khat is still only weakly inserted into international supply chains, mainly serving local (or national) markets for traditional, medicinal or recreational use. It is produced as a cash crop, at a relatively small scale. The scale of kratom cultivation in Indonesia has increased, with production oriented mainly for export, but its present and future legal status is ambiguous and uncertain. How do both crops provide livelihood options for small-scale producers while being seen as competing for resources with “legitimate” crops, especially those “legible” to the state by being commercialized, taxable, and seen as reliable sources of foreign currency? Does this result in intermittent state pressure that ranges from passive (e.g. lack of agricultural extension and other support to producers of illicit crops) to stigmatization and potential criminalisation of growers?
- In Colombia, coca has been profoundly but unevenly inserted into international illicit markets with powerful non-state actors playing a key role in controlling (access to) these markets. Coca production has therefore been embroiled in extremely complex and devastating conflicts. Some proposals from local communities in Colombia aim to transform coca production to serve local and national levels in traditional and medicinal markets. This draws on the experience of Bolivia, which re-acceded to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (after previously withdrawing) with a reservation allowing it to regulate domestic licit coca markets. How does this create the possibility of shifting the legal status of illicit crops in ways that could be beneficial for communities and smallholders?
- Finally, in what ways do regulatory pressures and perceptions of illicit crops create tensions among transnational agrarian groups and frontier communities? When governments or NGOs pursue “crop substitution” strategies or “legal licensing”, how do policies and programs generate hierarchies and discrimination among various groups of farmers and other rural workers?

Acknowledgments:

The authors heartily thank Asmin Fransiska, Lisa Gezon, and Kristina Lyons for sharing reflections and insights with us and making this conversation possible. We also thank Dania Putri at the Transnational Institute for helpful comments.

References

- Bewley-Taylor, D., & Jelsma, M. 2016. *UNGASS 2016: A broken or broad consensus*. Drug policy briefing, 45. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Transnational Institute (TNI). tni.org/en/publication/ungass-2016-a-broken-or-b-r-o-a-d-consensus
- Gezon, L. L. 2012. Drug Crops and Food Security: The Effects of Khat on Lives and Livelihoods in Northern Madagascar. *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment*, 34(2), 124-135.
- Gezon, L. 2016. Drug effects: Khat in biocultural and socioeconomic perspective. Routledge.
- Gezon, L. L. 2017. Beyond (anti) utilitarianism: khat and alternatives to growth in northern Madagascar. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 24(1), 582-594.
- Jelsma, M. 2018. *Connecting the Dots... Human Rights, Illicit Cultivation and Alternative Development*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Transnational Institute (TNI). tni.org/en/publication/connecting-the-dots.
- Lyons, K. M. 2020. *Vital decomposition: soil practitioners and life politics*. Duke University Press.
- Rusmana, Y. 2018. “U.S. Hunger For Opioid Alternative Drives Boom in Borneo Jungle,” [Bloomberg](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-06-05/u-s-hunger-for-opioid-alternative-drives-boom-in-borneo-jungle)
- Putri, D., & Blickman, T. 2016. *Cannabis in Indonesia*. Drug Policy Briefings 44. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute (TNI). tni.org/en/publication/cannabis-in-indonesia.



Serena Stein is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Wageningen University & Research, working at the intersections of anthropology, agrarian studies, and political ecology. Her research gathers around ethnography of agribusiness frontiers, transnational extractive linkages across the Global South, and conservation politics, particularly in Mozambique and Brazil. She is Co-PI of the Mangrove CoLAB, a collaborative and comparative program of studying coastal ecologies and agrarian change with scholars in Mozambique and India (SSRC).



Katie Sandwell works with the Transnational Institute, an international activist think tank headquartered in Amsterdam. Katie's work with TNI's Agrarian and Environmental Justice Programme centers on food sovereignty, just transition, climate justice, and democratic access to and control of resources, as well as intersections between these. Katie has also worked with TNI's Drugs & Democracy Programme, with a focus on municipal cannabis policy.



[Asmin Fransiska](#) is a human rights, drugs law and international criminal law lecturer at the Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia. She has over 15 years experience as a human rights advocate, involved in UN agency and the international Civil Society Organisation (CSO) projects, as well as in international and national experts' communities, providing research, publications, collaborations, advocacy, and training on drug policy and human rights.



[Lisa L. Gezon](#) is a cultural anthropologist and Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of West Georgia. Her research interests broadly include health (social, mental, physical) and the environment, considering the ways that they intersect. She has studied commodity chains of the drug khat in Madagascar, considering land cover change, rural and urban livelihoods, and the cultural politics of drug policies and perceptions.



[Kristina Lyons](#) is Assistant Professor of Anthropology and with the Penn Program in Environmental Humanities (PPEH) at the University of Pennsylvania. Her current research is situated at the interfaces of socio-ecological conflicts, transitional justice, rights of nature debates, community-based forms of reconciliation, militarized ecologies, and science and legal studies in Colombia. Her manuscript, *Vital Decomposition: Soil Practitioners and Life Politics*, was published by Duke University Press in 2020.

Image credits from p 30: 1/ Agência Brasil. 2006. *Coca leaf, in Bolivia* (image cropped to fit). 2/ Ferdinand Reus. 2009. *Man enjoying his qat in Sana'a, Yeman, January 2009* (image cropped to fit). 3/ Uomo vitruviano. n.d. *'Mitragyna speciosa' leaves* (image cropped to fit).

Correspondence:

Serena Stein, serena.stein@wur.nl.

Katie Sandwell, c.sandwell@tni.org.

Cite this article:

Stein, S. and Sandwell, K. 2021. "Illicit Crop Frontiers: Colonialism, Commodification, and Countermovements." *Commodity Frontiers* 2: 24-32. doi: 10.18174/cf.2021a18081.

Commodity Frontiers is an open-access journal edited by the CFI Editorial Board, Mindi Schneider, senior editor. Read it online at [Commodity Frontiers](https://commodityfrontiers.com), or our website, commodityfrontiers.com.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

