COCAINE SMUGGLING

Between geopolitics and domestic power struggles

Angélica Durán-Martínez

In 2016 the Government of Colombia signed a peace agreement that ended its 60-year confrontation with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), one of the world's oldest insurgencies. The lengthy agreement, one of the most detailed peace agreements ever signed, included a chapter on the "Solution to the Problem of Illicit Drugs" detailing a plan to eliminate coca crops through an alternative development and crop substitution program, and the depenalization of the lowest level of the cocaine supply chain (coca cultivators). This proposal, though caught in contradictions driven by the idea that coca crops could be completely eliminated, provided a comprehensive plan to address the economic marginalization that underlies the coca economy in Colombia. Yet, four years after signing the agreement the implementation got stalled, constrained by domestic and international challenges. Domestically, budget limitations, lack of political support, the inability to address socio-economic challenges, and the persistence of armed actors undermined the plan's implementation. Internationally, steady cocaine demand, pressures from the United States to fumigate coca crops, and pressures from criminal organizations to maintain cocaine flows, undermined the potential for weakening the illicit cocaine trade while providing sustainable incentives for coca farmers to move into other licit, but less profitable economies. These difficulties in implementing the coca crop substitution programs in Colombia highlight the interplay between local and domestic factors that characterizes cocaine smuggling, and that this chapter will analyze.

The chapter first revisits the most notable power imbalance in the cocaine trade, the geopolitical one, determined by the power disparity between producers and consumers of cocaine, which has been well recognized in the literature. Then the chapter addresses other dimensions of power imbalance that have started to be more recognized recently, and that still lag behind in informing public policy. Lastly, the chapter explores transformations in cocaine supply chains in the twenty-first century and discusses how they have affected cocaine smuggling and the policies aimed to control it.

From coca to cocaine: the geopolitics of cocaine smuggling

The history of cocaine is a just over a century old, yet the history of coca, the plant from which cocaine is extracted, dates back more than 4,000 years. The coca plant has ancestral ceremonial, ritual, and secular uses for indigenous tribes in the Andean region of Latin America, and its uses

and psychoactive potential are very different from cocaine, yet the modern regime of drug control created throughout the twentieth century has treated these substances as roughly the same. Important scholarship on the cocaine trade emerged in the 1980s, highlighting how foreign power imbalances and the US–Latin America relationship during and after the Cold War shaped cocaine trade and policies (Bagley 1988, Lee 1991), but this scholarship tended to be policy oriented and focused on material power considerations. Over the 2010s, the scholarship has expanded theoretically and connected a focus on material power with the analysis of discourses and ideas, exploring intricate power relationships back to colonial times when coca use first became known to the world, passing through the discovery of cocaine and the first efforts to regulate or diminish its use, to the more complicated politics emerging after the entire cocaine commodity chain became globally prohibited in 1961 (Durán-Martínez 2018, Gootenberg 2008).

From colonial regulation of coca to restrictions on cocaine legal trade

The power imbalances associated with coca leaf during colonial times mimic in some ways the disparities that characterize cocaine smuggling since the second half of the twentieth century. The Spanish empire used the stimulating effects of coca leaves to increase productivity in mineral exploitation, but relegated traditional forms of coca chewing and exchange, which were deemed immoral by the Catholic church. When cocaine was first synthesized in 1860, and a legal economy emerged, coca cultivation was concentrated in Peru, which developed a solid legal industry (Gootenberg 2008). Through the late 1800s and early 1900s regulations over the legal commerce tightened progressively, creating the initial opportunities for illicit markets to emerge. Before the legal cocaine trade was outlawed globally in 1961, power imbalances that demonized traditional indigenous practices had already motivated campaigns to eradicate coca crops, blurring the distinction between the plant and the synthesized drug. Such campaigns were promoted both by international crusaders and an array of domestic actors including doctors and lawyers who, without solid scientific evidence, blamed coca chewing for the illnesses and difficulties faced by indigenous communities (Davis 2020).

Cocaine smuggling networks appeared in the early twentieth century in the cracks of the initial quotas on legal commerce but were not as sharply characterized by geopolitical power imbalances, and emerged in response to a combination of temperance campaigns in the United States, and a growing, though still small, market for illegal recreational cocaine use. The appearance of evidence of addiction, and growing cocaine use in the underworld of the United States and some European nations, set the stage for attempts to limit the legal industry. This in turn generated opportunities of diversion from the legal market involving countries where pharmaceutical companies synthesized cocaine, such as Germany or the Netherlands, less known players such as Japan, which maintained coca plantations in Taiwan, and other countries which rivaled Andean coca production at the time, such as Java (Courtwright 2001, Farber 2019, 15–30). World War II disrupted these networks, but then in the 1960s cocaine use started to grow again in the US, setting the stage for a new wave of smuggling.

Historian Paul Gootenberg (2008) documents how as restrictions on the legal cocaine industry grew, the illegal market expanded responding to growing demand. By the 1950s, the oldest legal cocaine industry, Peru's, had decreased in size first because there was competition from other producers in the world (such as Dutch Java) but then because restrictions on non-medical use, and then on medical use, grew, particularly in the United States. After World War II, cocaine use expanded and more sophisticated transnational smuggling networks emerged. These networks, involving mostly traffickers of Cuban and Chilean origin, were relocated to

other parts of South America and the United States after the 1959 Cuban Revolution and Augusto Pinochet's 1973 military coup in Chile¹ put pressure on dismantling these networks. The market was mostly seized in the 1970s by emerging Colombian drug trafficking organizations, which became nodes of cocaine smuggling networks and of the war against them. These events shaped a geography of cocaine production that has persisted for decades, with Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru constituting the world's major coca and cocaine producers, and North America, particularly the United States, remaining the largest cocaine consumer in the world. Compared to other illicit drugs (opioids, opiates and, cannabis), as of 2018, cocaine had the lowest reported prevalence rate for the world as a whole (0.38% of the population compared to 3.86 for cannabis or 0.61 for opiates) (UNODC 2020) and consumption was concentrated in the Americas and Oceania, followed by Europe. While power asymmetries characterize all forms of smuggling, it is thus feasible to argue that the influence of the United States in cocaine policy and in its smuggling dynamics is stronger than for other drugs because it is tightly connected to the geopolitical power dynamic between Latin America and the United States.

The US and the war against cocaine

Some historians suggest that the analytical emphasis on the US War on Drugs sometimes overlooks how other superpowers contributed to shaping the international drug control system (Collins 2018). It is undeniable, however, that the United States' influence made cocaine the subject of one of the most militarized antidrug campaigns in history (Andreas 2019). Unlike opioids, for example, legal cocaine trade is marginal and confined to small markets regulated domestically. As Bewley-Taylor (2016) argues, when the first international legal instruments of drug control emerged, the concern with regulating coca and cocaine was weaker compared to concern over opium. The 1912 Hague International Opium Convention, the first multilateral legal instrument for drug control, for example, only contains a minor mention of cocaine, and up to the late 1940s, neither Bolivia or Peru (the main producers of coca leaf at the time) nor countries with pharmaceutical interests in legal cocaine like Germany, supported an international crusade against coca or cocaine. This changed after World War II, when the United States' growing concern with cocaine use aligned more closely with government interests in Bolivia and Peru to eliminate "backward Indian behavior" materialized in coca chewing.

Since mid-twentieth century, US interests have prevailed in coca and cocaine regulation, as reflected in the framing and enforcement of the three major international treaties that make up modern international drug control: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; and the 1988 Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs. In 1948, the Commission of Narcotic Drugs (CND), dominated by the United States during the early post-war years (Bewley-Taylor 2016), launched the Commission of Enquiry into the Coca Leaf, which with feeble scientific evidence declared that coca leaf was deleterious for health and equated it with cocaine. The US lobby was crucial for the framing of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which equated coca and cocaine, did not recognize traditional, legal, and medical uses of coca leaves, and only included an exception that allowed Coca-Cola to procure raw materials for its popular drink. In the 1980s Peruvian and Bolivian delegations at the United Nations, motivated by changing domestic coalitions which now included indigenous groups, lobbied to include language recognizing traditional uses of coca in the 1988 Convention which complemented the 1961 treaty by expanding the policing and sanctions of illicit drug trade. The lobbying was partially successful, but did not change the spirit of the Convention, creating a gray area in the legal status of coca chewing and cultivation

for licit purposes. In 1995, US delegates prevented the publication of a study by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) which concluded that most coca leaf use had no negative health effects. In 2008 the United States delegation opposed a proposal by Bolivia to reform an article of the 1961 Convention that prohibited and aimed to abolish coca leaf chewing, on the grounds that coca leave production increased cocaine production potential (Bewley-Taylor 2016).

US influence in policing the international cocaine trade has also been manifested in the funding of, and pressure for, militarized campaigns against cocaine trafficking that have led to human rights violations and disproportional policing (Youngers and Rosin 2005). During the Cold War, such campaigns merged with, and reinforced anti-communist efforts, though in many cases the latter took precedence, as became evident in the infamous Iran-Contra scandal (Dale and Marshal 1991). After the end of the Cold War, the emphasis on militarized drug control expanded, with notable campaigns such as Plan Colombia, a controversial antinarcotics plan that since 2000 deployed US\$10 billion in US assistance to combat cocaine production and reestablish security in Colombia. Plan Colombia is officially touted as a success story given an initial reduction of coca crops and an improvement in some security indicators, but it also caused human rights violations, extreme militarization, and ignored the expansion of paramilitary groups (Tate 2015). Besides its cost in human lives, militarized campaigns have also been jeopardized when US domestic allies, often touted as drug control champions, engage in drug trafficking themselves, as occurred with the Chief of Intelligence in Peru in the 1990s, Vladimiro Montesinos (Rojas 2005).

The focus of US-influenced policies has been the reduction of supply, rather than demand, which in turn, has put the burden of militarized drug control on drug-producing rather than drug-consuming countries. Yet within the US, cocaine policies have deeply impacted marginalized sectors of the US population, particularly African Americans. As Michelle Alexander argues, in the 1980s as crack use increased, the policies aimed to control it repressed and marginalized black populations, in what she terms *The New Jim Crow*, a form of maintaining racial segregation through mass incarceration (Alexander 2010). Both the trafficking and use of crack cocaine were concentrated among black populations, because crack provided an escape valve to lives of hardship, and the involvement in trafficking represented an avenue for economic and cultural integration (Farber 2019, Reinerman and Levine 1997). Racialized patterns of use and trafficking fed exaggerated depictions of crack's effects and its "contagious" potential, which were used to legitimize disproportional laws. In 1986, at the peak of the anti-crack euphoria the Reagan Administration introduced mandatory minimum sentences posing radically different penalties for cocaine and crack: a five-year minimum sentence was associated with possession of five grams of crack as opposed to 500 grams in the case of cocaine. The Anti-Drug laws of 1988 deepened this disproportionality by imposing high level trafficking sentences to any member of a drug trafficking conspiracy, regardless of the level of responsibility. Consequently, many low-level dealers lacking resources for private defense lawyers who can negotiate sentences, heavy users, and innocent people lacking legal protection, ended up with long sentences, feeding the mass incarceration problem of the United States. Zero-tolerance policies and sentencing procedures deepened racial biases and systemic inequalities, and hyper-policing also made the trafficking disputes more violent, constituting one factor behind the so-called crime epidemic in the United States between the 1970s and 1980s (Blumstein, Wallman and Farrington 2006, Goldstein et al. 1989).

In sum, the influence of the United States in cocaine control efforts is evident. A focus on the geopolitics of cocaine, however, may have minimized the importance of domestic processes, and other forms of power imbalance, which are explored next.

Domestic processes: state power, development, and violence

Recent literature has recognized how complex domestic power dynamics shape cocaine smuggling as much as international forces (Durán-Martínez 2018, Gootenberg and Dávalos 2018), though debates persist on whether domestic or international forces are more important. Methodological, theoretical, and empirical innovations emphasizing the importance of disentangling micro-processes and the lived experience of all actors involved in smuggling and its policing in specific geographical spaces, have complemented and expanded an earlier focus of the literature on broad descriptions and archival analysis, partially rooted in the idea that qualitative studies of the illicit were impossible. I focus on three issues examined in recent literature illustrating crucial connections between domestic politics and cocaine markets. First, the variation in power and profits along the cocaine supply chain creates inequalities which are either downplayed or reinforced by drug policies. Second, differences in the organization of state power and in the business organization of cocaine trafficking, shape variations in violence associated with the cocaine trade. Lastly, complex relationships with developmental projects make cocaine smuggling both a result of state power, and a reflection of cracks within it, rather than just a simple result of state weakness.

Supply chain divergence

Iconic characters like Pablo Escobar, the infamous leader of the so-called Medellín cartel in Colombia, who has inspired numerous movies and TV shows, have dominated popular images of the cocaine trade. These images emphasize large profits and powerful organizations, but often ignore complicated realities and power imbalances between the lowest levels in the supply chain and powerful criminal leaders.

Cocaine, like heroin, has a long supply chain, from production to distribution, and is characterized by disproportional profits among its stages, reflecting characteristics of the drug (the psychoactive potential of cocaine emerges through a complicated process that adds many chemicals to the coca leaf), the geography of the markets, and the policing of the illegal trade. All of which add large profits to the final product, and most importantly create incentives for criminal organizations to emerge to manage the international trade. For example, the farm gate value of the coca leaves required to produce a kilogram of cocaine in Colombia is less than US\$1,000, but the typical retail price of one kilogram in the United States is about US\$78,000 (Reuter 2014). More importantly, the connections among individuals involved in the production of raw material (coca growing), and those in the distribution level are tenuous. In Colombia for example, by 2017 the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime estimated that 44% of coca growers transformed coca leaves into cocaine base, and then sold it to the organizations controlling exports and wholesale. The remaining farmers sell untransformed leaves, but even those selling cocaine base receive a relatively small profit (SIMCI-UNODC Sistema Integrado de Monitoreo de Cultivos Ilícitos – Oficina de Naciones Unidas contra las Drogas y el Crimen 2018, 17).

Recent scholarship based on careful case studies shows how the operation of smuggling networks varies across and within countries (Kenney 2007). For instance, in Peru, drug trafficking organizations are often decentralized and limited to intermediation in the distribution for export (Van Dun 2014). In Colombia, by contrast, various armed groups engage in different aspects of drug trafficking as discussed by Idler in this volume, and consequently, exert more control over lower production levels, although coca growers and distributors remain independent and rarely belong to a trafficking organization. Across the transit regions of the

Caribbean and Central America, many organizations participate in the cocaine trade. While Central American street gangs are increasingly seen as central actors in drug trafficking, and their involvement in the cocaine trade has increased over the years, it is not always direct or predominant, and varies across countries (Dudley 2010). In El Salvador, gangs profit more from extortion than from the drug trade, and remain independent from drug traffickers, whereas in Honduras drug trafficking organizations, colluded with elite politicians, are more powerful and capable of controlling gangs and engaging them in trafficking. In Guatemala, traditional drug trafficking families and organized crime networks engage more prominently in drug trafficking than gangs (Cruz et al. 2012).

Drug policies often fail to recognize such diverse incentives, connections, organizations and profits along cocaine supply chains. For example, in Colombia and Peru in the 1980s and 1990s, the communist guerrillas FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) taxed coca growing and acted as intermediaries of coca growers. Both national and US authorities interpreted this engagement as an attempt to control and profit from the international drug trade, ignoring that cocaine trade was a source of profits but also a strategy to create social support bases among coca farmers (Felbab-Brown 2009). As a result, policies that attacked crops to weaken insurgencies (such as forced eradication) backfired. In Peru, in the 1990s the government mounted a more effective campaign against the Shining Path precisely when it stopped focusing on coca eradication.

Violence

Cocaine markets are often depicted as extremely violent, minimizing the variation that exists within the cocaine trade (Angrist and Kugler 2008, Naim 2006). To be clear, violence is prominent, and a cursory comparison shows higher homicide rates across countries along the cocaine trafficking routes than in those along opiate trafficking routes (UNODC [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime] 2016). Violence is also evident in prominent examples: the war that Pablo Escobar declared against the government to stop the extradition of Colombian nationals to the United States in the late 1980s; the extreme violence that between 2007 and 2020 has caused more than 300,000 deaths in Mexico; or the role of cocaine trafficking in funding non-state armed actors (paramilitaries and guerrillas) in the Colombian civil war. However, within and across cocaine producing and transit countries violence varies due to factors that the scholarship is only starting to explore, such as the nature of the organizations involved and the level of competition among them, the relations among state power, electoral competition, and criminal groups (Durán-Martínez 2018a, Trejo and Ley 2020) the design of enforcement policies (Lessing 2017), and the less explored civilian interactions with traffickers (Blume 2021).

The violent consequences of transnational illicit markets like cocaine are thus mediated by local power dynamics. Violence tends to increase where competition among criminal groups is higher and declines whenever a group controls the market. The scale of the violence, however, also depends on the nature of the actors involved. Colombia experiences higher violence because more sophisticated trafficking groups participate in all the aspects of the supply chain and connect in intricate ways to a long-standing civil war. In Bolivia by contrast, most actors work in the initial links of the supply chain (cultivation and harvesting of coca leaves, and production of coca paste), thus reducing the economic stakes when market conflicts do emerge (Grisaffi 2019). Additionally, Bolivian cocalleros (coca cultivators) have mobilized through unions and indigenous communities to protect and advocate for legal and traditional uses of coca. As a result, violence in Bolivia is low, though, notably, cocaine fueled elite violence and

authoritarian rule in the 1950s and 1980s. In Peru, indigenous movements also exist but they are weaker and were delegitimized due to the connection between coca cultivation and the Shining Path guerrilla group in the 1980s. As a result, weaker grass roots mobilization may have made trafficking networks more prominent and organized than in Bolivia, but more fragmented and decentralized than in Colombia. In Colombia, indigenous traditions related to coca, and indigenous mobilization, are more limited than in Bolivia or Peru. In the 1990s, coca-growing peasants (*campesinos cocaleros*) mobilized in opposition to the government's forced eradication and militarization policies (Ramírez 2011). The stigmatization and victimization derived from the engagement of armed groups and cocaine trafficking organizations made it difficult for these social movements to advocate for legal coca production. For example, in 1999 indigenous communities founded a company producing coca-derived products, but the institution regulating agricultural and food production prohibited commercialization outside of indigenous communities (Ramírez 2020).

Scholarship on violence also highlights the significance of unpacking state power and its influence on the cocaine trade. States combat crime, but they can also protect and benefit from illicit trades, and changes in state power and in electoral dynamics have contributed to changing violence in cocaine markets. The history of Mexico since the mid-2000s illustrates this dynamic, as the breakdown of the hierarchical political structure created around the decades-old semi-authoritarian rule of the PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party) was crucial for the spiraling violence the country has experienced since 2007 (Durán-Martínez 2018a, Trejo and Ley 2020). As other contributions in this volume highlight, the relation between state power and smuggling is multifaceted, sometimes highlighting state absence and weakness and others making evident its power and centrality. Thus, rather than assuming unidirectional interactions between states and cocaine markets, the scholarship has advanced in uncovering how forms of organizing state power, and state policies, shape smuggling dynamics. This is also evident in recent studies of the relationship between cocaine smuggling and development (Gootenberg and Dávalos 2018).

Coca, cocaine, and development

The earnings of coca growers and low-level workers are often essential for survival in coca-growing communities and in marginalized distribution hubs with high poverty and limited infrastructure (Grisaffi and Ledebur 2016). The fact that most coca-producing regions are located in poor areas reflects how state weakness, and sometimes absence, are key drivers of illegal economies. Studying the cocaine trade only through the lens of state weakness, however, obscures how state power shapes and even strengthens it, or how cocaine has created alternate paths to accessing state power and economic circuits.

For example, state developmental projects have shaped the geography of cocaine. Gootenberg and Dávalos (2018) document how centers of coca production for the cocaine trade in the 1980s, in the Amazonian frontiers of Bolivia (the Chapare region), Colombia (the Putumayo region), and Peru (the Huallaga Valley), were the subject of state-promoted colonization and agricultural expansion projects in the 1960s. These projects, aimed at expanding agricultural frontiers, attracted migrants with promises of land and employment, but when projects failed or were abandoned, an idle and impoverished work force found an alternative in the illicit cocaine trade (Paredes and Manrique 2021). The cocaine trade then became the main connection of these areas to capitalism; for example, according to UNODC, in 2017 the value of cocaine production in ten municipalities concentrating 44% of total coca crops in Colombia represented almost double the amount of the municipal budget (SIMCI-UNODC Sistema

Integrado de Monitoreo de Cultivos Ilícitos – Oficina de Naciones Unidas contra las Drogas y el Crimen 2018). In some regions, coca leaf trade provides the cash flow that drives local economies, creating complicated relationships between licit and illicit activities (Ramírez 2014). For coca cultivators, the differential profits between coca and other licit crops are not as high as sometimes assumed but are appealing because they are reliable even in difficult-to-access areas (Zevallos 2017).

Understanding that illicit cocaine's history can be traced to failed developmentalist projects adds complexity to the scholarly view of cocaine trade as resulting from state weakness and absence (Bunck and Fowler 2012, Thoumi 1992). Through its drug policies, failed developmentalist projects, and collusion with organized crime, state presence shapes the history of cocaine smuggling. This nuanced understanding of the relation among state, development, and the cocaine trade also provides crucial policy lessons.

For decades, international organizations and governments have implemented alternative development projects aimed at providing sustainable livelihoods that can replace coca cultivation. These projects have more effectively reduced coca crops than other repression and forced eradication models, but they still show mixed results, among other things, because they fail to recognize how coca production and the cocaine trade transform communities, or how crop replacement needs to occur in tandem with the creation of reliable markets for alternative products. More importantly, alternative development often clashes with parallel repressive policies that make state presence ambivalent, while combining strong militarized operations with extremely weak social service provision and legitimacy. To come full circle, these local efforts are complicated by persistent transnational demand for cocaine, which given its illegality, is more profitable than other markets. These tensions are evident in the evolution of attempts to innovate cocaine-related policies, discussed below, which have partly derived from changing supply chains and geopolitical dynamics.

Changing supply chains and geopolitics

The literature on cocaine smuggling has recognized well how the power imbalances discussed so far, and the policies implemented to eliminate cocaine flows and routes, have shaped, rather than eliminated, cocaine flows (Clawson and Lee 1996, Eddy, Sabogal and Walden 1988, Zepeda and Rosen 2014). In the best cases, successful anti-narcotics operations have dispersed smuggling routes to many more locations across the Americas and Africa, and in the worst cases, they have increased levels of violence, as has occurred in Mexico since the government started a militarized campaign to dismantle drug trafficking organizations in 2006. Scholarly debates remain, however, and further research is still necessary to determine the extent to which new policies can emerge and reduce cocaine smuggling, or at least its most destabilizing consequences. This section briefly discusses the connection between anti-narcotic policies and smuggling dynamics, and how, paradoxically, geographic changes partially brought up by anti-narcotic policies have created space for new policies. It also shows how the transformative potential of new policies is hindered by complex economic and social realities and the illegality of the trade.

The distribution of coca and cocaine production among the three Andean countries has varied over time, partially in response to enforcement actions. In the early 1990s, offensives against coca cultivation in Peru and Bolivia prompted crop surges in Colombia. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2010, 2014), in 1990, Bolivia and Peru concentrated 87% of the cocaine production potential worldwide; by 2000, Colombia concentrated 79%. This pattern was again reversed between 2000 and 2012, when

the coca-cultivated area decreased by 52% in Colombia while it increased by 37% in Peru.² After 2014, cultivation increased rapidly in Colombia, reaching a historic high in 2017. In Peru and Bolivia, cultivation declined partially as a result of new policies to control coca cultivation, though both countries also experienced increases in 2016 and 2017, driven by multiple factors including an upward demand trend in the U.S. and a decline in gold prices, as illegal gold mining is an alternative economy to coca, especially in Colombia and Peru.

Enforcement operations and changing market dynamics contributed to multiply cocaine transit points in the 2010s. While in the 1970s and 1980s, most cocaine transited into the United States via maritime routes in the Caribbean, in the new millennium smuggling routes included several inland points in Central America and Mexico, and complicated paths through West Africa into Europe. Countries in the Southern Cone of the Americas became more important, although still minor, transit points for trafficking routes bound for Europe; Venezuela and Brazil became transit points for cocaine routes through South and West Africa. Cocaine processing laboratories, and facilities for processing intermediate and low-quality forms of cocaine base aimed for intraregional markets, have appeared in new countries including Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela (UNODC 2020). The geography of cocaine flows in the 2010s was thus more diverse than in prior decades.

Diversified cocaine supply chains are also linked to new consumption markets. By the late 2010s, the cocaine market in Brazil became the world's second largest, representing 18% of the global market in terms of users, mainly supplied by Bolivia. In the 2010s, local drug use became more widespread and noticeable to governments and citizens across the Americas, though it was not entirely new and often reflected prior inattention to complex long-term consumption trends. In 2015, UNODC estimated an annual cocaine prevalence rate of 0.8% for South America, higher than the 0.7 reported in 2004–2005, but lower than the 1.3% reported in 2013 (UNODC [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime] 2016). Although increasing rates of cocaine use in countries that are traditionally seen as producing and transit countries have to be analyzed with caution – in no small part because of difficulties in finding reliable data – they indicate that supply chains have dispersed due to the effects of enforcement over cocaine transit routes and production nodes, and a growing cocaine use outside of the United States and Western Europe. The expansion of illicit activity portfolios by criminal groups, though not entirely new, also drives the diversification of cocaine supply chains, as some protagonists of the cocaine trade increasingly engage in other illicit markets, as occurs in Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela.

It seems appropriate to ask whether these changes can transform the geopolitical imbalance that has characterized policy making regarding cocaine control. This is a question that deserves to be more systematically researched, but an initial look suggests that the effect is mixed. On one hand, in the early 2010s, producing countries' efforts to challenge the militarized war on cocaine, though not welcomed, were not completely boycotted by the United States, perhaps reflecting the political preferences of the Obama administration, and the policy priority given to the opioid epidemic, as cocaine use stabilized and became less of a concern for domestic security in the United States. On the other hand, the United States remains the world's largest cocaine market, and the policy focus on cocaine supply reduction increased again as some statistics indicated growing cocaine use after 2014,³ and Donald Trump's government reinforced more repressive drug control policies. Beyond the US, cocaine's transnational markets and the difficulty of forging a consensus to reform international conventions, complicate the implementation of alternative supply control policies, as evident in Bolivia and Colombia.

This chapter highlighted that cocaine smuggling has been characterized by a power imbalance between producers and consumers, which has translated into policy making, but at the

same time, policy making is still mediated locally. In Bolivia, for example the United States sponsored highly militarized drug operations such as the Triennial Plan, Operation Blast Furnace (1986), and Plan Dignidad (1997),⁴ and influenced the drafting of its main drug law – Law 1008 of 1988 (Grisaffi 2019). Some coca cultivation for legal purposes, however, has been allowed, and Presidents like Jaime Paz Zamora or Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who were aligned with US interests, compensated growers for eradication or slowed down eradication campaigns. When Evo Morales, a former leader of the cocalero movement critical of the United States, was elected President in 2006, in a context of growing debate around drug policy and changing supply chains, Bolivia left the international drug conventions re-joining with an exception that excluded coca leaf chewing from the list of controlled substances. Morales also implemented a policy expanding the legal coca production limit set in 1988 from 12,000 to 20,000 hectares, and authorizing legal cultivation in the Chapare, a region traditionally excluded from legal production quotas. To prevent diversion for illegal markets, the government set a cultivation limit of 1,600 square meters per family. The most interesting aspect of the policy, and the main reason for its success in controlling coca crops was that monitoring and implementation were responsibilities of grassroot organizations (Grisaffi 2019).

Morales' policies successfully reduced the hectares of coca cultivated⁵ and were dubbed by some analysts as the world's first supply-side harm reduction approach (Farthing and Kohl 2010). As Grisaffi (2019) has documented, success has been caught in contradictions that derive from the persistence and profitability of the international cocaine trade. Morales navigated conflicting demands among his supporters' expectations that he could eliminate restrictions on coca cultivation, and international commitments to deter illegal cocaine. While Bolivia has a successful legal market, the illegal market still sustains the livelihoods of many campesinos who also despise the international restrictions imposed on a market where the demand is generated outside of their country.

Similar contradictions have limited Colombia's efforts to eliminate aerial fumigations of coca crops with toxic chemicals like glyphosate. Colombia has faithfully followed US-driven cocaine control policies, and is the only coca producing country that has allowed glyphosate use, fumigating over 1,800,000 hectares of coca between 1995 and 2015. Fumigations were suspended in 2015, in the midst of the peace negotiations with the FARC, and because of then President Juan Manuel Santos' vocal support for drug policy reform. In 2008, the election of a new President who did not support the reforms proposed in the peace agreement, such as the crop substitution program, alongside increasing cocaine demand in the United States, and a spike in coca cultivation, led the Colombian and United States governments to demand the reactivation of aerial fumigation, using simplistic arguments that connected the growth in crops to the suspension of fumigation, and the growth in demand, to the growth in supply (Durán-Martínez 2018a). While fumigations have not been re-initiated at the time of writing this chapter due to restrictions imposed by the Colombian Constitutional court, the crop substitution and voluntary eradication programs have been undermined, reflecting both the persisting pressure coming from the United States, and the complex internal and external factors that make illicit cocaine smuggling a resilient market.

Conclusion

Cocaine smuggling has been shaped by sharp geopolitical power imbalances which are partially determined by the drug's characteristics: it requires a long process of transformation from the raw material (coca leaf) to the synthesized alkaloid; the coca bush requires particular geographic conditions not widely available across the globe; and once synthesized, the ratio of weight to

profit is very high. These characteristics, however, cannot account fully for the particularities of cocaine history, and are not inevitable; for example, both in the late 1800s, when the legal cocaine commerce emerged, and in the twenty-first century, when the illegal cocaine supply chain diversified, the market's geography was much more diverse. In any case, one distinct characteristic of cocaine smuggling, and its policing for most of the twentieth century, is the influence of the US, both as the largest consumer, and the largest enemy, of the drug. As in the case of other smuggled goods, local social, economic, and political dynamics, and a complex set of actors, perceptions, and ideas explain the evolution and changes of cocaine trade.

As other chapters in this volume highlight, both the weakness of state services and the centrality of state power and actions, shape cocaine's history. The 2010s brought changes to the global cocaine supply chain that opened opportunities to rethink cocaine control policies both at the supply and demand side. The effectiveness of those policies, though, is limited by the profitability and extension of cocaine demand in the context of an international drug control regime that restricts legal markets. The future of cocaine control and scholarship on cocaine smuggling require recognizing simultaneously the transnational connections that incentivize the market, and the localized politics that shape the lives of the actors involved in it, from coca cultivators to distributors and users, to law enforcement officials and politicians. This demands, among other things, greater dialogue among scholars of drug use, and those of drug production and trafficking. It also requires nuanced perspectives that question simplistic narratives such as those that exaggerate the dangers and analyze cocaine smuggling only through a security lens, or that alternatively fail to recognize practical and moral conundrums that surround its protagonists.

Notes

- 1 Not all trafficking networks from Chile disappeared, as those connected to sectors of military and government elites survived (Vergara 2017).
- 2 The exact size of the changes remains controversial because the measurement of coca crops and cocaine production potential varies over time and between institutions. Statistics can be politicized as reflected in assessments of cocaine production potential in Bolivia (Washington Office on Latin America 2012, Fox 2012).
- 3 This increase, however, appears in some indicators of use (monthly prevalence, and cocaine deaths, especially those involving opioids) but not in others (overdoses and treatment admissions) (Kilmer and Midgette 2018).
- 4 The Triennial Plan and Plan Dignidad focused on forced eradication and interdiction operations, and Blast Furnace provided military assistance and counterinsurgency training to search and destroy drug processing operations. These operations generated violence against communities that were vehemently opposed to them.
- 5 This reduction is reported in UNODC statistics but not in statistics from the Office of National Drug Control Policy of the United States, which has not supported Morales' approach.

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