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Khat: Is It More Like Coffee or Cocaine? Criminalizing a Commodity, Targeting a Community

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Author(s)

Ezekiel Gebissa

ABSTRACT

This article looks at the expansion of khat chewing from the Horn of Africa to Western countries. It assesses the reaction of various sections of US society toward a practice they perceived as a dangerous new "drug" and a possible source of funding for terrorist groups by documenting the effect on Oromo immigrants of a nationwide crackdown by law enforcement. For the new immigrants, chewing khat provides a setting that connects them to the homeland and eases the vicissitudes of integration into the host culture, but the practice is illegal. It also shows how the media and political interest groups have shaped public perception of chewing khat in a negative light and precipitated the promulgation of hasty policies that have made Oromo immigrants targets of law enforcement. The article urges users to exercise discretion in a political environment that is not ready to restore fairness and rationality to policymaking.

KEYWORDS

Cathinone; Drugs; Terrorism; Immigration; Traditional Use; Law Enforcement

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