

Growing Culture

**An Ethnographic Study of the Legalization of Cannabis in
Uruguay**

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Abstract

This thesis is based on six months of fieldwork conducted in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. The country legalized cannabis in 2013, but during my fieldwork only two of three aspects of the law were implemented. It was legal to cultivate privately or join a cannabis club, but there are no places to legally buy the product.

In the thesis, I aim to explore different aspects of the cannabis movement in the country. In the first empirical chapter I look at how my informants perceive cannabis, by comparing it to other substances, like alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The second empirical chapter, seeks to explore the microeconomic responses to the legalization. I elaborate on the gift economy that has emerged, before turning my attention to a new type of *grey market* where entrepreneurs work in the grey zone of the law by illegally selling legally cultivated cannabis. The last part of the thesis examines the cannabis ritual, and by comparing it to a similar type of ritual regarding yerba mate, I explore how cannabis fits the Uruguayan pattern of consumption.

My main argument is that there is a growing culture in the wake of the legalization of cannabis.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Partly excited, partly tired, I had just been on the ferry that brought me safely across the River Plate basin from Argentina to Uruguay. The next stage would be a three-hour long bus ride from Colonia de Sacramento to the capital, Montevideo. A boulevard of palm trees was placed along the road, but beyond lied nothing but endless fields of grass, which inhabited a portion of Uruguay’s twelve million cattle. There were a few houses scattered along the road, but it was only after two and a half hours, when we approached Montevideo, that the shape of a city emerged. Roughly half of the Uruguayan population lives in the urban area of Montevideo, and around 95% of the population lives in what the World Bank indicates are “urban areas”. Arriving in Montevideo felt like arriving in a large city in Southern Europe. The Spanish and Italian immigrants that settled in the area at the turn of the 19th century heavily influenced the style of the city, and French architects have left their mark on the downtown buildings. This thesis is based upon the lives and reflections uttered by the people I encountered and lived side by side with during my six months of fieldwork in Montevideo. The title of the thesis reflects upon both the culture of growing cannabis, as well as my main argument in this thesis; that the cannabis culture continues to grow and develop in Uruguay.



Figure 1: Montevideo skyline

Cannabis in Uruguay

Despite adhering to the U.S.-led “war on drugs”, Uruguay has always had liberal drug laws. Drug possession for personal use was decriminalized already in 1974, but the amount possessed was not established, thus leaving each judge in charge to decide on what was considered “personal use”. However, the law prohibited all production, sale and commercialising, making it no legal way to obtain cannabis. In 2011, the government started to look at possible solutions to the problems with organized criminal gangs, and a public discussion regarding the legalization of cannabis emerged. The following year, a proposal for legalizing cannabis was made, aiming to make it a state-controlled, regulated market. Several social organizations fighting for the legalization joined the debate, demanding that the self-cultivation of cannabis should be incorporated into a legalization. Finally, in July 2013, the law was ratified, with a majority of the votes. Representatives of the Uruguayan government argues that its main reason for legalization is to break the criminal gangs. As José Mujica, president at the time, said: “The real problem is not the marijuana, but the drug trafficking” (EFE, 2013).

Since cannabis is the most popular drug in the country, there has obviously been a black market where marijuana and money change hands, and in Uruguay there are mainly two different types of marijuana possible to obtain. The *uruguayo*, the good quality Uruguayan home-grown marijuana, and *paraguayo*, compressed blocks of marijuana mixed with chemicals and leaf remains from other plants, imported from Paraguay. It has been estimated that Uruguay's illegal cannabis market alone generates around 30 million dollars, but the numbers are inconclusive (Fijnaut & De Ruyver, 2015:59-60). It is noteworthy to take into account that Paraguayan drug lords are one of the region's biggest producers and exporters of cannabis. Even though the decree was signed on December 20th, 2013, it was still not possible to buy cannabis in any legal way during my fieldwork. This means that the black market continued to stay strong. The main difference, I will argue later, is that a new kind of entrepreneurs, working in the grey zones of the law, have emerged.

The estimates presented by the *Junta Nacional de Drogas*¹(JND) in 2015, indicates that about 160 000 people, 6 percent of the adult population, use cannabis regularly. The survey said that one out of four users grow cannabis themselves or can get it from a friend (Garat, 2015). Another study by JND (2015) shows that 50 percent of university students have tried cannabis, one third has used it during the last year, and around 15 percent has used during the last month. In terms of gender, more male students have tried cannabis, but the numbers on frequent use, are more even, with 18 percent of the males, and 13 percent of the females who have tried marijuana. It is interesting to see that 55 percent of the people that had smoked cannabis in the last twelve months responded that a friend or a third party gave the cannabis to them.² This means, that a majority of the cannabis users do not obtain it on their own, but instead get it as a gift or share it with a friend. Furthermore, around 46 percent said they would use one of the three legal ways to obtain marijuana³, while 35 percent said they would not. This continues the controversies of the law, where you have to register in order to buy or cultivate cannabis.

Anthropology of Drugs & Substance Use

Anthropological perspectives on drugs and substance use have often been of concern in the discipline of medical anthropology. The traditional approaches to drugs have emphasized psychoactive plants like ayahuasca in South America, the betel nut in Papua New Guinea, and kava in Polynesia, usually in a context of medicine or ritual shamanism in order to get in contact with ancestors or the spirit world. The other focus emerges from the United States, and has concerned itself with problems regarding addiction, violence and poverty in urban areas, most notably by Phillipe Bourgois.⁴ There is, of course, research from other places, but as Hunt and Barker (2001:166) stress; “few nations outside the US have available the amount of funding, [... or] encounter drug or alcohol problems on the same scale as in the US”. However, the approach has been towards problems, and few studies of the potential benefits of “unhealthy” substances exist. Hunt and Barker point out that there are few comprehensive overviews of the

¹ The National Drug Board.

² The word in the text is the verb “*regalar*” which literally mean, “to give someone a thing as a sign of affection or consideration”.

³ The three are self-cultivation, membership in a cannabis club or sale at pharmacies.

⁴ See, for instance, Phillipe Bourgois (2012).

anthropological research on drugs, and that it has been “ghettoized to its own domain, separate even from work on alcohol” (2001:169).

Cannabis, on the other hand, has been widely overlooked by anthropologists in the last decades, after several research projects on health and social consequences regarding long-term use of cannabis in the 1970’s and 1980’s (Ember & Ember, 2004:378-9). Mac Marshall (2001:157) notes that “it is quite surprising that the issue of the legalization of medical marijuana seems to have been overlooked by anthropologists”. Recently, there have been some anthropologists who have aimed at researching medical marijuana, among them Anna Waldstein (2010), but the analytical framework for exploring the discipline is lacking. The fact that both illicit and licit drugs often have been of a concern to medical anthropology, with an approach towards marijuana as medicine, may have disregarded the more holistic approach towards drugs. My focus will not be bound to the discipline of medical anthropology, but I rather seek to explore different aspects of the cannabis culture in order to look at people’s perception and use of cannabis.

Our neighbours in sociology have produced more research on cannabis use, and have often understood it in terms of a subculture. While Parker, Aldridge and Measham (1998) argue that drugs are not part of a rebellious behaviour any longer, but rather have been absorbed into wider, acceptable leisure activities. Pedersen and Sandberg deny this statement, arguing that cannabis is still related to difference. They elaborate that “the cannabis culture still characterizes cannabis users, their identities, rituals and mythology” (2011:25). Their understanding of cannabis use as a subculture is relevant to their research in Norway, but due to the fact that cannabis is legalized in Uruguay, the mythology is not as prominent. However, as I argue in chapter 5, the mythology, rituals and identity come to the surface more prominently in terms of pilgrimage.

The 2015 Annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), had a special Cannabis Culture Event. The fields of this event included mostly political and legal anthropology, as well as anthropology of tourism. The contributions from the meeting are yet to be published, but it suggests an intriguing future for anthropological studies of cannabis. The field still lacks both ethnographic material as well as a strong analytical framework. With this thesis, I hope I can contribute with the former.

Cannabis – Drug or medicine?

Cannabis, marijuana, weed, ganja, porro or pot. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but the botanical classification is the genus *cannabis*, with subspecies like *cannabis sativa* and *cannabis indica* (Pedersen, 2011:17). The plant originates from China, and historical evidence supports the use of the plant as oil, fibre and hemp for clothes and ropes, but also human consumption for psychoactive effects. Different varieties of the plant are found around the world.

Cannabis is a plant, widely used around the world in different settings. It is categorized as a drug by the United Nations, and therefore criminalized in most of the world. The definition of the word “drug”, according to the Oxford dictionary, is “a medicine or other substance which has a physiological effect when ingested or otherwise introduced into the body”. However, certain negative connotations follow the word; thus, defining cannabis and other substances are problematic. Andrew Sherratt elaborates on the terminology of labelling different substances under the same category:

“All terms in this field are notoriously slippery, and tend to incorporate judgements in what were originally more precise usages: ‘intoxication’ (with original implications of poisoning) is now widely used as an equivalent for ‘inebriation’ or other specific behavioural descriptions. This is why the neutral term ‘psychoactive’ has been generally used in this volume.” (Sherratt, 1995:9)

Anna Waldstein, argues that cannabis, depending on one’s perspective, can be defined in many different ways, including medicine or drug, because of its variety of how culturally diverse individuals experience it (Waldstein, 2010:38). Here I will not label cannabis as ‘medicine’, and since the categorization of cannabis as ‘drug’ is morally charged, I prefer to follow Sherratt’s use of the term ‘psychoactive’ in describing stimulants that alter or affect the brain.

For clarification, I primarily use the word *cannabis*, in this thesis to refer to the name of the species and as a general term, whereas the word *marijuana* refers to the dried flowers of the cannabis plant. The words are used interchangeably in everyday speech.

Research Questions and the Structure of the Thesis

Although recent approaches towards cannabis have been in the discipline of medical anthropology, I do not pursue such an angle. The reason for this is three-fold. First, the law does not distinguish medical use from recreational use. Secondly, none of my informants expressed that they used cannabis in order to get a medical gain or a positive health effect, although none dismissed potential health benefits. Thirdly, my academic interest is more bound to the social and cultural aspects of cannabis. My choice of doing fieldwork among students and young adults is based on the fact that this selection has the highest prevalence of cannabis, as illustrated above.

This thesis has three empirical chapters. After this chapter follows a chapter on the social and political background of the legalization of cannabis in Uruguay, as well as a presentation of the law itself. The central aspect of the law is on public health, and I will explore those themes more closely. Chapter 3 follows somewhat the themes of health, from the preceding chapter, but revolves more on my informants' perception of cannabis, as opposed to tobacco, alcohol and other types of drugs. Chapter 4 seeks to cover the economic spheres of cannabis, and I aim to address three different type of economic actors. It is legal to buy and use cannabis, yet no places where it can be bought legally exist. This, I argue, have given room for thriving economic activities, both legally and illegally. Chapter 5 takes a turn to the ritual and mythological aspects of cannabis, and I look at how cannabis is used, and what meanings are embedded in cannabis use. By comparing the use of mate and use of cannabis, I seek to explore how cannabis fits in with the Uruguayan pattern of consumption. Then, I move towards the study of community, and look more closely at the structures of the cannabis movement, and how the importance of mythologies still manifest themselves in tourism, or pilgrimage, to the 'sacred' coastal towns in the east of the country.

While I have gathered empirical data on cultivation and prevalence of cannabis among a group of young students, it is not necessarily representative for the rest of Montevideo. My empirical gatherings have only second hand information on how the state-licensed cannabis clubs work. I tried to get in contact with some clubs, but they did not respond to my requests. In general, I found it hard to get response on the e-mails I sent, but this could also be due to the fact that they did not want foreign people snooping around. In

addition, I did not have any key people who could get me in contact with the right people. What it does, however, is to provide insight in how a selected group of individuals that are part of a cannabis movement, actually perceive the world.

Further, I conducted fieldwork in the middle of the implementation of this legalization. During my time in Montevideo, it was allowed to cultivate cannabis yourself, or be part of a club that cultivates cannabis. Although the government is trying to implement the sale of cannabis at pharmacies, this had yet to be introduced when I was in Montevideo. This thesis is thus an analysis of an intermediate stage, or a liminal phase of the implementation.

Casa Conventillo

The first of February 2015, I moved into *Casa Conventillo*, an old house located in one of the downtown neighbourhoods. It was a grand old house, filled with marble, mosaics and modern art décor. It balanced the architectural style of the late 1800's with traditional furniture and modern art. My room was quite Spartan, only containing a bed, a chair and a desk. The other rooms were well decorated and personalized by the persons inhabiting them. When I moved into the house, there were seven people living there, in addition to the owner and myself, making us a total of nine. The people living here were in their late twenties, which made the house more serene and mature. Victor, the owner, was in his fifties, and lived in a separate part of the house. He had rented out rooms in the house for more than a decade, and had chosen to rent out rooms only to people who had reached at least twenty-five years. At the same time, he charged less rent for the room than similar places. I paid 8000 pesos for a month's rent, while similar places usually charged 1-2000 pesos more. "I charge them less, because I know that they are good tenants. This is a stable income, and I don't need to remind them about the rent," he used to say. Pablo had been living in the house for four years, making him the person who had stayed the longest. He was 30 years old, and worked at an art gallery in the evenings while studying at the University. The last two years, Victor had entrusted Pablo with finding new tenants, and it was important for both of them that every person fitted in the house socially, as well as contributed with their opinions and décor.

Out of the seven other people living in Casa Conventillo, six of them worked to make a living, while one was a full time student. Besides Pablo, three of them worked in the hotel business, one at a bar, and one worked as a photographer. The last person, Marco, did not have a job, but he seemed to manage just fine without, thus, I suspect he got money from his family in Chile, or had accumulated money from previous work. He had dreadlocks, and had a bohemian lifestyle, living in the present. The inhabitants of Casa Conventillo were educated, and while only one of them, Jorge, already had finished his studies, four of them studied at the University.

Diego and the Student Community

During the last three and a half months of my fieldwork, I moved into an apartment with Diego, Cristian and Hernán. I encountered Diego through a mutual acquaintance, who told me that he was looking for people to move in to his parents' spare apartment. When I met him, it turned out that the apartment was undergoing renovation, and there was not even a bed in there, but Diego insisted that I could stay with his family around the block, the few days it took until the apartment was finished. I accepted the challenge, and thought it could be interesting to see how the following events played out. The next week, I got to know Diego, Cristian and Hernán quite well, as we painted the indoor walls, went up and down the three floors with garbage, and hoisted heavy furniture from the street to the balcony with ropes. We listened to reggaeton music while we worked, and Hernán and Cristian often took breaks on the balcony to smoke cigarettes or share a joint. Needless to say, the work was inefficient, and we used twice as much time as Diego had anticipated.

After a while, Diego turned out to be a key informant of mine. He willingly shared his knowledge of Uruguayan society, culture and way of life, and often mentioned that he himself was not "typical Uruguayan". His characterization of himself as different from other Uruguayans became useful to me. He often said things like "Uruguayans are lazy", "things go too slow here", and "if you want to have something done, you need to do it yourself". He, as most of my informants, came from the middle class segment of the population, although I would say his family was upper middle class, taking into account that they owned both a house and a spacious apartment, as well as drinking bottled water when the tap water was of good quality. Diego studied, while working full time in

an office, earning a decent salary. Cristian and Hernán were different. They lived from day-to-day, never making huge plans for the future. Hernán in particular was like that, often oversleeping and missing classes at the university.

Because all of my flat mates had to work or attend school during the weekdays, I often wandered about in the neighbourhood, talking to the local kiosk owner, visiting Diego's parents, or going to the street market. Every Monday and Thursday there are *ferias de fruta y verduras*, which are provisional markets on the street that sell fresh fruits, vegetables, cheese and meat. Since they do not pay taxes to the government, these places are cheaper than the supermarkets, and people usually go to these places to buy fresh food. I went there every week to buy vegetables for the household.

It was mostly on the weekends that people gathered for social happenings. Then I became part of a larger group, either going to parties (*fiestas*), pre-parties (*previas*), barbeques (*asados*) or just going to the park or a bar to watch football matches. Of course, *asados* could be held at the same time as *fiestas* or *previas*, in fact most of the times I went to an *asado*, there were also a *fiesta*. While *fiestas* often were crowded and had many people present, *previas* served better for talking more intimately to people.

Place & Motivation

When I applied to the Master program in social anthropology, I had to write a one-page abstract where I would briefly describe my project, both the topic and the place I would like to do fieldwork. The weeks before I had to apply, I went online and researched potential places and topics. I had never been outside Europe, and Latin America had always interested me, from the great Inca and Mayan civilizations, through Spanish colonization, to Che Guevara, and the military dictatorships. I researched each country, and found that there had been little anthropological research on Uruguay, which made me more interested in the tiny country on the River Plate basin. I tried to look at potential environmental fields, and found the building of a deep-water port near Rocha interesting. However, there was little information to find about the project, so I quickly abandoned that thought. Instead, I remembered having read an article about the then current president, José Mujica, labelled "the world's poorest president", and remembered that Uruguay had legalized cannabis. I did some research on

anthropological perspectives on drugs, and found little relevant anthropological literature on the topic, except some studies of crack and opium from the United States. On the other hand, there have been lots of sociological studies on drugs, and I immediately became interested in doing an ethnographic study of how the legalization of cannabis was affecting the country, and also if it could be effective in fighting the organized crime gangs and drug cartels.

After I had prepared for this project for a month, I read news articles about what was called the “failing legalization”, that everything had been postponed, and that the legalization might not even happen. I consulted with my supervisor, and decided that I should continue my work from my bachelor’s degree, and conduct a fieldwork on football. The topic was not made in haste. I was already familiar with the Uruguayan triumphs in international football, winning four⁵ World Cups, which is remarkable for such a small nation. When writing my bachelor’s degree, I had read the theoretical works of Archetti (1999), Armstrong and Giulianotti (1997), and had therefore planned to conduct fieldwork on how a proud football nation faced modernity and challenges regarding that modernity. I was interested in how the football clubs were built up around *socios*, a structure where the supporters actually have control over the clubs.

Change of Plans

As mentioned above, I had initially planned to study the legalization of cannabis in Uruguay, but abandoned the thought halfway through. February 1st, I moved into a grand old house that I call *Casa Conventillo*. As fate would have it, the legalization of cannabis was moving towards the next face, and I suddenly stood amidst six cannabis plants cultivated legally in the house. When I moved in, I was still slightly optimistic about my football project. I had tried to contact both clubs and supporter fractions, without getting any replies, except from an anthropology student, who had knowledge about the Uruguayan football scene. I met him, and he told me that I should stay away from the next match. I remember his words clearly: “Outside the stadiums some hooligans may ask you who you support, and if you say ‘*Peñarol*’, they may ask you once

⁵ Uruguay has only won two official world cups, in 1930 and 1950, but they won two Olympics before FIFA started arranging world cups. The Uruguayans count them as world cups, and therefore has four stars on the national team’s jersey.

more: ‘... but who do you *really* support?!’ He recommended me not to go to *Peñarol’s* opening match for the season, which was played in *barrio Cerro*, a poor neighbourhood known for excessive violence, heavy drug problems, and even homicides. I decided to follow his advice, and just as he had predicted, incidents occurred on the terraces. Supporters of Cerro started throwing rocks and fireworks at the police, which responded in turn with batons and shields, and pictures of supporters covered in blood were published all over the internet and in newspapers the following day. Now I had been in the field for one and a half month, and I was depressed about not getting any data, and suddenly I had another challenge.

Reflecting on why my project had failed, I find three major things that are briefly connected to each other. My first struggle was that the field was too broad, and I had problems with constructing the field. Preparing for fieldwork, I had thought it would be easy to get access to either supporter clubs, or one of the two major football clubs, and if that was to fail, then I could try a different club. When I arrived, I contacted people to present my project and myself, by both e-mail, private messages on social media, and some even in person. Out of around twenty requests, I only received three answers: One from the anthropology student mentioned above; one from a football agent that would get me in contact with a former player; and the last from a supporter saying that he could not help me.

Second, I did not find what I had expected to find. Sure, almost everyone talked about football; they said proudly that they were either *bolso*, Nacional-fan, or *manya*, Peñarol-fan. However, the matches did not attract people. Diego, one of my key informants, was a Peñarol-fan to the heart, yet he almost never went to matches. Nestor, the anthropology student, told me that people rarely went to matches, but that it could be interesting to study how Uruguayans instead had favourite players in Europe, with whom they identified themselves. Interesting as that might be, I still found a study like that to be difficult.

What really pushed me over was issues regarding safety. I found Montevideo in general quite safe and quiet, but I was constantly warned about the threat of *chorros*, street thugs, and *barrabravas*, hooligans, on the football ground. It is easy to take precautions

against street thugs, but when football is played on a clearly bounded area, namely a football stadium, it is harder to take precautions against violent football supporters. I went to three football matches before the violent Cerro incident, and in two of the matches, I witnessed violence. The first incident was a friendly match where supporters of Peñarol threw rocks and other physical objects on the opponent's goalkeeper. The second was more personal, as I suddenly found myself between supporters of *Defensor Sporting* and a group of five to six Nacional fans. I was going around the stadium to get to the entrance when I heard the sound of shattering glass. A glass bottle had hit the ground four or five meters away from me, and I saw that the supporters of Nacional next to me picked up rocks from the ground and threw back at the Defensor supporters. I walked away, and suddenly five-six police horses approached to break up the brawl. Although these incidents were not physically harmful to me, I realized that conducting research in this field could be too challenging. At the same time, I did not want to put myself in danger, so I contacted my supervisor, and decided to abandon that topic.

At the time, I felt downbeat and defeated in having to change my topic. However, different degrees of changing focus during fieldwork is not unusual. Doing interviews with various anthropologists, Judith Okely writes about changes in focus: "If they had geared their research aims to bounded hypotheses, let alone fixed questions as interrogations, they would have been stranded. Instead, planned or not, they drew on holistic knowledge and history when switching focus and topic" (Okely, 2013:48). She further notes, "things happen. Things change. The unplanned character of ethnography is *precisely* its value". As mentioned above, I had initially planned to do a research about the legalization of cannabis. Hann and Hart (2011:169) write that "fieldwork means following up whatever seems important as it happens", and I suddenly found myself amidst six cannabis plants. My new research topic was thus easy to choose, and I went back to reading the abstract I had made of the cannabis proposal. I then made a new, brief project outline and sent it to my supervisor for approval.

Although almost two months had gone down the wrong path, I had already gotten a lot of data on the topic. As I was interested in the cannabis legalization from the beginning, I had been paying attention to information I got about it, and had encountered several people smoking cannabis. My main source of data was, of course, from the place I was

living, *Casa Conventillo*, where cannabis was cultivated. From my previous topic, I had also gathered much useful information. On the football matches I attended, banners with the cannabis leaf hung on the fences; there were graffiti connecting cannabis and the football clubs all over the city; and the football supporters chanted songs that included taking cannabis and losing control. I had planned to analyse football supporters by looking at the rituals inside the stadium, but now I could do the same while looking at the cannabis ritual.

Language

While conducting fieldwork, many challenges arise, but one of my biggest challenges was the language. I had taken weekly classes of Spanish before I went to Uruguay, and pre-booked a two-week long intensive Spanish language course in Montevideo, that I hoped would get me on a sufficient level of Spanish to manage on my own. This turned out to be much harder than I had anticipated. The first problem was that I came during the vacations, and I was almost alone in the class. While that was probably good *in* the class, it was not as good *outside*, since I had practically no one to practice my Spanish with, and all the tours and activities that were advertised, were mostly cancelled due to the lack of people.

The second problem, was that my language teacher was not a proficient teacher, and did not manage to pass on his knowledge of the Spanish language as well as one would have expected. The teacher was a Spanish citizen, which leads me to the third problem, with which I struggled the hardest. Since my teacher was Spanish, I had been learning Castilian Spanish, the standardized Spanish spoken in Spain. While they do speak Spanish in Uruguay, there is a distinctive dialect in the River Plate region, often called *rioplatense* Spanish. Beside some slang words, I failed to grasp a major character of the dialect in the beginning. The struggle was phonetic; I had already learned to pronounce the Spanish letter *y* and the double *l*, *ll*, as the English letter *j*. However, in the River Plate region, they pronounce it as *ch*. This led to confusion several times, especially when my landlady in the beginning was talking to me about remembering my *chaves*. Well, yeah, I remember Hugo Chavez, I thought to myself. It took me some time before I realized she was saying *llaves*, which means keys. After around three months in the field, I had reached a level where I understood most of the conversations. Among my informants,

several people spoke English, however, and it was thus easy to get help if I was stuck on a word or sentence. With modern day technology, it was also easy to go online and check the dictionary when I got stuck and had problems.

Methodological strategies

On one of my last days in Montevideo, I watched a Uruguayan movie called *25 Watts* (Rebella & Stoll, 2001) with some of my informants. The movie follows three teenage friends hanging around Montevideo, drinking beer, smoking marijuana and pretty much doing nothing, while they wait for the day to pass. It has many similar traits to the American *Slacker* genre, or even further back to the Italian neo-realism filmmaking of the 1950's, with the banality and simplicity of every-day life. I feel this summarizes fieldwork, at least my own, in a good way. Conducting fieldwork is more like *25 Watts*, than, for instance, *Scarface*. Fieldwork is waiting for things to happen, fieldwork is sitting in a chair or a sofa, talking about the weather, fieldwork is about being bored, about waiting for informants that never show up, fieldwork is worrying about the future; both for the informant, and the anthropologist – anxious he will not gather sufficient data.

The empirical data this thesis is based upon originates from participant observation among young adults, ranging in age from mostly 19 to 30 years. I partook in the daily lives of the people, sharing thoughts, ideas and material goods like food and cigarettes. Originally a non-smoker, I ended up smoking three packets of cigarettes a week, partly due to boredom, and partly because that made me knit tighter bonds to the people that smoked. In addition, it was a good strategy for me to stand in the “circle” when my informants smoked cannabis or regular cigarettes, and was a good icebreaker at social gatherings. Further, I read the daily newspapers and bought relevant magazines to gain insight in the public debate. I trawled social media to get wind of possible events, and went to several events and demonstrations related to both the legalization of cannabis and other social movements.

The two places I lived were not more than two blocks away from the *rambla*, the boardwalk stretching around all of Montevideo's coast line. The tranquillity of the ocean, the panoramic view into the endless sea, and the waves smashing into the rocks served

as a place where I could seek solitude and gather my thoughts in the emergence of depression or insecurity. The *rambla* also served as a place where my informants liked to hang out, and often during the evenings, we would head down to watch the astounding sunset while drinking *yerba mate* or smoke marijuana. *Yerba mate* is a type of green tea, rich in caffeine and minerals. It is an important cultural identifier in Uruguay, and I will elaborate its importance in chapter 5.

While living in *Casa Conventillo*, I had the possibility to see how the cultivation of cannabis actually worked first hand. I was treated as one of their equals, but unfortunately, the room I rented was only available to the middle of March. I then had to move out and find another place to live, and ended up moving in to Diego's apartment. When I moved, I was told that I should visit the house often, and come back to hang out with them every Sunday when they went to the park. As Marco told me: "Come hang out back in your *real* home!" I did visit them several times after I moved out, but I felt I was pushing my luck with them. I had to contact them every time, and I was never approached back. In some ways, I felt like I was a burden to them while hanging out. That being said, I was not treated badly, but it seemed like they just lost interest in me after I moved out. However, as I was seeing them less, I was introduced to another network of young adults, mostly students, through Diego, and gradually attended more and more social gatherings with them.

Ethical considerations

When entering the field, I brought with me the basic ethical rules that every anthropologist should be aware of. As a main rule, I went with the mantra "do no harm". That means that I tried to do as little impact to my informants as possible, and follow their lead. I found no problems with that, and had few cultural conflicts in my field, as the Montevidean society, where I conducted fieldwork, is not as different to Norwegian society as one might expect. I did not have a hard time getting informed consent by people, as the first question I got usually was variations of this: "What are you doing in Uruguay?" I got so used to answering that question, that I felt like I had the following sentence on repeat: "*Soy un antropólogo y estoy acá para hacer una investigación sobre la*

*legalización del cannabis... Qué pensás sobre la ley?”*⁶ That also served as a good way to get information, as people often would ramble about politics, although several people just laughed and said that all the foreigners are looking at the cannabis legalization in Uruguay, and said that nothing had changed.

Every person mentioned in this thesis have been given new names. Every person has been given a different name, and when considered necessary their occupation has been changed. The neighbourhoods where I lived and spent time while doing fieldwork are not mentioned by name, and I have instead renamed the more important places by fictive names. I am aware of the power that lies in representing other people, and it is with the utmost respect and humility for my informants that I write this thesis.

⁶ Translation: “I am an anthropologist, and I am here to do research about the legalization of cannabis. Do you have any thoughts about the law?”

Chapter 2 – Context: Uruguay’s History, the War on Drugs, and Legalization of Cannabis

History

Located east for Argentina and the Uruguay River, and southwest of Brazil, *La Banda Oriental del Uruguay*, gained its independence in 1828, as a buffer state between the two neighbours. With less than 75 000 inhabitants at the time of independence, the country faced profound immigration during the second half of the 19th century, mostly from Spain and Italy. At the turn of the century, around one million people were living in the country, making it one of the largest immigrant countries in the world per capita. In order to understand the present, there are four key periods, in which I am going to elaborate on here; the creation of the nation, the progressive political ideas of José Batlle y Ordóñez, the military dictatorship, and the emergence of the Frente Amplio in the wake of the 2002 economic crisis.

After the independence in 1828, Uruguay was a sovereign state, but it was still a small state, with a major portion of cattle herders. The cattle herders came in conflict with the native indigenous tribe of the *Charrúa*, and one of the first things done by the first president, Fructuoso Rivera, was to kill the rest of the indigenous people. Soon after the creation of the state, a civil war emerged between the conservative *Blancos*, representing the agricultural interests of the interior, and the liberal *Colorados*, standing for the business interest of the capital. The political duopoly between the two parties reflects the political conflicts between city and countryside, which I will argue later on, is still visible today.

José Batlle y Ordóñez became president in 1903, and served two periods⁷ as head of the state. Having studied in Paris, at the Sorbonne where he picked up liberal ideas, he started the modernization of the Uruguayan state. During his two terms, he separated state and church, and banned crucifix and references to God in public oaths. He talked strongly in favour of women’s rights, establishing divorce laws and women’s suffrage. Economically, he introduced the “battlismo”, a reformist political doctrine that laid the

⁷ From 1903 to 1907, and from 1911 to 1915.

foundation for a welfare state. State banks were created, eight-hour workdays were introduced, and public sector monopolies in electricity and insurance were set up (Thompson & Chamberlaine, 1989). The progresses during his presidencies earned Uruguay the nickname “Switzerland of South America”. As we will see later in this chapter, his idea of a state-run monopoly on alcohol was introduced after his death, and is potentially also the model for the cannabis legalization.

The Cold War era in Uruguay, as in the rest of Latin America, created instability and economic uncertainty, and during the 1960's, there was a recession combined with political mismanagement. From the most radical cells of the Socialist Party and members of trade unions, a political movement called *Tupamaros*⁸ emerged, robbing people from the establishment and then distributing food among the poor people in Montevideo. Later, the group evolved to be a guerrilla movement, taking part in political kidnappings and assassinations. A lot of *tupamaros* and other political dissidents were imprisoned and tortured⁹, and in the end, the group was broken down around the same time as the 1973 *coup d'etat* occurred.

When the dictatorship ended in 1985, *Tupamaro* leaders were released from prison, and some of the former leaders became politically active again, now under the tricolour banner of *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front). *Frente Amplio* challenged the established two-party tradition of *Colorados* and *Blancos*, and ended up with the majority of the votes in the 2004 election, making Tabaré Vazquez the first left-wing president in the country. Vazquez' five year term made improvements on social issues as well as economic growth, and the party won the next election as well, with the former *Tupamaro* guerrilla fighter, José Mujica as president. Mujica's presidency made further advancements in many areas, like legalization of abortion, state-regulated cultivation and sale of cannabis, as well as allowing same-sex marriage. His ability to go through with these proposals made him a popular man among my informants. In the 2014 elections, Vazquez was once again elected president, further strengthening the leftist politics that have been dominating the last 10 years.

8 From Túpac Amaro II (1738 - 1781), an indigenous leader from present day Peru who rebelled against the Viceroyalty of Spain.

9 In 1979, Uruguay had the highest percentage of political prisoners in the world.

The Social Structure of Uruguay

Latin America is known for high inequality in terms of distribution of income, yet Uruguay remarkably stands out in both income distribution and social progress. On the 2015 Social Progress Index, Uruguay is ranked at number 24 in the world, ahead of countries like Italy and Poland, and almost scoring the same points as countries like France, Spain and Portugal (SPI, 2015). The country scores particularly good on tolerance, basic human needs, personal freedom and human rights, it is free to attend universities, and it is mandatory by law to have a day off from work if you have an exam. On the other hand, Uruguay scores low on access to advanced education and a sustainable ecosystem. The lack of globally ranked university and job opportunities among the young is a problem, causing emigration and brain drain.

There is a strong middle class in Uruguay, with around 53 percent of the population considered being in the middle class, and 30 percent being in the lower-middle class. This is not to say that there is no poverty; 13,5 percent is defined as being in the lower class (Álvarez-Rivadulla & Queirolo, 2013). In terms of poverty, the recent leftist government made several improvements during the last ten years. Moderate poverty declined from 32 percent in 2006, to 9,7 percent in 2014, while extreme poverty declined from 2,5 percent in 2006 to almost disappearing with only 0,3 percent of the population living in poverty in 2014 (The World Bank, 2015). However, there are programs for following up on people without income or a decent place to live. A typical example are the *hurgadores*, people without a job, who ride horse and cart around the city and scavenge through the garbage bins. While that will probably qualify as poverty in many countries, many of the *hurgadores* actually make quite a handful of money, by selling of cardboard, and going to the many pop-up markets, especially at the weekly Sunday fair, and sell the stuff they find. According to Victor, the owner of Casa Conventillo, when the government was about to conduct the census of the people living below the poverty line “a couple of years ago”¹⁰, they discovered that the *hurgadores* actually made more money than some people did in regular employment.¹¹ This is not unique in Uruguay. Philippe Bourgois makes the same conclusion in East Harlem, where the inhabitants according to statistics “should have been homeless, starving, and dressed

¹⁰ Which means a couple of years prior to 2015.

¹¹ I have no sources on this, other than my landlord.

in rags” (Bourgois, 2003:2). Due to the underground economy, however, people managed to live decent lives, albeit some financial limitations.

The Sunday fair is something of its own, and it is possible to find almost anything if you just look hard enough. My first visit to the fair took me by surprise. I came across a variety of old LP records of Swedish dance bands, one man had a stand where he sold around 300 different remote controls, another man had a two-meter tall bomb, but what was most surprising to me was the amount of what I considered garbage. Many people sold broken watches, rusty tablespoons, and even used cups with broken handles. I consulted Victor about this, and he started laughing, and started to tell me a story:

“I often go to the Sunday fair to have a look, and I also wondered about the broken cups. They sell many nice cups there as well, but here is the thing. I was working on my house one day, when the thought hit me. ‘It would be really nice to have a broken cup or something to put the paint brushes in’. The next Sunday I went there again and asked a guy how much he wanted for it. He shrugged, and said ‘10 pesos (\$0,33)’. So I paid the man, and then he had 10 pesos more than he would otherwise. This is how Uruguay works. If something is broken, you fix it. So if your pocket watch has a broken pointer, you buy another broken pocket watch and take what you need to repair your original one”.

The participation in the Uruguayan democracy is conspicuously high, with an obligation to vote in elections. If an eligible voter refuses to vote, he will get a deduction of his wage. Moreover, the state’s involvement in the personal life is high. In order to keep the population from mispending their money, a certain amount of the wage can be paid in food vouchers. The vouchers work at both restaurants, the butcher and in supermarkets, but it can only be used for food, thereby preventing people from buying alcohol, tobacco or other non-edible groceries. This was a particular hassle to Diego, who often paid me back in food vouchers when I lent him money. The state’s involvement in personal life has apparently been a success, due to the high level of Uruguay’s citizen trusting the state (The World Bank, 2015).

As mentioned above, Battle y Ordóñez separated church and state. That makes Uruguay rather different from the rest of Latin America where the church still stands strong. While the majority of the population are Christian or believe in a deity, the everyday religion is more or less absent. This is radically different from, for instance, the neighbouring country Argentina, where the constitution demands that the president has to be Catholic. Even the traditional religious holidays have removed the religious context. The official name of Easter, widely known in Latin America as “The Holy Week” (*semana santa*), is “Tourism Week” (*semana de turismo*) in Uruguay, and Christmas Day is known as “Family Day” (*Día de la Familia*). Even crucifix and other religious symbols are banned from hospitals.

The official information states that 45 percent of Uruguay’s population are catholic, 10 percent Christian but not catholic, and 27 percent believes in God while not a particular direction. 15 percent of the population are atheist or agnostics (Sotelo, 2010). However, by looking at the demographics, the percentage of people living Montevideo are larger in terms of atheists and agnostics (ibid.). 21 percent of the population in Montevideo do not believe in a God, while the number of non-believers in the interior is around 10 percent. When looking at the specific numbers, the departments with an atheist percentage above average are Canelones, Maldonado and Rocha, all departments where *Frente Amplio* stands strong. Rocha is particularly interesting, since its coastal town flourishes of ‘hippies’ during the summer time. Moreover, the downtown barrios of Montevideo, where most of my informants lived, all have a higher percentage of non-religious inhabitants, than the average of Montevideo. These data are relevant, because there are obvious conflicts with Christianity and the consumption of cannabis. With that, I do not intend to indicate that Christians do not smoke cannabis, or that only non-religious people smoke cannabis.

Latin America and Neoliberalism

Traditional anthropological approaches to studying Latin America have been towards development, the relation between rich and poor, indigenous groups and natural resources. In the last decades, anthropologists have turned their focus towards the neoliberal politics in Latin America. By neoliberalism politics, I mean the economic policies adopted in the 1980’s and 1990’s, aiming to provide an economic growth in the

region. Neoliberalism is “a radicalized form of capitalism, based on deregulation and the restriction of state intervention” that has its foundation in “a belief that growth leads to development, and a promotion of freedom as a means to self-realization” (Hilgers, 2011:352). The result has often been that large foreign companies have taken advantage of this and exploited the local area, without benefitting most of the local people. This has again led to increasing differences between the rich and the poor. Uruguay too has adopted neoliberalist politics, as illustrated in the case of the pulp mill in Fray Bentos by Cecilia Salinas (2010), where she argues that the industries do not lead to progress for the inhabitants. In my case, however, neoliberalism is not relevant, and I argue that 10 years of rule with the *Frente Amplio* has turned the country away from the most radical neoliberal policies.

Stener Ekern (2015) has pointed out that the study of Latin America has had a tendency of having an “obsession with the state”. While other regions, such as Africa has been characterized as a region where one should “help”, Latin America never had that approach. Instead, it has been considered a “conflict scenario, with social movements and political parties, communities, insurgencies and other actors who should be supported or counteracted against” (Bull, 2015:248). Benedicte Bull (2016) has rightfully observed that there has been a right tide in Latin American politics recently. Venezuela and Argentina switched their left wing governments to the right in 2015, and Brazil and Peru are likely to do the same in 2016. A distrust of the politicians in charge, and a wish for fresh political reforms in economically unstable countries seems like the catalyst, rather than a changed ideology. Uruguay on the other hand has gone the opposite way, and the left-wing party *Frente Amplio* have only strengthened their position by winning three elections in a row, and seeing economic growth thirteen years in a row. Still, having an economy tightly connected to those of Argentina and Brazil, could be fatal once again.

Global Context – ‘War on Drugs’

The legalization in Uruguay did not happen in a vacuum. A major part of the motives behind a change in the legislation was because of exterior threats, including drug trafficking and the threat of violence. It should not come as a surprise that the threat is

an effect of the U.S.-led 'war on drugs',¹² which became adopted into the United Nation, making every member state sign the declaration of drug prohibition. In the 1970's, the Richard Nixon administration pushed towards a total prohibition against all drugs, and Nixon personally declared drug abuse to be "public enemy number one" in his famous 1971 speech. In the following decades, illegal trafficking of drugs to the United States increased rapidly, and left Colombia, among other countries, in a mixture of corruption and open civil war for decades, from which it still has not recovered. Latin America in particular has suffered deeply from the current politics of the war on drugs. Of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world in 2014, 45 were on the American continent. The thing most of the top ranked cities had in common was that it was located along the drug route from South America to the United States, or in Brazil, where the major drug routes to Europe lies. Uruguay, geographically placed south of the drug route, has not been affected that much, but still has problems with trafficking, being a secondary route to the European market.

Despite the fact that the U.S. introduced the so-called 'war on drugs', recent years have seen that cannabis has been legalized or decriminalized at state level. Four states in the U.S. have legalized cannabis for both medical and recreational use, while a dozen of other states have either legalized medical marijuana, or decriminalized personal use. More states seek to go through with legalization of cannabis for all purposes in the years to come, and the discussion is now whether cannabis should be legalized on a federal level as well.

Jarret Zigon argues that the best way to understand the "war on drugs" is by analysing it as a situation (Zigon, 2015). A situation is not limited, as to the visible consequences of gang violence often presented by media, but it manifests itself all over the world in different ways.¹³ Thus, "certain military missions in Afghanistan, police violence in the United States, therapeutic interventions in Russia and Denmark, torture and rape in Indonesia" have in common that they are all local manifestations of the *situation* named the drug war (Zigon, 2015:501). Nonetheless, in Uruguay those manifestations have led to legalization, and now the world turn its eyes towards Uruguay, which has passed the

¹² «War on drugs» is an inaccurate term. The "war" does not affect the drug, but people.

¹³ The reader familiar with globalization theory will see a connection to Ong & Collier (2005).

point of return. Reversing the legalization seems to be out of the question in the immediate future.

The Purpose and Regulation of Law 19.179

In my aim to grasp the meaning and purpose of the legalization, it is essential to make a full understanding of the law itself, and see how it is written. The Uruguayan Law number 19.172 is called “*Marihuana y sus derivados*” – marijuana and its derivatives, and regulates the state's laws regarding the control and regulations for import, production, acquisitions, treatment, commercialization, and distribution of cannabis. Already in the first article of the law, it is declared that it is in the interest of the public to protect, promote and improve *the public health* – through a political orientation aimed at decreasing the risk and reducing the potential damages surrounding cannabis. Further, it aims towards giving adequate information and education about the use and abuse of cannabis, by creating a state-run institute that will control and regulate the cultivation and sale of cannabis, called IRCCA¹⁴. The law is written in a way that stresses the importance of a good public health, interestingly putting the cannabis use under the same regulations as for tobacco use, and it is allowed to smoke cannabis in every public space where it is allowed to smoke tobacco. In addition to this, it is made clear that another purpose of the law is the necessity of protecting the country's inhabitants from the risks of illegal commercial, and drug trafficking, as well as reduce the occurrence of organized criminality. The last point is especially interesting, as it proclaims that the absence of violence is equally important, making the absence of violence an incorporated part of the law.

Moving over to the specific regulations regarding personal and inter-personal relations to the actual plant or product, the law proclaims that it is still illegal to sell, cultivate, harvest and commercialize every psychoactive plants, with some exceptions regarding the *cannabis* species. I will only address the three most important exceptions. The first exception is that it is allowed to personally cultivate up to a maximum of six cannabis plants, with a harvest that should not be more than 480 grams annually. The number of six plants applies for the household as well; meaning that a four-person household does

¹⁴ IRCCA = *Instituto de Regulación y Control del Cannabis* (Institute for regulation and control of cannabis).

not have the option of cultivating six plants each. This exception specifies that the cannabis must be for personal use or shared, implying that sale for profit is illegal.

The second exception is that it is possible to start or join a cannabis club. Cannabis clubs will have to be approved by the executive power, and will be controlled by IRCCA, having to fulfil the conditions and regulations stated. The clubs will need to have at least fifteen, and at most forty-five members, and can cultivate up to ninety-nine cannabis plants. However, they can only have an annually harvest that is proportional to the amount of members that the club has, which means an annually amount of maximum 480 grams per member. The third, and most demanding exception, is that the IRCCA will license the sale of cannabis to pharmacies, under the conditions already mentioned. To be able to buy cannabis in these pharmacies, one will have to register in a system, in which the IRCCA will have an opportunity to gain insight. The sale of marijuana may not exceed 40 grams monthly, which adds up to the same annual amount as both the clubs and self-cultivation, 480 grams each year. However, since IRCCA can gain insight in the purchase history, they will also have the possibility to conduct regular controls of people withdrawing “suspicious amounts” from clubs or pharmacies, suspecting to sell off parts of their quantity, as well as “helping” people with excessive use of cannabis to get the right medical attention or help.

It is quite interesting to take into account the emphasis towards health issues and in that regard I also want to address the tobacco law, introduced only a few years earlier. The first government period of the current president, and oncologist by profession, Tabaré Vazquez, made a legislation that prohibited smoking in enclosed public spaces in 2006, and further strengthened his anti-smoking politics by prohibiting tobacco commercials, and increasingly warning and educating about the potential health damages of tobacco. This law is significant, and as of spring 2016, there is an ongoing conflict between the state of Uruguay, and the international tobacco empire *Phillip Morris*, over what the latter has called the “devaluation of its cigarette trademarks and investments in Uruguay” (Psetizcki, 2010). Tobacco use has been declining a lot since the law came into force, and a survey made by the National Drug Board (JND), states that youngsters between 13 and 17 years old in Uruguay smoke more marijuana than tobacco. According to the survey, 17 percent of the participants had used marijuana in the last year, while

15,5 percent had used tobacco (JND, 2014). This was the first time in the history that smoking of marijuana exceeded that of smoking tobacco, and the prevalence of marijuana has doubled the last ten years. In the population in general, 8 percent answered that they had used cannabis during the last year, and 31 percent answered that they had used tobacco. The National Drug Board made a statement, warning about the results, but government officials responded that this is merely a global tendency, and not necessarily related to the new law.

Before analysing the law, it is essential to have a key understanding of laws as socially constructed. Laws are made by humans, and are culturally determined. As a foundation in his critique of the universalist perspective on Human Rights, Richard Wilson (1997) argues that cultural ideas of right and wrong differs from societies, and warned about potential damages to especially indigenous people. He argues that it is a new way of imperialism, but rather a cultural imperialism where one set of values is above the others. Louis Dumont (1986:240) points out that different sets of values in a society are organized in a hierarchy, and that the set of values highest in the hierarchy trumps the others. Dumont's notions of values propose a good way of analysing the legislation. We see in the law that a set of values are highlighted, as for instance the education and enlightenment of certain risks that follow use of cannabis. This is in line with the traditional approach stated by the United Nations. However, the legality of use and cultivation of cannabis is not, so there are obvious conflicts in the approach. There are two sets of values in terms of health, which I find to be the ones highest in the hierarchy. First, there is the individual level regarding users of cannabis. The Uruguayan state acknowledges that a certain percentage of its population will use cannabis despite its potential risks, and therefore they want to make sure that the product they use is certified, to minimize the risks. Second, there is a set of values regarding the population in general. The state again acknowledges that as long as there are consumers, who are willing to pay for the product, organized criminals will try to benefit from this by smuggling narcotics into the country, and by doing that, the risk of violence increases. The dilemma then is whether active pursuit of those criminals in order to confiscate and eradicate cannabis, is better than taking away the market from the criminals by legalizing self-cultivation and commercial sale. In this case, the absence of violence is seen as the best way to ensure safety and the public health.

By legalizing cannabis, the Uruguayan state has transformed a cultural object, cannabis, from illegal to legal. Igor Kopytoff (1986) describes how objects have a certain biography, and how their perception as commodity is a process. He uses the term *commoditization*¹⁵ to describe the process of becoming a commodity, to which *singularization* is the reverse process. I borrow those terms, and readjust them in this context to be “legal” and “illegal”. Commodification then, is “legal”, and singularization is “illegal”, while the “object” is cannabis. When cannabis first was declared illegal by law, it went through a “singularization”, and thus became an unwanted object. It was withdrawn from the market due to the fact that it was considered profane. Now it has gone through another process, and become legal again. During the process of law, the cultural object, cannabis, has gone through a process of “commoditization”, and thus been accepted as a commodity again. Kopytoff further argues that certain objects may have different meanings to different persons. I seek to find the differences in the perception of cannabis as commodity or non-commodity more in chapter 4.

State Regulation of Whisky

In implementing the legalization of cannabis as a state monopoly, the Uruguayan authorities have already a strong history in taking control over markets. Most notably is the creation of *Administración Nacional de Combustibles, Alcoholes y Portland*¹⁶ (ANCAP) in 1931. The creation of ANCAP was initiated by the *batllismo* politics, and had several goals for alcohol (Finch, 1981:211). Believing that alcohol was the fuel of the future, the Uruguayan government put a lot of effort in trying to make the country energy independent, but failed due to the global expansion of the petroleum industry.¹⁷ A contemporary problem in the 1920’s was that people were distilling wood alcohol and mixing toxic blends with alcohol (Haberkorn, 2013). Intoxication was a serious problem, so the government took action and created a monopoly on alcohol. The strategy back then was, as senator Lucía Topolansky explained in an interview, “that people are going to keep drinking, but we have to offer a quality product, that doesn’t carry any dangerous side effects” (Haberkorn, 2013). ANCAP specialized in distilling whisky, and

¹⁵ Not to be confused with the Marxist theory *commodification*.

¹⁶ National Administration of Fuel, Alcohol and Cement.

¹⁷ Explaining the name of ANCAP, and the reason why the company produces alcohol alongside oil and cement.

while the monopoly was dissolved in 1996, an after-effect is still visible in Uruguay today, with Uruguay being the second largest consumer of whisky per capita in the world, succeeding France (Ferdman, 2014).

The similarities between the state monopoly of alcohol and the legalization of cannabis are many. The plant itself propose interesting opportunities, as the industrial variety of cannabis: Hemp can be used to produce products like rope, organic plastic¹⁸ and clothes. Similarly, in the 1920's people drank wood alcohol and alcohol mixed with toxic blends. The most common cannabis product on the streets of Montevideo has the same problem, as it is mixed with toxic substances. Moreover, a state monopoly on cannabis is likely to generate a considerable tax income, which also was a motive for the creation of ANCAP.

A Short Report from the UNGASS conference, 2016

Before moving to the next chapter, I will briefly touch upon the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS). This special session was originally scheduled to be held in 2019, but due to the enormous impact drug trafficking has on the transit countries, Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia demanded that it had to be pushed forward. The three countries suffers heavy loss of human lives due to drug related crimes, and demand that the present drug policy has to be changed. The United Nations made no changes to the official drug policy, and although Uruguay did not get much to say at the conference, their official stand follows what I have already discussed:

“The approach towards drug policy should be based on the pillars of public health, Human Rights, gender, coexistence and quality. Disorders related to problematic drug use are preventable, treatable and reversible”

- (National Drug Board, 2015)

Despite no real change in the official stance by the United Nations, countries like Canada, Mexico and Colombia proposed to take action on their own. Canada has already made a bill for legalization of recreational cannabis for personal use in 2017. Mexico and

¹⁸ Hemp plastic is a lot more sustainable for the environment, as it deteriorates quickly in nature.

Colombia have indicated that they will follow with a legalization of cannabis for medical purposes.

Chapter 3 – Perceptions of Cannabis

In this chapter, I will address issues regarding how people perceive cannabis and public health. Following the previous chapter where I touched upon central elements of the law, I will now turn to the individual perception of cannabis and drugs. I will first touch upon some general health issues, and then look at how cannabis differs from tobacco and other drugs. In the last part of this chapter, I will use a celebration of the legality of cannabis, “The First Marijuana Harvest” as a case to explore how state and people interact with each other.

In the analysis of my empirical data, I will draw heavily on Mary Douglas’s work “*Purity and Danger*” (1991). I will not only look at the distinction between purity and pollution, but also use the concepts of binary oppositions, that we know from the structuralist tradition of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972), to obtain a more adequate understanding of how my informants perceive cannabis. I follow Lévi-Strauss in his proposal to that every culture can be understood through binary oppositions, and that people think about the world in terms of dichotomies. I am aware of the fact that Lévi-Strauss’ universalist approach to dichotomies has faced critiques from several scholars, and rightfully so. Among others, feminists have commented on his notion of female being subordinated by male as a posture that contributes to legitimizing men’s power over women¹⁹ (Eriksen, 2010:133). However, thinking in cognitive structures with binary oppositions proposes a useful analytical tool in this context. As we will see in this chapter, there are existing dichotomies that cannabis is related to as a binary opposite, as tobacco opposed to cannabis, and pasta base as opposed to cannabis. Moreover, and maybe more interesting, there are mainly two types of cannabis present in Uruguayan society that serves as each other’s opposite.

Health Perspectives on Life In Uruguay

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*”. Veena Das, among others, has pointed out that this definition emphasizes the physical ‘state’ and not the ‘experience’ of well-being, thus pointing to the extent “which we have begun

¹⁹ As well as propose a ‘third’ gender.

to think of health and disease as linked to the fates of body populations and the regulatory powers of the state” (Das, 1990:27). Health can mean many things in different contexts, and she argues that this plurality of meaning is important in tackling health issues (1990:45). My focus here will be on the actual perception of what is healthy, and try to use those perceptions in order to understand how people perceive cannabis.

As I have explained in the previous chapter, the Uruguayan state and public health are closely linked together, and because the state is in a complete responsibility of public health, this also reflects the citizens’ thoughts on the issue. The first and most visible initiative towards the improvement of public health, I soon found out, was that salt was damaging to the body, and by knocking salt off from the dining tables one could expect to live better and longer. Every restaurant I went to had official stickers from the *Ministerio de Salud*²⁰ with a fitting slogan: “*Menos sal, más vida*” - less salt, more life. While it is true that too much salt is not good for your health, I found it strange that not a single restaurant I visited during my first weeks of fieldwork actually had salt or pepper already placed on the table. I did not pay too much attention to the salt issue before I was attending a dinner in *Casa Conventillo*. Sofía, one of the girls living there, had made a nice pasta dish, but I found the complete lack of salt not appealing. I stood up, walked the two metres to the kitchen counter, got the saltshaker, and poured some salt over my plate. Sofía made a shocked noise to get my attention, and almost screamed to me, “oh my god!” Although I understood it was because of the salt I had put on, I was a little surprised myself, and quickly responded with a cautious “what?” She said with a serious tone; “So much salt... You are going to die!” The Uruguayan cuisine is neither spicy nor well seasoned for my taste, and I had a lot of discussions with both Sofía and other informants whether salt or spices destroyed the taste of the food. I like my food with salt and different spices. They respected that, but Sofía’s response this time was an expression concerning my body’s well being.

Sofía was not the only person who spoke out about my salt habits. My first weeks living together with Diego, he complained about my excessive use of salt as well, telling me that I was *loco* (crazy). At this time, I did not even use much salt in my food, considering

²⁰The Uruguayan Ministry of Public Health.

the only salt that was in the house was a big bag of chemically produced salt. I then decided to buy a relatively expensive salt grinder with sea salt. Some days after my purchase, I noticed that Diego was using my salt grinder on his dinner. I confronted him about what I had just seen, and asked him why he was using the salt. If he was to complain about my salt use, I should definitely retaliate in kind. “Yeah, but this is a good salt”, he told me; “this is naturally produced”.

The separation Diego made between “natural” and “unnatural” in terms of salt, and what can be extended to “pure” and “impure” is a distinction that became increasingly clear during my fieldwork. As we will see later in this chapter, there were general distinctions between “natural” and “unnatural”, “pure” and “impure” when it came to cannabis. Mary Douglas (1991) draws on the Durkhemian thoughts of sacred and profane boundaries when analysing the concepts of pollution and purity. Douglas applies that notion of boundaries in order to explain the abominations of Leviticus, and how some animals are easily categorized, and therefore “pure” and edible, while others are not as easily categorized, and hence, “dirty” and “impure”, and not for eating. Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnar (2001:168) write-on the symbolic boundaries that they “are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices [...]”. Further, the boundaries “separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership”. Symbolic boundaries, then, are tools that individuals or groups struggle over and come to agree in order to define the reality. Let us keep this in mind while we turn over to my empirical data.

Cannabis and tobacco

In chapter 2, I mentioned the strict tobacco laws, and how those restrictive laws, combined with public education, have led to a significant decline in tobacco consumption. It is a well-established fact that cigarettes are bad for your health, and can cause cancer, reduced fertility and have other unfavourable effects. Yet cigarettes are widely consumed throughout the world. Among my main informants, only Jorge and Pablo were habitual smokers, however the majority smoked occasionally or at parties. Others were completely against smoking cigarettes, as they said it was “chemical” or “intoxicating”, and thereby “impure”.

The reason for the decline in tobacco consumption is not only related to education of health risks and stricter laws. Another and equally important fact that has to be taken into account is the price of cigarettes, which had purposely been increased due to a raise of taxes. A pack of cigarettes was relatively expensive compared to the neighbouring countries, Argentina and Brazil. While an expensive brand cost around \$3 in Uruguay, you could buy the equivalent for \$2 in Argentina or \$1,80 in Brazil. At some *ferias* it was possible to buy contraband cigarettes from Paraguay or Brazil for around \$1,80 apiece, but my informants usually did not buy contraband cigarettes, as they were not considered good quality. Still, research has shown that illegally imported cigarettes actually account for almost one third of the total tobacco market in Uruguay (EFE, 2015).

While the occasional smokers mostly bought cigarettes, Jorge and Pablo usually bought rolling tobacco. The reason for this was not the taste, but because rolling tobacco was cheaper than manufactured cigarettes. Since I was the only other person in the house that smoked cigarettes regularly, my relationships with them, especially Pablo, became closer, and we often went out to the balcony to smoke cigarettes together. Already the first day I met Pablo, he asked me if I had cigarettes, which I unfortunately did not have at the time. Claudia, one of the other persons present was surprised, and asked Pablo if he smoked. Pablo sighed and exclaimed an ambiguous “no”. He then told me that he was ashamed of his smoking habits, and that he wanted to quit smoking, but he had not given it a proper try yet. I asked him why he was ashamed of smoking, and he answered that he did not feel it was good for his body.

Almost every evening in *Casa Conventillo* were spent on the balcony outside of either Pablo or Mariana's room. The balcony served as a tranquil, informal space where it was possible to relax and enjoy each other's company, and we spent many late evening hours on the balcony, talking about the wonders of life in the quiet atmosphere. During these evening sessions there were frequently consumed marijuana cigarettes, which gathered everyone that was present in the house. When someone had available cannabis, they used to put on music, often reggae related to cannabis subculture like Bob Marley, and the household gathered around in a circle, passing the joint around to the left. At these rituals, I usually lit a cigarette and partook in the circle, but politely rejected my “turn” with the joint. It was perfectly fine for me to deny smoking cannabis, and at times other

people in the circle renounced their turn, but my choice to smoke cigarettes instead of a joint was seen as a bit strange, especially since I smoked regular cigarettes instead of cannabis. When I asked Mariana if she wanted a cigarette after one of these rituals, she told me that she did not smoke tobacco, since it was “poisonous” (*tóxico*).

Diego, my host for the last three months of my fieldwork, did not appreciate cigarettes at all. His father had worked in a tobacco factory, and no one in his family smoked or had been smokers. After I moved into his apartment, he told me that if I wanted to smoke, I had to go out on the balcony. I did not find that especially strange, but he then proceeded to tell me that I could smoke marijuana inside the house if I wanted to. This practice repeated itself in several homes I visited. Cigarettes were considered dirtier and more unnatural than cannabis. The tobacco odour was pollution to the rooms, and had to be segregated from the indoor environment, while cannabis was tolerated as something natural, and could therefore be smoked inside. Interestingly, smoking cannabis inside the house was also more tolerated among people who did not smoke cannabis themselves.

The emerging question is, then, why is smoking cannabis inside a house tolerated? Legally, there are no differences between cannabis and tobacco in terms of where it is allowed to smoke. It is illegal to smoke both cigarettes and cannabis in enclosed public spaces, but in enclosed private spaces, like most homes, it is, as we have seen, more accepted to smoke marijuana than cigarettes. In many ways, tobacco was dirt, and what Douglas calls “matter out of place” (1991:35). Therefore, tobacco did not belong inside in the apartment, and as Douglas writes; “Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment” (Douglas, 1991:2). The exclusion of tobacco is, therefore, a means to get it outside the house, where it belongs. Cannabis on the other hand could remain inside the house. To use an emic perspective, tobacco contains noxious fumes and gases, while cannabis does not. A symbolic boundary is made between the inside and outside of the house, where dirt, here represented as tobacco, has to be segregated from the inside and placed on the outside the walls.

Preparing a Joint

To prepare a cigarette containing cannabis, you need to have four things: Rolling paper, a filter, marijuana, and a grinder.²¹ I will here illustrate how Hernán used to make his joints, as I observed him making joints countless times during my stay. First, he took a suitable amount of marijuana, between a half and one gram, and put it in the grinder, before grinding the marijuana until it was just small fragments. Then he used a small stiff paper and rolled it to make a suitable filter, before rolling the paper around the filter to make a cone. He then put the marijuana fragments into the joint and flicked the joint with his fingers so that it became more compressed. He filled it up, and twirled the top of the joint together. Then it was ready to smoke. This is different from what I have learned about the Norwegian or European practice. In Norway, for instance, it is common to mix the cannabis with tobacco, especially if it is hashish, but also if it is marijuana (Pedersen, 2011). This may of course be because of the price; one gram of cannabis is between ten and twenty times higher in Norway than in Uruguay. Here, particularly one episode is interesting to highlight:

I was at an *asado* with a big group of people when Cristian lit a joint and passed it around. A few moments earlier, he had shown me that he had obtained recently harvested marijuana. The texture was a bit wet, so he used some tobacco to get the joint to burn better. The joint passed through several people, before a young girl, unbeknown to me, took a puff. She blew the smoke out of her mouth and her face became severe. “Is it tobacco in this?” she said with a serious tone. Cristian looked at her for a few seconds and mumbled something I did not catch. The girl asked him again, somewhat irritated; “seriously, is it tobacco in this? Because I do not smoke tobacco!” Cristian responded, a bit embarrassed; “yes, but just a little bit”. She passed the joint to her left, and said *gracias!* with a sarcastic tone, and did not talk to him for the next twenty-thirty minutes. Then she apologized to him, and said that she did not expect there to be tobacco in the joint, and that this threw her off. Taking into my observations, it was a fair assumption. I had only noticed the mixture of cannabis and tobacco two times prior to this event, and several people had uttered that they should not mix. Douglas (1991:34-5) proposes to make an understanding that if two things are exposed to each other, the attributes transfer between the objects. More specifically, the ‘dirty’ object pollutes the pure object.

²¹ One can also use a water pipe, but those paraphernalia was not frequent used among my informants.

This leads me to say that when cannabis and tobacco mixes, the cannabis gets polluted by the tobacco, and incorporates the impure qualities of the tobacco.

Cannabis and other drugs

The prevalence of cannabis was widespread during my fieldwork, but to understand how my informants perceived cannabis as a substance, I find it useful to compare it to their perception of other drugs. Often when we talked about Uruguayan society and the legalization, it was inevitable to touch upon subjects like other drugs, most notoriously *pasta base*, the antithesis of cannabis in terms of both social and cultural status. Pasta base is a form of cocaine paste, similar to crack, and is used mainly by poor people drifting on the streets. In addition to pasta base, cocaine was somewhat²² prevalent, but was not considered dirty or polluted to the same degree although I would not say that it was categorized as “pure”. Rather, cocaine ranges in-between pasta base and coca leaves, as we will see later. Nevertheless, the reason for pasta base being “impure” is clear, as it literally is the chemical leftovers of the cocaine production.

One night, I went to a party with Hernán, Carolina and some of their friends from school. After the party, they wanted to go to *El Almacén*, a former storage building now renovated and made into a huge party place for electronic music. When we got to the entrance, we met one of Carolina's friends, Rodrigo, who had come out to sneak us in through the VIP entrance. His handshake was clammy, and pearls of sweat rolled down his face, his pupils were large and he was nodding his head along with the music as we greeted each other. We went inside and stood under the stairs for a minute, while Rodrigo gave Hernán a blue pill of what I later learned was ecstasy. Hernán swallowed the pill, and we got out on the dance floor to enjoy the hard techno that pumped out through the stereo. Later that evening, Carolina asked me how much drugs cost in Norway. I started with what I perceived as the most common Norwegian drug, cannabis, and told her that I thought it cost around 23 dollars per gram. She looked at me and smiled, and said; “*pero ... cannabis no es una droga – but ... cannabis is not a drug*”.

²² When I write “somewhat”, it is because I am aware that it has a certain prevalence in the country. I never encountered cocaine among my informants, but was told several times that it was used on the VIP clubs by the “rich guys”.

After this night, I started to pay more attention to *how* people actually perceived cannabis. If it is not a drug, then what is it? On the other hand – what makes cannabis different from other substances that are categorized as drugs? A few days later, I confronted Carolina about what she had said, and asked her what she had meant by that. She answered me that cannabis was no more dangerous than alcohol, and that if alcohol should be legal, then cannabis should be legal too. She then straightened up, and admitted that it was a drug, but started elaborating. “It is mild, and it is totally wrong that it is equated with pasta base or cocaine. Those drugs are dangerous”. I asked her if she had tried any other drugs, but she denied that. “I have a brother who is a drug addict, so I do not take any drugs myself”, she added.

While pasta base is the type of drug that poses most problems in the southern cone of Latin America, Europe has had long-lasting problems with heroin – a semisynthetic opiate. Pasta base and heroin resembles each other, in the sense that they are both chemical, highly addictive, and damaging to the user’s health. Pedersen and Sandberg (2011:176-7) set up a distinction on how Norwegian cannabis users distinguish themselves from heroin users, and in explaining why they do so, the authors propose that it may be due to the symbolic meaning of heroin as addictive, and that the heroin users are seen as ill. That is probably a decent point, but at the same time morphine, which is a form of opiate in its purest form, is frequently used in hospitals without being attributed to addiction or illness. Similar reflections can be made on the case of coca leaves in Bolivia. Coca leaves are the leaves that cocaine is made from in a chemical process, and in Bolivia, there are campaigns that urges for the legalization of coca leaves (TNI, 2008). The argument is that the indigenous people have used it for thousands of years prior to the arrivals of Europeans in South America, and it is still part of the indigenous tradition. The international status on the coca leaf has long been problematic, as the UN maintains its position on its illegality. Comparatively, in Bolivia too, I find it plausible to believe that the coca leaves are considered “natural”, while cocaine is seen as “impure”.

Two Different Varieties of Cannabis

Drawing further on the dichotomies between pure and polluted, the time is ripe to compare cannabis to itself. There are mainly two types of cannabis available in Montevideo; the illegally imported Paraguayan “brick weed”, and the home grown, high potent Uruguayan marijuana. While the Paraguayan cannabis is cheap, it also has rumours of being mixed with leaves, faeces, chemicals and petroleum. It has a distinctive smell, and smells more like a car garage than a plant. The Uruguayan cannabis had a familiar sweet smell, which smelt like something that you could expect to smell in the nature. Then, if the Paraguayan cannabis was chemical and impure, and the Uruguayan cannabis was natural and pure, why does not everyone smoke the Uruguayan weed? The answer to this is twofold. First, the Paraguayan type goes for a much lower rate. On the streets, the Paraguayan cannabis can be sold for as little as one fifth of the Uruguayan cannabis. Second, there is a shortage of the Uruguayan type, and the demand is simply too overwhelming for the relatively few suppliers. Furthermore, as we will investigate further in the next chapter, it is still not legal to sell cannabis, and the state-controlled sale at pharmacies is yet to be implemented. Nevertheless, things are changing. After the first harvest of the legal crops started in late March, the Paraguayan kind seemed to disappear from my network of informants, and the last two months I did not smell it anymore on the streets. A convenient question is, though, if Paraguayan cannabis was impure, why did people buy it? Well, it still worked, one just had to smoke a larger amount. Although people bought and smoked it, I always heard excuses when they had it. “*Solo es paraguayo*” – it is only Paraguayan, was a common phrase during my first three months of fieldwork.

On occasions like *previas*, there were often different types of drinking games played, and I used these situations to my own benefit. One evening, we were a small group gathered around at the house in which Carolina and Tomás lived. It was late, and the group had decided that they needed a game of cards to get the spirit up. In this card game, when one player got a card with the number 10, they had to say a category, and then the person to their left had to say a word in that category. After some rounds, I got a card with the number 10, and decided that the category this time should be “drugs”. Hernán, who was sitting at my left, said immediately “*cannabis*”, making the person to his left say another type of drug. It kept going until Tomás said “*alcohol*”. The group reacted to his

answer, telling him that “alcohol” was not a drug, but Tomás protested about this. “*Si cannabis es una droga, alcohol es una droga también!*” – If cannabis is a drug, then alcohol is also a drug! he shouted. Two of the girls denied his assertion, but the rest of the group agreed with Tomás, and the game went on.

The arguments made by Tomás above, and Carolina earlier in the chapter when she said that cannabis is no worse than alcohol, did not stand out on its own. Several people made that connection, and cannabis users in other countries have used the same argument frequently as well.²³ Some people even made statements that disparaged the negative side effects of cannabis, and proclaimed that alcohol was bad. This is an obvious paradox, as the very same persons actually drank alcohol themselves. Some people even told me that alcohol was bad, and took a sip of a beer just seconds later. Sandberg and Pedersen (2011:84) have noted the same paradox, and argue that the fact that people feel like they have to justify their cannabis use serves as evidence that cannabis is still stigmatized.

During another *previa*, we played a version of the game “Never have I ever”, where one person had to say something he or she has never done, and then those who have done it have to take a sip of their drinks. In this version, however, when saying “never have I ever”, those who had done it would have to answer completely, and elaborate. When it was my turn to ask a question, I asked; “Never have I ever taken any other drugs than cannabis”. That proved insightful, as six out of the group of eight people had tried cocaine, and further three had tried a mildly hallucinogenic plant called *salvia divinorum*. With the exception of Hernán, who had tried a variety of drugs, no one had tried anything else than cocaine or *salvia divinorum*. As the discussion of drugs went on, I asked the group if they wanted to try other drugs that they had not already tried. Three people said that they would like to try the hallucinogenic plant *ayahuasca*, and two of those three said they would like to try ecstasy, but the rest of the group were content with what they had already tried, and said that cannabis was sufficient for them.

²³ Pedersen and Sandberg (2011) touches upon this point several times in their book.

Producing Health – The Government Strategies

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how the law has been written to maintain the government's focus on public health. There are two main subjects that I will stress here surrounding this focus. First, the government has diverted the health aspects from a previous attitude of cannabis as a drug, to a discourse where it is a need to ensure its inhabitants health by giving them a certified and quality checked product, as an alternative to the Paraguayan weed mentioned above. When the government is taking control over the commercialization of the cannabis industry, it is a way to make sure that people who used to smoke Paraguayan cannabis will now have the possibility to get a hold of a product that is safer, and more reliable.

The second change of subject is maybe the most important one in terms of politics. The government rationalizes the legalization by making the threat of violence against public safety an incorporated aspect of the public health. The rationale lies here within the fact that if they can take a share of the money from organized crime networks, and thereby reducing the profit in illegal drug activities, they can also ensure the population's safety. Neither of these two subjects are something new in terms of the state seizing control over prohibited markets. As we saw in the previous chapter, the country had significant problems with illegal alcohol distillations in the 1920's, when people got poisoned drinking wood alcohol and other toxic mixtures. The Uruguayan state intervened, and started producing certified whisky, rum and vodka, which it still does. That experience is similar to what the government is trying to do with the cannabis industry now.

To secure that basic public health issues regarding cannabis are being maintained, the government created a new, state-run institute for regulation and control over cannabis activities, IRCCA. It has the authority to give out licenses for persons or households who want to register for cultivation of cannabis plants at home, as well as approving cannabis clubs. It has the responsibility of educating and giving out sufficient knowledge about cannabis, raising awareness of the potential harms the drug can cause. In the future, it will also track the sales registers at pharmacies, to make sure that no one exceeds their monthly limitations, and to check up on suspicious behaviour. If anyone is withdrawing the full amount every month or having problems with consume, it can be necessary to hospitalize people, and force him or her into treatment.

Before we move over to see how the state promotes health incentives regarding the law, and how the people respond to those laws, let us have a look at some theoretical approaches. Michel Foucault writes on the relation between the state and knowledge, that the individual is not necessarily repressed or altered by the social order, but rather “carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of force and bodies” (Foucault, 1977:217). Knowledge is obtained through surveillance, and one of those techniques was the architectural structure of the modern prison of *Panopticon*, which effect was “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (1977:201). Central to Foucault was the aspect of power and the relation of power between the state and the person. I do not seek to follow the aspect of power as such, as I find it to be a matter-of-course. Rather, what interests me is his approach towards the state as an institution that fabricates persons. The next subchapter will thus seek to explore in which way that is actually the case in Uruguay.

The First Harvest - In the intersection of state and person



Figure 2: The First Sovereign Harvest of marijuana

Earlier we have seen how the state and people perceive and propose certain ideas of purity and pollution, but now I will show what happens when state and citizens interact. At the beginning of April, as the cannabis crops were ready for harvest, things started to change in Montevideo. An increasing number of my informants were in possession of the Uruguayan cannabis, and in the streets and public parks, one could often smell a more herb-like cannabis odour, as opposed to the strange and rather chemical odour of the Paraguayan “brick weed”. With the new harvests, the appearance of the Paraguayan “brick weed” more or less disappeared in my circuits, during the last two months of my fieldwork, I did not even once encounter people who were either carrying or smoking it. As the first harvest took place, it was time for a celebration, and instead of the annual “Legalize Cannabis” marches, that takes place all over the world, it was rather time for the first celebration of an actual legalization of cannabis. Under the slogan ‘*Primer cosecha soberano*’, – the first sovereign harvest, there was no need to march to the legislative palace like previous years, but rather a celebration was held at *Molina de Perez*, a quiet and large park in one of the more wealthy outskirts of Montevideo. The celebration was organized by *Movimiento por la Legalización del Cannabis*.²⁴ Advertisements before the celebration were marked with “*Jornada informativa cannabica*” – cannabis information day, as well, and it was announced that representatives from the state would be present to distribute information about cannabis.

The celebration was scheduled to start at 3PM, but as Cristian and I approached the park, we did not see any people, and only heard the chirping of birds. As we got closer, we saw a scaffold behind some trees, and something that looked like a music scene. Some thirty people were sitting in small groups, relaxing, drinking mate, smoking cannabis, and enjoying *la vida tranquila*, – the quiet life, and like so often during my fieldwork, I once again had to wait for something to happen. As time went by, more and more people started to show up, and an inflatable castle was put up. At this time, I realized that people had brought their children with them, and had no problem smoking cannabis in front of them. I asked Cristian about why kids were present at such an event, but he just shrugged his shoulders as a sign of indifference, and told me that it did not

²⁴ The Movement for Legalization of Cannabis (in Uruguay).

matter. “If people want to bring their kids with them here, why not? Nothing happens here, it’s peaceful”. Although it was a Saturday, and most people had the weekend off from work, I was surprised that it had merged a family gathering with a cannabis celebration. It did however, not seem like a problem for any of the people attending this afternoon. This may indicate that cannabis actually is undergoing a normalization process and that the cannabis culture in Uruguay is not as closely linked to a ‘secretive’ subculture as Sandberg & Pedersen have shown that it is in Norway.

Cristian and I walked around, and we went to the information stand that was to the left of the scene, where we saw that it was IRCCA. They had a stand here with the purpose of raising awareness and sharing information about cannabis. IRCCA is the representative of the state who was present at this celebration in order to make sure that the health issues regarding cannabis were attended to. At this event, they had a stand with large posters of different aspects of cannabis, while simultaneously passing on knowledge to the persons present. I started talking to one of the representatives, who explained to me that they had a somewhat secluded role during the event. Although the event was supported by IRCCA, they did not feel the need to squeeze into the crowd. “People are having a good time, we are here just to answer questions people may have towards cannabis use”, he told me. Then he showed me a flyer with information about the law, and another about the potential risks regarding cannabis. I will present them here. The headline read, “There is a point of balance between enjoying oneself and taking care”. Then, seven recommendations or advices regarding cannabis use were listed:

“If you consume cannabis, bear in mind...

- 1) *When, with who, and why you smoke. If a joint circles around, that does not mean that you have to take it.*
- 2) *Ensure the quality and its origin. If it is pressed,²⁵ it is not legal. The current regulation does not allow this product.*
- 3) *In the first experiences, it is best to be accompanied by someone you know. In unpleasant experiences, it is important to keep calm, and if necessary ask for help.*
- 4) *It is less risky to vaporize. Then you will avoid inhaling burning paper that contains toxics. If you smoke it in a joint, use as thin paper as possible.*

²⁵ ‘Pressed’ means the illegally imported Paraguayan cannabis.

- 5) *There are different usages: Recreational and medical. Cannabis with higher THC generates more psychoactive effects, and cannabis with higher CBD is used more often for medical purposes.*
- 6) *Avoid consuming cannabis if you drive, study, work, operating machines, or if you suffers from any psychiatric disorder or going through a challenging time.*
- 7) *Promote your rights and responsibilities from day to day. Do not encourage underage smoking or illegal trade.”*

In addition to this, they were also giving out water and free cups to people, ensuring that people could hydrate. The cups had engraved statements saying “cuidate y disfrutá” – take care and enjoy yourself, a slogan used by the IRCCA to raise awareness of the potential dangers surrounding excessive cannabis use.

My informants, however, were mostly aware of these seven items. It was not expected that everybody should take a puff of the joint, although standing in the circle where a joint was lit usually was a sign of wanting to participate. They were aware that the pressed cannabis was not legal, but if they did not have anything else, they still used it. I hardly observed anyone using a vaporizer to smoke cannabis, but that is to some extent a matter of practicality as well. My informants were well aware of the difference between recreational and medical marijuana, especially so in *Casa Conventillo*, where I find it plausible that, at least, Jorge and Marco probably know more than the government officials do. As far as I was told and what I noticed, cannabis was not used in situations where the government recommends not using it, with the exception of while studying. I showed Cristian the flyer I had received, and asked him if he smoked at work or at school, and he started laughing. “Of course”, he said. “Not that often, but it happens occasionally that we go out to share a joint”. At some point later in the conversation, he told me that his creativity increased when he was high, making the curriculum more exciting when he was studying.

At this stand, albeit at a public celebration arranged by independent actors, the state, embodied in the employers giving out information, have the power to fabricate the individual. What we see, however, is that many people attending cannabis events such as this already have the knowledge that the state search to distribute. Not only that, they do

not even follow all the guidelines that the government seek to teach. The state subtly attempts to “fabricate people” and their use of cannabis, by making themselves visible, or to rephrase the citation of Foucault from above, to induce the users of cannabis a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. In this case, it proves inefficient, because most people already know the advices proposed by the state, and choose to ignore the ones they do not agree with and the ones that are not convenient for them. Moreover, the attempt at fabricating people into not cultivating cannabis prior to the new law neither proved to be effective, as people still cultivated both cannabis and knowledge.²⁶

Around midnight, the celebration moved on to the *Excarcel Miguelete*. Miguelete was a prison before and during the dictatorship in 1970’s and first half of the 80’s, but was closed down shortly after the return to democracy. The prison yard had been used before as a party location, but this time it had been chosen since it represented a much greater symbolic value. The celebration was located in a place where criminals were kept away from society, yet now people who would have been criminals just a year ago voluntarily came into a place where they could have ended up. Lamont and Molnar writes that symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors (2002:168), and this event was a clever redrawing of symbolic and factual legal boundaries in the civil/civic sphere in Montevideo. The result of this symbolic boundary, was that the people partaking in the cannabis movement emerged “into groups and generate feelings of similarity” (Lamont & Molnar, 2001:168). A cannabis activist, speaking from the scene put up inside the prison, made this point very clear, as he talked about the progress of the legalization. “We have won the battle!” he shouted from the scene, to the cheering of the crowd. This event symbolically marked the first victory of the legalization movement, and the first crop was now harvested.

While the tranquil, slow-paced life is almost a social virtue in Uruguay, this also represents both the politics and more especially the implementation of this law. When I ended my fieldwork, there were still no signs or indications to when it would be possible to buy cannabis at pharmacies. However, there were more than 2000 people registered

²⁶ And, I argue, neither does it in the rest of the world, as we see a global war on drugs proving to be inefficient and failing in a large scale.

for growing cannabis at home, and a significantly larger amount of people growing cannabis without registering. If those numbers are a result of the absence of regulated sales on pharmacies, or if it is part of a trend of an increasing trend is yet to be determined.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set cannabis up against tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, and we have gained an understanding of how my informants perceived cannabis. By comparing it to tobacco, we have seen that cannabis has a natural attribute, and that it belongs to the private enclosed spaces, while tobacco is excluded and segregated from them. By mixing cannabis and tobacco together in a cigarette, the cannabis then undergoes a process, which makes it polluted, and thus not consumable by some people. We have seen that some of my informants did not even consider cannabis to be a “drug”, taking into account that drugs are generally considered potentially harmful, which according to some of my informants, cannabis was not. The “drug” label is widely reserved for the substances like cocaine, pasta base and other psychoactive stimulants. The common feature then, is that the substance that is closest to nature, and not processed, is considered purer, and thus “better”, than its opposite. The Uruguayan cannabis is more worth than the imported Paraguayan brick weed because of this. The government plays an active role in ‘fabricating citizens, and I have shown how the government implements the new law by redirecting the focus on the general public health to also include absence of violence from organized crime gangs. As became evident in the last part of the chapter, the state tries to monitor and influence its citizens to be careful and have a modest consume of cannabis, by partaking in events related to cannabis, as “The First Harvest”. There, we saw that many people already have the knowledge that the state provides, and are therefore not particularly affected by it.

Chapter 4 – The Informal Economy of Cannabis

I was out in the backyard of *El Boliche*, a nightclub where my informants frequently went. It was warm and humid inside, and the air was bad, so I had gone out to get some fresh air and cool down. I sat down in a chair, and started talking to a group of young men who sat at the table next to me, smoking cannabis. They asked me what I was doing in Uruguay, and I explained that I was here to research the impact of the cannabis legalization. Pedro, one of the men who sat there, told me that his father grew cannabis at their house, and was quite proud of that fact. We talked for a little while, before Pedro and his friends were going home for the night. Before they went out of the club, he brought up a small plastic bag containing a *cogollo*, a sprout from the cannabis plant, and told me; “take this, *amigo*. It is a gift to you from me”. I thanked him, but said that if he wanted to smoke more that night, he could keep it for himself. He assured me that it was not a problem. “This is the best *cogollo* you can get your hands on in Uruguay. When you are in Uruguay, you have to experience the best marijuana that exists”. I thanked him again, and we gave each other a hug before he left.

This chapter will address three different economic strategies of the distribution of cannabis in Montevideo. The first part will address forms of reciprocity within the gift economy of cannabis. The episode demonstrated above represents the clearest example of this. I never saw Pedro again, and besides spending an evening together, he did not get anything from me in return. His gift to me was thus more a token of hospitality, a ‘pure’ gift given to show me the good side of Uruguayan society. I will elaborate on the mindset of sharing that was an important aspect of both the marijuana and the general worldview among my informants. Here, I will mainly address the legal cultivation in *Casa Conventillo*, where I lived during parts of my fieldwork. The second part will have a focus on the cannabis clubs and at the same time turn the attention to the absence of state-run outlets of cannabis, hence creating a *grey market*. I am aware that the term grey market can be misleading in this context, because it implies the trade of commodities through distribution channels that are legal, but unintended by the original manufacturer, and often means the trading of imported goods, otherwise not available in the country. However, I will use this term to distinguish it from what traditionally has been understood as black market, or what Philippe Bourgois calls an underground market (Bourgois, 2003:2-4). The grey market is then an informal, not legal, yet not

illegal market in which this trade takes place. The third part of the chapter will turn its attention to Francisco, a cultivator who grows cannabis without governmental permission. I will argue that this illegal cultivation has similar traits to both the gift economy and the underground grey market.

Again, it is important to stress that there are no legal ways to buy cannabis, and the purpose of this chapter is to provide empirical data from a micro perspective to see which economic strategies unfold. I will further remind that the economic motivation behind the legalization is to take the market away from organized crime gangs, and to create a state monopoly. The creation of a monopoly prohibits other actors from selling cannabis, but since there are problems with the implementation of the monopoly, no place to legally buy cannabis exists yet. It is, however, legal to give cannabis to other persons as a gift. This unintendedly creates a gift economy, which has recently also been created in the District of Columbia, in the United States (Barro, 2015).

Self-Cultivation

The balcony in of *Casa Conventillo* often served as the meeting place for the tenants of the house, and was only accessible through Mariana's room. By entering her room, it was easy to see her support for the liberal president at the time, José Mujica. Among an *Aborto Legal*²⁷ poster, the LGBT movement flag, and other posters on the walls, hung green leaflets cut in the shape of a cannabis leaf with the text *Legalizar Uruguay 2013*. These leaflets were used during the marches for the legalization of cannabis in 2013, and gave a foreshadowing of what was waiting outside on the balcony. On the left side of the balcony stood five large white buckets, containing in total six plants of cannabis. The largest plant was about one meter tall, while the other five ranged between fifty and sixty centimetres into the air.

From the moment I moved in to *Casa Conventillo*, I was told that the plants were Marco's project, but since he was not home the first week, Mariana and to some extent Jorge tended to the plants, giving them the correct amount of water and fertilizer. When Marco returned from his vacation, we were introduced to each other, and I followed him out on

²⁷ *Legalizar Uruguay* = Legalize cannabis in Uruguay, *Aborto Legal* = Legalize abortion, which was legalized in 2012.

the balcony asking him if the cannabis plants were his project. He denied that, and told me “they were the house's plants”. I further asked him if it was his initiative. “No it does not matter. These plants are part of the house. It is our little house project”. That was the spirit in *Casa Conventillo*, every person had to contribute to the household in order to make it complete, and often both goods and food were shared. In fact, one of the first things I was asked about was “what are your skill? What can you contribute with to the house?” I said that I did not have any extraordinary skills, and that I would have to think about it. Only a few hours later, the solution presented itself nicely. Victor, the owner, told me about his plans of having a theme on one of his walls, and wanted to put pictures of the carnival up on the walls. Luckily, I had bought a new single-lens-reflex camera, and was appointed for the task of taking pictures of the carnival.

While I found this reciprocity to be a deed among both my informants and the people I met casually during my stay, this was especially so in the *Conventillo*. On one of my first days there, we were going to a party on one of Montevideo's many rooftops. I asked Mariana if we were stopping by a store to buy some wine or beer on our way to the party, to which she told me that she had already baked bread. I asked her to repeat her answer, and she told me once more that she had already baked bread for the party. I was standing still for a few seconds before I realized that we had talked past each other. While I am used to bringing my own alcohol and food to barbecues in Norway, I realized that she meant that she had contributed her part to the party by bringing the bread. Going to a proper *asado* implied everybody making some kind of contribution. Jorge had bought some meat, and Marco would bring some *boniatos* (sweet potatoes). At this point, I had not been thinking of bringing anything other than a bottle of wine for myself, and quickly realized that the best way to contribute was buying one or two more bottles of wine.

This party also represented my first real experience with both the prevalence of, and the habits around the cannabis culture among the young adult segment of the population, the segment I mostly ended up partaking in myself. After dinner, I suddenly noticed the distinctive smell of cannabis drilling through my nostrils. I turned my head and saw Jorge smoking the joint he already had prepared at home. Around him, in a circle, there were four other people, none of whom I knew from before. I joined the circle and asked

them what they were smoking. “*Solo es paraguayo*” – it is only *Paraguayan*, said Jorge, implying that what they were smoking was the cheap, low quality, imported Paraguayan brick weed. “At this time of the year”, he told me, “it's not easy to get *uruguayo* because most of the plants are yet to be harvested”. With *uruguayo*, he meant the high quality, homegrown cannabis. During my time in Montevideo, I heard several people complain about having to smoke the Paraguayan weed, which had a weird odour, and rumours would have it to be mixed with chemicals, faeces, oil and other chemical waste.

The Spirit of the Spliff

Throughout the evening, I observed several occasions where people were standing in circles and sharing joints. Even though it was not always the same enclosed circle of people, many persons recurred and mixed in between each other, and people shared the joints between each other. As I later learned, it was common for a person to bring one or two joints to a party, or when going out to a nightclub. When a group of friends went to a party, a certain amount of the people present had brought with them a joint, so that the burden did not lie on one person. The number differed, sometimes five out of eight had brought with them joints, and other times only two out of ten did it. Usually, around one third of the persons present had brought with them joints. This meant that people could share joints, and have joints lasting throughout the night. This reciprocity took place in almost every social gathering I partook. We know from Marcel Mauss' (1995[1924]) famous essay on gifts and reciprocal exchange, that there is an obligation to give, receive and to give back gifts. In many ways, this was true regarding the sharing of joints. Everyone standing in the circle, or nearby, were asked if they wanted a puff of the joint.

It was, however, not necessary to accept the joint, although there were rarely people standing in the circle who did not want a drag. Sahlins, drawing on the influential works of Mauss, proposes a threefold division of reciprocal exchange. At the one end of the spectre is the *generalized reciprocity*, representing “...the small currency of everyday kinship, friendship and neighbourly relations, the 'pure gift'...” (Sahlins, 1972:191), while at the other end of the spectre is the *negative reciprocity*, representing “...self-interested seizure, appropriation by chicanery or force required only by an equal and opposite

effort on the principle of *lex talionis*²⁸ (ibid.). In-between the two, Sahlins proposes *balanced reciprocity*, a third typology, which represents symmetrical relations.

It was mostly friends and friends of friends who were sharing the joints among them, thus it was a small currency of everyday friendship, a generalized reciprocity. Sahlins (1972:193-4) further writes: "*Generalized reciprocity* refers to transactions that are putatively altruistic, transactions on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned. [...] The requital thus may be very soon, but then again it may be never." A failure to reciprocate does not necessarily mean that the giver of something, stops giving. One reason for this is that smoking cannabis together has another aspect, strengthening social relations, which I will fully explore in chapter 5. When taking part in the smoking of cannabis, it is indeed an altruistic transaction between the person who brought the cannabis and the people receiving it, and even though some people never brought cannabis with them, they were still accepted in the ring every time.

This also goes for strangers, people who you are not likely to meet again. As mentioned earlier, cannabis and alcohol go hand in hand with each other, and a joint is often consumed outside a bar or night club. In that context, there are many people without relations with each other, and in those spaces, interaction between people tend to be easier. However, as noted above, with cannabis there is an obligation to give and share, and when joining the circle, it is a way of establishing relations with the counterparts. These relations, however, do not necessarily have to last for more than the moment, like for instance my relations with Pedro. A similar type of behaviour was easily spotted in the parks during the day. One warm summer day, I was sitting on a bench in a park close to where I lived, when a young guy sat down next to me. His clothes were weary, and I quickly realized that he came from humble circumstances. He had seen me smoking a cigarette, and asked me if he could get a cigarette from me. I gave him a cigarette, and put another between my lips while fumbling in my pocket to find a lighter. He insisted on lighting my cigarette for me, as a token of his gratitude, and we started talking.

²⁸ Lex talionis = The principle often called «Eye for an eye».

It turned out that he was an orphan, living in a youth home during the nights. To keep his place at the youth home, he had to be inside the doors before 7PM every evening. He then got a meal, a shower and a bed for the night. In the morning, he had to be out before 9AM, thus being left to himself during the day. He told me that he was often hungry, as he had to acquire food and money on his own. During the day, he mostly spent his time drifting around the area. However, I spoke to Diego about this episode, and he told me that the youngster probably did not go hungry, as poor people, often tend to get food coupons. Nevertheless, the youngster asked if I smoked cannabis, or rather trying to find out if I had cannabis with me. I told him that I did not have anything on me, and he then asked if I would like to smoke cannabis with him. He pointed at another bench, where a man in his late twenties had a cigarette in his hand, and told me “that man smokes cannabis, do you want to join me?” I politely declined the invitation, and we said goodbye to each other, while he went over to the other man. I could see that the other man had no quarrels about sharing his joint with the youngster. They did not talk to each other, eliminating the possibility of them being acquaintances, and after a couple of minutes, the older man stood up and walked away.

If the type of gift relations among my informants can be described as a generalized reciprocity, the gift relationship between these two men is completely different. Sahlins would understand this as a type of negative reciprocity, where the young boy attempted to “get something for nothing with impunity” (1972:194). It does provide some insights to this interaction, but to analyse this incident more sufficiently, I find it better to turn towards David Graeber’s notion of the fact that no reciprocity is in fact expected between unequal (Graeber, 2001:225). He illustrates his argument with the example of giving the gift of a dollar to a beggar, and the fact that the beggar is not likely to give anything in return if the two were to meet again at a later point. I believe this was also the situation in the case in the empirical episode with the youngster. The fact that they did not talk to each other, and the older man leaving the bench without even saying goodbye, clearly insinuates a non-verbal mutual agreement of not wanting to knit tighter relations. This, I will argue, could very well be a result of their unequal social positions, as the beggar, in this case the youngster, feels stigmatized of having to ask strangers for goods and valuables. In accepting the gift, in this case a marijuana cigarette, he has not only received a ‘pure gift’, but the burden of having to beg for it makes it poisonous

(Parry, 1986:463-7). The fact that he is not capable of acquiring the resources needed for buying commodities makes him dependent on obtaining it from other people.

Another strategy for poor people on the streets was simply to just ask for change and in all honesty “*dame una moneda que es por el porro/vino, por favor*” - give me some change for cannabis/wine, please. This is a more direct way of the poison of the gift, where the beggar directly puts himself – I only encountered male beggars asking for money with the purpose of obtaining drugs or alcohol – in the submissive relation to the potential giver of gifts. My informants were aware of this strategy, and if they were to give money to beggars, they had limits for how much one should give. I learned this explicitly one day from Diego: I was sitting at the entrance in the afternoon and drinking *yerba mate* while enjoying the cool breeze that made being outside endurable, when a poorly dressed man walked past and asked for *moneda*, some change, for food. I usually ignored beggars, as I had been told to do so by many of my informants. This time, however, I checked my pocket, and gave him four or five coins, adding up to around 15 pesos (\$0,48). As the beggar moved on, I saw Diego coming towards me, and he asked how much I had given. I said that I gave away maybe 15 pesos, and he said to me with a serious face that I should not have given him that much. “It is sufficient to give just one coin of 1, 2 or 5 pesos”.

Notes on the Price of Cannabis

The price and cost of cannabis are aspects that need to be mentioned here. Cultivation of cannabis in households makes the cost of using it almost non-existent. The only expenses are the cost of equipment, which is a one-time expense. On the streets, cannabis is relatively cheap compared to other countries, with the street price of one gram ranging between one and three American dollars, depending on quality and networks. One large bottle of beer bought in a kiosk or supermarket costs almost three American dollars. This means that it is possible to get between one and three grams of cannabis for the same amount as one litre of beer. Studies from the United States show that the prices of cannabis fall considerably after legalization (Steinmetz, 2016), which again means that cannabis is more affordable and accessible, and makes it more eligible for sharing.

Cannabis clubs and the grey market

Hernán and I were walking along one of the busier streets in Montevideo when we stumbled across a street vendor, selling various homemade things related to cannabis. Among the painted mugs and glass bongos, a cannabis pipe made out of the traditional Uruguayan *bombilla*²⁹ caught Hernán's attention. He consulted the seller, a middle-aged man with dreadlocks and colourful clothing, about the price, to which the man responded 250 pesos (\$8). Hernán was satisfied with the price, and was about to pick up his wallet when the man asked if we wanted something else. "I don't usually do this, but I can get some *uruguayo* for you", he said, although we strongly suspected that this was something he did a little bit more than he would admit. Hernán asked for the price, and the man told him that he could get 25 grams for 3000 pesos (\$100). They agreed to meet at the same place two hours later, so that they could carry on with the transaction. Two hours later, the sun had already set, and the streets were dark and less crowded. We went back to the man to ask him if everything was ready, but the seller told us that he had forgotten all about it, and asked us to wait some time while he was making a phone call.

While we waited for his contact, we started talking to him and his colleagues. We sat down next to them, and they offered to share a beer with us. Most beers in Uruguay come in one-litre bottles, so we passed the beer around, while we conversed. As most Uruguayans I sat down with, they enjoyed talking, and were quite interested in me, being from Norway. They asked me about social issues in Norway, about gender equality, discrimination against sexual orientation, crime rates and general happiness. I answered their questions adequately, and we started talking about drug policies. I told them that Norway has strict laws on drugs and two thirds of the prison inmates are in prison because of drug related crimes (Justisdepartementet, 2012). They did not believe me at first, but I assured them that it was true, as I further explained that the drug scene in Norway was quite different from the one in Uruguay. The illicit drug trade in Uruguay is more or less divided into cannabis and *pasta base*, and to a lesser extent cocaine and in some circles, mushrooms. The Norwegian drug scene is a lot wider, with extensive use of both heroin and amphetamines, in addition to cannabis, cocaine and psychedelics.

²⁹ Bombilla = A metal straw used for the consumption of *yerba mate*

They could agree on the prevalence of different narcotics, but they did not find the cannabis law in Uruguay to be that good.

Paula, a blonde, forty-year-old woman who sat in the circle with us, explained to me: “It [the law] has a lot of problems, you know, for instance one needs to register, and who knows what will happen with that information?” She was a widower, and had lived a rough life, as her husband took an overdose and died some years ago. “But it's good that they acknowledge that cannabis is not the big problem. The thing is that if you want to buy cannabis, the dealer will try to sell you some cocaine, because that is where the big money are.” After about an hour, a well-dressed man with glasses, who seemed to be in his late forties, approached our intermediary and he and the street vendor went around a corner together, before the seller returned and sat down again next to Hernán. He then put a bag in Hernán's pocket so discreetly that I did not even notice it, strengthening my suspicion that he had done this more than he would admit. Hernán told me that we had to go, so we said goodbye and went back home.

This was my first encounter with the “*grey market*” cannabis trade, and it illustrates quite well one of the most common ways to obtain cannabis without cultivating yourself or knowing anybody who cultivates. As I have explained earlier, the only way to obtain cannabis legally is by registering and growing it yourself, or by joining a state approved cannabis club. For that reason, these types of bargains happen as discreetly as in this case. Cannabis plants demand a lot of attention, and have to be given a sufficient amount of light and fertilizer, and the watering process takes several hours each day. The first option is thus clearly for the most genuinely interested in both growing and smoking, taking into account all the work hours needed. The cannabis clubs, because of their large-scale cultivation, demand more total work, and therefore need more labour to do the gardening. However, while it is practically free to get the seeds for self-cultivation, you have to pay a monthly fee to be part of a cannabis club. The fee is around \$3000 pesos each month, which equals around \$100 USD. The reason for this is that the costs of running a small-scale growing club is expensive, as you will need to pay the employees and rent a good location, as well as paying for electricity and tools. The street seller told us:

“If they removed the limit of maximum 45 people per club, or increased the limit to 200 people, it would be a lot cheaper to run these clubs, and it would be more beneficial. Because the monthly fee of 3000 pesos for being part of a cannabis club is definite, even if you want just 5 grams a month, you will have to pay 3000 pesos. And who wants to pay 3000 pesos for just 5 grams?”

I will argue that these types of economic arrangements force people to withdraw the full amount of 40 grams, which then will force them to either share or sell their surplus.

The Uruguayan state wants, of course, their citizens to respect the law and act within it, but when there are flaws in the social structure, people tend to utilize those flaws to their own benefit. Fredrik Barth (2001) illustrates this in his work from Darfur, where he shows how an Arabic merchant managed to take advantage of the different economic spheres in the society, and use them to gain his own profit. By learning how those spheres worked, the merchant discovered a grey zone in which he was capable of converting voluntary labour within one sphere, into free labour, thus making a huge profit. Like the Arabic merchant, many members of cannabis clubs in Uruguay also see the opportunity to convert the surplus of their own product to make a small profit, and by doing that becoming mini-entrepreneurs working in the grey zone of the law. Since cannabis is obtained legally, yet being illegal to sell, I prefer to use the term *grey market* as opposed to the *black market*, which is mostly controlled by organized criminals.

While some saw it as a way to make a small profit, others sold parts of their monthly share of cannabis not because they wanted to earn money, but rather because they felt like they were forced to do it. During an interview with Francisco, which I will elaborate further in the next section, he told me that a friend of his had joined a cannabis club because he had neither time nor motivation to grow cannabis on his own. Francisco told me that his friend had regretted his membership, because it was too expensive compared to his smoking habits. As a result, he felt he had to sell part of his share, not because he wanted to make money, but rather because he did not want to lose money. As far as Francisco knew, his friend was still a member at the time of the interview. The problem with this grey market is structural. On the one hand, there is a demand for cannabis, but not any place to buy it. On the other hand, several people have too much

cannabis in their possession. The opposite interests ensure that the cannabis is put out on this grey market. What we have here is a typology that fits with Sahlins balanced reciprocity. “In precise balance”, he writes, “the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay” (1972:194). He notes that the balanced reciprocity is “more economic”, where the parties confront each other with different economic and social interests, which makes the material side of the transaction at least as critical as the social (1972:195). Here, cannabis is not part of a gift economy, but rather part of two actors who acted out of self-interest to get respectively cannabis and money.



Figure 3: Francisco watering his plants

Illegal cultivation

While the inhabitants of Casa Conventillo were content with the law, having no problems registering themselves, the majority of the cannabis smoking population was hesitant. In February, my second month of fieldwork, headlines like “*Marijuana growers in Uruguay are skipping the law*” were released almost daily in newspapers like *El País*. At that time, February 2015, it had been legal to cultivate marijuana at home for six months, but only 1300 citizens had registered for self-cultivation. In many ways, the public opinion seemed to sway against the law, with polls showing that only 34 percent of the population were supporting the law, while 60 percent disapproved. Several news

articles proclaimed either a failure, or at least raised several fundamental questions, like “when will it be possible to buy marijuana legally?”

While I find it strange to proclaim the legalization to be “failing” before it was fully implemented, and even before the first crops had been harvested, it was no doubt that the marijuana implementation faced several challenges. The biggest challenge was clearly the fact that it was still not possible to buy marijuana legally, and there was still not any progress in the promised state-run outlets. Another challenge stressed by LAMRI was the fact that only 1,300 people had registered for self-cultivation. According to numbers from the Association for Cannabis Studies in Uruguay (AECU), some 10,000 people were still cultivating at home. The question whether people would actually agree to register or not, had been given much attention in earlier debates over the last years, and many pro-cannabis activists had urged the government to eliminate this part of the law. They feared that the government would use the information gathered to force people into rehab, and while they trusted this government, some people also worried about how future governments could misuse this information. A legitimate worry, considering the recent dictatorship that ended in 1985.

One of the persons growing marijuana at home, but still not registered for home growing was Francisco, who I came in contact with through one of my other informants, Julieta. She was a friend of Hernán from school, and we often went to the same social gatherings in the weekends. She was a quiet girl who enjoyed the tranquil atmosphere of the smaller gatherings rather than bigger events, and often went home when a gathering got too crowded and noisy. Before Francisco agreed to meet up with me, Julieta had to approve of me, and also had to come together with me to Francisco’s house. I met Julieta in the afternoon, and together we caught a taxi to Francisco's place. To get to his place, we had to drive for fifteen minutes, and on our way, we passed through some of the rougher *barrios* (neighbourhoods) of Montevideo. Outside of the main road, there were no streetlights, and it was almost completely dark, except light shining through some windows. When we stopped, I paid the driver and we went out to find Francisco’s residence, which was a lot harder than we had expected. The poor illumination made it hard to read the house numbers, but after a while, we found the correct house. Then, we got another problem. There was no doorbell on his house, and Julieta had no more

charging units left on her cell phone. Since the communication in Uruguay is done mostly through free applications on smart phones, she did not have his phone number. We tried knocking on the door, but she knew it would be nearly impossible to hear it from his room. Fortunately, he had her number, and after maybe five minutes in despair he called her, and the problem solved itself.

The door opened, and a young man with curly, blonde hair and a green sweater appeared. We greeted each other with a hug before entering the house. We went through a long hall, through a patio, and then we could go into his part of the complex. When entering his apartment, it was quite spacious with little furniture. Only a three-seated sofa, a chair and a table were standing there, while the walls were covered in paintings, most notably of Bob Marley and the Rastafarian colours. I complimented him of his Marley painting, and he thanked me, before enthusiastically asking me if “we should go straight to his attic to see his garden”. I followed him up the stairs, and into a small, white room, where the heating lamps helped to keep the sufficient temperature and lights for the plants, while an electric fan was carefully blowing wind through the room. He had eight plants right now, and had given each of them their own name. He explained me how he cultivated them, and which ones he had the most faith in would become the best final product.

We returned down to the living room, and he immediately opened a box, and started to show me examples of different types of cannabis he had grown. He even took up a small piece of hashish, which was the first and only time I encountered it during my fieldwork. While he was preparing a joint, I asked him why he was growing cannabis without registering. He answered me that he would like to register, but there were several reasons why he had not done it yet.

“I don't think they would allow me to grow marijuana in this house because of the standards of the house. Moreover, I do not want to just grow cannabis, I want to experiment with different species of cannabis. If I register, I am afraid that they [the government] will deny me to plant what I want. And I will not be able to grow more than six plants”.

I asked if he had considered registering in a cannabis club, if that would help him doing what he wanted. He had, but as he said, “I will wait and see what is happening with other people before I eventually register. If it seems to be working well, then I think I will support the law and start growing legally myself”. Francisco's hesitancy to be a legally registered cannabis grower was a view shared by many of the consumers in Uruguay, and although the AECU reported that there were only 1,300 registered growers in February 2015, this number had increased to 3,000 growers just six months later.

“But do you really need to grow that much cannabis? You told me that you don't use that much cannabis for personal use. How many plants do you actually need?” I asked him. He then told me that two months ago, he had filled up the whole room upstairs with cannabis plants, and was eager to show me pictures he had taken of that period. He went to the kitchen, and returned to the living room with his iPad, that contained several pictures and videos of his previous crop. The pictures showed a room packed with cannabis plants, and he told me that he had 23 plants at that time. I asked what he was doing with all those plants, if he was selling them or if he smoked them all by himself. He told me that he gave a lot of the produce to his friends, and that he did not smoke much himself. Usually he smoked when he was on holiday, and beside that only a couple of times a week while hanging out with friends. He stressed to me that he never smoked alone. He proceeded to tell me that during the summer he mostly spent his time with his father at their family hostel somewhere in Rocha. It was in a coastal village well known for being a place where ‘hippies’ and other people frequently vacate during the summer, and where the consumption of cannabis is very prevalent. During the warm summer months, the demand for cannabis increases, and their hostel often supplies the demand by sharing the goods they possess. He denied making any real profit on the cannabis he was growing, but it does indeed help their hostel business getting good reviews. Even though Francisco and his family are not selling cannabis as a commodity, it can be argued that it is not a ‘pure gift’ as their guests pay for the accommodation with money, in which cannabis is included, making them indirectly paying for the cannabis as well. However, due to the fact that cultivating cannabis was his hobby, and he did not make cannabis to get a profit, makes it more a token of hospitality or generosity, which Sahlin's places as the general reciprocity.

The Cultural Biography of Cannabis

In order to explain whether the proposed 'gift economy' works or not, I find it useful to go back to Kopytoff's theory on the cultural biography of things. I followed his approach in chapter 2, in order to explain the legality of cannabis in the law. Here, I will use him in his literal sense, and analyse how cannabis is both a commodity and a singularity. To refresh the memory, he understands "things" as part of an ongoing process of commoditization, which is the process of something becoming a commodity (1986:72). The opposite of commoditization is culture. In every society, there are things that are "publicly precluded from being commoditized" (1986:73). He calls the process of going from a commodity to a non-commodity for a singularization process. That process makes a certain object either sacral or special, and then pulls the object out of the exchange sphere. Further, he explains that a thing may be a commodity for one person, and at the same time a non-commodity for another (1986:64). I find that to be a good approach in determining the biography of cannabis. As the empirical information above supports, cannabis is both a commodity and a non-commodity at the same time. Of course, it is obvious that cannabis was a commodity to both Francisco's friend, and the street seller, taken into account that they sold cannabis. On the other hand, it was also a non-commodity. As the distribution of cannabis as gift supports, it held no monetary value, but was rather a special object.

To illustrate this more clearly, let me present an excerpt of a conversation I had with Marco out on the balcony one day when he was watering the plants. Using a similar technique as Runar Døving (Lien, 2001), I simply asked him "what is cannabis?" He looked at me and repeated my question. I told him again; "yes, what is cannabis?" He smiled at me and said; "*bueno... es la flor más hermosa de mi jardín*" – it is the most beautiful flower in my garden. For Marco, as for many of my informants, cannabis was not a commodity. It was special, it was a tool that could provide them with insights, or to stress down and relax (*relajarse*). Of course, Marco, the rest of *Casa Conventillo* and other people participating in the gift economy, did also buy cannabis if there was a shortage. I have already described how Hernán bought 25 grams of cannabis, and was still part of the reciprocal exchange. My argument here draws on a similar notion by Kopytoff, who said that an object could be "a commodity at one time and at another time not a commodity" (1986:64). For Hernán, the 25 grams of cannabis that he bought, was a

commodity when he bought it, but when it was in his possession, it was no longer a commodity, but assigned other attributes.

A Blooming Cannabis Industry

While cannabis remain out of pharmacies, many new businesses have surfaced to seize the opportunities. Paraphernalia and other objects related to cannabis flourishes on the street markets along the tourist areas. On the huge Sunday market, it is possible to find t-shirts, keychains, flags, and equipment like pipes and bongs for smoking cannabis. One of the largest successes is actually a cookie company called Marley. They have made a huge profit by customizing the traditional *alfajor* cookie, and rebranding it a *bajonero*. *Bajonero* refers to a person's state of mind after smoking cannabis and his appetite increases, and is similar to the English word "munchies". A dozen of new grow shops have emerged around the city, specializing in articles related to cultivating cannabis. Illumination, fertilizer, cannabis seeds, special fans and similar can be purchased, as well as advisory services in cultivation. In addition, production of cannabis for both research and industrial hemp have been initiated. After I left the field, even cannabis tours have emerged, where it is possible to pay for a guided tour around some of the landmarks in Montevideo. The tours also include tasting of Uruguayan grown cannabis.

Conclusion

The purpose for this chapter has been to explore the distribution of cannabis in Montevideo. More specifically, I have tried to make an account of the informal economy of cannabis by looking at three different factors. The main goal for the government was to seize control over the illicit cannabis trade by taking over the production and commercialization of the drug, but it still has not been able to implement the state monopoly. Instead, I argue that the structural weaknesses following the legalization with the lack of places to buy cannabis legally have resulted in the emergence of a grey market. The produce of this grey market is to some extent cannabis legally grown in the cannabis clubs, and to some extent cannabis grown by people who have not registered in the system. That fact needs to be understood as a temporality, but is nonetheless one of the challenges that the state needs to fix in order to succeed with the aims they made with the legislation.

Another response to the law is that a thriving and growing gift economy of cannabis has emerged. My empirical findings were found predominantly among young students, and in these circles, a network of informal activities regarding cannabis unfolded. At parties, different people brought joints with them, allowing the cannabis to last through the night. The gift economy is coherent with the view people hold of cannabis, which among my informants was that it was not a commodity, but rather had special attributes assigned to it. I will elaborate on what these attributes are in the chapter to come. However, with the growing attention and prevalence of cannabis, businesses not directly involved in the cannabis economy, but specializing in paraphernalia, food and such have bloomed, and at the same time are creating more jobs. The latter makes the future for the cannabis industry in Uruguay look interesting.

Chapter 5 – Connecting to nature through ritual

In this chapter, I will examine smoking cannabis as a ritual to approach nature, and analyse it comparatively with the drinking of *yerba mate*. I think it is necessary to once again turn to the history of Uruguay, and the *gaucho* tradition, in order to explain the prevalence and use of yerba mate. The gauchos were as we will see, the cowboys of the south, and yerba mate is a type of tea that has been drunk in parts of South America since before the colonial settlements, and was adopted by the settlers and embedded in the gaucho identity. Although it poses a lot of importance in both Argentina and Uruguay, as well as the southern part of Brazil and to some extent Paraguay and Chile, mate has a more important, or at least different, tradition in Montevideo. The tradition of drinking mate resembles that of a ritual, and there are certain social norms that are followed in a mate session. I will argue that this ritual is similar to the ritual of smoking cannabis. Further, I will write about how the cultivation of cannabis plants in *Casa Conventillo* can be seen as a form of a *communitas*, and look at how the inhabitants perceive both the present and the future. I understand the cannabis movement in Montevideo as part of a *communitas* that has risen in the recent years. From there, I will turn the attention east, and explore Punta del Diablo, a coastal town on the Eastern shore of Uruguay, where ‘hippies’ gather in the summer, thus creating some sort of a community.

The Gaucho Heritage

Now the time has come to elaborate on the gaucho myth. Before the Spanish settlement in Uruguay, five different indigenous tribes inhabited the area, most notably the warrior tribe of the *Charrúa*. There were long conflicts between the *Charrúa* and the cattle herders, who had settled inland, until the first president of Uruguay, Fructuosa Rivera, ordered the genocide of the *Charrúa* people in 1830. In the eighteenth century, most of the non-native population in Uruguay consisted of cattle herders, and their habits and traditions, were influenced by the indigenous tribe, which then gave its origin in the gaucho myth.

In trying to explain the origins of the masculinities and national identity in Argentina, Eduardo Archetti (1999:31-36) explains how the hybridization between the indigenous people living in the area, and the European immigrants, played an important role in the

creation of the Argentinian nation-state. The gaucho was a product of this colonial hybridization, and the mixing gave the gaucho certain attributes. According to the contemporary Argentinian writers, they had inherited the pride of the Spanish blood, and the vileness and sense of independence of the natives. The same processes happened in the creation of the Uruguayan collective national identity, perhaps most notably in the national football team, which possesses *la garra charrúa* – the *Charrúan* claw – which refers to the courage and fighting spirit of the *Charrúa* people. Archetti further notes that “the model of the gaucho advanced by the nationalists can be seen as a reaction of urban intellectuals in Latin American societies entering into modernity [...] and at the same time, as a re-creation of traditional male virtues in a context of change”. (Archetti, 1999:40) He argues, then, that the “wild west” type gaucho culture became transformed into a collective national heritage.

As a sociological reality, the gaucho has been gone for a long time. Still, it has been stressed that the gaucho is an archetype, an ideal folkloric hero, representing the good Rioplatense virtues. Analyzing a novel written by Ricardo Güiraldes at the beginning of the twentieth century, Archetti argues that the fundamental Argentinian values here comes to the surface, presented by the gaucho. “Values like generosity, lack of interest in material things, skill in the complicated art of horsemanship, the endurance of physical hardship and the acceptance of a hierarchical society are central” (Archetti, 1999:39).

While the skills in horsemanship is not relevant in a practical way to make a living today, it is still maintained, most notably through the gaucho festivals during Easter, which is often referred to as *Semana Criolla*, the creole week. Archetti has also shown that skills in horsemanship are also important in the upper class, and manifests itself through polo. Moreover, I will argue that the other values presented are still important aspects of the Uruguayan selfhood, and I have already presented empirical evidence on both the generosity and lack of interest in material things in chapter 4. However, I will have to point out that the interest in material things is in many ways changing. I will elaborate that notion later in this chapter. The same can be argued for the acceptance of a hierarchical society and structure, as we will see that the cannabis movement responds to, and seek to diminish. When it comes to endurance of physical hardship, I will go further and say endurance in general is a deed among my informants. As Cristian told

me one day when I was practicing my Spanish: “*Aguantar! Aguantar* is so important!” He punched the table with his fist. I asked him what the word meant, and he elaborated: “For instance, if I am at Ana María’s [his girlfriend] parents, and I hate them, then I ‘*aguanto*’. If I support a bad football team, that never wins, then I *aguanto*. It means to hold on, not to give in.” Of course, the word could be translated into *enduring*, or *to put up with*, but it is used in the sense of not giving up, to put up with something painful, either physically or mentally, because better times will come. The virtue of endurance may be even more attributed to the Uruguayan society, because of the small size of the country, as well as the economic dependency of its big regional neighbours, leaving them with little influence on their own economics, as they have experienced most lately with the 2001 financial crisis in Argentina.

Anthropological Understandings of Ritual and Symbols

The study of ritual and symbols have been key concepts in the history of anthropology. One of the great forefathers of sociology, Émile Durkheim, points out that ritual maintains social order. According to Durkheim, rituals are, “[...] ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups” (Durkheim 2012[1912]:38). At the lowest level, four criteria define ritual, according to Durkheim. There has to be physical appearance of humans, they have to share a common focus, common emotions or spirits, and common symbols. Victor Turner goes further, and defines ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (1967:19). Ritual contains spiritual and religious components, and thus, if reduced to a routine, an everyday ritual, it would lose its significance. On the other hand, Sveinung Sandberg and Willy Pedersen write that habitus, traditions and the everyday ritual have been the most widely used in research on substance use (2011:38). I agree with Sandberg and Pedersen that it can be useful to approach use of substances with habitus and everyday ritual, but I will not dismiss the importance of ritual presented by Turner.

Geertz understands rituals as texts that can be read and written down as culture. He writes that the ritual of the Balinese cockfight explains kinship ties and social life in the village. The ritual consists of two types of involvements, which he labels *deep* and

shallow play (1973:432-42). The deeper the cockfight is, the more is at stake, and more people are involved personally. Thus, the people involved in the deepest play are deeply experientially and emotionally engaged in the ritual, while the shallow players are relatively little attentive to the central action. Bruce Kapferer (1984) has approached another model, which I find to be of greater importance here. In his analysis of demon exorcisms in Sri Lanka, he proposes another way to look at rituals. While an exorcism ritual is taking place, large groups of people gather around, and like in the Balinese cockfight, different people are taking different position in the ritual. The closer to the centre of the ritual, the deeper one plays, to borrow the term from Geertz. However, in order to be reflexive about what the ritual is doing, one have to be able to move back and forth between the spiritual and everyday context. "Through this play, individuals can experience the world of their construction and then stand back and reflect upon its various meanings" (Kapferer, 1984:205). Contrary to the view of Geertz, Kapferer views the persons who have lesser important roles and are in the periphery as more eligible to be reflexive about the ritual. The participants that are closest to the centre are often too immersed into the ritual to be reflexive.

The Ritual Aspect of Yerba Mate

Cielito, cielo que sí

guárdense su chocolate,

aquí somos puros indios

y solo tomamos mate.

- Bartholomé Hidalgo (ca. 1810)

Little Darling

you keep your chocolate

here we're all Indians

and we only drink mate

The poem cited above, derives from the Uruguayan poet Bartholomé Hidalgo, and is an excerpt from a longer poem written around 1810, where Hidalgo, a gaucho and a member of the armed guard greets a representative of the King of Spain (Folch, 2010:20). This is, of course, a metaphor for sweet and bitter, and the moral is that gauchos can not be subjugated and bought by sweet chocolate, but kept their independence, represented by the traditional and bitter drink, *yerba mate*. *Yerba mate* is a green tea, rich in caffeine, originating from Paraguay³⁰ where it had been used by the indigenous Guaraní people since before the colonization. After the Spanish settlements

³⁰ Hence its botanical name, *Ilex paraguariensis*.

of present day Paraguay were introduced to the tea, it spread with Jesuit missionaries to the River Plate region, where it rapidly gained popularity, especially among the gauchos. If there is one thing of the gaucho influence visible in contemporary Uruguayan society, it is the extensive use of mate. It is hard to overestimate its importance in the River Plate region, and in Uruguay even more so. During the civic military dictatorship, mate sessions were the only form of public meeting that was allowed, and it became an important way of evading the curfew. Drinking mate was nothing political, and was generally accepted by the police.

Drinking mate was an important aspect of the daily morning routine among many of my informants, as well as a preferable drink for relaxing. Before moving into Casa Conventillo, I had not yet learned the skill to prepare mate, but was completely aware of its social importance, and one of the first things I had to do, was to learn how proper mate should be prepared. Mariana showed me the way to do it:

“First, you fill the gourd up two-thirds with yerba, like this. Then you put your palm over the cup and shake it. This way you will get all the small fragments on your palm, so you don’t get it in your *bombilla*³¹. Now, we shake it some more, and tilt it, so it creates a space for where the *bombilla* is going to be.” She poured a glass with cold water, and put some of it in the open space, while the yerba absorbed the water. “It’s good to have some cold water in it, so you don’t burn your tongue. Now we wait a minute”. When the minute had passed, she carefully poured hot water from the kettle into the space where the cold water went, and filled it up. “We now have to wait some more, until the water once again has been absorbed by the yerba.” Then she immersed the *bombilla* straw in the open space, and used it to build a wall of yerba. “Now, we can pour more hot water in the cup, and then it’s ready!” She poured sufficient water, and gave it to me to take a sip. I received the mate, and took a sip from the *bombilla*. The taste was quite bitter, and I got some small yerba particles in my mouth. I asked her if that was common, and she told me that the first sip always contains some particles, but that I will get used to it. “I do not even notice that anymore”, she added.

³¹ Bombilla = A metal straw used to drink yerba mate.

Every Uruguayan has their own way of preparing mate, although the ways are quite similar. There were, however, certain rules attributed to the consumption of mate that were universal. The first and most basic rule of drinking mate, is that you should never move the *bombilla*, as it destroys the whole tea. A couple of days after Mariana taught me how to prepare mate, we sat in the living room and watched television, and I noticed that Pablo was mixing the whole cup of mate with the *bombilla*. I asked him why he did it, because I had learned that one should not do something like that. He laughed at me, the inexperienced beginner, and explained that he was just doing it because the yerba was almost “used up”, so he was mixing it again to get a fresher taste. When a group of friends or acquaintances were together and mate was drunk, there was always a person who was the ‘server’³² that filled up the cup with hot water and passed it to the next person. When that person had drunk it up, he or she passed the cup back again to the ‘server’. The ‘server’ then filled up the cup again with hot water. This process repeated itself until the other person said *gracias*, thank you, which meant that he or she was content, and did not want any more.

I did not know that saying *gracias* meant that I was content when we some days later were in the park and met up with some friends. I accepted the mate gourd, drank, and then I said *gracias*, as I would with every other food or object I would have received. When I gave the cup back, I simply did not get offered any more mate, which made me feel a little rejected. Being afraid of insulting their friends, I did not say anything about it, and somehow forgot about it until I some days later talked to a German neighbour about the lack of good coffee in the country. He told me that he had tried mate, but he did not like it, and told me a story of his first encounter with it, where he too had said *gracias* and did not receive any more mate. He then explained to me that when people said *gracias*, it meant that you were really saying that you did not want more.

Drinking mate is in many ways a ritual, or at least has the potential of being a ritual. Drinking mate in the morning can of course be a ritual in the sense that the drinking of mate transforms a person from sleepy to awake. As Pablo always told me: “Without mate in the morning I do not function”, implying that mate is something he needs to

³² The ‘server’ was the person that had brought the mate equipment. As far as I noticed, there was no hierarchy of who brought the mate.

wake up. Jorge also had a similar approach to mate, and since he mostly worked night shifts, he usually woke up late in the evening, and always started his day with going to the kitchen and heating up water for his mate.

Now we find ourselves at a crossroad of ritual theory. Victor Turner would probably not consider drinking of mate a ritual, since it resemblances the technological routine of everyday life. The spirituality in mate ritual is difficult to locate, as it is wrapped in symbolism. However, by deconstructing the mate ritual, we find some values that are fundamental in Uruguayan society. When more than one person is present, mate has a deeper sense of being a ritual, and in my experience, sharing a mate posed three main purposes. The first and most obvious is the physical or bodily purpose; mate contains caffeine, vitamins and minerals, hence giving the person drinking a physical awakening, having more surplus of energy. Second, it poses a social purpose. Inviting someone to share a cup of mate with you, symbolizes a token of friendship and respect, thus tightening social relations. When sharing the gourd, and drinking from the same metal straw, everybody's lips are touching the same straw, and symbolically makes everyone participating equal. To pass something from lip to lip sends powerful signals of equality, friendship and solidarity. Third, it has a spiritual level of bringing peace and tranquillity to mind; in fact, it is almost expected to be at ease when sharing a mate. The purpose of a ritual is to evoke a certain mental state, and sharing a mate is thus a ritual transformation that serves to get to a state of peace and tranquillity.

The Ritual Aspect of Cannabis

Throughout this thesis I have provided different approaches towards how, where and when cannabis is used. A key point in chapter 4 is that there is an obligation to reciprocate marijuana. A study of the social organization of marijuana smoking in Southern California from 1977 shows three fundamental ritual actions embedded in cannabis (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). First, it is expected that every person who has cannabis, share it when a joint is being made. Second, the joint or the bong will have to be passed around to everyone present. Third, to smoke cannabis together, implies an obligation to further social interaction. My empirical data supports what was presented in that study, although the first ritual is a bit different, because my informants usually

just brought one or two pre-rolled marijuana cigarettes with them, and shared it like that.

On a warm sunny day around noon, I was sitting with Jorge and Marco on the pavement outside our house. At this time of the day, it was almost equally warm inside the house as outside, and the boulevard of trees outside made it preferable to sit outside and get the cooling breeze from the sea. While sitting there, the conversation turned to the cannabis plants, and Jorge expressed how much he was looking forward to harvest them. I asked them questions about the legalization, and wondered how it was before the legalization. Jorge told me that it was not very different in terms of smoking cannabis outside. “We could still sit here and smoke *porro* without any problems”, he said, “the only thing is that if it was obvious that you smoked cannabis in front of police officers, they would harass you and check if you had anything on you”. Marco added that, “if they did not like your face, they would give you a hard time. They do not like people with dreads, so if you have dreadlocks, they would give you a hard time”. In other words, they could not arrest someone for smoking weed, but although it was not illegal to possess small amounts of cannabis, they could and still did bother people about it. Even during my fieldwork, I read articles about people that were arrested for possession of both larger amounts of cannabis, as well as plants being confiscated. At some point, Jorge lighted up a joint, and started smoking. When the joint came to me, I took a puff, and passed it back to Marco. Jorge said that he did not know that I smoked cannabis, so I told him that I usually did not, but occasionally did it anyway. “I like to be in control over my own body”, I told him. Jorge looked at me as if I had offended him, and said; “so many things happens so rapidly, smoking [cannabis] lets you be who you really are and enjoy life. It makes you slow down in a world that spins too fast”.

For Jorge and Marco, as for several others of my informants, smoking cannabis was a happening where its sole purpose was to get to another level, together with friends. When using cannabis, they shared a common focus, which was to get a distance from the daily life that, according to Jorge, “spins too fast”. Except for Juán, none of my informants had or seemed to have problems with excessive use, or abuse of cannabis.³³ Juán was one of the oldest persons in the group of students I did fieldwork among. He was 29

³³ Although addiction or addictive behaviour can of course be hard to spot.

years old, and told me that he had smoked cannabis at least more than ten years. At social gatherings, he was always quiet and laidback, and preferred to be in the background.³⁴ When the group went out to a bar or a nightclub, he usually did not dance for long, and I always found him outside talking to people, often with a joint in his hand. Juán, smoked marijuana daily, and it often seemed to me that he used cannabis out of habit and a 'need' to use it. If the ritual purpose of smoking cannabis is to get to a certain mental state together with other people, then the whole purpose of the ritual falls apart in this case. Let me put it in context. There is a group of people, with a common focus, who use cannabis to get to a certain state together. One of these people, Juán in my example, smokes cannabis daily, and has built a higher tolerance for the drug. While the built-up tolerance for cannabis forces him to smoke more in order to get the same effect as the others, the balance between spirituality and everyday context also gets harder to distinguish. Much like the persons who are too deeply involved with the exorcism, Juán has in a sense become too deep in the ritual, and thus lack the reflexivity that the rest of the group possess. There has to be a balance between how much and how often a person should smoke, in order to get that reflexivity from the ritual.

As we have seen, mate and marijuana rituals have many similarities in the ways they are performed, but also in what they do or symbolize. First off, both are herbs, and thereby natural (cf. chapter 3). Both the *bombilla* and the joint goes from one person's lips to another person's lips, both the mate gourd and the joint go around in a circle, and both rituals have a ritual leader: the person who brought the gourd or the cannabis. Drinking mate and smoking cannabis have social purposes, creating or strengthening social relations. Moreover, both are all about getting to a level of tranquillity, a state where the stress from school, work or other noisy elements of the daily life are forgotten about. Comparatively, the same account has been made on the *Chuukese* of Micronesia, where the men who smoked cannabis viewed being high as a state of tranquillity and frivolity (Halvaksz & Lipset, 2006:214). As similar as they may be, one could wonder if the use of cannabis at some point could replace the mate, or if the two complement each other, and work interchangeably.³⁵ The same reflections have been made by Jamon Halvaksz and David Lipset (2006), when they explored marijuana in Papua New Guinea. They argue

³⁴ That being said, Juán was not timid or shy.

³⁵ This connection was first pointed out to me by Hernán, who made a joke about Uruguayans having to drink mate to perk up, before smoking a joint to get down again.

that marijuana has overtaken the position of beer in some Papua New Guinean communities. Citing Larson (1987), Halvaksz, and Lipset (2006:214) argue that marijuana had been assimilated into Pacific patterns of consumption, and although it is illegal, the weak Pacific states make the enforcing of law difficult. This poses for interesting comparatives. I find the same underlying processes taking place in Uruguay. While I will not go so far as to say that cannabis is replacing yerba mate, I find them to be complementary to each other. The major difference is that mate is more frequently drunk at the beginning of a day, and early afternoons, while cannabis works better in the evening or at night. More specifically, cannabis is more often used in the weekends. While in one survey, 55 percent of the people smoking cannabis regularly responded that they had smoked cannabis before going to work³⁶, the majority of people smoking cannabis do so at social events in the evening or on the weekends. However, similarly to Larson, I argue that the use of marijuana is being assimilated into Uruguayan patterns of consumption, and the way marijuana is being used fits the Uruguayan cultural tradition well.

Breaking with the structure – *Communitas* and Urban Utopia

Let us now move over to breaking down the ritual use of cannabis, and explore how the inhabitants of *Casa Conventillo* experienced cannabis. The cannabis movement in Montevideo have grown quite big, and *Casa Conventillo*, constitutes a small fraction of it. Drawing further on Victor Turner, this cannabis movement in Montevideo can be understood as what he calls *communitas*. Turner (1977) saw in society two different models that were linked together, *societas*, the structure and *communitas*, the anti-structure. While *societas* represents the established society as we know it, with its regulated structures and social hierarchies, he understands *communitas* as the radical opposite. *Communitas* are “society as unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (Turner, 1977:96). The interaction and conflicts between the two structures is what creates society, and therefore should society be seen as a process, rather than a timeless entity (Turner, 1977:92).

³⁶ According to *El País*, August, 20th, 2015: <http://www.elobservador.com.uy/consumidores-frecuentes-marihuana-contra-limitacion-la-ley-n670508>

The cannabis movement in Uruguay, I argue, is this unstructured *communitas*, coming to the surface to demand the right to cultivate and buy cannabis legally. More specifically, I would say that the movement that I experienced during my fieldwork was rather the result of the *communitas* that had emerged the last couple of years and culminated in the legalization in 2013. Turner writes that the values of *communitas* are strikingly present in the hippie movement of the 1960's. "The hippie emphasis on spontaneity, immediacy, and 'existence' throws into relief one of the senses in which *communitas* contrasts with structure. *Communitas* is rooted in the 'now'; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom" (Turner, 1977:113). Thus, in a way one could say that parts of the cannabis movement had become rooted in the structure now, as the law and custom was changed. However, most of the people wanted a more progressive law. The similarities between the hippie movement of the 1960's and the cannabis movement in Uruguay are many. Both movements have an ideology of anti-materialism, they have a mantra of 'living in the now', and cannabis³⁷ has an important role in both movements.

Cultivation of cannabis was part of the daily aspect of *Casa Conventillo*. The plants were tended to from morning to evening, and even got a good night's sleep, as Marco had a tarpaulin covering the plant from the streetlights during the night. A late evening in April, it was time to harvest the first of the six cannabis plants. When I came into the room, music was already playing in the background, and the moonlight shined in through the balcony door. A group of seven or eight people were standing on the balcony, waiting for what was about to happen. Mariana and Sofía, two women, had the honour of cutting the first plant. Their gender was not a coincidence. Before cutting the plant, Mariana said: "The indigenous people in Peru said that the coca plant had to be cut by the women, because the plant is female and its energy has to be continued". Cannabis plants are also gendered, and it is only the female plant that has the buds, which can provide the psychoactive purposes. Therefore, it was only natural that it was the two girls who had the honour of cutting the first plant. Mariana held the plant, while Sofía put the scissor around the bottom of the stem, and cut the plant off. They proceeded to

³⁷ The worldwide cannabis culture of today has its roots in the hippie movement in the 1960's, including the cannabis movement in Uruguay.

cut off unwanted leaves and held the buds up for the group to see. The buds went around the group for people to take a closer look at them, and smell them. Mariana said that she dedicated the harvest to the Mother Earth (*tierra madre*). “The ‘white men’³⁸ have disrespected the coca plant, by creating cocaine and generating an enormous evil which is drug trafficking. It’s in the honour of the native people that suffer we cut this plant today”.

Communitas have often been ascribed ‘sacred’ elements, and they are not absent in hippie movements either. Turner writes that it can be seen in the use of religious terms like angel and saint, or for instance the Zen Buddhist saying; “all is one, one is none, none is all” (1977:112-113). The nature and its place in the world was a frequent topic among the inhabitants of *Casa Conventillo*. The topics for conversation were often about sustainability, as was embodied in many of the people living there, through riding bicycles, recirculating organic and residual waste, and even by having a separate place where they recycled the mate.³⁹ In this context, we see that the respect and appreciation of the nature has an important part of the life in *Casa Conventillo*.

Among my informants, there was one person that particularly was held high in regard, and in many ways worked as an anti-materialist, religious leader; the recent president, “Pepe” Mujica. Many of my informants saw his remarkably social liberal politics, at least in a Latin American context, combined with his humble nature, as a perfect role model. In some cases he was even close to a spiritual leader. However, while “Pepe” Mujica stands out as a role model for anti-materialism and prudent ideals, it is not equally easy for the population to live as humble as him. The people in *Casa Conventillo* balanced Pepe’s anti-materialist ideals with a form of what I call “prudent consumerism”. A prudent consumerism is in one way a paradox, but I find it useful to explain that it is difficult to maintain an anti-materialist view and still live while allowing yourself some luxuries. I use the term prudent consumerism in order to explain how the two can balance. The ideology of *Casa Conventillo* was, as elaborated in chapter 4, built up around reciprocal activities. Moreover, the value presented earlier in this chapter in

³⁸ She used the term ‘white men’ although she, and the vast majority of Uruguayans, are ‘white’. The expression was made more in a reflexive way to explicate on how we as people are destroying the nature.

³⁹ Mate has a high potential in being recycled, but few measures have been made towards it. One time, I encountered a group of people raising awareness to this outside Montevideo’s city hall. They sold plants and food that had been cultivated in compost from mate.

terms of lack of interest in material things was also important there. However, they acknowledged the fact that commodities were necessary to live decent lives.

One example of this balance is the use of credit cards. Uruguayan stores rarely have promotions and offers like we are familiar with in Western capitalism markets. When they do have it, people flock to the stores, like on *Día del Centro*⁴⁰ when I was travelling home by bus, and the whole city centre was in chaos, causing the bus ride to take 40 minutes longer than I had expected. Nevertheless, some stores have made an agreement with banks, and offer commodities with an attractive discount, but only if one pays with a credit card from a certain bank. This is, of course, a way to get people to sign up for credit cards, trying to make paying on credit a habit. Mariana had a credit card like that, and if anyone in the house wanted to buy something, they borrowed her card. Then, when the invoice came, they went to the bank and paid everything at once. They never bought anything without already having the money. With that action, they acknowledged that they were part of a materialist world, but on the other hand they did not get trapped by the system.

Escaping The City: Pilgrimage to the Hippie Beaches of Rocha



Figure 4: Punta del Diablo.

⁴⁰ Translates as “Downtown Day” or “The day of the City Centre”.

In grasping the core of his field, the anthropologist should listen to what the informants talk about, and how they talk about those subjects. While cannabis may have been a key symbol in terms of an urban utopia, living lives in peace and harmony, there were some places people spoke more highly and warm about, than other. For instance, when I talked about going to the border town of Salto for a weekend to get my visa renewed, Mariana expressed her opinion about the city in a negative way. "I do not like Salto or *salteños*", she said to me. When asked what she did not like about them, she answered: "They are too religious and conservative, for instance, they have doctors there who would not carry out abortions, even though it was legalized just a few years ago". Although she criticized the people, and not the place itself, it is clearly a connection between people at one place, and how people perceive that place. There were however places that were spoken about more glamorously, and with a warmth and positivity that obviously was important to them: Various destinations along the eastern coast of the country, the most notable ones in the department of Rocha. During my fieldwork I was almost daily reminded about how beautiful it is to walk over the dunes leading to Cabo Polonio, or other places in Rocha, and how relaxing and *tranquilo* it was being there.

Most of the destinations in Rocha are small fishing villages ranging from a few hundred inhabitants to a couple of thousands. During the high season, in January and February, tens of thousands of tourists visit. Cabo Polonio, however, is unique in that there are no roads leading to it, and there is no electricity, making it a desired place to go for many people seeking a peaceful environment where they can completely disconnect from the world of Internet and electronics. The easiest way to get there is by walking eight kilometres over sand dunes, along the Atlantic Ocean. Punta del Diablo is also one of the more popular villages in Rocha, seeing its population increase from around 500, to around 25,000 during the summer. Halfway through my fieldwork, albeit after the peak of the season, I found it necessary to go to one of those places myself, to see what it was all about. My plan was to spend three days in Punta del Diablo, and two days in Cabo Polonio, but due to unforeseen events, I had to stay in Punta del Diablo for four days, and never got to visit Cabo Polonio. When I said I was going to the eastern coast, I was met with phrases like "*que bueno, me alegro por ti*" - how great, I am happy for you". Before my trip, I had been given numerous tips by Marco and Mariana about where to go, when

to walk past the dunes to experience the most visually stunning scenery, and where to stay.

I arrived in Punta del Diablo by bus late at night, and walked out to a dirt road. It was dark, and almost impossible to see anything other than some lights from a bar across the bus terminal, and sporadic lights in the distance. A group of young people was standing outside the bar talking and laughing, but otherwise it was really quiet, and I could hear the waves from the sea pounding the rocks in the distance.

After a good night's sleep, I started walking around the town and along the beach. The impressions of this coastal town previously given by my informants, was as accurate as I had thought. Surfers and people with dreadlocks could be seen everywhere, and I had no reason to doubt my guidebooks statement of Punta del Diablo having the highest rate of people with dreadlocks per capita in South America. The atmosphere was quiet, and tranquil, as one could expect, and I could easily imagine how this was a sprawling place to be during the high seasons. Jamaican flags, pictures of Bob Marley, the Rastafarian colours, graffiti and signs with the cannabis leaf were highly present, as for instance on the hostel on the picture in Figure 3. As both the Jamaican flag, the Rastafari colours on the house, and the cannabis leaf symbols on the surfboard indicates, this was a hostel where it was probable to obtain weed. At another house, I saw a subtle sticker in a window where it said: "THC⁴¹ – Authorized Dealer".

In the lectures at the University before fieldwork, it was said that after a week, you have understood everything, but after a month, you do not understand anything. I will therefore not put too much emphasis on my four days here, but now turn to two of my informants. Luis, a man in his fifties that worked in a bar in Punta del Diablo, told me that there really was not any different here now than before the legalization. "Well, there has been coming more tourists ... and people like you", he told me, referring to me as a foreign person trying to grasp what is going on. "I think it is humorous how much foreign people are focusing on the legalization, here no one cares, it doesn't make any difference". I asked him why it did not make any difference, and he told me that the

⁴¹ THC is an Argentinian magazine about cannabis, and refers to the psychoactive constituent in cannabis, *tetrahydrocannabinol*.

police did not do anything before either. “This is a quiet place. *Tranquilo*. Nothing happens here”.⁴²

Francisco, the cultivator in chapter 4, whose family run hostel was located somewhere in Rocha, told me about how he spent his summers there with great joy, playing instruments in the sunset, meeting new people, and benefitting from “the good things life had to offer”. He explained how his father and himself were supplying the hostel with self-cultivated cannabis, giving away marijuana to guests staying at their hostel. Confronted by the question of legality, he told me that it did not matter anyway, there is not a single representative from the police force or the government in general that could or would interfere. “The community governs itself”, he said.

However, not all of my informants were content with the summer tourism. Talking about social progress in the country, Diego told me: “People here in Uruguay are stuck in their own bubbles all year around. They go to their favourite places, to the interior, or to Piriapolis, Rocha or whatever, and vacate there. Hanging at the rambla, just slow pacing and doing nothing for three months. Then, it gets colder, and people are complaining about the lack of progress here, and just work until Christmas, and then going on vacation again”. After Easter, he told me that I was going to see a completely different type of Uruguayans. “Now they are actually going to work, everything productive here happens during the three winter months”.

A theoretical approach to pilgrimage can be problematic, as Simon Coleman has pointed out before me. Criticizing Victor Turner’s approach to pilgrimage as a *rite de passage*, he says that the behaviour and activities associated with pilgrimage will “change over time as systems of transport, articulations of spirituality, secular ideologies, forms of syncretism and so on are transformed” (Coleman, 2002:363). He further notes that, “belief in the worth of studying pilgrimage can become self-defeating if it turns into dogmatic assertions of what sacred travel must, or must not, contain” (2002:364). However, pilgrimage, as religious practice is still meaningful for people. Therefore, I aim to propose places like Punta del Diablo and other towns along the eastern coast as

⁴² This is a truth with minor modifications, as there had been, for instance, sexual abuse of a young woman just a few months earlier.

places where *communitas* unfold, and where it is possible to find cannabis communities. The remaining question then is why do people go to these places?

Tourism in Uruguay is quite common, and it seems that different people prefer different places. Of course, many places are preferred because of family ties, but certain attributes are attached to different places. The coastal towns in Rocha, like Punta del Diablo, have a widespread cannabis and 'hippie' feeling. In these places, the materialism of everyday is absent, and it is a sense of a community, yet imagined, as it is likely that most of these people will never know one another (Anderson, 1996:19). Moreover, the tranquil atmosphere, and the closeness to the nature makes it a rather opposite to the stressful life in the city. Particularly, escaping the city is a sensible approach towards these activities, as the city lacks almost all the qualities that are attached to, for instance, Punta del Diablo. Robert Park (1967:3) once said:

“[The city] is man’s most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart’s desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself. “

Of course, anthropologists know that landscapes are temporal, and never really are untouched (Ingold, 1993), but in a way, these pilgrimages can be understood as a way of reclaiming the wild and “untouched” nature. To escape from the city that man has built, and seek solitude, reflection and quiet in a natural environment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how the ritual of drinking mate has roots and are embedded in a deep tradition originating in the mythology of the gauchos. Drinking mate has several purposes, and when a mate session involves more than one person, it has a purpose of strengthening social relations, and is a token of peace and mutuality, while simultaneously proposing a time for reflexivity. While cannabis is a relatively new substance in Uruguayan society, it has rapidly gained popularity, and the cannabis ritual strongly resembles that of mate. The purposes of cannabis also bears striking similarities to those of mate, and is used to relax, tighten social relations, and has a

reflexive purpose. I raise the question if cannabis could substitute the drinking of mate, but regardless of the similarities, the two functions more in a complementary way. Nevertheless, like (KILDE) have done in other places, I argue that the use of cannabis fits the patterns in Uruguayan culture.

I went on to explain the cannabis movement in Montevideo as a *communitas* that rose up to demand legal rights for cultivating cannabis. Deeply anchored in this cannabis movement are the senses of reciprocity, the lack of interest in material things, and bears resemblance to the hippie movements of the 1960's. While this movement, embodied in the various people partaking, is spread out over Montevideo and the rest of Uruguay throughout the year, a concentration of this movement can be found during the summer, pilgrimaging in the coastal towns on the east shore of Uruguay, as for instance Punta del Diablo.

Chapter 6 – Concluding Remarks: A Growing Culture



Figure 5: Cannabis graffiti.

The picture above is in many ways representative for this thesis. It illustrates three of the most important things I learned while living and participating with my informants. The three symbols are closely related to each other. In the background, there is a cannabis leaf, which symbolizes the foundation of my thesis, as well as for the cannabis movement in Montevideo. Covering most of the cannabis leaf, is a red, five-pointed star, strikingly similar to the communist star of the Soviet Union and China, but the same star was also used by the Uruguayan urban guerrilla movement called *Tupamaros*, which former president José Mujica was part of. Although communism as an ideology has a bad reputation, at the centre of communism is the thought that every person is equal. This, I found was a virtue among my informants. Moreover, communism symbolizes the anti-materialist viewpoint. One should not brag about what one has. Having a lack of interest in material things is a value held high. Covering parts of the red star is a white dove. The dove symbolizes peace and freedom, and the dove painted apparently looks like it is on its way up in the air, as if it has regained its freedom after being confined to the ground. The picture is, I think, a strikingly accurate metaphor of the cannabis legalization and the virtues cannabis represents for my informants.

As the title of this thesis suggests, the legalization of cannabis in Uruguay is growing. Yes, it is a culture that revolves around cultivation of cannabis, but at the same time, I argue that all aspects of cannabis are increasing in number, both in persons consuming it, cannabis tourism, as well as paraphernalia and grow shops. It is a culture that is growing, and simultaneously taking root in the fertile Uruguayan soil. I will now summarize some of the main themes presented throughout the thesis that demonstrate this.

In chapter three, I take a closer look at how my informants perceive cannabis, and how they compare it to other substances. My findings show that my informants did not view cannabis as a drug at all and rather accepted it as a natural part of their environment. Moreover, even though the state has a presence in cannabis related events, and awareness campaigns, people were already aware of the potential risks. Arguing against what Sandberg and Pedersen (2011) have done in Norway, I find cannabis in Uruguay to go through a normalization process, as illustrated in Figure 1, where people had no problems mixing a cannabis celebration with a family gathering.

In my experience, sharing a joint was deeply embedded in the cannabis culture in Montevideo. Chapter four looked at the promising Uruguayan gift economy. The motive was not necessarily economic, but rather sharing a joint strengthened social relations. A common strategy was that several people brought one or two joints with them out to a party or other social gatherings. This was a good strategy, as the responsibility then was not left to just one or two persons who actually had to bring with them more cannabis out. Instead, this made people sharing the joints more actively.

In chapter five, we saw how cannabis has adopted into pattern of Uruguayan culture. While *yerba mate* is strongly embedded in the identification of Uruguayans, the rituals attached to it bears striking resemblance to that of cannabis. While the bodily effects of the two substances are quite different, they complement each other. As a ritual purpose, both *yerba mate* and cannabis reach many of the same achievements, like stressing down and disconnect from the daily life, in order to be reflexive.

That being said, there are certain flaws in the law, and if the Uruguayan state wants to be successful in tackling those issues, they will have to work hard. Two problems about the law came frequently up during my fieldwork. The first, and what most people complained about, is the demand that if you have to grow or smoke cannabis legally, you need to be registered in a database where government officials may have insight in. People do trust this government, but with the military dictatorship only 30 years back in time, people are reluctant to register. Only 3000 have registered for cultivation, but estimates have assumed that maybe 20 000 people cultivates cannabis illegally. The second flaw is the cannabis clubs, which are expensive to be a part of, and has led to an emergence of a *grey market*, where legally grown weed is being traded illegally on the street.

Where to go from here?

This thesis is one of the first empirical anthropological studies of cannabis legalization, and possibly the first with the legalization in Uruguay. On its own, this thesis is just an ethnographic description of a legalization in a liminal phase, as the fieldwork was undertaken before the state monopoly was implemented. However, it will be interesting to see what the future of the legalization will bring. Future studies of the legalization of cannabis in Uruguay are needed, and especially insights in how large scale cultivating of cannabis can be valuable to conduct.

However, the field of cannabis extends beyond Uruguay. In the immediate future, more countries will follow Uruguay in legalizing cannabis, and potentially other psychoactive substances as well. Some states in the U.S. have already legalized cannabis, and the state of Colorado seems to attract American researchers. Further, it looks like Canada will be the next to follow, as prime minister Stephen Trudeau proposed a bill for legalizing cannabis in 2017, and Mexico and Colombia have announced that they will legalize medical marijuana soon. There are also ongoing debates in Argentina and Chile that suggest that this could happen also there in a not too distant future.

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