



THE HIGH NORTH

Contents

Foreword / ix

RYAN STOA

Introduction: Can Someone Tell Me What Just Happened? / 3

ANDREW D. HATHAWAY and CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

PART 1 Cannabis in Context: Historical, Political, and Economic Factors

1 From Prohibition to Legalization: Cannabis Use and the Law / 29

CATHERINE CARSTAIRS

2 Cannabis-Policy Integration and Alignment: Missed Opportunities and Obstacles to Collaborative Governance / 52

JARED J. WESLEY

3 Displacing the Illicit Cannabis Market: Challenges and Trade-Offs / 73

JASON CHILDS and GEORGE HARTNER

4 Medical Cannabis Dispensaries: A Conduit for Change? / 97

JENNA VALLERIANI

PART 2 Cannabis and Public Health: A Multidisciplinary View

5 Cannabis Legalization: Déjà Vu All over Again? / 113

MICHAEL DEVILLAER

6 Cannabis Substitution: The Canadian Experience / 146

MICHELLE ST. PIERRE, SARAH DANIELS, and ZACH WALSH

7 Cannabis and Mental Health: A Sociological Perspective / 164

ANDREW D. HATHAWAY

**8 Help Wanted: The Plight of Workers and Consumers under
Canada's Legal Cannabis Production Regime / 188**

CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

PART 3 Cannabis Subjectivities: An Array of Voices

9 Women in Corporate Cannabis Work / 213

From a Good:House to Good:Farm / 213

An interview with JEANNETTE VANDERMAREL

Building Consumer Trust in a Nascent Industry / 219

KARINA LAHNAKOSKI

Cannabis Jobs in Canada / 223

ALISON McMAHON

10 Last Stop before Hopeless / 231

KELLY INSLEY

11 Dusting Off the Path – Tsi Nionkwarihotens / 242

KANENHARIYO SETH LEFORT with CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

12 Slow Cannabis / 266

KELLY COULTER

13 Illicit Cannabis Market Folklore / 272

Guilty Republic / 274

CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

For the Discriminating Traveller / 280

"SAL"

**14 Cannabis Activism in Canada: Reflections on a Movement
in Transition / 286**

JODIE EMERY

**Postscript: "Craft" Cannabis and a New Kind of Canadian
Farm / 312**

ANDREW D. HATHAWAY and CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

List of Contributors / 326

Index / 329

Introduction

Can Someone Tell Me What Just Happened?

ANDREW D. HATHAWAY and CLAYTON JAMES SMITH McCANN

There is a scene in the anarchic masterpiece *Mad Max* in which a police chase culminates in a multi-vehicle crash. The motorcycle cop goes into a skid, lays down his bike, and slides to avoid hitting a car. Ashen-faced at the chaotic scene of mayhem, the driver gasps: “Oh my God! What’s happened?”

The earnest cop, “Jim Goose,” removes the face shield of his helmet. Tanned and youthful, he smiles and replies: “I don’t know, man. I just got here myself.” And then he laughs.

Well, here we are, indeed! But what to make of the historic changes ushered in when legal cannabis became a reality in Canada on October 17, 2018? What happened and what will happen are controversial and contentious. Reactions ranged from overjoyed to cynical to cautious to alarmed to outraged to indifferent, to name just a few.

Does the legalization of cannabis signify the culmination of a victorious agrarian or cultural revolution? Or does it represent an all-too-rare capitulation by the criminal justice system, a recognition that prohibition does not work? Is it an admission that the war on drugs has done more harm than good? Does legalization demonstrate the supremacy of science and reason over ignorance and fear? Or is it just a ploy to woo young voters? To be more cynical, is it a shameless cash grab by ex-cops and politicians who profited by waging war on (some) drugs and who now profit as prominent shareholders and investors in legal cannabis production? Is legal cannabis just

another sign of social Armageddon, marked by licentiousness, mass immigration, and the rest? Does it mark the dawning of a new Age of Aquarius? Or is it the inevitable result of the corrupting influence of modern neoliberal market forces?

Whatever cannabis has been and is becoming, its social meaning is something firmly rooted in “the social lives of things” (Appadurai 1996). To understand the social lives of things, anthropologists examine their relationships with people and other objects in the different times and places that have influenced their meaning. The social history of cannabis in Canada, of course, is distinctively Canadian but inseparable from its larger cultural significance in North America and elsewhere.

A Green So Delicious It Hurts¹

Despite the “startling lack of toxicity” known to distinguish cannabis from other psychoactive substances, its more common name is believed to be derived from the Portuguese word *maraguango*, for “intoxicant” (Lee 2012). The term *cola*, used by growers to describe the long bud cluster at the top of the plant, is Spanish for “tail.” Terms used elsewhere, and in the ancient world, are less mundane, reflecting a sense of reverence and gratitude for the powers bestowed on users. *Dawamesc* is Arabic for “medicine of immortality.” And the terms used by Indian *sadhus* (holy men) for cannabis once described it as the “joy giver” and the “leaf of heroes.”

When migrant Indian labourers were indentured to the “Spice Island” of Jamaica in the 1800s, they called it *ganja* – the same term later made famous by reggae legend Bob Marley. Early jazz musicians in the United States called it *tea* and *gag*, *muggles* and *Mary Warner* to hoodwink the authorities and claim it as a symbol of subcultural belonging to a world outside the law.

Hippies called it *weed* and *pot* and even more overtly politicized its meaning as a symbol of defiance and countercultural allegiance. The growing prevalence of the use of a banned substance over decades ushered in the advent and diffusion of drug culture, including intimate shared knowledge of the historically transgressive act and the meaning of getting high and being high.

Sociologist Howard Becker (1963) long ago described the social process of learning to become a “marihuana user” in a deviant subculture devoted to the drug.² In participation with more experienced users, one learns how to produce its mind-altering effects and recognize them and enjoy them as connected to its use. To become a regular user, one must have access to a

steady source of supply and learn how to control one's behaviour after using the drug in encounters with authorities and respected others liable to disapprove.

Becker (1963) argued that the user also learns to understand drug-use behaviour as nondeviant, or normal, in terms that depart from the norms and values of a society that views marijuana use as harmful and immoral. Understanding drug use, from the point of view of users, thus requires an understanding of (sub)cultural forms of knowledge that partially determine use behaviour and experience in its situated context as an inherently social act.³ But what are we to make of the societal reaction that signifies transgression in the meaning of drug use?

By the late 1970s, marijuana use had become the most widely committed crime in North America – a crime that disproportionately made criminals of youth and those already marginalized by race and class distinctions. Critics have contended that the prohibition served to justify the targeting of *others* seen as a threat to law and order and as a scapegoat to protect the vested interests of elites. Thus, winning the war on drugs was less important than the ends served by its function to maintain the status quo. “The drug war is a holy war,” quipped Joseph McNamara, “and in a holy war you don't have to win” (Lee 2012, 160).⁴

Born of temperance-era virtues, marijuana prohibition in Canada and the United States employed themes of social chaos, degradation, and disorder to trigger the anxieties of the property-holding classes. Fears evoking class and racial conflict were augmented in the Reefer Madness era by a moral panic over marijuana's designation as the *assassin of youth*. “Officer Warns Insidious Weed Is Even Supplied to School Children,” exclaimed a 1938 headline in the *Toronto Star* (Boyd and Carter 2014).

Today, the war on marijuana – as we once knew it – may be over, the insidious weed having transformed into a respectable commodity called *cannabis* that can be legally bought and sold. And yet eight decades after the height of Reefer Madness, there has been a resurgence of concerns about psychosis, the effects of use on adolescent brain development, and rising diagnoses of cannabis use disorder (CUD).⁵ Moreover, the related health care burden is reportedly costing the economy billions of dollars every year.

In Canada, the architects of legalization, eight decades after Reefer Madness, have made claims of a not too different sort. The former deputy prime minister Anne McLellan led the task force informing the creation of the regulatory system allowing legal access to cannabis for recreational use.

She is also of the view that only “stupid people” use the drug (e.g., see CBC 2003; Emery 2016).

Official statements by Bill Blair,⁶ the former minister for border services and organized crime, suggested the illicit cannabis market finances organized crime in the “billions of dollars.” In his former role as police chief of the City of Toronto, Blair observed that he had seen marijuana ruin lives. His more recent statements are consistent with past claims of the RCMP, which has referred to marijuana as “the most dangerous narcotic in Canada today” (Poole 1998, 68), and those of Public Health and Safety Minister Ralph Goodale,⁷ who warned Canadians of the dangers of buying cannabis from dealers selling “poison product that could kill them.”

The emerging stance of government – that legalizing cannabis serves public health objectives while advancing social justice – has thus been somewhat undermined by claims not far removed from the blatant propaganda of the Reefer Madness era. To be clear, it is our position that legalization is a pyrrhic victory, a win that inflicts a devastating toll on the victor, one tantamount to a defeat. The outcome for Canadians is thereby one that negates a true sense of achievement, which damages more long-term progress.

Okay! Time to Move along Folks. There Is Nothing to See Here.

The war on drugs has long been substantiated by hyperbole, othering, and outright lies that serve to reinforce distinctions between “good drugs” and “bad drugs.” The good-drugs-versus-bad-drugs theme is being transformed now that cannabis is becoming a respectable commodity – while still being sold by bad guys “on the streets.” Participants in the illicit market, who continue to profit from the sale of an unregulated drug, are characterized as *really* bad guys of a different character than those who are abiding by the rules.

Has the government’s objective of diverting cannabis profits into the deep pockets of new corporate profiteers spurred a reinvestment in myth making? How do these claims stand up to evaluation based on evidence that provides a more informed and nuanced point of view? The illicit cannabis market – quite unlike the one emerging in which the profiteers are good people who pay taxes and wear suits – is commonly portrayed in a distorted way, suggesting that it is run by violent criminals selling dangerous drugs to kids.

A 2011 report by the Canadian Justice Department provides a more informed view. The data on arrests for cultivation show that only a small fraction of the cannabis market was connected to organized crime. In five hundred investigations (1997–2005), just 5 percent of grow-ops were linked

to organized crime or street gangs. Firearms were located at 6 percent of busted sites, a rate approximately consistent with the national proportion of licensed gun owners in Canada. While only 3 percent of the investigated grow-ops were found to be growing more than one thousand plants, over half had five or less. Forty percent were issued fines (Boyd and Carter 2014).

The connection between cannabis and organized crime is thereby not substantiated by the facts. Historically, however, exaggerating the connection has reliably resulted in larger law-enforcement budgets supporting more surveillance of illicit substance users. Our bloated criminal justice system requires more lawyers, judges, bailiffs, and corrections officers, among other opportunists, to protect the turf of a new brand of profiteers. The scapegoats of the past are issued pardons, if deserving, rather than expungement of their sins.⁸

The new class of criminal created – that is, those guilty of diverting profits properly intended for the regulated market – is strikingly familiar, populated disproportionately by youth, racialized minorities, and the lower classes. Their social characteristics further justify the surveillance and policing of groups excluded from the legal market.

Successfully displacing illegal vendors also requires the legitimization of claims that target uninformed consumers. Unregulated cannabis is depicted as more dangerous and inferior to products being sold by corporations. To justify the higher cost, for those who can afford it, buying legal cannabis is represented as putatively safer because of child-proof packaging and point-of-sale restrictions. The public must be malleable enough to be receptive to the notion that these safeguards will reduce use by youth – and unsuspecting pets and children – and prevent the sale of cannabis laced with fentanyl and other so-called street drugs.

Suggesting that “street dealers” subscribe to business models in which it is advisable to sell adulterated cannabis requires a violent transformation of reality implying that the drug is sold by dangerous criminals and street thugs. The term *folk market*, though more accurate, does not have the same ring to it as connecting organized crime and violence to the sale of drugs on the unregulated market.⁹

Critical reflection on claims making by the powerful (claims that serve the economic interests of elites) elicits themes familiar to sociologists and anthropologists. As we shall see, however, the legal cannabis phenomenon is fertile ground for insights from across the social sciences. All social scientists, to some degree, concern themselves with the social construction of reality and its relationship to power (Berger and Luckmann 1991; Goode

and Ben-Yehuda 1994). As something firmly rooted in the social lives of things, cannabis is rife with cultural significance, symbols, rituals, and meanings that are in the process of being rapidly transformed.

From a constructionist perspective, science itself is understood as just another perspective, or way of looking at the world, in which objectivity or fact cannot be separated from our cultural understandings.¹⁰ Conducted from its standpoint as a perspective of perspectives, a constructionist inquiry's primary objective is to render strange and problematic ways of looking at phenomena that are ordinarily taken for granted. To imagine different ways of looking at the world is to imagine that things can be otherwise. Inquiry of this nature is political in that it serves to diminish the power of authority and legitimacy, which are produced and reinforced by unquestioning belief.

When political realities are taken for granted, or understood as matters of technical necessity, the language of scientific experts is commonly co-opted to serve the interests of the powerful by concealing from the public that moral and political decisions are being made. To foster the development of many perspectives, the best defence is to be skeptical of every perspective. Constructionists must situate claims making within its social context of culture and structure. We must acknowledge that all claims – and, indeed, all research products – cannot be separated from the cultural and social realities in which they are produced. Because the meanings of all things are situational and relative, we need to understand what claims mean within their larger social context.

Social problems are the products of collective definition. Social scientists possess the kind of knowledge needed to serve as a corrective for ignorance and misinformation and to further understanding of the makeup of the problem. This position is in no way inconsistent with the idea that all sources of knowledge are social constructions that ought to be treated as claims in their own right. Recognizing the sociocultural context of claims making helps situate it structurally, and politically, in a world where there is an increasing obligation of social scientists to challenge ideas and ideologies that many people take for granted. Rather than obsessing about theory, our objective is to facilitate informed investigation and critique.

Ethnographic Inquiry and Representation

The High North: Cannabis in Canada is a curated collection that seeks, in its interdisciplinarity, to create something novel. We favour Roland Barthes's

(1972, cited in Clifford 1986, 1) interpretation: “To do something interdisciplinary it’s not enough to choose ‘a subject’ (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.” Our approach is broadly ethnographic in that we as editors invited an array of contributions and set out to discover emergent themes and patterns (Altheide 1987). As Eric Weissman (2017) notes, such work inevitably crosses academic boundaries in seeking to derive information from people and their experiences. The central task of the ethnographer is to make sense of how people become engaged in thinking critically about their world. But how can social research be effective, Weissman (2017, 57) asks: “In a world where truth is unstable and objective reality constantly socially constructed?”

This definition of the situation opens the door to innovative forms of inquiry and methodologies that bridge the social sciences and literary work done in the humanities and outside academia to inform, augment, and challenge scientific ways of knowing. Much of this volume is accordingly devoted to discovering insights through a myriad of methods, some of which have been described elsewhere using such terms as *autoethnography*, *ethnographic autobiography*, *reflexive ethnography*, and *public ethnography* and in research that employs ethnographic observation and sees the inherent value in producing “messy texts” (Denzin 1997).

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011). This approach challenges objective research standards for representing others and treats research as a political, socially just, and socially conscious act. Recognizing research as both a process and a product, the autoethnographer uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography.

When the intent and purposes of relating a life story are anthropological, other authors suggest that the work be labelled ethnographic autobiography (Wolcott 2004). More specifically, an ethnographic autobiography is a life story told to an anthropologist or used in ways that implicate a sociocultural rather than a psychological interpretation.

Reflexive ethnography is an approach to research guided by a critical understanding of the philosophical basis of ethnographic authority (Davies 2012). It attempts to strike a balance between postmodernist relativism, which overemphasizes reflexivity in ways that hinder research, and a realist perspective that values the scientific method. This is an ethnographic

standpoint that reflects postmodern insights by incorporating different standpoints to expose the tyranny of hegemonic metanarratives.

The areas of overlap between academic subjects and those of most appeal to the general public are described elsewhere as public ethnography (Gans 2010). This approach differs from academic ethnography when its sites and subjects are relevant to what the public wants and needs to know and when it is written in nontechnical language.

More generally, along with Norman Denzin (1997), we acknowledge the importance of reflexive, messy texts that break with representations that are typical for traditional, realist writing forms. Such authorship is sensitive to how reality is socially constructed and understands that writing is a form of narrative or a way of framing reality. Messy texts are unapologetically political and tell stories that are multivoiced and many sited, with a tendency to be open-ended and resistant to theoretical holism. They tend to make the reader work and refuse to impose meaning. These are more than subjective accounts of experiences.

Like James Clifford (1986), we contend that ethnographic writing is something that itself is situated and determined contextually, rhetorically, institutionally, generically, politically, and historically. So, yes, indeed, the task is daunting. In addition to conventional academic sources that shed light on these phenomena, we sought to achieve fuller polyvocality by curating a living, breathing collection of accounts by nonacademic authors too. By seeking voices typically ignored, or rendered marginal, in the lead up to and aftermath of legalization in October 2018, we wanted to tell stories that may never have been told. Clifford (1986, 13) asks: “Who speaks? Who writes? When and where? With or to whom? Under what institutional and historical constraints?” Put in another way, we ought to be attentive to the struggle reflected and produced by age-old questions surrounding the proper role of the researcher or philosopher or author.

To quote Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 33): “After all, the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and non-literature and so forth are not laid up in heaven.” Clifford (1986) speaks of the crisis in representation as a postcolonial awakening in anthropology among those tasked with representing others in their cultural descriptions by crafting the “expected texts.” Instead, researchers are encouraged to “seek out and establish new modes of contact across cultures” by breaking the conventions of the academy that serve to reinforce hegemony, such as the socially advantaged speaking for disadvantaged others. The challenge posed by Dan Rose (1993, 216), and we

agree, is for ethnographers to strive to develop “new relations within other cultures, such that we begin to draft new forms of texts, and explore new modes of experience.”

Rose (1993, 217) writes: “The future of ethnography lies in a more sophisticated and self-conscious relationship” in which ethnographic texts, “whether in sociology, anthropology, psychology, critical legal studies, planning, or folklore, will be a polyphonic, heteroglossic, multigenre construction.” Thus, we endeavoured, as Rose (1993, 218) urges, to assemble a selection of “critical, theoretical, humanist mini-essays that advance ... particular disciplines” and tried to capture “the conversations, voices, attitudes, visual genres, gestures, reactions, and concerns of the daily life of the people with whom the author participates.” Accordingly, this volume, if successful in the eyes of readers and contributors, convincingly achieves the cohabitation of “analytic, fictive, poetic, narrative, and critical genres.”

Before proceeding, it is fitting to acknowledge the incisive words of Australian Indigenous rights activist Lilla Watson, who is often quoted for reminding would-be allies: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”¹¹

Our approach to this endeavour is to situate our efforts within social scientific discussions and recurring debates in academia about the role of the researcher in producing public scholarship. Whatever our commitment to “truth telling” and our apparent obligation to contribute to resolving social problems, presuming to perform such a role is ultimately fraught with contradictions, challenges, and criticisms. There was a time not all that long ago when Canadian poets were feted in public occasions that attracted widespread media attention: “The assumption was that poets could speak articulately to the nation at large about matters that affect our collective life” (Wayman 2014, 79).

But how might a collective life be spoken to when there are so many issues that divide us? And, moreover, how could one ever hope to speak for and do justice to oppressed groups such as the Indigenous people living in third world conditions within our own borders, or the one in four Canadians who face housing insecurity and go hungry every day? How might we tackle and atone for Canada’s contribution to global carbon emissions or our ignoble distinction of being, on a per-capita basis, among the worst polluters on the planet – despoiling fisheries, forests, pristine shorelines, lakes, and streams?

At minimum, the invocation to engage in public sociology, anthropology, and ethnography (or any of the other disciplines) requires that social scientists must seek to “break down the public appearance of a united and consensual society” (Hathaway 2015b). This, in turn, requires maintaining academic freedom to be critical and at liberty to refuse to take the world for granted. In a moving tribute to his colleague Kerry Preibisch, Gerardo Otero honours her commitment to advancing “organic public sociology” with a clear value standpoint to “bridge the tension ... between science and politics ... value neutrality and value relevance” (Otero 2017, 355).

With a nod to Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual, the primary role of researchers must be to challenge or question “conventional wisdoms” that underpin assumptions about policy formation that put people at risk of structural violence. This role includes debunking myths and scare tactics to reframe hegemonic, prejudicial cultural images and calls on us to problematize the complicity of academia in serving the technocratic aims of the neo-liberal state (Hathaway 2015b).

Ethnographic institutional critique, contends Eric Weissman, is a means to further social justice aims that contradict and conflict with dominant neoliberal values. His research on homelessness speaks truth to power by demonstrating that access to power is enhanced by shelter, safe community, and having a say in one’s affairs and a chance to “get back in the game of being a citizen.” Citizenship is predicated on participation by self-transformative political subjects and through constructive criticism of material conditions (Weissman 2017, 61). We are similarly committed to advancing ethnographic practice through immersion in often overlooked communities to enhance understanding of their versions of reality by ensuring that their story has been told – and told by them.

Subjective lived experience is a person’s history (Scott 1991, 1992). That is to say, as Clifford (1983, 129) does, it is the culmination of “clues, traces, gestures, and scraps of sense” that inform the construction of “stable interpretations.” Experience is best described as knowing. Joan Scott (1992, 27) observes that until the eighteenth century, “experience and experiment were closely connected terms, designating how knowledge was arrived at through testing and observation.”

Knowledge gained by experience is the most authentic truth on which to anchor subsequent reasoning and analysis (Williams 2013). There is immediacy to personal experience as something ordinarily accepted as irrefutably real. One’s lived experience is reality. It is a form of truth. And we

should care very much about seeking out the truth or, more accurately perhaps, the truths of lived experience that often go untold.

As a wise man once said, "I'm not sure I can tell the truth ... I can only tell what I know."¹² Experience is the ring of truth listeners seek from a storyteller. It is what researchers are pursuing when they ask someone to tell what they know about a given way of life. Indeed looking for the truth in accounts of reality is the very essence of the work of social scientists. It is the kind of interaction that has enabled humans to flourish for millennia through the exchange of lived experience from one person to another. And it is experience adorning the cave walls of Chauvet and Altamira in southern France and northern Spain.

Experience provides a way of knowing that includes potential revelation of unspoken truths that challenge "hegemonic constructions of social worlds" (Scott 1992, 24). Speaking truth to power requires seeking out these truths with regard for relational, historical processes that shape understandings we "know" to be true. Ethnographers, notes Clifford (1983, 140), must also learn to "share our texts," and the writing credit, with our collaborators, "for whom the term 'informants' is no longer accurate, if [indeed] it ever was."

Claims about the truth reflect both power and resistance (Burawoy et al. 1991); and it is usually the loudest, the richest, or strongest in any social interaction who assume the "right" to speak. Countering this tendency asserts the need to hear all voices in what Rose (1993, 219) calls "multiple, heterophonic sites of a struggle." Far from being the exclusive domain of academics, understanding of the history and cultural experience of cannabis in Canada requires attention be paid to the experience of otherwise neglected voices bearing witness to the "green rush."

The present volume is an extension of our research on the subject of cannabis in Canada, especially Clayton McCann's long-term research program of creating linked humanizing projects that tell the stories of coworkers who have laboured in precarity, not *as if* but *because* they are tales of his own. These are themes explored in well-known works of sociology and anthropology such as Alice Goffman's *On the Run* (2015) and, less recently, Philippe Bourgois's *In Search of Respect* (2003). More generally, and to the point, the goal of thick description can also be a conduit to advocate for change. In this vein, Michael Burawoy entreated the ethnographer to represent culture as not merely "arenas where laws are played out but a constellation of institutions located in time and space that shape domination and resistance" (Burawoy 1991, 281).

It's a Pleasure! Introducing Cannabis the Commodity

The use of cannabis is pleasurable, and pleasure is subversive. Pleasure is freedom. And freedom is pleasure. When pleasure is commodified, however, that same pleasure binds consumers to their duty to consume (Jameson 1983). Is altered consciousness false consciousness? More to the point, several hundred years of “grow or die” indoctrination under capitalism were not about promoting freedom. As the apparent love child of the Reformation and colonial expansion, capitalism was not the first established system of exploitation and oppression to valorize expansionist imperatives, of course.

The birth of capitalism was predicated on establishing a global slave trade, itself preceded by trade routes that predated the Roman Empire. Trade had to be protected from the pirates, and the locals had to consent or be coerced, through force if necessary, to desire and supplicate themselves to the new gods. The dismantling of peasant communes, often violent, took place in the colonies supplying the slave labour, colonies fuelling capitalism's early growth. Capitalism – and hence freedom, as the world has come to know it – feeds on the flesh of slaves, devoured through brutality, genocide, and ecological destruction.

Travelling pathways carved by torchlight from the jungles of antiquity to today's glass-and-steel corridors of power, cannabis (the new commodity) has been domesticated and reinvented in another form. The cannabis consumer has been seduced into believing that capitalism is the provider of a pleasure made permissible for those who pay and play by the new rules. As Herbert Marcuse (1969) sagely noted fifty years ago: “The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form.”

Consumption is constructed as the necessary interval between periods of production; the social practice of consumers is the just reward for production time well used (Appadurai 1996). The collective consciousness is, accordingly, conditioned to demand what we desire and desire what we demand. Consumption is a necessary part of the performance that shows we are deserving of the pleasure – at least for those who organize their lives in such a way as to afford to pay the bills, with some left over to participate in capitalism's rituals of conspicuous consumption.

Consumption rituals express ideas of order and disorder (see, e.g., Geertz 1966; Blackman 2011) that protect the interests of the owners of production. The place of cannabis in modern history, in this light, treads a path

well-travelled by commodities such as sugar and other intoxicants such as alcohol and tobacco. In the case of sugar, Sidney Mintz (1986, 44) observes that “more elaborate and heterogeneous consumer demand” came with increasing product differentiation. New consumption habits served to demonstrate “a critical connection between the will to work and the will to consume” (Mintz 1986, 64).

William Marling (1998) notes a seismic shift in consumer culture in the 1920s, on the heels of Prohibition, a shift that ushered in new meanings tied to alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking, especially by women. Within a few years, social relations based on gender changed dramatically: “In 1920 only the bravest women claimed a right to smoke, but by 1927 women smoked in restaurants, theater lobbies, and at parties” (Marling 1998, 4). New consumption habits in that era and thereafter were greatly influenced by the consumer’s never-ending fascination with technological innovation. New spending “began to chase ‘qualities’ of color, lightness, and newness. Momentum shifted from mass production to mass marketing and then to consumers” (Marling 1998, xi).

Commodities are said to “have momentum if their durability, economy, and familiarity make them a part of people’s habits” (Marling 1998, 40). And, investment has momentum. Once investors have a stake, they will continue to invest more to protect their investment and to overcome competitors. Thus what constitutes “good food” (or a good intoxicant) is, ultimately, “a social, not a biological matter” (Mintz 1986, 8). Or, to put it differently, it has been pointed out that “one did not succeed entrepreneurially by making *better crack*” (Grief 2017, 154).

Organization and Objectives

To better understand cannabis’s shift from a banned drug to a commodity from a multifaceted and critical perspective, *The High North: Cannabis in Canada* brings together illuminating insights from across the social sciences. The move to legalize and regulate in October 2018 provided new opportunities and a sense of urgency to document this dramatic transformation from a multitude of standpoints. Contributors from outside academia bring perspectives and voices seldom heard to the discussion as we enter a new era of cannabis-policy reform.

This collection came together after much deliberation to determine the volume’s intended scope and content. Its multidisciplinary focus and inclusion of perspectives from outside academia are designed for a wide readership. The editors invited original chapter contributions from cannabis

researchers at Canadian universities with academic training in history, psychology, sociology, economics, political science, and anthropology. We requested interviews or written contributions from nonacademic activists and industry insiders, including legal and illegal cannabis production workers. In collaboration, our collective aim has been to make a timely, novel contribution to the literature, written for an audience of scholars and laypersons, to stimulate more nuanced discussion and debate.

The collection is organized into three parts. The first part helps contextualize recent policy developments by examining the history of cannabis in Canada and some of the many challenges presented by the move to legalize and regulate its use. These readings offer insight into the social, historical, political, and economic factors underlying Canada's distinctive experience with cannabis through a multifaceted, multidisciplinary lens.

Part 1, "Cannabis in Context" opens with Catherine Carstairs's examination of the social history of cannabis throughout the twentieth century – from the ban in 1923 to the emergence of a counterculture that celebrated marijuana, to early efforts at marijuana law reform, and to more recent policy developments. **Chapter 1** helps situate the contemporary context of cannabis legalization by providing a deep history of the emergence of prohibition laws in Canada, a process that ran parallel and was connected to claims-making activities in the United States. Themes of race and social order in law-making trickled up to become nationalized, later sparking the emergence of countercultural social movements. Historians, notes Carstairs, are like magpies with an affinity for collecting bits and pieces and odd scraps of information. Her work in **Chapter 1** sets the stage for what comes after, revisiting key sources and gathering fresh insights that illuminate the history of cannabis in Canada. Ninety-five years of prohibition left a legacy of drug-war bureaucracy on an unprecedented scale.

De-escalating and dismantling the ban against cannabis has been a governmental exercise fraught with extraordinary challenges. In **Chapter 2**, Jared Wesley explains the unique political context in which cannabis was legalized in Canada, wherein provincial jurisdiction and local policy control are shown to take priority over harmonizing measures that might be fruitfully adopted under federal regulations. The analysis provides a striking contrast and some parallels to American policy developments. The states have largely developed their own measures, wherever cannabis is legal for consumption by adults, within a context of ongoing federal prohibition. The political realities of legalizing cannabis in Canada called for the integration and alignment of a multitude of levels of government and law enforcement

agencies, resulting in a bureaucratic landscape that is daunting. Wesley examines the extent of (mis)alignment and collaboration between federal and provincial/territorial governments in cannabis policy development. His training as a political scientist and practical experience working outside academia in intergovernmental relations provide a unique perspective on the alignment of theory and practice as applied to complex, nationwide policy-making challenges like cannabis legalization. He overviews a number of the factors that contributed to the federal government's decision to develop its own policy framework, leaving the provinces and territories to devise a patchwork of new policies that replicate existing alcohol and tobacco regulations.

The challenge of repealing and replacing prohibition with a regulated market is further amplified by the economic imperative of competing with existing, and definitively displacing, illicit sources of supply. [Chapter 3](#) critiques the faulty economic reasoning behind policy decisions that establish legal markets for cannabis as though consumers have no other choice. Jason Childs and George Hartner analyze the market structures adopted by Canadian provinces for legal distribution to cannabis consumers. The academic training of the authors as economists informs their research focus on assessment of the relative effectiveness of each model for displacing the illicit cannabis market. In addition to the need for more effective integration pointed to by Wesley, they contend that policy development suffered from a lack of time. Using national-level data to evaluate the rollout of a regulated system of cannabis supply, they examine marketplace behaviour of consumers as determined by competing vectors such as price, variety, and quality of product. Their analyses of data from the National Cannabis Survey shed new light on factors that determine choices made by cannabis consumers with new options to consider in a market where illegal and legal sources coexist.

The insights gained in [Chapters 2 and 3](#) contribute to a better understanding of political and economic factors to facilitate more critical inquiry of public policy and governance in neoliberal societies. Shifting the focus of inquiry to use of cannabis as medicine, and sources of supply beyond the regulated market, [Chapter 4](#) examines the essential and yet largely overlooked role of medical cannabis dispensaries in providing a model for safe and reliable access. Jenna Valleriani traces the emergence and growth of North America's "medical marijuana movement," with particular attention to Canada's evolving medical access programs in the twenty-first century. Her chapter documents the history of medical dispensaries with reference

to how local governments have responded to use of cannabis as medicine and service providers still considered at the fringes of public health and law. She concludes that legalization has not provided necessary support for sick Canadians seeking safe, affordable access to cannabis in an era dominated by new political and financial vested interests. In addition to improved integration across governments and government departments, Valleriani calls for less restrictive, more inclusive regulations for the licensing of medical cannabis dispensaries.

In sum, [Part 1](#) contributes to a better understanding of the bigger picture from a vantage point informing the critical perspective that resonates throughout the book. [Part 2](#), “Cannabis and Public Health” provides a closer look at new public health priorities, challenges and opportunities as cannabis undergoes transition to a regulated market. These chapters – by researchers from across the social sciences with background training in psychology, sociology, and anthropology – cover topics ranging from health and safety regulations to the use of cannabis for treating opiate addiction. [Part 2](#) concludes with research by the editors. The last two chapters, respectively, examine cannabis use and mental health and the heretofore neglected conditions facing workers in legal cannabis production.

[Chapter 5](#) by Michael DeVillier inspects the bureaucratic process that (mis)guided the development of federal legislation and regulations governing the legal cannabis industry. DeVillier situates legalization within a political economy in which psychiatric drug treatment and pharmaceutical companies are the major players in a profit-driven industry. He observes that government, in practice, has tended to prioritize protecting corporate interests, and paid lip service to its mandate of protecting health and safety. The resulting business-friendly model, being legitimized by public health authorities and related institutions, effectively facilitates co-option of state policy by profiteers whose practices are harming public health.

[Chapter 6](#) provides another window to critique how public health has been co-opted by claims makers who focus on the harms of using cannabis while largely disregarding benefits of use. Zach Walsh and his students, Michelle St. Pierre and Sarah Daniels, conducted in-depth interviews with Canadian researchers about the use of cannabis as a substitute for opioids. The authors note that legalization has provided opportunities to conduct more rigorous and systematic research into the conditions under which the use of cannabis has measurable benefits to public health. The use of cannabis as a substitute for more addictive drugs has long been controversial,

yet it has evident potential as an adjunct to more conventional addiction treatment options. The authors argue for expanding harm reduction interventions, and point out that focusing on harms of substance use overlooks the benefits described by many users. This tendency is evident in policy discussions evoking a distorted view of cannabis dependence and biased assumptions about mental health effects.

To provide a less distorted view of mental health effects, [Chapter 7](#) reviews the research literature observing a tendency to treat the use of cannabis itself as a comorbidity or substance use disorder, or in other equally pathologizing terms. The author, Andrew Hathaway, contends there is a need for more sociologically informed research on cannabis use patterns, experiences, and outcomes, as the user understands them. Studies using interviews and surveys show that users commonly interpret its mental health benefits as primary reasons for cannabis use. The interpretation of such research that takes seriously the perspectives and experiences of people who use drugs significantly differs between scientific disciplines. Within the social sciences interpretations vary depending on one's training as a humanist or positivist and related disciplinary canons or commitments about what counts as scientific evidence or "proof." Overcoming stigma and discrimination that equates the use of cannabis to a form of mental illness is as much contingent on supplanting ideology as the resolution of empirical disputes.

[Chapter 8](#) by Clayton McCann adjusts our focus from cannabis and mental wellness to environmental health. Despite the evident potential of regulating the supply source to optimize health benefits while reducing harm, McCann contends and documents the myriad concerns raised by large-scale cannabis production for the legal market that present significant new challenges and risks. Drawing on experience and ethnographic research over several years before and after legalization, he traces the dramatic transformation of the plant from an illegal crop into a corporate commodity. Echoing concerns raised in [Chapter 5](#), the author critiques the use of harmful products, neglect of regulations, and lack of government protections in this burgeoning new industry. In closing, he proposes a *clean cannabis manifesto* that calls for the enforcement of much stricter regulations, and regulatory oversights prioritizing safeguards that ensure the health and safety of both workers and consumers.

In sum, the contributions in [Part 2](#), through a variety of disciplinary lenses and methodological approaches, argue for a rethink of assumptions

guiding cannabis policy development. The authors call on policy makers to pay more than mere *lip service* to the goal of harm reduction when it comes to regulating legal cannabis production and consumption of these products. Collectively, the chapters in [Part 2](#) call for adopting a more critical and nuanced understanding of the evidence informing Canada's new "public health approach."

[Part 3](#) extends the ethnographic orientation of [Chapter 8](#) so as to give the last word to nonacademic voices that tell the social history of cannabis in Canada. Inspired by feminist and postcolonial methodologies, each of the six chapters underscores the need for more engagement with messy texts and narratives reflecting lived experience. [Part 3](#) is bookended (in [Chapters 9](#) and [14](#)) by the contributions of female industry insiders Jeannette VanderMarel, Karina Lahnakoski, and Alison McMahan and well-known social activist Jodie Emery, each of whom have very different and important tales to tell. The wide array of narratives presented in between include voices seldom heard in drug-policy discussions, such as those of socially excluded, dislocated, and alienated persons seen as disposable by society.

A core constituency of this group, as described in [Chapter 10](#) by Kelly Insley, consists of literally and figuratively institutionalized persons, including the chronically ill and addicted and the neurodivergent "medical cannabis patient." In their refusal to be categorized and easily disposed of by social institutions, there is a sense of subjectivity, a human thread they share that is repressed by institutionally acceptable personas and subject positions. A different kind of subjectivity is shown in [Chapter 11](#) by Kanenhariyo Seth LeFort, who offers unique insight into an Indigenous worldview. This serves as a gateway to broader understanding by helping us to situate cannabis law reform within a larger framework of anticolonial legal struggle. In so doing, it provides a counternarrative that highlights the complex relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and the conflicting principles of (neo)liberal democracy.

[Chapters 12](#) by Kelly Coulter and [Chapter 13](#) by Clayton McCann present cannabis cultural folklore as a form of narrative that tells of lived experience as a tool to deconstruct the myths of the black market. Bearing the marks of authenticity of a cultural achievement that contradicts official claims and policy pronouncements, these selections do not merely debunk the claims and language of bureaucrats and technocrats – they are also products of a world with different meanings. The people of the plant are far from normal in a world that appears to be seeking to normalize cannabis. It remains to be seen if and how public policy demands to standardize and

regulate consumers of these products will manage to effectively accommodate their differences.

Envisaging the Future: Some Preliminary Remarks

With an eye to protecting the legacy of Canada's cannabis folk market, we envisage a sustainable future for craft cannabis prioritizing the protection of the environment, fair trade, and labour standards. With legalization came the corporatization of cannabis and, with it, the compulsion to accumulate the large sums of finance capital required to make money from money (Røyvrik 2013). The corporation is the principal sociolegal arrangement under late capitalism in Western society. Thus, in many ways, it is the "scaffolding – or form – of life," comprising legal-rational and cultural formations (Rose 1993, 198).

When the Government of Canada began investing in corporate cannabis production, there could be no other outcome. And now the record shows that legalization has been sold to Canadians and investors based on claims that new producers would be willing and able to actually produce cannabis. Not so, as we shall show. The documented "pump and dump" schemes are a byproduct of intensified demand for capital accumulation that obscures the aggregate of skills, history, and knowledge that created the demand and supply to begin with.

Karl Marx used the term *commodity fetishism* to describe neglect of the labour that produced the product because of an obsession with the commodity itself. Workers' labour is exploited when they are rendered into interchangeable parts of the production process through deskilling and industrialization. It has been observed, however, that exploitation and corruption are not inevitable conditions of legal cannabis production.

With Ryan Stoa (2018; see also Schaneman 2020), we envisage a way forward that is organized, protected, and sustainable. Cannabis cultivation has important implications for natural resources and ecosystems because of pollutants, irrigation, energy consumption, and soil integrity, all of which are variables that affect human health (Seddon and Floodgate 2020). The adoption of the appellation model practised in French wine-growing regions is a solution that will create "a legally protected geographical indication of origin" for local cannabis production.

In addition to ensuring quality and regulations protecting the environment, workers, and consumers, Stoa notes a number of advantages for communities, not the least of which are job creation and tourism with profits that benefit local rural economies. Cultivation standards within appellations better encourage compliance to conserve and protect water, soil integrity,

and use of renewable energy sources. Regulations can include incentives to transition to cleaner production techniques and technologies and to prevent the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers.

There is no good reason, observes Stoa, that craft cannabis can't be just as popular and profitable as craft breweries in the beer industry. The creation of a localized identity around regional cannabis production would provide legal protection of the intellectual property of growers and a guarantee of authenticity for buyers. Creating access to markets for small, family-owned farms would create ancillary trade organizations and co-ops and supports a lengthy chain of connected local insurance, commercial, retail, and financial services.

Channelling billions of dollars of cannabis revenue into small-scale farming ventures would spur rural renewal. In Canada, much like the United States, there is little standing in the way of a concerted "public effort to create an agricultural model for the cannabis industry that serves the public interest" (Stoa 2018, 190). Bill C-45, the legislation governing legalization, permits Health Canada to regulate this sector. No laws need to be changed to reduce the well-documented social harm attributable to low-cost, low-quality cannabis flooding the market.¹³

Another social cost of legalization in its present manifestation is the considerable loss of agricultural knowledge and heritage in Canada, as it has hastened to adopt the mobile corporate model:

As has frequently been observed, financial markets move their investments around at a pace that is out of all proportion to the commodity exchanges that not so long ago underlay the basics of international financial fluctuations. Financial markets may be regarded as exploiting countries or firms ... They shift capital to a country (currency purchases, loans to the state, acquisition of an interest in local firms), but can withdraw it at any moment (this possibility being stipulated as a condition of investment). (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 365–66)

This devotion to private enterprise in business all but assures the eventual migration of resources and skills to the United States after federal legalization.

Perhaps the time is right to adopt a more responsible approach to legalization that is modelled on Stoa's vision of a cooperative community of family farms. These arguments are revisited at the end of this volume. But, to be clear, it is our position that the time is right. The time is now.

Notes

- 1 Charles Baudelaire, as quoted in Jameson (1983).
- 2 Use of terms like *user* – as opposed to *drug consumer* and other variations such as *people who use drugs* – are increasingly disputed for their stigmatizing attributes, as are dated terms such as *marihuana* or *marijuana*, which are considered vestiges of an overtly racist past. These objections notwithstanding, we have opted to preserve the terms used in historical sources (and by the contributors) rather than replacing them with recent terminology that might be deemed more scientific or politically correct.
- 3 Likewise, terms such as *drug addiction*, *dependence*, *abuse*, *substance use disorder*, and *misuse* are socially constructed designations that are widely disputed in the literature and subject to change in science, as they are in daily common use. Their use throughout this book is at the discretion of the authors, and of we the editors, to suit our present purpose. We make no claim suggesting that these are the right terms, most appropriate or best terms, scientifically or otherwise. They are just the terms that we have used, and we accept that others may object to them and favour other terms.
- 4 Joseph McNamara was a well-known US police chief and a vocal critic of the war on drugs.
- 5 The discovery of CUD has significantly contributed to a “net widening” effect through the use of screening tools that adopt a lower threshold for delineating problematic use (Hathaway 2015a).
- 6 Statement in the House by Bill Blair, Liberal MP for Scarborough Southwest (Ontario), September 22nd, 2017, Canadian Parliament, <https://openparliament.ca/politicians/bill-blair/?page=47>.
- 7 Kathleen Harris, “Pot Consumers Paying Less Than \$7 a Gram, Statistics Canada Survey Finds,” *CBC News*, February 8, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/statistics-canada-cannabis-pot-price-1.4524891>.
- 8 According to the Government of Canada (2020), “The purpose of a record suspension/pardon is to remove barriers to reintegration that can be associated with a criminal record. If an application for a record suspension/pardon is approved, the entire criminal record is to be kept separate and apart. The criminal record can only be disclosed, ceased or revoked in certain circumstances ... For expungement, the Government recognizes that those whose record of conviction constitutes a historical injustice should not be viewed as ‘former offenders.’ Their conviction was for an act that should never have been a crime and had the conviction occurred today, it would likely be inconsistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”
- 9 The terms *folk market* and *folk knowledge*, as we use them in this book, refer to the informal supply and distribution networks and cultural understandings shared by those with life experience in interaction with other users and suppliers. These shared skills and knowledge have been informally passed on from one generation to the next for many decades in Canada and many Western countries; in other cultures, they extend back for hundreds, even thousands, of years.
- 10 For a more detailed discussion of constructionist inquiry with particular attention to drug policy and science, see Hathaway (2015a).

- 11 Of further note, Watson has also stated that she is “not comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process.” Her preference instead is that the quotation be credited to “Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s.”
- 12 Quote attributed to Richard Price, a Cree Hunter in the province of Quebec, c. 1930s.
- 13 In their global review, Seddon and Floodgate (2020) observe that high-THC products (shatter, resin, rosin, hashish, and nano-emulsification) can inadvertently deliver a highly toxic load of pollutants from pesticides and fertilizers in higher concentration because of the process of extraction. Potential outcomes of exposure to these toxins are rising mortality, morbidity, and ER visits. They also note that the high concentration of consumption in a small portion of the consuming population can be problematic, from a public health perspective. In Canada and globally, it is well established that Pareto’s Law applies; the bulk of cannabis consumption (80 percent) is concentrated in a small proportion (20 percent) of users.

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