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Chicanx Cannabis Relationships: Cultural and Political Histories of Cannabis Resistance

PLANT PERSPECTIVES
DOI:10.3197/WHPPP.63845494909749

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on interdisciplinary feminist cannabis research that prioritises the cannabis relationships and spaces in Chicanx/Latinx communities. The interdisciplinary approach I take builds from the fields of ethnic studies, Chicanx feminisms, environmental humanities and critical cannabis studies. I offer a history of cannabis ethnobotany to understand the cultural and medicinal approaches to cannabis from a queer trans Chicanx feminist positionality. Signaling to a Chicanx cannabis history that exposes racial cannabis politics dating back to the early twentieth century in the US, I build from this history to share cannabis futures grounded in Chicanx environmental perspectives. There is a need for cannabis research because human-plant relationships are currently tethered to extraction and profit, as is visible in current cannabis industries.

KEYWORDS

Cannabis relationships, Chicanx feminisms, critical cannabis studies, ethnobotany

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uring a time of global uncertainty and grief, the California cannabis industry made $15.2 billion dollars in revenue between 2020 and 2022. While businesses were shut down due to COVID-19 safety restrictions, cannabis dispensaries were considered essential businesses. In the US specifically, medicinal, political and legal relationships with cannabis have been at the forefront of drug policy for over a century. In the early 1900s medical apothecaries and practitioners prescribed cannabis (Grieringer 1999). Whereas in the late 1980s and 1990s HIV and AIDS patients resorted to alternative medicine as the US government lacked initiative to find solutions to the epidemic (Gould 2002). Research shows that cannabis has antiviral properties, which can have both positive and negative effects among HIV/AIDS patients (Ross 2023). As such, all consumption of cannabis for health conditions should be tailored to the individual. Currently, the cannabis industry is being molded by capitalism's illusion of profit with people's well-being as a secondary priority. Cannabis is federally prohibited in the US and classified as a Schedule 1 Substance with no medicinal value and a high rate for addiction. Based on geographical location, cannabis can be medically or recreationally legal, decriminalised,

or completely prohibited at the state level. This is based on racialised political bias rather than scientific research. Such bias dates to the Nixon administration that denied research findings proving cannabis was not dangerous in order to support his political agenda inciting the War on Drugs (Hudak 2016).

Stereotypical cannabis pathological tropes include incarceration, addiction, or 'having poorer educational outcomes' from cannabis use (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2020). Studies demonstrate both the harms associated with cannabis consumption (Daldegan-Bueno, Linder and Fischer 2022; Hall and Stepjanovic 2020; Kansagara et al. 2017; Matheson and Foll 2020;), as well as the use of cannabis to treat opioid use disorder (Benedict 2022; Elkrief 2023; Rosic et al. 2021; Socias et al. 2018; Timko and Cucciare 2018).[1] There are major histories of cannabis that have been written over the last thirty years that address its medical benefits, hypercriminalisation and racial policing and social history. Since 1996, when cannabis was first medically legalised in California, research studies have explored the uses of cannabis in treating cancer, HIV and AIDs-associated symptoms and as a remedy for the side effects of harsher pharmaceuticals (Abrams 1998; Braitstein, Kendall and Chan et al. 2001; McPartland and Pruitt, 1999; Prentiss, Power and Balmas 2004). During this era scientists identified the endocannabinoid system in the late-twentieth century (Pisanti and Bifulco 2018), which points directly to a 'long association of humans with cannabis' (Crocq 2022). As such, medical conclusions about cannabis benefits have been prominent and ultimately influence states across the US in their passing of medical cannabis legalisation policies. There is currently a high interest in cannabis research on the use of cannabis for harm reduction among opioid users (see Lucas 2017; Wiese and Wilson-Poe 2018), which offers a public health perspective that is often missing from policy briefs and business models for the cannabis industry.

This article calls attention to the ways Los Angeles cannabis cultures embody and constitute social relationships and political histories built on solidarity and resistance. I argue that Chicana/o/x cannabis social

1 My focus here is not to delineate the historical trajectory of cannabis in the USA. There is research ranging from chemical, psychological, legislative and public health aspects of cannabis legislation among other subcategories that might be of interest to scholars.

cultural spaces and relationships have been rendered invisible within larger cannabis discussions in the LA geopolitical discourse. As part of a Chicanx feminist research project, I embed my experiences as queer trans cannabis patient from California to situate lived experiences as feminist methodology and theoretical foundations missing in broader cannabis research. This interdisciplinary cannabis feminist research prioritises cannabis relationships and spaces in Chicanx communities that build from Chicanx feminisms and qualitative ethnographic methods. The questions guiding this article are the following: how have Chicanx/Latinx folks advocated for and fostered alternative cannabis relationships and spaces in Los Angeles? How can the stories and practices of Chicanx/Latinx LGBTQ+ people inform social justice-based relationships with cannabis? In this article I first outline Chicanx feminist frameworks shaping the research followed by an outline of the feminist methodology informed by practices of 'the rotation'. After introducing the research participants, I position their narratives within a Chicanx cannabis history in California detailing the racial politics engulfing cannabis dating back to the early twentieth century. I then focus on Los Angeles cannabis culture as described briefly by participants. I conclude with reflections on cannabis ethnobotanical futures that engage with Chicanx environmental perspectives.

Throughout this paper I use Chicana/o and Chicanx interchangeably, the first to keep the author's original use and the latter represents mine and a disciplinary intervention to embedded gender non-binary and trans inclusive language. Chicana/o/x identity represents Mexican-American communities or those of Mexican ancestry in the US; Chicana/o/x is a politicised term rooted in political histories of resistance from the 1960s and 1970s (Oboler and González 2005) in response to political persecution, institutional racism, economic inequality and lack of educational opportunities. Continuing the legacy of mass political advocacy of Mexican-Americans across the Southwestern United States, the Chicano Movement, comprising community members, activist and academics, is a comprehensive term for 'multiple forms of militant activism' emanating from the idea that 'working-class Mexican Americans could demand and win progressive change' and challenge racial and economic injustice (Oboler and Gonzales 2005). A demand and outcome from the movement was the establishment of academic Chicana/o Studies departments across universities in California

aimed at combining education, research and political consciousness. Additionally, this is in tandem with other social ethnic movements that were fighting racial oppression, economic disenfranchisement, political suppression, among other issues, in the USA, such as the Black Power Movement, American Indian Movement, Asian American Movement and other Third World liberation movements.

While the Chicano movement shaped political activism and advocated for racial justice among Mexican-Americans, Chicanas have long criticised the male-dominated politicisation that invisibilised their labour that reproduces sexist narratives and organising structures (Dicochea 2004; Espinoza 2007; Espinoza, Cotera and Blackwell 2018). Chicanas both supported the movement and created separate branches of organising tailored to their needs. For instance, the Chicana feminist movement, similar to Black and Asian feminist movements of the time, aimed to 'improve the position of Chicanas in American society', by believing in an analysis of gender alongside race and class (Garcia 1989: 220). Chicana feminists have challenged sexist Eurocentric ways of being and knowledge production that push back against notions of intellectual validity rooted in elitism by offering one's own experiences to connect 'the self to individual communities and to relations of power' that reproduce social inequality (Elenes 2000: 105).

More recently, trans Chicanx scholars have more directly critiqued transphobia and harmful gender binaries among Chicana feminisms (Aguilar-Hernandez and Cruz 2020; Caraves 2020; Cuevas 2018; Galarte 2021; Heidenreich 2020), and they offer a reimagination for engaging Chicanx trans* studies that expands the fields ideological, onto-epistemological and pedagogical frameworks beyond the gender binary. The use of the 'x' has been advocated for by transgender and gender-nonconforming people in the US 'as a reminder that their bodies are still experiencing a colonisation invested in disciplining them to fit a standard gender identity, gender presentation, sexual orientation, and a particular sexual performance' (Pelaez Lopez 2018). A trans Chicanx feminist approach is priority here because cannabis spaces in the USA are not exempt from transphobic rhetoric pushed forth by right-wing racist policies currently attacking trans communities.

CHICANX FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS

Through a Chicanx feminist lens, I highlight the precarity of cannabis relationships within a context of US geopolitics by which capitalist settler logics manipulate cannabis understanding and discourse. Feminist theoretical and epistemological models help address and challenge cannabis politics that often romanticise the growing capitalist industry and also to expose embedded structures of oppressions through an intersectional lens. Cannabis as the subject of Chicanx feminist research refuses hegemonic knowledge production about plants as merely resources for extraction. Chicana feminist epistemologies (CFE) (Calderón et al. 2012) centre lived experiences of Chicanas while also transcending research by the cultivation of self. Chicana feminism is grounded in Anzaldúan and third world feminisms as a means to resist epistemological racism by foregrounding the life experiences and knowledge of Chicanas embodying 'a sense of political urgency to engage in a decolonising process and address educational [and social] inequities within Chicana/o communities and this decolonising work is never separate from spiritual activism' (Calderon et al. 2012: 516). Chicana/x feminist's theorisation and praxis is imperative in cannabis research, and broader plant relationships, because it foregrounds the 'embodied knowledges of Chicanx/Latinx people and connect research to social justice activism, effectively reworking the boundaries of academic knowledge production' (Cahuas 2022: 1515), that challenge objectifications of both the body of the cannabis consumer and cannabis itself. Chicana/x cannabis knowledge production here must be grounded in the lived experiences and embodied knowledge of communities directly involved and engaged in cannabis culture, both mainstream and underground, given that '[o]ne always writes and reads from the place one's feet are planted, the ground one stands on, one's particular position, point of view' (Anzaldúa 2009: 172).

Much of queer Chicana/x feminist theorisation is grounded in Anzaldúan feminist thought, which builds from the writing, poetry and scholarship of Gloria E. Anzalua. As a queer, lesbian Chicana from Tejas, she theorised on the embodied practice of challenging heteropatriarchal violence among Chicano communities and within white queer spaces that attend to the interlocking impacts of historically silencing the experiences of women of colour, lesbian and queer people.

Significant to Anzaldúan thought is the theorisation of the borderlands as a site of historical geographical violence that directly impacts immigrant communities in the US, especially along the US-Mexico border. Anzaldua writes the '[b]orderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy' (Anzaldua 2022: 8). Such edges and spaces where differing experiences, viewpoints, knowledges and people meet, 'represent intensely painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transform' (Anzaldua and Keating 2015: 242). Beyond the physical borderlands, Anzaldúan thought situates the 'psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderland' as not particular to the Southwest, as is often assumed, but rather an embodied in-between space that cannabis relationships can fill. The stories of Chicanx, Latinx and Mexican stoners situated in this paper offer insights on their personal, embodied experiences navigating social structures materialising through cannabis that is often an in-between space. Chicanx cannabis experiences are representative of a political and cultural history trailing cannabis for generations across the US and Mexico that is at the centre of the interlocking vectors of marginalization and resistance. Chicanx feminist cannabis research offers political and cultural embodiments of solidarity that are 'deeply relational and aims to develop new conocimientos, or understandings' that are often missing in mainstream Western cannabis research (Cahuas 2022: 1517). Chicanx feminisms expose legacies and contemporary manifestations of coloniality shaping how we understand our relationships to other human and non-human beings including cannabis.

Chicanx feminist frameworks facilitate a critique of heteronormative hegemonic settler narratives shaping the development of a growing 'legal' cannabis production, as do Indigenous feminist scholars (see Reed 2023). Chicanx feminist decolonial onto-epistemologies begin to sketch how settler colonial logics shape embodied relationships with cannabis or 'how body and place can be rearticulated to expose mechanisms of oppression, such as homophobia and offer liberatory alternatives' (Calderon et al. 2012: 520-521), especially within a growing white heteronormative dominant cannabis industry (MJBizDaily 2022). A gendered analysis of cannabis and sexuality intersect in the geopolitical

realm as respective cannabis and LGBTQ+ policy changes have paralleled similarly rapid changes in public opinion in the US (Schabel and Sevell 2017). Furthermore, in the US, cannabis ownership is almost 85 per cent 'white, with non-white owners comprising just over 15 per cent of the market' (cited in Ordoñez 2024). Additionally, women make up less than 25 per cent of ownership and executive roles in the cannabis industry, with LGBTQ+ people also being underrepresented (Ordoñez 2024). Research shows that women trimmers in the cannabis industry are 'underpaid in comparison to men and have been subject to egregious forms of sexual harassment', including pay incentives for working topless at cannabis farms (Ordoñez 2024; Walter 2028).

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the research is shaped by Chicanx feminist ways of knowing, being and knowledge production practices that disrupt and problematise 'Western notions of truth/fiction, individual/collective, and memory/history' (Davalos 2008). Building from qualitative Chicana feminist (auto)ethnography, I engage 'academic readers by pulling them away from interpreting this research as simply a distant 'unit of analysis text', a challenge to white feminist autoethnography methods that situate the individual as a unit of analysis to critique neoliberalism (Craven and Davis 2013). The significance of autoethnography is that it 'confronts and defies traditional investigative methods…[and] challenges the role of objectivity in research since it underscores the positionality of the researcher in this investigation' (Chavez 2012: 342). Queer Chicana feminist methodologies guide this paper's analysis of autoethnographic research data on cannabis relationship, spaces and culture rooted in cultural and political histories of embodied resistance in Los Angeles that challenge notions of objectivity that distance the researcher from the field. Not only do I situate my own experiences alongside the participants, the fieldwork used for this research is co-constructed in which 'both parties—researchers and interlocutors—are reading each other and making conscious or unconscious decisions about how to present themselves and interact with one another' (Miranda 2022: 355). With this in mind, I propose a methodology framed as 'the rotation' by my research participants to show the varying complex Chicanx cannabis relationships across Los Angeles.

THE ROTATION

The rotation consists of the cannabis users interviewed: Kuetzal, Juana Ines and Gude. Their words contribute to this article's discussion on Chicanx cultural and political histories of resistance, and introducing them first is a symbol of respect for their time and stories. One major aspect of cannabis culture impacted by COVID-19 is our way of connecting with each other when we smoke together in a rotation. The rotation refers to the people who participate in a cannabis smoking circle. Usually when there is a group of people everyone gathers in a circle in order to pass the joint, blunt, piece, etc, around. The rotation also refers to the direction in which cannabis is passed, which is almost always to the left and should always continue in the same direction. There is a rotation in the circle where everyone can see each other as they share cannabis, stories and check-in with each other. The customs of a rotation are part of informal rules within cannabis culture that people learn through their participation (Reinarman and Cohen 2007). This is not unique to cannabis culture, however, as circles can represent sacredness in varying Indigenous cultures. Smoking circles, however, are not meant to appropriate sacred Indigenous practices. I recognise that cannabis smoking circles, as described here, are important for understanding how and where people co-create cannabis relationships that attend to cultural practices.

Out of safety, smoking circles in general were impacted because sharing smoking devices or passing the blunt or joint would increase the chances of coronavirus transmission. The rotation, an organic component of cannabis culture, was near impossible during research fieldwork. Although our rotation and practice of sharing was disrupted, I created the rotation as a guide that disrupts linear research design and writing. That is, the individual interviews were conducted online via zoom, and here I created an imaginary smoking circle in order of the individual interviews: Kuetzal, Juana Ines and Gude. I did not provide the participants with the cannabis they were consuming, another aspect of cannabis culture; each person had their own. This textual re-imagined rotation is part of cannabis ontologies informed by queer Chicanx cannabis stoners from LA. The intention of smoking circles vary based on the people present, and include 'listening to one another's concerns, challenges and joys [which] traditionally take place in the form

of a circle' (Medina 2019: 377). Chicana feminist onto-epistemologies share these values and invoke that knowledge to make sense of why and how smoking circles are integral in cannabis culture.

Kuetzal (she/her/hers, they/them/theirs)

I began the zoom interview with Kuetzal on an early Saturday morning late January 2022. Kuetzal identifies as a queer Mesoamerican Latinx cannabis user that takes pride in their Guatemalan and Mexican cultural identity. They have bachelor's and master's degrees from two different California State Universities in the LA area. As we started the interview, Kuetzal responded to the question of identity by verbalising her critique of dominant homogenous conceptions of the term 'Latinx'. Kuetzal's comments are part of a larger conversation among Chicanx and Latinx communities challenging colonial understandings of US Latinx identity and its material impact on Afro and Indigenous communities due to Latinidad often centring whiteness, heterosexism and anti-Blackness (García Peña 2020; Pelaez Lopez 2018). Kuetzal states that the term 'Latinx' often compartmentalises identity and reminds us that 'race is just a construct, a social construct'. Kuetzal notes that when people apply the term Latinx, they are 'lumping me into a category. [But] wait. [I'm] more than just being Latinx'. Here, the term Latinx does not capture the cultural, ethnic and racial identity of Kuetzal, nor many other folks across LA who are immigrants, mixed or biracial and Indigenous.

Cannabis has offered Kuetzal healing, cultural connection, medicinal cannabis knowledge and sense of collective awareness among Chicanx/Latinx communities. When asked, how would you compare the ways cannabis use is talked about in Latinx, Chicanx and Latin American communities compared to the dominant US society and/or other marginalised communities? She shared, 'I feel that when it comes to cannabis, in Latinx, Chicanx [communities], and also Latin America, I feel this plant is known ... It's known. We are aware of what it does for us' (Kuetzal interview excerpt). Cannabis, also known as marijuana, mota, yerba, among other terms, in Chicanx/Latinx communities, is not new, as Kuetzal reminds us. Communities across Latin America have known how to use marijuana as medicine, as *remedio* (remedy) and the awareness about cannabis as medicine is misguided by racial politics and social stigma. The cultural and historical relationship to

cannabis is marked by violence due to repressive governments that in turn have field cartel conflicts. For Kueztal, cannabis has additionally been a source of healing from gender violence and trauma experienced throughout the years.

Juana Ines (she/her/hers)

The second stoner in the rotation is Juana Ines, a public health practitioner who has bachelor's and master's degrees from two different California State University campuses in the LA area. Juana Ines is a knowledgeable working-class community member, researcher and advocate who describes herself as a professional that refuses to see herself as somehow more than other folks in her community because of her education and profession. As a bisexual Mexicana/Latina femme that mainly consumes cannabis for her chronic illness, Juana Ines takes a moment for her to grapple with non-normative sexuality in a traditional Mexican household. She states, 'I am bisexual. It's one of those things, though. I still have not been able to evolve because my parents. [It is] very conservative at home. They somehow had an idea that this was my identity' (Juana Ines interview excerpt). Cannabis has offered Juana Ines a sense of self-awareness, relief and healing that flourished as a necessity due to heterosexism and having an invisible disability requiring her to seek out medicinal cannabis.

Her experiences as a Mexicana/Latina in Los Angeles living with an invisible disability shows the ways her body makes visible the ways ongoing forms of oppression are historically interrelated (Hall 2011; Pellow 2021). Her gendered, classed, sexualised and disabled experience brought her to cannabis; the type of body that is either tokenised in medical cannabis legislation campaigns or hyper-sexualised at cannabis dispensaries. For Juana Ines, her relationship to cannabis represents a cultural history of her body as a Mexicana/Latina cannabis user with an invisible disability.

Gude (they/them/theirs)

The third stoner in the rotation is Gude, a queer Mexican-Filipino community outreach coordinator for a cannabis non-profit organisation, an artist, a well-being advocate and a self-identified lover. Cannabis has offered Gude patience, focus time when they are overstimulated, relief

from anxiety and overall well-being. Gude's experiences and lessons with cannabis consumptions and activism has asked them to prioritise care and cannabis social justice that abandons incarceration and criminalisation. Their political awareness of the racism that permeates the commercialisation of cannabis, especially through dispensaries, is an issue significant to Gude's envisioning of cannabis culture. Gude imagines a future of cannabis and overall cannabis culture in which 'all the people that had been incarcerated for weed are out of jail. They do not need to be there, forgive them. Because times are changing you know' (Gude's interview excerpt). For Gude, a queer Chicanx cannabis user and advocate, cannabis politics and culture are different from the twentieth century, and people should not need to be in jail for cannabis related charges when people are making millions in the cannabis industry. This critique of incarceration demonstrates that cannabis reform is not working for marginalised and targeted BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) communities as is the narrative across recreational cannabis policies in the US.

Los Angeles is a major city where racial politics, cannabis and geography meet to create a cannabis culture influenced, and influencing, mainstream and brand-name cannabis discourse. Gude is directly involved with cannabis community organising, and witnesses first-hand the cultural shift occurring across LA cannabis scenes and people's relationship to cannabis. They share, 'these really swanky like dispensaries come out. And especially all these like not people of color … they don't really have a care in the world, or celebrities coming out with their own cannabis brands … I think now, it's enough time to let people live their lives still, at least reclaim that part of them'. Gude wants people who have been incarcerated to live their lives while they still can, given that they have spent significant time in jail for cannabis. As a queer Chicanx stoner, they understand the current cannabis industry as careless when comparing brand-name cannabis brands and people who have been criminalised for cannabis use or possession. Current cannabis spaces such as dispensaries are trailed by a history of criminalisation and also care networks that date back to queer, trans, gay and lesbian cannabis advocates from the 1990s. There is a disconnect between current celebrity-type brands, for instance, and the care invested in creating cannabis clubs, as they were known initially in California.

CHICANX CANNABIS HISTORY

The experiences of Kuetzal, Juana Ines and Gude are situated within Chicanx cannabis history that reminds current generations of how cannabis activism led to current access to cannabis in the US. Chicanx cultural and political history of cannabis in the US highlight how cannabis is marked by racist criminalising politics that pushed cannabis into the mechanisms of the War on Drugs. Mainstream discourse about cannabis has historically been rooted in racist and sexist assumptions that date back to the early twentieth century when 'yellow journalism' sensationalised marijuana as being 'used by dangerous populations' (Valdez and Kaplan 2019: 124). The racialisation of cannabis isn't fully in effect until US and California government officials establish a national scientifically unjustified reputation of Mexican cannabis as producing violence, due to marijuana being widely considered as a lower-class drug in Mexico (Campos 2012; Grieringer 1999). The racist narrative of the 'Mexican Marihuano or loco weed' (Grieringer 1999: 254) allowed for the perpetual persecution and discrimination of not only Mexicans as is evident, but also East Indian immigrants who faced racist anti-immigrant sentiment in the first two decades of the twentieth century accused of growing cannabis in northern California.

Part of the 1900s anti-cannabis rhetoric and motivation behind capitalist and racist laws were the associations of cannabis with poor people and the conflation of class with race: 'Class consciousness was a recurring element in marihuana prohibition even in its infancy. Mexican-American patricians appealed to sentiments of [Black] inferiority, and European-American officials appealed to sentiments of Mexican inferiority' (Bonnie and Whitebread 1974: 35). This racial hierarchy and anti-Black sentiment still permeates national cannabis discourse. This was a time of large Mexican immigration and many at the time made 'pointed references … to the drug's Mexican origins' and sometimes to the criminal conduct which inevitably followed when Mexicans used the 'killer weed' (Bonnie and Whitebread 1974: 38–9).

In 1914, the Los Angeles City 'board's enforcement efforts soon brought marijuana to public attention ... where the board's agents launched a crackdown in the city's Mexican Sonoratown neighborhood' (Gieringer 1999: 259). The raid in Sonoratown, present-day Chinatown, is said to be the first cannabis raid in the US (Dudley

2014). This is important because it not only sets the historical reference point of racist cannabis narratives that seeped into late twentieth century's war on drugs, but also into current-day cannabis recreational legalisation efforts that rely on criminalising anti-Mexican and anti-Latinx sentiments (Guerra 2022).

This Chicanx cannabis history coincides with the rise of Asian exclusion acts stemming from the fear of an 'Asian invasion' which 'grew out of racial and class anxieties' (Karuka 2018: 82). This colonialist fear of Asian migrations combined with centuries old stereotypes of 'orientals' and the Chinese in particular, threatened an imagined future and 'vision of California as a space of settler accumulation'. With particular racial, class and cultural qualities this expressed fear also excluded Mexican, Chicana/o, Indigenous and Black folks and carried with it gendered assumptions about cannabis users. During this era, LA's racial composition was also shifting with significant numbers of African Americans relocating to a city considered a 'land of opportunity' and whose 'racial hostility against African Americans was not as severe as it was in other parts of the country' (Kun and Pulido 2014: 10). The early twentieth century set the foundation for racist ideological and political understandings of cannabis that faced resistance and push back in the second half of the century.

Federally, cannabis is classified as a 'narcotic,' in the US which is a legal term frequently applied arbitrarily and up until recently, has carried harsh punishments due to its alleged, not ethically proven, detrimental properties and substance misuse, and as such, research and development have been forbidden' (Chaachouaya et al. 2023: 98). This political history is important because it is tied to the racialisation of communities of colour, specifically Black and Latinx/Chicanx communities, who continue to fight against disproportionate persecution, even in states with recreational cannabis laws. The early half of the twentieth century's marijuana crusade was aimed at depicting cannabis as immoral, dangerous and causing madness, all fuelled by racist ideologies. The second half of the twentieth century declared cannabis as illegal worldwide and classified as a Schedule I of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs treaty (Chaachouaya et al. 2023: 99). The ideological and discursive shift about cannabis as medicine also shifted as botany became secondary to chemical science for medicine. Additionally, synthetic chemical science also shaped the way we understand and approach

plants as medicine from one of holistic remedy to addictive side–effect ridden pills.

LOS ANGELES CANNABIS CULTURE

Queer, trans and femme cannabis users in this research define their relationship to cannabis culture from an intersectional lens that prioritises their hope for the future. Sociologist have defined cannabis culture or 'user culture' as a learned social behaviour that includes informal social rules, discretion and characteristics of etiquette that constitutes cannabis use as a cultural practice in contemporary society (Becker 1953; Cohen and Reinarman 2007). Social scientists have identified cannabis use patterns as a 'ritual means of stepping outside that [Western work] ethic for a couple of hours – to take a break from it, to seek changes in the consciousness', (2007: 127). To an extent, cannabis culture embodies an anti-capitalist potential that allows people to simply exist without the demands of productivity. Chicanx cannabis users included in this paper aim to 'recover subjugated histories and knowledge(s)', that critique 'master narratives of racial and patriarchal orders' (Aldama and Quiñonez 2002: 2). I offer a feminist research interpretation of the rotation's definitions of Chicanx cannabis culture as place-based and geographically informed by LA geopolitics that challenge western racist, anti-Black and xenophobic notions of cannabis use as inducing violence. Their definitions are connected to cannabis spaces and relationships as one main aspect of cannabis culture in Los Angeles that centres on sharing with others, whether that be food, cannabis, stories or the location of a 'spot'.

For Kuetzal, cannabis culture is about sharing, even when someone says they do not have any cannabis to share. They state: 'I'm coming from the perspective of community, that is why sharing is like "hey you don't have it today, I got your back. I'm sharing but go ins, go ins in whatever you can". That's the community that I try to nurture when I'm smoking with cannabis users'. The term 'go ins' is slang for offering or contributing something to the space one is part of aside from money, in this situation, this means sharing food, snacks, or even intentional vigilance to those around that may call the police for smoking cannabis publicly. Sharing cannabis is part of a queer Chicanx cannabis

culture that values community, communication and balance because even when someone does not have weed to share, there is a collective awareness that you can contribute something else, like water, food or snacks. Kuetzal's relationship with cannabis is one that prioritises sharing cannabis with other folks who make up their smoking community. People who are not considered part of their smoking community are those that are selfish, greedy and disrespectful. 'So what happens, you get cut, you're not gonna be part of the next session, because that's not how you should be treating it in the first place'. Cannabis culture is about respect and self-awareness because it has been stigmatised and persecuted for years that smoking circles are meant to challenge that to create a sense of community and trust.

For Juana Ines, the current cannabis culture 'needs a lot of adjustments and a lot of actual education' by creating cultural content that 'is really going to change the way here in LA' (Juana Ines interview excerpt). People like Mala Muñoz, a Latina cannabis advocate in LA who created Marijuanera Podcast, as Juana Ines suggests, are pushing back on the appropriation happening in the cannabis industry, while also embracing their sexuality that is either hypersexualised or shamed in a machista misogynist society. Juana Ines actively attends cannabis events in LA because 'I want that to grow, you know, I want that power of different people actually being able to contribute to it. That's my hope'. Different people contributing to cannabis culture in LA also means addressing biphobia and embracing sexual diversity and non-normativity that has been rendered invisible in mainstream cannabis culture. Juana Ines's negative experience coming out to her parents as a bisexual cannabis user combined with the cis-heteronormative cannabis discourse, show that LA Chicanx/Latinx communities and cannabis culture are too distant from one another. Latinx/Chicanx communities have contributed to cannabis culture, even when social structures and political ideologies have villainised and criminalised them/us.

At the opening night for a new cannabis brand in Los Angeles, Gude noticed the guestlist for the event was made up of media influencers, press, media sponsors, the CEO, 'the people that grow it, the people that create the packaging', (Gude interview excerpt) among others. More importantly, Gude looks for a personal connection as part of their definition of cannabis culture. With a room full of people welcoming a new cannabis brand into the industry, 'we have to remember, you know,

our incarcerated community, people that are in jail for cannabis. They are definitely a part of our culture because we owe a lot to them [and] their journey. Unfortunately, people get caught up and then they're put into jail and they're punished for it' (Gude interview excerpt). Cannabis legalisation has validated contemporary cannabis culture to celebrate cannabis consumption as a lifestyle while often forgetting incarcerated people who are not reaping the benefits of business and industry. There is a responsibility to have communities of colour participating at these events, and Gude states that: 'it identifies with my culture, I feel like there were a lot of people of colour. There were a lot of people [who] look happy, like they were very, very eased and I feel there are a lot of women, women identified, especially in my community. I look for that, I look for the femmes and the people that it brings a lot of peace and solitude because I identify with that'. Gude alludes to the gendered dynamics women and femmes face at the structural level, and the ways cannabis is one space their voices and experiences can be centred.

CANNABIS PLANT KNOWLEDGES

Mainstream understandings about cannabis now position the plant in a relationship tethered to extractions, criminalisation and profit. Cannabis ethnobotanists have built from 'botanical, environmental and anthropological evidence to formulate [a] theoretical reconstruction of the earliest uses of Cannabis' (Clarke and Merlin 2013: 29). While the field of ethnobotany developed to understand the relationships between communities and plants, the 'standard Western notion of "ethnobotany" is misleading because of its association of "ethnobotany" with "primitive or unlettered societies". This association creates a false binary' (DeGuzmán 2019). Chicanx and Latinx cannabis relationship exceeds the limitation of ethnobotany in its expansiveness and anticolonial approach to plant relationship. Traditional ethnobotanical understandings of cannabis with a new direction pushed by Latinx scholars who emphasise 'the botanical' as

> encompass[ing] more than botany as a science. It exists in many registers and in relation to many kinds of activities: agricultural, horticultural, medicinal, gastronomic, aesthetic, and so forth. The "botanical" is transdisciplinary and crosses lines between specialisation and everyday practices, capturing a wider swathe of knowledge practices pertinent to LatinX (DeGuzmán 2019).

Cannabis relationships from a Chicanx feminist approach recognise that 'the study of "ethnobotany" where the term "botany" and what counts as "botanical knowledge" still operates largely within the logic of European and Euro-American colonialism and empire' (DeGuzmán 2019). Cannabis relationships have a historical lineage in both transgressive and violent place-based understandings that are challenged through the lived experiences as demonstrated by Gude, Juana Ines and Kuetzal.

In Chicanx and Latinx communities, cannabis has been used for physical pain and psychedelic rituals, along with recreational uses during labourious conditions (Johnson 2017). The heritage of a Chicana/x cannabis ethnobotany is located in the kitchens, backyards, at the park, in people's bathrooms within a literal sense and in revolutionary war within a Mexican historical sense. My Mexican mother has always had a bottle of green rubbing alcohol with cannabis flower in it for her physical ailments. She learned this from healers in Sinaloa, Mexico and local *botanicas* in California. This is a cultural practice and place-based knowledge that centres cultural spaces where cannabis medicine is normalised and is contrary to popular belief that depicts Mexican and Chicanx cannabis users as drug traffickers.

The intergenerational knowledge about cannabis handed to me, such as concentrated topical remedies, represents the embodied Chicanx/Latinx cannabis heritage rooted in Mexican traditions. My mother's spiritual and cultural upbringing has incorporated plant medicines, including cannabis, to heal from varying ailments. This cultural knowledge is an example of, 'LatinX botanical epistemologies' that incorporate botanicas as important sites of 'healthcare resource for LatinXs in the United States' (DeGuzmán 2019), and are examples that situate cannabis relationships as healing. Additionally, this highlights the cultural place-based cannabis relationships in Chicanx and Latinx communities that have had to create alternative spaces for healing out of necessity due to the lack of affordable and equitable health care in the US.

The origins of cannabis cannot be traced to one single geographical location given its diverse species, subspecies and varieties, except for Antarctica. Cannabis has been traced as Indigenous to Central Asia and is 'found almost every-where on the planet' (Chaachouaya et al., 2023: 99). Cannabis is among the first plants to be traditionally used for 'therapeutic, culinary, psychotropic, fiber, and oil-yielding plants discovered

since agricultural farming began 10,000 years ago' (Chaachouaya et al. 2023: 99). It is well known to the public that cannabis, scientifically known as *Cannabis sativa L.*, has been used for 'the treatment of chronic pain, depression and inflammation' (Hourfane, et al. 2023; Lyons et al. 2023), as well as dietary supplement (Iftikhar 2021). Relief aided by medicinal cannabis include nervous-system-related conditions, along with gastric disorders, diabetes, scarring, nausea, seizures, multiple sclerosis, cancer, Alzheimer's, insomnia and Crohn's disease (Balant et al. 2021; Chaachouaya et al., 2023; Hourfane et al. 2023).

Historically, cultural, spiritual and ritual practices have involved smoking or consuming psychedelic plants including coca leaves in the Andean region, tobacco across North America before it was mass produced into cigarettes, ayahuasca, peyote and psilocybin mushrooms, to name the most commonly known. There are traditional and culturally specific uses for cannabis across countries such as traditional religious drinks prepared and highly consumed during Indian festivals (Hourfane et al. 2023). The relationships between cannabis and humans have influenced the evolutions and genetic diversity of cannabis impacted by 'artificial selection of desirable qualities and for a variety of purposes, humans have been manipulating Cannabis plants for many thousands of years' (Clarke and Merlin 2013: 6). This is how we now have options for indica, sativa and hybrid strains that reflect specific psychotropic characteristics, although some scientists might say these strain differentiations are not as distinguishable as they seem.

Furthermore, there is a colonial history attached to cannabis that is often overlooked and perpetuates anti-Black historical cannabis narratives. For instance, hemp 'provided rigging and sails that allowed sailing vessels of the great fleets of Europe and Asia to navigate the oceans for exploration, exploitation, battle, commerce and travel' (Clarke and Merlin 2013: 6). While at first this may seem that hemp aided the development of transportation technologies such as boats and sails, however, the era in which these developments occurred were during the time of mass human trafficking and enslavement of African people. Additionally, the use of cannabis in North America also came at the expense of the theft and exploitation of Native land (Reed 2023). With theft and exploitation of Indigenous land came the transplantation of plants which 'involved the colossal re-organisation and destruction of the natural ecosystems of colonised lands by imperially directed

impositions both mixing with, appropriating and replacing native species' (DeGuzmán 2019). Cannabis history has a linkage to colonial history, ecological degradation, and is not absolved from social, economical and agricultural violence. Colonial logics of dispossession are reproduced in the cannabis industry through the usurpation of the land to cultivate cannabis and extract its value without regard for the impacts this has on Indigenous peoples, women in particular, 'that require land-based relationships to be destroyed, removed and replaced with systemic forms of labour exploitation' (Arvin et al. 2013).

Historically, Western researchers, including ethnobotanists and anthropologists have enacted their academic social, economic, gender and racial privilege to extract knowledge from Indigenous communities for their professional benefit. As a response, feminist anthropologists have challenged such methodological and epistemological approaches by 'paying more attention to the power dynamics' between researcher and subjects through a gendered perspective that instead highlights the voices of the research participants (Lamphere 2016: 42). More specifically, African American/Black and Chicana/Latina feminist scholars across fields of anthropology, history, sociology, literature, among others, explored and emphasised the racialised and gendered positionality of women's work to explore labour relations, family dynamics and issues of reproduction, to name a few, that began in the late 1970s and early 1980s in academia (Davalos 1998; McLaurin 2001; Russel y Rodriguez 1998). Similarly, feminist anthropologists doing ethnographic work built from social science practices to unpack how lesbian and gay identity alongside race, class, and/or sexual orientation shaped consciousness, identity and community' (Lamphere 2016: 50). While there is a trajectory of feminist ethnographic research by looking at feminist anthropological work, the hierarchies remain across academic fields, including those that involve plant research on cannabis.

It is not a mystery or hidden knowledge that structural oppressions combined with racial privilege shape western knowledge production that historically privilege white cisgender men.[2] Chicanx and Latinx scholars have challenged Eurocentric approaches to the study of plant and human relationship that are 'orientated toward British and Northern

2 See M.J. Berry et al., 'Toward a fugitive anthropology: Gender, race, and violence in the field', *Cultural Anthropology* **32** (4) (2017): 537–65.

European cultures not usually associated with LatinX epistemologies. It is associated, rather, with Anglo gentlemen who were eighteenth and nineteenth century amateur scholars of botany' (Guzman 2019). To understand the cultural and political relationships that Chicanx/Latinx and broader communities of colour have with plants, specifically cannabis, we need to understand the social context in which cannabis research and policy thus far, have not prioritised the experiences of communities most harmed from the criminalisation of cannabis. Simply put, while racially privileged people (i.e. white, rich, cis-gender and able-bodied) benefit from recreational cannabis policies that prioritise profits, there are communities of colour who continue to be criminalised for their associations with cannabis, whether it be through possession, cultivation or distribution.

Chicanx feminist scholars offer theoretical embodied knowledge as a challenge to harmful western epistemologies tied to how 'colonisation was a source of harmful fragmentation for Indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica and continues in the present day through racist colonial legacies that embed forgetting and misremembering. Yet our ancestors don't forget us. We remember when we work with plant medicine in balanced ways, alignment is possible when we listen for the remedies and healing they offer us' (Zepeda 2023: 124). The understandings of cannabis as medicinal and spiritual are tied to rituals and practices rooted in Indigenous practices that are often misunderstood in Western academia. For instance, in some Indigenous communities in Mexico, cannabis has been known as 'La Santa Rosa', the sacred rose, which is placed on an 'altar of the divine' alongside *antiquas,* 'ancient things' such as obsidian, incense pots, fragments of crystal, among other things like images of Catholic saints (Williams-Garcia 1975: 133). Cannabis is a sacred plant and 'companion of the ancient things' used by a curandera (healer) requires a daily offering of water and refreshments as a gesture of care and attention. This example of cannabis as a spiritual sacred plant in Indigenous and Mexican communities exemplifies a cultural embodied knowledge regeneration that is traditionally orally shared through storytelling or rituals.

Chicanx cannabis relationships understand that cannabis as a plant is medicine and has been used as a political tool shaped by social structures delineated by race, class, (dis)ability, immigration status, sexuality and gender. Critical cannabis understandings are made through

personal and collective discursive encounters that recognise cannabis as a subject of political contestation and social transformation in day-to-day experiences. This manifests in the ways we talk about cannabis beyond stigmatisation, where we choose to buy cannabis, when we engage with the plant as a relative and not a commodity and when we actively advocate for cannabis social justice. Contemporary mainstream cannabis knowledge lacks reciprocity and respect for plants beyond settler colonial logics of resources extraction. Reciprocity is missing in current iterations of cannabis relationships due to the lack of access to intentional land access. As one of my interviewees states: 'if we had land and we were growing this ourselves I don't think it would be such an issue' (Kuetzal interview excerpt). 'If we had land' nods to the idea that access to land to grow cannabis is one solution to address issues of miseducation, disconnection between people and land, loss of ancestral agricultural and medicinal knowledges, as well as profit-driven coaxing disguised as recreational policies that highlight tax revenue. Under settler colonial capitalist economies, land is thought of as property to be owned and not a relational being that shares its abundance. There is a dissonance between what we need to grow cannabis and giving Native communities their land back. Native communities' connections to the natural world have been ruptured due to 'an imposed logic emanating largely from the values and conventions of colonial descendants' (Turner, Spalding and Deur 2020: 4), such as owning land, which is enacted across the cannabis industry.

CONCLUSION

Human-plant relationships are currently tethered to extraction and profit, as is visible in the current cannabis industry. A capitalist cannabis industry means profit is the motivating factor for cannabis policy while social equity policies, that include reparations, are secondary priorities. The types of relationships we have with plants, especially cannabis, are a representation of the relationships we have with each other and Earth. My knowledge and analysis as a non-native, non-Black queer trans Chicanx scholar that honours the respective 'connections with plants and the places they grow have been ignored or downplayed by colonial governments and settler society' (Turner, Spalding Deur 2020: 5).

The cultural relationships that communities of colour have historically sustained with cannabis and other plants have been marked and impacted by settler colonial logics. Perspectives about plants have shifted through the colonisation of botanical epistemologies and ontologies, however, that does not mean they completely vanished. Chicanx and Latinx cannabis relationships address and resist contemporary cannabis politics that situate the cannabis plant as a commodity to profit from. Settler colonialism foregrounds heteropatriarchal whiteness as the norm, as a governance project (Simpson 2016) and as an ideological and material structure of dispossession by which to eliminate Indigenous nations. This enables the manipulations, exploitation and appropriation of cannabis knowledge with capitalist logics. Critical cannabis plant relationships need to embody resistance to settler colonial temporalities and politics that heal the disconnect from plant medicines.

Cannabis has the potential to remind us of the sacredness of plant medicine and also address the environmental harms perpetuated among BIPOC communities. Learning how to grow and take care of cannabis, as part of a cannabis education, addresses how the

> environmental crisis has resulted in an existential crisis; mending this breach in our relationship with land and plants requires that we continue to take steps toward coming back into balance with our ecosystem. From the reciprocal relationship we share with land and plants is born an awareness of our own life's ephemeral existence. For millennia, people have made sense of their own mortality in connection to the agricultural cycles (Medina and Gonzales 2019: 333).

Chicanx/Latinx people in the US are part of global communities who have historically shared 'their plant knowledge from generation to generation' (Cox and Balick 1994: 84) through healers, their apprentices and familial oral history traditions. Chicana/o/x communities have a long political, cultural and healing history with cannabis that has been rendered criminal. Chicanx cannabis analysis of cannabis relationships centres and prioritises Chicana/x and cannabis cultural knowledge and history to disrupt racist underpinnings of cannabis studies. Chicana/x cannabis ethnobotany pays attention to the historical, social and political narratives that have shaped the relationship with cannabis. A Chicana/x relationship with cannabis means it is holistic in its approach to wellness and medicine, and it is oriented towards social justice. Chicanx feminist research on cannabis relationships sits at the locus of an interdisciplinary Chicana/o studies trajectory and attempts

to ideologically bridge the foundations with cannabis and ethnic studies. As I argue, cannabis is part of critical cultural and historical political interventions in Chicanx and feminist studies because people are still in jail for engaging with cannabis, and its cultivation remains tethered to mainstream industrial mechanisms of extraction. The cannabis industry is under the grips of state-sanctioned profiteering that takes social justice and equitable practices as secondary or illusionary. This history of criminalisation is one aspect left out of conversation on cannabis plant relationships, one that requires an intersectional analysis highlighting how race, class, geography, gender, sexuality shape such relationships.

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