

Victor López García*

TEN PHOTOGRAPHS

Cannabis Culture in Victoria, and Cannabis Counter-Culture in Mexico City



This Cannabis Boutique is located in the downtown streets of the city of Victoria. There, I met Daniel, a Chilean who told me that one of the boutique's requirements for hire is to speak Spanish, as the storeowners believe that the Latinx population is on the rise. Victoria, November 2022.

In October of 2018, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau legalized and regulated recreational marijuana use across Canada.¹ From that moment on, the plant succumbed to capitalist domination, and a plethora of dispensaries emerged. The essence of resistance in its consumption, the years of prohibition, its stigma, and all the codes used by marijuana-users seemed to go up in smoke.

Weed can now be bought at stores, with no questions asked, no drug dealers, and no fear around its transportation. One can simply walk around and smoke. Marijuana has entered the neoliberal Canadian development model, leading to significant sociocultural transformation in all realms. To me, the difference has become palpable in my interactions with other migrants from Mexico—a country in which violence has flooded the streets thanks to cannabis's lack of legalization—among many other consequences.

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Alitzel Cannabis at Terraza Weera. Alitzel is a biologist, gardener, and cannabis farmer who has grown marihuana at the interdisciplinary collective Terraza Weera for the last three years. On the instagram profile @terrazaweera, the collective publishes information on growing one's own marihuana as well as on medicine and science. It encourages the self-management of people's own consumption. Mexico City, May 2022.



Skwati Spayen Cannabis is a dispensary of various cannabis products, with a special focus on the plant's sources. The dispensary is stocked with marihuana grown by farmers from various Canadian indigenous nations. Thus, the dispensary highlights the art created by the First Nations. Victoria, December 2019.

Candela (@kndela_sc on Instagram) is a young fighter on the path to becoming a professional. Like many others, Candela does not smoke marihuana but uses topical cannabis. Cannabis extract has helped relieve her muscles after training and fighting. Mexico City, December 2021.



After three years of being promised regularization, in Mexico, there are still many bureaucratic hurdles to passing legislation that prioritizes citizens who wish to freely access marijuana, without drug dealers as intermediaries. Most certainly, until the corporate pieces align in such a way that the “Mexican nation” can compete with the United States and Canada, this regulation will never materialize. Considering that the great drug cartels own the business of grass today, that the “antineoliberal” government led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador will pass legislation has come to seem increasingly far fetched. In fact, the government might be keeping such legislation under its sleeve in order to boost the ruling party in the 2024 elections.

For two semesters—one in 2019 and another in 2022—I had the opportunity to visit the city of Victoria, in Vancouver Island, British Columbia, where I was met with what one might call the homogenization of cannabis culture. Simply put, all kinds of cannabis are available, in all its forms: edibles, flowers, extracts, pre-rolls, and a plethora of other derivatives. While, at first, I and other migrants were astounded by our ability to expeditiously acquire legal marijuana cigarettes, in the long run, we noticed that our spending on weed was towering. Personally, I felt that by purchasing marijuana in this way, I was unraveling the essence of resistance that this plant has historically carried. And it’s not that alternative spaces don’t exist: I was able to talk to several marijuana-growers on the island.² Yet, the dizzying work that being a Latinx migrant involves, with hours of toil taking up much of our lives, makes such conversations hard to come by. Additionally, as an outsider, the cultural barrier of not being able to fluently communicate in English made establishing ties to other organizations with critical perspectives quite challenging.

In keeping with Canada’s normative character as well as its sound social practices, the youths at the University of Victoria have their own designated benches for smoking cannabis. Smoking outside of these designated areas can lead to fines or reprimands, even from the student population. Victoria, November 2019.





Buying edible THC gummies at Jerry's Dispensary on the road connecting several towns between Nanaimo and Victoria. On this road, I found many independent dispensaries, which I was told tend to offer cannabis grown by local farmers. Victoria, August 2022.a

While, in Victoria, the alternative organization of Latinx cannabis users seems to be undergoing a process of depoliticization, Mexico City is experiencing the contrary. In the latter city, collectives, organizations, clubs, and political projects that question the institutional orders banning marihuana use for the free development of one's personality are cropping up like sativa in the springtime.

Dulce Mariana (known as Marihuanita) —a cannabis user who has dedicated much of the last six years to home growing and has become well known for her work in disseminating scientific knowledge— smoking a joint at the Global March for Marihuana Decriminalization in front of the Palacio de Bellas Artes, among a multitude of marihuana users. Mexico City, May 2021.





The clandestine graffiti artist Gomas (@gomasgom on Instagram) has become well known not only among the street-art community but also among cannabis activists in Mexico City. Her paintings deploy the cannabis aesthetic, with the prevalence of the color green. Mexico City, February 2023.

Another good practice among the Victoria community is its commitment to using designated smoking spaces, even at music festivals like Rifflandia, where I was able to bring my personal dose and enjoy the music on offer. Victoria, September 2022.





Anita is a dancer and anthropologist from Bogotá, Colombia. During her last visit to Mexico City, she gave a few ceramics and joint-rolling workshops, free of charge. Mexico City, July 2021.

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This a selection of photographs that provides a brief sketch of the contrasting cannabis culture in two totally different cities during the same time period. These cities are located in two countries that have shared an economic treaty since 1994. While one has prioritized regulating safe access to cannabis, the other is far behind in creating fair regulations for society. In response, new ways of organizing around cannabis have sprung up in Mexico. Fortunately, these have intentionally built politicized, consequential networks using feminist perspectives to question the patriarchal social order that, in Rita Segato's words, "is the cornerstone and center of gravity of all forms of power."³ **MM**

Notes

- ¹ We should highlight that the purchase of medicinal marihuana had been allowed since 2001.
- ² The island of Salt Spring, which is nationally renowned for its marihuana farming, is located some 40 minutes from Victoria.
- ³ Rita Segato, "Manifiesto en cuatro temas," *CRITICAL TIMES*, April 2018, pp. 212-225.