

“Gajar Nouka”: an Exploratory Look Into Dhaka Middle Class’
Youth’s Relationship to Cannabis Use

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of B.S.S. in Anthropology

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It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help, except where I kept names and identifying details confidential and used pseudonyms for the sake of anonymity.

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Abstract: This thesis explores cannabis use among people who are in the age group of 18-30 years old and self-identifying to be of the middle class, based in Dhaka. It places cannabis use in a broader light of the local political context, as a lifeworld that people share, and critiques how that plays out for its members. Looking into ways in which cannabis use creates a specific “subculture” or lifeworld for its’ members and consequently, how that affects actors as they exist in an isolating and oppressive urban space like Dhaka city, this paper explores oppression, deviance and community.

Keywords: cannabis; drugs; lifeworld; deviance; healing; gender.

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Title: “Gajar nouka”: an exploratory look into Dhaka middle class’ youth’s relationship to cannabis use.

Introduction:

Cannabis, ‘marijuana’ or ‘ganja’ is one of the most easily accessible recreational drugs available to Dhaka’s population today. With the recent revitalization of the war against drugs in Bangladesh due to political reasons and (de)criminalization of recreational and “medical marijuana” on a global scale, a closer look into weed use in Dhaka city is warranted and timely. In searching for formal written work on cannabis use situated in Dhaka that does not inherently demonize the “drug”, carrying all of the negative societal connotations that come with the term, and often considering substance use and abuse to be synonymous, both linguistically and conceptually. All the newspaper articles, op-eds and other media material I collected have also shown that their studies and attitudes often included addiction and ‘the gateway effect’ without question or elaboration (Akhter, 2012), as recent literature, especially within the scope of the war against drugs, has been driven by the fear of drug addiction among the youth. This hinders not only a comprehensive look into cannabis use but it is far removed from the origins of hemp and cannabis use. I use the term “weed” and the more clinical “cannabis” throughout my ethnography instead of the Bengali “gaja” or “ganja” as my paper addresses the larger context in which cannabis use is posited in the world, wherein “ganja” and cannabis may mean the same thing but may hold different cultural meanings or used to denote different derivatives of the cannabis plant, the former being the locally produced dried plant material, while cannabis also includes other plant-derived products, eg. hash (from “hashish”), edibles, etc.

Considering the historicity of weed use around the world, we see that medical, recreational and spiritual use of weed and the other components of the cannabis plant took place in non-European settings from ancient times with little conceptual distinction made between the different forms of use (Rice, 2018). Further, the trajectory of how drugs like cannabis were made illegal is actually due to European and colonial influences in more recent centuries (Mikuriya, 1994), so it is strange that the imperialization perpetuated by these ‘foreign’ forces that flipped the script on this “soft drug” and gave it its illegal tag is now taking decriminalization as token of political and cultural progressive thinking. Newspapers all over the world write about “Western” countries being more progressive about drug use and combatting both drug addiction and through legalization, softening the stigma around drug

use, in general. Countries like Holland are frequently cited by pro-cannabis aficionados as nation-states who are differentiating cannabis as a “soft drug” in drug control policy and the (in their case, partial) legalization has presumably kept drug related deaths numbers down (BBC, 2000), this sentiment is echoed by the interlocutors of this paper, as well, as the Netherlands is commonly dubbed as a kind of ‘cannabis heaven’ for ‘stoners’ (the colloquial term for someone who uses cannabis, can be used in a derogatory or reclaimed context). In a time like this, when countries are reevaluating their relationships with cannabis while it continues to lose its historical specificities, I would like to explore the relationship that middle class ‘youth’ living in Dhaka city today has with cannabis use.

As a result, my primary interest is to see the possibilities in which weed use in Dhaka city by the middle class could be framed without the stigma and negative associations made by society, both in Bangladesh and the world. I would like to look at how the city’s population which is under extreme strain, due to environmental or situational causes (like the pressures of fast-paced city life and oppressive features of the state, eg.) and facing neoliberal modes of living and expectations, which include a competitive environment, with an emphasis on linear life development and no place for difference. These cultural limitations of sense of self, interact with this particular drug, which is so widely distributed but still vastly misunderstood and under much contention all over the world. Consequently, I would like to explore how the use of this substance can be useful and healing, both recreationally and medically, the line between which we find to be rather blurred, by displacing and deconstructing dominant meanings and ways of looking at the focus group; urban middle class youth. In particular, the objective of this paper is to attempt to understand the relationship that the middle class population of Dhaka have regarding weed consumption, disposition and attitudes in Dhaka city by engaging with young adults, by asking the main research question: “How does the use of the substance cannabis function among the middle class ‘youth’ of Dhaka city?”

Objective:

For this research, my objective is to look at cannabis use among a particular section of the population in Dhaka, place in a broader light of the local political context, as a lifeworld that people share, and regarding issues around aging and city life, and how that plays out for the actors, who are in the age group 18-30 years old and self-identifying to be of the middle class. If consumption of weed is as common as it is thought, what are some of the reasons people who belong to these categories are engaging in it? What are the ways in which weed

use creates a specific “subculture” or lifeworld for its’ members and consequently, whether a sense of commonality may serve a purpose for people in society as they exist in an isolating and oppressive urban space like Dhaka city? Essentially, what are the reasons that these individuals subscribe to this lifeworld and what does it do for them? And finally, what does all this say about Bangladeshi society on a broader level?

Further questions like the following have been explored:

- How does politics affect the consumption and distribution of weed? What are the politics of legality and law enforcement in Dhaka city?
- What are the reasons an individual may choose to be part of the weed-based lifeworld? How does weed function as a social aspect of the lives of those who are in it?
- Is there a link between youth drug use and healing? What are some of the other ways in which we can link youth and drug use beyond deviance?
- How do individualistic factors like gender, age, class, personality, background, etc. affect a person’s likelihood to be a part of this lifeworld?

Scope and relevance:

In order to better understand weed consumption in Dhaka, we need to posit it within a context of Bangladesh and the world, and to situate Dhaka’s relationship with drugs and weed, in particular, we need to scope out the country’s political scene to contextualize the drug wars and its effect on the lifeworld and its members. My contextual framework is transnational, and my focus group is centered in Dhaka. The main group consuming weed country-wide may be stereotypically the younger population or ‘youth’, so my research focuses on the relationship between cannabis and people between 18 and 30 years old, by interviewing them and trying to contemplate what their lives entail. This age group has been picked to ensure that most of my interlocutors either consume the drug themselves or are immersed in a particular youth culture that does allow for the sustaining of this lifeworld, whether that be confined to a space like their academic institutions (eg. public university halls) or linked to their occupation or hobbies (e.g. musicians, artists, etc.).

As an anthropologist in training and someone with an inclination or fascination with deviance, the relationship between drugs and deviance has always been interesting to me. Further, as a visibly queer woman with mental health issues, living in Dhaka can be difficult, to say the least, and many of my friends who share at least one of those identities have these common anxieties regarding Dhaka and the many different pressures on the urban middle class youth. This has led me to question how people belonging to such marginalized groups, or those considered to be “youth”, experience societal expectations as perpetuated by political, social and familial constraints within middle class Dhaka. As I explore attitudes in relation to societal conformist ideals regarding any kind of drug use, as understood through individual accounts of consuming weed in Dhaka, which I have collected via interviews, I must keep in consideration my own position in this lifeworld. I am aware of my intimate affinity with the lifeworld, and my multiplex identities as someone from the middle class, as an insider to this lifeworld and local to Dhaka city (Narayan, 1993). As the author who falls in the age group of the ethnographic actors, has many friends who consume weed and is on the insider part of the continuum (Hayano, 1979), I try to remain aware of my position, which allows me to acknowledge the substantial basic knowledge I have regarding the practices surrounding weed distribution, preparation and consumption. However, keeping this in mind, I want to better understand the role the state and society plays when it comes to how Bangladeshi society’s values undermine and impede their urban youth in their wellbeing and growth, how those who consume drugs or engage in other ‘deviant’ behaviour may do so to deal from their surroundings and how cannabis can be used to understand larger society itself.

Research Methodology:

The scope of my ethnography is limited to the spatial scape of Dhaka city, however, my field is both imagined and bounded, as the weed users I have studied form their own lifeworld which is built on imagined social connections based on practices, beliefs and situational spaces. The most significant of these spaces is the fictional conception of the “circle”, a shared space in which bonding takes place and community is made (even if temporarily) through social ties of maintaining secrecy and doing something forbidden together. Though components of the cannabis plant can be used or consumed in many forms, for example, smoking the leaves or other variations of weed-based products or ingesting in the forms of “edible” food or drink, the most common method of consumption in Dhaka is smoking the plant derivatives in different vessels. When consumption occurs through smoking, one of the

most common practices among users in Dhaka among the middle class especially, is consuming weed in the form of a cigarette-like construction typically called a “joint” which is usually smoked in a social setting and passed around the members within a “circle” as dictated by smoking etiquette, wherein which the weed-based social connection is created and contained. My field consists of these imaginary “circles” and my interlocutors are the individuals who occupy them.

In order to get a better idea of practices and attitudes among weed smokers, I have not only interviewed weed users in settings in which they are familiar but also delved into rituals and customs by taking part in the practices related to their lifeworld both inside and beyond the imaginarily constitutive circles. Due to the lack of academic research, my methodology heavily depends on my interlocutors, who are weed users between 18 and 30 years old, self-identifying from the middle class and students at university level, recent graduates and new professionals. My methodology heavily depends on my informants, who I have sat with to conduct informal, mostly unstructured interviews one-on-one and participant observation in small groups of “circles” with 3-12 persons. My main informants are 12 in number, with a balance of gender (men, women and non-conforming), and all actors identifying with one of the three levels within the middle class; upper/middle/lower middle classes. I have also taken part in over 20 “circles” over the conception of this paper, in which dynamics varied based on the people that occupied them. Ethnographic observation along with examination of media, music and texts on drug culture has given me a better understanding of Bangladesh’s relationship with drugs, beyond the political aspect, which have been explored through information and views found in op-ed articles, online videos and newspapers. The bibliography also contains the research and journal articles relevant to my study.

Due to my own middle class and private university background, these are areas I have the most access to, while keeping in mind that my sex and class limits me in certain spaces. The interviewees are all self-identifying as part of the middle class, according to their own perception of their socioeconomic position and lifestyle. While all of my interlocutors reside in Dhaka at the point of this thesis, some have roots in other districts of the country or have spent considerable time in other countries. My relationship with my interlocutors has been a self-reflexive process as I was conscious of not asking definitive questions as my insider status may influence how I phrase my framework, careful not to perpetuate my conception regarding the lifeworld. It is important to me to let me informants process their own

experiences in their lifeworlds without my anthropological eye intruding, and in the case of interlocutors I knew beforehand, not to let my personal connections to them influence the conversations. Further, since the substance which with my ethnographic material is concerned with is illegal, my code of conduct includes giving all interlocutors and participants pseudonyms to protect their identity, regardless of whether or not they felt comfortable sharing their name. Other identifying details like name of academic institution they belong to, and others that have come up in conversation have been avoided as well.

Hayano (1979) claims that choice of field is usually determined by the insider's identity and group membership(s) in conjunction with the political and social context. In my case, my ability to "pass" as an 'insider', one who not only shares the lifeworld but also is native to the location, sharing ethnic and socioeconomic, and in some cases, gender, identities, made it so that the actors in my research opened up to me in ways that presumably an 'outsider' researcher would not have been able to pursue. I attempt to deploy both the roles of 'insider' and 'anthropologist' without being confined to my mental horizons of interpretation or ignoring the distinctive tonalities of the existence of the lifeworld, especially as I try to see "their experiences within the framework of their own idea of what selfhood is" (Geertz, 2001). Combining a self-reflexive and deconstructive approach to ethnography, throughout the ethnography, I continue to be reflexive of my position and assumptions while providing a fragmented integration of theory, as it parallels how fragmented and unique people's experiences and sense of self are (Josephides, 1997). I aim to capture the lifeworlds of the actors as would be viewed through their eyes; in terms of research objectives, it is a product of experiential and observational data. I strive for the existential insider's perspective gained through subjective experience instead of for an convoluted "objective" outsider's point of view, especially with respect to the how the drug scene functions here.

Theoretical framework:

Weed-based lifeworld:

When we look at different conceptions of "subcultures", different schools of thought focus on various aspects of society, however, the concept of "subcultures" originated within the context of research into juvenile delinquency and juvenile deviance (Pfadenhauer, 2005). However, the Latin prefix "sub" refers to the fact that "subcultures" exist within other cultures, which have more mainstream power and usually wider acceptance. Further, this suggests that "subcultures" are inferior because they exist within another larger culture and

have limited diffusion opportunities. Abu-Lughod (1991) argues that “‘culture’ operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy”. As subcultures see self-construction of identity through opposition of others, different sides of the power divide undergo conflict within the diametrically opposed processes in which they are situated. According to the Chicago school approach within sociology, “subcultures” not only deviate from the “predominant cultural models” but they also search for and form new alternative models (Berzano & Genova, 2015). Culture is an essential tool used to construct the other. Anthropology, by focusing on ‘culture’ and othering the communities they study in the process, needs to understand that the process of creating the self through opposition always entails the violence of repressing forms of difference. The dominant mainstream culture “others” any identities formed within these “subcultures”, as their practices and values are usually in opposition or contrast to the larger culture’s norms, and thus, their image is constructed by those who “other” them. Rather, I would argue that even if the alternate cultural model scheme is true to an extent, the traits and values a “subculture” holds is dependent on and influenced by an individual member’s sociocultural conditions. By focusing on particular individuals and their settings, I try to subvert the problematic notions of culture that presume it to be a homogenous entity.

Initially, “subculture” was evaluated through the lens of socioeconomic class, however, since the 1990’s, it has taken a more style or theme specific stance (Pfadenhauer, 2005). The term “subculture” is outdated and debated for several reasons, namely it has a myriad of interpretations and definitions but while I argue that the term is used to denote struggling and stigmatized groups, which may diminish their value in as their existence only makes sense or is sustained within the larger “main” culture, the term “subculture” (denoted in quotation marks throughout) has little utility in my research, as in the case of Bangladesh, weed use manifests in a particular way in modern-day, 21st century Dhaka city, which can be better described by the term “lifeworld” as it holds less of a loaded meaning, also compared to other terms like the more problematic “neo-tribe” (Sweetman, 2009). This has to do with the specificities of society, wherein people’s relationship with each other and their ultimate goals have changed due to their collective identity and being part of a system based on practices and values.

Sociological lifeworld analysis takes a special interest in the perspective with which the people who are the ‘objects’ of research perceive the fragments of the social world relevant

for them, the relevant fragments viewed from a certain perspective which are called “social lifeworlds”. A small lifeworld is not exactly the same as a "social world" but it is "the correlate [part] of the subjective experience of reality in a [partial or in a temporally restricted and particularly situated] culture" which is shared with others (Pfadenhauer, 2005). Edmund Husserl’s notion of “lifeworld” can be thought of in two ways: “(1) in terms of belief and (2) in terms of something like socially, culturally or evolutionarily established (but nevertheless abstract) sense or meaning.” (Beyer, 2016) The first point refers to the beliefs against which an actor justifies their attitude towards themselves, others and the world around them. The second finds that the common lifeworld functions as a system of meaning which constitute their language, through which these actors conceive their selfhood. As the lifeworld is both individual or personal and intersubjective or communicative, the concept functions as the subjective view of what is lived and what is meaningful to the actor, and serves as the background and lens through which they perceive and comprehend their lived realities (Husserl, 1970). As lifeworld is deeply rooted in action, communication, and evaluation, I explore the weed-based lifeworld in Dhaka through the activities of its’ actors, the ways in which communication occurs within the lifeworld and how they reconstruct their sense of self, as a part of the lifeworld.

“Deviance”:

Deviance assumes the category of “normal” and is recognized as a process or condition organized in the service of power (Williams, 2014). Hebdige (1979) argued that a “subculture” is a subversion to normalcy, that they can be perceived as negative due to their nature of criticism to the dominant societal standard. Hebdige argued that “subcultures” bring together like-minded individuals who feel neglected by societal standards and allow them to develop a sense of identity. And an individual’s progressive adoption of a subcultural model will furnish them with growing status within this context but it will often, in tandem, deprive them of status in the broader social context outside where a different model prevails (Nwalozie, 2015). Due to this construction of “subcultures” as the “other”, the dominant culture is assumed to be filled with passive individuals while those in the “subculture” are active participants of this subset of society, regardless of their proclaimed identity (in this case, whether or not they identify as a “stoner”, or the equivalent ‘someone who smokes weed’), and thereby, active deviants from the larger mainstream cultural model. This ascribes autonomy to the members, who choose whether or how much they are involved in the

lifeworld, and a certain level of self-conscious power that comes with deviating from sociocultural norms. However, I would argue that the intersection of being on the margins and accepted by the mainstream culture produces spaces in which practices of sociocultural differentiation unfold and also overlap, so neither can be seen as a monolithic “other”. This is especially true of cannabis users in Dhaka or Bangladeshi users, in general, as they exist in multiple subjectivities and identities, which engage in conflict on various levels of intersubjective experiences.

These boundaries are continually shifting and being redrawn, the contexts of cultural activity habitually reconstituted by new and longstanding power relations between the drug consumers and the state and lines of continuity or cultural logics (Stahl, 1999). Boundaries are reasserted and maintained through processes of social differentiation and distinction; independent drug dealers, people from poorer backgrounds and with less protection (ie. ones who do not have political backing and/or part of organized crime groups) are killed while the middle class can get by with bribes in legal encounters and still have their supply of weed, or drug of choice (Hasnat & Rabbi, 2018). And as corruption flourishes in other (possibly all) branches of government, the drug trade is sustained not only because of the demand but due to the law intentionally turning a blind eye when it benefits them and potentially silencing those who know too much (Farmer, Savage, & Smith, 2018). Further, even though the focus of the war on drugs in Bangladesh has been on “yaba”, cannabis remains the most widely used drug and as such, the state creates an atmosphere of fear in order to maintain their power and continue in a corrupt system that affects all drug users and even, people who have nothing to do with drugs (Safi & Rahman, 2018).

Global setting:

Historical context:

All over the world and throughout history, the ‘cannabis’ plant has seen a variety of uses in textiles, medicinal, spiritual and ritualistic aspects of human existence. Also known as hemp, one of the first and oldest known human agriculture crops, which is a form of the cannabis plant used to manufacture products such as oil, cloth and fuel. Hemp fibre was used to make clothing and paper while seeds were consumed as a grain in ancient China (Li, 1974). Dating as far back as the second millennium B.C., the first written reference to the cannabis plant was in a Chinese medicinal document allegedly written by a legendary figure who worked extensively with Chinese medicine and herbs, named Shen Nung. In India, one of the earliest

written references is when cannabis is mentioned as "Sacred Grass", one of the five sacred plants of India, in the Atharva Veda (Science of Charms). It is thought to have medicinal value when consumed and serves as an offering to the god Shiva, who is also frequently associated with cannabis, with one of their nicknames translating to "Lord of Bhang" (Gumbiner, 2011). 'Bhang' is the local term for cannabis in India, as there is an edible preparation with the same name that originated in the subcontinent. The dried cannabis leaves, stems and seeds, most commonly found, is colloquially called "ganja", similar to "gaja", both terms used in Bangladesh as well. Other local terms include "গিঁজা" and "শিদ্দি" (shiddhi)", the latter being more common in non-urban spaces, but applicable across regional and demographic differences. For the urban interlocutors, the term "shiddhi" was more commonly used when interacting with rural or working class people, especially when trying to acquire weed through them when on trips out of Dhaka. Weed-related argot provides way of conceptualizing, communicating and thinking about weed among users and distributors (Johnson, Bardhi, Sifaneck, & Dunlap, 2005). Common slang names used worldwide includes "marijuana/marihuana" and "pot" which are Spanish names for the plant; "pot" derives from the Spanish word for 'marijuana' leaves called "potiguaya". In different parts of the world, 'marijuana' now refers to different formations of the plant, including drug preparations from it. In legal markets, medical use and 'weed activism', many have tried to move away from this term, to disassociate consumption with the illegal drug trade, and instead opt to use "cannabis" (Steinmetz, 2017). When consumed as a drug, cannabis has psychoactive properties, which places the person consuming the substance in a state of "high", most commonly attributed to the presence of the compound known as THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). Cannabis plants also produce a group of chemicals collectively known as cannabinoids, which have a wide range of biochemical effects in the bodies of users, which may manifest in physical and/or neurological symptoms. There are many ways to consume cannabis other than the most widely known method, which is smoking in the form of a "joint"; they are vaporizing (which is similar to smoking), edibles, tinctures, capsules, and topicals. Each form provides a different kind of experience, some combining the psychoactive and physiological experiences, as in, the terms of how the product makes the consumer feel and what it does for their bodies and minds. This also inevitably differs from person to person, as each person's body reacts to the drug differently.

Medical or health-related use of cannabis plants dates as back as when use of cannabis began. It has been historically used to treat disease and alleviate symptoms of a wide range of medical conditions, physical and mental health wise. Historical documents of cannabis use have shown health benefits that range from increasing appetite in patients to helping them cope with chronic pain. While cannabis continues to have medicinal value, British colonial “concern” and the USA’s imperialistic reach over drug control has made it so that cannabis is demonized heavily regardless. This is partially steeped in racist ideas of the origins of cannabis use, for example, the case of USA where co-opting “marihuana”, or the better known term “marijuana”, a Mexican Spanish word, by the United States government who deployed in their campaigns against the drug during the 1930’s, functioned as a way to “other” the use of cannabis and the groups they associated them with, eg. non-white immigrants. Further, this was used as a way to disproportionately incriminate people of colour and minority group members (Halperin, 2018), something that occurs in really high numbers in North America till this day.

Politically, lobbying against drugs during the colonial period and beyond, has led to several countries, including Bangladesh, Mexico and USA, forming multiple histories regarding efforts at regulation and authoritative control, which saw their governments initiate a war against drugs further aiming to build and uphold systems that (continue to) benefit the political parties when it comes to garnering support and exercising power, and in these dishonest systems like our state, many injustices go unnoticed. ‘Modern civilization’ also has a need for ‘modern’ ie, scientific research to validate their opinions, in either direction, whether cannabis is beneficial or harmful, which leaves the question of bias, for one. However, the fact that weed was illegal and treated as a narcotic, even though there is has long been and continues to be medicine with cannabis as an ingredient being produced globally and sold commercially, means ‘modern’ scientific research remains difficult, inaccurate and in some cases, impossible to carry out. In the 21st century, most of cannabis’ ancient medicinal history is forgotten by the world and the anti-cannabis state propaganda had taken over public sentiment in most countries. “The ensuing chaos of ignorance, partial truths, and outright lies has produced a cacophonous toxic confusion surrounding the use of hemp drugs.” (Mikuriya, 1994)

Beyond the conventional understanding of medicinal and recreational use, cannabis has long been used in a spiritual context in multiple belief systems across the world. The drug use in

this symbolic sense is not as much about the immediate action of taking the drug or even the behaviour it may correlate to but an attempt to know one more fully and entry into a spiritual world, which holds many significant symbolic and ritualistic values in ideologies like Buddhism and Lalon. In India, for example, Bhang is used in the Hindu religion in particular, it was used to celebrate the last day of the Durga Puja, and offerings of it were made to the god Shiva in temples (Iversen, 2008).

In Bangladesh, due to the prevalence of Sufism and Lalon philosophy, weed is smoked as a part of a meditative process which brings the devotee closer to god (Knight, 2014). According to Kibtun, a male university student who visits the Lalon mela in Kushtia every year, there is contention between the ‘shadhu’ about the use of weed and the people of Kushtia wanting to not be associated with weed on a national level. They know at the largest gathering for Lalon followers, weed is consumed by devotees and attendees alike and some Lalon ideologists will distance themselves from the drug, echoing more contemporary political views. He told me Lalon mela used to be a place for music and faith to thrive, but as years go by, the event is increasingly commercialized, making it lose its touch to Lalon’s beliefs. As the authorities realize the large scale use, they’ve started limited the practices that take place at the main Lalon ‘akra’, making finding and smoking in public increasingly difficult for attendees. Further, even though cannabis has a long history of benefits and is one of the least physically harmful of drugs, it continues to be illegal in most of the world today. This in turn, impedes medical research on cannabis use and its possible health benefits that may be more relevant to the present day.

Values regarding law and crime stem from historical struggles over legitimacy, in “which powerful groups succeed in delegitimizing and criminalizing certain practices.” (Abraham & van Schendel, 2005) The British colonization period is a key period of category and meaning formation, as cannabis is already a part of indigenous rituals and medicine. But modern scientific and puritanical discourses separate the domain of religion, so that the spiritual practice is now viewed as potentially morally incriminating, a “leisure” activity gone wrong as opposed to an entheogenic understanding. During the British Indian colonial period, the use of cannabis was so prominent, the British colonial administration conducted a large scale study in the 1890’s in India (Iverson, 2008). Like many other activities that date back before the colonial occupation period, the colonial forces were “concerned” that the use or what they deemed abuse of the substance, cannabis, were harming the health and mental state of the

locals. As hemp plants were already a part of the region's agricultural system, the British government had the Indian government look into the cultivation of the plant, production and trade of drugs derived from it and the social and 'moral' impact of its consumption, by appointing a commission. The Indian Hemp Commission, as it was known, underwent systemic interviews, sampling and research after which they produced, according to variable sources, anywhere between six and nine volumes of collected and analyzed data. Their conclusion believed that use of cannabis, especially in the case of bhang, should not be prohibited, as its' medical and religious use dates back centuries and the substance itself was deemed to be not as harmful as initially thought of by colonial forces. The findings of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report also realized that banning the use of the drug would lead to opposition from the locals, especially religious devotees who used it for spiritual reasons. In Chapter 14, it proclaims that "even if the absolute prohibition of the use of the drug could be enforced, the result might be to induce the use of still more noxious drugs"; a sentiment regarding drug policy that is relevant today. Their conclusions were, in regards to moral, mental and physical degradation, were that moderate use of cannabis can be beneficial and even "excessive" use did not necessarily lead to any harm (Mikuriya).

Legality:

Since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, legal systems of most countries have gradually put in laws against the cultivation, possession and distribution of cannabis. In the early couple of decades of the 20th century, as the two world wars passed, governments over the world regressed from an utilitarian mode of governance that practices non-interference to intrusive majoritarian autocracies (Mikuriya, 1994). Currently, only a handful of countries in the world have legalized or decriminalized cannabis consumption (both medical and recreational) and cultivation on a national level; Uruguay and quite recently, Canada and South Africa. This does not mean, however, that the drug is not already widely available to the public all over the planet. While tobacco and alcohol may be more widely used in terms of quantity, cannabis is the most popular "narcotic" drug in the world, according to the UN's World Drug Report of 2018. It is speculated, and there is evidence present, that the easy availability and perceived lower risk of harm has contributed greatly to cannabis' common use, especially among adolescents. Prohibition not only makes regulation impossible but allows for exploitation and other unethical practices in production and distribution of cannabis. At government level, most countries opt for criminalization over harm reduction strategies

which benefit drug users and in the case of ‘medical marijuana’, patients, in the long run. Prohibition itself makes drugs less safe to take, which is important even though fatally overdosing on cannabis or the psychoactive ingredient, THC is not possible. Since banning drugs do not make them go away, it is wiser to put in systems that make it safer for consumers, as opposed to making it harder for them to know what is in their drugs, what forms and amounts of consumption are healthy for them.

Legality of the substance is not straightforward, however, most countries have separate laws and regulations for cultivation, possession and medical use. The grey area within legalization allows for the sale and consumption of cannabis at licensed establishments, for example, at Spain’s cannabis clubs and Netherlands’ coffeeshops. Then there’s conditional legalization, like in India, where, due to historical traditional use both as medicine and spiritual intoxicant, Holi time sees increased free consumption and states like Uttar Pradesh have licensed bhang shops, while ayurvedic dispensaries also have products with bhang (Mitta, 2012).

Criminalization usually makes drugs stronger and more potent (to decrease transport and distribution and maintain a high profit), and this is one of the arguments used against cannabis legalization, that stronger weed has the potential to do more harm. However, there is little evidence to support this claim, as even if cannabis has higher potency or levels of THC, research still shows that the harm we think cannabis is causing is not necessarily only caused by the consumption of the drug, as other harm factors were not taken into account. In the same grain, when cannabis is accused of being a gateway drug, that cannabis users will go on to do “harder” drugs, like heroin and yaba, the gateway effect, which includes more nuance than is accounted for, is argued to come from other substances that society does not deem as harmful like tobacco/cigarettes or another widely available intoxicant, alcohol. The results of research that finds cannabis is harmful remains inconclusive as we can take tobacco and alcohol into account. There is also the argument that most hard drug users are more likely to consume cannabis but that does not necessarily mean most cannabis users go on to try or regularly use harder drugs. As society and state assume that once a person consumes cannabis, they are inherently labelled a drug user, someone who is now open to all kinds of (harder) drug experiences. This was disputed by my interlocutors, who helped me understand the individual and collective reasoning for smoking up and consuming cannabis, as I tried to answer the question: “Why do people consume cannabis in the first place?”

Another argument for keeping cannabis illegal is that it has addictive properties and will lead to substance abuse. Cannabis addiction is actually more physiological than physical and banning it makes it harder to treat (Kurzgesagt In a Nutshell, 2018). Simultaneously, the research that needs to be conducted in order to treat cannabis addiction and understand its medicinal uses cannot be carried out accurately or safely if it is still banned. And when it comes to addiction, the video with the same title on the youtube channel Kurzgesagt (2015) cites psychologist Bruce K. Alexander's study on cocaine addiction conducted with rats, in which, the conclusion was: "It's not the chemicals [in the drugs that get you use or get addicted to], it's your cage." (Alexander, 2010). I argue that in the case of cannabis users (who are not necessarily abusers), Dhaka is that cage for its residents, especially for those in certain marginalized groups including minorities and the age group my paper is concerned with.

'Bengali Stoners':

Legal context:

When Bangladesh signed the Geneva Convention in 1974, one of the conditions included that all the participants had to ban cannabis cultivation by 1990 (Mahmud, 2017). As the new country joined the international political sphere, one of the unintended consequences of which was that cultivation of cannabis was banned in 1987 and sale in 1989. In the meantime, The Drugs (Control) Ordinance, No.VIII was passed in 1982, which details control over manufacture, import, distribution and sale of all drugs, not only narcotics. The most significant of Bangladesh's drug laws comes with the passing of the Narcotics Control Act which came into force in January of 1990. Titled "Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Control Act, 1990", this Act repealed all previous colonial laws and established both the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) and the National Narcotics Control Board (NNCB). The NNCB board falls under the Ministry of Home Affairs and was designed to provide policy guidelines to the DNC. The NNCB acts as the highest-ranking policy-making body that conducts research in order to formulate drug-related policies and strategies while the DNC is responsible for implementing the legal objectives of drug-related issues mentioned in the act. Amended in 2000, 2002 and 2004, the Act has features which are aimed to dealing with the issue of drug control, smuggling and addiction and empowers multiple law enforcement bodies to carry out the drug-related administrative activities, like conducting searches and arrests (Star Law Review).

The Act has the power to override all other laws in place at the time of its inception. As per Schedule I of the Act, THC in any form, like cannabis resin, charas or hashish is class A narcotics while hemp plants, cannabis (in plant form), bhang or any article manufactured in combination with cannabis or bhang are B-Class narcotics. And according to section 9 of the Act, cultivation, production, processing, carrying, transportation, import, export, supply, purchase, sale, possession, preservation, warehousing, exhibition or use of any kind of narcotics including cannabis and its' derivatives and various forms is prohibited. However, the Act has given permission to manufacture, process, import, export, supply, purchase, sell etc. of narcotics for any approved medicine or for undertaking any scientific research provided the same is being done under proper license. Punishment for drug-related offences and license violations can go as high as the most severe penalties including life imprisonment and death sentences (UNODC).

Legality is an analytic category that presupposes social fixity, sustained by the practices and phenomena we observe around it. (Abraham & van Schendel, 2005). For cannabis, it exists in an unstable legal space, wherein the public sentiment regarding weed and the state's official position depends on political and economic considerations rather than medical, spiritual or health related values. And as legal attitudes towards cannabis changes across borders of countries, with various aspects like whether it is allowed for recreational or medicinal use, personal possession, production or cultivation and loopholes amongst these categories and over borders. Cannabis is argued to be less dangerous than other drugs like tobacco and alcohol, which have legal status in more countries worldwide but the growing argument in the favor of 'medical marijuana' and cannabis place as a "soft drug" puts it in a position wherein its' formal (il)legality is challenged by the population's social perception of the activity which it may no longer consider to be criminal or illicit. This applies to pro-cannabis activism in the European and North American regions where cannabis has seen medicinal value for antiepileptic and anti-anxiety purposes, entheogenic use within India, Nepal and Bangladesh, including the Lalon ideology, and recreational users, like my focus group of Dhaka's middle class youth.

This gap from formal law manifesting into social moral norms regarding criminality can also extend to the law enforcement forces. The presence of anti-drug laws do not necessarily extend to its implementation and the absence of law enforcement does not necessarily mean the practices are permissible or socially sanctioned. In the case of Bangladesh's law

enforcement regarding drug use, there is an understanding among Dhaka's middle class youth that carrying or consuming cannabis in public is illegal and dangerous (to a certain extent) if caught, but police forces are likely to be lenient regarding the hard-and-fast laws. Further perpetuated by the drug war and assumed to be always upheld by the state, laws are in reality not as binding as the average citizen assumes, as the police officers regularly benefit from a corrupt system, in which they can take bribes, and then there are the political forces who benefit from the drug system running smoothly, as they get their cut of the profits. Kibtun also told me a story about how his young cousin, who had a powerful political familial connection, got into an altercation with an armed policeman in civil clothes, disguised as a 'muriala' (puffed rice seller) stationed nearby a popular drug dealing spot. Every day, he claimed, lakh taka worth of drugs like yaba and cannabis are being smuggled and distributed through points like these, which the law enforcement have identified but intentionally do nothing about, as they got bribes from all sides of the process. Here, the same groups responsible for upholding laws and punishing crime are the ones committing them, proving how unstable the boundaries of legality are. These bribes, fall under the broader concept of corruption, which is one of the "many forms of state predation -or coercive appropriation of wealth by state personnel- that do not follow legal bureaucratic procedures" (Abraham & van Schendel, 2005)

Politics of Drugs:

While legality remains ambiguous and laws largely unenforced, the recently revved up "war against drugs" in Bangladesh has seen a rise in "special operations", which perpetuate the government's already oppressive system of surveillance, authority and control, creating a culture of fear among the citizens in exchange for their subordination (Al Jazeera, 2018). The process of implementing these drug-related laws does not follow through as effectively as these documents would suggest, as drug use continues and the corruption in the state's systems prevails. The war against drugs is being carried out by the current authoritarian government under prime minister Sheikh Hasina as a tactic to gain international support, among other reasons. As the global war on drugs continues to be futile, expensive and dangerous, Bangladesh tries to follow their steps and fails as well. As law enforcement and the state aims to cut down on drug usage by putting in harsher punishments in an ongoing campaign against alleged drug dealers and users, this has not led to a decrease in production, trade or consumption of drugs, instead the number of drug-related deaths rises worldwide. As

the demand is still present, production and cultivation of drug-related products continues and the extrajudicial killings carried out by the state serves as scare tactics and a veil for political schemes (Farmer, Savage, & Smith, 2018). Politically motivated killings take place quite frequently and under the guise of the drug war, members of the opposition and/or suspected criminals and perhaps innocent bystanders, who may have no relation with the drug trade are killed in supposed “crossfires”, which are always justified in defense of the paramilitary groups like RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) by political leaders and ministers alike. Ahead of the election due in December of this year, critics concur that these crackdowns reflect Hasina’s increasingly authoritarian rule, which included their eventually violent response to the recent student demonstrations regarding road safety, and the arrest of a prominent photographer for treason for speaking out against their tactics (Baldwin & Paul, 2018). These anti-narcotic drives are meant to show the public that the government is trying to be lawful, effective rulers, which is far from the truth, as they are trying to intimidate citizens into supporting them and their “causes”, and normalizing their acts of power. The prime minister’s office apparently did not respond to questions about whether the drugs campaign is a populist ploy by these Reuters reporters.

The moral panic that led to and was exacerbated by Bangladesh’s war on drugs is influenced by international conventions and attitudes towards ‘drugs’, like the United Nations Office of Drug and Crime’s policy charters and countries like the United States of America, one of the driving forces of the global war on drugs. This comes at the price of the health of drug users who are not necessarily drug addicts, those who risk overdose for lack of safe regulation and knowledge, or addicts who need medical help and proper rehabilitation, instead of getting jail time, being forced into rehab centers that may do more harm than good and living in a constant state of guilt, doubt and fear. The goal is to stop drug supply by shutting down trade, arresting dealers and manufacturers but as the demand for intoxicants doesn’t change, harm reduction strategies may be the more effective route than hardline policy enforcement, as it reduces the stigma around consumption and avoids trafficking casualties. Many of the problems that we associate with drug use are actually caused by the war against them, for example, prohibition has led to more violence than it has prevented. According to CNN (2018), members of UN and Human Rights Watch and local student-led protests have expressed their condemnation of the Bangladeshi government for disregarding law and carrying out extrajudicial killings in the guise of drug control.

Media representations:

Media, in form of journalism or popular media, can be subversive, or it can also be perpetuating cultural ideas of “drug” demonization, while pandering to the political hierarchy, ie. those in power. There are several pop culture references including songs which refer to “gaja” and/or “nesha”, the latter literally meaning addiction but as slang, it also means the act of drug-taking which is not necessarily addictive and is used without the negative connotations employed by the larger culture. In the online scape of Bangladesh, it is almost like we see a binary representation of both sides of the drug debate, those who follow cultural norms and the blatant and unbothered drug users.

Music from local bands include songs titled “Gajar nouka” by Defy, “Neshar bojha” by Popeye and “Afim chaash” by Blunderware; these are examples of songs that paint a picture of how normalized and integral weed is to Dhaka’s youth scene. These songs are commonly played by a group of university students hanging out, heard on campus as there is always one of the squad who has an acoustic guitar.

“খােবা না আর গাঁজা ম্দি পােশ থাকো তু

িম/

জািন আসেব না উম বাতাসে

এই কথা িন

তমায় ভুলে গাঁজার ানীকা বাই ঙ্গিরাবাই গাঁজার ানীকা পাহাড়তলী যায়”

The artist from Defy first claims if he gets the person he loves near him, then he won’t feel the need to smoke up. But then, a couple of lines down, he says he hears in the wind that that person will not come (to him), so he’s going to use ‘gaja’ to forget them. This song plays into the stereotype that men quit cigarettes and other drugs for the sake of their partner, which is a problematic depiction of how modern romantic relationships work in Dhaka’s young middle class. The other stereotype shows weed is used as a way to cope with their rejection and loss, as is seen in the other two songs as well.

These songs appeal to the teens and young adults who make up the majority of these bands’ listening demographic for a multitude of reasons. One of these reasons are “fitting in” and seeming cool, however, there are songs that go beyond the ‘sad stoner’ trope and address societal issues too. The most recent of these songs, that is viral music video of a song

featured in a contemporary film, titled “Hajir Biryani” after the famous biriyani shop in Dhaka. This is the most dance-party music out of the ones I mentioned, where the lead singer sings about the bender he goes on, which includes alcohol, weed and yaba.

“হাজির কীল ডাল পদিগাজা Cদের কী

চলেব Cনশা - জমেব Cখলা”

But as he sings about urinating on the walls while drunk, the singer also raps about the state and its’ problematic features:

“টাকারই Cখলাের - এ কালো কুলটিছি লাটে লাখ লাখে

হাজারে

নB িসেমে - চলেছ Cযই ক্রমবেছ জনগণ -

বাড়েছ ঐবেলমা Cচার পুলিশর Cখলা Cরাজ হয়,

চলেছ তNাশি,চলেছ Cখাঁজ Cখাঁজ,

আসল Cচার চুরির ক্রিদন দপ ুরে।

সিত7 বলেল Cিল খািব পাজেরা”

The rap sections talk about how the state is a corrupt system where money is what rules, the black market is thriving, citizens are dying as problems increase. This pertains to the drug war without him explicitly saying so, as the citizens are presumably killed as collateral damage for the state’s crackdown on drugs. The police are constantly on the search for drugs and associated ‘deviant’ behaviour and if one points out who the real thieves are, then they’ll get shot in the hip, which is fitting as the current government becomes more authoritarian; increasing surveillance, inciting fear through raids and silencing anybody that ‘dissents’ and expresses views that do not aligns with theirs, while generally being skeptical towards the urban youth, who they are quick to call out as criminals.

While sifting through youtube, I came across a video titled “Bengali Stoners” that attempts to parody Bangladeshi weed smokers and their presumed habits in a number of skits but it ends in a twist, wherein one of the characters delivers a dreary, monotone monologue facing the camera, advising them to not smoke weed. The narrator warns that “one day you will get sad and your friend will offer you a stick to make you feel better. Think again.” (Palash, 2016). Usually these videos parody several different aspects of Bangladeshi youth life, serving as

comedy without having any kind of deeper message. Similarly, there are investigative journalism shows that focus on criminal activity and produce dramatic representations of crackdowns like “Crime Patrol”, which reinforce culturally restrictive ideas around “drugs”.

However, media is not always pandering, as journalism in the last couple of decades has seen several criticisms like the ones mentioned above, against Bangladesh’s crackdowns and drug war. In an analysis on Bangladesh’s drug war, Mahmud (2017) acknowledges that weed was not as the “same stature” as other popular, harder drugs like yaba and phensedyl. He also mentions that not all dealers are male. An example of which can be found in a news report video clip by local television channel Maasraanga (Report, 2017), women and children are shown to be involved in drug dealing. The clip itself runs along the narrow distinction between discussing them as perpetrators and victims. Furthermore, in the footage, one of the dealers confess to paying off the OC of the train station where they operate in order to keep authorities off their backs and continue business. And when the OC, who was also interviewed and talked about his team’s efforts to stop the drug trade under his jurisdiction, is questioned regarding this, he nervously laughs and denies any implications of corruption or deceit.

Further examples include an Asian newspaper which uses identifies “crossfires” and “gunfights”, in which the drug dealers consistently are allegedly armed and the ones to shoot first and their “response” is to shoot back to “protect” citizens and public property, as “euphemisms for extrajudicial police killings.” (Uttom & Rozario, 2018). There are instances wherein witnesses are kept silent, the police and political narrative taking the reins, blurring out the voices of the family members of victims who do speak out. In one case, the officer behind one of these drug raid operations justifies killing drug dealers as he believes that drug use inevitably leads to crime and in their attempts to control the drug trade, arresting dealers do not work as they come out on bail and the process is repeated (Baldwin & Paul, 2018). In the same article, a local priest named Father Rozario speaks out against the police’s actions even if he does agree with drugs being an issue that is dangerous. A Chinese news source, Xinhua (2018) claims the number of drug war related deaths have crossed hundred with the latest wave of anti-drug campaigns that started in May of 2018. And after all this, what all of these national and international based news sources and op-eds second what is evident; the war against drugs is not stopping the drug trade but is instead harming, intimidating and punishing the people residing in the nation-state. Many of my interlocutors’ parents would

warn them when staying out late at night, regardless of whether or not they knew of their children's drug use, as they are worried for their safety as they could be targeted due to age, gender, class, etc, in a country where the law enforcement is notoriously ruthless.

Ethnographic analysis:

The substance I analyze in this paper is cannabis due to its wide availability and categorization as a “soft drug” (not per contemporary global legal understanding but historical evidence), as that allows me to steer clear of discussion that suggests all drug use is inherently drug abuse and explore cannabis use holistically, and without prejudice. Usually, the focus of scenes and “subcultures”, is not on the chances and opportunities their development may hold but rather the risks they possess, in terms of crime and deviance, and that limits our scope of exploring drug use and individual interest. In society’s pursuit and subsistence of social order, the average individual residing in Dhaka has to undergo adaptation within the social hierarchy which may manifest in structural and personal strain for certain individuals. All the conflict created among humans for their differences in beliefs on what they should do with their lives or how they should behave, and strong conflicting notions of what constitutes the public interest can cause a great amount of mental and emotional strain, and I argue that the circumstances in which people of my demographic interest exist in Dhaka city make them likely to consume cannabis by fitting it into their existing lifeworld, and this is not necessarily in an unhealthy way. As Cohen puts it, people “develop a cultural style as a means of coping with their particular circumstances and of resisting the dominant values of society.” (Blackman, 2005).

For Durkheim, “social solidarity in the form of social cohesion for a group or “subculture” binds people together through commonality to confront anomie.” (Blackman, 2014). Based on Durkheim’s theory of anomie, Robert K. Merton’s strain theory produced a sociological conception of deviance, in which, deviance results from interaction between culture, structure and I argue, self. I argue that strain does lead to what society perceives as deviance, in this case, in the form of cannabis use, whether that be regular or occasional consumption. And since you can't smoke cannabis out in public, the shared use of it can bring people closer, as they have to be confined to a private area which builds a relationship engaging in solidarity based on shared secrecy. Here, Durkheim’s idea that “collective representations are products of real social groups that share symbols and common meaning and thus create forms of

solidarity” are relevant, as weed users have interesting relationships with their identity as users and the communities and social experiences that form around its’ use.

Large parts of individual lives, identities and freedoms are impeded by (the illusion of enforcing) laws enacted by the state, public life and corporate aspirations, as descriptions from my interlocutors echoed. The physical space of the city itself holds many levels of limitation. Rishita claimed that if Dhaka had more fields, accessible rooftops or general open spaces in which young people could exist, play and interact without worry of judgement or safety, then less number of teenagers would perhaps engage in illegal activity, including drugs like cannabis. There’s the limited space, due to the population to space ratio being really skewed and the lack of open, free and safe spaces in public in an already congested, rapidly growing metropolitan city. Two of my interlocutors separately quoted “গাড়ির চেয়ে গাজার Cখায়া ভালো” which translates to weed smoke is better than car smoke. When there’s the cultural and social restrictions which stem from several parts of an individual’s life. If there is something that is causing mental strain on a person, whether that be class issues, poverty, lack of social acceptance, conflict with family and society and so on, the larger society, including the state do nothing to help address these issues, especially the ones that have roots in systemic oppression. The actors of my research who identified with gender and sexual minorities directly linked their cannabis use as a coping mechanism for their mental health concerns, which stem from their experience of feeling unsafe and cornered by larger society. Further, the Bangladeshi government continues to uphold strict surveillance in public life, making citizens feel unsafe and under scrutiny. The family also quite commonly reinforces religious, cultural and societal standards of expectations including norms regarding marriage, family/procreation and career/employment, to name a few aspects. People in their 20’s especially are in a transitional state in their lives and facing pressure to conform from the state, family, peers and so on, when it comes to academia, religion, etc. This is exemplified for people with minority identities who face oppression on multiple levels on a daily basis, like queer folx, women and non-conforming individuals. Drug policing is a very real mental health issue, as the person who is self-medicating using substances like cannabis that are illegal, this adds to their anxieties. When people are already using weed to cope, all the secrecy that needs to be maintained and the stigma around self-medicating, mental health and drug use do not help their conditions or make it easier for them to avail the substance’s benefits. Whatever people’s reasons for consumption are, treating cannabis use like a crime

adds to the problem of those who use it to deal with their realities and adds to shame that already make people feel like criminals and “druggies”, with a further layer of guilt and questioning that builds on these existing anxieties.

Circle formation:

The first circle I participated in for this thesis was at a mutual friend’s place. He shares a flat with four of his other university classmates, making their house a central gathering place for university friends as it close to campus. It was one of those houses where people always came and went, it was never just the flatmates. Since most of them were stoners anyway, it was extremely common for people to come over and find themselves in between two people they may not know smoking up. Since there are no parents in the house, smoking could take place indoors, anywhere, making it easy to hide from landlords and prying neighbours. The people who occupied that space varied; each of the flatmates had friends over regularly and their friends brought theirs and so on. It was common for the house to be full of people, no one person connecting everyone in the circle. They all belonged to the same socioeconomic class usually, as most of them were university students (not necessarily of the same one). The average circle was 5-7 people, going up as much as 20 on particular days, like public holidays. Smoking up took place at all hours of the day, as sleepovers were common; people would smoke up in the evening after the day of classes, in the early morning after an all-nighter or bender or generally whenever they could get their hands on it. Cigarettes and alcohol were quite common too. Yaba was relatively more expensive and had to be planned for, but it was more common to just smoke weed by itself as opposed to doing any of the other ones as a standalone.

The interesting thing about this house was that even though people did not necessarily know each other, the shared space doubled as a weed sanctuary, especially for those smoking up at home was out of the question. The topic of conversation ranged from sports and politics to academia and university gossip. As long as there was a joint being passed around, the conversation flowed. People made jokes about others who sneakily hoard the joints, poking fun and trying to get them to pass it. The gender of the people in the house did not matter, as a result, the women who smoked up were not ‘othered’ by the male host or his masculine peers. And the number of women in the house were also pretty high, as in all of the circles I’ve participated in, the ratio of women:men was nearly equal here. It was also here that I heard the following weed-related proverb: “গাজা খািব রাজার মেতা” which translates to ~~the~~

weed like a king'. This proverb, in my experience, has been most commonly used when someone is trying to take a drag of a joint that is nearing the front end of the roach. It is unclear why or how this proverb came to be, but it is rumoured that since the end of the joint is where all the tar from the tobacco go and stay put, it is particularly unhealthy to be smoking that part.

Another interesting circle was much smaller. Two people, who have been together romantically for almost a year but have been hooking up for longer, let's call them Tai and Ray. Tai is a queer, trans* non-binary woman and Ray is her heterosexual partner. She started smoking up when she got to university, saying if she had found it sooner, it would have made high school a lot more bearable. Ray was not her introduction, but it was with him, that she become a hardcore stoner. Learning to roll better, scoring for a shared stash and smoking up when they met everyday. This stoner couple incorporates weed into their daily life, but also uses it as a way to enhance their relationship. "When I spent days indoors in my room, barely getting out of bed because I was so done with life, he would come over and make me his signature huge joints. He named them the most masculine things like after football players, with one of the biggest called 'machismo'." It also helped their sex lives; "it helps me get out of my head and focus on my own pleasure, it helps me feel, in general." They told me stories of smoking up while having sex, on trips and in public, all of which they took a separate interest in.

The placemaking aspect of circle formation includes basically how my actor group interacts with cannabis, which can be broken down into three basic stages: acquiring the cannabis products (colloquially known as "scoring"), preparing it for consumption, which includes knowing how to deal with tools (which also have to be collected) through which it can be used and finally, consumption. Weed is widely available in Dhaka city, with dealers all over the country bringing in different strains of cannabis and traveling across districts, in order for supply to meet the demand. As the state continues their drug crackdown and the general election is nearing (Baldwin & Paul, 2018), at the time of interviews, scoring weed becomes more precarious and dangerous. And while the various strains of cannabis make weed accessible across socioeconomic classes, whether or not one is able to "score" weed may also be dependant on social connections. Men are more likely to know dealers, and some middle class youth are willing to pay more money for better quality weed or 'stuff' that isn't laced with harder drugs, which is a common concern. In my ethnography, I have found that who

you know in this city can determine what kind of or how frequently one is able to procure and consume weed. This is not only because friends may hook others up with dealers or “score” for them but also, as most people’s households are not safe spaces to consume weed, the friends’ houses or neighbourhoods where it is possible to do so with minimum hassle tends to be where those circles of friends or acquaintances usually meet up. In these cases, the supply or “stash” (as it is known) is usually shared with people occupying these spaces, by splitting costs and responsibility for scoring. When the stash is finished, the person whose supply it was is said to be “dry”, there is no word for when the stash is full or the person has just scored.

Dealers usually find customers through word of mouth, and it is possible to have ‘regulars’ with whom relationships are built. Discounts may be offered for old customers, regular buyers and those who buy in bulk, or to buy in credit, for which the relationship requires a certain level of trust, that one would not expect from such interactions. This part of the process works like any economic transaction, as the substance is called ‘মাল’ (maal) ~~is~~ referred to in these interactions, which is the Bangla word for product. However, beyond the financial aspect of this relationship, it is possible for the consumer to develop a relationship with their dealer in which they care about their wellbeing. I witnessed as a group of friends whose dealer’s (presumably fake) name came up in the newspaper as one of the people the government killed in a ‘crossfire’, and the ensuing worry showed me that my interlocutors cared about their dealers as people, even if they did not know much about them, and were not only concerned with their need for supply. And the fact that the english-speaking youth call their distributor dealers, like in english-speaking countries, speaks to the fact that the urban middle class youth’s linguistic habits are influenced by international media, like television and film.

Gender:

When it comes to scoring in the city, it is not as easy for female cannabis users the same way it is for the men. One of my female interlocutors, Richita professed that she felt a sense of accomplishment when “scoring” by herself for the first time, even though when it comes to dealers, there are both men and women dealers operating in some of the busiest neighbourhoods in town. This sentiment of independence was echoed by other female-identifying users, especially those who started smoking through male partners or friends. As it was harder for the women to exist in public spaces in Dhaka city anyways,

carrying out an activity like scoring an illegal drug was extra scary, and I found that it did not bear the same sense of achievement for the male participants. While scoring is difficult for all youth, men are more likely to be stopped at police checkpoints throughout the city and have their bags and bodies checked, which happens less often with women.

While the cannabis scene is male dominated, young middle class women who smoke up are not few in number by any measure. University students tend to smoke more than girls in high school, regardless of age, as most get more mobility when they get to undergraduate level, allowing them to access and come across more spaces participating in this lifeworld. The “stoner girl” trope builds on the ‘problem child’ and ‘bad girl’ labels, making women who smoke up more likely to get punished by their parents and society for being involved in drug use, while men are judged differently for the same practice. It is assumed in many households that men will outgrow their drug use when they grow up, get employment and are no longer a student, so their weed consumption is considered to be temporary.

In contrast, if a female university student is ‘caught’ with weed in any capacity, their entire personality is questioned, they are labeled as a ‘rotten egg’ and many parents tighten their disciplinary grip on their daughters. Some heterosexual men have also a kind of preference for women who smoke up as they may find them to be in tune with their supposed open-mindedness which low-key plays on the fact that women are assumed to be conservative and ‘pure’. The ‘bad stoner girl’ works both ways, as women can be found more or less attractive by their heterosexual male peers; some men do not want their partners being involved in cannabis use, even if they are, and some men explicitly want partners who can share the same lifestyle, so that they don’t have to hide this practice from them. Here, the woman can either be the dream girl that smokes up with them, happy to indulge in recreational use, with bonus points for being able to assist in the process of acquiring, preparing and rolling weed and share that small workload of being designated roller in a group, for example. Or they can be perceived as impure and undesirable, ironically because they are thought to be “promiscuous” and somewhat rebellious. The connotations that women who smoke up are more likely to be sexually active, adds to the ‘bad girl/pure woman’ dichotomy.

It is to be noted that the stereotype that men always have to be the point of entry into this lifeworld is untrue, as the handful of women I have found who started smoking up with their male romantic partners, but their relationship to weed is not contained in these partnerships

only. The women informants were more likely to be able to access weed due to their male friends or partners, so that serves as their entry sometimes. However, these women develop their own relationship with the drug, as they go on to smoke up with their friend circles, that may be all-women, or by themselves. Learning how to score, roll and smoke up especially if they are not already cigarette smokers, the number of which also holds no correlation to the women who smoke up. And then there's the women who started smoking up by themselves, with friends or other family members, like siblings or young aunt/uncles.

Tulshi who has been been making edibles in Dhaka for the past 3 years had her first experience smoking up with her older sister, who wanted her to learn in a safe space as she would eventually go to university and be exposed to the local drug scene. Now that Tulshi, her sister and another flatmate live together, they face a lot of trouble as female tenants, constantly under scrutiny. So, when they had some neighbours come over, they discussed amongst themselves whether they could disclose parts of their lives with these people, contemplating telling them about the weed, but realizing quickly that risking that kind of information for a friendship could lead to them getting evicted.

Bangladeshi middle class society on a broader level can be seen manifested in "circles" as well, as the interlocutors who identified as women told me how their gendered experience of society can extend to the weed based lifeworld. For example, when it comes to taking care of someone in the circle, women are expected to come forward and take responsibility. Women in general are less likely to be a part of this lifeworld, due to many societal limitations, with men more often being comfortable in situations regarding drug use, however, once in the lifeworld, it is not usually a factor that determines how a member is treated within the setting, as "circles" have that kind of neutrality, on the whole, excluding some of the microaggressions addressed. The subcultural patterns work the same way, for the most part, for all genders, but their positions are structurally different as they would be in societal hierarchy. What does gain a person capital in the lifeworld is skills and knowledge on procuring, preparing and consuming weed. In some cases, women and younger smokers are assumed to be inexperienced and patronized. For example, Rishita told me about the time she was smoking through a glass bong, the person whose bong it was, was providing instructions to her, even though she had not indicated that it was her first time (in fact, it was not). They were not at that person's house, but at a mutual friend's house so it could not be viewed as hospitality. Further, it is not possible to interpret the spaces in which female-identifying

stoners operate, without understanding how they are socially located within the larger societal context of sex and gender structuring.

“ধরিয়ে চুদ!/Light it up!”:

One of the most significant activities in Dhaka’s weed culture centers around the “joint”, which has its own set of rituals, customs and rules. The preparing or “rolling” process has many steps. Regardless of where and who one is with, it is courtesy among weed smokers to help in the process of preparing the weed for consumption. The first stage is prepping the dried weed, sometimes called ‘grinding’; taking out the seeds and stems and breaking it down into smaller pieces by hand so it can be packed into the roll of a paper cylinder. Some of my interlocutors also add dried tobacco leaves from cigarettes to make the joint burn more effectively, colloquially called “suga” (from “sugar”), or as my main informant, Mridha coined the term “chuka”, which some of their friends have picked up in their vocabularies as well. As these terms are socially constructed and verbally shared, the word “chuka” is a random nickname that gained traction among the participants in some of the circles the original user has presence within. Particular argot separates weed use from other drug-based lifeworlds too, as brown sugar is another (locally used) name for heroin. These terms exist in the minds and on the tongues of its users, and as its knowledge can identify someone who is a part of the lifeworld, it is never practiced around people who are not. As knowledge of these argot are passed on in social interaction with more experienced users, this is a way for new users to gain accessibility and acceptance within circles. Correct use of terms have to be backed up by knowing further customs and norms though.

There is contention of whether joints are better mixed with tobacco (sometimes done to increase the amount of mixture that can be stuffed into joints) or without (known as “raw”). Then, the ‘rolling papers’ used to pack the weed into a cigarette-like construction has to be acquired and held in a way so that weed can be stuffed into the cylinder with the filter renamed as a ‘roach’, which is another borrowed word from international media. This can be made out of any material that can be manipulated into a functioning roach, through which weed can be smoked freely. Dhaka sells rolling paper in many tobacco stores (eg. roadside “tong”) where other smoking products like lighters, are available. The size of the paper determines how the joint burns and how much weed the joint can hold. As papers come in different sizes, how big a joint one rolls depends on many factors, eg. how many people are sharing the joint, how much weed is available and what the occasion is, for example. Joya

and Protiti told me stories of how on a stoner's birthday, it is common to pamper the birthday person with joints or weed-related paraphernalia. Joya's friend circle put their birthday friend in the middle of the circle, had them light up regardless of who made the joint and spontaneously making up a new custom; to ensure that the person they were celebrating got the most puffs, each person passed to the person in the middle after every turn, thus making them very buzzed in a short span of time. On another birthday, the friends stuck a joint onto the birthday cake, to be lit up after the cake is cut.

Rolling joints can be a matter of personality. The kind of joints you know how to make or choose or learn how to make says something about that person as a smoker and a "stoner". Just as compliments are paid to the chef, in a circle, when someone rolls a good joint, others will compliment the joint. Commonly, this takes place when the joint has been made 'smooth', meaning it is easy and comfortable to smoke. Then there's the opposite of a smooth joint, which can be described as 'tight' as air gets caught within the joint and makes it burn erratically. Rafa claimed that rolling a joint is a very visceral pleasure, as you get to play with the material with your hands and in a social setting especially, many of my interlocutors have told me that it gives their hands something to do, if they are restless or socially anxious and in cases of smoking with people you are not particularly close to, gives you a role and purpose to be in that space, the mutual goal for everyone being "smoking up", which is what smoking weed is known as.

The state of being intoxicated on cannabis, the "high" is a state of mind that can feel uniquely different for each person. The time period when someone is high, is sometimes called a "trip", influenced by North American and European television media. This trip usually accentuates and amplifies what the person is feeling or their state of mind at the point, as with other intoxicants like LSD.

As Nora explains: "weed increases a feeling if it is already there, but it does not create what it not there". It tends to be a feeling of heightened consciousness while simultaneously creating the sensation of being in the midst of a haze. The THC in the weed makes the person intoxicated, and is responsible for the "high" feeling while the CBD in the weed is a way for weed users to get their bodies to get to a more relaxed state. Biologically, these two compounds together create a sensation that transcends the "upper/downer" drug dichotomy as chemically these two general compounds have contrasting but somehow congruent effect within the body. Different strains may have different levels of the compounds, however,

which can be but is not clinically manipulated in labs in Bangladesh like it is in other countries where cannabis is mass produced, or part of a legal market. How a person experiences that consciousness is affected by the “economy, politics, society, industry, pollution, the police, upbringing”, etc (Hall & Jefferson, 1976). Many more factors go in why the person feels as they do when intoxicated under cannabis.

One of the main sensations is the focus on the present time. In neoliberal capitalist society, time is equated with productivity and money, but for the person who just took a hit, as the conventional notions of time break down, they are given the freedom to feel the moment and think about nothing else. In more than one circle, I heard someone say: “Oh, wow, has it only been ten minutes? Felt like an hour has passed.” along with “Whoa, it’s already been an hour? I feel like I was just lost in my thoughts for a few minutes there!” These unconventional thought patterns can manifest in more specific or deeper focus, like finding the unusual in common situations. As Miner (1956) described the Nacirema, he described the act of teeth-cleaning and dentistry as an activity stripped of the social meaning the practice has in North American society. Similarly, during a session, someone stoned may look at their own society as far removed from their socially constructed meaning and uncover other truths about their lives and surroundings, by asking questions that usually start “have you ever thought about how..?”

The theme of playfulness was one commonly found within circles, even if not everyone is friends prior. The subjective experience depends on the dose, potency of strain, the environment in which it is taken, the mood of the user, their familiarity with cannabis and to an extent, their expectations of the experience. Then, there is also the matter of becoming a different version of oneself when intoxicated. Similarly to how people claim they have drunk personalities, the same thing applies to people’s ‘high personality’, which is what they are like under that drug’s influence. This point of view usually comes from the idea that intoxication lowers inhibition and thus, allowing a person to not have to perform according to societal rituals and social limitations.

Sociality:

The most pertinent feature of the lifeworld is the social aspect surrounding drug use, particularly the specificities of social weed use which provides insight into how weed use creates a specific lifeworld for its’ members. When it comes to the social organization around a weed use-based lifeworld and the practices that the Dhaka middle class scene constitutes of,

my concern is less with the substantive details of the activities it entails than “with the discovery of those features of its organization which would warrant its characterization by participants in particular ways” (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Concerning the act of consuming the weed, smoking up with other people entails social smoking etiquette, which interestingly includes the ability to retreat from the sociability of the setting as people have different reactions or intentions to smoking.. Not only are joints offered the same way cigarettes are, there are expectations and rituals involved. People who have weed on them are expected to share, for example, it is offered as hospitality when guests arrive at a person’s house or someone may bring their own stash as a way to contribute to social occasions like parties or trips.

The passing of the joint in the “circle”, which is an imaginary construction is a highly ritualized and routine procedure in which customs include, the person who rolls the joint (regardless of whose stash it is) gets to “light up” (lighting the joint first) and unspoken rules that the joint will be offered to everyone present in that space who wishes to participate. There is no competitiveness when it comes to sharing the joint, as in order to create equal standing for everyone, hoarding the joint is heavily discouraged. Sometimes, each time the joint circles around, the person who may have refused the joint will be offered it on every turn, thus giving them the opportunity to join the circle, same as will the person who has entered late. Sometimes, the passing of the joint in the circle will be counter-clockwise (“right hand pass”), this latter custom seems to stem from more European influences so it has less prevalence across the whole of the middle class. More universal customs include rules like “puff puff pass” or the local term “নিমাই” (pronounced ‘nimai’), these determine the number of “puffs” a person takes before passing the joint. I have not been able to ascertain how the word “নিমাই” came to be or came to mean ‘taking a single puff before passing’, which is done to increase the speed at which passing occurs and usually, done to ensure that the weed is shared more evenly and people are intoxicated in a shorter amount of time, leading to a more concentrated “high” for some. Nimai also takes place if there is a limited amount of weed on hand.

Addiction does not seem to be much of a concern for my focus group, as they drift in and out of circles, their weed habits changing due to time, mood, finances and relationship with other stoner friends. The terms “গাজাখোর” (gajakhor) or “গাঞ্জাখোর” (ganjgakhor) which mean weed-addict can be used among friends endearingly or can be thought of as an insult,

based on who's saying it to them. Richi told me how when a particular ex-boyfriend she didn't get along with jokingly called her a 'gajakhor', she really took it to heart. She found it hypocritical of him since it was during their relationship that she started consuming weed more often than she was before. However, the same person told me how she used to hate the smell of cigarette smoke as a teenager, and when she now hangs out with friends from that time period, they all get together and smoke up, usually at her house, then usually joking about how that person who couldn't stand to be in the room is now quite comfortable with weed, sometimes calling her the same word. Here, it serves as more of a recognition from her friends that she had changed her attitude toward something, instead of poking at her.

Stereotypes of stoners also include someone taking up weed after some life event that was emotionally difficult, like heartbreak, or becoming paranoid after smoking up. Arian told me that he felt like he was being watched, whenever he was stoned in public, and that people could tell he was high. This kind of experience is common in Dhaka city, where people do have the tendency to watch youth closely, quick to attribute any 'deviant' behaviour to drug abuse. While there is some truth to these stereotypes, on the whole, people start consuming weed for a number of reasons, not merely as the result of a bad life situation. While for some people it may aggravate their anxiety, which is usually amped up by the fact that they know they are doing something illegal and stigmatized, and cause them to feel paranoia, for others, cannabis serves as a way to self-medicate for their anxiety disorders and relieve their anxiety symptoms, as three of my interlocutors attested to. For many of these users, figuring out what their threshold is, for tolerance (in terms of how much they are using and mapping how it makes them feel) or what strain works for them, or what they want to achieve through smoking up vastly improves their chance of having a more informed and safe experience with weed.

When it comes to class issues, the middle class can afford a more relaxed weed lifeworld than the working class, who also consume weed at high rates. For the working class, it may also be for leisure but mostly it is an occupational practice, as many vehicle drivers will get intoxicated in order to be able to spend long hours working or on the road. However, it is not uncommon for middle class university students to smoke up with strangers on the streets of Dhaka. In areas like Dhaka University (particularly around student hubs like the Teacher Student Centre), students share weed with other people, creating an interesting class interaction, in which their differences are put on hold while they are part of a circle together.

This one time, I was out with my friends in Dhanmondi lake, it was evening time and one of my friends wanted to smoke up since it was empty where we were sitting and the moon was shining, they wanted to admire it intoxicated as the sun went down further. While my friend was grinding the weed, a man approached us. The entire group freezes fearing repercussions, instead the man chuckled, gave us a nod to indicate that he was not going to rat us out and came close to our group. The queer people in the group instantly froze, since they did not necessarily have positive experiences with random men in public. He stood with us because he wanted to smoke with us, but sensing the others' discomfort, my friends politely took leave. This is one instance out of many; on the other hand, Nino, a student of Dhaka University who lives in the residential halls on campus. He's used to regularly walking up to people who were smoking up on campus and joining them. This is a rather common occurrence, regardless of class. However, this is easier for men to do in Dhaka city, regardless of the neighbourhood.

Although the ritualization of the joint and circle may seem trivial, the practice is crucial to understanding the social organization around cannabis use. There is a usually sense of camaraderie among smokers and especially, if there is a new smoker, attitudes towards that person differ, however, in general, most "circles" in my experience try to help the newbie smoker learn how to inhale the smoke in order to get "high". There is also the matter of aftercare, in which, if a person has a "bad high/trip", gets sick for some reason, need help going home or if it is their first time, people in the circle assume responsibility for taking care of them, as they are bounded by the shared experience. The rituals and etiquette within the circle depend on the members within, their relationship to each other and several other factors. The structure of the circle makes it so that as weed is treated as a social object with communal effects, wherein weed is quite freely offered, consumed and shared. How consumption, especially in settings like the "circle", affects people can be broken down into different conceptions of weed use found through my ethnographic research. Through my interviews and participant observation, I have found there to be three basic classifications of weed use among my interlocutors. The first level is functioning or maintaining general wellbeing as a person, this may be through help in basic, daily needs like building an appetite, helping fall asleep, manage pain, etc.

"Munchies" is the appropriate term for the feeling of hunger after smoking up, this is usually followed by eating together if the circle consists of friends, who do get 'the munchies'.

Smoking up helped Aria with her loss of appetite when she was in depressive episodes; “when the idea of getting food down my thought made me sick, I would smoke up and try to eat as I knew I needed to not starve myself”. The people who menstruate in my ethnography also noted using weed to self-medicate when they had menstrual cramps, as for a couple of them, it is the most effective method of menstruation-related pain management. Due to its’ immediate effect, the high can work like an antidepressant, in lieu of access to support services or mental health services. And due to the range of prices weed is sold at (anywhere from 20 tk to 1200 tk for between 10-25 grams), it can be used as a regular coping strategy, as especially compared to the two other popular narcotics, alcohol and yaba tablets, weed is cheaper and more widely accessible.

The second level is coping or dealing with particular emotions, situations or ailments. This can be related to my interlocutors who smoke more when they are in difficult situations, for example, going through heartbreak, family pressures or undergoing a depressive episode, especially if they have a chronic neurological condition wherein they can gauge their state of health and wellbeing. The third level is the most widely associated with weed due to the psychoactive elements in THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which is enhancement, in terms of spirituality, mood or social occasions like parties, concerts and outings. For my group of interest, weed is most often seen as a form of enhancement in terms of leisure, wherein people smoke up together before going to see live music, attend events and just relaxing with friends in a social setting. Of course, there is overlap in all these levels and none of them are mutually exclusive. For example, for someone who needs social interaction to maintain a level of wellbeing, but finds themselves to be unmotivated to go out, due to depression, may find energy needed to leave the house and socialize. It is possible and quite common among my interlocutor group that people meet, become friends or form relationships based on smoking together. Further social interaction takes place beyond the “circle”.

Consumption of weed is a choice, in which there are many more reasons why someone would choose to take cannabis. Those who opt out have varying reasons too, eg. they do not like how their body reacts to being high, they do not appreciate feeling out of control, or they do not like the person they become when they’re high. There are also many methods through which weed can be consumed. While the “joint” is my centre of focus, due to its’ special social formation and primary use by the middle class, other methods include water pipes and bongs (hookah type instruments with a water chamber), edibles (eg. weed tea, milk,

brownies, etc) and “sticks” (cigarette filters that have replaced the tobacco with a weed mixture). But when it comes to the sociality of weed, contextual variability determines how, where and why social and spatial relations intersect in the places and ways that they do. There are broad and complex ritual modes of communication, in which individual actors are articulated to a larger social imaginary.

The intersection of social spaces and social relations can be also examined through the three components that make up Henri Lefebvre’s analysis of the production of space: spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 2014). Spatial practices are the methods of practice that are produced and reproduced within particular spaces or locations, which determine the characteristics of each of these social formations. The spatial practice of smoking up with others ensures a certain degree of social cohesion. In terms of social space and each member’s relationship to that space, this cohesion implies specific levels of competence and performance relative to others who occupy that space. Representations of space include the forms of knowledge and practices that organize and represent space in particular forms, as in, the signs, codes, and other mannerisms that determine how that space conceptualizes and attaches meaning to their practices. Representational spaces or spaces of representation include the imaginative construction of collectively experienced sites, like the imaginary “circle” within which a form of cannabis is consumed and shared, which embody complex symbolisms linked to the underground nature of this “subcultural” social life.

A subset of cultural capital, “subcultural capital” is cultivated forms of knowledge that manifests through practices, symbols, behaviour and argot (Stahl, 1999). This can be a form of being in the know, which includes knowing how to inhale smoke, roll a joint, “score” weed and so on. These types of knowledge are not formal, they are learned or acquired through practice and exposure, and in many cases, help from peers and other members, regardless of your relationship or closeness to them. The mode of community building around drug use, especially when smoking up, is not necessarily built on mutual acquaintance. Lifestyle communities that are not geographically based but “symbolically, aesthetically and thematically located "territories" in social space” (Pfadenhauer, 2005). The affiliation to scenes such as these is not determined by ascriptive personal attributes but by stylistic aspects of behaviour, communication, consumption, ways of thinking, which go beyond traditional forms of social integration like family, neighbourhood or religious association. “The

ambivalence of integration and distinction, of difference and unity, is a constitutive element of such post-traditional communities” (Pfadenhauer, 2005).

Conclusion:

In relation to societal conformist ideals regarding any kind of drug use, the individual accounts of consuming weed in Dhaka, which I have collected via interviews explain how weed use thrives in spite of the state or society’s attitudes towards drug use. These individuals subscribe to the lifeworld for a myriad of reasons, however, one underlying connection I have found is that the lifeworld or the community that stems from it allow the person to escape neoliberal expectations of Bengali urban middle class life. Each of the interpretations I have found from my interlocutors captures an aspect of the truth, as the motive behind smoking weed suggests the methodical character of the actor which corresponds to the kind of person one is and what getting high or the act of smoking with others accomplishes for them, at that point in time. It's less about the drugs and more about the people who use them. Their dispositions in life determines the reasons people choose to use substances like weed. Influenced by how weed is viewed as a societal object and how society views those who use drugs, personality traits like curiosity, propensity for risk taking behaviour, rebelliousness, etc. all influence the capacity to which people smoke up, or how their consumption manifests. For some, it holds more social value and allows connections and intimacy, for others, it adds to the value of some of their favourite activities like listening to music, having sex, relaxing on a trip, etc. Personal disposition is the main reason behind cannabis use, not merely categories like gender, class, etc. as drug use takes place beyond such classification. And youth culture is inherently seen as non-political, because it has been defined that way by larger institutions of family and state, who do not view their values as having political or social legitimacy. As a result, it is not possible to understand the “drug problem” Bangladesh seems to enjoy discussing without looking into the individuals that make up this lifeworld, the political implications of their lives and the healing that takes place within.

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