

Handwritten text in a stylized, cursive script, possibly representing the name "Sally" or "Sally" written twice. The top line shows the letters "S", "A", "L", "L", "Y" in a bold, thick, black font. The bottom line shows the letters "S", "A", "L", "L", "Y" in a similar style, but with more pronounced loops and flourishes. The overall appearance is that of a signature or a decorative nameplate.

My deepest gratitude to Abla for the unwavering guidance & Thank You JJ, for the moral and technical support throughout the writing process of this paper, and to my friends and family for allowing me to write about what's in my guts.

DISCLAIMER: I AM NOT AN ADDICT, I THINK

I never used any kind of drugs while living in the Philippines, my name and my heritage are an embodiment of colonialism, a Filipino-Japanese-Spanish descent. Now, my body has been colonized; by substances that in effect have made me feel high. I've sat, stood, cycled, danced, and sang with heightened senses and altered perception. When I am high on cannabis, the blood in me ousing-deafening with every pump from the arterial structure. At every beat, the universe becomes me, ever converging. In one gulp all that is perceived swallowed down the guts like a can-pop-fizz-bubbling. I become the past continuously thriving in the present.

When writing about substances, I refer to drug(s) as illegal psychoactive substances that lack cultural sanction and produce perceptible effects on the consciousness (Jay, 2010).

To ground this paper, I am a Filipino in Amsterdam and have been a cannabis user since I moved. That is my trigger. I've often felt conflicted about substance use because where I come from, there is an epidemic of substance abuse that arguably most Filipinos see as the problem. Cannabis is one of the most commonly used psychoactive drugs worldwide (UNODC, 2022b). A cannabis user in the Philippines faces six months of rehabilitation as a first offense, 6-12 years imprisonment as a second offense, and for a dealer or supplier, is life-imprisonment or the death penalty (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (Republic Act No. 9165). | FAOLEX, n.d.).

IN MY GUTS

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Bachelor Thesis

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OLON...RLD

THE PROBLEM



THE PROBLEM

In the Philippines, substance use or to say drug consumption is perceived as a problem. It is associated mainly with addiction and it echoes of criminality and inhumanness, and over the years there is a ‘War on Drugs’ which exacerbated the problem (Jay, 2010). This term was first popularized in the media following President Richard Nixon’s press conference in 1971 as a global campaign on the illegal use and distribution of drugs, as he declared substance use as ‘public enemy number one’. A term later adopted by Philippine media, which started with Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte’s anti-drug campaign on June 30, 2016, till today, under the new administration of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr, son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos (JOHNSON & FERNQUEST, 2018).

The anti-drug campaign focuses on the eradication of drugs in the country. The first six months under Duterte resulted in extra judicial killings, the killing of suspected drug users, dealers, and lords, which in the eyes of the majority-of-the people, are simply addicts and outlaws. The Philippine National Police admitted to having killed 6,200 people, and Human Rights activists insist that the number of deaths is more than what has been reported. Throughout Duterte’s six-year term, the killing was relentless, extrajudicial, unprovoked, and decriminalized. Decriminalized in the sense that Duterte himself approved of the killings and “If you know any addicts, go ahead kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful”. He insists that the drugs have led to a criminal-corrupt-driven society that started with the use, which eventually destroy the country in the future. With a nationalistic view, he stated, “I am a president of a sovereign state, and we have long ceased to

be a colony. I do not have any master, except the Filipino people. Nobody but nobody” (McManus, 2016).

I am not new to the concept of illegal drugs. There is a history of drug abuse in my own family, once we had meth addicts. Grasping what a drug addict means is quite hard for me these days, as I could be addicted to drugs, sex, or anything that hijacks a person’s pleasure or reward circuits to wanting more. But as I look thoroughly back at the problem, substance use is neither bad nor good but is wholly dependent on the intention of use. To argue that this is not the problem but rather the conditions that led to its misuse or abuse, we look at substance use concerning addiction. I refer to *Against the Drug Cure Model: Addiction, Identity, and Pharmaceuticals* (Tekin et al., 2017). Where addiction is a person-level phenomenon, as opposed to a sub-personal brain chemistry phenomenon. It said that addiction affects the person as a whole, in his or her complexity as an embodied agent in the social world, which cannot simply put a brain on a body’s shoulders (it is not only neurological). However, to your mind alone, your addictive behavior itself is a narrative. I was born in Cebu, Philippines in 1998. Around this year, the Philippines celebrated the centennial of its independence from being a colony. I’d like to contest the problem in the context of what I call the Colonial World, tapping into the legacies of colonialism in the Philippines and connecting its continuities or the impact of events from the past to the present. I believe this to be relevant as interpersonal relationships, social and physical environment, and personal identity are a factor(s) that cause or lead to substance use.

COLONIAL WORLD

When I talk about colonialism, it first brings me to this thought of ableness, which makes me think about power.

The power I hold as a native English-speaking, mixed-race Asian, a Filipino. Believe it, colonialism has brought me good things, but it has also given me the opposite. I grew up privileged to the point where not only was I provided with the necessities, but also had opportunities that most people don't have, like being able to live elsewhere other than the country of origin. I would like to clarify that I am a migrant seeking the best opportunities out there since I wasn't forced to flee my country but had chosen to do so.

In contrast, colonialism also breathes displacement. As it is known, colonialism is a practice that involves the acquisition of land or so to say a civilization with a main function; the extraction of economic benefits from the colonized - it is the control of the life of people as assets in cultural, economic, and social spheres. I want to highlight three Philippine colonial events that have a profound hold on its history and people. These events namely: The Advent of Catholicism, The American Way of Life, and The Rape of Manila. Although these events are what prompt Filipino solidarity for the now. There is the link to trauma, which in this case, is the displacement of Filipino lives. It is found that 70% of substance abusers have a history of trauma exposure (Khoury et al., 2010).

THE ADVENT OF CATHOLICISM

Before the advent of Catholicism, the islands had already absorbed the influences of Hinduism and Buddhism from neighboring countries. Animism was the main practice my ancestors held belief in, that all beings, human and non-human are imbued with divinity. In 1521, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan came to Sugbu (Cebu). He brought with him the crown and the cross where for 333 years, the Philippines was a Spanish colony. Las Islas Filipinas, named after King Philip II of Spain. During this colonial period, the arrival of Catholicism did not

only convert but enslaved and exploited Filipinos. Within this period, a colonial and feudal system evolved where Catholicism was the overriding cultural force. In this system, forms of abuse committed towards Filipinos, and to name a few are: labor, sexual abuse, and limits in education. The Spanish colonial administrators and friars carried out these abuses. Regardless of their age, Filipinos were forced to work as slaves in the development of Spanish settlements, where women were also sexually abused by Spanish settlers. Resistance meant more suffering and death during this colonial period. There was whipping, kneeling, hanging, and sacking. These acts of torture also occurred within the education system as a form of discipline. An education system curtailed to prevent retaliation and resistance. And catechetical instructions were used to hold social, political, cultural, and moral power over the people in the forms of the confessional box, and rituals of absolution. These were the ways to control and legitimize a system that was meant to embed inferiority (Staal, 2013).

"I came from an all-boys catholic and technology school in my primary to secondary stage of education, where such methods my body also experienced; a Roman Catholic Gay, one of the many." (Goyenechea, 2022).

In 1896, the Philippines declared independence, backed by the American promise of an independent Filipino republic. Then the Spanish-American war of 1898 ensued, and both claimed the main powers in the islands. However, the United States did not keep its promise but occupied the country until 1946.

THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE

What happened under the American occupation is that the US imposed its own colonial rule on the Philippines, picking up what the Spanish left, resorting to brutal military force, and genocide, wiping at least 10 percent of the

country's population. However, what they did was different than the pure plunder of the Spanish rule instead, the US colonial rule was of modern imperialist power, which meant investing capital. To extract super profits from the colony. To assert economic and political control, the US integrated its educational system with the further development of public school systems with the English language as its medium of instruction. Schools indoctrinated the 'American way of life', adopting ideas, attitudes, and tastes that reciprocate the commodities of the US.

This "Americanization" meant adopting western philosophy, diminishing the patriotic and progressive ideas and values that gave impetus to the revolution against the Spanish colonial power in the country. By 1936, the Commonwealth government was established as a neocolonial arrangement with the US. An agreement under pretences resulted in a suppressed yet profitable capitalized economy (Staal, 2013).

In December of 1941, Imperial Japan invaded the Commonwealth of the Philippines as a strategic attack against the US, 10 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Amidst WWII, the country served as the battleground for the US and Japan. From 1942 to 1946, the Philippines was a Japanese-occupied country. However, Filipino and American underground resistance groups were emerging throughout the landscape. But these were disparate groups with different political agendas - guerillas, such as Hukbalahap, a commonly known communist guerilla movement comprised of Filipinos of all backgrounds, from peasant farmers, workers union, communist party members, and laborers. During this period, the Philippines and its people, especially those who sympathized with the allied forces or questioned the occupation were subjected to atrocities of war: death marches, rape, beating, famine, and the destruction of the land.

THE 'RAPE OF MANILA'

In 1945 was one of these war atrocities. Manila had a dense population and was one of the last points of Japanese resistance, which was in the end, suppressed. But not before they slaughtered 100,000-500,000 inhabitants of the city. Men were skinned alive, stabbed with a bayonet, houses burnt intentionally, women and children raped in the streets, and Japanese soldiers even committed necrophilia. A massacre that came to a halt when the Japanese were completely eliminated (Staal, 2013). To say the colonial world has only brought trauma would be highly inaccurate. History is complex and dynamic. Without colonialism, Philippine civilization wouldn't have advanced the way it did. Catholicism brought values, and along with the physical restructuring of pueblos, villages then are now megacities. In the precolonial times, the islands were composed of different communities, and Spanish colonialism unified these communities under one political body, which is now the Philippines. Although much considerably shorter than the Spanish, the Americans' impact was very profound (to consider, *I am writing and thinking in English*). They brought their public systems and democracy.

Our colonial history indeed had shaped the cultural identity of the Philippines that is modern, Asian, and western in tradition, but has displaced or so to say is still displacing lives. Thus, I conform to the displacement that is rooted in an experience that is inherently traumatic' (Einashe et al., 2019).

Trauma is inherent in displacement, and the Philippines is a country that has gone through hundreds of years of colonization, from a Spanish to an American colony to a Japanese-occupied country. Colonialism still has a say in how Filipino bodies walk around the world, as Filipinx-Australian theater maker Jules Orcullo states (TEDx Talks, 2017).

I am fortunate to have not lived in these events, but a shared history is a shared trauma; it has different degrees and intensities that are unique to our own experiences. Where “*collective or cultural identity clarity is related to personal identity*” (Taylor & Osborne, 2010), p. 97).

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SOWN TRADITIONS

PLANTS
POLICIES AND TRADE

SOWN TRADITIONS

I remember my first hit of smoking a spliff. A spliff is a split between tobacco and weed rolled neatly like a lumpia roll, equally satisfying my guts. No one pressured me into doing it. Smoking weed just came about when I was a first-year architecture student. Smoking cigarettes wasn't helping with the stress that came along with the family expectations, and just the intensity of the study itself. I was buzzed out and high as a kite. I was aware I was high, and I was okay with it. In the Philippines, drugs are the devil doing, but keep in mind the devil was once an angel.

I'd like to refer to myself as an "unwilling addict" (Tekin et al., 2017). Accordingly, these are addicts who may actively seek or at least willingly accept help to alleviate their condition. The intuitive idea behind an addict's unwillingness is this: he is addicted; he knows he is addicted and recognizes the harmful consequences of being addicted, wants to avoid the consequences, and appreciates that doing so requires breaking the pattern (quitting, refraining, avoiding relapse).

Substance use, however, in a lot of cultures, is a practice that revolves around traditions. Our engagement with drugs as humans is effective without a beginning. Though the concept of it emerged in written history dating in a Sumerian clay tablet dating back to 2000 BC. In 1600 BC, in an Egyptian medical text, Ebers Papyrus which contains the anatomy of the poppy plant. Egyptians knew the works on the body; poppy juice is a remedy, a pain killer, and a sedative. The origin of plant-derived drugs in human cultures is a long-standing symbiosis. It is a tale of observance and copying habits from animals (Jay, 2010). We learned how to search without digging our noses into burnt ashes for emerging mushrooms and stuck out our tongues for a drop of poppy milk, a yellow sap, or morphine as a nip to make us purr and buzz. Getting high is nothing new to our ancestors

and not even to our animal antecedents. These nitrogen-based alkaloid compounds evolved throughout millions of years, extracted for a slap of oil and burnt for vapor, a consumption that is both medicinal and or recreational. The consumption of drugs is not just about getting high it also is about reinforcing cultural values, even if they're divisive, but not always. In South Pacific cultures, where ecstasy pills, 2cb, and such designer drugs are unknown, kava is drunk as part of a ritual and social interaction that is both symbolic and practical. Kava is a narcotic drink extracted from a large pepper plant, *Piper methysticum*, which is drunk fresh and is prepared by grinding and soaking the tubes or roots of the plants. When taken, it has a numbing effect from the peppery burn by which a head rush is felt (much like a sniff off a bottle of poppers); kava brings you to a trance. It is, however, an established cultural exchange for peace and prosperity among its users. It encourages positive social behaviors: generosity and sensitivity, cordial conversations, and comfortable silence (Jay, 2010).

There is also the chewing of betel nuts which most likely exist in many places around the world. Betel nuts are the produce of *Areca catechu*, a species of palm that grows in tropical Pacific Asia, and in parts of east Africa. It is known as the crimson addiction in the northern regions of the Philippines, as betel chewers are easily identified with their teeth rotten and in the crimson shade. What betel does is slightly heighten your senses, and hit you with an intensified nicotine-like rush and a buzz comparable to a warm hug and cup of coffee. Today in the Philippines, betel chewing is still one of the oldest addictions dating back to 3000 BC, which is closely related to the indigenous tribes. Its use is regulated, and its consumption in public is prohibited. Betel chewing is a recreational virtue sanctioned by centuries of tradition and is now known to be a carcinogen (Hiên, 2006).

The palm grows everywhere, as I recall. An untamed orchard that grows in the maimed concrete roads, beside leaning towers of beaten electrical posts, entangled with the electricity lines that have been unbrushed for decades causing blackouts in neighborhoods, and a said cause-of-fire in slums that have been on the way for gentrification. But what can you do when squatting gives a roof over your head, and betel chewing prevents you from going too much in your head?

On June 24, 2022, United Nations human rights experts called on the international community to bring an end to the so-called “War on drugs”, promoting drug policies that are heavily anchored on human rights. Based on the Philippine drug war alone, data shows the undermining of health and social well-being and the waste of public resources as the War on Drugs, continues to fail in the eradication of illegal substance use (End ‘War on Drugs’ and Promote Policies Rooted in Human Rights, n.d.). When looking at policies, the drug of choice for this topic is cannabis, it is necessary to look at the policies and trade before reflecting on its use as a Filipino in Amsterdam.

POLICIES AND TRADE

The global demand for cannabis has been soaring over the decades, and almost every region illicitly produces it. Its cultivation trend rose to more than 190 countries and territories at the start of the covid pandemic, and reported growth in indoor cultivation surpassed outdoor cultivation at the global level. Thus, cannabis cultivation reports have their limitations and rely on direct indicators (its cultivation or its eradication, and or production sites) or indirect indicators (the harvested and seized cannabis plants, and the origin it implicates). Indeed these would be insufficient in unraveling the extent of cultivation.

However, these indicators still point out to the countries where most likely substantial cultivation exists. Source countries for cannabis include the Philippines in South-East Asia, along with Thailand, Indonesia, and Laos. In Europe, the Netherlands is just one of the many (UNODC, 2022a).

Cannabis, in context, is illegal in the Philippines, but here in the Netherlands, it is under the soft drugs category (category II). This means that use, possession, and trade are forbidden under the Dutch Opium Act, however, it is openly tolerated for recreational use by official policy. The Dutch National guidelines allow recreational use through the coffeeshops where retail sale to its consumers is allowed as long as the following criteria are followed: no hard drugs (category I), no nuisance, no underage clientele, no over advertising, and no large quantities. Coffee shops allow the sale and possession of under 5 grams of cannabis to their consumers. The latest development suggests a legislative proposal regarding a closed coffee shop chain (an experiment) that involves the appointment of certain cultivators by the Minister of Health to supply all coffee shops in participating municipalities. This entails legalizing recreational cannabis while regulating quality and safety (Leuw, 1991).

To summarize, the Netherlands has a policy of tolerance for the sale of soft drugs in coffee shops, meaning its sale is a criminal offense, but prosecution for this offense does not happen. The reason for their toleration policy is to mitigate the trade of soft drugs from criminal dealers to suppress the sale of hard drugs since encounter is understood as bringing them closer to substance abuse.

Policies tend to revolve around the illegal trade of drugs and their abuse, where prohibitions are placed, although some drugs lack a cultural framework to make them desirable, resulting in no prohibitions (Jay, 2010).

Cannabis, I would say, would be an exemption, and I think the Netherlands is continuously revising its policy knowingly that prohibitions aren't as successful, while in the Philippines it's almost set in stone. Much recently in the Philippines, amidst the continuous persecution of drug-related offenses, a new bill was proposed to the senate by celebrity actor (now senator) Sen. Robinhood C. Padilla (perfect first name for his new senatorial role and first act): SB no. 230 or the proposed Medical Cannabis Compassionate Access Act of the Philippines (MCCAAP), filed on 7th of July 2022, and still pending (MEDICAL CANNABIS COMPASSIONATE ACCESS ACT OF THE PHILIPPINES, 2022). It would not be the first attempt at the legalization of cannabis in the country, as many have tried, and five other related bills are still waiting for hearing. The only catch is this bill proposes medical cannabis in the form of a pill (this would be a hard one to swallow amongst my fellow unwilling addicts). Nevertheless, a lot of people have expressed that it's 'high time' for the Philippines, considering people have been plucked like weeds (no pun intended).

It is said that prohibitions lead to substitution. In the 70's Amsterdam was the capital of the heroin trade, the Dutch capital had around 10,000 heroin addicts. The Dutch Opium Act was introduced first in 1919, to regulate drugs with a high addiction or abuse factor. If we look at Amsterdam in the '70s till the '80s, heroin left a devastating mark on Amsterdam, which in turn gave rise to a new youth culture that revolved around drugs like cannabis, hashish, and LSD (High Humans, 2023). Substance use as a symptom of an absence of belonging may be at this point a fine line, whereas, in the context of colonialism, it can be seen as a consequence of its epistemic conditions – if we directly talk about the trauma that is inherent in displacement. On the other hand, there

is a cherished intoxication in societies as new substances emerge, where the concept of drugs over time compounds and blurs from disparate sources and traditions – as a result, subcultures are born per se, which are also seen as a response to prohibitions. Cannabis has long been a marker of identity, and a culture that resists majority norms. In the western world, it has been long associated with music, like the Jazz scene. Subcultures are understood as underground societies, but this is only because it is seen as a form of resistance to the likes of radical people. So say, cannabis users, fall into a stereotype (stoners or potheads) under different subcultures. But I'd also like to define “subculture as a collection of rituals, stories, and symbols” (Sandberg, 2013).



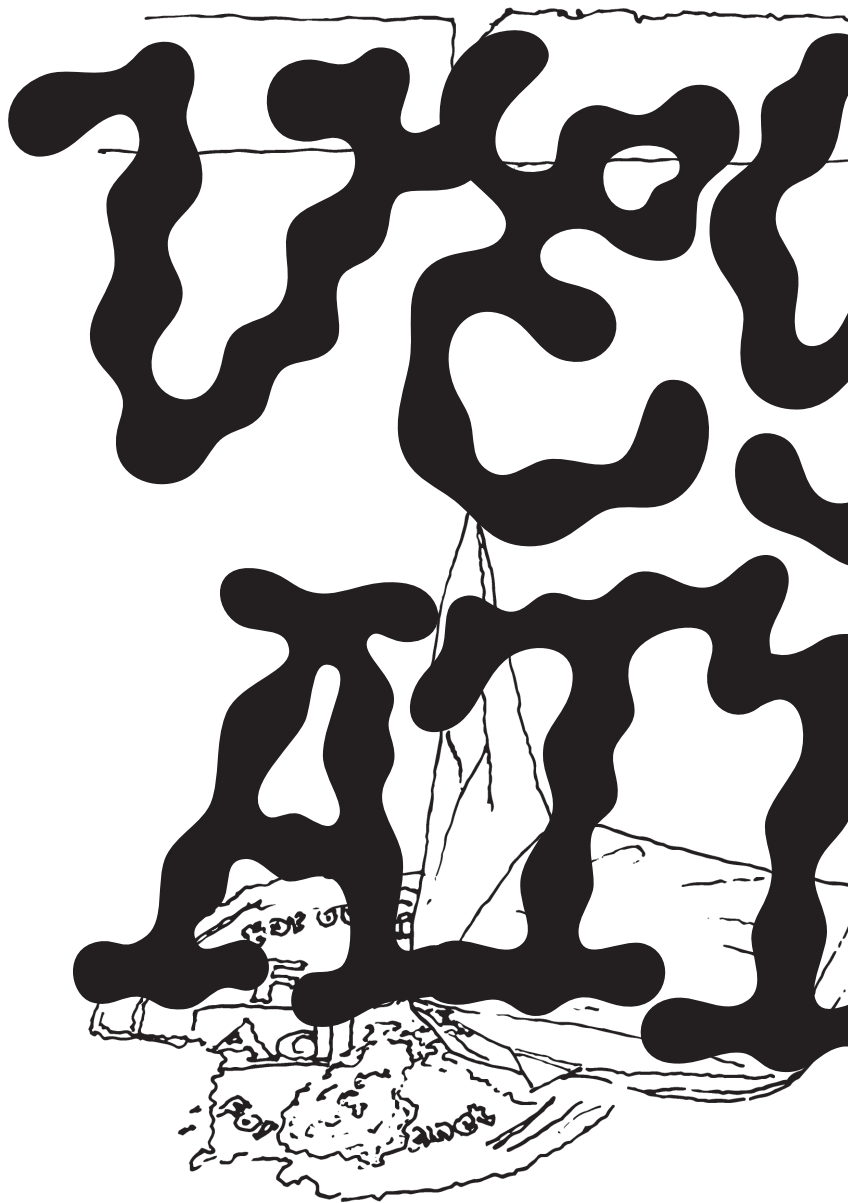












TRANSCENDENTAL
STORIES



In the following pages are two of the many conversations I've had with substance users. I recount them here, in an attempt to gain a better insight into the matter, test and distill theoretical claims in Part I against real-life experiences. These two conversations I have chosen to share hold stories of transcendence¹ and drug use. The first conversation is in person while the second is not, the first involves two acquaintances and the second with my brother. For anonymity, I refer to my acquaintances with the initials of their countries.

SA is a twenty-five-year-old European cis-man originally from South Africa, half Afrikaans half English. He lived between South Africa and Europe for most of his life, and only recently he settled in Amsterdam. In between moving, he spent his youth at a boarding school. Right after, he studied a business degree in finance and accounting, which he then left to pursue a brief stint at a fashion school. Followed by a contemporary art degree before starting the current Architectural Design at Rietveld.

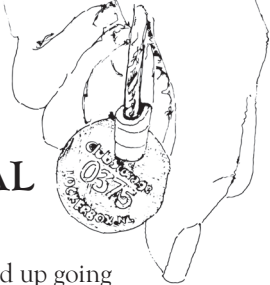
DK is from Denmark, who later joined the conversation, and is also a student at Rietveld who's a good friend of SA.

PH for the Philippines is me.

¹ Transcendence by definition is an experience beyond the normal. In substance use, a transcendent experience has a potential dark side. There may be a fine line between the well-being of transcendence and the dangers of addictive escapism. However, in Daoism, transcendence has been a destiny, a reward for good deeds, or a way to perspicacity. For this purpose, transcendence is understood as both the experience brought by substance use and, along with it, an insight.



TRANSCENDENTAL STORIES



SA One night I went on a date, and ended up going back to this girl's house, and smoked some of her weed. Eh, sort of only took like maybe two or three puffs. Then we were like making out on the bed, and I basically like rolled over and fell out of my body. Like, have you ever watched "Get Out2"? I'm not joking, it's the most similar thing that I've ever experienced in my life. I just fell out of my body and like felt like I was falling for like 15 minutes and rolling around. I came to, and I was like Oh my God what happened, she was like 'I don't know your eyes flashed... like your pupils dilated for like 10 seconds and then you just came back '.

PH Sounds like smoking ecstasy.

SA Yeah, like she put me in an Uber and I got home and don't remember the sort of the next three days. My roommate was there basically just looking after me, she says I was writhing around all over my bed, dehydrated, sweating.

PH She wanted to call an ambulance, then she called my brother, and my brother came. None of which I remember. I have a tick that started that's never gone away from that. I then got my blood tested, and what it all had was THC3.

PH Right Jesus, I've never had that experience.

2 The film 'Get Out' is a 2017 psychological horror movie. The key element of the story is where the Armitage family for decades has been supplying African-American bodies for the old and dying white folks in their cult—neurosurgery and hypnosis as a way to move the consciousness of one person into another's body.

3 THC or Tetrahydrocannabinol is the major psychoactive component and one of the 113 cannabinoids recognized in cannabis.

SA It does help that I have other mental conditions, so like it's compounded by that. But any other drug has never ***** me up like.

PH So that's just weed? Just THC?

SA Uhm, yeah.

PH That's the thing, it really differs based on the brain chemistry, on the chemical compounds. It also depends a lot on the space, and how you interact within that space.

SA Totally yeah, I wasn't comfortable, I didn't know the person. But like I've done that before, you know? I've smoked weed while I was out, and it was fine. But I hadn't smoked weed in a long time. Maybe like, at least six months. I was drunk, I was very drunk.

PH Okay, okay. It's like a "end up in a ditch" kind of situation.

SA I could say quite categorically on a couple of planes of my life that it was like a pivot, yeah my life has never been the same since that night. My mental state...I remember when I woke up after a couple of days, I literally said to my roommate: My life will never be the same, after seeing what I saw.

It's weird, I don't know how to explain it.

I think I was mostly terrified about what your brain can do to you, and what you're capable of.

DK When you say your life has never been the same, does it feel like it's been worse? Or is it just changed? Without having connotations of feeling really bad.

SA It's like having a really traumatic event, and feeling like you've never ever regained your confidence entirely. Your confidence in your mind and your body.



PH Would you say you were displaced?

SA Yes, absolutely!



DK I think it's already a thing, to make an analogy, for instance, I've dislocated my shoulder and since then I've never been as comfortable with doing anything physical because I'm afraid it will happen again. It is almost the same, where you don't trust your brain as you did before because you know what happens when it tips.

SA I would say it's the same, but I would also say it's this inherent, your soul has this base that it sits on as a human - that's just completely eroded away. You feel like your soul becomes very brittle, and I don't know how to explain that; I'm not a particularly spiritual person.

PH So how do you feel about that? Now that you're in Amsterdam, where, it {cannabis} is essentially everywhere.

A I hate the smell of weed now, but not that I can't stand it. It doesn't bother me.

K Have you touched weed since?

A No! I think I could do brownies for some reason, but I will probably never try it. The thing is, I've done everything except weed since then because I trusted all those things before. Also, my sort-of psychiatrist said to me that weed can have unintended effects given my condition, but I've done mushrooms a ton. A lot of cocaine, too much. Basically, everything under the sun that isn't considered taboo, I suppose.

H Well, most or majority of those are taboo, in a lot...

A No, but I'm like, I've never done meth, you know.

H All of those are categorized as hard drugs.



SA No, I know. But like, meth, people don't like meth because it makes your teeth fall out.

PH Same thing as cocaine, man.

DK No, but yeah, it (cocaine) is still associated with you having success. Where meth is like, you're down the drain.

PH That's very debatable.

SA I've known someone whose boyfriend was/is a meth addict. The difference for him (the boyfriend), was that when he takes meth and comes down from the high... It's like Oh My God, I love That. I Do Not Want To Stop This, I Want More.

As an experience, smoking cannabis has been portrayed as a form of release. However, like other known psychoactive substances, it links to amotivational syndrome⁴, but it only is seen among patients that are long-term users of that substance. In the case of SA, the symptoms of such syndrome show only when it is heightened by alcohol consumption. Yet so, in cannabis consumption alone, there has not been any catastrophic effects on health that have been noted (Hollister, 1988).

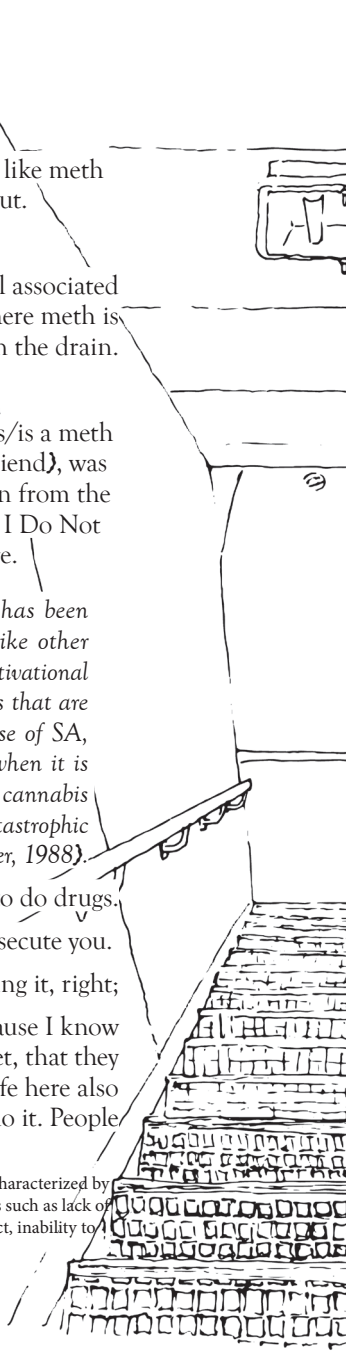
DK In here it's safe to do drugs.

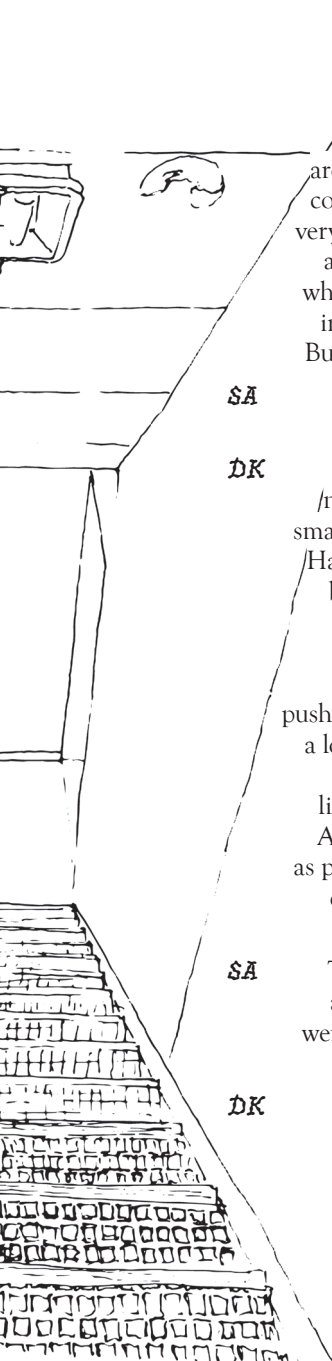
SA It is! Because the government doesn't prosecute you.

SA & DK Not for taking it, right;

DK But I think for me it's safe to take it, because I know there are so many sellers on the market, that they have to have good products... It feels safe here also because there are so many people who do it. People

⁴ amotivational syndrome is a chronic psychiatric disorder characterized by a variety of changes in personality, emotions and cognitive functions such as lack of activity, inward-turning, avolition, apathy, incoherence, blunted affect, inability to concentrate and memory disturbance.





around me know what is happening. So I'm very... confident, or I feel safe that if something didn't go very well, people would know how to react... There's always someone who's around quite experienced, who will know how to handle the situation - if I'm in Denmark, of course, there's also a lot of drugs. But I think then it's more limited to special circles.

SA

Do you think that's the truth...
/ or you think that's what exists there?

DK

There are people doing... It's normal, or it's not /normal, but it's not considered crazy. Here... very small things, just knowing that Amsterdam and the /Hague for instance agreed as like municipalities to be a testing ground for legalizing mdma. They're probably not going to be allowed to, but just knowing that... a municipality, actually, kind of wants it to be a safe space - they're not trying to push it, but they know that this is anyway happening a lot. They put up these signs like Please don't take this pill, because it's dangerous, not this kind of like DON'T TAKE ANYTHING YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED. More like We want you to be as safe as possible while doing drugs. Yeah, we know you're doing it, and were not necessarily encouraging it but...

SA

That was wild when in the pamphlet we got at Rietveld, like especially as first years they were like: Make sure you have a reputable dealer, please be safe...

DK

I think it's that kind of; that it is so normalized, makes it feel safe for me.

My brother is a long-term cannabis user, and a father of two, he resides in the city I was born, Cebu, Philippines. After three years of being away, I decided to go back for the holidays. There were unforeseen circumstances in our family, to which Gton (my brother's nickname) had to live elsewhere than his home. Only recently his name was put on the list for suspicion (for dealing, which is not the case), and is under surveillance by police. Over Christmas eve, he told me this:

Ako pa nimo, mo hunong nakag smoke.
Tanawa ragud ko.

[If I were you, I'd stop smoking weed].

Just look at me.

Since moving to Dublin in 2014, our relationship has been quite distant. Although we did grow up in the same home, our childhood was already quite different. I am the youngest of four, he's the second. After three weeks of being back in Amsterdam, I called Gton and asked him about what was behind what he said. The following is our conversation that took place over a Facebook video call in the Bisaya-English language. As a disclaimer, this is not a perfectly translated piece.

Ⓔ Because it's costly, that's all. It's also illegal here. For me, it's okay that you smoke. It's a nice thing, especially if you know what you're lighting up.

Ⓙ Of course, naturally, I see it that way here. When you know what you're smoking, where to get good quality, and the fact that I take pleasure in it without being imprisoned. I do enjoy it here. But my question is did you tell me what you told me?

Ⓔ Are you sure I told you to stop? When I myself can't even stop completely. I haven't smoked... I was chased by the police, that's why.

Ⓙ Yeah that sounds serious but also stupid. So you're telling me you haven't smoked since nor thought about it?

Ⓔ It's only recent. I smoked as much as I could even with the fact that I was chased with a gun pointed at me. Until Grandmother came back home, she kept repeating and insisting to stop. Every day, she reminded me. You know her, she knows when I'm high. Back then she would just look at me and say "Look at your eyes!".

Ⓙ But how did it all start for you? The drugs I mean.

Ⓔ Because I liked it. Not that you get dependent on it, but it helped make my day better. You get less irritated, it's like.. the negatives, the negative emotions...When I don't smoke it stays in my head, but it's all in my head. I get angry, but not intensely, I get angry quickly with annoying things, situations, and people. But when I smoke, even if everyone bothers me, I just laugh. I just go silent. [...]

Ⓔ It must be doing something to my brain.

Ⓙ That's obvious, no?

G Then why are you asking me (annoyed tone)? [...]

J What strains did you smoke?

G Locally? Depends on what was available, but they always had a variety, Sativa, Indica, and hybrid.

J You know just on the street where I live left and right downstairs there's a coffee shop.

G The quality we have here is actually good. The stash and strains we have here come from California, top shelf.

J But the Philippines have local cultivators, can you not get from them?

G There is, there is! However, the majority of the growers grow only for themselves or their respective PSG (polysomnography). Despite it being illegal, we can order kush, for example, for only 20 Philippine pesos (0.34 euros) per gram but there is a minimum order of a kilogram. If you decide to purchase weed here, you most likely have to do a bulk order. There is still a preference for imported/smuggled weed from there or the US because it's common knowledge that we don't have the technology that unlike the rest has unlocked the potential "good shit".

J But have you heard of SB 230, the one Robin Padilla proposed?

G Yes, that's old news. It's been months since I heard about it, it's to legalize cannabis for epileptic patients. Politically it's being hindered by the Senate President, Sotto.

J Is there any relationship between the MCCAAP and recreational users, like yourself?

9 I think there is, or maybe no, not that I know of.
If so it's likely to be a step-by-step, it wouldn't be
legalized if recreational use is part of it.
You know already, it would be frowned upon, the
Pinoy (Filipino people) understanding of it Is seen
as the gateway drug for teenagers. I've tried different
drugs; changa⁵, party, shrooms, but meth?
Never. Heroin, cocaine, nope, it's not
popular, they'd be too expensive.

[In the background to Gton]

Lola/Grandma: You need to start looking for a job!

9 We can't really say we use drugs because we're hard-
headed, we're not. Aside from it being accessible..
although back then when my friends and I started
smoking weed it was not popular. Today it's
different and it looks alien to younger people, it's
mainstream. Younger people boast around. But I
think for me and my closest friends, we're a bit older
now, we smoke because it makes us feel better. Our
personality, our day, and socializing get better, it
helps me adjust quicker. I don't look for weed, or
to get high these days. I think my life experiences
back then made me look for it, I wasn't settled. I
was asking friends for it, and even my girlfriend. I
didn't have a network back then to buy any weed, so
I reached the point where I went up to a mountain
where growers have them somewhere hidden under
cliffs or deep into woods. I went to a farm, below the
cliff. Now, I'm okay. I don't smoke or don't get to, I
found pleasure in actually doing something when
I'm in Siargao, I do things where my body feels more
natural like surfing. Because it feels like every push

5 DMT is a psychoactive chemical in the tryptamine family; it causes intense
visuals and strong psychedelic mental effects when smoked...often infused in dried
plant matter to create changa (DanceWize & Hi-Ground, n.d.-a).

of adrenaline, while on that board and when you swim up for oxygen feels like being high in the end. It's true, it feels like that for me, a natural high. I've seen my friends also just drink beer as an alternative when they can't smoke. But still, a lot of us have associated some drugs with some things that become routine, it has triggers in our brain based on what kind of alcohol we drink, I think. [...]

J What was your highest point?

G You remember in the movie, where the Ancient one touched Dr. Strange's⁶ forehead, and his surroundings shattered? I did acid, 200ug crystal gel⁷, and after peaking high, I smoked an ayahuasca herbal form mixed with kush and changa. It's painful when you inhale it, but you have to hold the smoke in. Naturally, your body would want to exhale it out. At that moment, my perception zoomed in and out as if on a spaceship. Everything went dark, I could just see three hovering white lights. You have to go over those lights until you reach the point where you only see one. You have to reach for that one tiny light, to reach a breakthrough, so you reach an astral form point. In real talk, you meet an entity. Try it, you'll believe me when I say so. I've never really, tried high-end drugs like cocaine, I've only tried those party drugs, LSD, and weed. But changa, it's not as synthetic as DMT, this one allows you to go through a journey. This breakthrough is so calm, we do it in situations where you're so broken, or you feel like you need a restart of your life. It's what we call "Ego

6 In the film *Dr. Strange*, the scene shows how the Ancient one used her mystical powers to shatter reality, sending Stephen Strange's consciousness out of his body, like lucid dreaming, into the mirror dimension (Marvel, 2005)

7 LSD, or lysergic acid diethylamide, is a psychedelic drug derived from a substance found in ergot, which is a fungus that infects rye (DanceWize & Hi-Ground, n.d.-b).

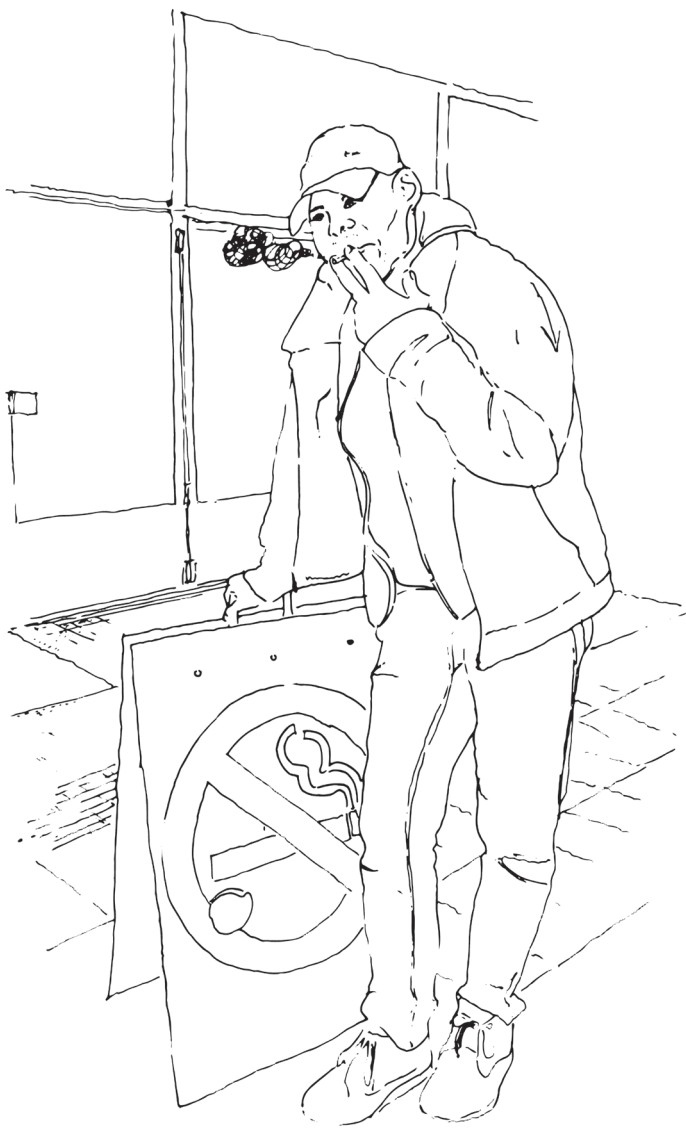
death⁸”, changa humbles you down. After a shock, everything is fractalized, everything converges and diverges, and lights spiral out. It really is an ego death, that encourages you to be sensitive and respectful, and journey back in comfortable silence. It’s a ritual, it almost allows us to speak spirit to spirit. [...] I’m comfortable to smoke in wherever place or space, where I wouldn’t get arrested to honestly speak. Hell, I would smoke in the streets here if I could. But on some occasions where it’s not only me in the space, and someone I know doesn’t, I wouldn’t smoke, it would be disrespectful. It degrades me, that is how I feel... A lot of my friends who were raised well, or didn’t have a rough childhood, started smoking through peer pressure, but I know a lot of them who still smoke up to this day have learned to embrace the substances and the effects. For me, if you compare one addict to another, either one is always more addicted to something. Some drugs make you feel like God, but weed instead makes you feel closer to God. I’m not devoted, but I am a believer. I don’t go to church, I don’t believe in their teachings with all the conflict between what they preach and the opposite things they do. I believe that there is not one god, or maybe that there are a lot of gods but only one Creator. I’m not religious, but some of my friends are. I think we meet people not based on our beliefs, you find people or they find you through connections even through experiences like getting high. [...]

8 Ego death, also referred to as ego-dissolution can be seen as the experience of attenuation or abolishment of one’s sense of being a well-defined and temporally embedded individual entity (Girn & Christoff, 2019).

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MIGRANT SPACE





MIGRANT SPACE

Ⓔ How is Amsterdam with drugs?

Ⓙ I think it's okay here.

Ⓔ Here, communities are still divided. In drug-congested areas, non-users see the life of users. Whilst in low drug presence areas, they just see these congested areas with abusers who have the nature of the devil, or evil people. That's not the case, life goes on even for users. Some people do in fact have a deeper understanding, some consider possible environmental reasons, like why is this person acting like this, they consider whether help is needed, or if there is anything that can be done.

Ⓙ Do you think you'll still smoke?

Ⓔ Me? Of course, I'll still smoke, even worse when I come to Amsterdam.
Most likely I'll plant myself some.
I think what Amsterdam is doing is good, do you think so?

Ⓙ So far, I'm alive. My experiences with drugs, not just weed, have been okay.

Ⓔ I think there will be a road to recreational use here, for weed, maybe sooner than other places, someday, I think the Philippines would not only limit it to medicinal use, it's just for the moment that a lot of the elderly have been damaged by black propaganda⁹, and a lot of stigmas are taught... I feel I'm home here, at times I do feel lost, but I learn to be happy. I have a family here... where else would I want to be?

⁹ Noun. black propaganda (uncountable) False or unverified propaganda, especially appearing to come from an enemy's own sources; disinformation ("Black Propaganda," n.d.)

want to be?"

"where else would I



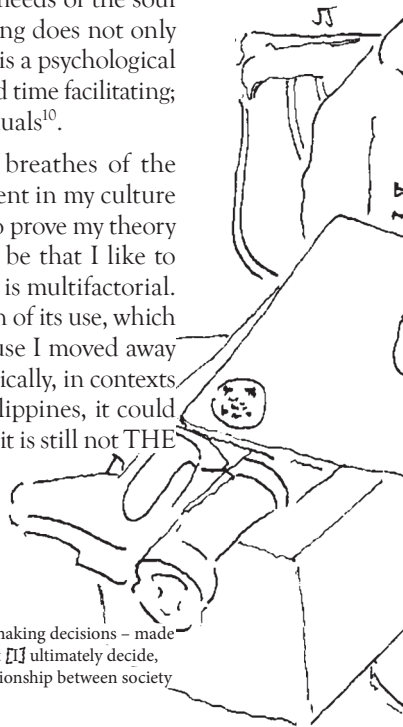


I ask myself the same question: “where else would I want to be?” I wouldn’t fully know well. I’m in a migrant space, where the walls are systems that teach us what to value and are boundless, but they’re borderless, making it a possibility to dismantle these walls when they don’t work for us anymore. Yet so, we’re all just hungry.

We’re hungry for some sort of belonging. Sometimes we do turn to substance use to fill a particular hunger. A lot of people do say: “Drugs?, it’s all in the head”—I agree. I refer to Simone Weil as she argues that people are starving, not just for bodily needs but psychological ones too. Food, shelter, and water are the basic bodily needs (Weil, 2002), but a sense of belonging, I would agree is one of the needs of the soul (psychologically). As I found that belonging does not only manifest as physical spaces we inhabit – it is a psychological need that systems and structures have a hard time facilitating; given the variance in our needs as individuals¹⁰.

I am a voluntary migrant, and this breathes of the displacement and its trauma that is inherent in my culture origin due to colonialism. In my attempt to prove my theory and answer the question how it came to be that I like to get high?. I understood that substance use is multifactorial. Thus this paper leans towards the intention of its use, which in my case is not a symptom simply because I moved away from the alleged cause. Although hypothetically, in contexts in likes of the colonial history of the Philippines, it could arguably be a symptom of colonialism. But it is still not THE one and only symptom of that matter.

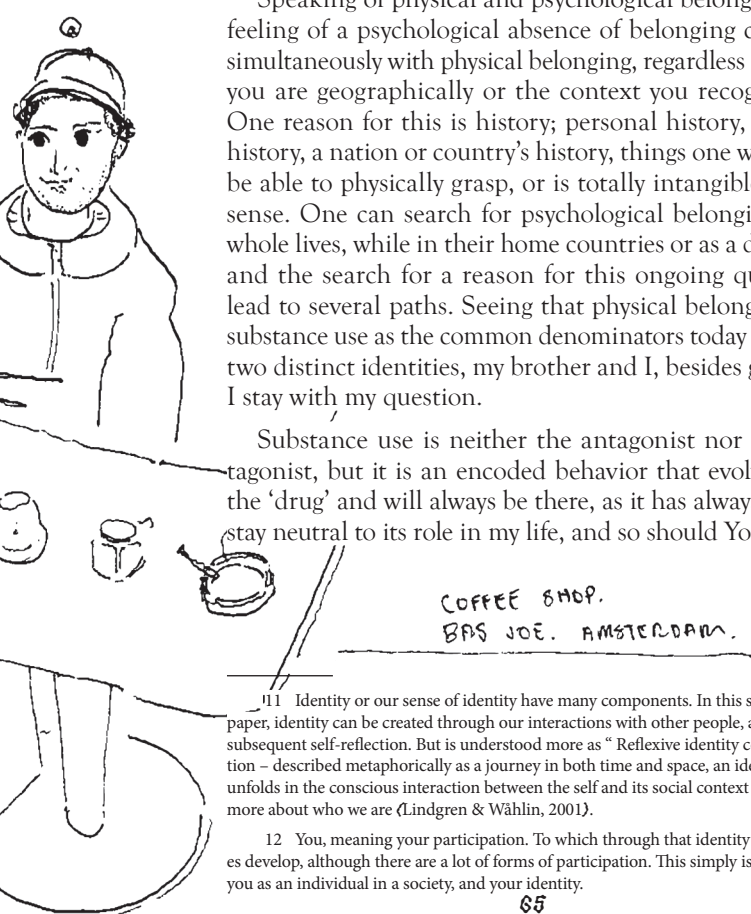
¹⁰ An individual, rational, autonomous agent that is making decisions – made up of tons of preferences, intuitions, independent things that [I] ultimately decide, yet so, there is no human that is truly independent. The relationship between society and individuals can’t be separated (West, n.d.).



I do belong, well, through my identity¹¹, here in Amsterdam. An individual will always be embedded in a society, and to belong in this sense, say physically, means a certain particular expression, mannerism, attitude, and action that only makes sense and can be expressed in a certain context or in that society, and this only requires You¹².

Speaking of physical and psychological belonging, this feeling of a psychological absence of belonging can exist simultaneously with physical belonging, regardless of where you are geographically or the context you recognize in. One reason for this is history; personal history, parents' history, a nation or country's history, things one will never be able to physically grasp, or is totally intangible in this sense. One can search for psychological belonging their whole lives, while in their home countries or as a diaspora, and the search for a reason for this ongoing quest can lead to several paths. Seeing that physical belonging and substance use as the common denominators today between two distinct identities, my brother and I, besides genetics, I stay with my question.

Substance use is neither the antagonist nor the protagonist, but it is an encoded behavior that evolves with the 'drug' and will always be there, as it has always been. I stay neutral to its role in my life, and so should You.



COFFEE SHOP.
BAS JOE. AMSTERDAM.

¹¹ Identity or our sense of identity have many components. In this sense of the paper, identity can be created through our interactions with other people, and our subsequent self-reflection. But is understood more as " Reflexive identity construction - described metaphorically as a journey in both time and space, an identity that unfolds in the conscious interaction between the self and its social context to discover more about who we are (Lindgren & Wählin, 2001).

¹² You, meaning your participation. To which through that identity and practices develop, although there are a lot of forms of participation. This simply is in regard to you as an individual in a society, and your identity.

ABSTRACT

Substance use—drugs are a growing trend in today’s society where in 2018, around 269 million people used drugs worldwide. Drugs have always had a role in society in the Philippines, it is an economic opportunity for the poor, and its use and abuse are perceived as a social menace. Substance use tends to be attributed to preexisting problems of users, from bodily illnesses, heritage, and often social class. In Philippine society substances that get you high are stigmatized and policed. Thus, persecution happens. As a Filipino migrant, where there is a “War on Drugs¹³” in the place of origin, it ignites fear and ignorance at a distance, I ask the question, ‘How it came to be that I like to get high?’ This paper does not aim to encourage the use of any drugs. It calls to decolonize substance use, as drugs will persist for as long as we have this universal impulse of intoxication, and prohibitions will not work. I propose the theory that substance use is a symptom of an absence of belonging in the context of colonialism and its epistemic conditions that have existed to oppress, suppress and separate us.

13 War on drugs is a term that was popularized in the 1970s by the media following Richard Nixon’s anti-drug campaign. The term has been easily used in the mainstream media to describe the majority of the contemporary drug-related problems.

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COLOPHON

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