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The Participation of Women in Drug Trade Networks:
life histories and lessons

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Abstract

Statistics from the Brazilian Ministry of Justice reveal that, in recent years, the participation of women in criminal activities has expanded dramatically. Women have been mostly arrested for non-violent offenses, in particular for involvement in drug-related crimes. High-scale revenues and numerous job opportunities have been attracting an increasing number of women to the drug world. Traditionally, the involvement of women in the drug economy is explained by conditions of social and economic exclusion that restrain their opportunities in the formal labor market. However, restricting women's motivations to engage in the drug trade to their social and economic marginalization resonates somewhat simplistic. The scope of this research is to contribute to debates about the level and nature of women's participation in the drug world, and to explore the diverse factors that motivate women to take part in drug trade activities. The principal argument of the thesis is that experiences and motivations of women in drug networks are various and personal and cannot always easily fit into the existing stereotypical categories.

Based on in-depth open-ended conversations, this research examines life histories of six women who have experienced incarceration for drug-related offenses. Particular experiences and social elements gathered in life story accounts are of extreme relevance to the investigation of interlocutors' motivations to engage in the illegal drug world, as well as a means to explore specifics of women's criminal behavior. Without ignoring the critical role played by victimization and marginalization, many women regard their participation in the illegal drug trade as a vehicle of empowerment and liberation, as well as a source of excitement and adventure. To achieve success in their illegal endeavours, women may assert themselves over men, invert regulatory practices of gender coherence, and manipulate traditional gender norms.

Zusammenfassung

Wenn man die Daten des brasilianischen Justizministeriums unter die Lupe nimmt, stellt man fest, dass die Zahl der in Kriminalität geratenen Frauen in Brasilien in den letzten Jahren dramatisch angestiegen ist. Die meisten Frauen, die ins Gefängnis gelangten, waren in keinen gewalttätigen Delikten involviert. Vielmehr handelte es sich bei denen um kriminelle Fälle welche den Handel mit Drogen betreffen. Exorbitante Geldeinkünfte und eine Vielzahl an Jobmöglichkeiten sind oft die Hauptursache für den Einstieg der Frauen in den Drogenhandel. Und in der Tat, Frauen kommen in Berührung mit Rauschgifthandel, vor allem wegen ihres ökonomischen Ausschlusses, welcher ihren Zugang zum Arbeitsmarkt und gleichzeitig den Einstieg in die Gesellschaft gewaltig beeinträchtigt.

Allerdings ist die angestiegene Anzahl an in Drogenhandel involvierten Frauen mit ihrer geringen Akzeptanz/Wertschätzung in der Gesellschaft kaum zu erklären und erscheint aus heutiger Sicht als verblüffend und kurzsichtig. Diese wissenschaftliche Arbeit unternimmt den Versuch, sich in die Debatte bezogen auf Genesis und Ausmaß der Frauenbeteiligung an Drogenhandel einzumischen und nicht zuletzt zu erklären welche als die wichtigsten Bewegungsgründe hinter den Frauenaktivitäten im Rahmen des Drogenhandels zu betrachten sind. Der Kern und Hauptthese dieses Schriftstückes gehen davon aus, dass Motivation und Erfahrung von Frauen im Bereich des Drogenhandels unterschiedlicher Art und personenbezogen sind. Diese lassen sich nicht mit allgemeinen Konzepten erklären und grenzen sich von den existierenden Stereotypen und Erklärungsmustern ab.

Die angewandte Forschungsmethode „arbeitet“ mit den Lebensgeschichten von den sechs Frauen, die wegen Drogenhandel verurteilt waren und im Gefängnis saßen, basierend auf Tiefladeninterviews (in- depth interviews) und offenen Konversationen/Gesprächen. Implizite Erfahrung und soziale Elemente als Teil eines lebensgeschichtlichen Narrativen sind von enormer Bedeutung im Umgang mit den Gesprächspartnern. Denn nur auf diese Weise wird ihr Involvieren in dem illegalen Drogenhandel zum Auge geführt wobei auch die unterschiedlichen Modelle dieses kriminellen Verhaltens zu einem besseren Verständnis gebracht werden können.

Ohne die wichtige Rolle von Prozessen und Tendenzen wie Marginalisierung und ungerechte Behandlung zu ignorieren, sehen viele der Frauen ihre Machenschaften und Beteiligungen an den illegalen Drogenhandel primär als Mittel zu einer Selbstbehauptung und inneren Befreiung/Befriedigung, andere dagegen bezeichnen ihr Verhalten als reines Abenteuer und Spass. Um Erfolge in ihren illegalen Drogen- Handelspraktiken zu verzeichnen, können Frauen sich gegen Männer durchsetzen und ihr Selbstbewusstsein zur Geltung bringen. Dabei entwickeln sie neue und bis jetzt nicht etablierte sozial- politische/regulatorische Komplexitäten von Gender- Kohärenz und sind in der Lage die traditionelle Gender- Normen in Frage zu stellen.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Research Question and Aims.....	3
1.3 Research Methods and Design	4
1.3.1 Theoretical Approach	4
1.3.2 Methodological Approach	5
1.3.3 Data Collection	7
1.3.4 My position as a researcher	9
1.3.5 Structure of the Thesis	10
1.4 Definition of Terms	12
 2. The organization of illegal drug markets	 13
2.1 The emergence of drug trafficking in Espirito Santo	13
2.2 The organization of drug trade networks.....	18
2.3 Drug trade: a masculine milieu?.....	25
 3. Representations of female criminality	 31
3.1 Patriarchal discourses and gender differences.....	31
3.2 The construction of female criminals	35
3.3 Postmodern feminism and the performance of women in the drug trade.....	41
 4. The Participation of women in drug trafficking networks	 51
4.1 Interlocutors.....	52
4.2 Getting into the business	54
4.3 Experiences and strategies within drug markets.....	63
4.4 Motivations.....	69
4.4.1 Financial Rewards	70
4.4.2 Romantic Relationships	73
4.4.3 Pursuit of Power and Status	75

5. When the house goes down	83
6. Discussion	95
6.1 Limitations of Study	97
6.2 Recommendations for future research.....	97
7. Conclusion	99
References.....	102
Curriculum Vitae.....	113

1. Introduction

The illegal drug trade is one of the most dynamic, globalized and lucrative “business” in the world; a multibillion-dollar transnational activity that involves the manufacturing, distribution and sale of illegal drugs. Because of the illegality of its use, possession or distribution, illegal narcotic drugs are traded at extremely high prices and generate profit margins that easily outstrip most legal and illegal businesses.

Although illegal drugs have always been available and distributed at multiple selling points across Brazil’s largest cities, it was only at the end of the 1970s that the country became a major drug trafficking route and an important drug trade hub. The increasing availability of drugs in the country led to an exponential growth in drug abuse and, consequently, stimulated the emergence of criminal networks that aimed to explore the vast revenues generated from the trafficking and sales of illegal drugs.

In a society marked by pervasive social and economic inequalities, it is not surprisingly that drug trade activities’ appeals may be regarded as more rewarding and exciting than opportunities in formal and legitimate labour market. Drug traffickers’ authority and lifestyle are viewed as powerful inducements for those who became ensnared by misleading opportunities for wealth, status, adventure, power, true love, and other propaganda.

In the last few decades, despite increased international cooperation, extensive anti-drug efforts and the deployment of warlike campaigns, drug trade activities have remained an endemic problem throughout Brazil. Emphasis on criminal law has not contributed to prevent the proliferation of drug networks, nor to the dismantlement of those already existing. Illegal drug businesses are still fully active, unaccountable and freely operated by drug lords or traffickers – who, upon imprisonment, may continue to run their criminal enterprises from within the country’s penitentiaries. Those concerted government’s efforts, however, have led to massive seizures of drug-related assets, and an unprecedented increase in the number of drug traffickers, dealers and smugglers being apprehended, convicted and imprisoned in Brazil.

Although criminal activities have been traditionally considered as male-dominate, one particularly worrisome trend stemming from the country's statistics on arrest ratios is the dramatically expansion on the number of women's participation in criminal activities. Statistics from the Brazilian Ministry of Justice reveal that the number of women imprisoned in the country has increased by 261 percent between the years 2000 and 2010 - in contrast, to a rise of 106 percent in the rate of male incarceration for the same period (Macedo 2010, Ministry of Justice 2010).

What has motivated the choice of this thesis topic is the fact that women are typically arrested for non-violent offenses, in most cases for involvement in drug-related crimes. High-scale revenues and various job opportunities have been attracting an increasing number of women to drug trade networks. According to figures presented by Julita Lemgruber¹, of the 15.263 women imprisoned in Brazil in the last five years, 65 percent (that is, 9.989 women) responded to accusations of involvement in the illegal drug trade (Vasconcellos 2011). Nevertheless, despite this problematic increase in rates of female incarceration, the participation of women in criminal activities (such as the drug trade) is still little explored in scientific works.

Traditionally, the involvement of women in the drug economy is explained by conditions of social and economic exclusion that restrain their opportunities in the formal labor market. It is in this context that illegal drug trafficking activities appear as a promising alternative to a competitive and discriminatory labor market, and to a social environment that overrates financial success and consumerism.

Undeniably, limited socio-economic opportunities have been associated to female delinquency. However, restricting women's motivations to engage in the drug trade to their social and economic marginalization resonates somewhat simplistic. Some approaches are even more problematic when they come to predicating that contexts marked by poverty and social exclusion invariably lead to criminality and delinquency (Barcinski 2009:1847).

¹ Julita Lemgrueber is sociologist and former head of the Prison System of the state of Rio de Janeiro and discussed these data in the Encontro Nacional de Encarceramento Feminino (National Meeting on Female Imprisonment) organized by the Conselho Nacional de Justiça (National Justice Council).

In a general manner, the participation of women in drug market activities is obscured by victimization and pathologization discourses. These narratives limit the understanding of female criminality by intersecting women's initiation into the drug trade either with relationship with a male co-offender, reactions to abuses and violence (physical and emotional) suffered throughout their lives, or a transgression to the idea of "female nature" essentially maternal and pacifistic (Barcinski 2009:1844, Miller 1986:144, Steffensmeier and Allan 1996:482).

For long, enormous disparity in statistics regarding female and male criminality contributed to the dissemination of stereotypic and monolithic views on women's involvement in the illegal drug economy. These elementary approaches do not investigate why a certain type of crime (e.g. drug dealing or smuggling) is committed instead of another, for what reasons women engage in drug markets, or why middle- or upper-class women also commit drug-related crimes.

In order to address these failures and misconceptions, extensive investigations and deeper analysis on the theme are imperative. Unable to fill in this gap, this master's thesis intends to offer a modest contribution to research on women's participation in drug supply networks through the assessment of their motivations and experiences in the drug world.

This study seeks to present more encompassing views on how women have constructed careers in the illegal drug economy, how they have strategize to achieve their business goals, what were their motivations to engage in these illegal activities and how the criminal justice system and their experience of prison impacted on their lives.

1.2. Research Question and Aims

The main purpose of this research is to contribute to debates about the level and nature of women's participation in the drug world, and to explore the diverse factors that motivate women to take part in drug supply activities. For this intent, the following research question was addressed:

- 1) What are the primary motivations for women to become involved in the illegal drug trade?
- 2) What experiences and lessons do interlocutors draw from their participation in the drug trade?

Relying on the accounts of women who were convicted for drug-related offenses, this thesis aims to identify elements and aspects (psychological, social, financial-economic, etc.) that have permeated their motivations and experiences by advancing some specific goals:

- a) Evaluate the structure and operation of illegal drug networks in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo;
- b) Discuss illegal drug trade as a gendered and multifaceted phenomenon;
- c) Explore gender-power relationships featured in the world of illegal drug dealing;
- d) Examine the ways in which criminal offences and conventional gender roles are connected;
- e) Focus on the experiences and situations encountered by the interlocutors in regard to their life stories, emphasizing the importance given to specific situations of their trajectories in the drug world;
- f) Investigate how gender, agency, socio-psychological and/or economic circumstances delineate these women's experience in the drug crime domain;
- g) Explore the reasons that motivated the interlocutors to ingress into illegal drug trade;
- h) Provide an account of my interlocutors' experience of prison.

1.3 Research Methods and Design

In order to assess women's motivations to engage in illegal drug trade, this thesis provides a parallel between the academic literature on the positions and roles played by women in drug trade networks, and the life histories of a group of women who have a history of incarceration for drug-related offenses.

1.3.1 Theoretical Approach

The theoretical section of this study will be presented to aid understanding of the functioning of drug trade networks and the participation of women in these illegal activities. It concentrates on a critical review of the organization of drug networks in the Brazilian State of Espírito Santo (where the empirical research was conducted), and an

investigation of the influence of patriarchal discourses and gender stereotypes on researches concerning female criminality and delinquency.

Using a postmodern feminist approach, this study examines the situation of women involved in the illegal drug trade and emphasizes the plurality of women's experiences. Without ignoring the critical role played by victimization and marginalization, many women regard their participation in the illegal drug trade as a vehicle of empowerment, personal and social liberation, a source of excitement and adventure. Postmodern feminism emphasizes the plurality of women's experiences and maintains that individuals act as active contributors to the context of their positions. To achieve success in their endeavours, individuals may invert regulatory practices of gender coherence and manipulate traditional gender norms. The performances of women in the drug trade may be examined as an example of 'subversive gender identity' where traditional gender roles are manipulated either by the adoption of a 'male' instance or blending aspects of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'.

1.3.2 Methodological Approach

The overall aim of this thesis is to assess factors that have permeated the decisions of my interlocutors to engage in drug trade activities. Within a qualitative framework and an interpretive stance, the participation of women in the drug trade and their motivation to engage in these illegal activities is explored in interlocutor's own terms, and produce some understanding about the significance of these activities in their lives.

Deniz and Lincoln (2005:3) define qualitative research as:

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research aims to describe, explore and understand the meanings interlocutors attach to their behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, feelings and motivations. Its main purpose is to understand those being studied from their perspective, to see the world and social

phenomena through their eyes, and to understand the meaning they assign to their life experiences.

The strength of qualitative research is the provision of in-depth investigations based on detailed descriptions of participants' behaviors, motivations and beliefs. Further, the use of qualitative methods of inquiry (i.e. open-ended questions, participant observation and focus groups) may take the researcher into not anticipated information (Guest et al. 2012:21).

Drawing on an interpretive perspective, this thesis is based on the idea that qualitative researches should "be concerned with revealing multiple realities as opposed to searching for one objective reality" (Guest et al. 2012:6). In accordance to Clifford Geertz's (1973) postulation, I believe that

To look at the symbolic dimension of social action – art, religion, ideology, science, law, morality, common sense – is not to turn away from the existential dilemmas of life for some empyrean realm of deemotionalized forms; it is to plunge into the midst of them. The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said (Guest et al. 2012:6).

Yet, this study attempts to explore issues and perceptions that emerged from interlocutors' narratives, to uncover the diversity of women's experiences in illegal stances - such as the drug trade, and consequently to question those researches that assume a general pattern of ignoring or downplaying women's experiences with crime and incarceration.

This research is based on the life histories of six women who have experienced incarceration for drug-related offenses. Life history interview is a qualitative research method used to gather, analyze and interpret "the stories people tell about their lives. It gives the reader an insider's view of a culture and it enables the researcher to obtain a person's subjective experience by capturing their feelings, views and perspectives" (Marshall and Rossman 1999:120-1).

The researcher's interest lies in understanding the world from the subjects' point of view to gain insights into what interlocutors perceive as important episodes of their lives and experiences (Atkinson 2001:124). Particular experiences and social elements gathered in life story accounts are of extreme relevance to the investigation of interlocutors' motivations to engage in the illegal drug world, as well as a means to explore specifics of women's criminal behavior.

1.3.3 Data Collection

There are a number of limitations encountered in conducting research on the drug trade and, in particular, of gathering a representative sample and obtaining reliable information. The illegality of drug trade, difficulties and challenges of accessing and interviewing drug dealers, and their fear of further prosecution or repercussion are some of the main challenges to be regarded by those who want to conduct research on this field.

I have considered those challenges since day one, and have to admit being lucky for having the initial contact with that who became my first interlocutor facilitated by my personal network. This interlocutor's involvement in the drug trade was known to me for a long period: prior to her involvement in the drug trade, she worked in the building I lived in for my late childhood, moreover her sister has worked for more than ten years at my family's apartment and helped to put us in contact.

First when I contacted that interlocutor (and all others), I explained that 'this project did not attempt to investigate the dynamics of drug trade, nor to find out specific information about her (their) participation in drug networks'. Rather, this thesis aimed 'to study the lives of women who had been prosecuted for drug-related offenses, from their earliest memories until the present'. I was extremely happy when the first interlocutor agreed to contribute with this thesis and am grateful for her support in introducing me to other prospective interlocutors. My first interlocutor and her colleagues (who also consented to participate in this study) have become important references helping me build a 'web of trust' with other interlocutors I have contacted through the State's Secretary of Security and the State's Penitentiary System.

During a period of two months², data for this research was collected through in-depth open-ended conversations at my interlocutors' workplaces³ or on the phone⁴. I spent between 3 and 4 hours a week talking to each interlocutor about their lives stories in an attempt to learn about their experiences through their own perspectives.

All conversations were held in Portuguese, the mother tongue of interlocutors and mine. Our conversations were not tape-recorded in an attempt to ensure spontaneity and promote

² This thesis' empirical research was conducted from mid-July until mid-September 2011.

³ Located in the cities of Vila Velha and Cariacica - two of Espírito Santo's largest cities.

⁴ Two interlocutors faced scheduling difficulties and asked for our conversations to be carried out on the phone.

frankness on the part of interlocutors. However, some handwritten notes were taken to capture key elements discussed, to preserve those statements that I wanted to refer to, or even to satisfy interlocutors concern that I would not remember things we have discussed. Once resulting from these handwritten notes, a few words in quotations may not be exact; nevertheless they accurately capture the meanings of statements made by my interlocutors.

At my first meeting with an interlocutor I would ask her to narrate me her life as a story, selecting chapters, taking into consideration important episodes, happy and sad memories, transition moments, persons and groups who have influenced their lives (in positive or negative ways). Despite collecting their entire life histories, in this thesis I have concentrated on the parts that relate to interlocutors' participation in drug trade networks.

In fact, detailed accounts of my interlocutor's experiences within the drug world emerged extensively during our conversations, a fact that I attribute to their awareness of my interest in the lives of women who were sentenced for drug offenses, and to the important role those experiences have in their lives. This thesis' fourth and fifth chapters examine these interlocutors' histories of involvement in the drug trade and dynamics of their participation, discuss some of their strategies, present their major motivations, and uncover the diversity of women's experiences in the drug world. The positioning of these women as drug dealers or smugglers is examined in consideration to their experiences of power or subjugation, in accordance or discordance to this study's initial investigations on the organization of drug trade networks, on gender stereotypes, and the criminal trajectories of women.

The issue of validity of the data collected was addressed through the triangulation of information. Coincidentally, most interlocutors had served their sentences in the same penitentiary within the same period, they knew each other well, recalled on histories and challenges experienced by the others, and thus facilitated the verification of claims.

The importance of empirical researches on drug smugglers and dealers is that it can advance our understanding beyond rhetorical generalities or stereotypes to reveal a multiplicity of factors and situations that influence people's decision to join the illegal drug world, as well as to emphasize the uniqueness of each person's experiences. Although limited in size, this research presents remarkable accounts and life memories of a group of women through thick and thin.

1.3.4 My position as a researcher

The idea of doing ‘anthropology at home’ has been extensively discussed in anthropology and carries out certain advantages and disadvantages to the research/researcher. To their benefit, ‘native’ anthropologists are assumed to have a knowledge-making relationship to the community or subject matter being studied. Secondly, a ‘native’ anthropologist is conceived to have in many aspects better access to certain aspects of the local culture (especially the emotional dimension) and to see easily realize nuances within a culture easier than those, who are foreigners. Conversely, a ‘native’ researcher is placed in one of the existing social categories and assumptions about him/her will be based on those. Moreover, anthropology at home requires the creation and maintenance of distance between the ‘native’ anthropologist and his/her ‘own culture’/‘own society’ for the evaluation of the research findings (Halstrup 1999:157-158).

Prior to research commencing, I was already filled with anxiety about these issues and my forthcoming encounter with interlocutors. It came as a natural process to reflect on my role as a researcher: on how my positionality as a white middle-class Brazilian student or pre-conceived ideas I had concerning drug dealers and traffickers would/could affect interactions with interlocutors and the practice of research. For these reasons, I decided it was important to make it clear for interlocutors that this would not be a study about crime or drugs per se; but rather a study about the life histories of women who have been prosecuted and imprisoned for drug-related crimes⁵. Thus I was not looking for or interested in operative details or figures related to their illegal activities, I was there to listen, respect, and understand their histories.

Fortunately I found my personal situation as a student to be beneficial in terms of connecting with the participants of the study to the extent that they felt solidarity with my intent to write this thesis for the conclusion of my Master’s degree. I admit being very surprised with my interlocutors’ pronto consideration and sympathy for my personal endeavours. Immediately after my first conversation with an interlocutor, she introduced myself to a colleague and explained: *“nós temos que ajudar ela (sic) a escrever este trabalho e voltar para casa. Ela já está morando fora, longe da família, há cinco anos.*

⁵ As I have briefly mentioned on the last section of this chapter, the specific focus of this thesis (i.e. the investigation of their experiences and motivations to engage in the drug trade) was not disclosed to interlocutors.

Conversa com ela, ela é uma garota muito legal”⁶. Although based on accurate information I have shared with her, this interlocutor’s sentences by no means reflect the way I have introduced myself to her. In addition to their solidarity, my interlocutors demonstrated appreciation for my interest in studying their histories and experiences. In our third meeting I could already experience a different level of openness and intimacy where detailed information about their activities and business strategies were given.

In addition, interlocutors’ position, background knowledge, and prior experiences override my position as a student interested in learning about their life histories. My lack of knowledge on Criminal Law (e.g. on mandatory minimum prison sentences for a specific crime) was identified by interlocutors and contributed to build trust on the subject matter of this thesis.

Taken for granted understanding of the illegality of interlocutor’s former business practices, my moral judgements on the rights and wrongs of their choices and activities were suspended. During our conversations, I refrained myself from elaborating on issues raised by my interlocutors and from asking leading questions that could influence their arguments, responses or perceptions. Instead, I limited my interventions to open-ended questions that aimed to increase comments and encourage interlocutors to further express themselves fully on issues they considered relevant. The focus of our conversations has continuously remained on their experiences and memories, while I was focused on demonstrating genuine interest and attention.

In the data collection process, I have become an active listener sustaining the conversation by verbal and non-verbal means and concentrating on what interlocutors were saying about their experiences.

1.3.5 Structure of the Thesis

In this introductory chapter, I have discussed the main topic of this thesis (i.e. the participation of women in drug trade networks), set its main goals, and laid out some preliminaries.

⁶ “We have to help her writing this research, and come back home. She has been already living abroad, and away from her family for five years. Talk to her, she is a very nice girl” (author’s translation).

Following this introduction, the remainder of the thesis will consist of five main chapters, which are further subdivided into different subchapters.

Chapter 2 contains a theoretical background on the organization of drug trade networks. It assesses the emergence of drug trafficking and trade activities in the State, and examines the traditional organization and structuring of drug trade networks. With regard to the main topic of this thesis, the focus is clearly on providing a means for building background knowledge on the hierarchy and power of illegal drug networks, and providing comprehensible input on the challenges and opportunities for women comprising these networks.

The third chapter begins with a discussion on patriarchal discourses and stereotypical conceptions of gender as they relate to expected social roles. It is based on these discourses and stereotypes that the participation of women in criminal activities is either ignored or perceived as a contradiction to prevailing social and cultural norms. This chapter will question these clichéd representations of female criminality and, fashioned on a postmodern feminist approach, advance a more inclusive and encompassing approach to the performances of women in the drug trade.

Following, chapter 3 will draw on the empirical research and give an in-depth account of the participation of women in drug trade networks, in accordance to my interlocutors' experience and viewpoint. It will uncover the central research question posed by this thesis and reveal the pathways and motivations that drove these women to participate in the illegal drug trade. This chapter will additionally elucidate the variation of experiences and strategies devised by interlocutors in the performance of their functions.

The fourth chapter assesses interlocutors' experience of prison and lessons they have taken from their experiences in the drug world.

To complete this thesis, chapter 7 discuss the findings in relation to the problem and research questions that were addressed and examined by this study. This chapter also includes a section on the limitation and recommendations of this research for future researches. Finally, the main results and findings of this study are summed up in the conclusion.

1.4 Definition of Terms

Two key terms used in this thesis can be overly broad and ambiguous in their meaning. To prevent confusion, I would like to briefly define the particular way I understand and employ these concepts in this study.

- Drug trade, drug trade activities or drug trafficking: These terms refer to a transnational illegal market that involves the manufacturing, distribution and sale of illegal drugs. Although planting and cultivation of illegal drugs may also be considered essential processes of the illegal drug trade cycle, these processes are not considered in this study.

According to Brazil's current drug law (Law 11343/06), the possession of illegal drugs for personal consumption is exempted from prison sentences, and punished either with education measures or community service. While the commercialization of illegal drugs are punishable by prison terms from three to five years (Presidência da República do Brasil 2006).

- Drug networks, drug enterprises or trafficking networks: These terms are used to define those illegal enterprises/partnerships that are involved and operate drug trade activities. The structure and organization of illegal drug networks is unstable and diverse, ranging from centralized complex organizations (geographically defined through the domination of a certain or various areas where their drug trade takes place), to relative simple and decentralized ones.

In reference to the anthropological notion of social network, the terms 'drug networks' or 'trafficking networks' are used in reference to "a continuous flow of interpersonal relationships based on secrecy and trust always under proof, in other words, on knowledge and vigilance people have of each other as well as taken for granted arrangements and rules between them" (Zaluar 2002:41).

2. The organization of illegal drug markets

2.1 The emergence of drug trafficking in Espírito Santo

Midway between Brazil's second (Rio de Janeiro) and third (Salvador) largest cities, Espírito Santo (Figure 1) is a small but strategically situated State. It comprises 78 municipalities, with a population of 3,514,952 inhabitants, 83% concentrated in urban areas with a population density of 76,25 inhabit/km². Espírito Santo's metropolitan area (the Greater Vitória⁷) is the most populous region of the State with 1,519,890 inhabitants (IBGE 2010).



Figure 1: Map of Espírito Santo [Author's adaption from MFA (2012:3)].

⁷ Greater Vitória is formed by the cities of: Vitória (the State's capital), Vila Velha, Serra, Cariacica, Cariacica, Fundão, Guarapari, and Viana.

The economy of Espírito Santo relies on a diversified industrial base led by mining and logistics sectors. The State holds the world's largest complex of pelletization of iron ore and is the country's largest producer of steel plates. Likewise, Espírito Santo is one of the country's leading producer of oil and gas, a major producer and exporter of eucalyptus pulp, and the largest exporter of marble and granite in Latin America. In the agri-business sector, the State ranks as the main Brazilian exporter of papaya, the second-largest producer of coffee and an important producer of other fruits (such as: strawberries, pineapple, passion fruit, etc). To distribute its products overseas, Espírito Santo counts on a large port complex that makes up its main conduit for doing businesses with the rest of the world (MFA 2012:4).

In marked contrast to its privileged geographical and economic situation, the state has been long besieged by a vile triad composed of: a corrupt government, organized crime enterprises, and staggering levels of violence. In Espírito Santo, organized crime constituted a kleptocratic system of political domination, which is supported by drug trafficking, looting of public treasury, and the impunity of government officials that are directly or indirectly involved (Congresso Nacional 2010:368).

Beyond doubt, impunity has been an important factor in explaining the state's high levels of violence. In fact, many of those responsible for the epidemic of crime and violence in Espírito Santo are themselves officially considered enforcers of the law, such as: elected officials, police officers, judges, prosecutors, among others (Congresso Nacional 2010). As Agesandro da Costa Pereira, former president of the state's bar association, remarked "Cities like Rio and São Paulo have serious problems with crime, but there you can at least say that criminals are criminals and the government is the government. In Espírito Santo, organized crime is the government" (Rother 2002).

Espírito Santo holds the negative distinction of being ranked second on Brazil's most violent states, with a murder rate higher than Colombia's⁸. In addition to contract killings of petty criminals, debtors and political opponents, the state's high incidence of homicides is associated to the flourishing of drug trafficking activities. Federal prosecutors deputized to investigate organized crime enterprises in the state have denounced the close relation between corrupt state officials and the Cali drug cartel (Congresso Nacional 2010:364;

⁸ In 2002, Espírito Santo had a murder rate of 55,3 per 100,000 inhabitants (G1 2012). While in Colombia, in the same year, the murder rate was 30 per 100,000 inhabitants (McDermott 2003).

377). According to the archbishop of Vitória, the capital city of Espírito Santo, “*o tráfico acabou criando ramificações dentro da polícia e em vários outros setores. Existe uma certa promiscuidade com braços do Estado*”⁹ (Meirelles 1999).

In the last decades, drug trade activities in Espírito Santo have undergone a rapid expansion, which led it to become one of Brazil’s main routes of drug transit and a channel for international drug trafficking (Congresso Nacional 2010:371). Privileged access and operational facilities make Espírito Santo an attractive target for local and international drug networks. The State’s strategic positioning not only ensures availability of its ports, clandestine runways, and a key road network to drug trafficking, but also grants privileged access to Brazil’s major consumption markets (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and Minas Gerais) (Congresso Nacional 2010:374-6).

As with most economic enterprises, drug trade activities in Espírito Santo are hierarchically structured: at the top end of the market distribution and sales chain, the ‘narco-bourgeoisie’ largely produces and exports massive amounts of drugs, accumulating vast economic resources which helps guaranteeing these kingpin’s influence and relative immunity from prosecution; at the lower end, the illegal retail drug market is mostly concentrated in the *favelas*¹⁰ and peripheral areas of metropolitan cities, and catered to a predominantly middle-class clientele (Congresso Nacional 2010:375-377, Centro de Justiça Global 2002:18;23, Leeds 1996:57, Rabelo 2010,). While wholesaler kingpins are rarely touched by the country’s or State’s justice system, the official drug war targets on low-level distribution networks and blames *favelas* for all violence and other drug-related ills that beset society.

⁹ In the words of the archbishop Silvestre Scandian, “drug trafficking ended up creating ramifications in the police and in several other sectors. There is a certain promiscuity enjoyed by the state apparatus” (author’s translation).

¹⁰ The term “favela was the name of a plant, with a medicinal and a practical function... It gained a geographical sense (Morro da Favella, in Bahia, then in Rio de Janeiro) during a rural civil war named ‘*Guerra de Canudos*’ (1895-1896) where soldiers after having fought in the war in Bahia eventually settled on a hill in Rio de Janeiro called Morro da Providência... They named their new settlement Morro da Favella, after the plant which had thrived at the site of their famous victory against the rebels and also as a symbolic gesture, as they were now in an inferior position. There from designating a specific place, favela became eventually the general denomination of an urban phenomenon typical of Rio’s development from the 1920s on, whereby settlers built precarious homes in land they did not own” (Valladares, 2008:2).

Through continued depiction of *favelas* and peripheral districts as spaces of danger, delinquency, and disease, media and political discourses pursue their narrow agendas and attempt to normalize a unified image of violence, as it would be confined to a particular place (Penglase 2010:326). This practice presents a dichotomic categorization of social spaces and groups of people: where on one side, at *favelas* and peripheral regions, the perpetrators of crime and violence ('them') are located; and on the other side, at middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods, wealthiest segments of the population ('us') who are portrayed as impotent victims of this tragic circumstances. Accordingly, a division is drawn between evil and good, barbarians and civilized, 'them' and 'us'. As Zanotelli et al. (2010:6) aptly observed, in Brazil

*não se admite a estrutural e profunda violência que é aquela de classe. A sociedade brasileira é marcada pelo predomínio do espaço privado sobre o espaço público. Há os espaços dos que mandam e o espaço dos que obedecem. Há a criminalização dos espaços, a inculcação nos dominados de que eles mesmos são 'A violência'. Não é 'o pobre' que é 'o violento', é a estrutura de dominação e exploração que engendra violência.*¹¹

Espírito Santo's metropolitan area (the Greater Vitória) is characterized by a topography similar to that of Rio de Janeiro, where the city is situated on low-lying ground by the beach and the *favelas* sprawl high above, perched on hills surrounding the city (Figures 2 and 3). *Favelas* first growth spurt in the state happened during the 1960s and 1970s, when industrialization process took place within the Greater Vitória. Settlements in the hills and deprived regions of the cities were primarily composed of less privileged populations, mainly rural migrant families and poor migrants, which were attracted by the new market opportunities but lacked professional qualification to secure attractive jobs (Lira 2009:63-4). Not able to afford adequate housing in the metropolitan area, these low-income earners started illegally building homes on public and private lands on the side of hills.

¹¹ "it is not admitted that the structural and profound violence is that of class. Brazilian society is marked by the preference of private space over the public space. There are spaces for those who rule and those who obey. There is criminalization of spaces, inculcation over the dominated that they are 'the violence'. It is not 'the poor' who is 'the violent', it is the structure of domination and exploration that engenders violence" (author's translation).



Figure 2 (left): Forte São João (Prefeitura de Vitória 2008).

Figure 3 (right): Morro dos Alagoanos (R7 2012).

In these peripheral areas, the vacancy left by the traditional absence of the state (mostly in terms of investment in infrastructure, public security, economic stimulation, and provision of public services) or its selective presence (aimed at creating the perception of threat or commitment to the needs of the poor segments of the society) was promptly filled by a specific economy and the socio-political dominance of criminals, who establish their own laws and disciplinary codes. While other illegal activities¹² have been undertaken in *favelas*, since the late 1980s drug factions assumed a quasi-exclusive domination of these terrains (Dowdney 2003:28, Leeds 1996:58, Valladares 2008:20).

While illegal drugs can be found all over the metropolitan areas of the State, *favelas* and peripheral neighborhoods have proven to be ideal grounds for illegal drug trade. It is in these areas, where State's laws and all its supporting structures are meaningless, where most drug trade is concentrated, that battles for territorial control are fought, and where almost every resident has a relative or acquaintance involved in drug networks (Dowdney 2003:74, Rabelo 2010).

¹² Including above all: *jogo do bicho* (literally “animal game,” a clandestine lottery), arms selling, dealing with stolen goods, homicides and kidnapping/captivity.

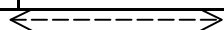
2.2 The organization of drug trade networks

Many drug traffickers and dealers view themselves as entrepreneurs engaging in market enterprises that generate money to satisfy many of the needs and wants others workers pursue through legal channels. Besides this motivation for money, as good ‘businessmen’, drug dealers focus on increasing profits, are risk avoiders, seek for growth opportunities, contend and confront competition (Desroches 2007:830).

Drug trafficking and dealing are ongoing economic activities in which participants must offer a quality product at a competitive selling price, marketing their drugs, and building a strong reputation to keep their clients and attract new ones (Desroches 2007:830). As any other market sector, illegal drug markets can be characterized by the degree of concentration or fragmentation, i.e. the market dominance or the degree of market control exercised by drug “enterprises”. Degrees of market concentration vary from perfect competition to monopoly, and both extremes of monopoly and competition can occur in local markets (such as urban districts and *favelas*). Lessing’s study (2008:46) observed that markets covered by nomad “micro-traffickers” in urban areas stand for the most competitive and fragmented ones. These autonomous drug retailers operate under very low profit margins and are unable to generate revenues to invest in supplies, storage, workers, etc. On the other extreme, owners of drug trafficking networks are operating a de facto monopoly, once it is unlikely for a new concurrent to establish his enterprise in a dominated district or favela. In addition to that, and contrary to market concentration perspectives, these monopolies used to remain unchanged in case another drug lord would take over the dominated market (Lessing 2008:46).

Drug trade networks develop organizational structures, strategies and business practices that reflect the specific market position they occupy. To better illustrate it, Table 2.2.1 (on next page) presents some aspects of the structural organization of illegal drug networks and underlines the differences between the less organized drug enterprises operating in fragmented markets and the more rigidly organized networks establish a monopoly position in the market (Lessing 2008:47).

	ENTREPRENEURIAL VARIABLE	DEGREE OF ORGANIZATION OF DRUG ENTERPRISES		
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
ENTREPRENEURIAL ASPECT	Number of enterprises / Types of market concentration	Various; Pseudo-competition	Large territories; elimination of rivals and territorial consolidation; control over all drug spots in a community	Quasi-monopoly between communities; oligopolies over the entire market
	Size / structure of enterprises	Less than five workers. Limited membership or hierarchy	Local hierarchy; resident managers; absent leader	Hierarchical structure reflected in the communities
	Division of Labor	None/Rotation Scheme	Clear definition of roles; separation between sales and security	Wages and careers
COMMUNITARIAN ASPECT	Relationship with residents	Minimum	Limited assistance; establishment of the social order	Strong patronal relations; semi-institutionalized social rules
	Dominance	Territorial (who sells where); without control over residents	Limited control over residents; restraint of police raids	Solid territorial dominance; rigid control over residents
MILITARY ASPECT	Arsenals	None/ordnance weapon	Ordnance weapons, some fusils	Large military arsenals, arsenals and ordnance weapons shared within communities
	Exhibition of force	No	Limited	Ostensive
	Military strategy	To hide or disappear	Maintain the basis/avoid total conflicts	Maintain the basis (with its defense structure). Intimidation, invasion and occupation offensives



Fragmented

Concentrated

e.g.
“Microtraffic” /
drug dealing
enterprises

e.g. Drug
Cartels /
Favelas
Comandos
(Commands) in
Rio de Janeiro

Table 2.2.1: Structural Organization of Illegal Drug Networks [Author’s adaption from Lessing (2008:48)].

Although smaller, pulverized and less armed, drug networks in Espírito Santo exhibit similar characteristics and modes of operation compared to those in Rio de Janeiro¹³: they are heterogeneous and fragmented, are motivated by economic interests, and adopt similar strategies of territory and community domination. Moreover, since the beginning of Rio's "Favela Pacification Program", which has dismantled or forced several drug factions out of the 'pacified communities'¹⁴, *favelas capixabas*¹⁵ became the perfect shelter for *traficantes* (traffickers) *cariocas*¹⁶ who have lost their market hub or control of drug points (Trinas 2011, Monken 2010).

Drug networks are territorial units, geographically defined through the domination of a certain or various areas where their drug activities take place. Locals refer to the drug networks in various ways such as: "*o grupo*" (the group), "*a quadrilha*" (the gang), "*a rapaziada*" (the boys), "*o tráfico*" (the trafficking), or more recently, "*o movimento*" (the movement) (Leeds 1996:60). The structure of drug trade networks is unstable and diverse; however the following diagram (2.2.2) demonstrates a general hierarchical organization of illegal drug networks, based on the work of several authors (Dowdney 2003:49-50) and confirmation from my interlocutors.

¹³ This comparison is drawn because drug factions or Commands from Rio de Janeiro have been worldwide known for their control of drugs and arms trade as well as for all violence they have perpetrated within the city's favelas throughout decades.

¹⁴ In late 2008, Rio state's government began a highly publicized slum "pacification" program that have implemented 21 permanent police units with nearly 4,000 officers covering 89 shanty towns citywide (Barbassa 2012). The expression 'pacified community' has been largely used to denominate slums that undergone the pacification process, erasing the social stigma attached to the word 'favela'.

¹⁵ Capixaba(s) is the native from Vitória.

¹⁶ Carioca(s) is the native from the city of Rio de Janeiro.

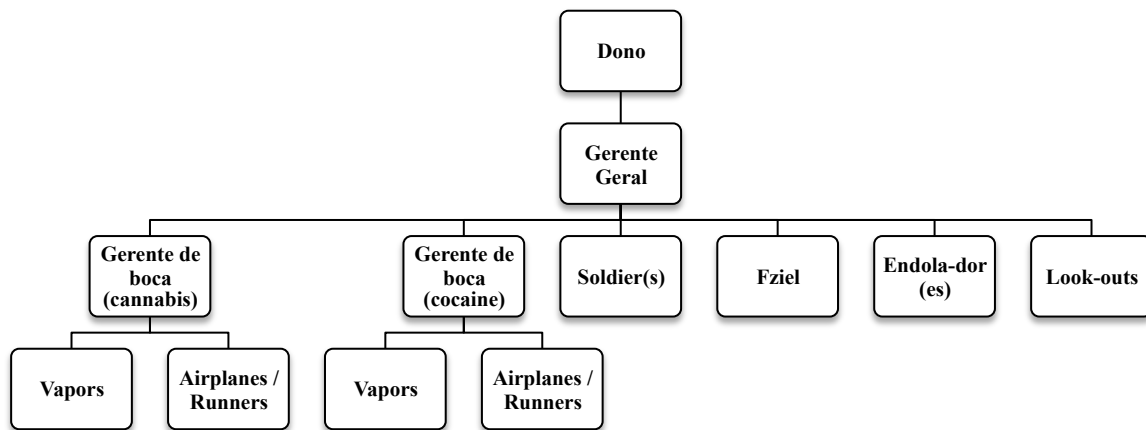


Diagram 2.2.2: Hierarchical Organization of Illegal Drug Networks (Dowdney 2003:49-50, empirical research).

Beneath, a brief summary of illegal drug networks' positions and their functions which include:

- *Dono* (Owner) - Drug leader (also called 'o homem' or 'the man') of a sale point (called *boca* or *boca de fumo*) or several of them, unlikely to live in the *favela* or controlled area but will maintain strict control of activities in the *boca(s)* and visit on a regular basis. It is the person responsible for buying or distributing drugs to be sold in the *boca*, and has the final decision within the territories controlled (Dowdney 2003:47, Sousa and Ferreira 2004:157).
- *Gerente Geral* (General Manager) – The person who serves as a liaison between owners and lower-level workers. General managers are responsible for organizing and dividing drug supplies, overseeing all daily operations of drug sales and collecting revenues. In addition, they might assure territorial defense and control of their areas, supply weapons to employees, negotiate police bribes, and supervise the work of other members. Managers report directly to the *dono* and may succeed to the leadership position, depending on the relationship maintained with the *dono*. As other members of the gang involved in the selling of drugs, earns on a commission basis¹⁷ (Dowdney 2003:47, Maher and Daly 1996:471-2, Sousa and Ferreira 2004:164).

¹⁷ Dowdney (2003:47 n.23) clearly explains that "Traffickers at any ranked level that work on a commission basis do not first purchase drugs and then sell on to the next level or to a client. Instead, drugs are passed down the hierarchy freely, leaving faction members to pay back what they have 'borrowed'". Although not

- *Gerente de boca* (Manager of boca) – Every *boca de fumo* has a manager responsible for sales of drugs at that point (Sousa and Ferreira 2004:164). *Favelas* and peripheric districts where my interlocutors worked had between five and ten *bocas*, which concentrated on the selling of one specific drug (usually marijuana, cocaine or crack).
- *Soldado* (Soldier) – Armed security who patrols drug points. The soldier has the duty to protect and defend the *boca de fumo* and surrounding community from invasion and police raids (Dowdney 2003:48, Sousa and Ferreira 2004:167).
- *Fiel* (Loyal) – Personal armed security guard and trusted obedient to the ‘*dono*’, ‘*gerente geral*’ or ‘*sub-gerente*’ (Dowdney 2003:48).
- *Vapor* (Steam) – Small dealers who sell drugs directly to clients at a *boca* (Dowdney 2003:48, Leeds 1996:60, Sousa and Ferreira 2004:165).
- *Correria* (Runner) / *Mula* (Mule) – Workers who smuggle drugs in their bodies (a strategy more common for international drug trafficking), strapped to their bodies or hidden in vehicles, luggages, or clothes (Fleetwood 2010:3).
- *Avião* (Airplane) – Workers who make delivers of small amounts of drugs to clients all over the city. These are the most common arrested and prosecuted members of drug factions (Dowdney 2003:48, Leeds 1996:60, Zaluar 2002:42).
- *Endolador*¹⁸ – Workers who prepare, divide, and wrap drugs into the small packs they are sold in (Dowdney 2003:48, Sousa and Ferreira 2004:164-5). Leeds (1996:60) is the only author who considered this position as an exclusive ‘women’s domain’, additionally noting that “women generally participate only in limited ways in favela-based drug dealing because the men in charge tend to hold traditional views regarding the role of women.”¹⁹

possible to determine the amount of money a member of the *movimento* will receive, Zaluar indicates that from the 500 percent profit from drug selling, half goes to the owner, 30 percent to the manager, and various percent to the *vapor* or *avião* (Zaluar 2002:42).

¹⁸ This denomination comes from the word dollar (dollar), in reference to the fact that the paper customarily used to wrap marijuana packets was green (Leeds 1996:60 n.32).

¹⁹ The authors suggests Zaluar’s article (1994) for a discussion on the “relatively rare instances of women in positions of control in the drug groups” (Leeds 1996:60) but does not discuss further her attribution of the role of ‘endolador(as)’ to women.

The exorbitantly high price of illegal drugs, “which in the case of cocaine is more expensive than gold as soon as it penetrates the Brazilian territory”, makes trade and smuggling activities attractive (Zaluar 2002:41). Drug trade has become a source of economic opportunity, quick and substantial income for countless Brazilians who entered the underground economy pushed by desperation, in search of or misled for economic opportunities, adventures, a holiday, etc.

Although drug networks’ primary objective is cash or cash equivalents derived from the sale of drugs, community control is perceived as an important mechanism in securing a faction’s exclusive domain of drug retail points in a certain area. To varying degrees, drug dealers control social order by establishing channels of clientelist relationship, threatening and extorting local residents while imposing their own “laws”. That structure of authority and influence that local drug traffickers have created in controlled neighborhoods is often called the “law of trafficking” (*lei do tráfico*) or “law of hillside” (*lei do morro*), and everyone in the community must comply with those rules issued by the *dono*. Non-compliance with the laws or suspicions of conspiracy against the drug group is punished, either by being expelled from the community or killed (Dowdney 2003:68, Leeds 1996:59-61).

Residents of drug trafficking areas may feel vulnerable and uneasy about this system of forced cooperation, however their lack of alternative is coupled with outrage at what they see as police officers’ and political authorities’ disregard for their lives and livelihoods. In fact, as Donna Goldstein (2003) asserted, “the gangs play a major role in providing a form of justice that many residents not necessarily involved in illegal activities themselves are willing to see administered” (Penglase 2010:322).

Relations between drug traffickers and community residents are characterized by heavily gendered notions of hierarchy as well as by specific representations of patriarchy, authority and violence. Patriarchal discourses of authority deployed by drug traffickers produce what Herzfeld (1980) calls “a moral taxonomy,” that is, a “system of ranking one’s fellow citizen according to a set of ethical criteria” (Penglase 2010:324-5). This taxonomy becomes particularly relevant “where there is a contradiction between competition over resources and local ideologies of egalitarianism, and where social boundaries are both blurred and yet important to maintain” (Penglase 2010:325).

Patriarchal discourses and images resonate with drug traffickers' representation of the *morro* (hillside) as an extended family; nonetheless everyone in the community is aware of the *quadrilha*'s disproportionate power and authority. In drawing inferences about the highly hierarchical nature of the Brazilian society, Marilena Chauí (1995:75) very aptly observed that in Brazil:

differences and social asymmetries are immediately transformed into inequalities that reinforce a relation of command-obedience. . . . Relationships among those who regard themselves as equals are made of complicity; and among those who are considered as different, the relationship takes the form of favour, clientelism, tutelage or co-optation; and when inequality is too severe takes the form of oppression.

Despite the little resemblance actual family structures bear to the traditional notion of 'patriarchal family',²⁰ Sarti (1992) asserts that this concept implies a 'model of authority' that the working class and urban poor appeal to make sense of their often incongruous and tension-filled lives. In a 'patriarchal family,' wives and children should 'respect' the status of the father, who will in return provide for and protect the family. In the *morro*, while traffickers provide for the defense and security of local residents, enforce communal norms of sociability, and invest in the welfare of the community; residents reciprocate by respecting the authority of traffickers, ensuring the gang's protection and anonymity from the police (Penglase 2010:324).

Additionally, ideologies of male authority condition and legitimate relationships between the *tráfico* and communities' residents, with the most powerful protecting and caring for the community, which should respect the *tráfico*'s authority. The *tráfico*'s role of "patriarch" and "protector" of the community denotes that local social relations are to be structured by complementary and reciprocal roles based on a different hierarchy (Leeds 1996:60).

For Lindisfarne (1994), the adoption of patriarchal discourses is embedded within a gendered rhetoric that "is politically effective because it operates at a level of abstraction which hides classificatory ambiguities and alternative points of view, while empowering some fortunate men and women" (Penglase 2010:325). Hence, patriarchal discourses and masculinity representations that characterize drug trade activities have been working to veil or stereotype women's opportunities and experiences within the dynamics and hierarchy of drug trade networks. Worldwide drug trade as a space of power, wealth, and

²⁰ Defined as a static and extended family centered upon the authority of a powerful male.

status has become an extremely appealing alternative to the needs aspirations of persons of both sexes, all ages and social classes.

2.3 Drug trade: a masculine milieu?

In common knowledge and in much contemporary research literature, the illegal drug world has been conceptualized as an essentially masculine domain rooted in a patriarchal notion of authority and legitimate violence (Penglase, 2010:320). Stereotypic and monolithic accounts of drug trade usually portray mythic constructions of powerful men, who have little compunction in breaking the laws, using violence to achieve their goals by partaking in this highly profitable criminal activity; and powerless women, who perform supporting, subordinate or sexual roles in male-led drug networks. These simplistic representations of the illegal drug trade may be flawed by a skewed perception of how gender shapes a person's experience, and structures the distribution of roles in organizations and societies.

The participation of women in the illegal drug trade has been heavily influenced by the organization of gender (Denton and O'Malley 1999, Rodriguez and Griffin 2005, Maher and Daly 1996). Gender has been long recognized as a basic principle that profoundly shapes the living and working conditions of men and women in society. As opposed to an individual's attribute or capabilities, gender is a "patterning of difference and domination through distinctions between women and men that is integral to many societal processes" (Acker 1992:565). As a socially constructed phenomenon, gender structures social relationships, sustains, reproduces, and renders legitimate roles and patterns of expectation. Lorber (1994) argues that in mainstream Western culture, "the social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structures; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power" (Barrett 1996:130).

It is under these circumstances of dominance among individuals that gender categories (or subjectivities) are ideologically constructed, legitimized and naturalized over time and culture. Gender categorization involves a complex process of socialization, interactional and micro-political activities that instil men and women with distinctive psychological and behavioural traits (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). Common view in conservative societies and organizations is that "things are the way they are by virtue of the fact that

men are men and women are women – a division perceived to be natural and rooted in biology, producing in turn profound psychological behavior and social consequences” (West and Zimmerman 1987:128). These fundamental and enduring differences between masculinities and femininities are produced through a combination of biological, cultural and social dynamics, which reflect the gendered organization of societies and labour markets (West and Zimmerman 1987:127-128).

Whitehead and Barrett (2001) defined masculinities as “those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine” [or queer] (Ellis and Meyer 2009:3). Rather than a stable monolithic structure, Rebecca E. Biron (2000) asserts that the performance of “masculinity for men functions as both an unquestioned ontological guarantor of gendered identity and an unstable, ever-shifting demand for credible performances of that identity” (McDonald 2006:20). In fact, the impact of interpretations of what it means to be a man (subject) and how Man (discourse) has been constructed will differ according to the context of the performance and the social, economic and political status of the performer. Performances of masculine identity, such as,

Authoritativeness, defensiveness, aggressiveness, physical strength, self-assurance, or self-reliance [are viewed] as heroic or natural in nation formation, military achievement, sport, or business; yet we often deem the very same displays criminally transgressive and unnatural if performed by men who are marginalised ethnically, politically, economically, or sexually (McDonald 2006:21).

As in the case of legitimate business markets, in the drug trade milieu the assessment of an individual’s capabilities is based on “traditional” (read stereotypical) gender roles and ideas of masculinities. The everyday lives of drug traffickers and dealers as social actors have been linked to characteristics socially determined or ascribed as masculine such as: aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control (Godfrey 2009:205).

Violent performances of masculinity are often perceived as readily available resource for the establishment of power relations in the context of drug trafficking. In general, it is through violent and brutal acts that men legitimise their power and assert their role as dominant actors within their gangs and their community structures. Moreover, since the social structure of drug networks is not predicted by age, experience or hierarchical order, violent assertions of dominance allow individuals to seize the necessary power to move

towards the position of drug leaders and of symbolic father of the community (McDonald 2006:22). Yet, traffickers deliberately unleash violence to intimidate rivals and ensure that their authority will not be challenged. Drug gangs 'compensatory' displays of cruelty and insensitivity generate deep anxieties and serve as an underlying guarantee of community's respect (or fear) to the authority of a drug trafficker (Zaluar 2009:166).

Furthermore, Campbell (1993) highlights a significant new dimension affecting deviant behaviour of men associated with 'street culture': the impact of a macho propaganda. According to the author:

The alleged absence of role models . . . came not from the absence of men and masculinities in their lives – the lads were surrounded by a macho propaganda more potent in its penetration of young men's hearts and minds that at any other time in history – they were soaked in globally transmitted images and ideologies of butch and brutal solutions to life's difficulties (Collison 1996:440-1).

In addition to violence, a blatant display of conspicuous consumption helps to reinforce masculine identity and traffickers' representation of successful men. Drug traffickers regard themselves as the personification of the fame, power and image of the area they dominate. By helping and lending money to community's residents, friends, and family members; impressing everyone with high levels of conspicuous consumption and an obsession for jewellery and brand-name clothes; and lavishing money on huge parties and barbecues; drug traffickers and dealers gain respect and appreciation from community residents and colleagues (Zaluar 2009:166).

By combining and manipulating these symbolic and material resources, dealers are able to enact and emulate a 'hegemonic masculine' identity. 'Hegemony' is a pivotal concept, deriving from Gramsci's analysis of class relations, and referring to the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process. According to Connell (1987), it is through this dynamic that a ruling class establishes and maintains a leading position in social life, holds the ability to impose situations, sets the terms in which events are to be understood, formulates ideals and defines morality as whatever's good for them (Donaldson 1993).

The concept of hegemony also relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole; it consists of the overall framework where specific relations of domination and subordination linger (Connell 2005:78). Hegemony can only subsist in case of some correspondence between the cultural ideal and institutional power; and it is in these grounds that drug

traffickers and dealers legitimately enact their 'hegemonic masculinity' within the community and their networks.

The term 'hegemonic masculinity' is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy" (Connell 2005:77). By assigning to men the necessary social (in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command) and material dividends (higher average incomes, control of major corporations and state's institutions), patriarchal societies enable men to perpetuate 'hegemonic masculinity' values and to legitimate the subordination of women on a social scale (Connell 2005:79-80).

Connell's concept is the most appropriate for coming to a theoretical understanding of gender power relations because it differentiates sub-/counter-hegemonic masculinities, while bringing in the feminist analysis (Sasson-Levy 2002:358). The notion of hegemonic masculinity denotes an ideal type against which other types of masculinity should be measured either through subordination, complicity, or marginalization (Sasson-Levy 2002:358).

In current Western cultures the prevalent ideal of masculinity is a man who is independent, risk-taking, aggressive, heterosexual, and rational (Connell 2005:13). In the particular case of Brazil, distinctions of gender are clearly expressed by the interrelationship between violence and male identity (Penglase 2010:321). Yet, in areas controlled by drug networks, a high concentration of guns incites a warrior culture and ethos that draws upon above-average levels of aggressiveness. Guns are regarded as symbols of power and status through which men impose their authority obtain access to goods and women (Zaluar 2010:16).

Traditional and hegemonic notions of masculinity are also inscribed into male criminals' conceptions of the 'ideal woman' and their expectations about her. According to Zaluar (1993:181), "an outlaw's true woman is one who helps him in his hour of need, when he is in prison and needs money, a lawyer, clothing, food and everything else". In keeping with the implicit rules that dictate people's behaviour within drug trafficking dynamics, the official partner of a criminal man - the 'loyal' (*fidel*) - has to remain chaste and faithful to him, even if faithfulness is not reciprocated (what is true in most cases) or when this man is serving his prison sentence. This woman has no options but the fulfilment of her

obligations, and any failure to comply with them is met with harsh and violent punishments (Barcinski 2012:152-3).

Despite their subjugation within those informal rules of drug trafficking, several women report feeling attracted by the power and position occupied by drug traffickers in dominated areas. In a study conducted by the University of Coimbra and Viva Rio on women and armed violence, women set out some reasons for their attraction:

“That’s what I think it is... it’s being drunk on power, on success... the girls think that the guy carrying a gun can give them... a position of some standing” [31-year-old inmate of Talavera Bruce Prison] (Amnesty International 2008:29).

Some of them are particularly motivated by the opportunity to improve their social and economic status through relationships with traffickers:

“Women love criminals. Christ, you even become more beautiful. You become gorgeous, powerful... You have standing. The girls are undervalued... A girl from the favela can’t afford a Gang, a PXC [designer labels]... a criminal can” [17-year-old Renata] (Amnesty International 2008:29).

Emotional involvement or relationship with criminal males (boyfriends, partners, husbands, relatives or sons) is repeatedly credited as one of the main reasons for the participation of women in drug trafficking activities (Barcinski 2012:153). Indeed, many times, it is through association with drug traffickers that women confront the ‘institutionalized sexism’ of the underworld and gain access to the illegal drug trade (see further discussion in chapter 3).

Nonetheless, drug trade networks and sales points continue to be dominated by men: they engage in drug dealing more often than women do, and usually perform more economically remunerative or higher status positions in the drug economy and consequently hold structural power advantages within the illegal drug world (Anderson 2005:376). Steffensmeier (1983) contends that male criminals generally prefer to “work, associate, and do business with other men” once they tend to stereotype women as inferior in physical strength, emotional and intellectual capacity to work in a risky and violent setting (Maher and Daly 1996:467-8). Consequently, the typical pattern of women’s involvement in drug trade networks has been characterized by sporadic, high-risk, low-paying jobs (Maher and Daly 1996:467).

In the illegal world of drug trafficking (as in most of the world), a gendered hierarchy systematically work to empower and privilege men while marginalizing and excluding women:

It is the man's body, its sexuality, minimal responsibility in procreation, and conventional control of emotions that pervades work and organizational processes. Women's bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding and child care, menstruation and mythic 'emotionality' – are suspect, stigmatised, and used as ground for control and exclusion... to function at the top of male hierarchies requires that women render irrelevant everything that makes them women (Lorber 1994:283).

Overwhelmingly, men have been regarded as a singular unified group mostly implicated in murders, rape, drug traffic or deals, and street gangs. There are numerous explanations and reasons for men to engage in violent endeavours (e.g. money, honour, patriotism, self-defence, liberation, etc); however all other grounds are underwritten by the prospect of securing a privileged male positioning in patriarchal systems and the reaffirmation of masculine power and identity (Cockburn 1999:9-10).

3. Representations of female criminality

3.1 Patriarchal discourses and gender differences

Most literature on drug use and trade is characterized by patriarchal discourses and stereotypical conceptions of gender that fall prey to the weaknesses of a rigid dichotomous system (e.g. as expressed in the axiom: women as passive victims and men as oppressors). These studies depict drug markets as highly sexist and segregated culture, which reproduce in a caricatured way a social 'order' artificially grounded on notions of masculine power and superiority (Ovalle and Giacomello 2006:298, Rodrigues and Griffin 2005:4). In general women are absent from these accounts, and when featured their involvement in the illegal drug trade is described as minimal, subordinate, and limited by "male employers' perceptions of women as unreliable, untrustworthy, and incapable of demonstrating an effective capacity for violence" (Maher and Daly 1996:483).

Simplistic assumptions about gender underlying much of those previous researches resonate with idiosyncratic gender representations of gender that have always been permeating non-egalitarian societies through mutual imbrication with other social relations of difference - especially power, status and roles. The dominance of these discourses comes not from its ability to present accurate depictions of social actors and practices, but rather from their engendering of "women and men as persons who *are* defined by difference" (Moore 2004:50).

The pervasiveness of gender as an organizing principle of social life requires that gender statuses be clearly differentiated (Lorber 2007:279). Specifics of gender differences are socially constructed and distinctively valued by ranking "men above women of the same race and class" (Lorber 2007:280).

Despite substantial cross-cultural and context variability in men's and women's roles, Rosaldo believed that a pervasive asymmetry between genders could be traced across societies: "perhaps what is most striking and surprising is the fact that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men" (Rosaldo 2001:19). As a consequence, in these patriarchal systems whatever men and women do – even if they do exactly the same thing – their actions are valued differently to the advantage of men. The

dominant gender category (men) is considered the hegemonic ideal, and characterises the norm that labels the other (women) as that which lacks the valuable traits the dominant possesses (Lorber 2007:281).

The efficacy and hegemonic potential of patriarchal discourses lie in their resonance with this socio-cultural order that configures normative gender and sexual identities by framing women and men as distinct groups. Different personalities, abilities and needs are attributed to these gendered individuals; who consequently are expected to perform particular roles according to the types and degrees of agency they enjoy (Moore 2004:50). This differentiation is the basis of a more general regime of signification and discourse which, when in play, generates those discursive effects that inform the construction of gender differences and categorizations (Moore 2004:50).

Masculine and feminine identities are not biological traits; but rather artificial cultural constructs that people attribute to biological traits at a given period of time. Assumptions of what is masculine and what is feminine are construed and regulated by the norms and expectations of particular human cultures and societies. Consequently, these gendered social constructions reproduce a society's view of how men and women should act, think, relate to others and what they can aspire to in life (Lorber 2007:279).

The process of gendering and its outcomes are an interactional process collectively produced and legitimized by broader social relationships and structures (e.g. family, religion, science, law, the fundamental values of a society, etc); however, the most powerful mechanism perpetuating these hegemonic discourses and patriarchal perceptions of male and female roles is the invisibility of this process, which renders other experiences and ideas virtually unthinkable (Lorber 2007:278-9).

Drawing on Foucault, we can think of gender positions as a 'regime of truth' produced by discourses and social practices, which establish and disseminate power relations. As Foucault (1976) explains,

In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated, nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse (Munro 2003:84).

A discourse, by its turn, is "not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories and beliefs" (Scott 1988:35). Discourses provide a range of 'obvious' and 'natural' 'subject positions' - ways of being

(identities), of relating (relations) and of understanding the world (knowledge) – with which individuals may temporarily or situationally conceive of, by themselves or others (Prichard 2000:35). Discourses are themselves ‘mechanism of power’ manifested in diverse ways and contexts across societies. When conceiving of the ‘mechanisms of power’, Foucault (1976) would “think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their postures, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people” (Munro 2003:82).

The production and circulation of discourses is neither unidirectional nor homogeneous; discourses entail mechanisms of power that concurrently perpetuate hegemonic positions (or identities) and allow opportunities for resistance and change. In this sense, Foucault (1980) reiterated that “the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or ‘manufactures’ something that does not as yet exist, that is, ‘fictions’ it” (Malson, 1998:27-8).

In spite of that availability of discourses, dominant ‘forms of power’ will determine “the conditions of ‘true’ discourses” and produce “knowledge in that exercise of power itself” (Amigot and Pujal 2009:253). Discourses of unequal gender relations involve awareness and accountability of individuals for the social and cultural norms ascribed for his/her gender category. In conformity to this principle, Foucault (1976) advised that we shall devote attention to a network of complex and interconnected ‘disciplinary techniques’, that help to operationalize power and target human bodies as objects to be manipulated and trained (Munro 2003:82).

Foucault’s concepts of ‘mechanisms of power’ and ‘disciplinary techniques’ give a valuable insight into the functioning of institutional structures and the bounds of societal rules that work to produce and reproduce conventional gender roles (or naturalized gender asymmetries). Rather than absolute imperatives, particular ‘truths’ legitimated by discourses are “historically produced within certain specific conditions of possibility” (Malson 1998:27). These ‘truths’ seek to establish a ‘signification’ through the expansion of disciplinary and regulatory elements that work to marginalize contesting discourses and determine what counts as real (Amigot and Pujal 2009:253). Moreover, as social practices, these ‘true’ discourses generate ‘real’ effects on individuals’ lives: they legitimate particular ‘truths’ about reality, and produce subjects (Malson 1998:28) – as, for example, women, criminals, delinquents, or deviants.

The connection that Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) establish between people's behavior and their social contexts/interrelations is that:

If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex categories. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals - not the institutional arrangements - may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions) (West and Zimmerman 1987:146).

Although expectations on gender performativity vary across societal contexts, every known society enacts and upholds characteristic tasks, manners, and responsibilities primarily associated with men or with women through institutional arrangements, local and temporal preconditions (Rosaldo 2001:19).

For radical feminists, the distribution of power and prestige by sex is specifically an issue “of male supremacy and female subordination” (MacKinnon 2006:248). A very simple example is the way that in many Western societies, “male sexuality and persons of the male gender are portrayed as active, aggressive, thrusting and powerful, while female sexuality and persons of the female gender are seen as essentially passive, powerless, submissive and repetitive” (Moore 2004:50).

In her study of women substance abusers, Tammy Anderson (2008) alleges that debates involving women and drugs were and remain focused on a “pathology and powerlessness” perspective that presents “women’s drug experiences as a set of female-specific problems, and consequently denies women’s activities or agency in negotiating the world” (Anderson 2008:2). According to her, this orientation obscures the realities of many women involved in the drug world and their experiences, once “whether concerning drug selling, drug financing (e.g. sex-for-drugs exchanges) meeting or retaining basic sustenance needs (e.g. housing), securing treatment and/or succeeding in abstinence, the literature consistently tells story about how men wield power over women and over the opportunities women encounter” (Anderson 2008:4). To that extent, researches have come to limited masculinist conclusions about the nature of operations, resources and social skills needed to take advantage of and qualify for drug trafficking/dealing (Denton and O’Malley 1999:514).

The hypothesis of universal subordination of women have been challenged and critiqued by a number of feminist anthropologists. Naomi Quinn (1997:183) considers “more accurate, and more helpful to treat women’s status as a composite of many different variables often causally independent one from another. Thus in any given society, this status may be very ‘low’ in

some domains of behavior, approach equality with men's status in others, and even, in some domains, surpass the status of men.”

In fact, it is imperative to understand that changing patterns of gender relations have led to a critical review and re-appraisal of our views regarding gender inequality in many areas of our lives. Historical and cultural developments occurred (at least) since the onset of industrialization bestow evidence of the malleability of gender roles and identities in response to socioeconomic changes. Traditionally conceived female and male roles have been gradually deconstructed within societies, and gender differences diminished as men and women blend traditional role elements (e.g. child rearing) with traditional male role elements (e.g. wage earners) (Nyalunga 2007:2).

According to Fausto (2001:6),

*a redução da desigualdade entre os sexos, no âmbito da sociedade ocidental, implica a maior presença da mulher não apenas na área do trabalho fora de casa, mas em diferentes campos, entre os quais se inclui a criminalidade*²¹.

Despite these facts, our knowledge of the nature and motivations of crimes committed by women is still very limited. Moreover, the issue of female criminality is still not treated as a social problem, its investigations have been dominated by stereotypical conceptions of gender and characterized by contradictions and inconsistencies that further undermine the development of this particular area of study.

3.2 The construction of female criminals

Crime has been traditionally described as a practice through which men ‘do’ or accomplish gender. Greater involvement of males in criminal activities is explained by an affinity between traditional masculine behavior and criminal activity. As Oakley (1972) has shown

[c]riminality and masculinity are linked because the sort of acts associated with each have much in common. The demonstration of physical strength, a certain kind of aggressiveness, visible and external “proof” of achievement, whether legal or illegal – these are the facets of the ideal male personality and also much of criminal behaviour. Both male and criminal are valued by their peers for these qualities. Thus, the dividing line between what is masculine and what is criminal may at times be a thin one (Shover 1979:163).

²¹ “The reduction of inequality between sexes, in the scope of Western societies, implicates a major presence of women not just in the area of work outside the home but in different fields, among which criminality is included” (author’s translation).

In opposition, women are not expected to commit crimes. As Steffensmeier and Allan (1996:476) note, qualities that are valued in the criminal subculture are the antithesis of most common femininity stereotypes - such as weakness, submission, domestication, nurturance, and “lady-like” behavior.

However, in contrast to the stereotypes described above, women perform a variety of criminal activities, many times exercising power and agency while negotiating gender power relationships, making and demanding concessions. Opposing traditional views of crime, Steffensmeier and Allan’s research (1996) found that female offenders are more prone than men to carry out crimes alone, and the most common pattern of female delinquent involvement is in association with a mixed group of boys and girls. In examining these aspects of female delinquency, Empey (1982) affirmed that

. . . while girls are not as delinquent as boys overall, they do report having committed a long list of illegal acts which historically have been viewed as “male” offenses. . . . Explanations are needed to account for. . . a picture of female behavior that is far different from the one suggested by tradition (Berger 1989:383).

Even after three decades since Empey’s observation, a comprehensive account of female delinquency is still much to be desired. Because of the small proportion of convictions they encompass, female offenders have hitherto received little attention in scientific researches. This neglect has often resulted in fallacious and inadequate accounts of women’s experiences and motivations to engage in crime. According to Carol Smart, classical and contemporary accounts of female criminality are still highly embedded in a sexist framework that

attributes to one sex socially undesirable characteristics which are assumed to be intrinsic or ‘natural’ characteristics of that sex. Such an ideology arises because the socially structured and culturally given nature of the assumptions informing these theories are not treated as subject for analysis; rather common-sense understandings are taken for granted as a suitable platform from which to commence theorizing (Smart 1977:90).

Inherent in these inconsistent conceptualizations are stereotypes about female biological properties, psychology and gender-role expectations. Proponents of biological determinism maintain that certain behaviors or forms of oppression are justified and inescapable because they arise from supposedly natural and, therefore, unchangeable factors (Nyalunga 2007:4, Smart 1977:91). Cesare Lombroso²² and his colleague Ferrero (1900) insisted that certain biological factors implicate in the development of women’s criminal behavior. In their words:

²² Lombroso was an Italian physician, commonly regarded as the father of Criminal Anthropology.

We have seen that women have many traits in common with children; that their moral sense is deficient, that they are revengeful, jealous and inclined to vengeance of refined cruelty. In ordinary cases these defects are neutralized by piety, maternity, want of passion, sexual coldness, by neatness and an undeveloped intelligence. But when piety and maternal sentiments are wanting, and in their place are strong passions and intensely erotic tendencies, much muscular strength and a superior intelligence for the conception and execution of evil, it is clear that the innocuous semi-criminal present in the normal woman must be transformed into a born criminal more terrible than any man (Gavigan 1993:217).

Along with biological determinism, gender system theories have also figured as a common rationale for the lower incidence of women in criminal activities. Rosaldo accounted for the differences of gender roles by arguing that: “characteristic aspects of male and female roles in social, cultural and economic systems can all be related to universal, structural opposition between domestic and public domains of activity” (Rosaldo 2001:35). By “domestic orientation” Rosaldo meant “those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children”. Conversely, the “public domain” referred to “activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups” (Rosaldo 2001:23). An example of such vindications is presented in Lombroso and Ferraro’s thesis (2004 [1893]), which attributed lower rates of women criminality to a “‘conservative tendency of women in all questions of social order’ and a women’s familial duties because of which she ‘leads a more sedentary life, and is less exposed than the male to the varying conditions of time and space in her environment’” (Harrington 2007:58). This emphasis on women’s maternal role place unfair and unrealistic expectations on women, which confined in their private roles would not access the sources of authority, prestige and status attributed to men in the public sphere. The subordination, control and oppression of women in all social spheres have been explained through the natural constraints posed by female biology and personality traits on women’s lives.

When women finally ripped their aprons off, their emancipation was upheld as a ready explanation for understanding female criminal behavior and, in particular, for the rising in official statistics concerning women in criminals justice systems (Gavigan 1993:222). Among those who have perpetuated this intersection between changes in gender/sex role and female delinquency, Freda Adler’s thesis of the “new criminal” is probably the most exponential and criticized example (Cernkovich and Giordano 1979:146, Gavigan 1993:221, Giordano 1978:127). In Adler’s (1975) view, increased independence would produce a shift in equality in both legal work and crime:

the phenomenon of female criminality is but one wave in . . . [the] rising tide of female assertiveness – a wave which has not yet crested and many even be seeking its level uncomfortably close to the high-water mark set by male violence . . . [Females are now] robbing banks singlehandedly, committing assorted armed robberies, muggings, loan-sharking operations, extortions, murders, and a wide variety of other aggressive, violence-oriented crimes (Berger 1989:379).

While suggesting that transformations at various levels of society may have impacted on female behavior, Adler's ideological stance is mistaken and oversimplified by assuming a degree of politicization on the part of offenders, and a kind of delinquency-inducing status to women's liberation movement (Chesney-Lind 1986:79, Cernkovich and Giordano 1979:146, Giordano 1978:127). Furthermore, by claiming that women's emancipation has fostered female criminality, Adler's emancipatory theory displays a peculiar position that argues against most criminological literature, which highlights the fundamental role played by victimization, role entrapment and economic marginalization in the creation of crime (Steffensmeier and Allan 1996:469-70).

Despite increasing the visibility of female offenders, these theories' reliance on stereotypical assumptions about women's roles tended to reinforce and perpetuate the concept of male as the 'universal' criminal and the female as 'gendered'. The most distressing fact about such dominant representations "is that they have only the most tangential relation to the behaviours, qualities, attributes and self-images of individual women and men" (Moore 2004:50). As a result of this superficial accounts, too little is know and too much assumed about the nature and motivation of women's crime.

However, it is important to recognize that female offenders are not a homogeneous group. For this reason, to understand the occurrence of a certain type of crime, investigations must be focused and tailored to examine specific behaviors of individuals involved in that particular crime rather than gendered ones (Barcinski 2012:146-7, Campbell 2008:235, Steffensmeier and Allan 1996:484). Nevertheless, that problematic conjecture related to investigations of women's crimes is unfortunately extended to the particular context of drug crimes. Apart from some exceptions, most academic literature regarding drug trafficking networks either disregards the experiences of female criminals or frames it according to a presumed universal culture and assumptions about a unitary (class and history-free) feminine nature (Barcinski 2012:146-7).

Patriarchal narratives explore themes of dependence, exploitation, dysfunction, passivity and victimization and rarely reflect on their senses of agency and power. Those accounts are summarized by a recent piece by Evans (2002):

Women still occupy marginal positions within drug markets and this has increased their risk of victimization. Women get into drugs because of experience with abuse and violent trauma early in life. Men lead them into drugs. They are still forced to rely largely on prostitution for economic gain and when they do engage in other crimes, such as stealing, it is always in partnership with a male leader. Furthermore, when women are able to gain access to the dominant drug market, it is through their boyfriends or husbands. Women's participation in the informal drug economy, in terms of drug sales and distribution, is contingent upon their link to men in their lives (Anderson 2005:373-4).

Despite acknowledging women's increasing presence in the drug economies ever since the late 1980s, some have argued that rather than emancipation and equality of opportunities it is women's powerlessness that has been shaping their experiences. In examining women's participation in the U.S. crack cocaine markets of the late 1980s and early 1990s in comparison with their roles in the heroin markets of the 1960s and 1970s, Maher and Daly (1996:466-7) concluded that recent drug markets are still monopolized by men and affording few opportunities for stable income generation for women. By addressing the opportunity hypothesis, the authors asserted that women were almost always employed as part-time workers, continued to occupy marginal positions within such markets and to face increased risk of violence and victimization. Furthermore, those women were still relying heavily and consistently on prostitution as a somewhat more stable source of income.

Maher and Daly (1996) vehemently opposed assumptions about changes in the gendered structure of drug markets or the emergence of "new opportunities" for women in these markets. Results of their ethnographic study found that:

Underworld institutionalized sexism was the most powerful element shaping the Bushwick women's experiences in the drug economy; it inhabited their access to drug business work roles and effectively foreclosed their ability to participate as higher-level distributors. For that most crucial element, we find no change from previous decades (Maher and Daly 1996:484).

One major difficulty in accepting these authors findings is that their ethnographic work was restricted to the study of women drug users that supported themselves through prostitution. Stigma and discrimination against drug addicts and sex workers is widespread in patriarchal societies and, paradoxically perhaps, reproduced within the drug world. Furthermore, as reported by the authors, their interlocutors were not trustworthy workers but dealers who would "constantly grapple with the urge to consume the product and to abscond with the

drugs and/or the money” (Maher and Daly 1996:475). Given this condition, it is obvious that those drug leaders could not place these crack- or heroin- addicted women in higher positions within their network, nor trust large supplies of drug or money to these male or female drug addicts. According to my interlocutors, to earn trust and be respected within the network one has to be controlled and prevent his/her own slide into drug addiction.

Another stereotypic assumption problematized by researches on drug trafficking is the susceptibility of women to drug addiction, which is considered greater and more tragic than men’s. This “female pathology” is regarded as another factor contributing to women’s failure to achieve any positive outcomes or experiences within the drug economy. Women’s particular condition is described in a special report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA 2003), which states that:

Female experience physical, psychological and social consequences from smoking, drinking and using drugs, many of which are different from or more severe than those experienced by male substance users. For instance, at the same levels of use female are more likely to become dependent on tobacco and more intoxicated from drinking than males and are more vulnerable to alcohol-induced brain damage and other substance-related problems than males. Females with substance use disorders are likelier than males to have co-occurring mood or anxiety disorders (Anderson 2005:374).

Unfortunately, most researches and theories have been restricting the analysis of women’s participation in drug markets to pathology or powerlessness narratives which ignore the influence of social, economic, political, and cultural factors in (dis)empowering the experiences of these women who ventured into criminal endeavours. This limitation is yet aggravated by the immediate association of female criminality to biological or psychological characteristics unique to women, ascribed social roles, and the assimilation by either or both sexes of a patriarchal ideology (Barcinski 2012:147).

Attempts to shift the dominant narrative to a more holistic approach that addresses women’s agency (i.e. interests, strategies, abilities, and actions) have been criticized by authors who believe that showing women’s power and engagement in illegal endeavours will affect assistance aimed at securing them better lives (Anderson 2008:3). Nevertheless, what advocates of this position fail to realize is that subjugating narratives only work to mask and hide the experiences of thousands of women who make up transnational, national and/or local criminal networks (Ovalle and Giacomello, 2006:297). Neglecting women’s participation in the illegal economy does not help to improve or change their situation, and becomes particularly controversial as the numbers of women involved in criminal enterprises (especially drug crimes) increases and their roles diversify.

In a modest effort to debunk masculinist stereotypic assumptions that tend to victimize and devalue the potential of women in their endeavors, this study maintains that despite being affected by socio-cultural norms and asymmetric power relations, women in the drug trade are not passive appendages unsuitable to engage in illegal markets. Contrary to what most researches have indicated, women can experience successful and powerful careers in the drug world either by manipulating traditional gender roles or engaging in non-gendered strategies. Most importantly, it is claimed that an individual's ability to conduct successful legal or illegal endeavors is not determined by its gender, sex, sexuality, race, color, nationality, religion, social class, or any other single variable, for no exact formula for succeeding and exerting power exists in the (drug) world.

3.3 Postmodern feminism and the performance of women in the drug trade

In keeping with my attempt to counteract stereotypes and simplistic assumptions of female criminality – specifically in presenting a more complex account of the performances of women in drug trade - this research is predicated on a postmodern feminist perspective. Postmodern feminism refuses attempts to include or expand the participation of women into existing opportunities of a male-dominated world (e.g. emancipatory theory), or to reverse the traditional logic of gender roles (e.g. gender/sex system theory) by focusing on women/the feminine. What postmodern feminism favors is a broader theoretical framework that critically combines modern and postmodern discourses²³ within a feminist political project that emphasizes the plurality of women's experiences (Beasley 2005:24, Giroux 1990:24).

Even though some feminists have been reluctant to espouse postmodernism in the belief that the rejection of universal principles would entail the abandonment of all social theory, postmodern feminism (as a discourse) does not support all postmodernist corollaries. To cite an example, postmodern feminism does not reject outright every forms of meta-narrative, nor considers all of them ahistorical and essentialist (Maharaj 1995:50). On the contrary, it acknowledges the importance of ground level narratives in reflecting the contexts and specifics of people's lives, histories and cultures; at the same time as it advocates for meta-narratives that contain elements of social criticism – i.e. that reveal a dialectical, relational and holistic link (Giroux 1990:31). For postmodern feminists, meta-narratives are important

²³ Postmodern theory challenges basic assumptions and practices of the modern paradigm by reassessing its core features, such as: concern for universal truths and values, deterministic logic, individualism and humanist ideals, and comprehensive systems of knowledge.

in privileging certain analyzes that reveal how certain interrelations and interdependencies work to model and empower larger social, political, and ideological systems (Giroux 1990:31).

In fact, what postmodern feminists promote is postmodern's critical project of 'denaturalizing', 'demystifying' and 'deconstructing' the Enlightenment's grand narratives of reason, objectivity and knowable self (Beasley 2005:24, Maharaj 1995:50). That position is based on a rejection of "a linear view of history which legitimates patriarchal notions of subjectivity and society"; and of "the notion that science and reason have a direct correspondence with objectivity and truth" (Giroux 1990:24). In summary, postmodern feminism conceives of a postmodernism that

represents a realisation that there is not a single truth but multiple realities, all are legitimate and all equally valid; that individuals, societies and economies are not governed solely by instrumental reason but are subject to historical and cultural processes that cannot be explained by reason alone; that the human being is not necessarily the centre of the universe; that modernism is itself an egregious male oriented conceptualization of the world and has consistently retarded female participation in human affairs (hence the emergence postmodern feminism)... (Skinner 2003:58).

Based on those premises, postmodern feminism supports the deconstruction of binaries situated between modernism and postmodernism (e.g. universality/multiplicity, totalizing/diversity, suppression of differences/pursuit of difference); and opposes hierarchically informed conception of identity (human or group). It seeks to demonstrate that in Western societies binary oppositions such as man/woman, masculine/feminine, mind/body, culture/nature, reason/intuition, always involve a political identity that not only privileges the primary (male) term over its other (female) but also works to nominate it the defining term (or norm of cultural meaning). Postmodernists attempt to dehierarchize and demean these constructions by demonstrating that the apparent priority and identity of the primary term is actually forged (Ebert 1991:893). As Derrida (1986) stated: in any binary pair,

the difference of the primary term is not outside but 'within' the term itself: any identity is always divided within by its other, which is not opposed to it but rather 'supplementary'. However, the logic of identity banishes this 'difference within' the privileged term by projecting its 'otherness' onto a secondary term seen as outside, thus representing the 'difference within' as an external dichotomy (Ebert 1991:893).

In other words, differences 'within' the category man are disregarded or excluded by projecting its otherness onto the category woman, and vice-versa. It is by opposing and

undermining the other ‘dangerous supplement’ (the female) inscribed in opposition to the primary (male) term that the category men sizes its dominance in patriarchal social relations.

One of the most influential theoretical contributions of postmodernism is its emphasis on the central role played by language and subjectivity as new avenues in which to conceive of meaning, identity, and politics. Postmodern discourse has challenged the dominant, positivist conception of language as a neutral vehicle for expressing ideas, interpretations and meanings; and therefore introduced the idea of language as a structured articulation of signs that index a system of differences (Giroux 1990:22-23).

For example, the word “man” is identified in terms of what men are not – women. The very meaning of “man” excludes the “feminine” and vice-versa. Moreover, the two terms of the binary are not equal. The first term – man – is superior. For example, “man” might be associated with reason, leadership, the public sphere, control, and authority. The hierarchical oppositions structuring linguistic and discursive meaning shape social practices as they become part of institutions, mass culture, therapeutic regimes, gender codes, and so on (Seidman 1998:18-9).

Herein lie the skillful manipulation of identities and the overturn of certainties: “the meaning of a signifier is defined by the shifting, changing relations of difference that characterize the referential play of language” (Giroux 1990:23). According to this view, we have no sense of reality, our knowledge and representations of the world are always mediated by constructs of language. As Derrida (1981) affirms: “all experience is the experience of meaning” (Ebert 1991:893).

In consonance with that interpretation of language as a representational system of reality, postmodern feminism stressed the importance of the notion of difference as a ‘site of struggle’ for ideological and institutional changes²⁴ (Giroux 1990:27). Postmodern feminism challenges the notion of difference as fixed and unchanging to invoke them as constantly shifting processes. It intends to distinguish not only the *difference between*²⁵ but, especially, the *difference within* each category²⁶ and the ways it works to subdue differences within gender categories (Ebert 1991:891-2). For postmodern feminists, no entity, whether an individual or the category of women, is considered “an autonomous, self-contained, self-same identity”;

²⁴ This is another point of divergence between postmodern feminism and postmodernism, which approaches difference “as either an aesthetic (pastiche or expression of liberal pluralism (the proliferation of difference without recourse to the language of power)” (Giroux 1990:27).

²⁵ Differences between “constructs identities by delineating the clearly marked boundaries between coherent entities or individuals that are self-same, identical with themselves”; e.g. differences between the sexes (Ebert 1991:892).

²⁶ In particular the differences of gender, class and race among women.

rather it is always “different from itself and divided by its other” (Ebert 1991:892). What drives postmodern versions of that argument is the belief that the production and reproduction of differences between the categories ‘woman’ and ‘man’, as well as by discourses which employ those categories, are both patriarchal and hierarchical – i.e. reflect patriarchal notions of personhood and agency (Moore 2004:51). In this sense, postmodern feminism has examined how differences are to be understood in order to alter prevailing power relations.

According to Joan Scott, feminists have been mistaken in placing the issue of difference in an antithetical relationship with equality, a term that denotes “the ignoring of differences between individuals for a particular purpose or in a particular context” (Scott 1988:44). In conformity with this usage, the opposite of equality is inequality or inequivalence; and its existence is dependent on an acknowledgement of which differences produce inequality and which do not (Scott 1988:44, Giroux 1990:32). As a political construct, the notion of difference is crucial to demands of equality.

In histories of feminism and in feminist political strategies there needs to be at once attention to the operations of difference and an insistence on differences, but not a simple substitution of multiple for binary difference... The resolution of the “difference dilemma” comes neither from ignoring nor embracing difference as it is normatively constituted. Instead it seems to me that the critical feminism position must always involve two moves: the first, systematic criticism of the operations of categorical difference, exposure of the kinds of exclusions and inclusions – the hierarchies – it constructs, and a refusal of their ultimate “truth.” A refusal, however, not in the name of an equality that implies sameness or identity but rather (and this is the second move) of an equality that rests on differences – differences that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition. To do anything else is to buy into the political argument that sameness is a requirement for equality, an untenable position for feminists (and historians) who know, the ground of difference (Scott 1988:48).

In sum, it is by precluding the reduction of difference to ‘opposition’, exclusion, and hierarchical arrangements that postmodernism allows for “an expansion of difference towards differences, a plurality that resists any set identities” (Beasley 2005:24).

A similar principle is laid out regarding the notion of subjectivity; postmodern feminism undermines the liberal humanist notion of subjectivity, which is premised on the idea that the subject is

an autonomous individual with a coherent, stable self-constituted by a set of natural and pre-given elements such as biological sex. It theorizes the subject as produced through signifying practices which precede her and not as the originator of meaning. One acquires specific subject positions – that is existence in meaning, in social relations – being constituted in ideologically organized signifying practices through which the

individual is situated in the world and in term of which the world and one's self are made intelligible (Giroux 1990:23).

The basic tenet of postmodern thought on the subject is that “discourses and practices provide subject positions within different discourses” (Moore 2004:55). The postmodern subject is composed of, or exists as, “a set of multiple and contradictory positions and subjectivities” (Moore 2004:55). An individuals’ multiple and contradictory subjectivities are hold together by dimensions such as: the subjective experience of identity, the physical fact of being an embodied subject, and the historical continuity of the subject guaranteed by an ongoing interaction between the ‘current’ subject identity (assumed by individuals) and positions being offered by marginal discourses to which individuals are constantly exposed (Moore 2004:55). Inter alia, “a single subject can no longer be equated with a single individual. Individuals are multiply constituted subjects, and they can, and do, take up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices” (Moore 2004:55).

This notion of the subject (as the site of multiple and potentially contradictory identities) is of particular analytical importance for investigating the engendering of subjects in the context of multiple co-existing gender discourses that may contradict and conflict with each other (Moore 2004:58). Furthermore, this idea is very empowering for alternative discourses on gender, once it comes to recognizing that individuals develop their sense of self through various and often mutually contradictory subject positions. Indeed, as Seidman (1998:18) contends, “such composite formulations of identities are less susceptible of exclusionary effects, less silencing of differences, and make us more aware of the socially construed, normative, and practical character of our knowledges”.

While in modern feminist theories, considerations of identity cannot be separated from issues of gender – actually, gender figures as the foundation upon which the concept of identity itself is based; postmodern feminists claim that differentiation of gender identities contributes to the perpetuation of an unequal system of power relations. In fact, postmodern thought does not consider gender as an absolute category but rather as an effect of a discourse of dichotomous gender identities. Fraser and Nicholson (1990) defends that for the development of a postmodern feminist practice, “the unitary notion of women and feminine gender identity” has to be replaced by “plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation” (Call 1995:35).

In her path-breaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2002), Judith Butler intended to subvert the traditional basis of identity and to bewilder and multiply identity representations. More than simply deconstructing gender into its socially constituent parts (either masculine or feminine), her work entails the recognition that sex/gender is not the expression of a natural inherent essence but rather the result of performances dictated by arbitrary and contingent discourses that serve to make these categories intelligible (Butler 2002, Nayak and Kehily 2006:460). Butler's argument is best conceptualized in her oft-quoted dictum: "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 2002:33). In this reading, "the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" that become embedded as gender norms (Butler 2002:33). These regulatory and subversive practices are shaped by both discourses and social practices, and normalized by cultural constructions of 'woman' and 'man' that by no means represent an objective reality.

By reflecting on Foucault's theory of subjectification, concepts of 'disciplinary techniques' and 'mechanisms of power' (already discussed in the first section of this chapter), Butler examines how the notion of personhood is produced in relation to and via discursive interaction with others. Butler contends that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility" (Butler 2002:23). In her view, prevailing notions of sex, gender, and sexuality are determined by social discourses, which simultaneously demarcate and prescribe identity norms resulting from repetition and reaffirmation. The mandated gender originated from that process is, in fact, "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 2002:43-4). Another way of expressing that idea is to assume that the very act of performing gender establishes our identity.

For Butler (1993), performative acts are forms of authoritative statement that exercise a certain 'binding power' (Nayak and Kehily 2006:461). Subjects involve themselves in the assumption of gender identities - for example 'doing girl' or 'doing boy' as a performance - through the assumption of various normalised practices (such as: bodily gestures, behaviors and attitudes) that constitute the "natural" expression of this subject position. In this context, gender is the action that produces the subject or, at least, the semblance of what the subject

‘is’ (Nayak and Kehily 2006:461). In this view, gender performances always represent copies, imitations, or idealization of dominant constructions of femininity and masculinity.

Messerschmidt (1995) discusses the way in which working-class minority ethnic gang members ‘do gender’ - specifically their ‘bad girl’ femininity in terms of gang membership and violence - through ‘doing crime.’ Rather than resorting to violence in an attempt to imitate male gang members or become ‘more like boys’, these girls are:

[t]he subject of competition and struggle to secure a situationally specific feminine identity. In other words, what is usually considered atypical feminine behavior outside this situation is, in fact, normalized within the social context of inter-neighborhood conflict; girl gang violence in this situation is encouraged, permitted and privileged by both boys and girls as appropriate feminine behavior. Thus, “bad girl” femininity is situationally accomplished and context bound within the domain of the street (Measham 2002:351).

Individuals constitute their selfhood as engendered subjects through several distinctive positions based on gender. Yet, at different times, most individuals will be required to perform their subject positions and to construct themselves and their social practices in terms of a divergent set of discourses about what it is to be a ‘woman’ or a ‘man’. The performance of subject positions offers multiple possibilities for the experience of gender and sexuality, even if those positions may be adapted, resisted or rejected (Moore 2004:56). Nevertheless, as discourses, these divergent positions are not detached from the dominant heterosexual order; on the contrary these performances are produced through the deployment of this system’s norms and will involve both individual and collective values, material and social context’s influence (Moore 2004:56, Nayak and Kehily 2006:461).

That rigidly circumscribed heterosexual order defines and differentiates the ‘appropriate’ from the ‘inappropriate’, the ‘moral’ from the ‘immoral’, the ‘normal’ from the ‘deviant’; and in doing so produces hierarchies and sexualizes power (Nayak and Kehily 2006:461). Indeed, the smooth functioning of the dominant socio-cultural realm (wherein gender identity is formed and operationalized) requires the excising of certain kinds of ‘identities’ – specifically “those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’²⁷ from either sex or gender” (Butler 2002:23-4). Therefore, those kinds of gender identities that fail to adhere to socio-cultural norms will be seen as developmental failures or logical impossibilities within that domain.

²⁷ For Butler, ‘follow’ in this context represents “a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality” (Butler 2002:24).

Postmodern feminist thought presents a particular concern with the ways in which voices, stories, and discourses of those deemed “other” are silenced by the power of patriarchal and hierarchical structures. By discrediting meta-narratives, postmodernism seeks to “open up spaces in or from which different and more varied ideas and practices may begin to emerge” (Flax 1990:31). Implicit in the dismissal of master-narratives is the articulation of

a power-sensitive discourse that helps subordinated and excluded groups to make sense out of their own social worlds and histories while simultaneously offering new opportunities to produce political and cultural vocabularies by which to define and shape their individual and collective identities (Giroux 1994:19).

In keeping with this perspective, performances of women that supposedly question “regulatory practices of gender coherence” (such as drug dealers) are not constructed outside or beyond the norm, but rather produced by the same normative framework, because “the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing” (Butler 2002:43). Individuals are not passive recipients but active contributors to the context of their positions, and it is in the measure that disruptive identities persist and proliferate that the limitations and regulatory aims of those norms will disclose (Butler 2002:24).

In most research and in conventional wisdom, the experiences of female (drug) offenders have been either ignored or interpreted according to a supposedly universal culture, common socioeconomic class, and history-free feminine nature. Besides that, traditional theories restrict their accounts of female criminality to biological or psychological factors, neglecting the impact of personal and economic aims, social and political constraints in the lives of female offenders (Barcinsky 2011:146-7).

The performances of women in drug trade networks may be examined as an example of ‘subversive gender identity’ when they come to manipulating traditional gender roles, either by adopting a ‘male’ instance or blending aspects of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’. Women have taken advantage of structural transformations to circumvent gender norms that restrained the improvement of their social status and income levels in the drug trade. Moreover, they seized these opportunities to attain higher positions within their largely male networks, establishing their own drug enterprises, or pursuing independent careers in drug selling (Sommers 2000:127).

Within and outside the drug world, several women (as well as men) have the experience of ‘being’ different persons in different social situations wherein different qualities and modes of

femininity or masculinity are required. There is a plurality of ways of being a woman presented to each of us at a particular time, but Weedon (1987) observes that

we know or feel we ought to know what is expected of us in particular situations... We may embrace these ways of being, these subject positions whole-heartedly we may reject them outright or we may offer resistance while complying to the letter with what is expected of us. Yet even when we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity (Moore 2004:57).

For Teresa de Lauretis (1948), the agency of subjects is exercised through these shifting and multiple forms of identity, which are constructed through available discourses and practices, and through self-analysis (Giroux 1990:33). Consciously or subconsciously individuals will “select” or “invest” on the multiple subject positions available to them (Moore, 2004:60). It is mostly by exploring this range of positions, as an operational strategy, that women undertake their activities in drug markets: they assert themselves over men, invert patriarchy norms, manipulate or subvert traditional gender roles.

The experience of female drug lords represents the main contradiction to dominant stereotypes that regard women’s participation in the drug world as secondary and passive. In his study of ‘queen pins’, Howard Campbell (2008) relates the history of Zulema, a female drug lord that adopted the macho ethical, behavioral and verbal style which reflected her traditionally male working milieu. According to Zulema’s accounts, since her youth she had been “a headstrong, rebellious female who cultivated a tough norteno attitude and lifestyle and who resisted male control in her family, at school, in the streets and dark byways of Juarez and El Paso, and in the international drug trade” (Campbell 2008:248). While in that environment some regarded her negatively as a *marimacha* [derogatory term to a Latina lesbian, roughly “dyke”], Zulema defiantly pursued her career as a mother, criminal and woman, that at times would be attractive to other men. As a fierce “*macha*” Zulema infringed on traditional gender roles for Mexican women, however her gender identity instead of a simply mimics of male *narcotraficante*’s representations or ideal images of feminist heroines was composed of blend aspects of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ (Campbell 2008:248).

Without ignoring the critical role played by victimization and marginalization in the experiences of individuals who engage in illegal economies, many women regard their participation in the drug world as a vehicle of empowerment and liberation from forms of male control, as well as a source of excitement and adventure (Campbell 2008:237-8). In this sense, through their involvement in criminal activities women may excel to positions of

power and authority that are usually conceived as male prerogatives. Through their participation in illegal drug networks, these women attained special privileges and occupied higher status positions than those (men and women) in the community who are not part of the gangs. The social and economic power exerted by drug networks is reflected in the influence, authority and lavish lifestyle enjoyed by network members. As a consequence, the opportunity to participate within this 'exclusive' criminal circle permeates the dreams and aspiration of various individuals who consider that prestige and lifestyle unattainable through legal means.

As Edberg (2004) asserts in his study of *narcocorridos*²⁸, there is growing enthusiasm among young women for the status and privileges associated with the position of drug trafficker, a role "in which women are powerful and celebretized for that power via the same or similar persona currently gendered for men" (Campbell 2008:237).

Women's participation in the drug economy may be motivated for a variety of reasons (or even a combinations of them) that usually result from a complex intersection between socio-economic circumstances and personal factors. Nonetheless, Edberg's remark is in consonance with the results obtained by this study's empirical research, which are discussed in the next chapter.

²⁸ Narcocorridos are "part of a pop music industry that glamorizes the drug trade but through a commercialized prism and an entertainment medium far removed from everyday life" (Campbell 2005:327).

4. The Participation of women in drug trafficking networks

Illegal drug markets are conventionally regarded as male-dominated arenas wherein women's involvement has been traditionally related to their subordination to criminal men, or by virtue of women's family ties and romantic fallings to these men. In contrast to these customary assumptions, women around the world have been participating in drug trafficking activities since the 1920s performing both subordinate (cooking and cleaning, transporting small quantities of drugs) and dominant positions (as drug dealers and bosses) in the hierarchy of drug networks (Campbell 2008, Mares 2011, Ovalle and Giacomello 2006).

The story of Ignacia Jasso de González (also known as 'La Nacha') is a classical example of the long involvement of women in the high levels of drug trade. From the late 1920s to the 1970s, 'La Nacha' became the first undisputed drug lord by controlling the distribution of heroin, morphine and marijuana in Ciudad Juárez, a prime spot for the trafficking of narcotics into the United States (Carey and Guzmán 2011:23). Like 'La Nacha', who entered drug trade together with her husband and expanded her network's business after his death, several women have been occupying high levels of drug trade in Mexico, Brazil, the United States, and elsewhere. In addition to those, another hundreds of thousands of women have been directly or loosely engaged in lower positions of drug networks worldwide.

Still, it was from the 1980s on that the participation of women in drug trafficking activities dramatically increased and gained more exposure, fuelled by the expansion of drug markets, the "epidemic" of drug use for recreational purpose and the emergence of crack cocaine abuse (Maher and Hudson 2007:806). The emergence and proliferation of drug markets and activities opened up more opportunities for women to escape limited roles, status and incomes and to operate at all ranks of drug networks.

The greater participation of women in drug markets has also been enhanced by illegal networks' efforts to implement new and innovative business strategies intended to evade the detection and confiscation of drugs by enforcement authorities (Campbell 2008:253). In the same extent that inspection techniques and procedures become more sophisticated, smuggling strategies of drug networks have to be quickly adapted. Consequently, drug lords have been increasingly attempting to take advantage of women's ability to raise less suspicion from the police, immigration and customs officers. As recorded by a female customs inspector, women have unique cavities in and on their bodies where drugs can be smuggled: their vaginal

channel, in faked pregnancies, surgically implanting drugs in their buttocks, under and between their breasts, as well as in brassieres or other items typical of female clothing (Campbell 2008:254). In addition to that, women have innovated by designing alternative transport routes, launching innovative smuggling vessels, and developing cross-class and cross ethnic alliances for transnational distribution of drugs.

This trend is evinced by the growing number of women in prisons and reports about women's involvement in drug-related violence that have been receiving widespread media coverage and public attention. In Brazil, official statistics have been pointing to striking increases in the rates of female arrestees, especially for drug crimes. According to sociologist Julia Lemgrueber (2011), from the total of 15.263 women imprisoned in the last five years, 65 percent (that is, 9.989 women) have responded to accusations of involvement in the illegal drug trade (Vasconcellos 2011).

The continuation of statistical reporting on drug offenders shed some light on research that for a long time have been portraying women as active participants in drug networks by investigating their participation in leadership positions, and their motivations to operate independently or in cooperation with men (Anderson 2005;2008, Denton and O'Malley 1999, Sommers 1993, Bourgois 1989, Campbell 2008). Such recognition advises that presuppositions of complete subordination and marginalization of women in drug trafficking activities have been perpetuating inaccurate assertions about the ability of women to have a firm sense of agency and conduct illegal business and activities (Denton and O'Malley 1999:514). Most importantly, conclusions and remarks derived from these studies have shown that women's experiences in drug trafficking have been characterized by successful and failed endeavours that are similar from their male counterparts' (Denton and O'Malley 1999:514).

Drawing on discussions from those studies as well as from findings of my empirical research with a group of women who have engaged in drug trafficking activities, this chapter examines the factors that influenced my interlocutors' decision to participate in these criminal activities as well as their strategies and motivations to engaged in drug markets.

4.1 Interlocutors

The specific aim of this chapter is to assess how and what social, economic, and personal factors have permeated the decisions of a small group of women to engage into drug trade activities.

By exploring the opinion of my interlocutors, I intend to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of their participation, to discuss some of their strategies, and to consider what were their major motivations to engage in the drug world.

As already discussed (see methodology), data for this research was collected during two months of research at my interlocutors' workplaces in the city of Vila Velha (Espírito Santo). My interlocutors' flexible schedule and working environment allowed us to conveniently spend some hours together during their lunch time, pre-booked appointments, and chats after work. Two interlocutors (Luiza and Sandra), who voluntarily consented to participate in the study faced scheduling difficulties and asked if they could be interviewed by phone. I spent between 3 and 4 hours a week talking to each interlocutor about their lives stories in an attempt to learn about their experiences through their own perspectives.

This investigation is the final result of informal conversations based on the life stories of interlocutors who have been convicted for drug trafficking offenses in Espírito Santo. Six women have voluntarily and generously contributed to this study, namely²⁹:

- Flávia: 31 years old; *vapor* (stem) and *gerente geral* (general manager);
- Helena: 42 years old; *atacadista* (wholesale dealer) or *distribuidor* (distributor)³⁰.
- Katarina: 23 years old; *gerente geral* (general manager);
- Luiza: 26 years old; *correria* (runner) and *avião* (airplane);
- Natália: 23 years old; *endolador*, *vapor* (stem) and *avião* (airplane);
- Sandra: 23 years old; *correria* (runner).

These interlocutors formed a diverse group of drug smugglers and dealers who happened to be women. Drug smuggling and dealing was the principal source of income and a constant activity for all interlocutors prior to their imprisonment. Because most of them had served their sentences within the same period and in the same penitentiary, they knew each other well and facilitated the verification of claims through the triangulation of information.

²⁹ To protect the identity of interlocutors, all names used in this study are fictitious.

³⁰ *Atacadistas* are usually independent from drug networks. They organize the import of drugs into Brazil or, as in the case of Helena, the trafficking of large quantities of drugs within the Brazilian territory (Dowdney 2003:39-42).

Interlocutors were asked to share their life stories with me: significant episodes, earliest memories, turning points, important scenes, and influences on their lives. Notwithstanding, detailed accounts on their experiences within the drug world emerged extensively during our meetings, a fact that I attribute to my interlocutors' awareness of my interest in researching the lives of women who had a history of conviction for drug crimes, and moreover to the central and distinctive role played by that experience in their lives. This aspect was highlighted by Natalia, who stated that *“minha vida mudou completamente com esta experiência [no tráfico]. Ainda bem que ainda sou nova e posso lutar por um futuro decente... Ano que vem eu quero tentar vestibular para Psicologia... Eu queria escrever um livro sobre isto, sobre minha experiência todas as dificuldades e preconceitos que enfrentei por opção ou destino...”*³¹

The positioning of these women as drug dealers or smugglers is examined in consideration to their experiences of power or subjugation, and in accordance or discordance to this study's previous investigations on the organization of drug trade networks, gender stereotypes and the criminal trajectories and motivations of women offenders.

The importance of empirical researches on drug smugglers and dealers is that it can advance our understanding beyond rhetorical generalities or stereotypes to reveal a multiplicity of factors and situations that influence people's decision to join the illegal drug world, as well as to emphasize the uniqueness of each person's experiences. Although limited in size, this research presents remarkable accounts and life memories of this group of women through thick and thin.

4.2 Getting into the business

The competitive and fragmentary structure of drug markets provides a favourable framework for women to break through into the criminal world, to make money and experience a certain degree of empowerment. For being socially considered the key of family ties and symbol of family identities, women are believed to possess the ideal social skills to hold up the fluid structure of illegal drug enterprises. In sum, those structural and operative characteristics are critical for the participation and advancement of women, when they come to maximize the

³¹ “Life was completely changed through this experience. It is good I am still young and can strive for a decent future... Next year I wanna apply for Psychology... I would like to write a book about it, about my experience [in drug trafficking], all difficulties and prejudice I have faced with in life as [exercise of] an option or by fate...” (author's translation).

resources and skills of networks' members in a way that large-scale enterprises would not (Denton 2001:60-1; Denton and O'Malley 1999:515).

In addition to that, the continuous expansion, informal authority structure, and vulnerable hierarchical order of illegal drug networks have worked to reduce constraints to women's participation, when they came to allowing new dealers to be easily absorbed by the market (Denton 2001:61). John Leib and Sheldon Olson (1976) have ascertained that lucrative illegal drug markets are open to any entrant who could benefit from a supplier that trusted them, raise enough capital for the first outlay of drugs, and implement the appropriate security measures to avoid detection (Denton 2001:61).

Finally, distinguishing factors associated with the operations of illegal drug networks, such as the reliance on the mutual trust of its members, may also facilitate women's participation in the underground economy. Illegal drug enterprises involve more complex and much stronger relationships than a simple business alliance; as family concerns, these enterprises usually engender emotional bonds and welfare support among its co-workers. Dorn et al. (1992) clarify that

the characterization of a firm as a 'family concern' does not mean that activity is confined to close blood relatives, rather it is a certain ethos and set of values that are being referred to. With the hardening of markets, the security of the real or adopted family is a safe haven for some people (Denton and O'Malley 1999:515).

Drug trade networks display the same characteristics usually attributed to women's networks (i.e. small and quite homogeneous units), and for this reason may provide women a favourable environment for business. The nucleus of typical drug enterprises often revolves around family ties, local loyalties or long-term friendships, which afford dealers with the necessary support, stability and measures of conventionality (Maher and Hudson 2007:817). As one of Denton and O'Malley's (1999:517) interlocutor noted "the crucial factor in setting up her drug network was the backup she received from her family: the family provided a stable shelter and conventional front while she established herself back in the drug economy". Another interlocutor outlined that family's support is also important for all background functions (e.g. care of children, responsibility for their expenses, and to conceal their money and precious belongings), in her words "it's a lonely place out there on your own, you need someone you can put your faith in" (Denton and O'Malley 1999:517).

My interlocutors' observations have also outlined the influence of partners and relatives in women's drug trafficking debut. Natália has explicitly pointed out that most women she met

in prison were convicted for drug trafficking and the large majority had entered into the world of trafficking because of the appeal or previous involvement of their spouses, partners, sons, or other relatives. According to her, women would either consent to the appeal of their partners' or relatives' businesses, or take control of inherited illegal drug enterprises. Hence, some of my interlocutors have followed this pattern of involvement observed by Natália:

- Helena

Helena had always been a devoted housewife and mother, and made her debut in the drug trade strongly influenced by her husband. Her husband worked to provide for the family and did not allow her to work outside their home; he used to say: "*mulher minha não vai ficar trabalhando para os outros*"³² (Helena). She did not know details about her husband's occupation, she only knew he used to purchase some goods in Paraguay or in some small cities in Parana (south Brazil), and negotiate and deliver these goods to larger cities in south Brazil or to capital cities in south-eastern Brazil (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Vitória).

At a time when his business was not doing well, Helena's husband decided to open a grocery to provide additional income to their family. Helena was expected to manage and work at the store while he would remain concentrated on his previous activities or enjoy his free time drinking and womanizing at bars. According to Helena, she accepted her husband's behaviour and lifestyle because she depended on him economically: "*Eu dependia do meu marido. Ele é uma boa pessoa, eu não tenho nada de mal para falar dele. Eu é que deixava ele ser sem-vergonha...*"³³ (Helena). She knew her husband was unfaithful to her, and witnessed his affair with the lady who worked for them at the grocery store. Helena's husband would always stare at the young lady, whisper into her ears, ask her to come to his house to solve issues related to the store. Once after leaving their son in charge of the grocery store, Helena saw her husband and their store assistant sleeping together on their bed: "*Eu sabia que ele andava me traindo por aí, mas pegar os dois na nossa cama doeu muito mesmo... Foi depois disto que eu caí em depressão*"³⁴ (Helena).

³² "My woman is not to work for others" (author's translation).

³³ "I depended on my husband. He was a good person, I can't say nothing bad about him. It was I who would let him to be shameless..." (author's translation).

³⁴ "I knew he was offending me around, but to catch them on our bed hurt very much. It was after this that I fell into depression..." (author's translation).

Helena's husband was arrested in flagrant at a federal highway in Espírito Santo after the police found seven packs of cocaine hidden in his car. Helena moved with their children into Espírito Santo to stay closer to her husband, and following his orders took control of his drug business. *"Ele pedia para que eu ligasse e entrasse em contato com algumas pessoas, depositasse e recebesse dinheiro. Era como se eu fosse uma secretária"*³⁵ (Helena). Despite being distant from the retail market, Helena controlled and intermediated the distribution of cocaine and marijuana originated from Bolivia and Paraguay in Espírito Santo. She would contact distributors to negotiate shipments, and give directions to their networks mules and dealers. Helena had already been involved in drug trafficking for two years, when the police arrested her after a four-month investigation and extensive phone-taps.

- Sandra

Sandra's entrance in drug smuggling activities happened in a more curious and accidental way. Sandra enjoyed a privileged social and economic status: was married with two healthy children, owned a house in a middle-class district and new car, had a good job in the administration of a private medical centre, and could afford sending her children to a private kindergarten; but she did not feel happy with that stable and ordinary life. She was still missing something: *"eu precisava sair daquela rotina. Eu acho que eu procurava por mais adrenalina"*³⁶ (Sandra).

She had been married for seven years and her first daughter was turning two years old when crises in her marriage begun. Sandra's husband's job promotion and new working setting (in an oil platform, where he would stay fourteen embarked days) contributed to the growing distance between them and to further strain on their relationship: *"não tinha mais clima para manter o casamento"*³⁷ (Sandra). On the same day that Sandra's husband embarked, she had the first contact with that who became her boyfriend and 'partner in crime'. Sandra was drinking some wine at her neighbours' after having had arguments with her husband who had left for work. She was chatting with her neighbour, the neighbour's husband and their cleaning lady when their phone rang. The neighbour's husband answered to the call and allured to his listener that he was doing great at home, well accompanied by three women.

³⁵ "He would ask me to call and contact some people, to deposit and receive some money. It was as if I would work as a secretary" (author's translation).

³⁶ "I wanted to get out of that routine. I think I was seeking a bit more adrenaline" (author's translation).

³⁷ "There was no way for me to maintain the marriage" (author's translation).

The phone talk was already lasting long when Sandra asked the neighbour with whom her husband was speaking to. The neighbour confided to Sandra that her husband was talking to a friend who was serving a prison sentence. Sandra felt excited and thrilled with the opportunity to chat with someone who was imprisoned; and based on her reaction her neighbour's husband passed her the phone.

From that first call on, the prisoner would call Sandra everyday; after all *“preso não tem o que fazer, então fica o dia inteiro no telefone”*³⁸ (Sandra). In fact, it was through these talks that Sandra and the prisoner developed a friendship that eventually blossom into a romance. That prisoner was able to give Sandra more attention and care than her husband could, and to make her life as exciting and entertaining as she ever dreamed. After their first date in prison, Sandra's affair started asking her to do some favours for him: *“um dia ele pediu para eu ir não sei aonde buscar uma coisa, depois para eu buscar um dinheiro... e aí você vai conhecendo melhor a coisa”*³⁹ (Sandra). Step by step, Sandra got to know the criminal universe and its members, she started to take care of her boyfriend's business in many cities of Espírito Santo, and would often travel to São Paulo to pick up drugs and deliver some money. Sandra's boyfriend trusted her since the beginning, in her opinion it happened because *“ele sabia que comigo não ia dar derrame; muito pelo contrário, eu sempre entregava mais droga do que era para ter. Porque quando eu ia buscar um pacote, os caras me davam mais 20 gramas [de cocaine] para eu cheirar – isto dava uns 400 reais. Só que eu nunca usei drogas então eu entregava tudo”*⁴⁰ (Sandra).

By practicing above and beyond what was asked of her, Sandra demonstrated her commitment and dedication to her lover and to his network. According to her, *“ele sabia que eu não precisava de dinheiro. Muitas vezes eu nem pegava o dinheiro da correria [transporte], deixava para ajudar alguém que estava [sic] precisando ou para ajudar negócios do grupo. Eu sabia que colocar um aparelho [telefone celular] na máxima custava cerca de 3-4 mil reais”*⁴¹ (Sandra).

³⁸ “Prisoners have nothing to do, thus they spent all day long on the phone” (author's translation).

³⁹ “One day he asked me to go somewhere to pick up some stuff, then to pick up some money... and that's how you get to know things better” (author's translation).

⁴⁰ “He knew with me there would be no rip-offs; on the contrary, I would always bring more drugs than it was expected. Because when I would come to pick up a package, guys would give about 20 grams (of cocaine) for me to sniff – this would amount some 400 reais extra [approximately 200 dollars]. But I have never used drugs, thus I would deliver it all” (author's translation).

⁴¹ “He knew I didn't need any money. Many times I wouldn't take my payment from the run [transport of drugs]. I would leave it for someone who was in need, or to help out in the group's businesses. I knew that to bring an

My interlocutors considered the ability to be reliable and trustworthy critical competencies for succeeding in illegal drug networks. Sandra stressed this fact by claiming: *“quando eles confiam em você, tem até disputa para ver com quem você quer trabalhar. Outros chefes me chamaram para trabalhar para eles mas eu não quis”*⁴² (Sandra). This statement is perfectly consonant with Freda Adler’s (1993) assertion that “one of the first requirements for success, whether in drug trafficking business enterprises broadly, or in any life undertaking is the establishment of a good personal reputation to make it in the drug world, dealers and smugglers had to generate trust” (Denton 2001:70).

Despite being central to the “occupational mythology of the industry” (Denton and O’Malley 1999:520), the pursuit of trust in drug networks proves to be particularly problematic in view of the atmosphere of suspicion, risk and doom that characterizes illegal markets. The dilemma of trust concerns the inability to discern who is involved in what, how much sensitive information to share, and who to share it with. Based on that, the only alternative is constant vigilance, scepticism, and careful assignment of tasks (Denton and O’Malley 1999:525).

Therefore, to avoid risking their business down, drug leaders prefer to cling to their primary relationships within the family and close friends to resolve dilemmas of trust (Denton and O’Malley 1999:519-20). In agreement with this conservative practice, my other interlocutors secured an opportunity to enter the drug business based on their friendship links with drug leaders and their good reputation within the community.

- Katarina

Katarina moved into Espírito Santo after the murder of her husband by his criminal partners. Vladimir (Katarina’s husband) was the manager of three drug points and, prior to his participation in the drug business, was deeply involved in the trade of light weapons in association with some corrupt police officers. Because of the high profits generated from his involvement in the drug trade and greater difficulty to trade weapons, Vladimir decided to resign from the light weapons’ business. Nonetheless, Vladimir’s decision was not accepted by his former criminal partners who afraid of being denounced hatched a plot to kill him.

equipment [mobile phone] into the maximum [maximum security prison] would cost 3-4 thousand reais [approximately 1,5-2 thousand dollars]” (author’s translation).

⁴² “When they trust you, there is even dispute about who you want to work for. Other bosses invited me to work for them but I didn’t want” (author’s translation).

After executing Vladimir, the police officers called Katarina and informed her that: “*Mandamos [ex-sócios] seu maridinho para o quinto dos infernos*”⁴³ (Katarina). The next day, not satisfied with killing Vladimir, his former partners invaded Katarina’s house to pick up some guns and to drop a hint to her of the risk she would incur if she did not keep her mouth shut. Their message was reiterated through punches, slaps, one kick after another... Katarina’s injured kidney and two front teeth knocked out would always serve as a reminder that she should keep her mouth closed.

Afraid that Katarina was at risk of suffering another aggression, her mother asked her to move into Espírito Santo, where relatives and family friends resided. Once in her new city, Katarina got a job at a restaurant and already in her second workday she bumped into two acquaintances, who were from her home city and have managed some drug points on the same network of her husband. Those guys asked Katarina what she was doing there and why she was working at a restaurant; upon her explanation, they promised to take her out of that job, once they could offer her something a lot better.

On the next week, those guys went back to the restaurant and took Katarina to a house where other female *vapores* resided. Katarina started to share the house and workload with other *vapores*, and a few months later assumed the management of their ‘house’ (drug point).

- Flávia

Flávia’s friends were involved in a drug network, they were doing well financially and the ‘word was around’ within the community. One day, Flávia’s friends invited her to a party by the leader of their drug network. At the party Flávia met Preto, who ended up inviting her to work for him as *vapor*. Preto was dating Eliana, Flávia’s best friend and general manager of his drug points. Flávia was already working as *vapor* for ten months when Eliana resigned her position after a police crash. Surprisingly, instead of inviting his brother (who also worked for him as *vapor*) to be his manager, Preto chose Flávia to perform that role. Flávia felt extremely proud for receiving the leader’s recognition and trust as an honest and reliable worker, who had never ripped off a customer or the network with money or a package.

⁴³ “We [former partners] have sent your dear husband to the bottom depths of hell” (author’s translation).

- Natália

Natália was also invited by a friend to set up a 'house' together. He already had contact with a wholesaler so they just needed to pool together their money to set up a drug point. There, they would process cocaine base into white powder and pack the drug, which was then distributed to their clients (contacts Natália's friend have had or were built through their good reputation) in nightclubs and bars. Their business was doing well from the beginning but did not last long; it was closed after a police raid six months after its setting. The seizure, however, did not prevent Natália and her friend to continue in the drug business; in recognition to their good reputation their wholesaler offer them work in his network. Natália then moved into a *favela* ruled by the network to work in the cocaine laboratory.

- Luiza

Luiza was a repeat offender, who had committed several armed robberies before being arrested for drug trafficking. According to Luiza, she has always studied, interned and worked (for several years in catering service and as housekeeper in a residential building), but enjoyed the risk and all adrenaline inherent in criminal activities. In her leisure time with friends, *"a gente se reunia lá no morro, conversava, bebia, fumava e aí, quando já não tinha mais nada para fazer, a gente descia para o asfalto para roubar um carro e se divertir"*⁴⁴ (Luiza). Many times the stolen car would be used to do their robberies and Luiza was the one to choose the locations to be robbed and to set the group's strategies:

*Eu olhava e dizia vamos lá... Uma das maiores doideras foi o roubo de uma joalheria. Eu entrei na loja com meu colega e pedi para provar uns anéis, enquanto a gente prestava atenção nas câmeras, quem trabalhava na loja. Depois, a gente voltava com a gangue e roubava tudo. Só que dessa vez o alarme começou a tocar, a polícia apareceu e nos seguiu pela cidade toda. Isto passou em todos os jornais*⁴⁵ (Luiza).

In another occasion, while engaging in the robbery of a small store, Luiza's luck ran out and she was arrested. However, Luiza was sentenced to only four months' imprisonment but her experience in the prison taught her to become worse: *"eu saí de lá, pior do que eu entrei. Lá*

⁴⁴ "We would gather up on the hill, chat, drink, smoke and then, when there was nothing else to do, we would go down to the asphalt to steal a car and have some fun" (author's translation).

⁴⁵ "I would give it a once over and say: let's go... One of the craziest things was the robbery of a jewellery store. I went in the store with my colleague and I asked to try some rings, while we paid attention to cameras, who worked in the store. Then, we came back with the gang and robbed it all. However, that time, the store's security system started ringing, the police came over and persued us throughout the city. This was reported in all TV news" (author's translation).

dentro você escuta várias histórias que enchem nossos olhos”⁴⁶ (Luiza). By hearing those stories and talking to those women, Luiza started to sketch out plans for her future endeavour: drug trafficking. “*Eu sabia exatamente o que fazer assim que eu estivesse lá fora. Tráfico é uma coisa muito mais fácil [em comparação à assalto a mão armada]...*”⁴⁷ (Luiza). Immediately after her release from prison, Luiza went after the community’s drug leader (with whom she already had previous acquaintance) to offer her services, newly established networking and expertise in criminal endeavours: “*ele sabia que eu era responsa, esperta, corajosa. Eu sempre fui assim... Não era como as outras [mulas]. Também, como eu tinha contatos na cadeia eu sempre ajudava. Sempre que precisava eu entrava em contato com elas para pegar informação sobre distribuidores, batidas, essas coisas*”⁴⁸ (Luiza). She begun working as *avião* within and outside Espírito Santo and progressively gain the leader’s trust and more responsibility within her network. Before being arrested, she was in charge of negotiating the price of drugs and the amount to be purchased by their network, in addition she would have to find out drugs’ suppliers in ‘drought times’.

Inevitably, there are times when people who are little known to dealers and drug users have to be employed in the network. However, these will occupy the most subordinate positions and be perceived as the most vulnerable and unreliable workers (Denton and O’Malley 1999:525).

Whatever the status of a member’s relationship with a drug lord or dealer, it was consensus amongst my interlocutors that the possession of a good reputation, reaffirmation of loyalty to the gang, and observance to the ‘rules of the game’ (specifically to the ‘law of crime’) were primordial factors for one to advance, gain more responsibility within the structure of a network and, consequently, to generate higher profits. Furthermore, they emphasized the ability of women in performing their tasks in the drug business: “*mulheres gerenciam melhor [as redes de tráfico], são mais espertas, mais sagazes*”⁴⁹ (Natália); “*Mulheres são mais detalistas, têm mais disposição para trabalhar*”⁵⁰ (Flávia).

⁴⁶ “I got out of there worse than I had entered. In there, you hear several stories that are a sight for our sore ears in there” (author’s translation).

⁴⁷ “I knew exactly what to do by the time I would get out of there. Trafficking is something much easier [in correlation to armed robbery]...” (author’s translation).

⁴⁸ “He [drug leader] knew I was responsive, smart and courageous. I have always been like that... I was not like the others [female ‘airplanes’]. Also, once I had contacts in jail I would always help them out. Every time it was needed, I would call them to get information about wholesaler, police raids and things like these” (author’s translation).

⁴⁹ “Women manage it [drug networks] better, they are smarter, more sagacious” (author’s translation).

⁵⁰ “Women are more careful, detailed and have more eagerness to work” (author’s translation).

4.3 Experiences and strategies within drug markets

As for any other business, a good strategy is of utmost importance to dominate the market in a certain area, maintain (or achieve) competitive advantage, and accomplish specific goals in the illegal world of drug trade. Drug lords, networks' managers, and drug dealers are also concerned with questions of how to secure reliable suppliers, provide a good product to lock in a loyal customers and attract new ones, make higher profits on the selling of their drugs, and seize opportunities to gain a rival's territory. On these grounds, they must consistently review their strategies to evaluate their networks' strengths and weakness, and to identify an opportunities and risks inherent in their actions.

My interlocutors stressed that changes in the management of a drug network usually correspond to a turbulent and uncertain period of the business cycle. In illegal drug networks, to reduce uncertainty and enhance interpersonal trust, new managers generally implement different strategies and recruit new members early in their tenure. That is what happened in Preto's network when Flávia assumed her position as manager: she changed the organizational and operational structure of the business. As a strategy to increase revenues and ensure more protection to her employees (*vapores*), she was audacious to change the location of drop offs to lively bustling places (e.g. last stop of a business line; beside the most famous bar) where people regularly gathered. Flávia has also brought into *movimento* people whom she trusted, and taught them to do things her way:

Tinha que andar certo no crime [respeitar as leis], como eu sempre andei. Não pode fazer coisa errada, dar derrame [de drogas ou dinheiro] ou pôr o movimento em risco, se não a dívida pode ser cobrada. Se for mulher eles podem raspar seu cabelo, queimar sua mão (pé ou corpo) ou mandam cobrar [i.e. matar]⁵¹ (Flávia).

Furthermore, Flávia expected her employees to guarantee the normality and efficiency of the *movimento*, and engaged on drug dealing to secure that employees were working efficiently and that order was kept in the *bocas*.

Flávia's responsibilities included stockpiling all drugs and weapons, supervising her subordinates, designing and implementing the network's strategies according to Preto's decisions. The team working under Flávia's supervision was divided in 7 *bocas* (3 of cannabis, 2 of crack cocaine and 2 of cocaine) wherein light weapons were also traded, a site

⁵¹ "One had to walk straight in crime [conform to the rules], as I have always walked. One can't do the wrong thing, cannot rip off [drugs or money] or put the movimento at risk, if not the debt has to be repaid. In the case of women, they can get their hair shaved off, burn your hand (feet or body) or give the order to charge [kill] you" (author's translation).

where drugs were packed, and a cocaine laboratory. In sharp contradiction to her position as a woman who has made significant inroads in a traditionally masculine arena, Flávia did not recruit any woman to her team:

*Todos os funcionários eram homens, não tinha nenhuma mulher porque mulher fala muito e no tráfico é importante manter sigilo. Ninguém dedura ninguém, tem que desenrolar sozinho [assumir responsabilidade pela droga e aguentar a pressão da polícia]. Não pode atrapalhar os negócios ou pôr a segurança do movimento em perigo*⁵² (Flávia).

Conversely, when talking about their experiences and strategies deployed in the drug trade, other interlocutors have praised the work done by women in illegal networks. Sandra draws attention to this matter by remarking that: *“a mulher é mais honesta, pesa a droga direito (não fica roubando no peso), presta contas em dia e é mais inteligente. Só é burra quando age por impulso, por emoção”*⁵³ (Sandra). For her turn, Katarina considers the performance and strategies deployed by female drug dealers superior to that of men. According to her, *“as mulheres são mais determinadas, têm mais coragem e ousadia, impõe mais disciplina e responsabilidade [ex. na prestação de contas, gerência do negócio]. A polícia também desconfia menos [das mulheres]”*⁵⁴ (Katarina).

Women employ a wide range of strategies and resources to succeed in their drug dealing business and to avoid arrest. Of particular relevance to drug apprehension's or arrest's avoidance strategies is the “contextual assimilation” of stereotypic images and behaviours ascribed to women (Maher and Hudson 2007:811-2). By exploring the assumption that women are harmless beings whose image and behaviours are irreconcilable with the identity of an offender, they become ideal for the performance of risk tasks such as the smuggling of drugs, weapons and money. My interlocutors were clear that women are not searched by police as frequently as men, and above all are treated with less suspicion. Recalling on one of her experiences, Luiza said *“já aconteceu de eu passar com a bolsa cheia de drogas e o policial não falar nada, até mandar eu ir para casa e ter cuidado [no caminho de casa]*

⁵² “All employees were men, there was no woman because woman talks too much and in trafficking it is important to keep secrecy. Nobody gets the wind up, one has to resolve alone [assume responsibility for the drugs and stand stanch in the face of police pressure]. One cannot compromise the business or put the security of the movimento in danger” (author's translation).

⁵³ “Women are more honest, weight drugs accurately (do not steal some amounts), balance the accounts without loss, and are more intelligent. They are just stupid when they act upon impulse, upon emotion” (author's translation).

⁵⁴ “Women are more spirited, have more courage and boldness, enforce stricter discipline and accountability [e.g. in the income statement, management of the business]. Police officers are also less likely to suspect [a women]” (author's translation).

porque já está (sic) tarde”⁵⁵ (Luiza). For occupying a higher position in the hierarchy of drug networks and performing more diverse tasks, Flávia would not incur such a risk. One of her strategies to avoid arrest was to keep a minor responsible for her security and accountable (in case of a police raid) for all drugs and weapons they carried⁵⁶.

Although “feminine” traits such as physical vulnerability have been perceived as incompatible with some aspects of drug dealing, accounts of women in other researches and statements from my interlocutors highlight advantages of capitalizing on these attributes and other gendered stereotypes. For sharing her house and drug set with other four women, Katarina attempted to maintain a somewhat normal routine to avoid suspicion. Their decision about when to sell was established in order to coincide with the lively pulse of street life: “*A noite a gente não vendia, era hora da diversão. A gente ia para os bailes, fazia festa, bebia. A gente só vendia de dia*”⁵⁷ (Katarina). In her view, this strategy would be deployed to deceive police officers, to avoid being noticed, and to gain market in a time where nobody was dealing. Katarina called attention to this fact by asserting that: “*Várias vezes, os policiais passavam em frente a casa e diziam que iam estourar aquele bordel. Eles xingavam, nos chamavam de tudo o que era nome e depois iam embora. Eles achavam que era uma casa de prostituição*”⁵⁸ (Katarina).

As far as the various techniques go, we identify how women strategize in face of a set of operational risks. In devising and implementing their strategies, women may also explore patriarchal values and attitudes regarding their femininity and sexuality to smuggle illegal drugs and charm their way to high-rank positions in drug networks or cartels. Models and beauty queens, such as Angie Sanclemente Valencia and Simone Farrow, have been attracting considerable media attention for their involvement in drug trafficking. Valencia, a former lingerie model was accused of heading one of the world’s largest drug gangs, and has been charged with recruiting “unsuspicious, beautiful angels” to work as mules (Diaz-Duran 2010, Leach 2010). Farrow an international swimsuit model has been accused of running a

⁵⁵ “It has already happened that I was walking by with a bag full of drugs and the police officer didn’t not say a thing, even told me to go home and to take care [on her way] because it was already late” (author’s translation).

⁵⁶ Offenders usually have an extensive knowledge of legal statuses and are aware that, according to Brazil’s legislation, minors would not be imprisoned or would serve a term of maximum six months in a special institution.

⁵⁷ “We would not sell in the night, nights were leisure time. We would go to clubs, [funk] balls, party and drink. We would only sell throughout the day” (author’s translation).

⁵⁸ “Several times, police officers would usually pass by the house and tell they would close down that brothel. They would swear, call us names and then leave. They would think it was a prostitution house” (author’s translation).

worldwide methamphetamine ring out of a Hollywood apartment, and using 19 aliases to ship the drug around the world by post (Cohan 2012, The Huffington Post 2012). In an interview to ABC News, former special agent Brad Garrett reiterated that: “It’s not uncommon in the modeling and entertainment industry... If your skill set doesn’t take you any place else, where’s it going to take you? A quick buck would be distributing methamphetamine. It tells me that she was not that sophisticated, and she may be desperate for money” (Cohan 2012).

Out of my interlocutors, Flávia was the only who mentioned to enjoy negotiating with ‘the men’⁵⁹, to explore her opportunities to deceive and seduce them. In general she would know all policemen, but they did not know who she was: *“era engraçado paquerar e seduzir ‘os homem’ (sic), negociar pagamentos [de proprinas] e dar tempo para os muleques evitarem derrame [apreensão de drogas]. Mas, depois de um tempo, minha fama caiu na boca do povo e eu tive que parar”*⁶⁰ (Flávia). In fact, Flávia has remained in charge of negotiating with police officers that were paid to protect the network, and to bribe others in case of seizures, but to protect her identity she would always send a young boy to intermediate negotiations with the police. The boy would say the negotiation terms loud and she would then give a positive or negative signal. Once the police caught an important dealer of their network and Preto’s best friend with drugs and a ‘12 chrome pistol gun’ (a gun that only they had by that time) and requested Preto to meet them up by an agreed place. Concerned that the police was planning to catch him, Flávia orchestrated a security plan involving three security fences to make sure Preto would not be arrested. The negotiation between Preto and the police officers went smooth and they did not need to resort to violence in order to protect their leader.

The passage narrated by Flávia demonstrates she has been both tactician and strategist in the performing of her tasks. Nevertheless, perceptions of women as naturally unable to perpetrate violence reinforce the idea that they are acutely vulnerable workers incapable to perform satisfactorily in the drug business. The threat of violence and the capability of perpetrating violence, according to one frequently expressed view, are of utmost importance to demonstrate the power of drug dealers and trafficking networks (Denton and O’Malley 1999:523). In opposing this doctrine, Hutton (2005:549) argued that his female dealer interlocutor’s

⁵⁹ Meaning ‘os homens’, a slang for police officers.

⁶⁰ “It was fun to flirt and seduce ‘the men’, negotiating payments [of bribes] or giving time for guys to avoid detection. But, after some time, my fame ‘became the talk of the town’ and I had to stop” (author’s translation).

expression of subcultural capital is smartness, because she cannot compete with male dealers and suppliers in terms of machismo and aggression, but she can ‘get one over’ on those who cause her problems by being creative about her social relationships i.e. pooling her resources with an established male dealer. Therefore she operates underneath the gaze of hegemonic masculinity in an ‘invisible’ way.

It may be argued, however, that the importance being given to the role of violence and the inability of women to deploy it has been exacerbated. The threat or act of violence in illegal drug markets might vary according to the region, selling methods, and the levels of drug dealers’ tolerance.

Despite claiming no fear of facing or perpetrating outbreaks of violence, Natália and Flávia have stated that a peaceful environment is always more profitable for the business. In my interlocutors’ networks the threat or usage of violence would only serve: to enforce drug debt payment (what would occur in places distant from their drug selling spots), to penalize workers or informants, to resolve disputes between dealers, and to impose order in their community.

Flávia said she has never killed nor order a person’s death; it was the gang’s leader who would decide on these matters. Contrary to her first statement, Flávia remembered one occasion she was leading the *movimento* and some employees reported to her that there was a new community’s resident who moved in after serving his prison sentence for statutory rape. The presence of this man in the area was an offense to their network’s rule and to a long-established “law of crime”, which asserts that rapes and rapists are cannot be tolerated by criminals. Therefore, in observance to their authority and “criminals ethics”, Flávia’s network members had to “charge” that men. Initially, Flávia did not take the rumour, asked for some investigation and protected the life of that man - who was the uncle of her childhood friend. Nevertheless, once the man’s conviction of rape was confirmed, Flávia had to request her employees to “charge” the man. As reported by her, it was a difficult decision that had to be taken to reinforce her position and the rule of her network. Likewise in her capacities as a mother and a criminal who has always abided to the “laws of crime”, Flávia knew that men was not a subject; in fact, he should have been “charged” before by his peers in prison.

The lack of reference in the literature about women deploying violence as a business tool convenes with the prevalence of researches that emphasize the victimization of women and exclude their capability to perpetrate a violent act (Denton and O’Malley 1999:528). While accounts resulting from this study rejected the usage of violence as a business strategy in the

dynamics of drug trade, it was not claimed that my interlocutors were not trained or equipped to dispense violence. With exception of Helena, all my interlocutors knew how to manage a handgun but reported that would prefer having someone to protect them while they would concentrate on their dealing or smuggling activities. In expressing her skill with guns, Luiza remarked: *“Eu sempre tive a curiosidade de saber como manusear, atirar. Nunca teve problema, mas se precisasse eu estava (sic) pronta para atirar”*⁶¹ (Luiza).

In keeping with my empirical data, I fall in with Denton and O'Malley (1999:523) who assume that “there is no self-evident reason why women per se could not or would not deploy violence, even though as noted already this is not a frequent pattern witnessed in our research. Resort to violence may depend on market and other social conditions as much or more than on gender linked issues”. In opposition, Sommers and Baskin's (1997) revealed that violence in crack cocaine markets mirrors any attempt to uphold economic interests and became an imperative means for dealers to manage their costs and increasing competition.

The strategies and experiences discussed above show that there is an ambivalent aspect in the position of women who serve in “masculine” roles such as those related to drug dealing. A major obstacle in the advancement of these women's criminal ‘careers’ is the structural organization, culture, and norms of these institutions (or illegal networks), which usually perpetuate binary gender differences and impose their identity as gendered ‘women’ - rather than an integral part of the system (Sasson-Levy 2002:370). Conversely to that, there are many women who subvert those traditional sexist divisions, occupy high and prestigious positions, and refuse social and cultural postulations of femininity and masculinity. Yet, as Butler (1990) acutely observed that this women's “rejection of the link between the female body and the feminine gender reveals the fluid, ever-changing, and performative nature of gender identities and exposes the arbitrary nature of the binary construction of gender” (Sasson-Levy 2002:371).

Statements and examples drawn from this research help to demonstrate that although female dealers may experience discrimination and adaptation problems within the world of drug dealing, they can deal with them in an effective, intelligent and creative manner. Kandiyoti (1998) has coined these gendered constraints as “patriarchal bargains”, which provide women greater power and options than they perceived it could be attained by a challenge to the

⁶¹ “I have always been curious to know how to handle, to shoot [a gun]. There has never been a problem, but I would be ready to shot if needed” (author's translation).

prevailing social order. In accordance to her notion: “Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct ‘rules of the game’ and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression” (Kandiyoti 1988:274).

To that extent, it is not enough to view female drug dealers as marginalized victims of the illegal business economy. Women can ‘play the game’ in the ‘hegemonic masculine’ world of dealing, confront extra obstacles consequential of stereotypes, demonstrate their ability to successfully perform their tasks, to develop trust and confidence from their subordinates, peers and bosses. As indicated by Denton and O’Malley (1999:521): “There are a variety of alternative styles and experiences, each sustainable in its own right according to the context, resources and ability. Even were we to accept that women are less practised in the rougher modes of the trade, they may operate effectively without conforming to male centred visions of what ‘is needed’ in the business”.

4.4 Motivations

In discussing their motivations to participate in drug trade activities, women’s statements may reproduce a paradoxical tension between acknowledging responsibility for their choices and crimes, and presenting themselves as passive victims lacking in agency, voice, and power. In their narratives, interviewees involved in Barcinski’s (2009) study vacillated between assertions of power and feelings of vulnerability in face of adversities. However, despite revealing accounts of women who experienced a certain degree of power, Barcinski’s (2009) research overlooked interviewees’ sense of agency in order to follow a traditional rhetoric that emphasizes victimization aspects of these women’s experiences, the ‘peripheral’ positions assigned to them, and the centrality of gender in women’s motivations to enter or leave drug markets.

For the most part, focus on the centrality of gender in women’s motivations to engage in drug trade activities relates either to the advent of women’s liberation movement and their efforts to obtain more independence and freedom vis-à-vis men, or to historically truncated avenues that hindered women’s opportunities in the formal labor market and consequently impacted upon their socio-economic conditions.

Nonetheless, it is important to consider that a wide variety of reasons can affect person's motives to engage in drug trade activities. In turn, these motivations can be related to economic, emotional, social and personal factors; or yet encompass simultaneous aspects.

In the following, my interlocutors' statements of their motivations to engage in drug trade activities will add on the already presented histories of their entrance into drug enterprises to demonstrate particularities of their life experiences that came to influence their decisions.

4.4.1 Financial Rewards

Conditions of social and economic deprivation and the lack of opportunities in the formal labor market emerge as traditional motivations for many people who get started in criminal activities. In essence, women's participation in drug markets is primarily perceived as a consequence of their economic needs and social aspirations.

In examining the specific condition of women in South America, Rosa del Olmo observed that prior to the advent of the women's liberation movement - whose influence she considered to have been overstated in these countries' context, structural factors and adverse socio-economic conditions have exerted a major impact upon women's situation. According to the author, women's lives and career's pathways in the region have been primarily affected by factors such as: trends of matricentric families, women's increased dependence on the informal economy, the expansion of drug markets as economic enterprises, and the multiple forms of discrimination women face in the education, employment, health, social and economic spheres of life (del Olmo, 1992 p.41). Twenty years later, Hunnicutt and Broidy (2004) reinforced Rosa del Olmo's thesis by ascertaining that "female crime can be characterized as fundamentally economic in nature" and "related to economic need" (Campbell 2008:242). Contending in this same regard, Julia Sudbury (2005) stressed that neo-liberal economic globalization has increased poverty in developing countries and disproportionally affected the situation of women as wage-earners and heads of households (Fleetwood 2010:4).

The theory of economic marginalization as defined by Naffine (1987) essentially posits that "it is the absence rather than the availability of employment opportunity for women [that] seems to lead to increases in female crime" (Simon and Ahn-Redding, 2005:15-16). Advocates of this theory claim that increased female participation in the labor force does not necessarily mean more equality between the sexes, or improved economic situation for

women (Chesney-Lind 1997). In this view, most female offenders engage in petty property crime as a desperate response to factors that work to marginalize women within their societies (e.g. poverty, unemployment, social and economic insecurity) (Simon and Ahn-Redding, 2005:15-16).

In recalling her personal motivations, Natália stated that her defiant stubborn behaviour, the lack of job opportunities, and her lust for easy money were important factors influencing her decision to enter the drug economy. She explained that her family has always had a good economic situation but she had difficulties to provide for herself since she left her parents' house at the age of sixteen:

Minha história começa aos 14 anos quando eu contei sobre minha homossexualidade para minha família... Eu era o quarto filho, tinha três irmãos mais velhos e minha mãe me adotou porque ela sempre quis ter uma menina. Por ironia do destino, aos 14 anos eu disse a ela que não era a menina que ela sempre quis ter. Eu era uma garota diferente, eu era uma garota que gostava de garotas. Minha família não aceitou minha condição [sexual] e eu resolvi sair de casa... Eu sempre tive que trabalhar para me sustentar. Não foi fácil, fiz todo tipo de trabalho até entrar para o tráfico⁶² (Natália).

Natália has also mentioned that some women become susceptible to the appeals of drug trafficking in face of the need to provide for their (sometimes many) children. It is in this way that one of Barcinski's interviewees describes the motivation of a friend to participate in drug trafficking: *"eu tenho uma amiga que ela sustenta os filhos – ela tem quatro filhos. Ela sustenta os quatro à disposição deles [dos traficantes]. Esse é o trabalho dela. Então ela se mantém dali. Se não tiver, não tem. E muitas das vezes você vê que ela passa necessidade"*⁶³ (Barcinski 2009:1846).

Traditionally, the involvement of women and men in the drug economy is explained by conditions of social and economic deprivation that restrain their opportunities in the formal labor market. Penny Green's (1998) research with Nigerian men and women imprisoned in the UK concluded that for both: "relative poverty, a sense of desperation and opportunity to

⁶² "My history begins when I was fourteen years old and talked to my family about my homosexuality... I was the fourth child, had three older brothers and my mother has adopted me because she always wanted to have a girl. Ironically, when I turned fourteen I told her I was not the girl she has always wanted to have. I was different girl, a girl that liked girls... My family didn't accept my sexual condition and I decided to leave their house... I have always worked to provide for myself. It was not easy, I have worked in all kinds of jobs until entering in drug trafficking" (author's translation).

⁶³ "I have a friend that sustains her children – she has four children. She sustains the four [children] at the disposition of them [traffickers]. That is her job. Then, she maintains herself there. If it does not have, it does not have. And several times you see she is facing difficulties" (author's translation).

rise above the grinding misery of economic hardship in the developing world all contribute to a rational explanation of the phenomenon” (Fleetwood 2010:4).

However, while addressing previous incongruencies of associating women’s liberation movement and enhanced freedoms with increases in the levels of female criminality, the marginalization theory (or gender-inequality theory) risks to confine female criminality to economic determinism and ethnocentrism (the old dilemma between Marxists and feminists) (Simon and Ahn-Redding 2005:17). Moreover, a central question that Simon and Ahn-Redding (2005:17) pose to advocates of the marginalization theory is “why women’s selective criminal participation has continued to increase as women have moved into higher-status occupations?”

Undeniably, filling the market niche for drug products appears as a viable alternative to competitive and discriminatory labor markets, as well as to a social environment that overrates financial success and consumerism. In spite of this, restraining people’s (women’s and men’s) motivations to engage in criminal endeavors to their social and economic marginalization seems overly simplistic and misleading once “it does not explain why people do offend at a particular time, why one type of crime is committed over another, or why men more than women are mules, if women are disproportionately affected by economic crisis” (Fleetwood 2010:4).

Scarcity of money, situations of economic hardship and social deprivation may affect people’s propensity to seek access to money in illegal ways, such as through the participation in criminal activities. Still, there are several other non-economic rationales that might primarily or concomitantly to economic motivations exert influence on people’s decision. In the same token, Campbell (2008:242) contended that economic necessity is a particularly compelling factor to workers occupying the lowest ranks in the hierarchy of drug networks, however it is a much less important issue among those occupying middle and upper levels where crime is usually related with the ability to exert power or influence over others, and to satisfy personal interests.

Even though coming from lower class (Luiza, Katarina and Flávia) and lower middle class (Natália, Helena and Sandra) families to enter drug trafficking networks from its lowest positions, my interlocutors have not considered financial need a primordial motivation for their engagement in the illegal drug trade. Natália represents an absolute exception as the only interlocutor who has engaged in drug trafficking in a middle-level position (by setting her

own ‘house’) and still alleging financial need as an important factor affecting her choice (or lack of).

4.4.2 Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships have also been recognized as playing a critical role in crimes committed by women. Several researches give comprehensible examples of women entering and advancing their participation in drug networks through their links with male drug dealers and traffickers. A general finding arising from these studies is that more women than men reported being introduced to drug dealing and smuggling by their sex or romantic partners, because of their dependence or manipulation from partners, as well as by taking over responsibility over their partner’s business when a partner is arrested (Maher and Hudson 2007:816). Drug traffickers and dealers may coerce or influence their lovers, spouses and relatives into collaborating in their illegal business as mules, endoladoras, drivers, and caretaker of drug stash houses. Furthermore, women reported being forced to conceal drugs or money or pay off debts incurred by their husbands with wholesaler dealers or drug lords (Campbell 2008:237).

These interpretations go in hand with Helena’s history of involvement in the drug world (as already assessed in this chapter). At the beginning, Helena was afraid that her husband would do something to her or to her family if she refused to follow his orders. Besides that fear, she has also reported a need to provide for their family and to pay the costs of her husband’s lawyers.

It is the opinion of Katarina that most women “*entram no tráfico por causa dos maridos, porque têm que sustentar a família ou porque queriam mesmo fazer – por safadeza ou falta de juízo*”⁶⁴ (Katarina). Drawing on the same matter, Luiza explained that several women allege engaging in drug dealing out of necessity, claiming that drug traffickers have manipulated their vulnerability and stronger commitment to their children. However, Luiza contended those assertions by claiming that, “*eu não acredito que seja tanto por isso. Você pergunta: cadê o esposo? Tá preso! Aí elas acabam se envolvendo*”⁶⁵ (Luiza). Her opinion is

⁶⁴ “Engage in trafficking because of their husbands, because they have to provide for the family, or because they wanted to do it – for the sake of villainy or poor judgement” (author’s translation).

⁶⁵ “I don’t believe it is so much for those reasons. When you ask: where is the husband? In jail! Then, they end up getting involved” (author’s translation).

that: *“a maioria entra no tráfico por influência dos maridos. Mas quando o marido ‘tá preso, a mulher acaba sempre se envolvendo. Tem cabeça fraca”*⁶⁶ (Luiza).

Fioravante and Silva’s (2011) interlocutors presented a similar perspective of their experiences, when these women come to discarding their position as victims manipulated by bad men. In their accounts, the role played by spouses and partners in women’s involvement in drug trafficking was considered particularly important; however, they fully assume responsibility for their own decision-making and actions. As expressed by Milena:

*Não é bem assim não, a gente não é nem um pouco coitadinha nem nada, o povo vem pensando que agente [sic] é coitadinha, mas não é. Quando a gente começa a mexer ali, a gente já sabe muito bem o que é, tem consciência do que é, e consciência de que pode caí [sic] à qualquer hora. Tem as influenciadas com certeza também, mas todo mundo tá ciente do que tá fazendo*⁶⁷ (Fioravante and Silva 2011:31).

In addition to my interlocutors’ statements, research also comprise extensive reports of women participating in drug trade under protection or tutelage of their partners, and taking advantage of their ties with men who were further up in the hierarchy (Maher and Hudson 2007:816). We have also discussed that romantic love was a decisive aspect in Sandra’s debut in the drug trade. According to her, the first time her lover asked her to pick a packet up somewhere: *“eu não tive dúvidas em aceitar [o pedido do namorado para que ela fosse buscar drogas], para agradar ele (sic)... Eu me apaixonei e me envolvi totalmente [no tráfico]. Ele era muito charmoso, bonito, e poderoso – ele era um cara de muito conceito no crime”*⁶⁸ (Sandra).

It is in this context that interlocutors’ accounts go in hand with criminology literature about the influence of men in crimes committed by women. In that view, women’s vulnerability to their partner’s demands and the low position they occupy within drug trade enterprises works to reinforce a larger patriarchal economy and promulgate a macho symbolism, which often contributes further to the victimization of these women (Campbell 2008:238).

⁶⁶ “Most women engage in trafficking under influence of their husbands. But, when a husband is imprisoned, the woman always ends up engaged. They are weak-minded” (author’s translation).

⁶⁷ “It is not this way, we are not poor victims, people think we are poor victims, but we are not. When we start working there, we know very well what it is, acknowledge what it is, and acknowledge the risks of being caught anytime. There are women influenced, for sure, but everybody knows what s/he is doing” (author’s translation).

⁶⁸ “I had no doubts accepting [his demand to pick drugs up], and wanted to please him... I fell in love and got totally involved [in drug smuggling]. He was very charming, beautiful, and powerful – a guy with a high reputation in crime” (author’s translation).

Drug dealers and traffickers are seen as a point of departure for women to explore the dynamics at work in drug networks. Furthermore, several women feel very attracted for the figure, power or lifestyle of criminals, as well as to the thrills, excitement and rewards they believed to be possible to gain from relationships with them. In explaining women's fallings for criminals, Flávia stated:

*Mulher gosta de bandido, porque bandido tem attitude. Eu gosto de homem com attitude. Não gosto de homem fraco que fica atrás de mim. Se tiver poder e dinheiro, aí é unir o útil ao agradável... Eu tive vários namorados, mas um era especial, eu vive os melhores momentos da minha com ele... Eu sempre gostei de trabalhar no tráfico, mas ele não, o negócio dele era assalto*⁶⁹ (Flávia).

Despite the evidence of her own experience, Sandra did not reflect on her attraction to a drug trafficker. Rather, she explained the fascination teenagers living in communities dominated by drug trade networks have for traffickers: *“as meninas de treze, quinze anos que moram nesses bairros e vivem na pobreza acham que o traficante é o cara. Elas querem ser a mulher do cara e fazem de tudo para entrar para o movimento”*⁷⁰ (Sandra).

4.4.3 Pursuit of Power and Status

Contrary to traditional understandings of women's motivations to engage in drug markets, some studies have focused on critical social resources associated with women's increasing participation in drug trade activities. The research maintains that entering drug networks may provide smugglers and dealers a universe of excitement, power, or status they considered unachievable through conventional means (Anderson 2005; 2008, Barcinski 2009;2012, Campbell 2005,2008, Fioravante and Silva 2011, Fleetwood 2010).

The power and status derived from illegal drug activities are frequently cited as central factors behind women's and men's decisions to earn a living, obtain social recognition and personal agency within the illegal avenues of drug markets. In the last chapter, I have briefly recounted the story of Zulema who was initially attracted to drug business activities by the opportunity they presented for adventure and revolt against bourgeois lifestyles (Campbell 2008:246). In the same way, my interlocutors expressed that images of a insidious and glamorized lifestyle

⁶⁹ “Women like criminals, because criminals have attitude. I like man with attitude. I don't like weak man, which stays after me. Would he have power and money, then it is to combine business with pleasure... I have had several boyfriends but one was special, I have lived the best time of my life with him... I enjoyed working in trafficking but he did not, his business was robbery” (author's translation).

⁷⁰ “Thirteen or Fifteen years old girls in these districts live on poverty and think that drug traffickers are the guys. They want to be the “woman of ‘the man’” and do everything to enter the network” (author's translation).

have influenced their decision to enter the drug world; according to Sandra: *“eu não fazia pelo dinheiro, fazia pela adrenalina, porque queria fazer alguma coisa, sair da rotina”*⁷¹ (Sandra). Stressing the relevance of power and money, Natália claimed: *“eu tenho que admitir que curtia muito aquela adrenalina aquele poder... Poder, proibição, dinheiro está tudo relacionado... É por causa do poder e riscos do tráfico que nós ganhávamos toda aquela grana”*⁷² (Natália). In the same vein, Katarina stated: *“eu gostava daquele poder... Sentia prazer em traficar... Gostava de ter dinheiro, de ir para o (sic) shopping e comprar tudo o que eu quisesse”*⁷³ (Katarina). For her turn, Luiza asserted: *“tinha aquela sensação de poder. Eu posso, eu sou esperta... Eu gostava de impor respeito a minha pessoa (sic)”*⁷⁴ (Luiza).

Flávia has also admitted to enjoy having power and control over others: *“eu sempre gostei de ter o poder na mão, de disputar flagrante, de sentir aquela sensação (sic) de perigo”*⁷⁵ (Flávia). During our talks she advocated that, over the three years she has participated in the drug trade, she has always had a voice in the community and authority to put order in their hill. During her time everything was easy and safe within the community, but *“hoje em dia, o povo pergunta quando que eu vou voltar. Tudo mudou, não existe mais aquela tranquilidade e segurança da época que nós estávamos na liderança”*⁷⁶ (Flávia). By the time her gang was ruling, things were not this way; everything was controlled and organized, there were no thefts and obviously no homicides within their territory. Currently the situation is very different, there is a lot of burglary, theft and homicides within the community: *“agora é a lei do revolver, na nossa época a lei do crime garantia a paz dos moradores”*⁷⁷ (Flávia).

⁷¹ “I didn’t do it for money, I did it for the adrenaline, because I wanted to do something, to get out of my routine” (author’s translation).

⁷² “I have to admit that I really enjoyed that adrenaline, that power... Power, prohibition, money, everything is related... It is due to the power and risks of trafficking that we earned all that money” (author’s translation).

⁷³ “I enjoyed that power... I enjoyed dealing... I enjoyed having money, to go to the mall and buying everything I wanted” (author’s translation).

⁷⁴ “There was that sense of power. I can do it, I am smart... I enjoyed imposing myself upon others” (author’s translation).

⁷⁵ “I have always enjoyed having power in my hands, to dispute flagrant, to feel a sense of danger” (author’s translation).

⁷⁶ “Nowadays people are asking when she is going to be back. Things have changed completely, there is not the same tranquillity and security of times we were in the leadership” (author’s translation).

⁷⁷ “Now it is the law of guns, during our time the law of crime ensured peace to the community’s residents” (author’s translation).

Finally, Helena explained that because of her naivety she did not realize how much she could profit from her participation in the drug world. According to her account, at first, she had no interest in taking over her husband's business but did it out of fear and financial needs. However, shortly after she started working, Helena felt empowered for being in charge of her husband's previous business, sustaining and extending business relationships with people renowned in the drug underworld, and making a lot of money while her husband was in jail depending on her money and assistance. Being involved in the drug trade, Helena experienced for the first time a sense of independence and power: *"o tráfico vicia... Tem aquela sensação de prazer, poder, prestígio. Você fica viciada pela adrenalina, dinheiro..."*⁷⁸ (Helena). Among her statements about this power, Helena traces the relationship between money and self-esteem, which has always been low but was further devastated after her marriage. In her words, *"eu me sentia bem de ir (sic) às compras e comprar tudo o que eu quisesse. Era ótimo entrar numa loja e ter todas aquelas vendedoras lindas e bem-vestidas me bajulando"*⁷⁹ (Helena).

In her ethnography of drug smugglers and dealers, Patricia Adler (1993) observed that "the dealing crowd was strongly driven by the pleasures they derived from their way of life. This lifestyle was one of the strongest forces that attracted and held people to the drug trafficking business" (Klerks 2000:8). According to Adler, that lifestyle could be interpreted as emulating "the jet set with all its travel, spending, and heavily partying" (Klerks 2000:8). This portrayal resonates with my interlocutor's description of their impulsive buying habits and overspending: *"eu gastava todo o dinheiro saindo, querendo coisas boas, comprando o melhor"*⁸⁰ (Luiza); *"eu ganhava muito dinheiro, mas gastava tudo com compras, farras e bebida"*⁸¹ (Katarina); *"eu gostava de gastar com minhas coisas: roupas, sapatos, jóias. Eu nunca andava desarrumada, no mínimo três vezes por semana eu ia ao salão... Eu gastava em média 500 reais por semana com manicure e cabeleleira. Eu sempre gostei de me*

⁷⁸ "Drug trafficking makes you an addict... There is that feeling of pleasure, power and prestige. You get addicted by the adrenaline, money..." (author's translation).

⁷⁹ "I felt good to go shopping and buying whatever I would want. It was great to get into a store and have all those beautiful well-dressed shop assistants flattering my ego" (author's translation).

⁸⁰ "I spent all money going out, wanting good things, buying what was best" (author's translation).

⁸¹ "I would earn a lot of money but would spend all on shopping, parties and drinks" (author's translation).

apresentar bem”⁸² (Flávia); or “*ganha-se muito [dinheiro] e gasta-se muito também roqueando, fumando, bancando os amigos*”⁸³ (Natália).

Those intangible (power and authority) and tangible (money and belongings) rewards may be conceived as compensatory mechanisms designed by drug offenders to overcome feelings of stigmatization or social invisibility and to enhance their self-esteem. According to the Alfred Adler⁸⁴ (1956), people create fictional goals and ideals to experience a renewed sense of pleasure and degree of perceived power (Highland and Dabney 2009:113). Once experiencing some initial success, drug dealers or smugglers get increasingly greedy for more money in a manner that is reflective of their status and power. During our talks, my interlocutors spoke of feeling special for having experienced excitement, adventure and rewards accrued from their participation in illegal drug enterprises.

For Patricia Adler (1993), drug smugglers and dealers reject the moral and social constraints that ‘normal’ society deem inappropriate or ‘abnormal’, to instead pursue a life of thrill and excesses:

Members of the “glitter crowd” were known for their irresponsibility and daring, their desire to live recklessly and wildly. They despised the conservatism of the straight world as lowly and mundane. For them, the excitement of life came from a series of challenges where they pitted themselves against the forces that stood in their way. Although they did not create arbitrary risks dealers and smugglers were gamblers who enjoyed the element of risk in their work, being intoxicated with living on the edge of danger. They relished more than just money; they reveled in the thrill-seeking associated with their close scrapes, their ever-presenting danger, and their drug-induced highs (Klerks 2000:8).

Drug dealers usually conduct their business with a remarkable feeling of immunity that allows them to get on regardless of the inherent risks. In fact, many times, the thrill of illegality makes the illegal drug market highly attractive to certain people. Natália observed that: “*a proibição era outro atrativo. Tudo que é proibido é melhor*”⁸⁵ (Natália).

⁸² “I enjoyed spending a lot on my things: clothes, shoes, jewels. I would never be caught under-dressed, at least three times a week I would go to the hairstylist... I would spend, on average, 500 reais (250 dollars) on manicure and hairstyling. I have always liked to look good” (author’s translation).

⁸³ “A lot [of money] is earned and a lot is also spent partying, smoking, providing for friends” (author’s translation).

⁸⁴ Founder of the school of individual psychology.

⁸⁵ “Prohibition is another attraction. Everything that is forbidden is better” (author’s translation).

Nevertheless, in the measure that they achieve any meaningful success in the illegal drug trade, dealers and smugglers stance shifts from a sense of anxiety to enthusiasm – making it seem like fun and glamour. Findings from Adler’s research show that ego gratification from their popularity and status in the community, contribute to drug offenders’ increased confidence, self-esteem and sense of power (Highland and Dabney 2009:111-2). Luiza’s statement exemplifies this feeling: “*eu não tinha medo nenhum, para as mulheres é até mais fácil [traficar drogas]*”⁸⁶ (Luiza). Despite her alleged lack of fear, Flávia recalled a particular situation she experienced in apprehension and anxiety:

*Eu nunca tive medo. Na verdade, a única vez foi quando a polícia divulgou uma lista com o nomes dos dez criminosos mais procurados do Estado. Preto estava na lista e eu estava fazendo a liderança (sic) do movimento naquela semana... Eu sabia que o movimento rival podia tentar se aproveitar da situação para tomar nosso território. Só que no outro dia eu dei ordens para os meninos e deixei tudo preparado. Mas eu não tive nenhum problema, os meninos sabiam que eu estava pronta para liderar*⁸⁷ (Flávia).

Moreover by participating in illegal drug trade, a masculine-dominated domain, women could acquire power and exert the influence and authority inherent to the dynamics of the drug world. To construct their identities as successful criminals, women would often dissociate and distinguish themselves and their ‘business’ practices from other women. Luiza felt proud of having been considered and respected as “one of the guys”, according to her all boys from the network would always say: “*é bandidona, você disfarça [o envolvimento com o tráfico] bem*”⁸⁸ (Luiza). However, the same treatment would not be extended to her two female colleagues, which “*só traficavam para ganhar dinheiro e um pouco de drogas, elas não negociavam [o preço das drogas a serem adquiridas pela rede] nem tinham contatos. O chefe sabia que ele só podia contar comigo*”⁸⁹ (Luiza). In fact, Luiza is still suspecting that, envious of her earnings, her network’s colleagues denounced her to the police.

⁸⁶ “I had no fear at all, for women it is even easier [to engage in trafficking]” (author’s translation).

⁸⁷ “I had never been afraid... Actually, the only time was when the police released a list of the ten most wanted criminals in the state. Preto was featured on the list and I was in charge of the leadership of the movimento during that week... I knew that the rival movimento could take advantage of the situation and attempt to take our territory over. But in the next day I gave some order to the guys and left everything prepared. But I didn’t have any problem, guys knew I was prepared to lead [the movimento] (author’s translation).

⁸⁸ “Yeah big bandit, you disguise [her smuggling practices] well” (author’s translation).

⁸⁹ “Just smuggled to earn some money and get small amounts of drugs, they didn’t negotiate [price of drugs to be acquired by their network] or had contacts. The boss knew I was the only he could trust on” (author’s translation).

Instead of comparing her influence and power to other women's, Flávia explained the difference in practices between 'old school' criminals and beginners, taking the opportunity to boast about the power she had experienced. Flávia said that once, the leader of another *movimento* disrespected her domains and sent his *vapor* to sell drugs in the area under her network domain. Her employees caught the guy and brought him to Flávia, who did not punish him but requested to speak to the guy's leader. Once that gang was smaller and newly established, its leader was in an equivalent position to Flávia's and the problem could be solved between them. As expected, the other gangs' leader came to Flávia's encounter and apologized for his employee's invasion of her network's domains, and assured Flávia that such a thing would never happen again. She accepted his apologies and alerted him that her gang would not tolerate another invasion. During their talk Flávia noticed that the other gang's leader was armed, a fact that could have been taken as another affront to her authority but she interpreted as a demonstration of his naivety, inexperience, lack of awareness of the 'laws of crime'. At that moment it would have been easy to order her employees to kill him, however strategically it was better maintaining a weak leader under the rule of the neighbourhood's area than risking to empower a stronger criminal to be his successor - what could either cause her problems or make it harder for her gang to seize their territory in the future.

In another occasion, it was Flávia and her employees who went to another *favela* to attend a party. The manager of the local gang came to her group and asked who they were and what they were doing there. She introduced herself and her employees, acknowledged the local manager they were there to enjoy the party, and assured him they were not invading their territory⁹⁰ nor were they armed. The guy asked if she was 'Flavinha da Providência'⁹¹ and surprised by her affirmative response, he admired Flávia's courage to come to another gang's territory for leisure without any protection. He said that even within his gang's domain there were several guys around guaranteeing his protection for that area being very disputed. While retelling the story, Flávia mocked him by repeating his words to make it sound dull, and then explained that she did not need protection to go there. She was not doing anything wrong and had many acquaintances (criminals) in that area to ensure her protection, if needed. She continued by saying: "*eu conheço muita gente, muita gente mesmo. Mas quando eu digo muita gente, não é muita gente qualquer um não. Eu conheço muita gente de conceito no*

⁹⁰ i.e. selling drugs there.

⁹¹ Flavinha is a nickname for Flávia, and Providência is the name of a fictitious favela. 'Flavinha da Providência' would then mean 'Flavinha of Providência'.

crime, não são estes novos, não”⁹² (Flávia). And she knew that area had just been conquered by that gang whose leaders were beginners in the criminal world, they did not have any criminal reputation or tradition.

In another reference to beginners’ lack of ability to exercise their authority and gain residents’ support, Flávia asserted that since her gangs’ arrest⁹³ her hill has been under the rule of another drug faction, which is composed of beginners. Her explanation continued with a strong statement about her power: *“eu ainda conheço muita gente, muita gente mesmo... É porque eu não quero mais, eu não quero voltar para o crime, mas se eu quisesse eu conseguia (sic) tomar o morro em um dia”*⁹⁴ (Flávia).

People from the community have alerted Flávia not to return to the community, which has been ruled by a rival gang since her gang’s arrest. Hence, Flávia has not had the opportunity to visit her community but ascertained: *“eu ainda vou lá, com certeza eu vou. Eu sou cria”*⁹⁵ *de lá e não vou deixar que achem que estou por baixo. Eu saí de lá algemada, humilhada, tenho que voltar e mostrar para eles que não me derrubaram”*⁹⁶ (Flávia).

The multiplicity of ideas, strategies and skills, which delineated interlocutors’ motivations to enter the drug trade indicate that there is not a unique, true explanation capable of adequately capturing the complexity of women’s performances in the drug world or their motivations to engage in these illegal activities. Rather, as Alcoff (1988) ascertained:

The identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through a cultural discursive context to which she has access. . . . The concept . . . of positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values (Giroux 1990:34).

⁹² “I know many people, really many... But I mean I know many people, not ordinary ones. I know many people with a high reputation in crime, not beginners...” (author’s translation).

⁹³ All members of her gang were arrested in the same day.

⁹⁴ “I still know many people, really many... It is because I don’t want it anymore, I don’t want to get back into crime, but if I would like to I could seize that hill in one day” (author’s translation).

⁹⁵ *Cria* is short for the term “*cria do morro*”. In Brazilian Portuguese, a *cria* is a person informally adopted and raised by a family. Hence, the term “*cria do morro*” or “*cria of the hillside*” means someone adopted and raised by the hillside (Penglase 2010:328).

⁹⁶ “I am gonna still go there, I will go for sure. I am *cria* of that hill and I won’t let them think I am disempowered. I have left handcuffed, humiliated, I have to go back to show them that they haven’t turned me down” (author’s translation).

Gender stereotypes and presumptions regarding women's abilities and suitability for criminal careers have been not only obscuring women's vulnerability and motivations to engage in the drug world but also hindering their increasing problematic participation within illegal drug networks. From individual empowerment and liberation until romantic failings, there is a wide range of motivations and opportunities predisposing women to enter the drug world. Despite bursts of excitement, money spends, and displays of power, the final outcome of my interlocutors' experiences lack the glamour, fun and freedom (this in a literal sense) of open-air drug markets. While they did not suffer (or did not report) sexual victimization or major entanglements during their careers in drug enterprises; from the occasion of their arrests on, my interlocutors' lives changed completely. It is better letting them put it in plain words: *"toda vez que você escapa um flagrante você tem (sic) uma injeção de ânimo. Você acha que vai escapar sempre, até que 'a casa cai' [gíria utilizada em situações em que algo oculto foi descoberto]"*⁹⁷ (Helena). *"E 'quando a casa cai', não sobra nada. Você acha que não vai conseguir sobreviver"*⁹⁸ (Natália).

⁹⁷ "Every time you escape a flagrant you receive a shot in the arm. You think you will always escape, until the day 'the house goes down' [it is a slang term used in situations where something that was hidden is found out]" (author's translation).

⁹⁸ "And when the house goes down, nothing remains. You think you won't survive" (author's translation).

5. When the house goes down

Although torture is absolutely prohibited under international law as well as many regional and national legal systems, it is still a mainstay in many countries, among them Brazil. Outlawed both in the 1988 Constitution of Brazil and in a 1997 alteration to the country's penal code, the use of torture remains a common practice of criminal investigation at Brazilian penitentiaries. Criminals and suspects are routinely tortured to obtain information or extract confessions, especially when it regards to arrests for drug offenses or violent crimes⁹⁹ (Frinhani 2004:108, CEJIL 2007:21-7). Socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups, in particular women, are the most vulnerable because of their lack of access to legal advices or representation. Accordingly, these groups are frequently subjected to those unofficial procedures that physically violate their person and exact severe injuries not limited to the corporal.

My interlocutors first encounter with patriarchal dominance and female subjugation has immediately occurred upon their arrests. Five of them were arrested in flagrant and four reported being subjected to instances of police brutality and misconduct, including prolonged beatings and opportunistic theft of their belongings. Luiza was brutally caught and thrown to the ground before the flagrant. Still, by the time her bag was opened and drugs found: *“eles [os policiais] me chutaram e diziam ‘vai isso que dá confiar muito’”*¹⁰⁰ (Luiza). Natália's homosexuality was treated as a disgusting perversion to be punished by the police. At the occasion of her arrest, she was severely beaten and verbally assaulted by police officers who kept saying: *“já que você fica se fazendo de homem, vai ter que apanhar feito homem... vai apanhar feito homem, sapatão dos infernos”*¹⁰¹ (Natália). Katarina tried to escape the police through the window but the police dragged her back into the house. Thereafter an officer kicked her legs¹⁰², hit her on the head, pulled her by the hair, and roughly forced her into the

⁹⁹ It is not the intention of this study to question or discuss behaviours and practices carried out by police officers in Brazil. Actually, my opinion is that as for women, men, and criminals, police officers are not a homogeneous group of people who abuse of their authority and violate individual and civil rights of criminal suspects. There are many who do act in that way, and there are also many who do not. Discussions advanced here are still related to the experiences and accounts of interlocutors. Unfortunately, in a country beset by inequalities and privileges sometimes it is impossible to discern between victims and perpetrators.

¹⁰⁰ “They [police officers] kicked me and said ‘that’s what you get for trusting [people] so much’” (Luiza).

¹⁰¹ “Once you pretend to behave as a man, you ought to be beaten like a man... you will get beaten like a man, dyke from hell” (author’s translation).

¹⁰² According to Katarina and Natália, despite severely beating criminals and suspects up, police officers do it on ways that physical injuries (like bruises and choking marks) are not apparent at the time of initial examination.

police van. However, her major complaint was that the police robbed her money and personal belongings. Finally, Flávia has also reported verbal and physical abuse by police officers, who wanted to know where the networks' drugs were concealed and where they were coming from. The police seized Flávia's house, and charged her for a variety of offenses including: drug dealing/drug sales, illegal association, apology to crime, possession of property related to drug trafficking, etc. Flávia said that: *"Estava tudo lá, tudo e mais um pouco. Até homicídio eles quiseram colocar na minha conta, mas eu não assumi nada disso"*¹⁰³ (Flávia). She opted for not assuming any of those crimes, did not disclose any information for the police and paid a high price for her silence: *"apanhei muito [dos policiais] e fui muito maltratada. Eles cobriram minha cabeça com um saco plástico para me sufocar, pisaram nos meus pés com aquelas botas pesadas... bateram no meu joelho com uma chave de fenda [causando sensação de choque], e enrolaram o fio do ventilador no meu pescoço"*¹⁰⁴ (Flávia). Besides physical injuries, Flávia was put under intense psychological pressure: police officers blackmailed her, threatened to beat her son, said she would rot in jail and miss out her son's growing up years. However, she responded to their provocation saying: *"Você pode até bater no meu filho, mas se isto acontecer você vai perder sua farda"*¹⁰⁵ (Flávia).

From the interlocutors who participated in this research, Helena and Sandra were the only ones that did not suffer any injuries at the time of their arrests. Sandra was arrested in flagrant at a bus station in Espírito Santo upon her arrival from Paraguay – where she went to pick up a drug stash. When Sandra was arrested police officers did not beat or hurt her, they just kept on saying: *"Você foi muito burra! Você é uma burra! Você é uma burra!"*¹⁰⁶ (Sandra). This was the only time Sandra was checked by the police, and she assumes they have received an anonymous denouncement. According to Sandra, even after double-checking her luggage, the police did not find the drug packages concealed in it. *"Fui eu que entreguei. Eu falei: 'tá aqui, dentro deste compartimento'... Ele [policial] não achava e eu disse: 'você tem que quebrar o ferro [da mala] para encontrar'... Eles [traficantes] escondem muito bem, colocam a droga*

¹⁰³ "Everything was there, everything and a lot more. Even a murder they attempted to put on my account, but I didn't take any of them up" (author's translation).

¹⁰⁴ "I was severely beaten up [by the police] and mishandled. They covered my head with a plastic bag to suffocate me, step on my feet with their heavy boots... stab me on the knee with a screwdriver [causing a feeling of shock], and wrapped a ventilator's cable around my neck" (author's translation).

¹⁰⁵ "You may even beaten my son, but would that happen you are gonna lose your uniform" (author's translation).

¹⁰⁶ "You were very stupid! You are stupid! You are stupid!" (author's translation).

embutida na mala”¹⁰⁷ (Sandra). In Sandra’s view, she had made her decision to surrender herself to the police: “*eu fiquei até aliviada, tinha que acontecer para eu parar... Eu já estava tão envolvida que não conseguia parar sozinha*”¹⁰⁸ (Sandra). Helena’s situation was atypical, once she was not arrested in flagrant. Helena was requested to give a statement at a police station and there confronted with tape recordings of her drug deals negotiations. It was based on these incriminating evidences that Helena was immediately detained and prosecuted later on.

No matter what legal or illegal procedures were undertaken during their arrests, the State’s Feminine Penitentiary in Tucum (Cariacica)¹⁰⁹ was a common destination for my interlocutors. Likewise, their first impressions, experiences and views about daily life in detention were in accord. To that extent, my interlocutors claimed that: “*o pior é que quando você entra lá você vê que nada muda. É tudo igual ou muito pior...*”¹¹⁰ (Flávia). “*A situação no presídio é muito difícil: falta higiene, a condição das celas é péssima, todas estavam superlotadas, tinha muita violência entre as presas... Ainda bem que você não foi lá*”¹¹¹ (Helena). “*A prisão não ensina nada a ninguém... Pelo contrário, a pessoa sai de lá muito pior, foi isso que aconteceu comigo na primeira vez. E, na segunda, eu tive que me segurar muito...*”¹¹² (Luiza). “*As coisas lá dentro [na prisão] são muito piores do que aqui fora. Lá você conhece pessoas de tudo quanto é lugar... Eu acho que todo mundo sai de lá muito pior do que entrou. Você fica sabendo de muito mais, aprende muito mais [em relação ao crime]*”¹¹³ (Natália).

¹⁰⁷ “It was me who gave it [drug staunch]. I told them [police officers]: ‘it is here, inside this compartment’ ... He [police officer] has not found it and I said: ‘you have to break this [luggage’s] iron bar to find it’ ... They [drug traffickers] hide it very well, putting the drug built-in the luggage” (author’s translation).

¹⁰⁸ “I felt alleviated, it had to happen for me to stop... I was so involved that I could not quit on my own” (author’s translation).

¹⁰⁹ The State’s Feminine Penitentiary where all interlocutors were first detained was deactivated in August 2011.

¹¹⁰ “The worst is that when you get there you see that nothing changes. It is all the same or much worse...” (author’s translation).

¹¹¹ “Situation in the penitentiary is very hard. There is a lack of hygiene, cells’ condition is terrible, all were overcrowded, and there was much violence among detainees. I am glad you didn’t go there” (author’s translation).

¹¹² “Prison does not teach anything to anyone. To the contrary the person leaves it much worse, that is what happened to me on the first time. And, on the second, I had to stop myself so much...” (author’s translation).

¹¹³ “Things in there [prison] are much worse than out here. There you get to know people from all over... I think everybody gets out much worse than when they entered. You get to know a lot more, learn a lot more [in regards to crime]” (author’s translation).

While prisons are not meant to be a paradise, we as a society expect that prison systems will succeed in the rehabilitation of detainees, by disciplining and providing them the necessary therapeutic and psychological support for change of behaviours. The prevalent combination of strict jail sentencing, inappropriate incarceration conditions, and punitive approaches to correction only works to transform prisons into training grounds for career criminals. During our talks, Katarina voiced out the bitterness and anger she used to feel towards the prison system: *“Na cadeia, eu sentia muito rancor, de tudo. Na minha mente eu ia voltar [para o crime]... Minha mente era tão suja quanto o diabo. Eu só pensava em matar, roubar e destruir... Quando alguém vinha me dizer: “Mataram não sei quem!” Eu dizia: “Ah é? Foi tarde!!!”*¹¹⁴ (Katarina).

In addition, all interlocutors have expressed their resentment and anger of being imprisoned under precarious living and sanitary conditions (see images on Figures 4 and 5). The penitentiary’s old building was characterized by a lack of infrastructure, maintenance and hygiene issues, which coupled with overcrowded detention cells provided a perfect environment for the formation of group rivalries and the aggravation of violence among detainees.



Figure 4 (left): Horrendous unsanitary conditions of a cell at the State’s Prison for Women in Tucum/Cariacica (G1 2011).

Figure 5 (right): Overcrowded cell at the State’s Prison for Women in Tucum/Cariacica (Agência Brasil 2009).

¹¹⁴ “In jail I felt a lot of rancour, regarding everything. In my mind I would go back [to crime]... My mind was as dirty as the devil. I would just think of killing, stealing, and destroying... When somebody would come to say: ‘whoever was killed!’ I would say: ‘Oh really? It was high times for it to happen!’” (author’s translation).

However, as in any other institution, within the penitentiary domains there were rules to be followed and a hierarchical order to be respected. Still, I do not refer to the administrative and institutional procedures enforced by penitentiary's director, security officers or agents; but to the hierarchy and authority certain detainees informally adopted. Each detention cell had a leader who enjoyed unequal privileges and authority, usually a higher status was granted to those who have had a 'prominent criminal career', who enjoyed an extensive networking within the criminal world, or on merit-cum-seniority basis.

As a general rule, newcomers had to adjust to the rules set by those leaders and to their low status. Exceptions were based on offers of money and mainly on a good networking with other detainees or criminals. Despite being arrested early in the morning she had just arrived in prison at midnight, and only received from her lawyer: a pillow, bed sheets, and 30 reais (the maximum amount a detainee could hold in prison). Flávia reported feeling scared with the mass, loud music and massive overcrowding of cells. Once she did get room in any cell, Flávia spread her bed sheets on the floor at a corner of the buildings' corridor and did not fall sleep afraid that another detainee could make something to her.

On the next day, Flávia got up from that nightmare. Her cousin, who had been detained at the maximum-security prison, called his acquaintances at the female penitentiary and requested them to give Flávia the good treatment she deserved. Besides being cousin of a criminal with good reputation, Flávia was the manager of a drug network and one of the most wanted women in the State. These credentials granted Flávia a high status, a comfortable bed and participation on the decisions taken within the cell she had chosen to stay. Moreover, she received a massive bag with clothes, personal belongings and enough food for a banquet. At that time: "tudo mudou... Todo mundo veio ajudar e querer fazer amizade"¹¹⁵ (Flávia).

One month later, Flávia was elected the leader of her cell. She did not want to occupy that position, but once elected she could not reject the post: "*Eles [colegas de cela] confiavam em mim e sabiam da eficiência da minha liderança [no movimento]. Lá dentro eu não podia fazer diferente... Eles sabiam que eu seria uma ótima representante, ia garantir nossos direito e trazer o melhor lá de fora*"¹¹⁶ (Flávia). On that same month, Flávia got her first mobile phone. She paid a former employee to bring the phone to the prison at the scheduled time and

¹¹⁵ "Everything changed. Everybody came to help me and wanted to be friends" (author's translation).

¹¹⁶ They [inmates] trusted me and were aware of the efficiency of my leadership of the *movimento* [drug network]. In there I couldn't do different... They knew I would be a great representative, enforcing our rights and bringing the best from outside" (author's translation).

throw it over the penitentiary's wall, a cleaning lady would then be in charge to deliver it to Flávia: *"Ela era muito gorda, tinha uns peitos enormes, aí ela colocava o aparelho assim entre os peitos e levava para gente. Tinha visita que também trazia. Elas enrolavam o aparelho num saco plástico e aí colocavam lá dentro [da vagina]"*¹¹⁷ (Flávia).

Flávia knew that many inmates were already jealous of the benefits and privileges enjoyed by her: *"elas morriam de inveja porque logo que eu cheguei eu consegui ir para cama, tive dois aparelhos [celular], recebia os melhores malotes, e tinha dois lagartos... Lagarto é alguém que lava sua roupa, arruma sua cama, faz faxina para você. Em troca você paga em dinheiro, comida ou drogas"*¹¹⁸ (Flávia). To protect herself from those who were already nasty, Flávia would always provide for some other inmates: *"É importante você bancar alguém, porque você precisa ter pessoas com quem contar. Eu sempre garantia que meu malote fosse suficiente para alimentar também outras detentas, geralmente as mais humildes, cujas famílias moravam longe e por isso não recebiam visitas"*¹¹⁹ (Flávia).

The female penitentiary's administrative, institutional and structural problems were reflected in the unusual living conditions enjoyed by those deprived detainees. Several of them were humiliated for their lack of money, of food supplies, impossibility to pay for a bed¹²⁰, and their increasing dependence on drugs. Those who could count on their family's economic support would arrange deals with prison staff or administration that would grant them certain privileges.

After asking her mother to stop visiting her in prison, Natália started working as a tattoo designer to make money for food and drugs. She disassembled an old radio and built up a small engine to tattoo the other inmates; tattoo inks and needles were brought by her friends or by other detainees' visitors. It was with money raised from the tattoos that Natália provided for herself in prison, according to her: *"lá dentro você é o que você tem"*¹²¹ (Natália).

¹¹⁷ "She was very fat, had enormous boobs, then she would put the phone between her boobs and bring it to us. There was visitant who would also bring it. They would wrap it in a plastic bag and put it in there [in their vaginas]" (author's translation).

¹¹⁸ "They were green with envy because as soon as I had arrived I got a bed, I had got two mobile phones, would receive the best food supplies, and had two 'lizards'... A 'lizard' is someone who washes your clothes, make your bed, clean up for you. In exchange you pay them back in cash, food or drugs" (author's translation).

¹¹⁹ "It is important that you provide for someone else because you need to have people on whom to rely. I would make sure my food supply would be enough to feed other inmates, usually the poorest, whose families live far away and for this reason did not come to visit" (author's translation).

¹²⁰ By that time, a bed costed 500 reais [250 dollars] but could also be bestowed by virtue of seniority.

¹²¹ "In there you are worth what you have" (author's translation).

Reinforcing Natália's assertion, Luiza claimed that: "*na cadeia quando você não tem nada, você não vale nada*"¹²² (Luiza).

Despite enjoying several privileges, Flávia would always warn those inmates who 'put themselves on airs' [*pagavam de patroa*] forgetting that 'beggars' [*mendigas*] were not in prison for fun. All of them committed crimes, had contacts outside the prison and most times more disposition than those 'mistresses' [*patroas*]. According to Flávia, it was important to keep in mind that: "*a cadeia não termina do portão para fora, ela apenas começa... As atitudes que você toma lá dentro, se refletem lá fora*"¹²³ (Flávia).

Regardless of any privilege or authority, all interlocutors described their time in prison as the most difficult period of their lives. The experience of imprisonment is emotional devastating, psychologically and physically harmful. Natália, Flávia, Katarina, Luiza, and Sandra revealed the use of both illegal and licit drugs as a way to adjust to prison life. While Katarina and Sandra stopped using illegal drugs after some months, Natália, Flávia and Luiza have been hooked on drugs while serving their time in a closed regime. Despite being arrested for drug smuggling, Sandra said she has never used drugs and only in jail she realized the gravity of social and health problems caused by drugs. In her words, "*tudo que eu descobri sobre as drogas eu descobri dentro da cadeia... Eu vi gente vender cabelo por droga, trocar o malote da semana inteira ou ligar para família dizendo que está (sic) doente e precisa de dinheiro para comprar remédio e trocar tudo por droga. As famílias traziam cartão de celular e elas trocavam por droga*"¹²⁴ (Sandra).

There was nothing in that criminal system to help interlocutors divert their criminal behaviours into a more responsible and fruitful lifestyle; on the contrary their accounts, images and articles presented by the media portrayed the State's Feminine Penitentiary as a very degrading environment for human lives and values. Rather than police or prison officers' punitive philosophy of corrections and strict sentencing guidelines, it was interlocutors' introspection, willing to change, family support, love for their children, faith, etc that lead to their rehabilitation.

¹²² "In jail when you don't have anything, you are worth nothing" (author's translation).

¹²³ "The jail does not end at those doors, it only starts... Attitudes you take in there are reflected outside" (author's translation).

¹²⁴ "Everything I found out about drugs I found out in jail... I saw people selling hair for drugs, exchanging all their week's food supply or calling their family saying she is sick and needs money to buy medicine and exchanging everything for drugs. Families would bring cell phone credits and they would exchange for drugs" (author's translation).

Katarina revealed the importance of religion and faith in her change. In prison, there was a religious service once a week: “às segundas, a gente tinha um grupo de oração organizado por um pastor. Ele pregava a palavra de Deus, mas se ele comesse a dar muito sermão eu ia embora... Mas eu aprendi que a única pessoa que está sempre com você é Ele”¹²⁵ (Katarina). Helena reported leaning on her faith from the very beginning: “*Toda noite eu lia a Bíblia (salmos 5, 3, e 91) e depois deixava ela assim, aberta no meu peito, para eu dormir. Era como uma proteção, um abraço de Deus*”¹²⁶ (Helena).



Figure 4 (left): Sewing Course at the Bubu/Cariacica’s Prison for Women (Diário do Congresso 2011).

Figure 5 (right): Group counselling for detainees at the Bubu/Cariacica’s Prison for Women (MPES 2012).

With the inauguration of a new Feminine Penitentiary in Bubu (Cariacica, presented on Figures 6 and 7), in August 2009, Flávia, Luiza, and Sandra have also experienced a new prison system where detainees shared the same rights and obligations, enjoyed psychological support and were offered several professional courses (e.g. bakery, informatics, eyebrow design). Sandra recorded her anxiety on being transferred to the new penitentiary: “*eu lembro quando soube que a gente ia ser transferidas, foi aquela tensão. No caminho para Bubu, eu pensei: ‘meu Deus, eu nunca mais vou ver minha família’*”¹²⁷ (Sandra). Luiza complained about the new system: “*em Bubu é muito sofrimento, o procedimento deles é muita humilhação (sic). Depois de um tempo até melhorou, mas os agentes abusam do poder*”¹²⁸

¹²⁵ “On Mondays we would have a praying group organized by a pastor. He would preach us the word of God, but if he started giving too much sermon I would leave... But I learned that the only person who is always beside you is He” (author’s translation).

¹²⁶ “Every night I would read the Bible (psalms 5, 3 and 91), and then I would let it like this, opened on my chest, for me to sleep. It was like a protection, a hug from God” (author’s translation).

¹²⁷ “I remember when I got to know that we would be transferred, it was that tension... On my way to Bubu, I thought: ‘My God, I will never gonna see my family again’” (author’s translation).

¹²⁸ “In Bubu it is a lot of suffering, their proceedings is a lot of humiliation. After some time things got better, but [prison] officers abuse of their power” (author’s translation).

(Luiza). Sandra's opinion is in conflict with Luiza's statement and, coincidentally, problematizes the experience Luiza had while serving her first prison term. In Sandra's account: *"presídios anteriores não mudavam as pessoas. Pelo contrário, as pessoas ficavam lá se drogando, perdendo tempo, fazendo amizades e aprendendo ainda mais sobre o mundo do crime"*¹²⁹ (Sandra). Speaking on this matter, Flávia observed that:

*mesmo não tendo malote, sendo mais rígida eu prefiro Bubu pela disciplina, responsabilidade... São coisas que você leva para casa: não sair sem arrumar a cama, estender sua toalha, ter horários... Lá eu consegui meu primeiro diploma, com 27 anos eu ainda não tinha nenhum diploma... Agora só não muda quem não quer*¹³⁰ (Flávia).

Katarina decided to change and indeed has been committed to that decision. At the beginning of her semi-open detention regime¹³¹, she received a job opportunity and started working at a fertilizer company:

*eu trabalhei por onze meses até que consegui meu alvará. Ai, eu achei que fosse ter que sair, mas eles me ofereceram um emprego e eu já estou aqui há nove meses... Mas isso não é o que acontece com a maioria. As pessoas acham que [o crime] ainda compensa, de seis em seis meses voltam para a cadeia... Não adianta, de 50 mulheres que estão no tráfico: 47 vão presas e as outras 3 morrem antes ou desistem. Mas Deus nos dá chances de mudar*¹³² (Katarina).

Sandra has been following the same steps of Katarina, and has been working at a large textile manufacturing company since she started to serve on a semi-open regime. Moreover, she already plans to be transferred to another division of the same company (close to her mother's house) as soon as her release warrant is executed. She said that her time in prison helped her reflect on her mistakes: *"eu tropecei no primeiro degrau e me ralei toda, mas só quando eu fui presa que eu descobri que foi um erro... eu tinha tudo: uma família linda, filhos saudáveis, um bom marido, e boas condições. Não sei o que eu fui procurar"*¹³³ (Sandra). However, she

¹²⁹ "Previous penitentiaries would not change people. On the contrary, people would be there using drugs, wasting their times, making friends and learning even more about the world of crime" (author's translation).

¹³⁰ "Even without food supply, being stricter, I prefer Bubu for the discipline and responsibility... These are things you bring home: not going out before making you bed, hanging out your towel, having schedules... There I have got my first diploma, at the age 27 I still had no diploma... Now only don't change those who don't want to change" (author's translation).

¹³¹ On a semi-open detention regime, offenders would be serving a full-time custody with day release for work or training purposes.

¹³² "I have worked there for eleven months until I received my [release] warrant. Then, I thought I would have to leave the job but they offered me a job and I have been already working here for nine months... But that is not what happen to the majority. People think that it [crime] still compensates, every six months they go back to jail... It is no use, out of 50 women participating in trafficking, 47 are going to be arrested, and the other 3 will either die before that or give up. But God gives us chances to make change" (author's translation).

¹³³ "I stumbled on the first step and grazed myself from head to toe, but only when I was arrested I realized it was a mistake... I had everything: a beautiful family, healthy children, a good husband and good living conditions. I don't know what I was searching for" (author's translation).

has decided to change and when she witnessed the first fight among detainees she made a promise to God: *“Eu prometi a Deus que assim que eu saísse dali cortaria meus chifres. Mas eu tenho certeza que eles já foram cortados”*¹³⁴ (Sandra).

Luiza had received her warrant one week before we started to talk. She was working at the same company Sandra does but quit to help her father at his grocery store. She has also resumed school and wants to become an executive secretary: *“minha família quer que eu fique mais perto deles (sic) e pediu para eu voltar a estudar para que eu possa arrumar um bom emprego... E é isso que eu quero, porque eu tenho que pensar na minha filha”*¹³⁵ (Luiza). Her second prison term was longer and more difficult, but *“serviu para eu ver que não vale a pena. O único caminho para quem está nesta vida é a morte ou cadeia... Eu tenho uma filha de 7 anos, o pai dela já é morto então eu sou o espelho dela. E é claro que eu não quero esta vida para ela”*¹³⁶ (Luiza).

Helena did not want this life for her son either. However, she could not make it for our two last meetings because she took a personal leave from work due to her oldest son arrest. Her children did not live with her; they were still living with her mother in Paraná because she did not want to let them close to their father. As she explained to me: *“eu prefiro que eles fiquem por lá porque eu não quero que meus filhos fiquem indo na cadeia... Eu tenho muito medo que meus filhos sejam influenciados pelo pai”*¹³⁷. It cannot be foreseen what changes this episode is going to cause in her life, but she has been a good telemarketer.

Helena, Flávia and Natália are colleagues at an NGO, which provides support and assistance for drug addicts. As Natália proudly remarked: *“por ironia do destino, nós pagamos à Justiça por ter feito mal à sociedade e hoje nós estamos ajudando a sociedade”*¹³⁸ (Natália). Flávia explained that before she started working at the NGO she would conceive of the relationship between drug dealer and addicts in a different way. She would think that: *“eu não colocava*

¹³⁴ “I promised to God that as soon as I left that place I would cut my horns. But I am sure they have already been cut off” (author’s translation).

¹³⁵ “My family wants me to stay closer and asked me to go back to school so I can get a good job... That’s what I want, because I have to think about my daughter. The only way for those who are in this [criminal] life is either death or jail... I have a seven year-old daughter, whose father is already dead so I am her mirror. And evidently I don’t want this life for her” (author’s translation).

¹³⁶ “It goes to show it is not worth it” (author’s translation).

¹³⁷ “I prefer to keep them there [in Paraná] because I don’t want my sons to be going to jail [to visit their father]... I am very afraid my sons would be influenced by their father.

¹³⁸ “By irony of fate, we have been brought to Justice for harming society and today we are helping society” (author’s translation).

*arma na cabeça de ninguém, eles compravam porque queriam. Mas hoje eu entendo que se não tiver traficante, não tem usuário... Então querendo ou não eu participava, contribuía direta ou indiretamente [com o mal que as drogas causam à sociedade]... E hoje eu amo o que eu faço*¹³⁹ (Flávia).

Hard times in prison have turned Natália into a different person: “*eu saí de lá uma pessoa muito mais forte*”¹⁴⁰ (Natália). Most importantly, her arrest

*serviu para me aproximar muito da minha família, da minha mãe... Hoje eu até endendo minha família, mas era muito difícil entender naquela época [quando ela saiu de casa]... Numa cidade pequena, as pessoas não entendiam, não sabiam o que era isso [homossexualidade]. Era como se eu fosse uma criminoso, antes mesmo de ser... Hoje mudou muito. Quando eu sai da prisão, achei que estivesse no paraíso... Só que depois que eu fui presa eu perdi totalmente a confiança deles, e isto eu não sei se consigo reconquistar, mas eu espero provar a eles que eu mereço*¹⁴¹ (Natália).

Despite expressing her influence with criminals and residents of the community, Flávia has assured me she is never going back to crime. She said that trafficking nowadays is extremely difficult, dangerous, and competitive; in addition to that, she does not want to spend her life doing bad and running away from the police. In her words: “*eu cansei dessa vida de crime, não quero mais isto para mim. Agora eu tenho que criar meus filhos, porque meus filhos não farão 5 anos novamente - eles só fizeram uma vez... Eu nunca pude levar meus filhos ao médico, ao dentista. E agora é isto que eu quero fazer, cuidar deles*”¹⁴² (Flávia).

Despite not living with her sons in the last years, Flávia has maintained close ties with them, especially with her eldest son. On the passage below, she speaks about their relationship, the way she explained him about her mistakes, and advices she has been giving him:

ele sempre foi muito apegado a mim, ele ia levar comida para mim, e ficar comigo... Eu conversei com ele sobre tudo. Eu já falei para ele: ‘Lucas a vida da gente mudou... Isto que eu estou passando é consequência das minhas escolhas. Tudo que eu tive de uma forma errada a gente perdeu, para ter as coisas a gente tem que trabalhar e estudar.

¹³⁹ “I wouldn’t put a gun at nobody’s head, they would buy [drugs] because they wanted. Today I know that if there is no trafficker, there is no user... Thus, even if I didn’t intend to I would participate, and contributed directly or indirectly [to the harm drugs cause to society]. Moreover, today, I love what I do” (author’s translation).

¹⁴⁰ “I left prison a stronger person” (author’s translation).

¹⁴¹ “Served to bring me closer to my family, to my mother... Today I can understand my family, but it was hard to understand them back at that time [when she left their house]... In a small city, people didn’t understand, didn’t know what it was [homosexuality]. It was as if I were a criminal, before turning into one... Nowadays, it has changed a lot. When I left prison I thought I was in paradise... But after my arrest I know I lost their trust fully, and I am afraid I can’t get it back, but I hope I can prove to them I am worth it” (author’s translation).

¹⁴² “I am tired of this criminal life. I don’t want it for me anymore. Now, I have to raise my sons because they are not going to turn 5 again, it has just happened once... I have never had the opportunity to bring my sons to the doctor, to the dentist. Now that’s what I want to do, I want to take care of them” (author’s translation).

*Pelo caminho mais fácil o único lugar que você vai chegar é na prisão (onde eu cheguei) ou pior, onde seu pai está*¹⁴³ (Flávia).

After all she has lived and experienced in crime and in jail, her focus and major concern is with the future of her eldest son. As she explained: *“eu tenho muito medo que meu filho se envolva [com o crime] porque meu filho presenciou minha prisão, sabia que eu tinha arma... E eles falam que tem esta coisa de sangue, o pai dele também estava no crime, morreu num assalto. O Tiago pelo menos tem o pai dele...”*¹⁴⁴ (Flávia).

Interlocutors’ accounts and critiques of the prison system, of living conditions in jail, and exposure to further criminal’ networks allude to the idea that incarceration measures had no influence on their decision to quit the life of crime. Rather, they relate their decision to personal determination, a willingness to change their lifestyles, and to resume life with their families. There is one sentence from Flávia that accurately summarizes interlocutors’ experiences and trajectories, from the decision to participate in drug trade to the time in prison: *“cada escolha é uma renúncia, por isso nós temos que ter cuidado com nossas escolhas e com vamos ter que renunciar”*¹⁴⁵ (Flávia).

¹⁴³ “He has always been very close to me. He would bring me food and spend time with me... I talk to him about everything. I have already told him: ‘Lucas our life has changed... This I am experiencing is a consequence of my choices. Everything I have got through wrong means, we lost. To get things we have to work and study. Through the easiest way the only place you are going to arrive is either in jail (where I did) or worse, where your father is’ (author’s translation).

¹⁴⁴ “I am very afraid that my son would get involved [in crime] because my son has witnessed my arrest, he knew I had a gun... And people say about this thing of blood, his father was also involved in the crime, he died in robbery. At least, Tiago can count on his father” (author’s translation).

¹⁴⁵ “Every choice is a renounce, for this reason we have to be careful with our choices and with what we will have to renounce” (author’s translation).

6. Discussion

Despite its small sample size, this thesis exploration of interlocutors' life histories aimed to increase knowledge and better understanding on the multiple interests and motivations that may influence an individual's decision to participate in the drug trade.

In the last decades, the alarming rise in the number of women involved in drug trade activities has been largely related to the expansion of drug markets, increased availability of job opportunities, and innovative business strategies developed by illegal networks to avoid confiscation of drugs.

Women engage in the illegal drug trade through several paths (such as parental, conjugal or friendship connexions) and may perform a variety of positions in the hierarchy of drug networks, which have been unobserved by academic researches. Most studies covering the participation of women in drug networks seem to be directed by stereotypical gender lens that focus on the victimization and/or pathologization of women criminal endeavours. These studies reject women's ability to exercise agency and respond to opportunities to achieve their desired outcomes, and prevent researchers and readers from developing a more pragmatic view of the matter - one that is based on facts not misconceptions. In Brazil, the participation of women in all ranks of drug trade organizations is a well-documented fact extensively reported by mass media and official statistics, which have captured the dramatic expansion in the number of women imprisoned for all types of drug crimes.

Unfortunately, legal and illegal job markets are still affected by a gender division of labour that distinguishes individuals' capabilities according to traditional sexist beliefs and stereotypical gender assumptions. However, there are several women (and men) who conform to these traditional gender prescriptions and others who challenge these stereotypical roles. Interlocutors' awareness of social roles and stigmas attached to women are explored and function as a point of orientation in the carrying out of their illegal activities. It is based on the danger potential of a person or situation that they will decide whether to play the "fragile sex" or "femme fatale" role socially ascribed to them, to exercise their authority or incur potential risks.

Evidence of interlocutors' achievements and ability to perform their roles shall be regarded as an assertion of their skills and rejection of gender-role stereotypes. These women's

determination, achievements and capability to fulfil their highest ambitions are the main proof of their 'success'. This is not to deny women's subordinate and victimized experiences but to call attention to their increasing interest and considerable progress in occupying central positions in the hierarchy of drug networks. Instead, this study maintains that it is not gender or sexual identity that define an individual's capabilities and interests, but rather a complex interaction of social, cultural and personal factors. Women's accomplishments within drug networks prompt us to question (or even corroborate) the fallacy of cultural stereotypes about gender roles in crime.

In the same way, this thesis asserts that it is misleading to reduce women's motivation to engage in drug trade activities to conditions of social and economic marginalization. As we have assessed, based on interlocutors' accounts, there is a multiplicity of reasons influencing women's decisions to enter the illegal drug world related to social and economic interests, as well as psychological and emotional aspects.

While findings from this study provide considerable insight into women's motivations to enter drug networks, their experiences within illicit drug markets and penitentiaries, as well as lessons learned from these past events, interlocutors' life histories revealed how diverse and subjective those experiences can be. Each individual has a unique personal history and perception of life, it is interaction of these factors that determines every single decision one takes.

It is important to emphasize that the interlocutors' accounts indirectly revealed a fundamental inversion of social, cultural and moral values derived from the prioritization of financial rewards and a lavish exciting lifestyle. As Sykes and Matza (2005:231) stated: "the basic characteristic of the delinquent sub-culture ... is a system of values that represents an inversion of the values held by respectable law-abiding society. The world of the delinquent is the world of the law-abiding turned upside down and its norms constitute a countervailing force directed against the conforming social order".

In Brazil as well as in other societies marked by a lack of social structure, high levels of inequality, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, violence, corruption, etc., the occurrence of additional vices such as high levels of criminality and the expansion of drug trade markets is perceived as just another problem among a plethora of others. Perhaps, in the struggle against all these social maladies, a paralysing feeling of general impotence and frustration accrues to a kind of indifference, an atmosphere of "banalization of crime".

6.1 Limitations of Study

The findings of this study must be considered in light of its limitation, which I will briefly discuss here.

The first limitation impacting on this thesis relates to its relative small sample size - which is comprised of six women who have served prison terms for drug crimes. Getting access to (former) drug offenders and establishing a relationship of trust with interlocutors are major difficulties in doing research about individuals' experiences in the drug trade. Usually this population fear disclosing their status as former members of drug networks, are concerned with breaches of confidentiality and the repercussion their words might have.

Another limitation involves this study's data collection method, which relied only on in-depth open-ended conversations. While providing considerable insight into interlocutors' motivations to enter drug networks, their experiences with illicit drug markets and incarceration, and lessons learned from these events; findings from this study draw on situational and subjective contexts. Indeed, results drawing from this research represent life histories of a group of women who have occupied different positions in the hierarchy of drug networks and performed different functions at a certain place and point in times. Accordingly, these results may not be theorized to a more general conclusion.

6.2 Recommendations for future research

There are several recommendations for future researches based on the limitations of this study. At first, it is imperative to advise future research to keep focus on the experiences of women who participate or have already participated in the illegal drug trade and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field.

The second recommendation is that future research would focus on women who occupy or have occupied the same position in the hierarchy of drug networks. As already mentioned a more homogeneous sample would allow for results to draw some general conclusion.

Another recommendation would be for a quantitative assessment on the main roles and responsibilities performed by women in drug trade networks.

Finally, it certainly would be valuable to undergo a comparative research on the motivations affecting the decisions of women and men to engage in illegal drug markets. This comparative analysis would provide a comprehensive picture of drug trade markets' main inducements for recruiting individuals and offer some insight for replacing the 'war on drugs' approach for more humane and efficient counter-drug policies.

7. Conclusion

The inquiry of this study has been to enhance understanding of women's motivations to enter illegal drug trade networks, their experiences and lessons learned from their participation in illegal drug markets.

While the assessment of individuals' capabilities within illegal drug networks are largely characterized by gendered notions of hierarchy and ideas of masculinity, the participation of women in these markets has been dramatically increasing in the last decades. Through an investigation of the roles performed by women in drug networks, this study discussed that women have been operating at all ranks of networks' hierarchy – a postulation that coincides with the variation of positions occupied by interlocutors comprising this study's small sample size.

Informed by a postmodern feminist approach, I defended that it is not gender alone that determines an individual's capabilities to occupy a specific hierarchical positions or to carry out certain responsibilities, but rather a complex interplay of social and material relations, personal agency and identities. Implicit in this view is an assumption that there is no universal or unitary category 'woman', nor any universal condition to be ascribed to this 'woman'. Women do not necessarily experience their lives in the same way; their experiences are formed in terms of time, locality and diverse structures of oppression (e.g. social class, economic condition, race, etc). Individuals are multi-layered subjects, who take up a range of subject positions, which may be contradictory and conflicting with each other.

It is important to consider that a wide variety of reasons may affect a person's decision to enter illegal drug markets. Financial rewards, romantic relationships, the pursuit of power and status were determinant motivations for my interlocutors to engage in drug trade activities. Nevertheless, perceptions and behaviours concerning these sets of motivations vary in strength and style from person to person. Although all interlocutors have recognized feeling inclined about the power enjoyed by drug networks' members, understandings of power varied according to personal expectations, qualities of behaviour, and opportunities.

Although interlocutors have made their debut in the drug world facilitated by their personal network of contacts, there were unique situational and subjective circumstances affecting an individual's decisions to enter illegal drug markets. Interlocutors' life histories revealed the multiplicity and subjectivity of their experiences and potentials: each interlocutor performed varied and different positions and employed distinct strategies to achieve their personal or career goals within drug networks.

To comprehend the nature of interlocutor's participation within illegal drug networks therefore required an assessment of her/his personal life experiences and views, of what s/he considered a legitimate opportunity, socioeconomic status, power, or success. Thus, neither their sexes nor gender norms contribute to the existence of a common pattern of women's participation or status within drug networks.

In the same vein, experiences and strategies characterizing these women's performances in the drug world cannot be generalized or explained by their shared sexual identity. Their experiences depend on the positions they occupy, risks they are exposed to, and strategies they employ at a specific situation. Nonetheless, interlocutors highlighted the advantages of capitalizing on stereotypic images and behaviours ascribed to women to attain certain objectives, avoid drug apprehension and an eventual arrest. Rather than feeling marginalized or victimized interlocutors who partook in this study expressed a sense of empowerment and confidence, which flourished every time they would complete their illegal duties without being caught by the police.

No matter what they have accomplished in their illegal business, drug dealers' and traffickers' careers are most likely to have a bad ending. In a sudden shock of reality and suffering, my interlocutors were arrested and ended their criminal careers experiencing the harsh conditions of prison. Overnight they lost their special status as members of drug networks and became individuals' deprived of their civil freedoms and relegated to the condition of prisoners. Interlocutors' arrest represented their ultimate defeat and a remarkable instance of personal failure that tormented them on a daily basis throughout their experiences of prison. However, during that period, interlocutors were skilled enough to reflect on their mistakes, overcome their feelings of revolt and resist to misleading temptations that would have pushed them back into crime. They have learned from their experiences, have found new motivations and a renewed strength to grasp new life opportunities.

Unfortunately, during their prison terms (or most of it), interlocutors have not received appropriate psychological support or participated in professional courses that could help orienting them throughout their prison terms and facilitate their reintegration into society. Interlocutors' decision to stay away from illegal drug markets after their prison terms was a matter of personal determination I wish will not be temporal.

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Curriculum Vitae



Europass Curriculum Vitae

Personal information

First name(s) / Surname(s)	Priscila Bittencourt Ribeiro de Oliveira		
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Telephone(s)	+ (43) (1) 90111517	Mobile:	+ (43) 6507900051
E-mail	priscila_bitt@hotmail.com		
Nationality	Brazilian		
Date of birth	21.06.1983		
Gender	Female		

Work experience

Dates	April 1, 2008 - July 31st, 2008
Occupation or position held	Intern
Main activities and responsibilities	▪ Researched on trade and industrial treaties; ▪ Drafted a variety of documents, reports and memoranda; ▪ Prepared overviews of the Latin American and the Caribbean Programme's projects; ▪ Elaborated overviews of the Programmes projects (work plan and activities); ▪ Translated the Integrated Programme for El Salvador (Spanish-English); ▪ Designed promotion material (flyers and folders) of the Programme's activities and projects.
Name and address of employer	United Nations Industrial Development Organization Programme Coordination and Field Operation Division (PCF) Regional Strategies and Field Operation Division (RSF) Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) Programme Vienna International Centre - P.O. Box 300, 1400 Vienna, Austria
Type of business or sector	International Organization
Dates	June 10, 2003 – June 10, 2004
Occupation or position held	Consultant
Main activities and responsibilities	▪ Undertook market researches; ▪ Elaborated market analyses; ▪ Identified new business opportunities; ▪ Prospected for clients to present and sell our products; ▪ Assisted in the design of marketing strategies and sales promotion plans.
Name and address of employer	ABX Consulting Rua Abail do Amaral Carneiro, 41 29050-535 Vitória – E.S. Brazil
Type of business or sector	Trading Company
Dates	June 10, 2002 – June 10, 2004
Occupation or position held	Consular Officer

Main activities and responsibilities	▪ Performed clerical duties and administrative work to consular tasks; ▪ Provided consular assistance and notarial services to Austrian and Brazilian citizens; ▪ Facilitated the Consulate's communication and outreach activities (cultural promotion, ceremonial activities, trade dissemination and cooperation) with media/press, local authorities, civil society and non-Governmental organizations; ▪ Updated databases and organize Consulate's protocols and documentation; ▪ Elaborated Consular reports to consular and diplomatic representations; ▪ Organized philanthropic and consular events.
Name and address of employer	Consulate of Austria Rua Abiaíl do Amaral Carneiro, 41 29050-535 Vitória – E.S. Brazil
Type of business or sector	Governmental
Education and training	
Dates	October 2009 – ongoing
Title of qualification awarded	Master of Arts in Cultural Differences and Transnational Processes
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Cultural and Social Anthropology / Transnational Processes / Human Rights
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	University of Vienna
Level in national or international classification	Master's Degree
Dates	May 2010 – May 2011
Title of qualification awarded	Master of Economics
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Geo-economic and Regional Studies
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Megatrend University - Belgrade, Serbia
Level in national or international classification	Master's Degree
Dates	July 2007 - April 2010
Title of qualification awarded	Master of Arts in Diplomatic and Strategic Studies
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Diplomacy, International Relations
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	The International University – Vienna
Dates	July 2000 - December 2004
Title of qualification awarded	Bachelor in International Relations
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	International Relations, International Politics, International Economy.
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Centro Universitário Vila Velha (UVV)
Level in national or international classification	Bachelor's Degree
Personal skills and competences	
Mother tongue(s)	Portuguese
Other language(s)	English, Spanish, French, German and Italian.

Self-assessment
European level (*)

English
Spanish
French
German
Italian

Understanding				Speaking				Writing	
Listening		Reading		Spoken interaction		Spoken production			
C2	Proficient user	C2	Proficient user	C2	Proficient user	C2	Proficient user	C2	Proficient user
B2	Independent user	B2	Independent user	B1	Independent user	B1	Independent user	B1	Independent user
B1	Independent user	B1	Independent user	A2	Basic user	A2	Basic user	A1	Basic user
B1	Independent user	B1	Independent user	A2	Basic user	A2	Basic user	A2	Basic user
B1	Independent user	B1	Independent user	A2	Basic user	A2	Basic user	A2	Basic user

(*) [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)

Social skills and competences

- Strong referential values of dignity, fairness, and equity;
- Sociability, diplomacy, facile and rapid integration in different cultural groups and environments;
- Ability to work in team or individually;
- Ability to liaise well with people of different cultural backgrounds;
- Responsible, reliable, and self-motivated;
- Excellent communication skills.

Organisational skills and competences

- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills;
- Detail-oriented multitasker with strong organizational abilities;
- Flexible, stress resistant and a team player with an energetic personality;
- Ability to perform assigned tasks under minimal supervision.

Computer skills and competences

- Operating systems: Microsoft Windows XP™ and Vista™, Mac OS X™;
- Excellent command of Microsoft Office™ tools (Word™, Excel™ and PowerPoint™) and Internet Explorer™.

Research Publications

- Arreola, Ashley; Bittencourt, Priscila. (2011). Black Men and their Portrayal in Austrian Media. Paradigmata 4. Pp.32-37.
- Oliveira, Priscila B. R. de; Penev, Plamen P. (2011). The Emergence of Organized Criminal Networks as Extralegal Authorities. Connections: The Quarterly Journal 10:4. pp.51-59.