

## The Owner of the Hill: Masculinity and Drug-trafficking in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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### R E S U M E N

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Este artículo investiga el modo en que los traficantes de drogas de Rio Janeiro, Brasil, usan un discurso ideológico de autoridad masculina para estructurar sus relaciones con los residentes de las favelas en esa ciudad. El artículo muestra cómo el discurso en torno al “respeto” permite a los traficantes la legitimación de su propia influencia sobre los habitantes de las favelas, la normalización de la desigualdad y el silenciamiento de la oposición. También muestra por qué los residentes de las favelas aceptan este tipo de discursos de autoridad y examina como estos residentes, a su vez, usan el discurso de género en su intento de negociar la relación con los traficantes de drogas. Sin embargo, los traficantes también alteran la relación entre la masculinidad y la asignación de los diferentes grados de vulnerabilidad. Además el artículo muestra como este tipo de relación genera una experiencia destabilizadora de ansiedad para los hombres de las favelas que no participan en el tráfico de droga. En general, sostengo que hasta que el análisis de la violencia urbana no se sitúe dentro de un contexto que tenga en cuenta el género, la misma no podrá ser completamente entendida.

This article examines how drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, use a gendered ideology of masculine authority to structure their relationships with residents of the city's *favelas* (squatter neighborhoods). It shows how gendered notions of “respect” provide traffickers with a useful way to legitimate their influence, naturalizing inequality, and silencing contestation. The article shows why favela residents sometimes find these gendered discourses of authority convincing, and examines how they use gender in an attempt to negotiate relationships with drug traffickers. Yet drug traffickers also alter the relationship between masculinity and the allocation of vulnerability. This work will look at how this generates destabilizing experiences of anxiety for men in favelas who do not participate in the drug trade. Overall, I argue that until the analysis

of urban violence is situated within a gendered context, it will never be fully understood.

PALABRAS CLAVES: violencia, Brasil, favela, género, narcotráfico.

KEYWORDS: violence, Brazil, favela, gender, drug-trafficking

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THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES HOW DRUG TRAFFICKERS in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, structure their relationships with residents of the city's *favelas*. It is based upon ethnographic research in the Caxambu<sup>1</sup> neighborhood, located in the Northern Zone of Rio de Janeiro. It argues that the influence exerted by drug traffickers in Rio's favelas depends not only upon their coercive violence and the Brazilian state's failure to provide public security, but also upon the ability of drug traffickers to manipulate local discourses and social relations.

This article examines a crucial aspect of this process: how drug traffickers use a gendered ideology of masculine authority to legitimate their use of force while eliding questions of inequality and contestation. I also examine why favela residents sometimes "recognize themselves" in these practices and discourses, and show the impact that this has upon men in the favela who do not participate in the drug trade. Overall, the goal is not only to analyze the gendered aspect of exchanges and clientelistic relations in Rio's favelas, but to also show how drug trafficking and urban violence are altering experiences of gender in Brazil.

Hetero-normative ideologies of gender and sexuality "necessarily stratify the allocation of legal rights and social privileges" (di Leonardo and Roger Lancaster 1997:2). Traffickers make use of such ideologies, altering the relationship between masculinity and the allocation of vulnerability to violence. While men in favelas who do not participate in drug trafficking can use this discourse of masculine authority to structure their relationships with drug traffickers, the changes in the relationship between gender and the allocation of vulnerability to violence also produce deep anxieties.

Judith Butler's analysis of the performative constitution of sexed and gendered subjects helps in an understanding of this dynamic. For Butler, sexual difference is the product of "a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (Butler 1993:2). Following Butler, not only is it important to identify the gendered component of drug-trafficker authority, but the processes that made this performative use of gender efficacious must also be analyzed. Materialization of sex, Butler argues, requires processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications enable the formation of a subject. Butler also emphasizes that this process is incomplete. Thus, I will examine not only how and why residents of Rio's favelas

interpellate themselves in drug-trafficker discourse, but also the anxieties that this produces for the vast majority of men in Rio's favelas who do not participate in the drug trade.

### **The Drug Trade, Gender, and Structures of Power in Rio's Favelas**

The drug trade in Rio's favelas is organized to sell cocaine and marijuana to clients in wealthier neighborhoods and, to a lesser degree, to consumers in the favelas themselves. In the 1980s, as the regional drug trade expanded, an organization called the Comando Vermelho used a two-pronged strategy to take over Rio's favela-based drug trade: ruthless violence against any opponents, and a strategy of forced reciprocity with favela residents, whereby the group exchanged "protection" for acquiescence to drug dealing (Amorim 1993; Penglase 2008). Elements of the state—especially the police—also became deeply involved in the drug trade. By the mid-1980s, drug-dealing groups occupied important positions in most of the city's favelas. This was true even in neighborhoods such as Caxambu, which are not as strategically important to the drug trade.

Caxambu was first settled at beginning of the twentieth century when emancipated slaves sought new homes, and when the urban poor were evicted from downtown tenements (Abreu 1994).<sup>2</sup> By the time I conducted my research, several generations of residents had lived in Caxambu, and they were linked through ties of kinship, friendship, and long-term propinquity. While there is relative variation in incomes, educational levels, and skin colors in Caxambu, on average the neighborhood's residents are poorer, less likely to be employed, less educated, and darker-skinned than the average resident of Rio.

Although many of the residents of Caxambu are Afro-Brazilian, within the neighborhood race was rarely an explicit marker of identity. In the terms used by Livio Sansone, the *morro* (hillside) could be thought of as a "soft area" of color relationships, where conflicts or tensions were rarely explicitly articulated in terms of racial differences (Sansone 2003:51–55). Robin Sheriff, who conducted research in a favela in Rio, also noted that "references to race and color are highly circumscribed—hemmed in, in fact, by a universally understood and conscientiously practiced etiquette" (Sheriff 2001:50).

In Caxambu, which had about four thousand residents, perhaps 30 young men and a few women were directly involved in the drug trade as full-time dealers, armed "soldiers," or higher-level "managers" (Raphael 1998; Dowdney 2003:39–51). Dê, the head of the drug-dealing organization, was allied with more powerful dealers in Mangueira, a nearby neighborhood that is more important to the drug trade. Yet despite their relatively small numbers, drug dealers in Caxambu, often referred to as the *tráfico*, exerted a powerful influence over the morro.

Alba Zaluar has argued that drug trafficking connects with and disrupts the “ethical vision” of favela residents (Zaluar 1994:19). The persistence of gender tropes and images reveals that relations between drug traffickers and residents exist within, and transform, broader notions of gender, authority, and violence. Drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro frequently claim to be the *donos* (owners) of favelas, and are often referred to simply as “o Homem” (“the Man”). Such terms make the connection between masculine authority and legitimate violence explicit: the “Man” deserves respect and submission because of his ability to protect his “family.”

Richard Parker argues that this “traditional” ideology of gender, rooted in a patriarchal notion of a man’s identity as constructed through his ability to control his possessions and family, “continues to exert profound influence over the flow of daily life, constituting a kind of cultural grammar that continues to organize important aspects of experience even in settings that would otherwise seem far removed from the past” (Parker 1999:29). Donna Goldstein, in her research in a favela in Rio de Janeiro, also noted a “lack of alternative public discourses” of gender and sexuality (Goldstein 2003:227).

Yet the patriarchal ideology that traffickers in Rio’s poor neighborhoods use is only one of several available in Brazilian society. Mirian Goldenberg (2000) argues that it is not possible to speak of a single model of Brazilian masculinity, but that there are a multiplicity of behaviors and desires, sometimes even within the same person. Fátima Cecchetto (2004) observes that contrasting styles of masculinity exist within social classes. The question, then, as Alba Zaluar puts it, is not simply to identify a hegemonic form of masculinity, but to ask which of the various conceptions of masculinity drug traffickers use, through what actions and agents, and to what ends (Zaluar 2004:367). Further, it is also essential to ask why residents of the morro sometimes recognize themselves in the “cultural grammar” offered by drug traffickers. As Rio’s traffickers make use of notions of masculinity, it might also be questioned how their actions, in turn, alter experiences of gender—sometimes in unexpected ways.

Two insights from anthropological research on gender provide critical starting points. First, anthropologists have insisted on noting the tension between ideals and practices. As Gutmann has stated, though “norms certainly provide an omnipresent environment within which men and women negotiate various forms of masculinity, we err when we neglect to carefully distinguish among cultural customs, traditions, and truisms on the one hand and the actual ideas and lived experiences of men and women” (Gutmann 2003:3–4).

The particularly sharp tension in the morro is between an ideology that emphasizes adult male autonomy, and the reality that men often have to submit to other men. This tension is not necessary “resolved” by practices being brought into

conformity with ideology, or vice versa. Instead, we can conceptualize an ongoing dialog between the two. As Pierre Bourdieu usefully puts it, “communication takes place in the compromise between contract and conflict” (Bourdieu 1979:114). If norms and practices are seen as existing not in contradiction to each other, but in relationship to each other, then what is important is how the tráfico “speak” with residents using the language of “respect.” This location between contract and conflict is often a zone of contradictions, ambiguities, and tensions.

Second, the analysis of gender in Brazil has highlighted the relationship between violence and male identity. The ability to be violent—or, more precisely, the capacity to issue a credible threat of violence—has often been central to one way of constructing masculine identities. Roberto Da Matta (1997) points out the close links between masculinity and violence by noting the ubiquity of slang terms that equate the capacity to be violent with virility. Parker argues that such a symbolic structure “links notions of virility and potency to notions of force, power, and violence” (Parker 1991:38).

Sarah Hautzinger, in a study of domestic violence in northeastern Brazil, has argued that violence can be related to gender in two different, contradictory, ways. On the one hand, violence sometimes ensures patriarchal power, serving as the underlying guarantee of male privilege. Hautzinger calls this “dominating violence” (Hautzinger 2007:22). On the other hand, men sometimes use violence against women to compensate for, or lash out against, losses of power and authority. Hautzinger calls this “compensatory violence” (Hautzinger 2007:95).

Hautzinger’s analysis helps to draw attention to the complexity of interactions between drug traffickers and residents of Rio’s favelas. Drug traffickers’ ability to issue credible threats of violence is central to their power, and dealers in Rio’s favelas have little compunction in using violence to achieve their goals. For example, Robert Gay states that drug dealers killed one hundred community leaders in Rio’s favelas between 1992 and 2001 (Gay 2005:187). Yet violence plays other roles as well. Traffickers sometimes deliberately violate their own rules, using violence “expressively,” to demonstrate their power. These apparently “arbitrary” uses of violence are necessary precisely because that power is so unstable. This “compensatory” use of violence, though, produces deep anxieties for many men in the morro who do not sell drugs.

### **The “Law of the Hillside” and Gendered Structures of Authority**

The structure of authority that local drug traffickers have created in neighborhoods such as Caxambu is often called the “law of the hillside.” This term appears to suggest that drug traffickers in Rio’s favelas have created a structure of influence based upon trading “protection” for complicity. Some analysts of local politics in

Rio's favelas have gone along with this interpretation. In a pioneering article, Elizabeth Leeds argues that rise of drug-trafficking syndicates was made possible by the state's failure to provide services and its repressive role in favelas. The result was an antagonistic relationship between favela residents and the state, generating a gap that drug-trafficking organizations could fill (Leeds 1996). Donna Goldstein observed that residents of the favela she studied felt vulnerable in a situation where the police and judicial system were seen as corrupt or abusive. As a result, she states, "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" (Goldstein 2003:189).

Other analysts have complicated this analysis. Michel Misse and Desmond Arias have argued that rather than taking advantage of the state's absence, traffickers have actually taken over clientelistic networks established by political parties and local elites, but turned them to their own advantage (Misse 1997; Arias 2006). Arias and Corinne Rodrigues have also documented that drug traffickers do not apply a "law," but are capricious and selective in how they intervene in local conflicts (Arias and Rodrigues 2006). I have also argued elsewhere that traffickers do not simply supply "security," but actively alternate between security and insecurity, and to do this they need the state as a "disruptive presence" (Penglase 2009).

Surprisingly, though, the gendered components of drug-trafficking influence have gone unexamined. Maybe this is because—unlike Argentina, for instance, where Auyero (2001) has analyzed how women are central to how politics is represented, and to the organization of structures of clientelism—in Brazil, the relations are often represented through images of masculinity and established between men. Yet when residents of Caxambu spoke to me about the role that the tráfico plays in their neighborhoods, they spoke in terms of heavily gendered local notions of hierarchy and place, and through comparisons to the police or to rival gangs.

An off-hand remark by Seu Vander, a resident of Caxambu, first made me aware of the impact of drug trafficking and urban violence on local gender ideologies. At the time of my research, the municipal government was carrying out a major urban infrastructure project in the neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> One day, I asked Seu Vander, a seventy-year-old retired man, if he thought the project was improving the neighborhood. He told me:

If you go to the police station and ask them, they'll say that it improved a thousand percent. For them it improved a thousand percent. All the alleys are paved and everything. For them it's better. But for the rest? What's the improvement? The police show up, invade someone's house, do what they want. That's not improvement. I'm not seeing any improvement. We're the same *favelados*. They come in, but

they don't beat anyone. I'm not going to say that. But shit (*porra*), just them entering your house, people who live near you are going to see and say, shit, they invaded Vander's house. They invaded José's house, Pedro's house. Shit, that's a humiliation.

What stands out in Seu Vander's complaint is not simply his critique of police harassment—a common occurrence for many poor and non-white Brazilian men<sup>4</sup>—but his anger at the place and manner in which this “humiliation” occurs. Like many Latin American men, Seu Vander is articulating a notion of masculinity that emphasizes the social role of the father (Gutmann 2003:15). A father (a *pai de família*) produces children, provides economically for his family, and protects his family and his home. A “real” man is also often spoken of as someone who does not “*levar desaforo de ninguém*” (take abuse from anyone). For Seu Vander, by invading his home the police are insulting his status as a man and, even worse, are doing so publicly, in front of other men.

Police invasions were also disturbing to Seu Vander because they marked him as a possible criminal, which was another insult to his status. This action is especially troubling for men in the morro given a historical context where poor and Afro-Brazilian men in Rio have repeatedly had to display their status as *trabalhadores* (workers) to avoid arrest for vagrancy or, even earlier, to avoid forcible recruitment into the military (Huggins 1985; Beattie 2003).

Seu Vander was making an implicit comparison that most people in the morro would understand: he was comparing the police to local drug traffickers. In contrast to the police, Seu Vander was insinuating, the tráfico “respect” local men and do not invade their homes. They also do not insult the status of local men by treating them as criminals. (As I will show below, the tráfico ironically claim to guarantee the status of non-trafficking men as *trabalhadores*). Unlike the police, whose raids are a “humiliation,” which pushes to breaking point the tension between ideals of masculine autonomy and the reality of submission, local drug dealers are more fluent in “speaking” with residents using the language of “respect.”

But as critics of the notion of “honor and shame” have argued, simply positing the existence of a discourse of gendered authority fails to answer how and why this discourse is performed and enacted in particular situations, substituting ethnographic analysis with reductionist generalization (Herzfeld 1980). It also offers little insight into the contradictions that notions of “respect” attempt, not necessarily successfully, to paper over (Lindisfarne 1994).

### **The “Patriarchal Family” and the Political Economy of the Drug Trade**

To understand why drug traffickers use the cultural grammar of masculine “respect,” it must be located within the political economy of the illegal commerce in

drugs. In February 2003, members of the Comando Vermelho (CV), a group that at that time controlled drug trafficking in Caxambu and in many of Rio's other favelas, orchestrated a temporary shutdown of the city's businesses to protest against prison conditions (Penglase 2005). The organization issued a public statement justifying the shutdown, which read, in part, as follows:

it is no longer possible to put up with these politicians and their oppressive and cowardly policies which are creating terror in poor communities, ordering their inferior worms, the police, to invade favelas and create terror, causing the deaths of many innocents, including old ladies, children and adolescents ... someone has to put an end to this violence, and that someone will have to be us, because the people aren't able to fight for their rights, but they are aware of who is robbing and killing them. (Folha de S Paulo, 24 February 2003)

The CV's statement makes explicit drug traffickers' gendered logic. Politicians, who should "protect" the poor, elderly, and children, are instead causing their suffering. Because people in poor communities are unable to defend themselves, the Comando Vermelho's leaders take upon themselves the role of "protecting" the poor and innocent. In return for this protection, favela residents should "respect" the tráfico as the legitimate authority. It is important to note the absence of any direct reference to race or racial discrimination. Instead, the CV's statement uses the language of the patriarch, the territory's owner, and the residents' master, to attempt to legitimate its authority.

Scholars have long argued about the relevance of the notion of the "patriarchal family," made famous in the writings of Gilberto Freyre and Antônio Candido (Freyre 1945; Candido 1951). Critics have argued that the idea of a "patriarchal family" posits an unchanging structure passed down from colonial times, and that such kinship relations, if they existed at all, were perhaps only characteristic of the upper class (Corrêa 1982). Linda Rebhun (1999) and Cynthia Sarti (1992), however, point out that the patriarchal family persists as an ideology among the working class and urban poor, even if their actual family structures bear little resemblance to an extended family centered upon the authority of a powerful male. According to Sarti, the notion of a patriarchal family contains a "model of authority," which the urban poor often invoke to order and make sense of their own, often contradictory and tension-filled, lives (Sarti 1992:38). Seen in this light—as a way of judging status, and a representation often at odds with a complex and contradictory set of social practices—it becomes apparent why drug traffickers find ideologies of masculine power appealing.

Favela-based traffickers can use gendered discourses of masculine authority to construct what Herzfeld calls a "moral taxonomy," that is, a "system of ranking



one's fellow-citizens according to a set of ethical criteria" (Herzfeld 1980:340). Such a taxonomy is particularly important 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 (Schneider 1971). Despite frequent reference to everyone in the neighborhood being "equal," residents are aware that drug traffickers enjoy disproportionate access to income. Drug traffickers also have to negotiate one of the central, and competing, taxonomies that structure social relations in the morro: the contrast between *trabalhadores* (literally "workers," but meaning law-abiding residents) and *bandidos* (criminals) (Zaluar 1985).

The language of the "Man" who protects his family allows the tráfico to acknowledge and negotiate these contradictions. As Lindisfarne notes, such gendered rhetoric "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" (Lindisfarne 1994:95). By positioning themselves as the "head" of the family, drug traffickers are arguing that local social relations should be guided by complementary and reciprocal, but by no means non-hierarchical, roles. Just as children and wives should "respect" the status of the father, and the father reciprocates by providing for and protecting the family, so should non-trafficking residents "respect" the authority of traffickers, who reciprocate by "protecting" residents from rival gangs or the police. In this way, drug dealers superimpose upon the distinction between *bandidos* and *trabalhadores* a competing distinction between "family" versus outsiders. Ironically, residents of the morro (self-described "workers") are able to enjoy the safety necessary to fulfill this role if they engage in appropriate exchanges with criminals.

### The Owners of the "Pedaço"

Traffickers' claim to be the protectors of favelas is a rhetorical gambit, which may or may not resonate with favela residents. As Butler argues, the production of gender depends upon identificatory processes by which subjects are engendered. Why has the offer of protection by traffickers been so convincing? How does it connect to, and reshape, how favela residents understand their social world?

One reason that this discourse resonates with favela residents is because traffickers draw upon a persistent pattern of representing the morro as an extended family. For example, when I told Zeca that everyone in Caxambu seemed to know everyone else, he replied: "That's it, it's a family. A familial place (*um local familiar*), right?" Significantly, the term "local familiar," which Zeca used to describe Caxambu, can be translated as either a familiar place, or a family-based place.

Such representations are a product of how the residents of Caxambu react to negative stereotypes of their neighborhood, and of the morro's pattern of urban growth. Almost since their emergence, favelas have been depicted in the media and in elite discourse as spaces of danger, disease, and social disorganization. Favela residents have responded by placing a positive emphasis on the close social relationships in the morro. The metaphor of a "local familiar" also often maps the morro's urban form. Early settlers of neighborhoods such as Caxambu often set aside parts of their plots for homes for their children or relatives, or added additional floors to their homes as their families grew. Zeca, for instance, inherited the house he lived in from his mother and father, who built first a wood shack, then a brick home, after coming to Caxambu. As Zeca's family grew, his father built a second story for his children onto the original home. At the time of my fieldwork, Zeca and his brother were dividing their parent's home into two separate houses (linked by a shared wall).

Drug trafficker discourse also resonated with how spaces in the morro were used. The public spaces of Caxambu were often an almost-domestic space, made up of extended family, and people who were "*conhecidos e considerados*" ("known and respected"). The morro's public spaces can be thought of as "soft spaces" of racial and color relationships: havens from the discrimination and anonymity of the surrounding "official" neighborhood. If, outside the morro, a non-white favela resident was regarded as a nobody or, even worse, as a potential criminal, within the neighborhood the same person was someone's cousin, neighbor, school mate, friend, grandson, nephew, or team mate on a local soccer team.

As a result, observers have pointed out that social identities in favelas are often deeply connected to local areas, called *pedaços* (Alvito 2001:61–73; Zaluar 1985:138). Male identities in particular are often linked to specific *pedaços*, such as local bars, corners, soccer fields, or other spaces located between the private (the home) and the public. As José Magnani notes, to belong to a *pedaço* is to be situated within a particular network of social ties, which combine kinship, neighborliness, and descent. Belonging to and being accepted as part of a *pedaço*, Magnani argues, "means being recognized regardless of circumstance, which implies the fulfillment of certain rules of loyalty, which even local criminals, in some way, observe" (Magnani 1998:116).

If the morro was a big family, then this family was seen to be threatened by various forces: by rival drug gangs, by policemen who extorted money from residents, and by the ignorance and racism of broader Brazilian society. Police violence in particular helps traffickers to legitimate their power by functioning as the "disruptive presence" upon which their authority is constructed. During my period of fieldwork in Caxambu, the police shot and killed two young men identified by residents as drug dealers, and would often extort money from traffickers. Though

Caxambu's residents deplored these incidents, police violence was seen as part of the "bargain" that drug dealers made, trading imprisonment or an early death for fast money (Zaluar 1994:7–12). What angered residents of the morro was police violence that targeted the "wrong" people. When the police shot and killed a man known as Ari the Ice-cream Seller, whom no one felt was involved in drug trafficking, anger was widespread.

Equally surprising to me, given the high levels of police violence, was how frequently residents, especially young men, complained about being "slapped in the face" (receiving "*tapas na cara*") by police. This sort of public humiliation was far more often the subject of complaint than police shooting, extorting, or torturing people identified as drug traffickers (see also Alvito 2001:18, 100). For instance, André, a man in Caxambu, told me:

Sometimes the police beat up people who have nothing to do with it [with dealing drugs]. Just because we live in the morro, where are we going to hang out? We're going to hang out in the morro ... sometimes we want to stay here. We know lots of people here, we stop at the corner and chat. Then sometimes they [the police] show up and they don't even want to know. They think that because you're in the morro, because you're wearing ... I don't know, a nice pair of shorts or something, that you're a *traficante* [a drug dealer], that you participate [in the drug trade].

When favela residents such as André, who self-identify as "workers," are harassed by the police, they do not usually complain that violent policemen are infringing the law, but that the police have been disrespectful to them by unfairly accusing them of being criminals. Young men in the morro also frequently make explicit reference to the police acting in a racist manner, or conflating residence in the morro with criminality. Despite a general reluctance to speak about personal experiences of racism, when young, non-white men are asked if they have experienced discrimination, they often refer to mistreatment by the police (Ramos and Musumeci 2004). Thus, if at times the morro is a "soft" space of color relations, police raids can shift the neighborhood into a "hard" space of explicit racial inequality.

### "It's all a Family"

If the "cultural grammar" that imagined the hillside as a big family gave traffickers a hold over local social relations, it also provided non-trafficking residents of the morro with a way of negotiating relationships with local drug dealers, seeking their assistance when necessary and attempting to moderate their use of violence. Nêgo,

a man in his mid-twenties, put this point across forcefully, referring to local drug dealers as *malandros* (hustlers):

It could be that someone here in the community, one of the hustlers (*os malandro*), is doing his business and treats you poorly. You can go talk to whoever is responsible for that person and they'll make sure it stops ... Here there's this thing ... if you look at it closely you'll see, I know that guy. They're all from here. People from here. It could be your grandfather, your cousin, you know? ... They're *cria*. Everyone's from here, it's all a family. Everyone knows everyone else.

Nêgo used several linked terms to describe the local drug dealers. First, he used the term *malandro*, harking back to a nostalgic past when criminals were seen as stylish rogues. Nêgo then emphasized the shared kinship ties, which could be appealed to in order to moderate drug trafficker behavior. The final term that Nêgo used to describe local traffickers—*cria*—is particularly significant.

The term *cria* is short for *cria do morro*. In Brazilian Portuguese, a *cria* (or *filho de criação*) is a person informally adopted into and raised by a family (Cardoso 1984; Fonseca 1986). Thus, the term “*cria do morro*” or “*cria of the hillside*” means someone adopted by the hillside. Claudia Fonseca notes that in favelas and other lower-class communities there is a “general acceptance of fosterage” (Fonseca 1986:17–19). In Caxambu, both semi permanent fosterage and shifting children from household to household were common. For instance, Dona Carmen informally adopted a boy who was abandoned as a baby. Dona Elsa also had a rotating group of grandchildren living in her home, depending on their mothers' needs.

By using the term *cria*, Nêgo was making an implicit claim upon traffickers. If the local traffickers could not be appealed to as actual kin (as “grandfathers” or “cousins”), they could be appealed to as quasi-kin, as *cria* who were metaphorically incorporated into the family of the favela, and who should thus treat favela residents decently. By claiming that the tráfico had been raised by the hillside, Nêgo was seeking to invert, however temporarily, local status hierarchies. There were several reasons why Nêgo would appeal to the notion of a “family.”

Nêgo ran a small bar near the top of the hillside, and was always on the look out for a quick money-gaining hustle, often at the blurred edges of the legal economy. Like many other young men in the morro, Nêgo based much of his identity, and quite a bit of his livelihood, upon his ability to demonstrate that he was *esperto* (smart or cunning) and not an *otário* (a sucker). Being able to claim “close relations” with the local *malandros* allowed him to see himself as someone who took part in their daring transgression of the established legal economy. Yet Nêgo also had to ensure that there was distance between himself and local drug dealers. Since he did not possess the official licenses necessary to operate a business, the police

could—and sometimes did—force Nêgo to shut down his bar. If he was perceived as being close to traffickers, Nêgo would also be a target for police extortion. On the other hand, since they often had extra money, the local drug dealers were some of Nêgo's best customers.

Nêgo's ambivalent attitude towards drug traffickers seems to be built into the gender and kinship structures used to organize relationships between traffickers and residents of the morro. In much of Brazilian society, a network of extended family ties (a *parentela*) is often an important resource (Wagley 1964). Yet in poor communities, the same network is also regarded warily, as the needs of extended kin may have a negative impact on one's own immediate family (Kottak 1967; Woortmann 1982). For instance, Clara, a close friend in Caxambu, relied upon extended kin and yet worried about the impact this had on her financial situation. She often told me that her sister and brother, who did not work and lived at her mother's home, were a drain upon her financial situation since they often asked for "loans," which she knew would never be repaid. Yet Clara also appealed to her family in times of need: Clara's sister often took care of her children, and Clara cultivated her ties with a maternal aunt who lived outside the morro.

Clara's family ties to the tráfico were equally complex. Part of why she regarded her brother's appeals for help with suspicion was because he was trying to extricate himself from the drug trade after having been shot in the leg for failing to repaying debts that he owed. Clara worried that he was actually using the money to buy drugs. Clara also had several male cousins who were drug dealers, and her son's *padrinho* (godfather) was at one point the head of drug trafficking in the morro. This connection helped guarantee my safety during one period of the fieldwork, and Clara sometimes took advantage of this relationship. For instance, she used her connection to her *compadre* (her son's godfather) to get a free carnival costume from the local samba school. But she worried that her son Martinho's admiration of his influential padrinho might lead him, like many other boys his age, into full-time involvement in the drug trade. As a result she tried to monitor carefully how much time Martinho spent with his padrinho. Thus Claudia had to negotiate the paradox of being "dangerous intimates:" while kinship and quasi-kinship connections allowed Clara access to resources, she worried that these same connections to drug dealers could expose her family to violence.

### **Dangerous Intimates, and Tensions and Anxieties**

Like other residents of Caxambu, Clara's relationships with drug dealers were often complex and ambivalent. Claudia Fonseca notes a similar ambivalence in family relations: beneath images of reciprocal obligations between husbands and wives, she states, lies "another version of gender relations, one in which the reciprocity

implicit in the conjugal pact, far from spelling out tranquility, seems to open the way for suspicion and one-upmanship as men and women endlessly vie to get the upper hand” (Fonseca 2002:65–66). In Caxambu, this tension also permeated relationships between traffickers and residents. But in this case, the one-upmanship was not between husbands and wives, but between men, with younger drug traffickers sometimes gaining the upper hand.

Women in Caxambu, perhaps because they were more aware of changes in male authority, were more likely to discuss this topic openly than men. When I asked Dona Carmen, whose back-yard restaurant I frequently visited, if Caxambu was dangerous, she told me:

No, it's not dangerous. I can't complain about that ... You're proof of that, because you live here with us and you know, right? ... For example: if someone were to mess with you, go to your house, break down your door, and steal your things. If you go and complain, ah, your things are going to have to appear. There's no doubt about that. If someone here robs your wife, they'll want to find out who it is. No way, that doesn't happen here! I mean, my kitchen is all open, right? My fridge is out here, the gas for my stove, and no one steals anything. Thank God, right? That sort of security we have. Not just with God, but with the guys who look after things.

Dona Carmen, a formidable woman who proudly identified herself as a *crente* (Pentecostal Protestant) and a *negra* (black woman), was often blunt about what she perceived as her husband's inability to protect and provide for the family. Her husband bore these comments with a sheepish resignation, and his lack of authority over his family was often a running joke in the neighborhood. Of course, anxiety about masculine status in poor communities is not new. Linda Rebhun has pointed out that two decades of economic crisis have made it difficult for working-class men to express their manliness through economic support for their families (Rebhun 1999:157–160). But not only were men such as Dona Carmen's husband competing economically against much younger men, they were implicitly abandoning control over their homes to other men.

Residents of Caxambu were also aware that although traffickers argued that relationships should be based on complementary but separate roles—repeating the well-known phrase “*bandido é bandido, trabalhador é trabalhador*” (“criminals are criminals, workers are workers”)—traffickers often violated their own rules. Local drug traffickers sometimes forced people to let them use their homes as hideouts, as drug or weapons stockpiling points, or as places for processing and packaging cocaine or marijuana. Drug dealers sometimes compensated homeowners for this use of their house. Other times, drug traffickers forcibly evicted homeowners or moved into their homes against their will. These more coercive

situations were rarely spoken about until the drug dealer responsible for these actions had been killed.

Favela residents also complained when the traffickers set up *bocas de fumo* (drug-selling points) near homes. Residents worried that living next to a boca exposed them to the possibility of shootouts between local drug dealers and police or rival drug gangs. In Caxambu, residents whose homes were near bocas de fumo sometimes attempted to get the president of the local residents association to mediate on their behalf with the tráfico.

Another major area of anxiety was parental fear about relationships between their daughters and drug-dealers. While residents of Caxambu would talk about how the hillside drug dealers “respect” local women, these statements often went hand-in-hand with commentary about the dangers that local girls and their families faced if girls turned down the advances of local drug dealers. Cases where this occurred were rarely discussed openly.

Men and women in the morro had very different cultural and social resources for dealing with the ways in which drug dealers became “dangerous intimates,” situating themselves within gender and kinship roles and yet often abusing their power. As Sarti notes: “As a hierarchical structure, the Brazilian family is based on the principle that the subordinate receives protection (although because it is hierarchical, abuse is always likely to take place)” (Sarti 1995:125). For women, having to deal with dangerous social intimates was, unfortunately, a familiar problem, and domestic spaces were all too often spaces of potential violence.

Women in favelas, as throughout the world, have had to develop strategies for dealing with dangerous social intimates, especially violent husbands, abusive uncles, and stepfathers. For instance, child-exchange is a socially acceptable way of mediating tensions between stepfathers and stepchildren: when a woman remarries, her children by other men are often sent to live with relatives (Fonseca 1991:143; Goldstein 2003). Women also seek protection against violent husbands or sexually abusive stepfathers through recourse to their male consanguines: sisters seek protection from brothers, and mothers from their eldest sons (Fonseca 1991:151).

Men, though, often lack resources for negotiating the experience of being vulnerable to violence by social intimates. Of course, the poor and working-class men in Caxambu were familiar with having to submit to the authority of other men. But this experience was usually mediated by age, social class, or social space. As boys, men often had to submit to the authority of their fathers or elder male kin. This pattern is marked in the morro through the use of honorifics, such as *Seu* (or Mr), and the use of a formal register (using the second-person term *o Senhor* instead of *você*) when speaking to elders. At work, submission to the *chefe*, or boss, is mediated by social class or work-place hierarchies.

Experiences of authority also vary according to social space: at work or in the street, favela men were often under pressure not to challenge wealthier and whiter men. But the home has often been a zone of masculine prerogative. Becoming a man is often socially marked by a man marrying and moving into his own home. As many have pointed out, the verb to marry (*casar*) derives from the word for home (*casa*) (Rebhun 1999:114; Beattie 2003:244). Peter Beattie notes that historically Brazilian law has protected the association between the honor of a head of a household and his ability to protect his home by limiting the power of authorities to enter homes in the daytime (Beattie 2003:242).

As the tráfico assumed the role of the “protector” of the neighborhood, they altered the allocation of rights and responsibilities, often assuming roles that had been previously assigned to older men. Drug dealers claimed to be equals (all “*cria do morro*”) and yet superiors. Traffickers also intervened in the domestic sphere, such as homes and family arrangements, of non-kin. As a result, they radically shifted how privilege and vulnerability to violence were allocated.

This challenge to the status of non-trafficking men is even sharper because of how masculine identities in Brazil, and other parts of Latin America, are often constituted through what Lancaster has termed the “allotment of access and accessibility” (Lancaster 1997:2). Here, following Hautzinger’s argument, the use of violence by drug traffickers shifts from guaranteeing their influence to undermining their own authority.

Masculinity is often defined through invulnerability to violence, and by the ability of adult men to respond to threats to their consanguineal family (Woortmann 1982:123). In addition, masculinity in Brazil is tied to sexual practices. Richard Parker (1991) has argued that the act of penetration defines a person’s gender, with masculinity being defined through the ability and willingness to penetrate, and the person who is penetrated being defined as non-male. In this scheme, bodies whose boundaries are impermeable are classified as male, while bodies which are, or are made to be, accessible are defined as female or non-male.

Although few men openly articulated this concern, it was clear that surrendering control over their homes and women, and thus their domestic spaces, to other men, generated new, and anxiety-producing, experiences. Men in the morro would talk openly about violations of their dignity, person, and possessions by strangers (especially the police), and concern about protection from these types of threats was openly and repetitively discussed. But violence committed by social intimates (local drug dealers) was surrounded by silence and denial.

The parallels with domestic violence are profound. Sarah Hautzinger explains that women in Bahia who were victims of male violence were often seen as having “wanted” or “deserved” a beating (Hautzinger 2007:71). In Caxambu, when drug traffickers attacked residents of the morro, this violence was often seen as



having been provoked by the victim (who “owed” traffickers something, or had shown disrespect to the drug dealers and “deserved” what happened). Discussions of violent acts that could not be so “excused” were silenced.

## Conclusion

Matthew Gutmann has argued that “[u]ntil men are routinely understood as engendered and engendering beings ... the control of some men by other men will be a topic assigned (and often consigned) to gay studies and queer theory alone” (Gutmann 2003:19). The complementary point is that until structures of power are situated within a gendered context, the authority that some men exert over others will never be fully understood. Drug traffickers in Rio, much like the Sicilian mafiosi, use ideologies of male authority to “condition” their relationships with residents of the morro (Schneider and Schneider 2003:118–126). Patriarchal discourse provides a malleable framework for various actors to make sense of, and attempt to manipulate, a fluid and dynamic social reality.

In such a context it becomes very difficult to determine to what degree residents of favelas have a choice in accepting the authority of drug traffickers. By creating multistranded relationships of reciprocity, traffickers provide residents of the morro with a framework for adjudicating status, rendering the world understandable, and attempting to cope with unpredictability and danger. Yet at times the tensions and contradictions in drug-trafficker structures of authority break down.

Ultimately, the strategy that drug traffickers in Rio’s favelas use in order to legitimate their authority may prove to be their own worst enemy. Drug traffickers, by using and manipulating gender ideologies, have reshaped the experience of masculinity for many men in Rio’s morros. In the short term, this process has produced anxiety and fear. Yet as tensions and contradictions in masculine power become more visible, men in favelas may respond by redefining the standards by which masculinity is determined and evaluated. If drug trafficking and urban violence have reshaped experiences of gender, then changes in gender ideologies might alter the social relations and discourses that serve to produce and sustain urban violence.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Caxambu is a pseudonym for a neighborhood where I conducted ethnographic research from 1998 to 1999, and in 2001. The names of Caxambu’s residents have also been altered.

<sup>2</sup>Residents of Caxambu and other similar neighborhoods in Rio rejected the term *favela*, using instead the term *o morro* (the hillside).

<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of the project, called *Favela-Bairro*, see Burgos (1998).

<sup>4</sup>Black men in Rio are more likely to be victims of assault by the police than white men, and are disproportionately victims of police killings (Lima 1999).

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