COMMUNITY JUSTICE AND FEMINIST CARE ETHICS: THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN COMMUNITY AGENTS IN MATHIAS VELHO, CANOAS, BRAZIL

BY

AMANDA KOVALCZUK DE OLIVEIRA GARCIA

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology of Law in the Oñati International Institute for Sociology of Law at the University of the Basque Country, 2019

Oñati, Basque Country, Spain

Masters Committee:

Professor Angela Melville, supervisor
Professor Noe Cornago, chair

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the University of the Basque Country/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea for the funding received towards my masters.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ECA – *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* – Children and Adolescent Protection Act

PRONASCI – *Programa Nacional de Segurança Pública e Cidadania* – National Program for Public Security and Citizenship

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

USC – Urban Social Center

VPC – Violence Prevention Center

Images and Figures

Abstract

Over the past decade, several projects on community justice have been implemented in Brazil under the execution of the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI). The Violence Prevention Center, located in the Mathias Velho neighborhood, in the city of Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, stands as one of them. This study aims to understand, on a local level, how nine women trained as community agents in Mathias Velho have shaped their role under a critical feminist perspective. This study used ethnographic research and qualitative data analysis, with the methodological approach being based on grounded theory. In short, the main results indicate a twofold process on the formation of the women's role as community agents. First, they largely resort to a discourse of care as a way to assert their positions, which mainly reflects the idea they should care for the community. Second, the presence of care work is highly connected to their perceptions of state institutions as flawed and inefficient, and to the non-use of law in their activities. These phenomena are then analyzed under the debate of feminist care ethics. In relation to this specific case, the overloading with unachievable expectations for their work and the use of conservative discourses have resulted in the women seeing themselves primarily as care, rather than legal, workers. This, in turn, reproduces rather than challenges sexist social structures. In short, this thesis stands as an ethnographic attempt to understand the relations between care work and the absence of law in the role formation of women community agents. It provides a feminist analysis of the use of care as a main strategy for achieving community justice, and uses a field-oriented approach to identify how it can be critically evaluated under the debate of ethics of care.

Keywords: community justice, ethics of care, feminism.

Resumo

Na última década, diversos projetos de justiça comunitária foram implementados no Brasil por meio do Programa Nacional de Segurança Pública e Cidadania (PRONASCI). O Centro de Prevenção às Violências, localizado no bairro Mathias Velho, em Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, é um deles. O presente estudo objetiva entender, em nível local, como nove mulheres capacitadas como agentes comunitárias no bairro Mathias Velho formaram o seu papel, utilizando para tanto uma análise feminista. Utilizou-se, para tanto, pesquisa etnográfica com análise qualitativa de dados, sendo a abordagem metodológica baseada em teoria fundamentada. Os resultados principais indicam um processo de duas faces na formação do papel dessas mulheres como agentes comunitárias. Primeiro, recorrem aos trabalhos de cuidado como forma de afirmar a sua posição, o que reflete a ideia de que atuam como cuidadoras da comunidade. Segundo, a presença dos papeis de cuidado está conectada a percepções acerca das instituições estatais como ineficientes, e relacionada ao pouco uso do direito nas suas atividades. Estes fenômenos são, então, analisados sob o debate da ética feminista do cuidado. Neste caso específico, as sobrecargas das mulheres com expectativas pouco realistas sobre o seu trabalho, bem como o emprego por elas de discursos conservadores, são considerados como evidência de que a formação do seu papel está fundado em noções de cuidado, e não justiça ou direitos. Considera-se que este fenômeno reproduz estruturas sexistas em lugar de desafiá-las. Em resumo, essa dissertação constitui uma breve etnografia para entender as relações entre cuidado e ausência do direito na formação do papel de mulheres agentes comunitárias. Propõe-se uma análise feminista do uso do cuidado como estratégia principal de justiça comunitária, e usa-se uma exploração empírica para identificar como este cenário pode ser criticamente avaliado dentro do debate da ética do cuidado.

Palavras-chave: justiça comunitária, ética do cuidado, feminismo.

Table of Contents

Introduction

When this thesis was planned, over my seven-month stay in Oñati, I was under constant intellectual stimuli from readings, classes, and conversations with highly-qualified professors and classmates. Over my masters, which stood as my first full-time experience in the sociological field, I tried to bear in mind that I wished to undertake empirical research, and wanted it to be responsive to my home country's reality.

Onãti was an experience that deeply fostered my interest for two main fields: community and gender studies. By being in touch with such topics over the classes, I immediately connected it to some of the experiments that I knew had taken place in Brazil in the previous years. As a lawyer taking a masters in sociology, community justice programs implemented by the Brazilian federal government in the past decade came out a vibrant scenario for further investigation.

This scenario was also related to my previous experience as a volunteer mediator at the legal aid center at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. In that time, my colleagues and I would offer a yearly edition of a free introductory training on conflict mediation. The course was aimed at people working with communities, lawyers, and students at our university, in order to make mediation more known as a conflict resolution method. In its eight edition, we received applications (small presentation letters were required from the applicants) from women working at the Violence Prevention Center at Mathias Velho neighborhood, in the city of Canoas. Although they lived and worked outside of Porto Alegre, they wished to participate as they recognized their own formation in conflict mediation had several gaps. Having received applications from many of them –around five or six agents–, my colleagues and I considered this to be an occasion to offer a full-time course directed specially for these women. Thus, in 2017 we offered –in addition to our regular 20-hour course on conflict mediation– a small training specifically planned for the community agents. By that time, I had no idea on what the Violence Prevention Center represented in terms of public policy in Brazil, nor what it would mean two years later in my academic career.

Not only did the community agents at the Violence Prevention Center in the Mathias Velho neighborhood attended the course, but they also brought along their colleagues from

Guajuviras, a neighborhood in Canoas which also held a similar project. As we would talk to them, two main comments emerged. First, the fact that the project was undergoing several changes, and the agents themselves were unsure about their roles. Second, their discourses indicated they some of them had been instructed in conflict mediation while others had not had such training. They hoped that our course could contribute to equating some skill imbalances in the group formation.

This empirical scenario was always in my mind as unanswered questions. As I was digging deeper on community studies in Oñati, I remembered these neighborhoods as places where programs for building community had been implemented, but seemed to somehow entail several challenges for their sustainability. As the agents commented on the occasion we met, they were unsure about how the project would develop in the next years. Thus, this research came up in a context where I tried to connect the knowledge I was being presented to in my master's studies to some questions I had concerning the Brazilian reality.

Originally, this research came up as an attempt to understand the effects of trying to create a sense of community based on the work of female leaders. I wished to understand the impacts of such a program that trained women who stood as references at the neighborhood as leaders in effectively impacting social ties. The research I pictured would be based on the intersections of community-building and gender studies.

As I started spending time at the field, however, I realized that my wish to study the potentials of female leaders' work in creating community was not underpinned by the reality at the center. In fact, my initial observation suggested there was little sense of community to begin with. This led me to question the inconsistency of my previous research question to the reality I wanted to study, and made me go back to redefining the main basis of my study in accordance to what was emerging in my empirical examination.

It was through the consideration of the emergent processes in the Violence Prevention Center that ethics of care came up as a subject in my study. Care was not a category I was working on when I first planned this research. However, as I began to spend time on the field, I realized how important it was to define the work of the community agents. When I started to realize the difficulties they faced in asserting their positions, I also moved away from inquiring

about effects of such work in building a sense of community in the neighborhood. Instead, I directed my analysis for exploring how this work impacted themselves as women under a feminist perspective.

Therefore, the debate on ethics of care came up in this research later on. The ethics of care was a debate initially proposed by Gilligan (1993), in response to the ethics of justice proposed by Kohlberg (1958). Gilligan's (1993) work aimed to respond to Kohlberg's model (1958) by arguing how women's experience was, in fact, disregarded by him. To do so, Gilligan (1993, p. 1-3) attempted to face "the exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research", as she resorts to empirical research on women's voice in order "to expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out in the construction of theory".

The conception of morality proposed by Gilligan (1993) focused on the idea of care as it "centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 19). The morality based on ethics of justice, as proposed by Kohlberg, emphasized separation and individualization, rather than connection and interdependence, as Gilligan (1993) proposed an ethics of care would enhance. In that sense, Kohlberg's model of moral development would place women at a lower conventional level than men. Gilligan aimed to respond to that by, instead, proposing that "women approach ethical issues in a different way, speaking with 'a different voice'" (Campbell-Brown, 1997, p. 272). By stating that, Gilligan (1993, p. 22) argues that "given the differences in women's conceptions of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities".

The ethics of care was further developed by feminist thinkers, and care became a central category of feminist debates. Feminist ethics based on a morality of care would advocate for a shift in "our perspective from a justice centred view, characterised by principles of impartiality, impersonality, formal rationality and universal principle, towards a care centred view with its focus on interdependent relationships, empathy and responses to concrete situations" (Campbell-Brown, 1997, p. 272). Care then became an important category for feminism as this debate recognized that, at a sociological level, "care might be able to deal better with various problems

which justice leaves unanswered" (Campbell-Brown, 1997, p. 273). Feminists then proposed care as category that could be thought beyond the failings of justice in promoting a notion of rights that stands as mostly individual, atomistic, and disassociated.

Among this debate, two main points still remain the focus of on-going discussion. First, the category of care as a gender difference. Second, the balance between an ethics of care and an ethics of justice. The first debate is deeply related to the latter.

Regarding the discussion on care and gender difference, Tronto (1987, p. 646) explains that "the equation of Gilligan's work with women morality is a cultural phenomenon, and not of Gilligan's making". Tronto (1987, p. 646) argues that doing so constitutes a "strategically dangerous position for feminists because the simple assertion of gender difference in a social context that identifies the male as normal", which implies risking relegating the distinct female to a place of inferiority. At the end, she argues how often feminist thinkers become trapped in the debate of defending a women's morality, rather than critically analyzing the philosophical premises of an ethic of care.

At the same time, other feminist theorists, such as Menkel-Meadow, tend to disagree to Tronto (1987). Although Menkel-Meadow (1996, p. 293) shares the moral argument for the use of an ethics of care, she also highlights how detaching women from care ethic might be dangerous. By "tracing its sources in the work of male philosophers, and by slighting the empirical reality of women's caring practices", such as that made in the work of Tronto (1987), she argues that core discussion on ethics of care might be missed. She insists on the fact that this is a theory proposed mostly in the experience of women, for which "we cannot strategically hide the influence of women in both the conceptualization and practice of care" (Menkel-Meadow, 1996, p. 293). Likewise, in her study about care, gender, and lawyering, Menkel-Meadow (1994, p. 77) suggests that thinking about care on this basis requires a more complex analysis: "the significance of an ethic of care for law practice is itself a difficult and important question, which could be explored independent of its connection to gender". However, she insists in "that care is gendered in our culture and that its expression in the law and legal ethics will continue to be disproportionately, but not exclusively, expressed by women and other 'subordinated' people" (Menkel-Meadow, 1994, p. 77).

The relation between an ethics of care and ethics of justice is delineated in the work of Kroeger-Mappes (1994), as she argues that both should be part of one overall system. In this sense, Kroeger-Mappes (1994, p. 113) explains that "affirming the distinctiveness of the ethics … should not mislead us into thinking them … as separate". Recognizing that they both form part of an overall system, for her, also means acknowledging differences between them. By doing so, we would then be able to see the broader picture as well as seeing "the relative powerlessness of women who are assigned the ethic of care" (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994, p. 113).

In this context, Tronto (1987, p. 655) highlights the risks of portraying an ethics of care as an alternative ethic to justice. By doing so, she argues that feminist thinkers, specially those who connected care to a women's morality, "have made it relatively easy for critics to dismiss women's morality as secondary and irrelevant to broader moral and politic concerns". Such arguments would then portray care as a theory that could contribute to an superior ethic of justice, but ignore the fact that "privileged men are the adjudicators of what is useful, of what is important, and, therefore, of what stands most in need of correction", making the ethic of care and its association to a women's moral voice easily dismissed (Tronto, 1987, p. 656).

Under this same debate, Noddings proposed an ethic of care as "a self contained theory", departing from the notions of Hume (Campbell-Brown, 1997, p. 274). Noddings then argues that the locus of the difference debate on care ethics is not supposed to generate an essentialist argument, as she rejects "that women and men are essentially, innately, different in emotional, intellectual, or moral makeup" (Noddings, 1990, p. 25-26). However, she argues for it to focus on different kinds of experience and expectations. Noddings (1990, p. 25) recognizes, then, that the different voice identified in Gilligan's work is, indeed, different from men's, but this result "can be traced to experience and socialization". Therefore, she argues we have to work with a difference category that is "not essential difference, but experiential difference" (Noddings, 1990, p. 27).

As this study utilizes an ethnographic methodology and grounded theory, presenting a full literature review on feminist care ethics does not constitute its central aim. However, it is necessary to consider care as the theoretical debate in which this analysis is centered. More specifically, the basis of the critique of this study relies on the work of scholars who have responded to Noddings (1990), such as Puka (1990), Houston (1990), and Hoagland (1984).

What I am to do in this research is to note how, in some empirical occasions, care is not always used for feminist purposes. To underpin my analysis, I largely rely on the work of these critics.

In sum, this is a field-oriented research divided into four main chapters. The first segment is dedicated to setting the scene. It presents the city of Canoas, the Mathias Velho neighborhood, and the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI[1]), which was the original version of the current formation of the Violence Prevention Center. It also addresses the aims of this research, further exploring my research question. At the end of the section, it considers literature production on Mathias Velho neighborhood and community justice programs in Brazil. I suggest that the relation between gender and care work in such projects have been under-investigated in the country.

The second chapter addresses the methodological issues on developing this thesis. It proposes its definition as an ethnographic intent, as I do not ignore the limitations developing an ethnography in a five-month time lapse entails. This segment also discusses my positionality in the field as a white, middle-class, childless, educated woman. My standpoint as a researcher contrasts deeply with the positions occupied by the community agents themselves. The process of acknowledging my privileges in the field is depicted as a reflexive, introspective exercise. In this context, the women are introduced to the reader. Their real names were replaced by pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

The third chapter of this study presents the main results. In this part, the main data I collected in the field is thoroughly depicted as I develop my argument on how these women built their roles as community agents based on care work and in the absence of the use of law. The main processes I identified are the divided in two main categories, which stand as the main lines of investigation for this research: care work and law. In the first, I depict how they defined their roles around their duty to provide *acolhimento*, how their positions as community agents intertwines with the roles of some as religious references, how they shape their identity around notions of motherhood and household duties, and how their care work ambivalently serves for resistance and empowerment strategies. Regarding their relation to law, I suggest that it is both relevant and distant. I then detail the intersections between care work and their resistance in

[1] I am keeping the acronym in Portuguese.

making greater use of legal strategies in their roles, despite being trained in legal education and attributing to legal knowledge a great symbolic significance. Their poor evaluation of public institutions also came out as an important element in their relation to the judicial system.

The fourth chapter aims to discuss the results presented in the third chapter and to connect it to the debate on feminist ethics of care. My main argument in this section is that these women mainly resort to care work in order to assert their positions, which reflects the notion they stand as caregivers for the community. At the same time, their attachment to care work may be strongly connected to their perceptions of state institutions as unable to respond to their claims, and overall resist to make use of legal strategies in their functions. In the terms of an ethics of care, since their paradigm for evaluating their work is based on their ability to care, the following situation emerges: whereas legal institutions do not care for the community, the community agents care deeply for it. Consequently, since caring stands as their baseline for success assessment, law becomes secondary, because it fails in its ability to do so. This is the backbone conclusion of this piece of research, as I attempt to undertake a feminist analysis on how these women shaped their role as community agents and caregivers for the community.

The possible consequences of this dynamics are discussed in this section under the debate of feminist care ethics. I suggest, based on the work of Puka (1990), Houston (1990), and Hoagland (1984) that care work, under specific circumstances, may reinforce female subjugation by promoting an essentialist notion of female roles. Those authors, like myself, do not reject care as an important category for feminist theory. However, I claim the importance of assessing its use on an empirical basis. On this specific case, I consider the overloading of women with unachievable expectations for their work and the use of conservative discourses as evidence of the use of care categories as adjusted to the reproduction of sexist structures.

In short, this thesis stands as an ethnographic intent of understanding the relations between care work and the absence of law in the role formation of women community agents in the Mathias Velho neighborhood. It proposes a feminist analysis on the use of care as a main strategy for community justice, and uses a field-oriented approach to identify how it can be critically evaluated under the debate of ethics of care.

Chapter 1

Setting the scene

This initial chapter sets the scene on which this ethnographic intent took place. It starts by drawing on a broader picture from the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI), and explaining how it was implemented in the context of the Municipal Policy on Public Safety by the City Hall of Canoas. It describes the phases of the program as follows: Women for Peace, Community Justice Center, House for Youth–PROTEJO, and House for Citizenship. These previous formations encompass an initial experience in the Guajuviras neighborhood in 2010, and developed to what stands now as the Violence Prevention Center with the support of the LaSalle Foundation both in Guajuviras and Mathias Velho. It is important to understand the development of the program over the last decade as it provides essential information to understanding how the roles of women community agents have matured ever since.

Whereas the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship was implemented both in the Guajuviras and Mathias Velho neighborhoods, this chapter then moves to a more specific scene by presenting the Violence Prevention Center (VPC) in the latter. Understanding the size of the area covered by the VPC is important to set the scale of the scene in which this piece of research was undertaken. The Mathias Velho neighborhood encompasses a broad part of the city of Canoas, and large part of its population. It is, therefore, a significant local trademark.

Data provided in this segment are divided in two main sources. Information on the previous years of the program are mainly taken from reports made by the executors of the project. As a researcher, I was given access to a report from the Canoas City Hall –which entailed information from 2009 to 2016– by the technic staff at the VPC, whereas those produced by the LaSalle Foundation – concerning 2015 to 2018– are available via open access at the institution website. My participant observation provided further information especially on the physical structure of the center, its operation, and current work organization, which is mostly depicted in the second part of the chapter.

After that, this chapter moves on to presenting the aims of the research. As I mentioned previously, this study has developed from an initial investigation on sense of community to a feminist analysis on care ethics. Since this shift was mostly due to the researcher's insertion in the field, presenting the goals of this ethnographic intent comes naturally after providing general information on the scene.

Finally, the chapter ends with a section of acknowledging the already existent work on the Mathias Velho neighborhood and on community justice programs in Brazil. Although there is quite a bit of research produced around those topics, I argue it has missed digging deeper into the position of the actors who put the programs into place, how they conceive their roles and their positions as community leaders, and their privileging of an ethics of care rather than the strategic use of law. Thus, I suggest they have ultimately missed the ways in which implementing community justice within Brazil is limited.

From PRONASCI to Violence Prevention Center: historical development of the Public Security Policy of Canoas (2009-2016)

Over the past decades, scholars have been inquiring about models of public policy in managing risks and sharing responsibility among social actors. According to Beck (1992, p. 20), this paradigm shows how, "in systematic terms, sooner or later in the continuity of modernization the social positions and conflicts of a 'wealth-distributing' society begin to be joined by those of a 'risk-distributing' society". Risk distribution, in the Brazilian social policy, has been over the past decade developed under the paradigm of active citizenship. As Gomes and Sorj (2011) assert, Brazilian public policies aimed for managing risks and insecurity in great urban centers has lately been based on sharing responsibility from the state to NGO, churches, and communities. In the name of transferring the management of risks to the community level, a national program for public security was developed, entitled PRONASCI. This strategy, which largely relied on the implementation of community justice programs, entailed in large scale making use of women for fighting intergenerational poverty. This perspective on responding to public safety issues was largely adopted in the city of Canoas.

From 2009 to 2016, the City Hall of Canoas implemented a Municipal Policy on Public Safety inspired by the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship. According to the reports produced by the City, the program allowed municipalities to have a new role regarding public safety, which began to act as "integrators of different institutions for Public Security in the direct development of violence prevention policies, having the priority to strengthen the protection and inclusion of young people"[2] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 13). This would allow a new response to the crisis in public security the city of Canoas was going through at the time[3] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 13). The main references adopted by the program are (1) the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and its recommendations for public security and safety for Latin America; (2) experiences of fostering public safety through citizenship and participation such as those developed in Medellín and Bogotá, Colombia, and the Peace Police Unities[4] in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and (3) doctrine on public security and criminal policy developed in the United States[5] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 12). This shift was entitled "a new paradigm on security"[6] that would represent integrated actions for prevention and repression, plus an idea of proactive public security, "where myriad areas of knowledge would engage seeking strategies that could impact the formation of violent behavior and the strengthening of ties on family, school, community, and social levels"[7] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 13).

The primary focus of the program was to respond to violence and the increase in homicide rates. From the start, the project assumed that it should act specifically for the most vulnerable group regarding such issues, which were shown to be young people from 15 to 29 years of age. Young people, therefore, were always considered to be a key point of action. Specific factors for vulnerability were considered to be youth population in school evasion and in juvenile

[2] In Portuguese: "... tendo como integradores dos diferentes órgãos de Segurança Pública, quanto no desenvolvimento direto de políticas de prevenção à violência, tendo como foco prioritário fortalecer a proteção e inclusão dos jovens das regiões de periferia".
[3] The City Hall reports that from 2005 to 2009 Canoas experienced a 120%-growth in the homicide rate (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 09) as a justification for the development of a new public safety program. This study did not endeavor to check such information with official statistics.
[4] In Portuguese: Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora – UPPs.
[5] No further details on specific doctrines, scholars or theories were provided by the report.
[6] In Portuguese: "O Novo Paradigma de Segurança".
[7] In Portuguese: "... onde atuam diversas áreas de conhecimento, buscando estruturar estratégias capazes de incidir na formação dos comportamentos violentos e no fortalecimento dos vínculos familiares, escolares, comunitários e sociais".

delinquency, as well as young adults egressed from the criminal justice system (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 15).

Over this period (2009-2016), a partnership between Canoas and LaSalle Foundation gave rise to a project entitled Canoas For Peace. Initially, funding was provided in the context of the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship by the National Fund for Public Security. Later on, particularly around 2012, the PRONASCI funding was drastically reduced, which led the continuity of the project to the initiative of the City on its own (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 79), and currently to the LaSalle Foundation.

Establishing areas for the implementation of the project was the first movement made by the City and by LaSalle. The project proposed the election of vulnerable areas for the installation of integrated intervention centers that would offer social and community services. The so-called Territories for Peace[8] were chosen as neighborhoods Guajuviras in 2010, and Mathias Velho in 2012. After this election, three centers for social action were implemented in each of them: Women For Peace, Community Justice Center and House for Youth-PROTEJO[9] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 17).

Women for Peace aimed to train women who were active in the community to promote their empowerment as community leaders, turning them into articulators for "strengthening political and socio-cultural practices developed by and for themselves"[10], as well as "promoting rights, building and strengthening networks for preventing violence against women and young people"[11] (Canoas City & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 78). Their training included topics such as human rights, digital education, notions about the social assistance system, empowerment and gender, and solidarity economy (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 78). The institutions responsible for the training were, at first, the non-governmental organization Themis[12], and later, LaSalle Foundation (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 79).

[8] In Portuguese: Territórios de Paz.
[9] In Portuguese, the original names of the projects are *Mulheres da Paz* (Women for Peace), *Núcleo de Justiça COmunitária* (Community Justice), and *Casa da Juventude-PROTEJO* (House for Youth-PROTEJO).
[10] In Portuguese: "… com a finalidade de torná-las articuladoras sociais e de fortalecer as práticas políticas e socioculturais desenvolvidas pelas e para as mesmas".
[11] In Portuguese: "… promover direitos, construir e fortalecer as redes de prevenção de violência contra mulheres e jovens".
[12] Themis – Gender, Justice and Human Rights stands as an NGO based in Porto Alegre endeavored to fight gender inequality in the legal system. For more information, see http://themis.org.br/somos/historia/.

Up until the last training program was provided, a total of 68 community agents had been trained in both neighborhoods (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 79). This was the project that received the most attention by researchers (D'Ávila, 2016; Sorj, 2015; Dos Santos & Silveira, 2015; Machado & Silva, 2014; Sorj & Gomes, 2011). While there has been considerable work on the foundations for the programs, there is little written on the current structure. My research focuses on the latter.

The Community Justice Center was planned as a community mediation center to which neighbors would resort in case of a family or collective conflict. The Public Defender's Office would work in partnership with the center by providing legal assistance and the judicial homologation of agreements when necessary. From 2010 to 2015, 158 community agents were trained in conflict mediation both in Guajuviras and Mathias Velho (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 80-81).

The House for Youth—PROTEJO was a project developed in accordance with the prescription of the National Program for Social Security and Citizenship as "a space for human development, for the promotion of a culture of peace, and as a space for interaction with difference and diversity"[13] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 82). Its main focus was to provide the young population in Guajuviras and Mathias Velho with strategies for "job market inclusion and for improving different capabilities for the intellectual, physical and behavioral development"[14] (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 82). It was made up of a center for digital education and a popular music studio for promoting cultural activities in the neighborhood such as graffiti, theater, and percussion music (Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation, 2016, p. 83). From 2010 to 2015, 625 young people made use of the services of each of the Houses for Youth in both neighborhoods.

From 2015 on, the administration of the projects was transferred to the exclusive initiative of LaSalle, and the three projects were merged into one single initiative in the Mathias Velho neighborhood. When the project was taken off the sphere of execution of the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship, the narratives used in the reports also underwent a significant

[13] In Portuguese: "Um espaço de formação humana, de promotores da cultura de paz, bem como espaço de convivência com a diferença e a diversidade".

[14] In Portuguese: "… preparação para o mercado de trabalho e ao desenvolvimento de diferentes habilidades importantes para o processo de formação intelectual, física e comportamental...".

change. Whereas earlier the programs were described within the perspective of the municipality as a public service provider, the LaSalle Foundation reports now include a beneficent discourse, clearly marked by a religious identity (LaSalle Foundation, 2014; LaSalle Foundation, 2015).

Image 1. Timeline for PRONASCI implementation in Canoas.

In 2015, the Women for Peace project in the Mathias Velho neighborhood was reshaped and transformed into the House for Citizenship (LaSalle Foundation, 2015, p. 14). Through the merging of different projects, the community agents' role was also reconfigured as their role started to be referred to as agents for social change[15]. The project started to entail a number of possibilities: services for psychosocial hosting for victims of violence and breaches in rights, conflict mediation, legal aid, legal education, and training of community leaders (LaSalle, 2016, p. 38). From 2016 on, the House for Citizenship also entailed a partnership with the Program for Consumers' Protection and Defense, and embraced a unity of PROCON[16], the municipal institution responsible for providing information on consumer law. The House for Youth, on the other hand, maintained its focus on the young population, but intensified its priority on those involved in juvenile delinquency, and gradually stopped being a place for cultural and musical production (LaSalle, 2016, p. 07). These represented the beginning of the transformations of what

[15] When the Women for Peace program was active, they would refer to themselves as a woman for peace. When the project was reshaped, they started adopting the term agents for social change. In this study, I opted for the term *community agents* to refer to them in a broader sense and in any of the phases of the project.

[16] In Portuguese: *Programa de Proteção e Defesa do Consumidor*, which is linked to the Municipal Secretariat on Economic Development. For further information, see: https://www.canoas.rs.gov.br/servicos/procon-canoas/.

is now known as the Violence Prevention Center, which will be described in detail in the following section.

The Violence Prevention Center in the Mathias Velho neighborhood

In the previous segment, I started by setting the broad picture in which the Municipal Public Security Program of Canoas is inserted, and explained how the project underwent several modifications to become what is now the Violence Prevention Center. I now aim to draw on a more specific scene. In this sector, I will present the Mathias Velho neighborhood itself, located in the city of Canoas, and depict the VPC current structure and functioning.

Canoas is located 18km north of Porto Alegre, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It is traversed by the federal BR-116 highway as well as the metropolitan rail. These reference roads divide the territory and its 350,000 estimated population in two major blocks (IBGE, 2018). Mathias Velho is located on the left side of the road. The closest train station is named after the neighborhood, which is the highest populated area in the city with its 48,000 inhabitants, based on demographic data collected by the 2010 Brazilian census (Canoas City Hall, 2012).

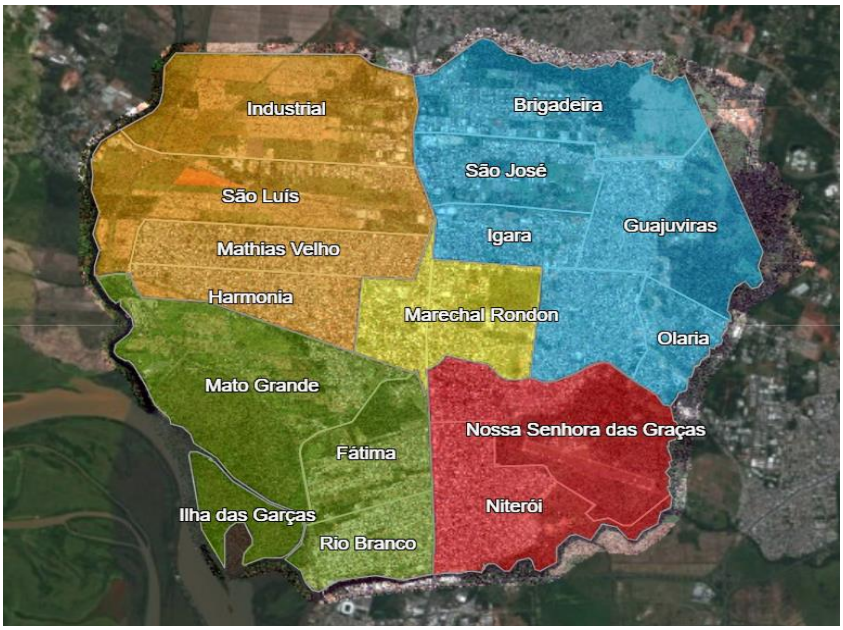

Image 2. Neighborhoods of Canoas (GeoCanoas n.d.).

The Violence Prevention Center was set up in 2017 after the project went through the modifications and was finally reshaped. The work developed in the center is split between the staff and the agents. The staff is currently constituted by three employees associated to LaSalle Foundation, those being two legal advisors, a psychologist, plus a part-time psychology intern. There is also a coordinator, whom I did not meet as she was absent due to her maternity leave. The community agents' team is formed by ten women. Nine of them agreed to participate in this research.

The community agents' work hours amount to 12 hours per week, for which they are paid an average of 300 Brazilian *reais*, plus transportation expenses. There might be a variation in the sum in case they are entitled to any social benefits. The agents share their workload between two centers: the Violence Prevention Center (VPC) and the Social Urban Center (SUC). In both places, they work in pairs. During the course of my observation, which was mainly focused on their work in the VPC, their teamwork division changed in an attempt to shift their work dynamic towards a more professional one rather than rely on the usual affinity-based level. The change entailed that the agents would start to work in bigger groups at the VPC, and independently at the SUC. Due to this modification, I focused my observation entirely on the first, since it was the place agents spent most of their time, were most comfortable at, and had the entire house for themselves. In the Social Urban Center, they were only entitled a desk.

Several times, some of them told me about their preference for the Social Urban Center because of its proximity to the more central area of the neighborhood, a place to which it was easier for them to get by bus. The Violence Prevention Center, on the other hand, was located in the so-called "the back end of the neighborhood"[17]—an expression used to depict the area that was the farthest from the train station and the BR-116 highway. Once I got to the neighborhood, it was clear that the farther away I got from such reference points, the less developed infrastructure the area had. Likewise, the area seemed farther from state action. Some of the agents, however, lived in this area of Mathias Velho, and were comfortable moving on foot to the VPC.

From the Mathias Velho train station to the Violence Prevention Center, I would get on a local bus that took me through the 6km distance from the railroad. During these bus rides, the

[17] In Portuguese, the agents would refer to it as "*o fundo da Mathias*".

frequency with which I saw inhabitants getting around on horses or bikes was quite high. On the street where the center was located, there were frequently three or four horses standing around.

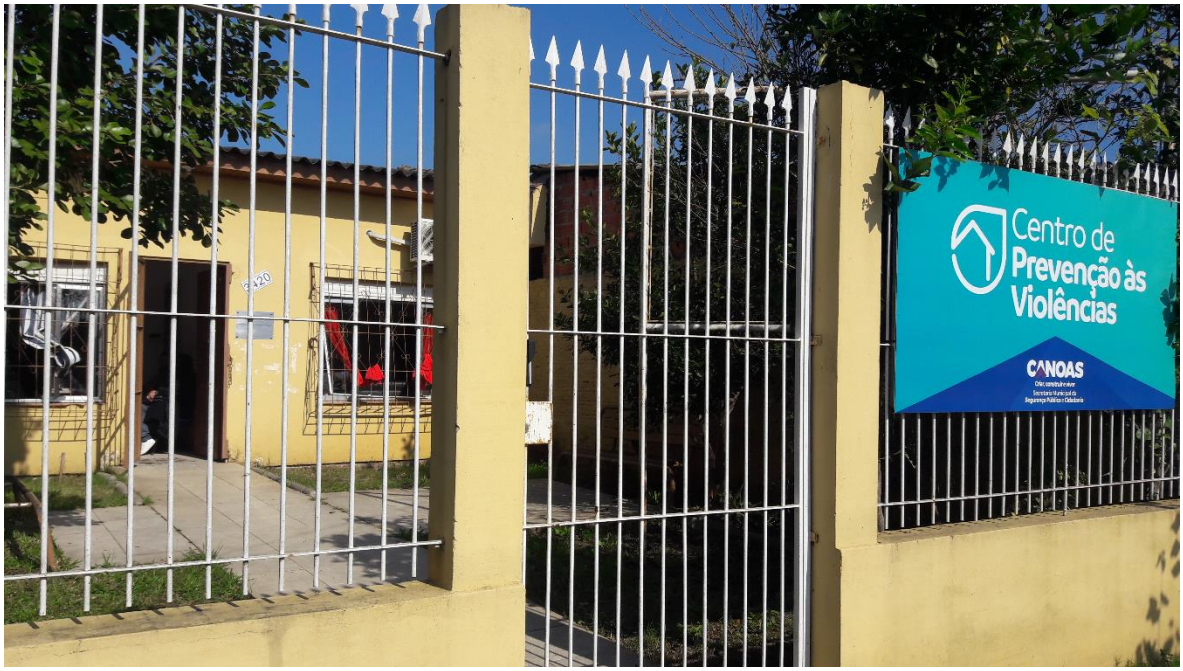

Image 3. Violence Prevention Center façade. July 2019.

The Violence Prevention Center is now located in a house at the corner of Santa Catarina and Santa Cruz streets. Its physical space is divided in a hall, where people are welcomed and basic information is collected, and where I would spend most of my time with the community agents having informal conversations; the technical staff room, to which the agents had full access, but was mainly used by the three professionals and an intern working silently at the computers; another small room with a round table for assisting people who came to the center or for conflict mediation sessions; a kitchen, where the agents would spend a considerable amount of time socializing; three bathrooms; and a garage, which usually served as a larger meeting room. There were also two other rooms that were not usually used and therefore served as storage place for the remaining music instruments and computers from the House for Youth program. All the computers were secured with steel cables. During the months of my observation, the staff and the agents often mentioned break-ins that had commonly taken place on weekends. When my study began in May 2019, the fence in front of the house had been stolen, which was worrisome for the team in terms of security, but was also somewhat convenient as it provided easier access

to the house in the occasions when the agents arrived earlier than the technical staff. The LaSalle Foundation did not allow them to have the keys to the center. On a night of June 2019, the air conditioner that had been installed in the garage was stolen.

The Violence Prevention Center now stands as a public service unit provided by the Municipal Secretariat for Public Safety and Citizenship[18] and executed by the LaSalle Foundation (LaSalle Foundation, 2017, p. 06). The activities are currently organized in two types of strategies. The spontaneous demand usually works for people who autonomously seek the center for some sort of assistance. The response to such type of request is usually a responsibility of the community agents, who should provide "conflict mediation sessions, welcoming of victims and forwarding of cases to the social assistance network, besides the assistance in the Consumer Protection Program (PROCON)"[19] (LaSalle Foundation, 2017, p. 06). During my observation in the center, no conflict mediation sessions were held, and there were specific employees in charge assisting consumers in the Urban Social Center since the agents themselves had not been trained in consumer law. The community agents' work, I concluded through my observation, were solely the welcoming—or, as they would frequently describe it in Portuguese, *acolhimento*—of those who arrived at the center.

The second work strategy, understood as programmed demand, was based on three projects directed specifically for young people, as a heritage from initiatives developed in the former House for Youth. These projects were a responsibility of the technical staff, and though the agents would also participate, most activities were formulated by the lawyers and the psychologist previously mentioned. Caring for Pathways[20] is a program that aims to deal with cases of young people in risk of school evasion. It entails a preventive, low-complexity function since it intends to prevent the growth of a vulnerability context that might lead them towards violence or drug trafficking. Every Young One Matters[21] is designed to take one step further and respond to middle- and high-complexity cases: young people who have already evaded the formal school system, and those who have already been involved in juvenile delinquency. A third

[18] In Portuguese: *Secretaria Municipal de Segurança Pública e Cidadania*.

[19] In Portuguese: "… os atendimentos oferecidos são de: mediação comunitária de conflitos, acolhimento de vítimas e encaminhamento para redes especializadas, além do atendimento descentralizado do PROCON".

[20] In Portuguse: *Cuidando Trajetórias*.

[21] In Portuguese: *Todo Jovem Importa*.

program, entitled Reconstructing Lives[22] was proposed as a follow-up system for high-complexity cases, i.e., people who have egressed the criminal justice system (LaSalle Foundation, 2017, p. 08-09). This project was not in execution around the time during which I conducted my research in the center.

Throughout the narrowing of the projects since 2017, the community agents' role has changed considerably: the shift on the program's execution—initially based on the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship, later under the partnership of Canoas City Hall and LaSalle Foundation, and finally under the exclusive responsibility of the latter—also brought modification of its purposes. This study aims to understand how these women currently conceptualize and enact their roles.

Aims of the research

The information above offers the necessary background for locating the research question within the context of community justice and gender. Having set the scene and provided a description of the functioning of the Violence Prevention Center, this section presents the main inquiries in my investigation.

Undertaking an inductive, ethnographic piece of research often leads the researcher toward unexpected directions. As I began this study, I was interested in understanding how the community agents worked towards building community in the neighborhood. I held oversimplified expectations that the creation of a community justice center in the Mathias Velho would have positively impacted their sense of community and belonging. I then began with a general research question, which was: If—and if so—how were these women trained as community leaders and how does it impact belonging to the Mathias Velho neighborhood?

While I transcribed the first conversations, I immediately realized that exploring their relationship with the neighborhood through the concepts of community and belonging led to nostalgic narratives that had little to do with what I really wanted to know in the first place[23]. At

[22] In Portuguese: *Reconstruindo Vidas*.

[23] For instance, the community agents would often tell about how a couple decades ago drug traffic in the neighborhood was nonexistent, how they had no public safety problems, neighbors were quite close and helpful, and

the same time, I realized that my initial research questions were naïve and based on my own expectations rather than observations. This showed me this ethnographic intent would require more time in the field in order to observe the natural emergences of processes—for example, the reproduction of roles of care—, rather than looking for dynamics I had expected to take place based on my own preconceptions.

That being said, this piece of research aims to understand *how these women have shaped their role as community agents and how they make use of law in it*. The formation of their role if informed by a feminist perspective, as I intend to challenge—often taken for granted—empowerment narratives. This was the broader inquiry that guided my observation.

As I realized the importance of care work in their roles, and the non-use of law in it, the study then developed in connecting the data I collected in the field to the debate on feminist care ethics. In this sense, I moved to more specific research questions, in order to investigate how care, as a category used in the community work of the women in the Violence Prevention Center, could be analyzed under a feminist perspective. The specific questions that guided this part of the study are the following: what are the risks and challenges in building community justice on a model that entails care work as a primary category while dealing with the failure to use legal strategies? How do the agents navigate this dynamic in terms of a feminist critique?

In sum, the aims of this research entail the following process: it begins from understanding the role formation of women community agents in the Mathias Velho neighborhood and, having found out it is deeply related to care work and to the absence of legal strategies, it seeks to analyze the community agents' role under a feminist perspective. In doing so, the study aims to draw on some conclusions about how public policies for community justice, such as those developed in the PRONASCI program, make use of the work of females. Overall, this exploration intends to challenge empowerment narratives that portray public policies on training women as if *per se* they promoted gender equality. It suggests, finally, the need to look closer to empirical scenarios in order to investigate whether the categories enhanced by such

---

how life was in general very good. On the other hand, on following interviews, they would contradict themselves by saying they felt more connected to the neighborhood after being trained as community agents than before, and comment how they perceived drug traffic in Mathias Velho to be a issue they have been dealing with their entire lives.

programs are in fact aligned with feminist purposes, or if they tend to reproduce sexist structures, or are somehow limited to creating ways for coping with sexism.

Significance of this thesis

A significant amount of work addressing the community justice programs developed in the two best-known poor neighborhoods of Canoas—Mathias Velho and Guajuviras—has been written in recent years, especially after the implementation of the National Program for Public Security and Citizenship (PRONASCI[24]) in the city. Most research in the legal field has revolved around criminal justice and public policies (Pazinato, 2010; Teixeira, 2015), and plenty of it has addressed people's view of the project (Santos, 2013; Santos & Azevedo, 2013; da Rosa, 2012; Damico, 2011; Acosta, 2017). In the sociological field, researchers have often endeavored to understand the representations of young people and the urban space of such neighborhoods (Gamalho & Heidrich, 2012; Pires et al., 2013; Raup, 2016).

Important debates around women's studies and community justice programs in the context of PRONASCI have also been proposed by scholars. D'Ávila (2016) analyzed the program development in Canoas in its previous iteration, when it was entitled Women for Peace[25], a project that then fed into the current Violence Prevention Center. In her masters' thesis in social psychology, D'Ávila (2016) interviewed ten women in the Guajuviras neighborhood and illustrated throughout their narratives how being trained as community agents had impacted their subjectivity. In her study, she briefly mentions her perception of community relationships after the Women for Peace program, which she considered to have been strengthened, and women's discourses to have become less individualistic (D'Ávila, 2016, p. 56-57). Her analysis, however, is based on what she understands as subjectivity processes around gender, class, and race. Departing from the life narratives of these women, D'Ávila (2016) addresses how their personal discourses have been modified by joining the program.

The work and positionality of women in the Mathias Velho neighborhood was discussed in the context of another public policy, Better First Childhood (Programa Infância Melhor), in the

[25] In Portuguese, *Mulheres da Paz*.

ethnographic study developed by Klein and Meyer (2015). In this program, the researchers identified dynamics of deprofessionalization of care that are very relatable to the processes I found in my own study in the Violence Prevention Center, although the projects' goals are significantly different. Whereas the projects developed under the PRONASCI program aim to create community justice centers, Better First Childhood invests on parental education. Klein and Meyer (2015) also employ a Foucauldian analysis on knowledge production.

Considering a broader context, such programs have also been implemented in other Brazilian cities. Sorj and Gomes' (2011) perspective of the projects developed in Rio de Janeiro offer an interesting departing point for my ethnographic attempt. The authors have noted that community justice programs such as Women for Peace are planned in an upcoming notion of social policy in Brazil that emphasizes women as the main focus for fighting intergenerational poverty and for promoting empowerment. In this sense, authors Sorj and Gomes (2011, p. 149) acknowledge the need "to investigate which identities are supported, modified or suppressed by the action of such programs"[26]. There is, according to them, a tension between the valorization of notions of womanhood, maternity, and roles of care, and the feminist influences advocating for gender equality as a means to fight poverty (Sorj & Gomes, 2011). Moreover, they also highlight that the planning of such program, in the context of the PRONASCI, already entailed a political debate between public managers inclined towards promoting the action of women as caregivers to young people—and feminist groups—who argued for the deconstruction of the association between womanhood and roles of care (Sorj & Gomes, 2011, p. 152). Machado & Silva (2014) add to this critique by pointing out the debate around the project in the poor communities of *Boréu* and *Morro do Alemão*, both located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which would entail a critical perspective of using women as a means for the reduction of urban violence instead of considering them as main beneficiaries of it.

Sorj (2016) has also developed significant work regarding whether the Women for Peace program adopts a neo-liberal perspective as social policy. Her analysis is based on the development of such project in the city of Rio de Janeiro from 2008 to 2013, when the execution of which came to an end. Her examination of the program provides an important background critique for my own research, especially in uncovering the process of deprofessionalization and

[26] Original version: "...a análise envolve se interrogar sobre quais identidades são incentivadas, modificadas ou suprimidas pela ação dos programas sociais".

informalization of care that surrounded the activities of the community agents. In my ethnographic intent, such controversy stood out as a vibrant process to be analyzed, although the moment at which my empirical study was undertaken, the program had already been reshaped and renamed as Violence Prevention Center—a process that did not occur in Rio de Janeiro.

Dos Santos and Silveira (2015) also discussed the underlying gender notions on the planning of the Women for Peace program and developed a descriptive study in the city of Santa Luzia, Minas Gerais, southeast region of Brazil. Their research indicated an increase in self-esteem and empowerment processes as one of the main victories of the project. The technical staff responsible for the execution of the program in the city also reported advancements in the strengthening of social ties and promotion of solidarity within the community. The project in Santa Luzia came to an end in 2010 due to what the authors highlight as "the absence of consistent and long-term public policies, … the scarcity of services to respond to the families' claims, … and the lack of political consensus regarding the strategies of intervention"[27] (Dos Santos & Silveira, 2015, p. 115).

These studies have provided the academic community with insights on how women trained as community agents may respond to the implementation of community justice projects. There is, in that sense, quite a bit of work produced on community justice and gender. However, little has been explored regarding a feminist analysis of community justice processes combining care work and its uses of law. This is an important gap, especially as demonstrated by my own research, that community justice agents primarily identify themselves as care workers. Moreover, the main academic production –with the exception of the work of Sorj (2011, 2016)– on this subject has often assumed that community justice programs endorse women's empowerment. By doing so, it has more than once missed a more critical eye on actually looking beyond the narratives these women reproduce themselves about their reality. It failed, therefore, in considering how structures such as work organization and role formation uncover underlying hierarchies and contradictions in discourses.

This study adds to past research by looking critically into the structures of the program and the work of women at the Violence Prevention Center in Mathias Velho, Canoas. As an

[27] In Portuguese: "... a ausência de políticas públicas consistentes e duradouras, ... a pouca disponibilidade de serviços para atender às demandas das famílias, somadas à falta de um amplo e forte consenso político em torno da adoção de estratégias de intervenção ...".

ethnographic intent, it aims to understand, on a local level, how the women community agents in the neighborhood have shaped their role as community leaders under a critical feminist perspective on roles of care, and how their use of law has impacted their activities.

Chapter 2
Methodological Aspects

For a significant part of the literature in sociological research, social scientists are "observers both of human activities and of the physical settings in which such activities take place" (Angrosino & Pérez, 2003, p. 107). While the classic tradition on observation would focus on the objectivity of observation, authors such as Angrosino and Pérez (2003, p. 113-115) consider that contemporary social research may be characterized by three main elements: a) "the increasing willingness of ethnographers to affirm or develop a 'membership' role in the communities they study", (b) the recognition of possibility that the "ethnographich truth" is not consensus, and that perspectives on facts may vary, and (c) that there must be a rupture with the colonialistic idea that there are research "subjects", proposing participants as collaborative partners. Under this notion, the scholars point out the need "to be aware of the problems inherent in claiming the privilege of objective, authoritative knowledge", and to break the traditional assumption that the validity of the ethnographic truth is universal and available to cross-checking through reports (2003, p. 110).

In order to develop a piece of research that is in accordance with the idea of ethnographic truth as an entity of many parts while still observing quality of work, it becomes urgent to acknowledge limitations and positionality of the researcher. In that sense, this section is twofold in that it presents the methodological structure of this study and discusses situations in which my "interactions, relationships, and emotional states while in the field have been moved from their traditional discreet place" as an investigator (Agrosino & Pérez, 2003, p. 110-111). To do so, it presents the main reflections on standpoint and positionality of the researcher. Moreover, the chapter ends by introducing to the reader the community agents who accepted to take part in the study.

On an ethnographic intent

The necessary conditions for defining a piece of research as ethnography have been long debated by scholars. Wolcott sustains, in short, that ethnography can be thought of as departing

from what it is not: empathy, merely first-person accounting, role study, among other strategies, although it might encompass them at times (1995, p. 190). Rist, likewise, criticizes what he describes as "any field experience, however short and of whatever form, is suddenly being formalized as 'qualitative data collection'"; that "the term 'ethnographer' is now being used to describe researchers who neither studied nor were trained in the method"; and the tendency of ignoring the considerable time required in the field, thus generating a so-called "blitzkrieg ethnography" (1980, p. 9).

Based on such considerations about the definition of ethnography, and considering the limitations I present in the following section, I chose to denominate this study a slight attempt at ethnography—or what Wolcott would consider to be a study that "at least indicates the way towards the development of full-blown ethnography"; in other terms, a "beginning ethnography" (1995, p. 193-195). My aim is, in his words, to develop a study that provides "an adequate model of thoroughness in moving from data to analysis … in providing a modest example of cultural interpretation" (1995, p. 195). In that sense, I am aware that this ethnography, and others developed in a 5-month time lapse, are inherently partial and incomplete.

The development of this study was based upon qualitative data analysis, and the methodological approach was based on grounded theory. A full process of development of grounded theory, according to Bryman (2012), entails following some general steps[28]. In this small piece of research, due to time limitations, I was not able to fully develop this grounded theory aim. I did, however, carefully follow the prescribed conditions when I had the time to do so.

As I previously mentioned, as I developed my research projected, I aimed to study the relations between gender and sense of community. I then began to spend time with them in the Violence Prevention Center, in a stage that Angrosino and Pérez (2003, p. 114) entitle "the observation of everything", in which "the ethnographer assumes a childlike attitude, assuming

[28]The researcher begins with a general research question; relevant people and/or incidents are theoretically sampled; relevant data are collected; data are coded, which may at the level of open coding generate concepts; there is a constant movement backwards and forwards between the first four steps, so that early coding suggests the need for new data, which results in the need to sample theoretically, and so on; through constant comparison of indicators and concepts, categories are generated; categories are saturated during the coding process; relationships between categories are explored in such a way that hypotheses about connections between categories emerge; further data are collected via theoretical sampling; the specification of substantive theory is made; and, finally, formal theory is proposed (Bryman, 2012, p. 571).

that he or she knows nothing about what is going on and taking nothing for granted". I was first introduced to the agents as a researcher by the technical staff, and most of them immediately recognized me from a training course on conflict mediation provided for them conducted by a group I had volunteered with in 2017. They would therefore initially refer to me as "the mediation girl".

In the beginning, I would mostly spend time at the center with them—which proved quite productive due to the little demand they had around the time I undertook my fieldwork—, record the conversations, and take field notes. However, as my descriptive observation developed, I started to realize that community-building was not the phenomena that would emerge in our informal exchanges. They would also question the term "community leader" when I used it, and questions about their role as agents started to come up. At the same time, gender roles and roles of care stood out as urgent topics in my initial observation, especially in the events they organized and in the teamwork meetings I would take part in. Likewise, the little utility law seemed to have in their activities as community agents got my attention, as it became crucial to understand the strategies these women would employ in their work.

In order to explore these arising concepts, I first had to back off in my observation to realize that what I initially planned to study had little resonance with the reality in the center. This led me to look further into what was emerging in the field, facing that it was often not what I had in mind as a researcher. Thus, I found myself readjusting my research question and beginning a more precise, selective observation around June 2019, "in which the ethnographer concentrates on the attributes of different types of activities" (Angrosino & Pérez, 2003, p. 114).

Over the course of that month and up to mid-July, I came back and forth between coding and exploring my fieldwork. As Charmaz (1996, p. 34) alerts, "the data gathered in grounded theory research become increasingly more focused because the researcher engages in data analysis while collecting data", and I would then continue the process of adapting my research plan to add areas to explore or eliminate questions that did not prove fruitful. This was also the part in which I worked on theoretical sampling, which Charmaz (1996, p. 45) recommends be done "later in the research to ensure that you have already defined relevant issues and allowed significant data to emerge". Balancing the appropriate timing for it in such a short-term piece of

research was challenging, especially considering that an "early theoretical sampling may bring premature closure to your analysis" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 45).

Boundaries on conversations and interviews had no clear-cut (Bryman, 1990, p. 300). As I developed a more consistent relationship of trust with the agents, some of them would talk to me in private—as we walked to the bus stop, as we were riding on a bus together after leaving the center at the end of the day, or as we had lunch in the VPC's kitchen. Spontaneous moments like these allowed the emergence of relevant data that would probably not have come up so easily in formal interviews.

There was, however, information I felt highly uncomfortable asking directly to the agents, even though our informal conversations would flow naturally. This was specially related to sexual orientation and racial identification issues, as I feared some of the agents might either feel embarrassed, or resort to unclear answers as a way of avoiding disclosing information they feared being judged for. I also wanted to collect information on race that was based on their self-identification. For that, I required them to respond a questionnaire (appendix B). It entailed basic information such as their age, number of family members, race, sexual orientation, religious identification, and previous work and community experience[29].

Around the second week of July, the work structure for the community agents— who would initially work in pairs based on their personal affinity to one another—was modified by the technical staff. This provided me with some elements on how this attempted to professionalize relationships among them in the Violence Prevention Center, and opened a new set of questions about their role formation and the uses of law in it. My observation of this new configuration, however, was brief: around the third week of July, I reached saturation due to time-related issues, and developed my substantial theory relating community justice and roles of care from that point.

Finally, moving on to data processing, I transcribed field diary notes and conversation recordings into categories. Data coding was manual and gradually repeated until I came up with the formation of relevant categories to explore: care work (composed by subcategories of

[29] In this questionnaire (appendix B), I divided questions about the agents' activities in professional and community work. As they started responding to it, I reckoned this separation to be inappropriate. Part of them included their work in the Violence Prevention Center in the professional category, whereas others considered it to be community work. It was unclear why this distinction was unequal among them.

religion, motherhood, and empowerment processes), and uses of law (formed by subcategories of absence, distrust, and symbolic representation).

Standpoint and positionality: commitments towards a feminist ethnography

While discussing feminist ethnography, authors have identified myriad strategies for using ethnographic methodology in accordance with feminist purposes. Some argue (Bryman, 2012, p. 583) for defying the secondary character usually given by male researchers to women's lives, interpreting women's realities from their own standpoint, and understanding women themselves in context. Bryman (2012, p. 453) also calls attention for realizing whether the research encompasses a non-exploitative relationship when women are conducting ethnographic studies on other women. For him, it should not be simply based on extracting information from one side, but also be of use by providing something in return.

Critically thinking literature production in sociology and anthropology, Viswesvaran (2003) questions the canonization of classic ethnographies. According to her, this phenomenon would explain why "the classics most often cited are those written by men", and why "ethnographies written by women are again cosigned to the margins of what is valorized" (2003, p. 73). Defining feminist ethnography would then mean "rereading and assigning new value to texts informed or discarded" as a restitutive and exploratory practice of "questioning the canon" (2003, p. 74).

Feminist scholars have also theorized feminist epistemology. Haraway (1998, p. 581, emphasis on the original) argued that objectivity, in feminist research, means "quite simply *situated knowledges*". The author criticizes classic narratives on objectivity as they would ignore underlying ideologies in knowledge production, and how feminism is inherently plural and partial. Likewise, Behar (1993, p. 309) acknowledges in her feminist critique of anthropology that "women ethnographers have found themselves needing to respond, not only to male critique of feminist anthropology …, but also to the critiques of Western feminism made by women of color", who have pointed out how "first-world women" would reinforce a notion of cultural other in the images they would portray in their researches about "third-world women". She would then

note the commitment of feminist anthropology with "difference, rather than sameness" (Behar, 1993, p. 310).

In fact, Haraway (1988, p. 589) emphasizes the strong link between feminism and interpretation. According to her, "feminism loves another science: the science and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood". Feminist objectivity, then, implies acknowledging the non-transcendence of the research production, and becoming answerable for the limits of what we see and study (Haraway, 1998, p. 583). At the same time, one should be mindful of the "danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583), since "the positioning of the subjugated is not exempt from critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretations" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584).

As a complementary notion to objectivity, reflexivity stands as "an essential component for unsettling hierarchies in the feminist research project" (Nencel, 2014, p. 76). For Nencel (2014, p. 76), as the particularities of the text reveal the interactions between the researcher's voice and the research subjects' narratives, each research experience would entail a different measure of disclosure of such interactions. While developing this study, I attempted to commit consciously exposing the underlying hierarchies and tensions that permeated my research process, since I understand that the subjective conditions in which the text was developed is largely important for its complete understanding.

Thus, writing this piece of research required me to confront a process described by Bourke et. al. (2009, p. 95-96) as the following:

> Coming to terms with our own privileged identities, be it class, race, gender, nationality or educational background, in peripheral contexts, has demanded a degree of introspection from each of us. Many of us have often questioned our own legitimacy in the field and find ourselves wondering what right we have to enter communities and write about lived realities that we ourselves often do not experience. […] In the context of the field, the researcher is continuously challenged with the implications of what her/his body represents – difference and privilege. […] Race, gender, class, nationality are constant points of negotiation, justification, positioning.

My objectivity and reflexivity in this research entails recognizing that I see the community agents' reality from a social, economic, educational, and racially-privileged

standpoint. Under this assumption, I acknowledge the impossibility of directly conveying their own voices. To do so would imply to ignore my position as a middle-class, white, educated woman, and the fact that I am transmitting their narratives in a language they themselves do not speak. As a researcher, I stand not only as a translator of their reality into academia, but also as a translator of their experiences into a language that is inaccessible to them. This was a critical point throughout the process of writing my thesis in English, instead of in Portuguese. This translation process, as Haraway (1988) noted, is inherently interpretative, both on feminist and linguistic levels.

In order to lessen such implications, my supervisor and I made the decision to keep the agents' quotes in Portuguese in body text, and transcribe them in English in footnotes. I also kept the original word they used the most to describe their work, *acolhimento,* as I did not find a term in English that could precisely translate it. I decided that writing in Portuguese would not have made my conclusions any more accessible to them, since many of them face literacy gaps. Therefore, as a strategy for making the study's results more attainable to them, I opted for giving them feedback (in person and in Portuguese) at the end of my fieldwork like so: I selected a number of questions that came up during my study and presented them to the agents as a reflection for their work in the center. My goal was to bring up topics that, during my observation, I reckoned as critical for the sustainability of their role as community agents. I did not provide them with answers, but mostly stimulated them to think about the process in their own terms.

My interaction with the agents began with being introduced to them by the staff, as I started to spend time in the center. In our first conversations, I realized the way I introduced myself did not reflect the elements they considered important to describe themselves. I would usually present myself as a master's student, considering what I naturally thought would be adequate to the professional environment we were sharing. They, on the other hand, would usually introduce themselves by disclosing elements of their private lives, such as those regarding motherhood, marital status, religious identity, and their household composition. The fact they were trained as community agents and worked in the center used to come up later on in the conversation, even though we were in the VPC's space. Overall, the fact that I had no one under my duties of care – either a child, a parent, or a spouse – arose as a contrast between me and

them. This became more significant later on in my research as I realized how roles of care were deeply embedded in their identities, and what a discrepancy it represented to my own – a single, childless, 26 years old woman living in Porto Alegre and finishing a postgraduate degree.

My position in the field was somehow ambivalent: I would easily fit among the technical staff, but also worked my way through the community agents. I found myself constantly negotiating my position as a researcher between the two groups. A key moment for observing these tensions was lunchtime. On the days I brought lunch from home—something which every community agent did daily—, we would have lunch together and socialize in the kitchen. However, on the days I would order something to eat, which implied additional expenses that the agents themselves could not afford, I would often have lunch with the technical staff. In these occasions, we would usually eat at a different time and room (usually the garage). These workers and I shared a similar education background, as the two lawyers were also currently finishing their postgraduate studies in Sociology. Moreover, we were a group of young, white and childless people. Two of them, like myself, lived in Porto Alegre.

The disparity between our educational levels was considerable. Most of the women reported not having completed secondary school. As they were being trained to become community agents, some tried to finish basic education by taking supplementary courses, although many emphasized attendance difficulties due to how unsafe it was to get around the neighborhood at night, the only shift when such courses were offered. Over the period of time during which I did my observation, one of the agents got accepted as a Social Work student at LaSalle through the National Exam for Secondary Education (ENEM[30]). Overall, I do not think that the fact I was taking my masters in an international institution ever came up in a conversation with them. I opted for not reinforcing that I was not a postgraduate student in Brazil, but in Spain, as I knew it would make my educational and economic privileges more evident. I was concerned that emphasizing such condition[31] would inevitably exacerbate hierarchies between us and thus impinge rapport.

[30] In Portuguese, *Exame Nacional de Ensino Médio*, a unified public exam in the Brazilian territory through which students can apply to higher education institutions.

[31] In Brazil, 40% of the adult population has not concluded their high school studies, and only 17% of the people holds a higher education degree (INEP, 2017). The Ministry of Education reports the existence of approximately 122

My relationship with the agents was initially strengthened by the fact that we usually shared the means of transportation to the center. I would get from my house in Porto Alegre to Canoas by taking two buses and the metropolitan train. Bus services were usually unpunctual and, as we would leave the Violence Prevention Center at the end of the day, we would often spend time at the bus stop talking. Few of them were often picked up at the center by their husbands at the end of the day, occasions in which they would promptly offer me a ride to the metropolitan train station. Significant information was disclosed by them during bus rides or walks to bus stops.

Public safety issues in the neighborhood were also a tricky element in negotiating my positionality. Due to the bad reputation of Mathias Velho, I was never completely comfortable around the place. Although my concern level was decreasing as I got used to bus routes and timetables, urban violence—mostly related to drug traffic—prevented me from taking more advantage of the public space in the area, since my pathways were usually restricted to main streets, crowded spaces, and walking as little as I could when I was on my own. Having grown up in a middle-class neighborhood in the north end of Porto Alegre, there were limits on how much I could relate to the experience of women raised in a slum in Canoas. I was not used to being exposed to the daily level of violence those women were, as they often witnessed drug cartels disputes. This context created a situation in which I depended on their "street wisdom" to mind my own personal safety.

In an attempt to establish a reciprocal relationship with the agents, I found a possibility of providing something for them in return through my experience as a mediator. As previously mentioned, the agents initially remembered me from a training course on conflict mediation provided for them by a group I had volunteered with in 2017, and would refer to me as "the mediation girl". Over the months I did my observation, the two most experienced mediators in the group organized a new training course for the other agents. They would often express their frustration for not having had any mediation sessions over the past two years in the center as well as their wish to stimulate others to gather more cases. In this opportunity, I assisted them by recommending materials, going over their slides, and organizing the course topics with them. I

---

thousand post-graduate students in the country, which represents an average of 0,058% of the Brazilian population (estimated in 210 million people in 2019 by IBGE) (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

was also present in the sessions they organized, took pictures, and helped them with time keeping and electronic resources. I limited my contributions to the activities I considered would not intensify hierarchy differences between me and them due to the gap between our educational levels', which could considerably compromise my position as a researcher.

The community agents in the Violence Prevention Center in the Mathias Velho neighborhood

This section's aim is to briefly introduce the nine community agents that agreed to participate in this research. Information about them was collected over informal conversations and through a questionnaire I requested them to respond. The aim of the latter was to create a more direct way to get information on race and sexual orientation, which were issues I feared would generate discomfort when asked directly in person. In order to protect their privacy, names used in these descriptions do not reflect the agents' real identities.

Janaína, aged 59, is a black, straight woman identified with African-Brazilian religions. After her husband's death and having raised a daughter and a son, she currently lives by herself. As a widow, Janaína was in charge of helping her daughter and daughter-in-law (she would directly refer to these two women as the ones responsible for children) and raising her four grandchildren. She says this role kept her busy after her husband died. Her participation in the project began in Women for Peace right after he passed, as she was looking for activities to avoid loneliness. Janaína has previous professional experience as a cleaning lady and a maid. She is now in early retirement due to a back problem she developed over years of hard work. Janaína's religious identity is very significant to her—she even stands as a religious reference in the neighborhood. From an early age, Janaína has owned a religious house and works as an African priestess – a *mãe de santo*.

Eduarda, aged 43, is the youngest community agent in the center. Black, straight, and Catholic, she reports difficult living conditions in her household. She currently lives with other sixteen family members, including her mother, her son, brothers, nephews, and sisters-in-law. Her professional activity is shared among the Violence Prevention Center, cleaning services, and caring for elder people. Her community activity also entails religious activities in a Catholic

Church, such as charity work in *Pastoral da Criança* and *Pastoral do Idoso,* and political activism in the main left-wing party in Brazil, the Worker's Party[32].

Brenda, aged 68, is the oldest agent in the Violence Prevention Center. White, straight, and identified with the Catholic religion, she lives alone and never had children. She often mentioned her sister as a close friend and companion. Her professional activity entailed having worked as a telephone operator for over 24 years. Besides being an agent at the Violence Prevention Center, for the past two years, she had also been a neighborhood representative for health-assistance issues, a work she did voluntarily.

Lorena, aged 61, is a black, straight woman identified with African-Brazilian religions. Lorena, like Janaína, was a religious reference in the neighborhood and owned a religious house. She is married, has a daughter and three grandchildren. Besides being a priestess, she is also the president at the neighborhood's association. Her identity as a religious leader was very important to her, and she reported being better known in the community as an *Ialorixá*[33] then a community agent at the Violence Prevention Center.

Carla, aged 48, is a black, straight, Mormon woman. Carla lives with three people, including her husband and her two kids. Her professional activity is shared between her role at the Violence Prevention Center and her informal work as an autonomous seller of imported products. Her community work includes volunteer assistance to children, teenagers and Venezuelan refugees. Carla is one of the few women who does not currently live in Mathias Velho. Living in Guajuviras, she often mentioned her wish to come back to the neighborhood in which she was born and raised.

Vanessa, aged 63, is a white, straight woman identified with Spiritualism. She currently lives with her husband, and has two daughters and two grandchildren. Vanessa was known in the community for working behind the counter in the small business she ran with her husband at the neighborhood's entrance. She reported that her positions—both her function as a clerk and the geographical location of the store—helped people to get to know her, since she could easily observe neighbors passing by and spent her whole life in Mathias Velho.

[32] In Portuguese: *Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT).*
[33] An African priestess.

Sara, aged 68, is a black, straight, Protestant woman. She currently lives with her husband, has three children and two grandchildren. Her continuity in the community justice program, which began around 2014, was at the beginning questioned by her husband, as he offered resistance. Previously to the Violence Prevention Center, she had neither professional nor community work experience besides having taught at the school church.

Roberta, aged 57, is a white, straight, Catholic woman. She currently lives with her husband, and has two children and one grandchild. Roberta was not a resident of the neighborhood at the time. She lived in Harmonia, a smaller neighborhood which shares borders with Mathias Velho, and she would often resent her distance from it.

Jessica, aged 45, described herself as a brown, straight woman with no specific religious identification. She has two children, and has no previous professional or community work experience. She currently lives with one of her daughters, her mother, and a niece.

The past chapters aimed to present the field, my position as researcher, and the women whose role development I studied. The next two chapters on this study address the outcomes of the relationships between these components: the Violence Prevention Center at the Mathias Velho neighborhood, the community agents who lived and worked there, and my observation as an outside figure to the field. The next section presents the results I identified in my observation and through data coding.

Chapter 3
Results

This chapter gathers the main results of my ethnographic attempt. Data depicted in this section was mainly collected through observant participation and informal conversations. These data was mostly registered in my field diary or voice recorded. All of this information was manually transcribed and repeatedly coded until two main components emerged: care work and the absence of law.

This chapter is divided in accordance to those main categories. The first part presents a thorough construction of how these women shaped their role as caregivers. Their discourses constitute the main sources for this examination, and are directly quoted in the body text in its original language. This category is built upon four specific processes I identified in the field. First, the agents assert their role around the duty of providing *acolhimento*, a concept I will explore further on. Second, their role formation is deeply intertwined with those attributed to religious leaderships in the neighborhood, especially African-derived-Brazilian practices. I suggest that the common features between being a community agent and a religious reference in the neighborhood dwell on the fact that both stand as caregivers for the community. Third, I address discourses on motherhood, household duties, and marriage to illustrate how the community agents resort to well-known care activities in the domestic sphere to inform their activities in the Violence Prevention Center. Lastly, I present how their discourses on care are often placed in an ambivalent position: it stands as something they attach for both role affirmation and for claiming for better work conditions, departing from the idea that caregivers should also been taken care of.

The second part of this chapter was considerably challenging to write, as it entailed a process of finding an empty space and writing about absence. As I identified law was not central to their role as community agents, I realized I had to nominate this phenomena and work through its consequences. I then developed, in the final part of the chapter, an exploration on these women's relationship to law. This relation entails a scenario in which, despite being far from law, the agents attribute to it great symbolic relevance for their role. Likewise, the absence of law –

and their poor evaluation of public institutions– seemed somehow to create a space in which care work could be used for fulfillment. These dynamics are further explored over this section.

Community justice and care

The realization of the presence of care work in the role of the women in the Violence Prevention Center was essential since the beginning of my three-month observation. In this segment, I intend to reconstruct the moments in which I saw the concept of care being brought up as part of their identities as community agents. This segment subdivided in four processes that I identified as underpinning this construction: role definition; religion; motherhood, marriage and household; and, finally, self-care, empowerment, and strategies for resistance.

Defining roles: "I am no community leader".

When I first started my observation at the center, I wanted to find out how these women shaped their roles as community *leaders*. I assumed their role was one of leadership from my previous readings and knowledge about the PRONASCI program, but they disagreed. As I first asked them about their role and used the term leadership, they promptly pointed out my misconception:

> **Jessica:** eu não sou líder comunitária...
> **Sara:** é, eu também não sou.
> **Jessica:** eu acho que a única de nós que é líder comunitária, mas é ali embaixo, é a Lorena.
> **Sara:** ah, é, a Lorena sim.
> **Janaína:** o que é ser líder comunitária? É ser conhecida pelo bairro? [sugerindo]
> **Jessica:** é, é ser conhecida pelo bairro, pela comunidade... vamos supor assim... eu tenho um perrengue, eu tenho um problema, que nem já me aconteceu, daí eu corri pra Lorena. Largaram uma boneca de vodu na minha casa...
> **Janaína:** sim, mas daí era uma questão de religião?
> **Jessica:** também, por saber que ela era de religião... Corri para ela, eu sei que ela faz, que ela tem grupo de carnaval, eu já sabia da história dela. Mas nessa região, aqui para baixo, todo mundo procura ela... A única que eu sei e conheço por liderança comunitária seria ali.
> [...]
> **Sara:** por líder comunitária eu entendo uma pessoa que lidera nos momentos em que as pessoas têm dificuldades... toma frente sempre... as pessoas recorrem a ela... para

> solicitar assistência, benfeitoria na rua, no bairro, em relação às pessoas na comunidade[34].

As these women immediately rejected my attempt to refer to them as community leaders, they started to explain to me who they saw as a community leader and why they did not fit the bill. Jessica thus explains that her understanding of a "community leader" is: for instance, someone recognized in the neighborhood for assisting others in solving problems, somebody to whom people can go in case they need resolution of a dispute. She points out Lorena, one of the women working at the center, as someone she considers to be a leader in the back part of Mathias Velho. She considers Lorena to have a public history in the neighborhood, since her role encompassed various activities, such as organizing celebratory events in the area like a Carnaval group, or providing religious support in her *Ilê*[35]. Jessica also mentioned how she herself has already relied on Lorena previously for problem-solving. Moreover, Sara adds that a community leader, to her, should lead in moments of crises and be proactive in providing responses to the community. Overall, a leader should perform as a benefactor who is aware of their neighbors' needs.

They suggested their role be called community *agent*, implying that their activities at the center would not entail the leadership component they had described previously. With the exception of Lorena, who would be simultaneously a community agent and the center and a community leader in her section of Mathias Velho, they did not identify elements such as being publicly known by the neighborhood, assisting others with their issues, providing spaces for celebration and interaction, or providing emotional comfort through religion as being part of the

[34] **Jessica:** I am no community leader...
Sara: I am not one either.
Jessica: I think the only one of us who is a community leader, especially in the back of the neighborhood, is Lorena.
Sara: yes, Lorena.
Janaína: what makes one a community leader? Is it being acknowledge in the neighborhood? [suggestive]
Jessica: yes, I think it is about being known in the neighborhood, by the community... For instance... I have a situation, a problem, as it happened to me before, I ran to Lorena's. Someone dropped a voodoo doll in my house...
Janaína: ok, but was it a matter of religion?
Jessica: yes, it was also because I knew she was a religious reference. I ran to her, as I knew her services, as I knew she had a carnival group, I knew her history. And around this area, in the back of the neighborhood, everyone looks for her. The only community leader I know around here is her.
Sara: as community leader I consider someone who leads in different moments when people have difficulties… Always takes the lead… People resort to her… To ask for assistance, for improvements in the street, in the neighborhood, to the people in the community.

[35] *Ilê* stands as a space for African-derived religious practices.

role of *agents*. My previous observation and readings, however, suggested that these women had actually been trained to become public, recognized references in the neighborhood for helping others solve problems, which would be somewhat contradictory in their definition of their own roles.

I then questioned them about the specificities of working at the Violence Prevention Center, and to what extent they would be different from being a community leader.

> **Jessica:** na minha opinião nós [o CPV] somos um centro de apoio porque as pessoas, por saberem do nosso trabalho, elas nos procuram...
> **Sara:** a gente acolhe as pessoas que vêm aqui, elas contam qual é o problema, e a gente faz uma análise daquilo que a pessoa está passando e sentindo, conversa entre nós, e tenta ver qual o meio que a gente pode auxiliar.[36]

While their responses were not very clear in explaining why they did not see themselves as *leaders*, in their explanations about their role as *agents* relevant insights for discussion arose. More importantly, providing what they referred to as *acolhimento* came up as a key concept. The verb *acolher* in Portuguese suggests something between providing nurture or shelter through practices of listening and emotional comfort. This was often the term used by the agents to describe their functions at the Violence Prevention Center.

Janaína, for instance, defined their role as a duty of *acolhimento* and *encaminhamento*, meaning to listen, provide comfort, and then forward the person to the correspondent public institution for the practical solution:

> No meu parecer, ainda que tudo que eu possa encaminhar, o nosso trabalho é de acolhimento e encaminhamento para a rede que nós temos... Temos a liberdade de fazer tudo conforme o nosso guia, pode estar inclusive na rua.[37]

In addition, narratives about providing *acolhimento* would not be restricted to their role as community agents working in the Violence Prevention Center. They would often note how this role would transcend work hours and follow them as part of their identity. Jessica, for instance, more than once mentioned an occasion when she saw a Facebook post in which a woman

[36] **Jessica:** in my opinion, we [the VPC] are a center for support because people, because they know our work, they come to us...
Sara: we receive people who come here, they tell us what the matter is, and we analyze whatever the person is going through and feeling, discuss it among us, and then try to see the way in which we can help out.
[37] In my opinion, besides anything, our job is about receiving and then forwarding to the network we have. We have the freedom to do anything in accordance to our work guidelines, even if we are on the street.

mentioned suicide. Although this person was not an acquaintance, nor did they share any common background, she felt it as her duty to reach out and offer help. She therefore got in touch with the woman, who lived in northeast Brazil, by responding to her Facebook comment. Their contact evolved as they would make phone calls to each other, in which Jessica would listen and provide emotional support by caring for her feelings. In several occasions, Jessica considered the woman's problem to be the absence of a maternal figure, to what she would respond by offering her own mother for a conversation— "lending her own mother", as she would explain. Jessica also proudly described how, as the months passed, this woman's mental health seemed to have improved with her support. As they would frequently get in touch, Jessica believes she managed to perform her role as a community agent through social media, as it would overcome the limits of the VPC and of Mathias Velho. When I inquired about how her role at the center would follow her other places, she noted:

> Sim, para mim me acompanha, em casa me acompanha... me acompanha... aonde eu souber que existe uma pessoa que precisa eu vou ir... às vezes as pessoas não sabem... eles não têm a informação que a gente tem... eu já escutei isso "vai lá e não consegue nada"... mas daí tu tem que tentar por outros meios...[38]

Jessica's notion of responsibility for the emotional well-being of others is a key element into understanding the agents' relation to roles of care and how it was sometimes reinforced by the very organization of the project.

Part of my observation encompassed a time (around June 2019) when some important modifications took place in the Violence Prevention Center. Both in my observation and conversations with the agents, it became evident that the center activities were going through a period of stagnation. Since few people would seek the center, the time agents would spend there was often underutilized. The technical staff would share this concern, and responded to it by reshaping teamwork strategies. The first meeting under this new strategy of work organization was endeavored to represent the projects—Caring for Pathways and Every Young One Matters—to the agents, in an attempt to recapitulate their roles in each one of them. In July, representatives from the LaSalle Foundation and from the Municipal Secretariat on Public Security visited the center and had meetings with the agents.

[38] Yes, it follows me around, at home... It follows me. Wherever I go and know there is someone in need. Sometimes people don't know things, they don't have the information we do... I've heard it before, "we go there and get nothing"... And then you have to try other means...

These teamwork meetings aimed not only to consolidate the center activities, but also represented a need of the technical staff for agents to perform more consistently in their activities. The professionals had long been aware of the difficulties presented by the personalized, affinity-based interaction the agents held towards the community. Although the project itself was designed to take advantage of women's personal bonds with the neighborhood, this closeness also entailed challenges. The technical staff had to constantly remind the agents about the importance of respecting work hours (mostly due to a concern regarding possible labor complaints in the future), which would collide with the women's identity as community agents, as previously mentioned. Moreover, the staff often had to remind them of the need of keeping personal views about neighbors apart from their role in assisting them, and avoiding disclosing confidential information about people as gossip.

At the first of these meetings, the technical staff denominated the agents' role in the Violence Prevention Center as providers of "*escuta qualificada sem julgamentos*", i.e., providers of a qualified listening space with no judgement. Thus, they should welcome, listen, and identify institutions who would provide solutions for the neighbors who sought the center. A significant component of the part they played was to help the project, as an external figure, to get deeper into the community through these women's positions as insiders. This discourse was reiterated in larger meetings in which the workers at the VPC would gather with workers from social and health assistance public institutions in Mathias Velho, as together they formed a working network. By using their bonds with the community, the agents would help out in identifying the families and young people who were most in need of assistance. The project also supposed that, since these women had spent their lives in the neighborhood, they would foster trust and proximity, stimulating their peers to reach out to the VPC. This discourse echoed in the agents' narratives, as they would manifest in the same network meetings by stating their role as part of the VPC was to "*fazer o acolhimento de todos os tipos de violência*", i. e., provide welcoming and support to people subjected to any kind of violence.

Acolhimento also emerged in the formation of conflict mediation that two of the agents independently organized for the others at the center, and to which I collaborated as a trained mediator. Vanessa and Carla, the two most experienced mediators at the center, who had joined the program during its previous formation as Community Justice Center, wished to formally

teach the other agents as mediators in order to bring cases to the VPC. As they would describe the phases of an extrajudicial mediation procedure, they would add an initial stage entitled *acolhimento*, which should be the first step. Carla then explained it as *"o estabelecimento de vínculos. É o acolhimento da pessoa, e não do conflito"*[39]. Her description shows how they created a specific pre-stage on the mediation procedure in order to get to know people, provide a listening space for them and connect with them. It seems to be the phase that reflected their functions as community agents, showing interest in people themselves and enhancing their bonds instead of working as outside, detached conflict mediators.

Vanessa was also a woman who described how her role of *acolher* as something that overcame the limits of the Violence Prevention Center, and as being strongly connected to her personal identity. Having worked as a clerk in a small business she ran with her husband at the entrance of the neighborhood, she said that people would often stop by and have conversations, which contributed to her role as a listener to be precedent to her formal training as a community agent at the center:

> Lá em casa é onde eles puxam a descarga das desgraças. Meu irmão que ri, "tu mora bem na entrada da vila, tu te ferra, todo mundo passa na tua casa primeiro". Não sei, é porque a gente tem mesmo essa coisa do acolhimento, já tinha antes. E os cursos me ensinaram, meu deus do céu, a tu ajudar o próximo. Tanto que hoje em dia tanto faz eu estar em casa ou estar aqui [no CPV], eu trabalho para o projeto normalmente, encaminho gente, faço tudo normalmente...[40]

As she says that "it seemed like we have this thing about receiving people", she explains how this role turns out to be somewhat natural to her; something she would do even prior to the training sessions she received as a community agent. She also explains how the geographical position of her house, at the entrance of the neighborhood, favors people stopping by when looking for solutions or advice. Moreover, she values how the courses helped her to better fulfill her wish to help others in the neighborhood.

These narratives the agents shared about the constitution of their role as community agents, what activities it would entail, and to what extent could they act as agents of the Violence

[39] Bonding. Receiving people, not conflict itself.

[40] My house is where people flush their misfortunes. My brother laughs [and says], "you live at the entrance of the slum, you're screwed, because everyone stops by your house first". I don't know, I guess we have this thing about receiving people, we had had it before. And the training taught me that, my God, you must help others. It doesn't matter whether I am home or here [at the VPC], I work for the Project anyway, forwarding people, doing everything naturally...

Prevention Center give out initial evidence on how providing *acolhimento* was important to them. Moreover, this would be an occupation that would often transcend their work hours, as they felt they should act as qualified listeners for others even outside the Center's space.

Between religion and community justice: "here we wear an identification badge".

As I recognized elements that suggested that the identity of a community *leader* was deeply associated to religious references in the Mathias Velho neighborhood, as exposed in the previous segment, I started to further investigate its relation to the role of a community *agent* in the Violence Prevention Center. In both cases, elements of *acolhimento* were very present, which generated some confusion among the women. The analysis on the experience of being a religious leader in the area is mostly based on the discourses of Lorena and Janaína, two of the community agents who were also African priestesses.

In Mathias Velho, Lorena was a well-known African-Brazilian religious reference and promptly identified by her fellow colleagues in the VPC as a leader. Janaína was also an African priestess, and shared her religious identity with Lorena. Lorena explained how she became a reference in the community by means of her religious work as the following:

> Eu que sempre tive uma casa [religiosa] como referência... A casa sempre é muito procurada por alguma razão, por alguma necessidade. Não só espiritual ou religiosa, mas assim, se uma pessoa quer ir morar lá para perto de casa, vai perguntar onde tem uma casa para alugar, quem é que me poderia alugar ... Então minha casa é um centro de referência. Como a gente chama, "um quilombo"[41]. Muita gente vai lá... Eu passo nas esquinas e as pessoas dizem: "aquela lá é do Ilê, mãe Fulana de Tal"...[42]

According to Lorena, her role as an African-Brazilian religion representative serves for providing religious services themselves, as a place where people would seek emotional comfort, but also encompasses other functions. She mentions, for instance, how people would also reach out to her for practical information, such as when they were looking for a place to live.

[41] *Quilombos* are settlements founded by people of African origin in Brazilian colonial time, usually freed slaves. Lorena uses the term to express the house as a reference for African-Brazilian culture.

[42] I have always had my [religious] house as a reference. The house is often sought out for some reason, some need. Not only spiritual or religious, but also people looking for a place to live nearby, they'll ask me where they can rent it, if I know someone interested in renting a place out... So my house stands as a reference center. As we say it, a *quilombo*. Loads of people come over. I walk on the streets and people say: that woman is the one from the *Ilê*, mother so-and-so…

> Às vezes eles [o pessoal] não saem na rua mas por exemplo ligam para a minha casa: "ô mãe, observa que anda um carro preto assim e assim circulando... ô mãe, tu pode ver o que que é isso?". Tudo eles me solicitam... Para saber se eu sei esse movimento estranho que tá acontecendo.[43]

She also describes herself as someone who belongs to the neighborhood, and walks the streets and is known by her neighbors. Being so well-informed about what goes on in the neighborhood, people would also rely on her for information about public security— asking, for instance, whether she knows anything about rumors on drug cartels disputes or suspicious cars going around the area.

In short, not only does her identity as a religious leader encompass recognition as a priestess, but also as a figure in the community who can provide solution to problems, indications, and recommendations about many topics. Despite this other persona, people would mostly still refer to her by her religious identity, calling her *mãe*—which comes from *mãe-de-santo*, a name for an African priestess—even when she was sought out for practical solutions.

Janaína would describe her religious identity as the following:

> **Janaína:** quando procuram a nossa casa de religião... é sempre, quase sempre a mesma coisa porque procuram a gente. Quase sempre é o mesmo tema...
> [E tu podes me contar qual é o tema?]
> **Janaína:** sempre é assim, ó... Na minha casa [de religião] acontece muito desunião, entre família, entre casal, entre parente... E eu tenho que trabalhar a cabeça das pessoas com conversa, primeiro com escuta... Não é diferença do que eu faço aqui! Primeiro eu tenho que escutar para entender, para depois eu ver o que eu vou poder fazer dentro da minha casa pra ajudar aquela pessoa a enfrentar aquilo ali.
> **Jessica:** ... a diferença é que aqui tu usa um crachá. Na tua casa é a tua religião, as tuas normas, o jeitinho de ajudar as pessoas... Não deixa de ser sentimental também, mas é um lado espiritual.
> [e aqui tem um lado sentimental também? Vocês me falaram do acolhimento...]
> **Janaína:** sim, o acolhimento é o sentimento.[44]

---

[43] Sometimes people don't leave their houses but call me and ask: "*mãe*, there is someone in a suspicious black car going round the area… Can you check what it is about? I am requested for everything. They ask in case I know anything about suspicious activities happening.

[44] **Janaína:** when people seek our religious house... It is almost always for the same reason. Almost always the same topic...
[Can you tell me what that is?]
Janaína: it's always like this... in my [religious] house there is a lot of dissension among family members, couples, relatives... And I have to work with people's minds by talking, and first of all listening... It is not different from what I do here! I must first listen to understand it, and then see what I can do in my house to support this person in facing it.
Jessica: ... the difference is that here you wear an identification badge. In your house it's about religion, it's your rules, your personal way to help out people. It's not only sentimental, but also spiritual.
[And does your work here entail an emotional perspective? You guys mentioned *acolhimento*….]
Janaína: yes, *acolhimento* is about emotions.

As Janaína was describing her religious role, she clearly identified similarities with her approach in providing *acolhimento* at the Violence Prevention Center. She explains how, in her religious house, she first offers a listening space for people to express themselves. She argues that she initially needs to understand the issue, and then make the decision with regard to what she should do to work on it spiritually. Jessica, listening to her, adds that the difference form that religious procedure to the VPC is that, at the center, they would wear an identification badge, referring to the institutional background of their functions. But she highlights how their work at the center also entails an emotional component—to which she opposes the spiritual component, which should be exclusive of religious references. However, albeit different, these roles seem to depart from an equivalent assumption: caring for the well-being of others. As Janaína responded in the questionnaire I applied to the agents, her community work was always directed to "*cuidar da comunidade*"—i.e, take care of the community.

The process through which both Lorena and Janaína depict their role as religious references as somehow similar to what they do in the Violence Prevention Center is essential for the understanding of the underlying dynamics of their roles as community agents. Lorena, for example, attributes to her religious identity some of the functions that could be expected of her as a community leader in the VPC. Janaína, likewise, identifies similarities in her own narratives, both related to care work. These two roles seemed to be specially mixed up in their cases, and both her religious and community activities would walk side by side.

In this context, I was informed by the technical staff about some previous conflicts regarding religious identities and work at the Violence Prevention Center, a situation that offers us additional clues on how these women shaped their roles. One of the lawyers reported a situation in which the agents visited a house in the neighborhood for a household visit, a common work strategy in the projects Caring for Pathways and Every Young One Matters. As they realized that part of the needs of the residents in the house was related to the emotional discomfort generated by the lack schools for their children—which was a situation the center itself could not solve at the time, as it depended on a resolution from the Municipal Secretary on Education—, the agents responded to it by performing religious services in other to soothe them.

Moreover, some of the agents' narratives about the absence of effective public services in the community often entail a religious, almost therapeutic solution. As Lorena describes,

> E uma coisa que se importa muito com o descaso que o governo tem são as igrejas. As igrejas – nos dois sentidos, as evangélicas e as católicas –, elas têm um tratamento com a comunidade que ela se importa. Então dentro da igreja funciona: clube de mães, pastoral da mulher, pastoral do idoso, pastoral da criança... Então essas pastorais – não é um trabalho de assistencialismo – elas geram realmente toda necessidade que o indivíduo tem. ... O descaso que o governo tem, as igrejas não têm.[45]

She then continues to what she reckons as the value of religious practices in education, including public schools, in fostering the formation of citizens. She refers to Catholic practices, in spite of her identification as an African-Brazilian priestess:

> No meu tempo de escola... tu entrava dentro de uma escola, a primeira coisa que tu fazia quando entrava na sala de aula era fazer o sinal da cruz e fazer uma oração... A gente era ensinado a adorar, amar e respeitar a família – pai e mãe em primeiro lugar... Isso aí hoje não existe... As crianças entram se atropelando, nem sabem o que é isso. Em escola que é ligada a uma igreja tu faz isso, mas a escola municipal e a escola estadual não têm mais esse trato, nem aquela preocupação que eu digo que é tornar o cidadão civil...[46]

Religious institutions in the Mathias Velho community also turn out to be especially relevant for women. In the event in celebration of Mother's Day the agents organized in May 2019, the participants often made comments which indicated the importance of religion as a space for women looking to be heard, in search of emotional comfort. This situation seemed to be especially urgent in cases of women victims of domestic or intra-partner violence, which would often resort to a Catholic Church branch entitled Women Pastoral. One of the women who attended the event emphasized this phenomenon when she expressed her appreciation of knowing the work of the Violence Prevention Center, arguing that, as a worker in this Catholic Church sector, "*agora a pastoral já sabe para onde encaminhar [as mulheres vítimas de violência]*"[47]. Another participant, moreover, identified with Spiritualism, noted that "*o trabalho espírita tira*

[45] The thing is that churches care a lot about the government neglects. Churches –either of them, both Protestant and Catholic– have a special way to treat the community because they care. So inside the Church there are services such as Mother's Groups, Pastoral Care for Women, for Elderly People, for Children... This Pastorals – which are not mere charity– they usually attend all the needs of the people. The neglect state has, churches do not have.

[46] In my school times, you would get into the school and the first thing you would do would be to do the sign of the cross and pray... We were taught to adore, love, and to respect family – parents, above all. Today it does not happen anymore. Children get in running over one another, they don't even know what it is. You might still have [these practices] in religious schools, but municipal and state schools don't have that treatment or the concern of forming citizens anymore.

[47] Now the Women Pastoral knows where to forward [women victims of violence].

mulheres da depressão"[48], revealing that the important therapeutic component for women in religion would also embrace believes other than Catholicism, Protestantism, and African-Brazilian.

Under these perspectives, the Church—in this case, Catholic and Protestant—offers services to the community in the absence of state. These services, according to the agents' narratives, offer something the state does not: care. Lorena and Janaína frequently point out how the churches compensate through religion the neglect and disregard of the official state order. By doing that, she suggests that this community, to a large extent, resorts to religious spaces—whether those be African-Brazilian-derived or Christian—for listening, attention, and responses in search of comfort when facing structural problems in the neighborhood. As a consequence, the community agents would also see themselves in the same tendency in providing *acolhimento.* By intertwining their roles around the same behaviors, they seemed to significantly approximate their functions to care work.

Motherhood, marriage, and household: "we, as women, are inherently caregivers".

From my very first time at the Violence Prevention Center, I was under the impression of it being a private space. First, the center is based in a house, so its facilities invite a more relaxed, intimate living atmosphere. The agents would usually spend their free time socializing in the kitchen or hanging out at the entrance hall, and would often share meals, handicraft, and talk about their personal lives. Overall, the environment resembled a household experience.

In May 2019, the agents hosted an event in celebration of the Mother's Day. During my observation, it was the time when I saw the Violence Prevention Center the most crowded: over 40 women attended, accompanied by approximately 20 children. The event proposed a discussion on three main topics: (1) how to change your daily routine, (2) sexism in the household, (3) how to take care of your self-esteem.

Lorena initiated the round of conversation by giving a speech on gender inequality in the domestic sphere. She started by commenting on the importance of being aware and well-

[48] Spiritual work gets women out of depression.

informed about women's rights in order to identify situations of oppression, something she and the other community agents were available to help neighbors with.

Female subjugation, according to this agent, could be perceived in two moments: firstly, in domestic and intra-partner violence, as she pointed out the importance of reaching out and assisting women who are being abused. As she said "*está errado dizer que em briga de marido e mulher não se mete a colher, porque tem uma companheira sofrendo ali*"[49], she implied how women should stand for one another and support their way out of gender-based violence. By doing so, Lorena seems to suggest that sisterhood and shared care among women could be a strategy against abuse. Secondly, she questions the position of women as the ones primarily responsible for household chores. She adds that earlier in her life she found herself in a repressed position because "*eu não sabia dos meus direitos, eu era uma Amélia[50]... tratava meu marido como se fosse o pai*"[51]. Lorena explains how she perceived her duties as a married woman towards her husband as a continuity of the care work she performed as a young girl towards her father. She also recognizes how difficult it is to deconstruct such patriarchal notions that are from early age embedded in women's minds: "*isso é o que a gente teve de criação. Obedecer marido, ele é o rei.... O nosso controlador, nosso vigiador... Essas coisas incrutinadas na nossa cabeça que é difícil de tirar*"[52].

Overall, Lorena's discourse seems substantially aware of gender inequality in the division of household tasks and of domestic and intra-partner violence. However, as she moved to her views on women's responsibility for emotional work, contradictions emerged:

> … as meninas caem, dizem "estão chorando de manhosa", e, quando menino cai, é "não chora porque homem não chora". Quando isso acontece, é o momento de acolher. A mulher é naturalmente acolhedora, e cabe a nós mostrar aos homens que não podem tratar os outros com grosseria.[53]

Lorena signals how sexism in the household takes place as adults promptly portray girls as sentimental and dainty, whereas boys would often have their sensitive side suppressed from an

[49] It is wrong to say that one should not intrude in couple's fights, because there might be a sister in suffering there.
[50] Being an *Amélia*, in Brazilian popular culture, means being a submissive woman.
[51] I didn't know my rights, I was an *Amelia*. I would treat my husband as if he was my father.
[52] That is what we have been raised to do. To obey the husband, as if he was a king. Our controller, our watcher. It's these things that people put inside our heads and that are hard to take out.
[53] Whenever girls fall, they say "she's crying because she's mushy", and whenever boys fall, it's like "men don't cry". Whenever this happens, it's time to care. Women are inherently caregivers, and it's up to us to show men they can't treat others rudely.

early age. Her speech shows an attempt to address traits of patriarchal masculinity, as she critically identifies how gender roles impinge the emotional development of men. Later on, however, she ends up reaffirming women as inherently *acolhedoras*, which challenges the gender-aware notions she employed in her first lines. Although she reckoned caring as an empowerment tool for women, she attributes to women the natural ability to perform the emotional work of pointing out and deconstructing patriarchal traits.

In that sense, Lorena depicted the community agents in the center as "*mulheres aguerridas que sabem sentir o que o próximo está sentindo*"[54]. She argues for how the women who work there stand as empowered but also sensitive, empathetic, and comprehensive. She characterizes the ability of connecting to the feeling of others as fundamental for their role, expressing how women who sought the services knew that this was a place for them to be heard and understood. This characteristic seems, somehow, to imply an underlying expectation that women should also guide men through better dealing with feelings and emotions. In short, her discourse ambivalently navigates between empowerment and the risk of stereotyping.

This perspective on natural categories for female behavior is also visible as she moves on to addressing motherhood. She states that "*ninguém nos ensina a ser mãe, a gente sabe pelo nosso instinto*"[55], implying the existence of inherent skills for women towards performing a maternal, caring role. There is a marked inconsistency between the female care work associated to spousal care-giving arrangements, and that directed to the emotional labor on raising children. Whereas the first is critically described by her, the latter is understood as intrinsically feminine:

> Não é pelo comodismo, é que a gente [mulheres] não tem tempo … A gente trabalha dobrado: fazer pão, esperar os netos com o café, chega o marido e tem que estar com a janta pronta, e eles [os esposos] às vezes não são nem capaz de oferecer a ajudar lavar a louça. O machismo … "homem que seca a louça não é macho" [com ironia] ... É comidinha pronta, chinelinho na porta... O pessoal mais jovem já tem outro discernimento, mas ainda tem muito homem que acha que quem cuida dos filhos é a mãe.[56]

[54] Strong women who are able to connect to what others are feeling.

[55] No one teaches us how to be a mother, we know it by instinct.

[56] It is not about indolence, it's because we [women] don't have the time for it. We work two shifts: to make bread, wait for grandchildren for supper, and then the husband gets home and you must have served dinner, and they [husbands] often don't even help out by doing the dishes. Sexism… "Men who do dishes are not manly enough" [quotes with irony]… It's all about getting meals ready, putting their flip-flops by the door for them… Young people already have a different mindset on this, but there are many men who still think mothers are the ones in charge of looking after children.

In her view, Lorena shows awareness of the insufficient care work from men towards children. She critically acknowledges that parenting should be equally divided, and that practices based on patriarchal masculinity impinge both men's development and women's empowerment. She adds by acknowledging how women stand in an unprivileged position in heterosexual relationships, as they would be socialized to tolerate control and power imbalance, and to constantly put men's needs over their own. In her struggle against gender violence, she is committed to raising awareness for women about behaviors that should not be condoned. However, she does insist on portraying female figures as more caring than men, and risks reinforcing naturalistic views on gender and roles of care.

The same components came up in discourses adopted by other agents. It seemed that many times the agents' work for *acolhimento* was somehow related to the role of caring and raising children in the family. When the agents proposed the alliance between a care work and a natural female aptitude for it, it seems like the result tends to overcome the limits of the household and move to the external environment in the neighborhood. This tendency becomes evident when they refer to teenagers involved with drug dealers.

According to the agents, drug dealers in Mathias Velho act directly in attracting young boys to join gangs and to initiate them in small dealings. Lorena once reported that many of them wait around in public schools and approach young boys as soon as they leave classes for the day. Since unemployment and school evasion were two of the main issues in the neighborhood, selling small quantities of drugs naturally stands out as an appealing possibility for money and social status. As she said,

> Nós perdemos os adolescentes pro tráfico. Esse é um assunto humuilhante que nos torna [mães e mulheres] incapazes. As mães adoecem vendo seus filhos se envovlerem com o tráfico. Precisamos resgatar nossos meninos [do tráfico], dar mais atenção aos jovens; esse é o nosso papel.[57]

Lorena and the other agents often see themselves in situations of despair regarding the future of young people, and their discourse shows a need for acting against it. However, they often attribute the responsibility of reverting this process to women—especially maternal figures—, who stand, in their views, as natural caregivers for young ones.

[57] We have lost our teenagers to drug traffic. This is a humiliating situation that makes us [mothers and women] feel incapable. Mothers get ill when they see their children being enlisted by gangs. We must rescue our boys [from traffic], give Young people more attention. This is our role.

Moreover, other agents commented in several occasions:

> **Vanessa:** a única coisa que me entristece muito são os jovens... A praça lá na frente de casa é uma tristeza de tu ver, sabe. Uma coisa que me entristece demais. Eu acho que esse governo tinha que ter um projeto melhor para esses jovens... Tu conversa com uma vizinha, ontem mesmo uma parou na cerca, "meus filhos tão perdidos... porque eu trabalho fora, eu não tenho como ficar com eles, ficar em casa", e o marido dela faleceu. E ela trabalha em casa de família, sempre trabalhou, e os guri agora estão perdidos, os dois. E eram a coisa mais querida os dois guris. ... E elas [as mães] ficam assim no maior desespero... Procuram, assim, pra desabafar, né. Não tem solução, precisam trabalhar, né, precisam deixar os filhos sozinhos.
> **Roberta:** é que as pessoas se apavoram muito – "é que eu trabalho fora, não tenho tempo de cuidar". Mas lá no meio das pessoas que tem grana também, que não precisam trabalhar fora, que têm mães presentes, também está tudo assim... Agora é mundialmente assim, a droga tomou conta total.
> **Carla:** é que estar também só por estar, né, não adianta. Tem que *estar* presente na vida dos teus filhos para que *outro* [o tráfico] não esteja...
> **Janaína:** ... eu acho que uma mãe não pode deixar os filhos assim, soltos ..[58]

Vanessa, Roberta, Carla and Janaína emphasized how seeing young boys being recruited by drug dealers gave them sadness and grievance. They show compassion and empathy for the suffering of mothers, as they often seek them as community agents for a listening space. Roberta promptly recognized the absence of maternal figures in raising children, due to female insertion in labor market, as a key factor for encouraging young boys' illegal activities. Carla then agreed by highlighting how the absence of maternal care produces a space often fulfilled by drug dealers. Janaína then added up by saying she does not think a mother should leave their children roaming carelessly around the neighborhood, as if it would naturally result in negative outcomes.

The narratives quoted indicate how these women believe their role as both mothers and community agents to engender responsibility not only for their children, but for young people in the community in general. Thus, a community agent in the Violence Prevention Center should work not only for caring for the family—a sphere that already entails a critical component in their

[58] **Vanessa:** the thing that makes me the saddest is the situation of the young people. The [situation at the] park across from my house is very sad, you know. It makes me very sad. I think the government should have better projects for teenagers. Whenever you talk to the neighbors… yesterday a woman stopped by my place, [and said] "my children are lost... because I have a full-time job, I can't be with them, I can't be at home", and her husband had died. She works as a maid in family house, she has always worked as a maid, and now her children are lost, both of them. And they were so sweet, her two boys... And they [the mothers] get desperate. They look for me to let off steam. There is no solution, they need to work, you see, they need to leave their kids alone.
Roberta: people get very scared – [say] "I have a job, I can't be at the house". I think this is happening even among rich people, people who don't need to go to work and can be at home, mothers who are present, it's all the same. It's a worldwide phenomenon, drugs have won all over.
Carla: it's not simply being at home, it does not work simply like that. You must be a *participant* in your children's life, so that *others* [drug dealers] are not.
Janaína: … I think mothers should not leave their kids like these, hanging around…

discourses—, but also for the community, a new area of action in which the same care strategies seem to be reproduced with little critical analysis. Therefore, the community agents often portray themselves as caregivers for the community, and indicate their personal wish in preventing, for instance, youth recruitment in drug trafficking from happening. In this attempt, they resort to their own private, long-used tactics: calling out on mothers for being more careful with their own kids, as if somehow being more attentive, harsher, or disciplined as a parent would prevent children from being enlisted by gangs. Most importantly, is calls attention how law is not much considered as a tool for their roles, since they mostly resort to care work strategies.

Finally, though a significant part of Lorena's discourse addressed sharing chores in the household, the very organization of the event entailed some inconsistencies with the narrative. In fact, over the months during which I did my observation at the center, I often realized how agents would respond to my attempts of running unstructured interviews with them quite unrealistically. They would frequently answer my questions—especially those directed to inquiry about the previous formations of the project and their own empowerment processes—with nostalgic, romanticized anecdotes I would later on identify as conflicting.

At the Mother's Day event, after the round of conversation took place, the agents planned a moment for celebration in which a large amount of food was served. Later on, they organized a raffle, and gave away two food baskets. A week later, a team meeting was scheduled for its evaluation. In this occasion, a lot of tensions between empowerment narratives and the roles of the agents emerged.

While providing feedback, the technical staff was critical of how work was allocated in the event preparation. The professionals expressed their concern for the agents having spent more energy in ordering food and preparing the environment for a warm reception than planning topics for fostering discussion or giving out useful information about their role at the center. These remarks opened an interesting discussion about the aims of the Violence Prevention Center and the role of the agents who worked there. One of the technicians was emphatic in asserting that the

event's aim should have been to promote rights, "*não distribuir cachorro quente, senão vira festa*"[59].

In response to these statements, the agents reacted in defense of their work strategies. For instance, Janaína and Lorena instantly argued that the Mother's Day event entailed not only a space for debate, but also a celebration. Janaína, then, added that "*na minha casa sempre tem comilança*"[60], arguing that whenever people would come over to her place, whether it was for celebration or for having a conversation about a difficult topic, it would entail eating as a ritual. Most of the other agents agreed, suggesting the importance of being welcoming and caring when hosting people in the VPC, which they considered to be part of their house. Likewise, Jessica added that offering a substantial 'coffee break' meal was an essential part of the event, as she feared neighbors would not attend if no food was provided.

In other occasions, the agents' engagement in providing coffee breaks as a strategy for conferring the Violence Prevention Center a homelike, welcoming character was also present. It was critical how also in other meetings the agents' participation would again be focused on providing services related to the work of domestic care, even when they were expected to engage more professionally. Whenever it involved other professionals visiting the center—for instance, Network meetings, which gathered the VPC, social assistance and health centers in the area; or whenever the Secretary for Public Safety of Canoas would attend—the agents' organization would often encompass a wish to provide a good welcoming environment. The Violence Prevention Center, besides being a house, also symbolically served as a continuity of their private care work that they previously performed only within the household.

Self-care, empowerment, and resistance: "Caring for the Caregiver".

Though the previous sections provided a significant amount of data on how these women gradually shaped their community agent role as caregivers, this is not a stable, uncontested phenomenon. The process of building their places stands as a dynamics of constant negotiation of care work and empowerment. This section aims to present discourses on self-care, individual

[59] It's not about handing out hot dogs, it's not a party.
[60] In my house, there's always a feast.

empowerment by means of education, and claims for better work strategies as attempts of resistance.

At the Mother's Day event, which was hosted at the Violence Prevention Center in May 2019, the round of conversation addressed methods for enhancing self-esteem. This discussion provided insights on resistance strategies for these women as caregivers.

In the occasion, Lorena opened the event with an initial speech in which the said that "*como mulheres, não temos tempo para cuidar de nós… para lavar o cabelo, tomar um banho com calma, fazer a unha*…"[61]. She noted that the event's proposal in addressing the daily routine entailed a concern for including moments for self-care. She suggested that women, who would always be so busy taking care of others, would naturally have difficulties in finding time in their day-to-day activities to look after themselves. Because of that, Lorena highlights the importance of caregivers to embrace personal care as a way of resistance. Her assertion resonated in the women who attended the event, as one of them agreed by saying "*eu passei 23 anos vivendo a vida dos outros, agora eu preciso cuidar de mim*"[62], indicating more than two decades of her life devoted to caring for others. These women seem to share a notion of womanhood deeply embedded in performing their role as female caretakers, though recognizing they often neglect themselves.

The strategy Lorena adopted for self-care, and one she proposed to other women, is based on enhancing self-esteem through beauty care. As she suggested, women should take some time for activities such as taking long showers or getting their nails done. These activities may enhance one's well-being, and naturally represent allocating time for oneself. However, they may also be problematic, as they target matching up to hardly achievable body-image standards. Moreover, their sustainability in actually providing and questioning sexist roles is contestable, as they disregard long-term, possibly more consistent proposals.

However critically analyzed, the implication of these strategies on the empowerment processes of these women cannot be overlooked. At the Mother's Day event, a make-up artist was present and provided free beauty services for the women. The majority of them took the

[61] As women, we don't have the time to look after ourselves... To wash our hair, indulgently take a shower, get our nails done.
[62] I have spent 23 years of my life taking care of others, now I must take care of myself.

opportunity to get their eyebrows, hair, and make-up done, which shows that most of the public bought into the agents' suggestion. Moreover, the community agents many times showed concern for physical appearance as an indicator for women's mental health. As Jessica once said about a woman she was providing emotional support for through Facebook, "*ela mudou, está tão bonita... quando ela está triste, ela não se arruma"*[63].

Although debatable, the empowerment processes in the formation of these women as community agents are undeniable. This is mostly visible in two narratives: first, their condemnation of domestic and intra-partner violence; and second, their education promotion.

At the Mother's Day event, for instance, Lorena's opening speech, besides addressing self-esteem, also explored how the community agents and the Violence Prevention Center were available to help women who had been victims of abuse. As they suspected the existence of gender violence in a variety of families in the neighborhood, they wished to reach out to such women. The event was thus based on the expectation that, by bringing the said victims to the VPC, awareness would be raised and maybe some women would feel encouraged to speak out.

Moreover, in our informal conversations, narratives about female independence would also emerge. Jessica was one of the proudest women in affirming her singleness and autonomy from men. She would assert her freedom as not having a partner to care for, and would proudly comment how she would go out at night whenever she pleased, despite the security issues in the neighborhood.

Her narratives, however, seem to entail an underlying character of competition. Whenever Jessica—who was very critical of marriage as an institution—would state her position, it would often generate discomfort in the other agents, who were in the majority married women. Her position seemed to somehow trigger a defensive response from others, as they would start to justify their personal choices. In addition, some of the comments regarding gender violence were often tinged by a judgmental tone. Whereas the agents wished to help out women in situations of abuse, they would also face difficulties in putting themselves out emphatically. They would often comment in private how they considered some women to be *Amélias*—meaning they were submissive or oppressed. As Jessica once said, "*mulher que apanha e quer ficar com o marido, é*

[63] She is changed, she is so pretty now. When she is sad, she won't take care of herself.

de ficar de cabelo branco"[64], expressing how she considered unacceptable how women would insist on staying in relationships with abusers. This dynamics seems to suggest how gender awareness appears to be raised in an individual level, but difficulties in building sisterhood through collective empowerment remained.

In terms of education, the women often asserted the importance of going through the training process as community agents, especially due to uncompleted baseline studies or learning gaps. Although some of them had already had previous experience in community work—either in religious services, political parties or neighborhood associations—, they often reported how they felt more assisted in their roles as they were taught about the social and health system. When I asked them about how their lives had changed after being trained as community agents, they responded as follows:

> **Lorena:** eu tenho uma diferença por eu ter uma casa, um Ilê, eu sempre já fiz esse trabalho, eu sempre já tive essa referência. Só que eu comecei a me sentir mais empoderada. Antigamente eu tinha que sair correndo politicamente para ver onde que existe alguém que vai tratar do idoso... que vai fazer essa filha cuidar desse pai... E a nível de saber onde existe, onde procurar... [...] Os encaminhamentos, mesmo que tu não tenha o respaldo que tu gostaria, mas tu fez alguma coisa. Tu fica mais satisfeita quando tu consegue não só orientar, mas aquilo que vieram te solicitar tu poder ajudar.
> **Brenda:** antes eu não sabia para onde encaminhar nem nada, e agora a gente já sabe...
> **Lorena:** [quando dá certo] eu me sinto com 1,90m [grande, poderosa].[65]

Their narratives on individual empowerment processes often contrasted with claims for different work strategies. Those claims were often associated with the previous versions of the project, such as Women for Peace and Community Justice Center.

> **Vanessa:** no Núcleo de Justiça Comunitária nós éramos atendidas, nós tínhamos as nossas reuniões, pela psicóloga.
> **Carla:** na Casa da Cidadania também a gente tinha...
> **Vanessa:** na Casa da Cidadania a gente podia se precisasse, né? No núcleo era de obrigação tu participar de uma reunião com a psicóloga para dizer como tu estava te sentindo, tu era assistida pela psicóloga. Porque a gente pegava muita coisa, pegava abuso de criança, pegava abuso de idoso... Olha, coisas bem fortes.
> [E como funciona esse cuidado agora?]

---

[64] Women who are abused and still want to be with their husbands... It's a hard nut to crack.

[65] **Lorena:** I am different because I have a religious house, an *Ilê*, and I have always done this job, I've always been a reference. I just started to feel more empowered. Before that, I had to run all over the place, politically speaking, to see where some elder men could get treatment… Or how to make this daughter look after her dad… It's about knowing where to go, where to seek assistance. […] When we forward people, we may not have the support we would like to, but it feels like we've done something. I get the most satisfied when I can do more than give out information, but also help out solving what people came here for.
Brenda: I didn't know where to forward people before, and now we know…
Lorena: [whenever it works] I feel like I am six-feet tall [meaning powerful].

> **Vanessa:** agora nem tem, vou te dizer. Não temos. ... A gente seguiu fazendo o que a gente fazia no núcleo, claro que com muita menos condições...[66]

Vanessa and Carla, who joined the project in its early days, resented how their psychological support was progressively reduced as the project developed from Women for Peace and Community Justice Center (in 2012) to House for Citizenship (in 2015), and finally to the Violence Prevention Center (from 2017 on). Whereas previously they had frequent meetings with a mental health professional in a project entitled Caring for the Caregiver, in the VPC— despite the presence of a psychologist in the technical staff— such services were not available. As a result, they had no therapeutic spaces to look after themselves and process the emotional work they were submitted to, although they were expected to provide to listen to and care for community members. At the same time I was spending time with them, anxiety issues were a common conversation topic.

Situations involving risk for their personal security also represented a claim for more support from the institution background in the project. Even though the agents were supposed to work at least in pairs as a safeguard, they complained about how protection measures seemed insufficient. Vanessa would often express her concern about not having a security guard available at the center for emergency situations in mediations sessions. She then would remember how some of the neighbors who were invited to sessions at the Community Justice Center were often rude and aggressive. Vanessa remembered a couple cases in which she described men present to be "*atrevidos*", meaning they were bold and questioned their authority as women and as conflict mediators. When situations like these happened, she talked about feeling more secure as she knew she could rely on the presence of a security agent waiting outside the mediation room in case people adopted a truculent behavior during the session.

Vanessa also related other experiences in which she felt insecure working at the project. She reported arriving earlier to her shift in the Urban Social Center once, when she opened the

[66] **Vanessa:** at the Community Justice Center we were assisted, we had meetings with the psychologist.
Carla: we had it too at the House for Citizenship.
Vanessa: we had it in the House for Citizenship in emergency cases, didn't we? At the Community Justice Center it was compulsory to participate in the meetings with the psychologist to talk about how you felt, you were assisted by her. Because we would deal with so many things, children abuse, elderly people abuse... rough situations, you know?
[And how does it work now?]
Vanessa: there is no such thing now, I'll tell you what. We don't have it... We continued doing what we did at the Community Justice Center, under much worse conditions.

service by herself. As she was there alone, waiting for her fellow colleagues to arrive, a man approached her for information. As she welcomed him and started the *acolhimento*, he confessed being involved in the killing of a group of people in the neighborhood. Because she had disrespected the program prohibitions about not working solo, and had no one to turn to at the time, she described how she found her way out of the situation by "*contornando a situação do jeito que pude... Tu tem que desconversar*"[67] – i.e., autonomously.

Likewise, the agents would often question the presence of young offenders in the execution of socio-educative measures in the Violence Prevention Center. The number of adolescents under this condition grew over the months during which I undertook my observation, amounting to a group of sixteen youths in July 2019, who were divided in two weekdays. The agents would often comment how they felt uncomfortable with the new situation, arguing that some were already "grown-up men", and avoided being alone with them. This discomfort was also underpinned by their beliefs of the juvenile justice as inefficient in punishing youth offenders, which I will continue to explore in the fourth chapter.

Over the teamwork routine meetings, the agents would often report to the technical staff how they resented the previous versions of the project, in which they perceived their work to be better supported. In one of these meetings, two of the agents energetically criticized the institutions to which the center was connected, such as the social and health assistance network, the LaSalle Foundation, and the Municipal Secretariat for Public Security. They would say that "*o CPV está sofrendo violência*"[68], meaning that what they considered to be neglected and suffered a lack of structure for developing their aims. The technical staff responded to such claims by considering their narratives about the previous projects to be romanticized and not very realistic. As the lawyers would say, discouraging them: "*agora é CPV, gurias. Eu não fico falando do meu antigo emprego. ... Se as coisas não funcionaram no CPV nesses últimos dois anos e meio de projeto, talvez a culpa seja nossa*"[69].

The relations between their yearning for the previous projects and the responses by the technical staff seem to represent an ambivalent dynamics in their role as community agents. This

[67] You handle the situation in any way you can... You have to change the subject.
[68] The VPC is suffering violence.
[69] It's the VPC now, girls. I don't keep on going on about my previous job... If things have not worked out in the VPC over this past two and a half years, maybe it's our fault.

point will be further discussed in the next section, as I present how they make use of law in asserting their roles.

The role of law

Before I visited the center, I was aware, by my previous readings on the project, that the community agents had been trained in topics such as rights, gender violence, social and health assistance institutions, and community mediation. As I started my observation at the VPC, however, I realized two main issues: firstly, not all the women had received the same training, since they joined projects in its different stages and formats. Only those who had adhered in the Community Justice Center were trained in conflict mediation, for instance—namely Vanessa, Carla, and Eduarda. Secondly, their legal education seemed to rarely come up as they were performing their roles as community agents, as they deemed their main function to be providing *acolhimento* and listening. Beyond that, they would often resist in making greater use of law in their activities. As I already had some clues about their connection to roles of care, I perceived the need for investigating how they would interact with law, state, and official institutions from such place. This section presents some of the data I gathered on their relation to these topics, and largely indicates a space of absence.

Contrasting law and empowerment: "we had a class on it", but "we would not know the words to use".

In June 2019, the technical staff started a movement in the center for restructuring work activities, and some confusion about the agents' functions arose. The first meeting under this new strategy of work organization was endeavored to representing the projects—Caring for Pathways and Every Young One Matters—and recapitulating what the agents' roles were in each one of them. The technical staff also suggested that the agents could reconsider in which project they would like to take part as a possibility of reorganizing teams in each program.

In this occasion, it became clear how uncertain the agents were about their specific functions regarding the public institutional framework. At first, I assigned it to the fact that the project was reshaped by the LaSalle Foundation in 2017, and that it has gone through several

modifications since its beginning as Women for Peace. However, further observation indicated that this hypothesis did not fully explain the processes that occurred.

In fact, the majority of the questions that emerged came from Jessica and Janaína, who asked "*até onde elas poderiam ir"*—how far they could go—as community agents. Their doubts demonstrate how uncertain they were about the limits of their role, what was allowed for them to do in the name of the center, and how to present themselves for requests to official institutions. They wondered, for instance, if they could escort neighbors to the correspondent state center—such as the health center for making a medical appointment, or the Register Office for issuing documents. Their attentive concern seems to show how they did not think simply forwarding people to the correspondent institution and letting them go through unassisted would provide a solution for the claim. In order to assure themselves, they appear to negotiate their wish to go beyond with their work at the center as caregivers and to challenge the limits imposed by law and other public institutions.

Furthermore, as I inquired the agents about the importance of law in their role, their responses were often vague, ambiguous, or resorted to emphasizing the importance of knowing women's rights:

> **Jessica:** nós não temos nada sobre Direito, mas tivemos uma aula... principalmente as gurias que trabalhavam no outro projeto. Enquanto Casa da Cidadania, a gente teve aulas com o Hebert, capacitações sobre se alguém chegasse e quisesse saber informações sobre como entrar na justiça, para não sobrecarregar o Hebert. A gente saberia como encaminhar, o que ela deveria fazer. Eu tenho tudo anotado na minha outra agenda... A gente é bem capacitada sobre pensão alimentícia, sobre tudo, sabe.
> **Sara:** a gente vê dependendo do caso o que surge para a gente, né. Se é de direitos... se tem que encaminhar para a Defensoria, se for Judiciário, se for para habitação, escolar, uma VD [visita domiciliar], reconciliação entre vizinhos...[70]

When Jessica notes they "don't have much to do with law, but had a class on it", she highlights the importance of having education of basic rights and state institutions in order to recognize claims in the community and effectively respond to them by forwarding cases. Despite

[70] **Jessica:** we don't have much to do with law, but we had a class on it. Specially the girls who worked in the previous project versions. In the House for Citizenship we had classes with Hebert, training sessions so that we would get information about how to fill out a claim in case someone needed it, and aiming not to overburden Hebert. We then would know how to forward cases, what to do. I have all the notes in my notebook. We are well-trained about child support, etc.
Sara: it depends on the case. If it's about rights… We have to forward it to the Public Defender's Office, to the legal system, right to housing, school places, HV (household visits), reconciliation among neighbors…

this aim, she recognized that women who joined the project in its early stages had received more information that those who took part more recently. Sara agrees by saying how having this background enables them to identify demands and take action accordingly. However, they would not directly provide legal solutions or information, but act as intermediaries between neighbors and public facilities as a way to increase access to justice.

In fact, such knowledge regarding access to justice often reflected in their personal narratives for empowerment. When I inquired them about what had changed in their lives after being trained in rights, they narratives often addressed having means to deal with gender violence:

> **Jessica:** Para mim mudou muito. Eu já nunca fui *Amélia*, a palavra Amélia não combina comigo, porque eu não gosto de cozinha. Daí tu ser uma dona de casa, limpa, cozinhar... agora, depois que a gente descobre que a gente não é só mulher para cama e para casa... Mas muita mulher na rua não sabe disso... Eu fiz o último curso de Mulheres da Paz, e depois que eu fiz aquilo ali... Gente, minha vida mudou.
> **Sara:** a minha situação também foi um estudo e conhecimento de libertação como mulher... Como esposa, como mãe. Porque eu fui muito só da casa, com o marido mandando e desmandando... dizendo "amém" para tudo também. E fazendo o curso eu vi que a vida de uma mulher não é só dentro de casa... ouvindo, e limpando, e cozinhando, e servindo... Até no princípio eu tive muita dificuldade em continuar participando das reuniões da Casa da Cidadania, em função de briga... As gurias até presenciaram...[71]

Both Jessica and Sara stated that receiving legal training and joining the program—each one of them in different phases of its development—led them to question their assigned positions as women. Although my question did not directly address empowerment and gender equality, whenever I would ask them about how the education they had gotten from the project transformed their lives, they would emphasize how knowledge about women's rights helped them to identify situations of oppression. Moreover, Sara reports how having been trained in legal education helped her to broaden her views on her own life, even to confronting her husband's resistance regarding her participation in the program. Being taught notions of law and

[71] **Jessica:** it changed so much for me. I was never an *Amélia*, the word *Amélia* never stuck to me, because I don't like cooking. Being a housewife, cleaning, cooking... After we found out that women are not only meant to serve in bed and in the household... But many women don't know that... I took the last training in the Women for Peace program, and after that... God, my life changed.
Sara: my situation was also for studying and learning about liberation as a woman. As a wife, as a mother. Because I was always a housewife, my husband would order... And I would say "amen" to everything, too. After taking the course I realized that a woman's life is not meant to be only in the household... Listening, cleaning, cooking, serving... At the beginning I had a lot of difficulties in attending the meetings at the House for Citizenship due to fights... The girls here have seen it.

access to justice, therefore, seemed to offer a space for raising gender-awareness and individual empowerment.

Paradoxically, when the agents would be asked to deal more directly with law, they would usually not engage. During my fieldwork, the technical staff would often share with me their concern to back out of some activities in order to leave it to the full initiative of the agents. Cristina, a lawyer, reported seeing contradictions between the empowerment discourse the project would adopt and how little the community agents would lead the way in their practice at the center. She argued that, though many activities that were supposed to be under the responsibility of the agents, they would often rely on the professionals to perform them. She highlighted that this happened including in tasks which the agents had been specifically trained to perform, such as those regarding legal and digital education.

This proved to be true in some discussions the conflict mediation course brought up. Around mid-July, when the agents organized this space (in which I collaborated), some doubts regarding mediation agreements came up. The default procedure at the center required that mediation sessions which ended up in settlements entail a term of agreement. At this point, the agents were oriented to interrupt the session and reschedule a new one. In the meantime, one of the lawyers at the center would gather settlement information from the mediators, and write it up in accordance to the legal standards and language. With this being done, the agents would then print out the document, and read it out loud to the ones assisted in the next session, having it signed by all the people present and three witnesses.

However, at this meeting, Vanessa shared some new possibilities about this functioning: "*a Cristina estava querendo que a gente redigisse os acordos*", i.e., that the lawyer wanted the agents to start writing up agreements. The reasoning under this proposal was, again, that the lawyers wished to back off in situations they reckoned the agents' autonomy could be fostered, and regarded their presence in this task not to be compulsory. The agents' reaction to this modification, regardless, was to express concern. When they started to discuss the option, several doubts about the adequate format and content of such agreements arose.

As the questions started to come up, Carla remembered I was lawyer, and asked me to explain what the content of the agreement should be, how it should be written, and how legally binding it was. While I provided some of the information she has asked for, Carla then giggled

and added: "*eu tinha esquecido que tu era doutora*"—I totally forgot you were a lawyer—referring to me in a formal, usually regarded as hierarchical, way to refer to people who hold law degrees in Brazil.

They then continued by explaining to me how they felt they were not able to perform such function:

> **Eduarda:** nós não sabemos a forma de escrever, aquelas palavras... Não sabemos.
> **Jessica:** e nós não temos orientação jurídica suficiente.
> **Vanessa:** e agora não temos mais Defensoria... Nos outros projetos tinha um advogado e uma assistente judicial que sentavam na mesa [de mediação]. Aqui nesse projeto nós não temos pernas para isso.[72]

Their narratives show how, despite being trained in legal education and used this opportunity for their individual empowerment, these women did not see themselves as capable of employing such knowledge as community agents. They feared being asked to write up terms of agreements as they did not know how to utilize the appropriate language for a formal document. They also recognized the inefficiency of their own knowledge to do so, and resented the lack of juridical support they had had in the previous years, such as the presence of the Public Defender's Office.

As a matter of fact, when the agents commented their work as conflict mediators, those who had worked in the Community Justice Center would report how important it was to be able to rely on legal institution for the enforcement of settlements. During this phase of the project, a Public Defender was weekly available to ratify the terms of agreement. As Vanessa reported, the presence of an official legal representative was an appeal for people to reach out to the center, as they would line up for assistance.

> **Vanessa:** As mediações eram fantásticas. O movimento do núcleo era uma coisa assim... como é que eu vou te dizer. Tinha fila. ... Aqui foi muita divulgação, especialmente no bairro aqui embaixo, onde o pessoal mais necessitava.
> **Carla:** e também porque antes a gente tinha uma Defensora, né, isso dava muito.
> **Vanessa:** é, aonde que tu divulgava que falava em Defensoria Pública...
> **Carla:** chamava as pessoas muito, porque elas poderiam resolver por exemplo pensão, divórcio, todas essas coisas aqui sem precisar sair daqui do bairro. Facilitava muito.[73]

[72] **Eduarda:** we wouldn't know how to write it, those words... We don't know them.
Jessica: and we don't have enough legal information for that.
Vanessa: and now we don't have the Public Defender's Office anymore. In the other projects we had a lawyer and a legal assistant that would sit with us in the mediation table. Here in this Project we don't have enough arms for it.

Moreover, at the meeting when the Mother's Day event was evaluated by the team, the discussion about the agents' autonomy in the center reemerged. At the event, the technical staff gave the agents full autonomy for organization. During the event hours, they kept working in their room, and only joined the gathering as the agents wished to introduce them to the community, a moment in which they welcomed the public and presented their availability as Violence Prevention Center workers.

When the team was discussing feedback about the event, Janaína noted how she had missed the presence of the technical staff during the occasion. She argued that they are the their "*garoto propaganda*", meaning their best advertisement element for attracting the community. She continued by highlighting how the lawyers' presence enabled them to say to people that "*aqui [no CPV] tem advogado*"—i.e., "we have lawyers here in the VPC"—, indicating a strategy for attracting people to the center, as their legal knowledge represented a positive prospect for problem resolutions. Janaína's description indicates how the technical staff, as formally educated people, would provide a legitimating character to their community work.

In short, the above-mentioned agents' concerns seem to trace back to two main issues: they perceive law as a source of symbolic relevance, in contrast to their feeling of being outsiders to it. Because of that, they would insist on the importance of having a Public Defender's Office at the previous version of the project, and how they resented this absence in the Violence Prevention Center. Under the same assumption, they would often insist on portraying lawyers in the technical staff as essential to legitimizing their activities. At the same time, whenever they were invited to make use of law in their roles, they would show resistance, despite having been trained in legal education.

---

[73] **Vanessa:** mediation sessions were fantastic. The movement here was something else… How can I put it...? People would line up at the door... There was plenty of diffusion, especially at the back at the neighborhood, where people needed it the most.
Carla: and at that time we had a Public Defender's Office, it was very useful.
Vanessa: yes, whenever we would promote it and mention the Public Defender's Office...
Carla: it was such an appeal for people, because they could resolve issues such as child support, divorce, without needing to leave the neighborhood. It made everything so much easier.

The absence of state and distrust in public institutions: "we stumble upon bureaucracy".

While the agents' daily activities seemed somehow distant from law, such distance was also present in the relation between the state and the neighborhood. The Mathias Velho community often faced issues regarding infrastructure (restrictions in water use, unpunctual public transportation services, potholes), public services (restricted school options, insufficient number of professionals in public health centers), and urban safety (robberies, drug dealing, and gang disputes which would end up in shootings). Therefore, the agents' perception of the state in the area was mostly related to its absence, rather than its action.

Their perception of official state institutions was often related to its inefficiency in responding to their needs, and many times entailed distrust. Once, Jessica commented with the other women, as we waited for the training session on conflict mediation to start, how a woman she knew in the neighborhood would often call the state military-police[74] because her neighbor's dogs would urinate in her fence. Jessica would mock the police officers as they would stand there, not knowing what to do, since solving such an irrelevant issue was clearly not under their competence. She also considered that the reason why policemen would still come to resolve such an insignificant problem was because this woman held an important working position at a metalworking facility in the neighborhood, and would make use of her personal influence to get her claims assisted. Jessica and the other women then commented how they had profound distrust of the local police, as they would often leave important demands unattended. Criticizing corruption and influence peddling, they stated: "*se eu chamo a brigada precisando, a brigada não vem. Mas como é ela, que se autointitula importante...*"[75].

Legal institutions did not escape such criticism. In the conflict mediation training they organized, the judicial system was described by them as the following:

> **Vanessa:** … a mediação é diferente do judiciário, em que o juiz decide, que é uma coisa fria e tu é obrigado a cumprir...
> **Carla:** a mediação nos torna protagonistas da nossa vida, sem incomodação com o judiciário.
> **Jessica:** a nossa cultura é largar nas mãos do juiz... e a gente esbarra na burocracia.

[74] In Portuguese, *Brigada Militar*, the institution responsible for preventive and ostensible policing in Brazil.
[75] Whenever I call the police, they won't come. But since it's her, and she considers herself to deserve special treatment...

> **Carla:** é, normalmente as pessoas saem do judiciário se odiando, e da mediação se abraçando.[76]

Vanessa and Carla, the most experienced mediators in the group, describe the appeal of conflict mediation to reside in its flexibility and warmth. They contrast the possibility of people making their own decisions about their lives with what she considers to be the hassle legal procedures represented. Moreover, they indicate how the legal system often increases animosity in conflict resolution, which she considered to be avoided in conflict mediation. Jessica agreed, by adding how she reckoned the judicial system as inherently bureaucratic and inefficient, while mediation could enable people to spare themselves of this discomfort. In sum, as these women consider the legal system to be a burden, their representations of conflict mediation also entail a somewhat idealized, romanticized component.

The agents' dissatisfaction with the official, legal institutions was much originated in bad experiences they have had themselves as users of such services. As they would comment,

> **Carla:** a gente vê tantas coisas erradas, tantas coisas dificultosas para as pessoas. Porque tu vai num serviço, e é uma dificuldade, a pessoa é mal atendida, não tem empatia, não tem aquele acolhimento que tu queria pra ti. E aqui tem essa liberdade de usar isso, de acolher bem a pessoa, de saber que aquela pessoa está sendo bem acolhida, bem tratada. É o que eu quero para mim. Daí aqui no meu trabalho eu posso fazer isso com as pessoas.
> **Vanessa:** e a gente que trabalha com isso, que já passou por certas situações... Tu tem um problema, daí tu vai num lugar e te dizem assim: "não, tu tem que ir lá naquele lugar lá". Daí tu vai lá, e é "ah não, mas não é comigo, é com o Fulano". A pessoa às vezes não tem um café para dar para os filhos de manhã, e fica naquele pula – vai aqui, vai ali, vai lá... Isso aí muito eu passei esse tipo de coisa, fazendo papéis para o comércio que nós tinha, resolvendo coisas cada vez que a minha irmã sofria violência... Então assim, nessas formações que eu fui fazer, eu pensava assim: "eu quero fazer para melhorar esse vai e vem das pessoas"...
> **Carla:** e a melhor coisa é tu ver uma pessoa sair agradecida por ter resolvido o problema dela.
> **Roberta:** eu fico me dizendo às vezes "puxa, isso tinha que ter existido lá adiante quando eu precisei tanto". Todas as noites que eu chorei, tudo que eu passei, todos os socorros que eu pedi e ninguém me socorreu, tudo que eu aguentei calada e não tinha para quem me socorrer... Por que que isso aí não tinha quando eu passei isso?[77]

[76] **Vanessa:** … mediation is different from legal claims in which the judge decides, makes a cold decision and you're bound to comply...
Carla: mediation makes us protagonists of our own lives, without having to bother with the judicial system.
Jessica: our culture is all about leaving it to the legal system... and then we stumble upon bureaucracy.
Carla: yes, usually people leave the judicial system hating each other, whereas they often leave mediation hugging each other.

[77] **Carla:** we see so much neglect, so many difficulties being imposed to people. Whenever you seek a public service it's so difficult, people are so mistreated, there is no empathy, there is no *acolhimento* you would long for. And here

Their narratives indicated how frustrated they felt when sought assistance in public institutions with little success. They reported being poorly treated by public servants, which would often not be concerned about easing the situation for the service user. Likewise, they reported witnessing situations in which the servers would forward people to other centers and give out misleading information. Roberta topped it off by reporting personal experiences in which she thought she had no institution to resort to, and felt mostly abandoned by the state. As a response to this context, they all commented how they worked through these disappointments by turning them into motivation for providing a more caring, empathetic treatment at the Violence Prevention Center. They wished, in short, to be more attentive to the people who sought out the center, somehow compensating state indifference towards the community.

In sum, the agents' relation to law and to legal institutions can be summarized as the following: initially, they argue they had been trained in legal education, although in their current activities law is not central to their role. In spite of that, for many of them receiving such training allowed them to become aware of gender oppression and to better respond to claims concerning intra-partner and domestic violence. Moreover, they perceive law as a source of symbolic relevance, in contrast to seeing themselves as apart from it. Whereas they often refuse engaging with legal strategies in their roles, they resent not having legal institutions, and portray the lawyers in the technic staff as an advertisement element of the Violence Prevention Center towards the Mathias Velho community. At the same time, yet contradictorily, law's symbolic relevance is also present on their wish for mediation settlements to be judicially ratified, although legal institutions are often criticized as distant and inefficient.

Their interactions with law are often ambivalent, and this dynamic becomes even more complex when we consider its interweaving with care work. Whereas the agents portray

---

we have the freedom to use it [*acolhimento*], to treat people well, to know they are being well received and welcomed. That's what I want for me. So here I do my work in accordance to what I like to do for others.

Vanessa: besides working here, we have been through difficult situations… Whenever you have a problem, and you reach out for an assistance center, and people say: "it's not here, it's over there". And then you go "over there" and it's like "this is not my competence, it's someone else's". Sometimes people don't even have ways to provide a meal for their children and they just need to move around – over here, over there, over here… I've been through this a lot, specially running errands for the small business I ran, or helping out my sister, who used to be abused. So whenever I would go to training sessions in the project I thought: "this is what I want to do to help prevent people from going round in circles"…

Carla: the best thing ever is when people leave thankful for having had their problems resolved.

Roberta: I tell myself "Gosh, this should have existed back then when I needed it so much". All the nights I cried, everything I've been through, all the help I asked for and no one reached out for me, everything I've endured in silence and had no one to turn to. Why wasn't it there when I had to face these things?

themselves as outsiders from law, this chapter demonstrated how they make great use of caregiving positions –often based on their religious or household experiences– for asserting their roles in caring for the community. Their roles, then, can be somehow defined as *caregivers for the community in the absence of law*. The consequence this dynamic entails are further discussion in the next chapter, as I propose a critical, feminist perspective.

Chapter 4
Discussion

In the previous section, I presented the data I gathered from my observation period. In short, it indicates a twofold process on the formation of the women's role as community agents. First, they primarily resort to care work as a way to assert their positions, which mainly reflects the belief they should care for the community. Second, the presence of care work is highly connected to their perceptions of state institutions as flawed and inefficient, and to the non-use of law in their activities.

The possible consequences of this dynamics are discussed in this chapter within the framework of the debate of feminist care ethics. My aim in this piece of research is not to provide a long description of this theoretical debate, since it is an ongoing discussion among scholars, and undertaking a dense literature review on it does not constitute my main goal. Rather, I will briefly present the main discussions as I see they relate to the empirical data I collected.

The reflections about women's moral development around care was initially proposed by Gilligan (1993, p. 1-3), in the attempt to respond to "the exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research". The author then used empirical research on women in order "to expand the understanding of human development by using the group left out in the construction of theory", which was long ago built upon the projection of masculine figures. Gilligan (1993, p. 14) argues that, in the tendency of constructing a single scale of measurement, which was derived and standardized from research conducted on males, psychologists consider the male behavior as the norm and female behavior as deviant. Gilligan hoped to challenge this assumption by shedding light on what she considers to be "a different voice".

This different voice, she explains, would entail questioning the place of care in the moral development scales:

> Women's construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules ties the development of their moral thinking to changes in their understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as justice ties development to the logic of equality and reciprocity. Thus the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationships, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach. (Gilligan, 1993, p. 73)

Ethics of care began as a debate on moral development, and initially care theorists –what Hankivsky (2014) describes as a first generation of them—were endeavored to discussing a moral development theory departing from Gilligan's (1993) response to Kohlberg's ethics of justice. Later on, a second generation of care theorists, especially those led by the work of Tronto (1987), widened the debate as they started to regard care as "*both* a moral and political concept" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 253, emphasis on the original). As Tronto (1987, p. 662) states, feminist analyses of care were key in exploring its connection to "morality and class, racial, and ethnic differences as well".

Care ethics have also been extensively criticized. Some theorists have highlighted the dangerous strategy of using care as a category of gender difference. Tronto (1987, p. 646) argues that this strategy entails the risk of missing out on the complexity of the debate by becoming "trapped trying to defend women's morality rather than looking critically at the philosophical premises and problems of an ethics of care". Feminist analysis, such as those produced by Tronto & Fisher (1990, p. 37), also noted how the debate has often been "excessively psychological, rarely viewing caring as work or understanding the meaning of that work in women's lives". Most importantly, criticism also addressed the use of care as a category that may lead to "essentializing women as 'naturally' caring", and therefore "denies the constructed nature of gender and may reinforce and justify gender oppression" (Day, 2000, p. 106).

Moreover, scholars have also called out on representativeness issues on care ethics debate, as a lack of commitment to intersectional analysis is incompatible to the inherent plurality of feminism. In this sense, black feminists have pointed out the lack of representativeness on black, lower-class women in Gilligan's work (Collins, 2000). Duffy (2005) called attention for how research on care privileges the experience of white women. Hankivsky (2014, p. 252) also demonstrated how, although some care theorists "claim to engage with intersectionality theory", they failed in this attempt by merely adding race and class, "rather than consider the ways in which these are co-constructed in multiple ways and with various effects".

Above all, I argue that one specific line of feminist critique on care is especially useful for looking into the data I collected over the course of this study. It is the one proposed by Puka

(1990), Houston (1990), Hoagland (1984), and other authors[78] who recognize that, under some specific circumstances, care work may reinforce gender stereotypes and subjugation by an essentialist notion of female roles. Having realized such paradox in feminist care theory, these authors do not reject care as a category of analysis (and neither do I), but highlight its nuances and contradictions on empirical situations.

Puka (1990, p. 58), like Tronto (1987), is critical of the cultural phenomenon of insisting on care ethics as a gender difference, and warns about how "attempting to distinguish woman's care-taking strengths from her socialized, servile weaknesses flirts with sexism itself". Puka's (1990) response to Gilligan's work departs from the adoption of a hypothesis of "care as liberation". Under this perspective, he analyses care as "not a general course of moral development, primarily, but a set of coping strategies for dealing with sexist oppression in particular" (Puka, 1990, p. 59). Houston (1990) and Hoagland (1984), critically responding to the model developed by Noddings (1990), also argue for the risk in using care in abetting exploitation and reinforcing oppressive institutions.

This section aims to connect the processes I observed in the field with feminist care theories. In my research, I summarized the role formation of the community agents in the Violence Prevention Center as *care work for the community in the absence of law*. My analysis in this segment focuses on presenting the outcomes of these dynamics under a feminist perspective. In that sense, I propose the following questions: what are the risks and challenges in building community justice on a model that entails care work as a primary category while dealing with the failure to use legal strategies? How do the agents navigate this dynamic in terms of a feminist critique?

Caring for the community in the absence of law

As I previously mentioned, the data I collected on how these women shaped their role as community agents entailed a dynamic between care work and the absence of law. This process is fluid and often ambivalent, but surrounds a main hypothesis: the community agents use of care

[78] I acknowledge that these authors do not exhaust the debate on ethics of care. However, they provide insightful reflection for dialoguing with data I collected in the field. A more complete bibliographical review can be expanded in further research.

work techniques to face what they regard as an absent state and inefficient public institutions. Such care work strategies, however, sometimes rely on the symbolic relevance of legal knowledge. In that sense, despite their general consideration of law as something distant, and despite their resistance in employing legal strategies in their activities, they do not fully dismiss it. Departing from this scenario, I will now draw on some interactions between care work and law in the Violence Prevention Center, and connect it to the literature on ethics of care.

As Lorena described the functioning of the VPC at the event hosted in honor of the Mother's Day, she stated:

> A gente se importa com o jovem que está se evadindo da escola, com o jovem que já se evadiu, com o jovem que está em problemas na escola; a gente se preocupa com as mulheres que têm problemas de violência, que sofrem por qualquer motivo; com o idoso...[79]

Lorena's description of their concerns as community agents shows their inclination to care for the community. Her view on their role entails worrying about meeting the needs of a variety of groups in the neighborhood. This shows a high emphasis on relationships between people who stand in interdependent connection, a reality that Gilligan (1993) extensively explains in her work.

To Lorena, her role as a community agent is shaped as an activity of relationship, an exercise of "taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 62). In this sense, her words convey her belief in the restorative potential of care, since community agents should show concern for the situation young ones, the elderly, and the women face in Mathias Velho. This perception aligns with Gilligan's (1993, p. 57) assertion on women's morality, as her interviews demonstrated women to see "life as dependent on connection, as sustained by activities of care, as based on a bond of attachment rather than a contract of agreement".

Lorena, in sum, articulates the community agents' role as "an ethic of responsibility that stems from an awareness of interconnection" (Gilligan, 1993, p. 57). Therefore, the basis of a community agent's work will be the awareness of the problems of diverse groups in the

[79] We care about the young ones who are evading school, about those who have already evaded, about any of them with problems in school; we worry about the women in situations of violence, who suffer for any reason; with the elderly...

community, the ability to bond with them, and to meet their needs. Community agents, thus, should respond to claims based on seeing themselves as a part of that very community. The motivation for this response departs from those very same ties.

In the way Lorena delineates them, people in the community are seen as members of a network of relationships, rather than as subjects of rights on an abstract level. She indicates the prevalence of a care ethic, as the evaluation of a community agent's work that dwells on the ability to care for others. In doing so, she puts the discourse of rights and justice in a secondary position. Having been trained in legal education, and relying on the support of lawyers at the Violence Prevention Center, the agents could have used an ethics of justice to convey their own role. They could have, for instance, described their activities as ones related to the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making, and the promotion of the rights of the individuals over connection—features usually attributed to masculine discourses (Gilligan, 1993, p. 19). Moreover, they could have presented their work strategies as based on "a hierarchy of rights and rules used to resolve moral conflicts or problems by weighing claims and judging which is the heavier claim" (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994, p. 110). However, the descriptions I provided in the previous sections showed how Lorena and the other agents would highlight their ability to *acolher*, emphasizing connection, listening, and concern.

In fact, in the rare opportunities in which the discourses of community agents would indicate an individualistic approach, it would be in the evaluation of the public institutions they would work with. Whenever they described their relationship with them and with law, these women would argue how the state's position towards the community is an example of indifference and unconcern (Gilligan, 1993, p. 22). Legal institutions, therefore, do not care for the community. Community agents, and religious services, on the other hand, care deeply for it. Consequently, since caring stands as their baseline for success assessment, law becomes secondary, because it fails in its ability to care.

The relation of the agents with state law institutions shows an ambivalent, complex process that can be summarized as follows. Firstly, they adopt discourses which resort to law as a tool for individual empowerment in fighting gender inequality. Secondly, law stands as symbolically relevant to their roles, as they would value the presence of the Public Defender's Office in the previous programs and cultivate the image of lawyers in the technical staff as

legitimating for their work towards the community. Thirdly, and paradoxically, they tend to critically evaluate the efficiency of state law and judicial institutions, as they themselves faced bureaucracy when they relied on them, and wish to provide a better service at the Violence Prevention Center. The idea of improving the services condition is largely based on their abilities for *acolhimento,* which is linked to their concern about connection and relationship described by Gilligan (1993) as the basis for care. Lastly, they contradictorily position themselves as outsiders to law, as they resist to employ legal strategies in their work activities, being more comfortable in its absence and performing care work. These processes are often conflicting, and represent the complex dynamics in their uses and non-uses of legal tools.

Overall, their relationship with law is ambivalent. Whereas they assign high value to it, they recognize their distance from it. On a practical level, law is not central to their role. Despite attributing significance to the idea of their work producing legally binding outcomes, agents were unsure about how to do so. However, their seeking for legitimacy in law also demonstrates hierarchies in relation to what they consider to be more educated people, such as myself and the technical staff. These conditions seemed to show they found themselves as disempowered for the implementation of what was taught in legal education, which opened an empty space for care work to be employed and caregiver roles to be reinforced.

Law was not distant from them only because of their education gaps—despite its influence in individual empowerment—, but also because of its symbolic representations. However highly appreciated, there were many symbolic barriers when they would relate to rights or legal institutions. Language appeared as one of the most important obstacle to them. As many of these women faced literacy gaps, legalese seemed to be quite inaccessible. As Eduarda's statement in the previous section suggests, she did not know the words to use. In sum, law stands as something distant, something they could not fully understand, but somehow also relied on for asserting their roles.

The position of being outsiders to law may also be related to building their role based on care. As community agents, they seemed to see themselves much closer to the community than to state action. They seemed to be more comfortable in *acolher* people at the center, as they would exercise their bonds with the neighborhood, and often provide emotional comfort to neighbors they had known for years. Although they would later forward people to the correspondent state

institution, they seemed to hold some attachment to work strategies that would underpin their positions as caregivers, something law did not directly enhance.

My field work does not allow conclusions on what processes are reinforced by which dynamics. Therefore, although I overall suggest that the absence of law is fulfilled by care work, some questions about the roots of such process remain largely unanswered. For instance, do the agents insist on their position as caregivers because the institutional framework at the community justice program and at the Violence Prevention Center enhances it? Or do they attach to care giving activities because they face the emptiness of law and, having received a fragile legal education, are more comfortable in using well-known, personal, care strategies? Moreover, is there a possibility they actively reject the use of legal strategies, pushing law away from their role as a way of resistance, despite having been trained in it? If so, what benefits do they get from doing that? It is hard to pinpoint whether care giving is fostered by the setting or by themselves. What remains to be analyzed, however, is how well it fits feminist purposes.

These assumptions bring up questions about the consequences of building community justice based on care work and in the absence of law. They also align with the need for feminist care theorists to rely on empirical research in order to assess the potential of care work as a category that enables gender equality. Departing form this, I intend to develop a feminist critique on the situation of women at the Violence Prevention Center. My examination entails mainly two lines. I consider the work these women perform as caregivers for the community to be most often inconsistent with feminist goals. Firstly, because it leads to overload: these women are put in a situation where, through care work, they are made believe they should care for the community and resolve broader socio-political processes that are not in their power to tackle. Secondly, because by asserting their work value on being competent caregivers, care becomes used as a tool for sexist judgments towards other women, as others would fail in this role. In this point, care becomes a background scenario for conservative discourses in which mothers are shamed and girls' sexuality is controlled. This, ultimately, impinges the formation of sisterhood and hinders empowerment on a collective level. Moreover, I argue that these two processes are surrounded by institutional circumstances of the project, in which devaluation of care work and the use of women for public policies that do not generate direct benefit for them aggravate what I think of

as a position of subordination. The following sections attempt to further explore these assumptions.

Care work overload

In this case study, a contrast between roles of care and the absence of law emerged as key to understanding the dynamics that permeate the role of the community agents. My previous analysis demonstrated an association[80] between failures in state institutions and care work positions. The agents' identity was significantly based on roles of care—something that came up in their narratives in their wish to *acolher*, in narratives about religion, motherhood, and in the personal bonds they held with the community—, and their evaluation of the state institutions often entailed the same paradigm of analysis. As the institutions failed to properly deliver public services in the neighborhood, they also failed in their motivation for caring and showing concern for the Mathias Velho community. In facing such absence, the agents seemed to respond by affirming their own roles of care. They would proudly assert their position as caregivers in the community, and sometimes even justify it as an intrinsic female trait.

While caring for the community may seem a plausible motivation for their work, it also entails several risks when analyzed under a feminist perspective. Since the standard through which the agents evaluated their own work was the paradigm of care, a failure in their responses for the claims of the community seemed to imply a failure in caring itself. Under this logic, the accountability for effectively meeting neighbors' claims took place at a very personal level. This holds important consequences for thinking community care for feminist purposes.

In one of the team meetings I observed around mid-June, the agents complained to the technical staff about the lack of school places, whose liberation depended on the Municipal Secretariat for Education. They had been facing the following situation in some household visits: there were little places available for complementary studies for young evaded ones to go back to school and finish their education. The only schools in the neighborhood that held free places were those in the least safe areas of the neighborhood, which entailed difficulties to commute at night. In this context, the agents were highly frustrated by seeing how, in some households, young

[80] What are the exact correlations, however, remains to be answered by future research.

people really wanted to restart school—and their families supported them in doing so—, but violence and structural problems prevented it from happening. The procedure adopted by the Violence Prevention Center was to require the Municipal Secretariat for a school place near the family's house, which entailed both waiting for a response and the risk of having the request denied later. The agents were distressed about the situation, since their concern for the community did not seem to be enough for providing responses. It seems like *acolher* was not enough of a work strategy, and they faced shortcomings which were not under their control.

The technical staff responded to that by stating that, unfortunately, there was little they could do in the Violence Prevention Center besides following the default procedures. The community agents, on hearing that, reacted with even more affliction. They mentioned how whenever they would walk around the neighborhood, they would run into family members who would ask for a response and inquire about reasons for the delay. They would find themselves extremely embarrassed when this happened, as if it was their personal responsibility to get the claim resolved.

As the agents were connected to the issues in the community through their personal ties, they would often feel accountable for resolving highly complex issues as a natural outcome for their concern for improving quality of life in the community. This scenario shows a process under which the agents, based on their ability to care, would make themselves responsible for issues they, in the end, were unable to deal with. This indicates how these female caregivers engaged quite unreflexively in assuming responsibility for wider social processes, which naturally lead to unfair expectations about their work and frustration. This frustration process, I infer, is derived from a lack of awareness on the broader, institutional setting in which they are inserted. As they could not reflect upon it, and felt accountable for failing to care, this scenario enhances a position of female subjugation by constantly regarding their work to a situation of scarcity, as they start to see their own efforts as never enough for producing social change.

In a context in which their role as community agents was regarded as one of care for the community, a failure in providing an effective response would largely be interpreted as a failure to care, as if they held no concern for others and their problems. This created a negative dynamic for their community work, since the agents, for instance, could not control the outcome the public institution would give to the case. Still, this process severely impacted their sense of self-worth.

Since their role was tinged by a personal perspective, the result was one in which, if somehow their work would not meet their neighbor's needs, their personal reputation would be at stake. This authentic wish for working for the community was also associated with peer pressure within the neighborhood.

The agents also used the same paradigm they used to evaluate their own work—a failure to respond accordingly implies a failure in caring for others—to evaluate the functioning of public institutions they worked with. In one of the team meetings I observed, for instance, the agents criticized the Tutelary Council[81] for often being absent from meetings. Their discourse was often critical to this specific institution. In this meeting, Janaína mentioned how she would frequently require workers of this center to respond to her claims and get nothing back from them. Moreover, the agents questioned the lack of attendance from Council workers to the network meetings. As this came up, the technical staff reminded that the Tutelary Council was one of the busiest institutions in the network, and that its workers were likely to be unable to prioritize meetings over their own workload. Janaína then responded: "*algum deles que está em casa não pode simplesmente vir aqui?*"[82]. Her comment implies that her wish to help her community is so important that it would represent a role that often would transcend workhours, since it was essential to her own identity. Interestingly, she attributes the same paradigm of analysis—a somewhat unlimited care capacity, almost embedded in self-sacrifice—to public institutions.

Janaína often mentioned how her role as community agent would follow her in other spheres, including when she would be home, since the duty to provide *acolhimento* and help others would follow her anywhere she went. This is so genuine to her that she also expects workers from other institutions to do the same, including making an effort to come to the network meetings that were held in the center despite their work day being over. This situation shows how relying on the work of women tied to the neighborhood may foster a care ethics in which they believe employees from state institutions should care as much as they do to effectively help the community. It will, however, inevitably lead to frustration.

[81] In Portuguese, *Conselho Tutelar*, the non-jurisdictional institution responsible for monitoring breaches in children and adolescent's rights in Brazil.
[82] Can't any of them who are not busy at the moment just come over?

Lorena expressed the same in the following statement:

> Às vezes eu me sinto de braço e perna amarrada... eu quero fazer tanta coisa e vejo que não tem braço para tanto... porque o descaso [do Estado] é muito grande. Tu tens a ferramenta e sabe como fazer, sabe como usar, mas não tem o respaldo necessário[83].

In fact, as time went by in my observation, I realized how isolated the community agents felt in their care work for Mathias Velho. As they perceived the state institutions to be inefficient, they would get frustrated. This dissatisfaction, however, was often allocated as motivation for them to do more in order to compensate the state's absence. Then, as they start believing they are the only ones who care, their position as caregivers would be reinforced. The fact that they were mostly unsupported and lonely in doing so, however, would bring them closer to a position of submission and overload.

The enlistment of young people by drug dealers seemed to aggravate this frustration. This was a major topic for women in the community. As I mentioned in the previous sections, the agents regretted how they could be "losing their boys" to drug dealers. In this point, their notion of their work as caregivers aligns with a maternal role, and gets critical regarding a feminist analysis.

As the agents portray themselves as caregivers for the community, and especially for young ones, they seem to indicate how much they desire youth enlistment in gangs to be something preventable. Their concern about avoiding it is underpinned by their personal bond to the community, and their wish to improve life in Mathias Velho. In these attempts, they again unreflexively engage in processes in which they are bound to fail, as they miss out on the larger socio-political forces that rule relations between youth recruitment and drug dealing. Moreover, their failure is again understood as an omission in care, which entails a very personal component. Questioning their own self-worth as caregivers, these women's discourses seem to suggest that by improving their capabilities, working harder or outdoing themselves would be an adequate response. This is clear in Lorena's narrative about how she feels like her hands are tied. She depicts such failed experiences as if they were due to personal limitations.

[83] Sometimes I feel like my hands and legs are tied … I want to do so much and I am just not able… Because neglect [state-wise] is huge. You have the tools and you know how to do it, you know how to use them, but you don't have enough support.

As a result, they naturally become overloaded female caregivers. Their affective, sensitive view of the community produces a sense of responsibility for it that, in association with care work, tends to reinforce a context of precariousness that keeps these women in a disadvantageous position. Under a feminist perspective, subordinating women to an unrealistic expectation of their work tends to maintain them in an ongoing situation of scarcity, as their sense of self-worth as caregivers is constantly at risk. In the Violence Prevention Center, the lack of awareness of larger, socio-political processes proved a key factor in maintaining these women at the margins because it lead the community agents to think that problems could be solved if they somehow managed to outperform themselves in their care work.

In sum, this context relegates the work of these women to a situation of precariousness and scarcity, to which they respond by reinforcing their role as caregivers. Care *per se*, however, is not an efficient tool to approach these larger processes. By getting attached to their position as caregivers, these women miss out on the opportunity to consider long-term, more concrete strategies they could make use of, and especially new ways of relating to the absence of state institutions and law. They miss, for instance, benefits they could have adopted a more balanced use of an ethics of justice and rights.

The overall frustration this process entailed generated two types of reaction. First, the agents seemed to resort even more proudly to their care work, as if by doing a better job they could somehow 'fix' it. Second, it created an opportunity for conservative discourses to emerge, which I present in the next section.

Conservative discourses

In their attempt to perform community justice as community care, the agents at the Violence Prevention Center faced several difficulties. This standard for work evaluation often led to frustration, as they measured the success of their activities in accordance to an ability to care (Gilligan, 1993). In this context, failing in resolving problems meant a flaw in showing concern and providing *acolhimento*. In an attempt to interrupt these processes as women responsible for the community, they suggest that being harsher, more disciplined, or more hard-working would

somehow respond to larger, sociopolitical processes happening in the neighborhood. These discourses would often, however, resemble sexist narratives, and flirt with conservative traits.

Frustration about inequality, poverty in the community, and what the agents consider to be the dominance of drug traffic often led them to engage in social control discourses. In their attempt to solve the situation in their own efforts, they attempt to care for young people in strategies close to those employed in motherhood. As Lorena would say:

> Eu odeio essa gente [os traficantes]... As meninas de 12, 13 anos, grávidas. Elas se encantam com o poder. Na minha idade, a gente ia namorar e o pai perguntava se estava com a carteira assinada, e o que pretendia com a moça. Hoje em dia tu vê as meninas na esquina, o que elas querem? Esses dias mesmo eu vi uma menina com a minissaia menor que a pistola. Fazendo ostentação. Posando para bater foto numa moto. Todas as outras garotas já dizem: "não se mete com a Bruna porque a Bruna é namorada do Vitor e o Vitor é o chefe [do tráfico] do pedaço". Eles [os traficantes] comprometem nossos jovens com aquilo que a gente não tem, e o Estado e o governo fazem como se isso não acontecesse dentro do nosso bairro... porque se tivesse um lugar para esse adolescente estudar, um turno integral, eles não estariam com os aliciadores. Eles [os traficantes] são o exército do tráfico, toda hora fazendo alistamento. E para o adolescente é pior porque fica impune, né, o máximo que vai pegar é uma medida socioeducativa. Não vai preso. Se for preso não fica nem 24 horas, não vai para dentro de um centro de reabilitação, de ressocialização. ... Para as meninas, o que vale [em relação aos traficantes], é o sexo, que é uma afirmativa muito mesmo na cara, né.[84]

Lorena's analysis stands as a good example for analyzing how the idea of caring for the community might sometimes entail a repressive, conservative component. Her discourse is marked by frustration and despair, as she says she hates drug dealers for the distress they cause in the lives of young ones in the community. She talks about how, in her view, drug dealing for young boys in the community is directly related to power and social status. Therefore, boys would engage in such activities seduced by what she considers to be an "army", indicating how organized gangs are in Mathias Velho. For boys, the problem is, according to her, that they do

[84] I hate these people [drug dealers]. ... Girls of 12, 13 years of age, pregnant. They get fascinated by power. When I was young, you started dating someone and your father would ask if this boy had a job, and what his intentions were. These days you see young girls standing on street corners, what do they want? The other day I saw a girl wearing a miniskirt that was shorter than the barrel of the gun [she had in it]. All boastful. Posing for a picture on a motorcycle. All the other girls saying: "don't mess with Bruna, because she's Vitor's girlfriend, and Vitor owns the area [as a dealer]". They [dealers] enlist our youth by promising that which we can't offer, and the state and the government pretend this is not happening in our neighborhood… Because if these youth had a place to study, full-time schooling, they would not be hanging around with enlisters. They [dealers] are an army of traffic, they are enlisting kids all the time. And it's more critical for adolescents because they don't get punished, you know, at most they will be subjected to a socio-educative measure. They won't go to jail. And if they ever do go to jail, they won't be kept in there for more than 24 hours, they won't be put in a rehabilitation, resocialization center. Girls, what's in it for them [in relation to drug dealers] is sex. They affirm it in everyone's faces.

not get punished severely enough. Lorena considers a socio-educative measure not to be harsh enough for young boys involved in drug traffic, as they would not spend much time in custody after committing an infraction. She then argues for a stronger punitive discourse in order to prevent boys from getting involved in drug traffic.

In relation to young women, it adopts a specific sexist component since it suggests that some broader processes can be avoided through the control of the sexuality of young girls. According to her, girls get involved in illicit activities differently. For them, the symbolic power would be the use of sex to assert their privileged position as a drug dealer's partner. Guns and possessions will then be used as a way to flaunt their condition to other girls, and to state a position of leadership through their sexuality. According to Lorena, they then become fascinated by power. In order to refrain that, she presents a nostalgic narrative about how in the old days a girl's sexuality was controlled by their father.

Other agents would also imply the need for more social control in their conversations:

> **Janaína:** eu acho engraçado, assim, toda vida teve tráfico de drogas dentro da Mathias. O que acontece hoje é que os pais e as mães parecem que largaram de mão... Eu como mulher morando na Mathias acho que depende da criação.
> **Jessica:** eu tenho uma filha de 26 anos, que eu criei de uma maneira, e tenho uma de 12, que estou tendo que me adaptar porque o mundo é outro. [...] Essa nova moda de agora... Eu me lembro até hoje que quando ela [a filha] tinha de 11 pra 12 anos começou essa moda do ficar. Daí eu cheguei para ela e conversei assim: Gabriela, essa história de ficar, sabe o que que resume? Tu vai ficar mal falada, tu nunca vai arrumar um namorado, porque tu vai beijar um hoje, beijar outro amanhã... Chamei o pai dela e botei ela a trabalhar. Se eu botar a Pietra [filha mais nova] para trabalhar hoje, eu vou presa. [85]

Through the agents' discourse, we can see how sometimes care—caring more strongly, harshly—can entail a conservative component. In this sense, their caring discourses convey the possibility of the social control of others—either punitively for boys, or corporally and sexually

[85] **Janaína:** I think it's funny how... We have had drug trafficking in Mathias [Velho] since always. What happens now is that fathers and mothers don't seem to care... As a woman living here in Mathias [Velho], I think it all depends on how you are being raised.
Jessica: I have a 26-year-old daughter, who I raised in a way, and another one at the age of 12, who I raised completely differently, since I needed to adjust because the world now is completely different. These new trends... I remember as if it were today when she [the oldest] was around 11, 12 years old and this dating thing came up. Then I approached her and said: Gabriela, this dating thing, do you know what it means? People are going to talk behind your back, you will never get yourself a proper boyfriend, because today you will kiss someone, and someone else tomorrow... I then I called her dad and we put her to work. If I put Pietra [the youngest] to work today, I'd get arrested.

for girls. This conservative trait seems to indicate that care represents an appropriate tool for dealing with the dangers of the neighborhood.

Their narratives, as they lack awareness of larger socio-political processes, make use of an overpersonalized logic. In this sense, they explain these dynamics on their own caring terms: enlistment of young people by drug gangs is due to negligence of the parents, who are lax with discipline and attention; likewise, the reason why girls would get involved with drug dealers is also due to lack of care and concern. Jessica, for instance, suggests that her role as a caring mother was to regulate her daughter's sexuality so that she would not be slut-shamed in the neighborhood. There is a strong assumption that discipline derives from their positions as caregivers as a way to protect their children.

In adopting this discourse, they enter a strong contradiction between what is expected from them as community agents by the institutions they work with and their own personal views. Jessica complains about how nowadays she cannot get a job for her younger daughter (as she did for the older one), because Brazilian legislation forbids child exploitation. Moreover, they comment how the Tutelary Council and the Child and Adolescent Protection Act are negative because it overprotects young people and enables parents from using harsh discipline.

> **Janaína:** tu viu que tu ouviu duas geração. ... A minha filha, com 12, 13 anos, se eu desconfiava que na escola ela ia sair outro horário ou ia me aprontar, eu estava lá na porta da escola esperando ela, e eu podia trazer ela para casa pela orelha que não tinha nenhum Conselho Tutelar que ia me impedir. Hoje eu já não sei. ... E agora a tendência é piorar, porque agora tem isso [o Conselho Tutelar], que não pode mais fazer isso [chamar atenção dos filhos] na rua... Tu tinha mais pulso. Faltou, por que que faltou? Por que que faltou esse pulso das mães?
> **Jessica:** é que assim, agora passa muito na televisão, o ECA [Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente][86]. O ECA protege... As mães hoje em dia querem proteger, só que na proteção elas tão dando a asa para eles irem para o outro lado [pro tráfico]. [87]

[86] ECA stands as *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, the legal framework for child abuse protection in Brazil.
[87] **Janaína:** you see, you listened to two different generations. … My daughter, when she was around 12, 13 years old, if I suspected she would leave school at a different time or was up to something, I would be waiting for her at the school gate, I would bring her home by her ear, and no Tutelary Council would prevent me from doing it. Today I am not so sure [if I could do that]… And now the tendency is for things to get worse, because it [Tutelary Council] doesn't allow parents to do this [to scold children] anymore… Back then you had a stronger discipline. It is missing now, why is that? Why do these mothers lack a firm hand?
Jessica: now it's always on the television, the ECA [Child and Adolescent Protection Act]. That ECA protects… Mothers nowadays want to protect their children, but in protecting them they give space for them to go to the other side [drug traffic].

Those legal devices for the protection of young people are depicted by the agents as negative, as if it would impinge mothers from using a firm hand when it comes to raising their children. Consequently, parents would lack the necessary strictness for keeping children away from drug dealers. This portrays an interest contradiction: the Tutelary Council, responsible for acting on the breaches of rights on youth population, is the very same institution whose absence the community agents would resent in network meetings. It seems like, although the Council was an ally in their work activities, it was seen as a burden in their private lives.

Another important contrast stands in shaming other women for failing in their care roles. Mothers whose children got involved with illicit activities, therefore, receive both empathy and judgment from the community agents. Although the agents resent losing young boys to traffic, they also promptly point out how these women have failed as caregivers. Once again, they show little awareness of larger socio-political processes going on, and tend to hold other women responsible for problems which they have limited power to act upon.

This suggestion of care as a component of conservative discourses entails a challenge for a feminist theory of care. In this specific empirical setting, it seems like women have instead used care as a strategy for maintaining control over other women, either by controlling girls' sexuality or calling out mothers on their flaws.

By exposing these phenomena, by no means I intend to suggest that care is a category of analysis inherently conservative. Neither do I mean that care is the *only* element in their discourses that would motivate the adoption of sexist discourses. The process I aim to expose is that, in the Violence Prevention Center—which is inserted in a community that *per se* is structured upon patriarchy—, narratives of care also seem to adjust to reproducing these very same sexist fabrics. In such case, care can be used in narratives of empowerment on an individual level—on fostering the identification of intra-partner and domestic violence, for instance—, but can also be used for the maintenance of patriarchal structures on a larger scale. This is the case of contradictions such as helping out women in situation of conjugal violence, but also shaming them for situations they seemed to have come up short in their caring potential.

Moreover, I consider it likely that, if these women did not adopt a care ethics, other categories could have served these patriarchal purposes—such as discourses on rights and justice.

My point is that, considering a feminist care ethics, one must be attentive to the empirical situations in which the emancipatory potential of care is used otherwise. In the end, this is likely to impinge the formation of more consistent, collective processes for female liberation, such as sisterhood.

Thinking strategies towards "care as liberation"

This section aims to expose two main processes I identified in the field under the perspective of a feminist care theory. Regarding the first, I suggest how the community agents' role lacks consonance with feminist goals as these women engage in overpersonalized accountability for phenomena that are not under their competence. Concerning the second, I suggest that care is used by them as a category to legitimate conservative discourses, both on punitive and on sexist components.

The dynamics I describe relate to the work of Puka (1990). The author considers that care, as described by Gilligan (1993), does not necessarily represent a different morality, but rather a service and sexist orientation women adopt as a way to cope with sexism. In fact, Puka (1990, p. 63) criticizes the narratives quoted by Gilligan (1993) in her analysis by suggesting that they lack a consistent process of consciousness-raising. In missing out on the processes of sexist socialization, then, Gilligan (1993) would have wrongly portrayed such narratives in ways to "personalize and legitimize responsibility for this orientation as a desirable form of 'taking control''.

I perceive a similar process at the Violence Prevention Center. When the community agents proudly assert their role as caregivers, the perspective proposed by Puka (1990) suggests that this may be a strategy for coping with a sexist structure that, in fact, limits their potential. Therefore, discourses that depict women as inherently caring, such as those adopted by Lorena at the Mother's Day event, would not show proper empowerment. They demonstrate, instead, that these women are struggling for recognition in the underestimated functions they are entitled to perform. They assert their caring abilities as a way to attach to the undervalued activities that were relegated to them in a context of exclusion. As Puka (1990) says, using care as a way of

coping with oppression is certainly better for women than not to resist at all. However, this process should not be misinterpreted as liberation.

Puka (1990, p. 73) also highlights the risk of defining care while lacking awareness of socialization processes in which women are impelled towards a "service orientation", or a "service ideology". According to him, traditional sexist socialization should be critically assessed. When we miss this, however, we entail the risk of legitimizing care service "by generalizing its apparent virtues ideologically", without truly insightful reflection (Puka, 1990, p. 74).

Again, when the agents proudly insist on their role as caregivers for the community, there seems to lack a consciousness-raising processes concerning their socialization. As this is not taken into account, the model of community work proposed to them also goes uncriticized. The lack of awareness about broader, socio-political processes, as I commented on the previous sections, also occasions the reproduction of sexist and repressive discourses, because notions of care seem to intertwine with beliefs about social control. This scenario leads women to engage in competition and shaming of other women who they consider to have failed in embracing the same caregiver model. This is a process Puka (1990, p. 63) depicted as "lack of political sense or institutional focus out of which a sense of solidarity with other women and a need for cooperative social action might derive".

Likewise, Houston (1990) expresses her concern in using care as criteria for moral worth. According to her (1990, p. 117), if a woman in a caregiving position is to assess her self-worth "as wholly dependent upon her capacity to care for others, or contingent upon being in relation, then she may opt to remain in relationships which are harmful to her". According to the author, this is a dynamics that can lead to a lost in paradigm for analyzing relationships that can entail an exploitative component.

Houston (1990) also highlights the dangers of excessively stressing the value of care. In her account, it can lead to ignore the fact that social conventions which regulate gender expectations are hardly modified by the use of this category. Instead, it is likely, as I observed in the Violence Prevention Center, that care discourse is adjusted to fit the patriarchal structures.

> Conventions now prescribe a manifestly gendered distribution of the benefits and burdens of caring, and it is recognizably tied to the sexual division of labour which holds women responsible for nurturance and caretaking. … The current conventions governing gender relations not only resist significant change, they can resist it in the ethics own terms – in the name of caring. I fail to see how Nodding's ethics offers any hope for a radical transformation of these gendered conventions. (Houston, 1990, p. 118)

One could argue that this exploitative component in caregiving relationships could maybe be reversed as the caregiver directs care to oneself. In the Violence Prevention Center, I did not identify consistent practices in this sense. The self-care strategies the community agents would undertake were mostly related to enhancing their self-esteem through body image. Moreover, the agents received no psychological support then, did not have programs for continued education, and their complaints about safety issues were usually unattended to. Consequently, they lacked long-term, consistent approaches to care for themselves. As Houston (1990, p. 119) explains, "caring is not an ethics that can stand alone", and expecting caregivers to be self-reliant—or paying little attention to meeting their needs—is likely to bring about risks of exploitation.

While I aim to expose the points in which a care ethics, in the specific case of the Violence Prevention Center, does not align with feminist theory, I stress that this does not mean I dismiss care as a category. In fact, the community agents also attempted strategies for claiming for better work strategies, and often negotiated their care work with empowerment processes, as I mentioned in the previous chapter. I do not aim to depict them as not having agency nor responsibility in engaging in these processes. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the contradictions in their discourses.

In that sense, the processes through which the community agents engage in care work shows that feminist goals are not always in sight. It is undeniable that being trained in legal education and gender issues has made them more aware of structural oppression. However, these empowerment processes are still limited, and do not reach a collective level. The circumstances under which they find themselves—overloaded caregivers with little support from the institution—flirts with domination for its scarcity. This dynamics becomes critical as the problems in unfulfilling their roles are regarded as individual failures (Wuest, 1993). Not only does this happen individually, but also collectively, as they judge other women—particularly mothers—for incompetence in their caring positions. As a result, the way care is adopted as a

moral standard for evaluating womanhood impinges the formation of sisterhood and connection between women in Mathias Velho.

This does not imply that care should be disregarded as a pattern for the work of the community agents. In fact, it is unlikely to be detached from their identities for a number of reasons that still need to be investigated. But the institutional setting at the Violence Prevention Center—and public policies in general—should be aware that sometimes care discourses echo structural sexism. Moreover, it should account for the need of widening empowerment processes from individual to collective levels, aiming at more consistent practices for fighting gender inequality.

Again, these risks do not mean that the potential of care work should be overlooked. As Puka (1990, p. 73) highlights, "the 'care as liberation hypothesis' does not claim that care only involves coping with sexism". I do not mean to engage in an essentialist comment, or to ignore that even in the context of their community work these women have faced empowerment. However, considering care on its potential for liberation entails critically analyzing care in the empirical context of this community justice program.

The institutional framework, in this case, may contribute to increasing the risks of female subjugation. This is not a stable dynamics, as in such situations there is usually a plurality of discourses and actors. As Sorj (2016, p. 125) notes in her analysis of the Women for Peace program in Rio de Janeiro, "it is precisely the normative ambivalence of contemporary social policies that simultaneously trigger stereotypes about motherhood and female practical knowledge, as well as ideas regarding women's collective participation". This normative ambivalence is also present in the Violence Prevention Center in Canoas, as the program has recently gone through several modifications.

Sorj (2016) explains how the project was initially proposed in Rio de Janeiro as a collective effort of mothers and women who would work on preventing youth from getting involved in the drug traffic. After being pressured by feminist groups, however, the project included goals more oriented to women's benefits, too. This is not the case of the current iteration of the Violence Prevention Center. The community agents currently work for projects which are designed to monitor and protect young people—Caring for Pathways and Every Young One

Matters. The fact that the work structure at the VPC makes use of the care work of women for a policy that does not generate direct benefits for themselves once again risks reinforcing traditional gender norms: women providing care for youth.

In addition, Sorj (2016) also recognizes that the program in Rio de Janeiro enhanced a "social mothering" dynamic in which patriarchal gender norms were upheld. The author (2016, p. 119) highlights that the approach would also "naturalize and inflate the moral authority of women and mothers over the population involved in drug trafficking". This is again a process relatable to those I identified in Mathias Velho, as the community agents used care as a moral standard for assessing the capacities of other women in the community.

Finally, an evaluation of the Violence Prevention Center should highlight the lack of work strategies that promote consciousness-raising and insightful reflection for the community agents to decide upon their role. As Hoagland (1984, p. 113) notes:

> If an ethics of caring is going to be morally successful in replacing an ethics located in principles and duty, then it must provide for the possibility of ethical behavior in relation to what is foreign, it must consider analyses of oppression, it must acknowledge a self that is both related and separate, and it must have a vision of, if not a program for, change. In my opinion, care stripped of these elements isn't a caring that benefits us.

Considering a care ethics that work in service of female liberation entails thinking the status of care at the community justice program. In order to so, the VPC should consider different work strategies for the community agents, ones which encompass a broader institutional focus, and a more realistic coordination with the socio-political processes at stake. It should also pay more attention to the claims of these women when they state their personal safety is at risk, and provide them with support. Investing in continued education, especially in the legal field, may also contribute to a more balanced relation between an ethics of care and an ethics of justice in the organization of the center. These conditions, if implemented, may contribute for the continuity of the community justice program in accordance to feminist care.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this piece of research, I summarized the role formation of the community agents in the Violence Prevention Center as *care work for the community in the absence of law*. I realized their legal education seemed to rarely come up as they were performing their roles as community agents, as they deemed their main function to be providing *acolhimento* and listening. At the same time, this dynamic entailed a fluid and ambivalent relationship to law. Overall, it can be outlined as such: care work techniques are used to face what they regard as an absent state, despite also attributing high importance to legal knowledge. Likewise, regardless of their resistance in employing legal strategies in their activities, they do not fully dismiss law's symbolic relevance.

My analysis also entailed thinking the outcomes of this dynamics under a feminist perspective. In that sense, I proposed the following questions: what are the risks and challenges in building community justice on a model that entails care work as a primary category while dealing with the failure to use legal strategies? How do the agents navigate this dynamic in terms of a feminist critique?

My examination in responding to such research questions entailed two lines. Firstly, I consider the care work performed by the community agents to be most often inconsistent with feminist goals. I make use of two processes to evidence such assumption. One, these women stand as overloaded caregivers, as they are made believe their care work for the community can solve highly complex social processes if they outdo themselves. In doing so, they unreflexively hope to tackle broader socio-political dynamics–such as preventing youth recruitment by drug dealers in the neighborhood–that are unlikely to be solved by the use of care. This, overall, generates an unjust burden of expectations that largely leads to frustration. Two, the agents assert their work value on being competent caregivers, and use care as a paradigm to judge other women who would fail in their caring roles. This ultimately impinges the formation of sisterhood as they engage in conservative discourses in which mothers are shamed and girls' sexuality is controlled.

In fact, the inconsistency with feminist goals should also be considered under the institutional setting of the Violence Prevention Center. I reckon the project setting to endorse the

undervaluation of care work and to make use of women for public policies that do not generate direct benefit for them. This, overall, exacerbates what I consider to be a position of subordination.

In this sense, my conclusions relate to those asserted by Sorj (2016), whose analysis of the Women for Peace program in Rio de Janeiro indicated that structures reinforced by public policies can also contribute to sexism in community care, even though they may also be based on discourses of female empowerment. In the case of the Violence Prevention Center, this is visible when considering that the primary focus of the program is to respond to violence and increase in homicide rates. In order to do so, it focuses on preventing juvenile delinquency by acting on school evasion. The fact that the community agents are women trained to engage on this program, but do not stand as the main beneficiaries of it, shows the need to keep on questioning the use of female work in public policies.

This scenario also lacks long-term strategies for directing care for the community agents themselves. Although in some moments the agents proposed strategies for self-care, they were mostly based on enhancing self-esteem through beauty care. At the same time, the agents resented how their psychological support was progressively reduced as the project developed from Women for Peace and Community Justice Center to House for Citizenship, and finally to the Violence Prevention Center nowadays. In sum, the agents had little therapeutic spaces in which they could look after themselves and process the emotional burden they were submitted to, although they were expected to provide listening and care for community members. This dynamic, associated to a lack of conscious-raising strategies for broader socio-political process, shows a large lack of support to the work of these women. It entails, over all, a considerable risk of submitting the community agents to exploitative scenarios as they disregard long-term, more consistent planning.

In connecting my research conclusions to the ethics of care debate, I suggest that the scenario at the Violence Prevention Center in the Mathias Velho neighborhood relegates the work of these women to a situation of scarcity. In assuming this, I do not mean to say care is by itself an inadequate tool for community justice. However, I stress the problematic scenario in which these women are not being encouraged to assess their work by considering broader socio-political scenarios, and new ways of responding to an absent state. While I suggest that they would

probably face the same issues if they adopted an ethics of justice, I do argue that they miss some benefits they could have had by adopting a more balanced use of an ethics of justice in tandem with their ethics of care.

Likewise, when I draw a critique on the use of care at the Violence Prevention Center, I do not aim to dismiss care as a feminist category. Nor do I ignore the possible benefits that are brought by it. However, I aim to highlight how these women often assess their own work and the functions of state institutions based on care. In doing so, they tend to assert their moral value based on caring for others and, at the same time, reject such institutions considering their functioning to be one of indifference and disregard. This approach may turn out to be unfruitful for their work and, after years, is unlikely to ensure its sustainability. Odds are, if they keep evaluating public organizations under a category of care, they will lack the necessary flexibility to deal with it. This does not mean losing a critical eye on the state functioning, but adjusting to more realistic terms. If the agents would not reject state institutions as fully flawed, and considered different paradigms rather than care for assessing it, their work could benefit from partnerships and a greater use of legal strategies.

The main conclusions this research aims to offer to the debate on community justice and ethics of care concerns the importance of empirical studies in evaluating categories we often take for granted on a theoretical level. For instance, if one would argue that care contains an inherent ideological value for its importance in feminist theory, one would miss out empirical settings where care can be seen among ambivalent processes, like the one in the Violence Prevention Center. Socio-legal research strongly benefits from a critical eye on the practical use of theory, especially in topics such as gender studies.

Likewise, making use of a sharp, critical eye also makes easier to nominate contradictions in the discourses. In this research, often the very community agents depicted their practices as empowering. As a researcher, I would question such narratives by considering them within the broader picture of my observation. By doing so, I do not mean to dismiss the importance of empowerment processes that did in fact occur in the lives of these women, such as those promoted by the enhancement of their education. However, my exploration also entailed exposing its limitations. This includes recognizing that firstly, whereas individual empowerment has been fostered, there are still many difficulties in levelling up to collective empowerment and

promoting sisterhood. Secondly, the lack of consciousness about broader socio-political processes may even indicate deficiencies in the empowerment they claim to have, as they end up hoping to stand out as a way to battle care undervaluing.

Most importantly, critically analyzing narratives of empowerment can help identifying and nominating underlying hierarchies. In the Violence Prevention Center, this emerged as an important component in portraying the agents' relation to those who held a higher educational degree than themselves, such as myself and the technical staff. Whereas they would describe themselves as empowered and would affirm being trained in legal education, they find themselves disempowered in the implementation of what they were taught. To overcome that, they would often rely on the lawyers for performing tasks they could do themselves. It is important for these gaps to be detected, so that work strategies can be reconsidered, and more consistent empowerment processes enhanced.

Finally, as with any research, some points were left unanswered in this ethnographic intent. One situation that could be further explored by future research entails the relationships between care work and religious practices. As I mentioned in chapter three, the discourses the community agents employ are often relatable to activities developed by those who are religious references in the neighborhood. Moreover, in some of the meetings and events I observed, other women from the community acknowledged the importance of religious services, such as the Pastoral Care for Women, in assisting victims of intra-partner and domestic violence. In the way that was depicted by the participants, these religious services seem to perform an important role in providing listening, concern, and emotional comfort to victims. However, the limitations of this assistance, mostly due to its religious character, should be further questioned under a feminist perspective. One could inquire, for instance: what sort of effects are being promoted in women supported by these religious branches? Does the emotional soothing entail a qualified, structural support for helping these women leave situations of violence? Or does it entail a perspective of endurance, fostering women to maintain abusive relationships under the belief they could somehow transform them?

As I mentioned, my main conclusion on this piece of research is that the agents assert their roles as *caregivers for the community in the absence of law*. Whereas my field work does not allow conclusions on what processes are reinforced by which dynamics, I overall suggest that

the absence of law is fulfilled by care work. In analyzing the possible roots of this scenario, however, questions that could also be responded by future research emerge. For instance, what motivates the agents in attaching to roles of care so strongly? Is it due to an influence of the institutional framework at the Violence Prevention Center? It is fostered by shortfalls in their legal training, or could it be somehow reversed by adopting a work strategy more based on an ethic of justice? Likewise, is there a possibility they actively reject the use of legal strategies, somehow being benefitted from the primary use of care in their activities?

Finally, for further developing this research, I suggest that it should be better adapted to the Brazilian and Latin American context. This would entail adopting a more intersectional perspective on care, and better committing to a decolonized analysis. As this stands as one of the limitation on my thesis, which was mainly developed considering literature produced in European and US countries, my position as a Brazilian researcher urges me to keep on researching on the representations of care for Latin and Black women.

This research aimed to understand how women community agents shaped their role in the context of the Violence Prevention Center at the Mathias Velho neighborhood. The contribution I hope to have made is one of proposing reflections on "care as liberation" for the goals of promoting community justice programs. In this case, I conclude by highlighting the importance of considering work consistent, long-term strategies for female community work. Those strategies should also entail a broader institutional focus, and encompass a more realistic coordination with the socio-political processes at stake. It should also pay more attention to the claims of these women when they state their personal safety is at risk, and provide them with the due support. Investing in continued education, then, comes out as a key element in promoting a sustainable scenario for the work of female community agents to be aligned with feminist purposes.

References

Acosta, S. P. F. (2017). Trajetórias Cruzadas: Jovens e Políticas de Segurança Pública no Guajuviras/Canoas. *Revista LEVS/UNESP-Marília*, *20*, 57–83. Retrieved from http://www2.marilia.unesp.br/revistas/index.php/levs/article/view/7516.

Angrosino, M. V., & Pérez, K. A. M. (2003). Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context. In Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: towards a new modernity.* London: SAGE Publications.

Behar, R. (1993). Introduction: Women writing culture: Another telling of the story of American anthropology. *Critique of Anthropology*, *13*(4), 307–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X9301300401.

Bourke, L., Butcher, S., Chisonga, N., & Clarke, J. (2009). Fieldwork Stories: Negotiating Positionality, Power and Purpose. *Feminist Africa*, (13), 95–105. Retrieved from http://agi.ac.za/sites/agi.ac.za/files/fa13_entire_journal.pdf#page=101.

Bryman, A. (1990). *Social Research Methods* (2nd Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Campbell-Brown, L. (1997). The Ethics of Care. *UCL Jurisprudence Review*, 1997, 272-286.

Canoas City Hall. (2012). *Canoas em dados* (2nd Ed.). Retrieved from https://www.canoas.rs.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Canoas_em_Dados2012.pdf.

Canoas City Hall & LaSalle Foundation (Org.). (2016). *Canoas pela paz: política municipal de segurança pública 2009-2016.* Canoas: Algo Mais.

Charmaz, K. (1996). The search for Meanings – Grounded Theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré & L. Van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking Methods in Psychology* (pp. 27-49). London: Sage Publications. Retrieved from http://www.sxf.uevora.pt/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Charmaz_1996.pdf.

Cloyes, K. G. (2002). Agonizing care: care ethics, agonistic feminism and a political theory of care. *Nursing Inquiry*, 9(3), 203-214. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1800.2002.00147.x.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Day, K. (2000). The Ethic of Care and Women's Experiences of Public Space. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 20(2), 103–124. https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.1999.0152.

D'Ávila, M. N. *Mulheres da Paz: histórias de vida, interseccionalidades e processos de subjetivação* (Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brasil). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10183/157434.

Da Rosa, C. N. (2012). *Círculos Discursivos, Juventudes e Dispositivos de Segurança Pública: paisagens do Guajuviras, Território de Paz* (Master's thesis, Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, São Leopoldo, Brasil). Retrieved from http://www.repositorio.jesuita.org.br/handle/UNISINOS/3435.

Damico, J. G. S. (2011). *Juventudes Governadas: dispositivos de segurança e participação no Guajuviras (Canoas-RS) e em Grigny Centre (França)* (Master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brasil). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10183/29317.

Dos Santos, S., & Silveira, A. (2015). Os desafios de um projeto de prevenção à violência e à criminalidade: O Mulheres da Paz em Santa Luzia/MG. *Estudos Feministas*, 23(1), 99-118. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/estufemi.23.1.99.

Duffy, M. (2005). Reproducing labor inequalities: Challenges for feminists conceptualizing care at the intersections of gender, race, and class. *Gender and Society*, *19*(1), 66–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204269499.

Gamalho, N. P., & Heidrich, Á. L. (2012). "A gente é da vila, mas não é bandido!" O lugar e a juventude nas representações sociais dos jovens do bairro Guajuviras- Canoas/RS. *Para Onde?, Porto Alegre*, 6(1), 57–63. Retrieved from http://www.bibliotecadigital.ufrgs.br/da.php?nrb=000945562&loc=2015&l=c645404498db46fb%0Ahttp://seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/paraonde/article/view/35647/23224.

GeoCcanoas, Canoas City Hall. (n. d.). *Canoas' neighborhoods* [Map showing the division of the city within microregions]. Retrieved from https://geo.canoas.rs.gov.br.

Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Gomes, C., & Sorj, B. (2011). O Gênero da "Nova Cidadania": O Programa Mulheres da Paz. *Sociologia&Antropologia*, 02(02), 147–164. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.br/pdf/sant/v1n2/2238-3875-sant-01-02-0147.pdf.

Hankivsky, O. (2014). Rethinking Care Ethics: On the Promise and Potential of an Intersectional Analysis. *American Political Science Review*, 108(2), 252-264. 10.1017/S0003055414000094.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575-599. doi:10.2307/3178066.

Hoagland, S. L. (1984). Some Concerns About Nel Noddings' Caring. *Hypatia*, *5*(1), 109–114. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1990.tb00394.x.

Houston, B. (1990). Caring and Exploitation. *Hypatia*, *5*(1), 115–119. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1990.tb00395.x.

Instituto Brasileiro de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). (2017). *Panorama da Educação: destaques do Education at a Glance 2017*. Retrieved from http://download.inep.gov.br/acoes_internacionais/eag/documentos/2017/panorama_da_educacao_destaques_do_education_at_a_glance_2017.pdf.

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2018). *Canoas estimated population* [Interactive map showing demographic information about Canoas]. Retrieved from https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/rs/canoas/panorama.

Klein, C., & Meyer, D. E. (2015). Mulheres-visitadoras, mulheres-voluntárias, mulheres da comunidade: o conhecimento como estratégia de diferenciação de sujeitos de gênero. *Cadernos Pagu*, (45), 427–455. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1590/18094449201500450427.

Kohlberg, L. (1958). *The Development of Modes of Thinking and Choices in Years 10 to 16.* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, Illinois, United States).

Kroeger-Mappes, J. (1994). The Ethic of Care vis-â-vis the Ethic of Rights: A Problem for Contemporary Moral Theory. *Hypatia*, *9*(3), 108–131. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00452.x.

LaSalle Foundation. (2014). *Annual Report.* Retrieved from http://fundacaolasalle.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Relat%C3%B3rio-Anual-2014-Funda%C3%A7%C3%A3o-La-Salle.pdf.

LaSalle Foundation. (2015). *Annual Report.* Retrieved from http://fundacaolasalle.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Relatorio_Fundacao_11042016.pdf.

LaSalle Foundation. (2016). *Annual Report.* Retrieved from https://www.yumpu.com/pt/document/read/58175648/fundacao-la-salle-2016.

LaSalle Foundation. (2017). *Annual Report.* Retrieved from https://issuu.com/algomais6/docs/32770_livro_realiza__es_2017_issuu.

Machado, B. O. S. da R., & Silva, T. de L. (2014). Mulheres da Paz: um estudo de caso sobre as noções de empoderamento no contexto do investimento social. *Revista Habitus*, 12(1), 7–19. Retrieved from https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/habitus/article/download/11422/8372.

Menkel-Meadow, C. (1994). Portia redux: Another look at gender, feminism, and legal ethics. *Virginia Journal of Social Policy the Law*, 2(1), 75-114.

Menkel-Meadow, C. (1996). What's gender got to do with it: The politics and morality of an ethic of care. *New York University Review of Law Social Change*, 22(1), 265-294.

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Número de pós-graduandos cresce no Brasil [*Number of post-graduate students grows in Brazil*]. Retrieved from http://portal.mec.gov.br/conselho-nacional-de-educacao/180-estudantes-108009469/pos-graduacao-500454045/2583-sp-2021081601.

Nencel, L. (2014). Situating reflexivity: voices, positionalities and representations in feminist ethnographic texts. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 43, 75-83. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.07.018.

Noddings, N. (1990). Feminist Fears in Ethics. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *21*(2–3), 25–33. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1990.tb00273.x

Pazinato, E. (2010). Do Direito à Segurança à Segurança dos Direitos: uma Abordagem Preliminar sobre Mediação de Conflitos e Acesso à Justiça na Cidade de Canoas/RS. *Revista Da Faculdade de Direito UniRitter*, 11, 157–175. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325260922_Do_Direito_a_Seguranca_a_Seguranca_dos_Direitos_uma_Abordagem_Preliminar_sobre_Mediacao_de_Conflitos_e_Acesso_a_Justica_na_Cidade_de_CanoasRS.

Pires, C. L. Z., Simão, A. R. F., & Pozzer, K. M. P. (2013). Representações Espaciais, Juventude E Periferia: Guajuviras/Canoas/Rs E Seus Desafios Urbanos. *Revista FSA*, *10*(1), 118–138. https://doi.org/10.12819/2013.10.1.7.

Puka, B. (1990). The Liberation of Caring: A Different Voice for Gilligan's „Different Voice". *Hypatia*, 55(1), 58-82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1990.tb00390.x.

Rist, R. C. (1980). Blitzkrieg Ethnography: On the Transformation of a Method into a Movement. *Educational Researcher*, *9*(2), 8–10. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x009002008.

Raupp, L. M. (2016). Juventude, Memória e Violência: pesquisa-ação no Bairro Guajuviras - Canoas/RS. *Mouseion*, (25), 91-112. https://doi.org/10.18316/1981-7207.16.40.

Santos, M. C. S. (2013). *Segurança Pública para Que(m)? Uma análise da implementação do PRONASCI em duas cidades gaúchas* (Master's thesis, Pontíficia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brasil). Retrieved from http://repositorio.pucrs.br/dspace/handle/10923/1752.

Santos, M. C. S., & Azevedo, R. G. De. (2013). Políticas de Segurança Pública e Juventude: o caso do Rio Grande do Sul. *O Público e o Privado*, (21), 111-126. Retrieved from http://repositorio.pucrs.br/dspace/bitstream/10923/8939/2/Politicas_de_Seguranca_Publica_e_Juventude_o_caso_do_Rio_Grande_do_Sul.pdf.

Sorj, B. (2016). Social policies, community participation and the deprofessionalization of care. *Cadernos Pagu*, (46), 107–128. Retrieved from http://www.scielo.br/pdf/cpa/n46/en_1809-4449-cpa-46-0107.pdf.

Teixeira, P. de S. (2015). *Aspéctos Punitivos em Políticas Públicas: análise do PRONASCI e dos projetos do Território de Paz do bairro Guajuviras, Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil* (Master's thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10362/18537.

Tronto, J. (1987). Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care. *Signs*, 12(4), 644-663. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174207.

Tronto, J., & Fisher, B. (1990). Toward a feminist theory of caring. In Abel, Emily K.; Nelson, Margaret K. (Eds.), *Circles of care: work and identity in women's lives* (p. 36-54). New York: State University of New York Press.

Visweswaran, K. (2003). Defining Feminist Ethnography. In: Lincoln, Yvonna; Dezin, Norman K. (Eds.) *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief* (p. 73-94). Walnut Creek: Altamira Press.

Wuest, R. (1993). Health Care for Women International Institutionalizing women's oppression: The inherent risk in health policy that fosters community participation. *Health Care for Women International*, 14(5), 407–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339309516068.

Wolcott, H. F. (1985). On Ethnographic Intent. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *21*(3), 187–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X85021003004.

Appendix A

Informed consent form

TERMO DE CONSENTIMENTO PARA PARTICIPAÇÃO EM PESQUISA

Nome do estudo: Gênero e Pertencimento – a experiência de mulheres líderes comunitárias no bairro Mathias Velho, Canoas, Brasil

Pesquisadora: Amanda Kovalczuk de Oliveira Garcia
Email: amandakovalczuk@gmail.com
Telefone: (51) 99610-9667

Estou realizando minha pesquisa de dissertação de mestrado no CPV e você está convidada para participar. A sua colaboração é muito importante para que eu possa entender **como mulheres líderes comunitárias experimentam o bairro onde vivem e se sentem parte da comunidade em que atuam**.

O que terei que fazer se decidir colaborar com o estudo?

- Na fase inicial da pesquisa, você não precisará fazer nada diferente do que já faz. Eu apenas observarei alguns atendimentos, reuniões e a movimentação geral no CPV sem realizar interferências.
- Aos poucos, iremos conversando sobre a sua experiência. Será uma conversa informal, sem protocolos, na qual eu eventualmente pedirei a sua permissão para gravar a sua voz. Você pode me pedir que eu pare a gravação a qualquer momento.
- No meses de junho e julho, é provável que realizemos grupos focais, bem como entrevistas individuais. Os grupos focais funcionam como espaços de roda de conversa, no quais eu proporei dinâmicas e assuntos para conversarmos. Tanto os grupos como as entrevistas serão realizados no CPV e durarão no máximo 2 horas. Pode que isso aconteça em algum dia que não seja o que você habitualmente vem aqui. Eu farei o possível para que esses encontros não mobilizem mais deslocamento do que o normal da sua parte, e tentarei concentrar nossos grupos focais nos dias em que acontecem reuniões gerais com todas as agentes no centro, ou em dias em que a maioria das agentes já se encontre presente por aqui em função de outras responsabilidades.

Resumindo:

- Todos os procedimentos (entrevistas e grupos focais) vão acontecer aqui no CPV;
- A maior parte da minha observação acontecerá entre junho e julho de 2019;
- A gravação será apenas de voz, e será usada apenas para que eu possa lembrar depois das informações que você me deu;
- A sua participação nessa pesquisa não envolve nenhum risco físico ou emocional, ou nenhum outro risco além do que as suas atividades aqui no centro já incluem. De qualquer forma, se você se sentir desconfortável em qualquer momento durante a minha observação ou durante as entrevistas, avise-me e interromperemos o trabalho;

- A participação no estudo não envolve nenhum custo ou retorno financeiro às agentes. Como pesquisadora, eu também não obtenho retorno financeiro.

Privacidade e uso de dados

- Eu possivelmente citarei e usarei diretamente o que você me disser durante as entrevistas e grupos focais no meu trabalho. Quando eu fizer isso, usarei um nome falso para proteger a sua identidade, a não ser que você expressamente me peça para usar o seu nome verdadeiro;
- Os resultados deste estudo são obtidos a partir das informações que você me der, e esses resultados podem ser usados em publicações ou apresentações de trabalhos científicos – a minha banca de dissertação será uma delas, por exemplo;
- Eu também poderei dividir os dados arrecadados aqui – fornecidos pela sua experiência – com outros pesquisadores, como a minha professora orientadora e outros colegas de profissão, mas apenas para finalidade de investigação;
- Trabalharei com cuidado em preservar o que você diz e a sua identidade, de forma que os arquivos completos de gravação e transcrição serão mantidas em sigilo;
- Seu nome e identidade será preservado em todos os momentos.

Finalmente:

A participação neste estudo é **voluntária**.
Você não precisa responder perguntas que não queria responder.
A qualquer tempo e por qualquer motivo, você pode decidir não mais participar.
Podemos fazer pausas, retornar ou encerrar a sua participação simplesmente com um aviso, sem qualquer penalização.
Se você decidir interromper sua participação nesse estudo, eu, como pesquisadora, irei perguntar se as informações que já recolhi ainda podem ser usadas.

Alguma dúvida?

Eu li este formulário e a proposta de pesquisa me foi explicada. Eu tive a oportunidade de fazer as perguntas que gostaria para tirar dúvidas e elas me foram respondidas. Em caso de perguntas adicionais, sei a quem posso perguntar.

Eu concordo em participar com a pesquisa acima descrita e recebi uma cópia deste consentimento informado.

Nome da participante:
Assinatura:
Data:

Appendix B

Questionnaire

QUESTIONÁRIO DE PESQUISA
RECOLHENDO INFORMAÇÕES SOBRE AS AGENTES

Convido você a completar as informações abaixo. Se você não se sentir confortável a respeito de alguma das perguntas, fique à vontade para não responder.

1. Nome: _____
2. Idade: _____
3. Cor da pele: _____
4. Orientação sexual: _____
5. Religião: _____

6. Quantas pessoas moram com você? Quem são elas?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Você tem filhos?

( ) sim. Quantos? _____
( ) não

8. Você tem netos?

( ) sim. Quantos? _____
( ) não

9. Já realizou ou realiza atividades profissionais (além do CPV)?

( ) sim. Neste caso, quando e qual sua função?

_____
_____

( ) não

10. Já realizou ou realiza trabalho comunitário (além do CPV)?

( ) sim. Neste caso, quando e qual sua função?

_____
_____

( ) não