

**LISTEN TO THE (IN)MATE: A LIFE HISTORY, READERS THEATRE
(RE)PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ECUADOR JAILS
ACCUSED OF DRUG TRAFFICKING**

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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0-612-62880-9

Canada

Thesis title: Listen to the (in)mate: A life history, readers theatre (re)presentation of women in Ecuador jails accused of drug trafficking

Degree: Master of Arts

Convocation: 2001

By: Hugo J. Bastidas

Department: Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology

University: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This thesis, presented in a readers theatre format, is grounded in life history and arts-informed research perspectives. Aimed to reach diverse audiences, the readers theatre script offers an alternative modality to present explanations for women's involvement in the illegal drug trade in Ecuador, South America. Individual life history interviews with seven women accused of drug trafficking are represented in a minimally staged conversation. In a dramatic mode, through scenes and acts, the script momentarily merges women's childhood and family experiences, spousal relationships and child care with their knowledge, or absence of knowledge, and experience in the illegal drug trade. Relevant social science literature provide thesis readers and script audiences with a contextual backdrop to the women's accounts of their lived experience. The inmates' narratives are staged against the background provided by low income households headed by women, "war on drugs" inspired legislation, and Ecuador's political and economic crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people are co-authors of this work. The testimonies of the women in jail hold the parts of this thesis together. Edilma, Nancy, Alba, Cynthia, Lucero, Grace and Luisa (all pseudonyms) provided the grounds and means for the completion of this work. Their voices have been an enduring source of encouragement and motivation. This thesis belongs to them and other women enduring life in prison.

The contexts of lived lives, the artful representation of lived experience: J. Gary Knowles provided intellectual inspiration and support throughout the thesis writing process. I have learned a great deal from his insights into the paramount importance of context and mindfulness for audience when preparing and producing an arts-informed research (re)presentation. He opened wide the field of possibilities for me to find and to sustain *my* personal context: a reflexive, process-appreciative inquiry into my daily life; the emotional closeness to and identification with natural and social landscapes – past and present. Gary's advice has assisted me in developing authorship and in finding a place for my voice within this thesis.

Ardra Cole – her scholarship, her teaching abilities and style, all intellectually inspiring – supported with grace, generosity and empathic understanding the final stage of manuscript preparation. I very much appreciated her comments and encouragement. Again, many thanks to Ardra.

Dale Burley proof read and co-edited this thesis. He delivered endless suggestions to improve this text's readability and flow. In those places where this work shines, one can see his craft.

This thesis is for Emma, Lucas, Lisa and my extended family in Ecuador and Canada.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. LIFELINE(S)

Question? 1

First 2

Second 9

2. LISTEN TO THE (IN)MATE: THE READERS THEATRE SCRIPT

Meandering the script 14

Inviting readers 15

Setting, stage and reading guide 18

Note to the thesis reader 20

3. "WHAT HAVE I DONE TO (UN)DESERVE THIS?"

Act One 23

The prison 24

Proof and evidence 27

Interrogation 29

The lawyers 34

The law 37

Act Two 40

Family 41

Schooling and peers 45

Work 49

Spouse 52

Pregnancies 56

Children 60

Splitting and new relations 61

Act Three 64

Familiarity with drugs 65

Illegal activities 69

Accidental involvement 74

Captured 76

Interpol 81

Final 83

4. BACKDROP

An imaginary line dividing the planet in (un)equal halves 85

Women in Ecuador 88

Law one-o-eight 92

Who is in prison? 96

Pow(d)ers 100

5. PERFORMANCE, LIFE HISTORY AND READERS THEATRE

Performance, public perception and understanding 105

A str(art)egy for life history research presentation 109

Other(ing) wo(men) 116

Autobiography 117

An allegory for the "decay of the aura" 119

Form a persuasive fiction 122

An(other) re(presentation) 125

Pitch it so they can it! 127

Curtain 130

6. "I" FROM THEM

Home-school's breaks 134

Buying 136

The day of the woman in jail 137

In John's Meadow 140

REFERENCES 143

APPENDIX

SEVEN WOMEN IN JAIL

(Profiles of the women interviewed)

Alba 150

Grace 151

Lucero 152

Cynthia 154

Nancy 155

Edilma 156

Luisa 157

1

LIFELINE(S)

- *Question?*
- *First*
- *Second*

For I believe that there can be no reflexivity unless one passes through a historical reenactment of perceptual difference.

— Nadia Seremetakis, *The senses still*

Question?

How could I renew a sense of the temporal context and living implications of five year old field work events and experience? Ethical dilemmas arise, how relevant is to do it to more than personal satisfaction? If so, what processes, goals and visions need to be re-enacted?

What could I re-learn from recalling past research's processes and outcomes using an enhanced, yet still fragmented understanding of *reality*? If to organise and to make sense of recent professional experience is the goal for my graduate work, how may I present that experience in a encompassing way so that you, them and I would end up being the *authors* of it? Content and context were known by me, what form should they take in order to foster readers' and participants' sense making and the dispersion of authorship?

How might a personal, performative experience in an academic institution, allow itself to be transformed into public information and to be apprehended as learning? How may a personal and institutional experience promote – through and around itself – political agency?

Many things have happened in between; how do I properly reach out beyond the sides that remained extramural the last time? Writing this work is just one of many other current mirrors reflecting my life; what kind of changes might take place – if any – in order to sustain a creative, personally pleasing approach?

First

In 1991, after several years in and out of a long-distance relationship, my partner and I decided to move in together. Lisa had just finished her studies in Toronto and was moving to Ecuador for good. We rented a place not far from Quito's airport and shared a window with two midget-size, very loud, *rise-and-shine* type, roosters. We were immersed in the romantic seclusion, while in the outside world, work and school were trying to accommodate each other.

It was the last year of my undergraduate Anthropology studies, and I had to select a thesis topic and to design its methodological approach. Also, I had just starting working in a researcher position for an Ecuadorian foundation responsible for monitoring, researching and intervening the illegal drug problem.¹ The emphasis was on youth, so we implemented

¹ In the early 1990s the United States government agencies responsible for drug policies were compiling information through the work of not-for-profit organisations in the Andean countries. The one that I worked for had mainly an ongoing quantitative research agenda managed by a team of psychologists and sample-designers, implementing epidemiological surveys, seeking numeric indicators to measure drug use prevalence in Ecuador.

approaches with qualitative research tools: in-classroom dramatisation and ethnography of outdoors night-life to assess knowledge and experience of illegal drugs among students in a private high school, and developing and grounding an informal network representing users of illegal drugs in Quito.

"Drug Users in Quito" was the research project for which I was partially responsible. Subsequently, this project became the topic for my thesis. However, it did not live long. After several months working for the foundation, the focus of my attention had shifted towards the participation of women in the drug trade. Field work and interaction with research participants had slowly unveiled some of its qualities. I became interested in understanding women's role in the trade against the background of a larger social context: gender relations; economic needs; the symbolic aspects ascribed to the manipulation of illegal drugs by women. Also, prison statistics were shocking: seventy percent of women in jail had drug related charges; the corresponding number for men was around forty percent (Dirección Nacional de Rehabilitación Social [DNRS], 1995).

The professional setting in which I was immersed had provided me with useful information, yet the personal relationship at home was proving to have a wider learning potential. Lisa and I often talked of her of experiences growing-up, in a Northern Ontario mining town, in the 1980s; a time when the drug trade, particularly of cocaine, was thriving in North America. Her stories and reflections were rich in personal and social contexts. Her first person, singular narrative provided a contrast, a unique backdrop to the then current situation in Ecuador. A new drug legislation was being drafted and. The effects of the United States-led "war on drugs" were increasingly permeating the economic and political life of Ecuadorian society.

For the last year of my undergraduate degree (a *Licenciatura*) in Anthropology, I planned, designed and implemented a program of research to examine the rationale behind the gargantuan over-representation of women in jail with drug related charges.



After slowly ascending through several *gates* in party's political power and decision-making hierarchies, I managed to get *godfathered* right into the Government Affairs Deputy Minister's office.² After an informal conversation in which I explained the goal and scope of my research, she signed an official memorandum instructing the Director of the Social Rehabilitation National Office (SRNO) to grant me access to the Detention Centre for Women (DCW) in Quito. Later on, at the SRNO, I received a photograph identity card that allowed me to visit the Centre in an official status.

The Director of the DCW reviewed my credentials and research purposes, and agreed to give me, if needed, her personal assistance. She then introduced me to a male clerk responsible for bringing up-to-date inmate population's socio-demographic indicators, and for processing prison admittance and release. Data management was rudimentary, done in longhand, on legal-length, five-fold deep, paper sheets. Using the information available, I mathematically induced a sample representing the quantitative indicators³ of the population

² The Deputy Minister, a lawyer known for her work with youth and gang violence in the streets of Guayaquil, Ecuador, was one of very few women in such a position of political power.

³ A collective portrait of the female inmate population depicts a woman who is around 30 years old; is single or in a common-law relationship; is the mother of two or more children; has had relatively few years of schooling; was working, before being incarcerated, as a primary care giver and/or in the informal economy. Therefore, very few have the resources "to buy justice" from a lawyer or judge. While in jail, they have to wait up to two years to hear a judge's sentence, and they can expect (guilty or not) up to 25 years without parole. Very little

with drug related charges. The DCW's Director having no objections to the final list of names randomly chosen, authorised a meeting to present the research project to potential participants.

The goal for the meeting was to invite a voluntary participation and to establish a trusting rapport. I also wanted to share with them some of the information I had gathered up to that time. When the meeting started, only two or three women were not present in a small room called *the classroom*. I introduced myself, the purposes of the study and the aspects of it relevant for this particular occasion. I briefly pointed to the huge gender disparity in the jail population with drug related charges and to the oppressive conditions female inmates were encountering all over the country. I said that I was interested in listening to what they wanted to say about their lives before they were arrested; that in return I would eventually elaborate a collective portrait of their life experiences. I also said that my intention was neither to assess *amounts* nor to judge personal decisions. They listened attentively, asked some questions and left the room rather briskly. I was glad the meeting was over. It took a lot out of me.

By the time interviews started, I thought I had succeeded in protecting the study process – and myself – behind a quite abstract, academic, positivist, scientific foundation. I had also disguised myself under hairy head and baggy clothing. It was relatively impossible to *go native*, so I wanted to perform a harmless persona, one eager to listen, objectively, to the personal experiences of women in jail. I wanted to stay away from suggesting the plainclothes

rehabilitation activities are designed and implemented. Most of them feel abandoned by family, spouse and society (Bastidas, 1996, pp. 104-108).

look of the undercover, narcotics-policing international agent.⁴ I also didn't want to suggest the role of the local cop, snooping for hidden evidence.⁵

The first interview went well. It lasted an hour or so. Alba took long pauses before sharing parts of her life with me. I replied to her short answers with few, broad-scope, pre-prepared and improvised questions, trying to elicit sought after details and events. Her life had gone through so much. Yet, she was able to transmit this combination of resilience and ingenuity, while being engulfed by a myopic administration of criminal justice. I thought I had made a gentle and discreet inquiry into Alba's life.

During the following weeks I met Grace, Lucero, Cynthia, Luisa, Edilma and Nancy. The interviews were of similar duration to Alba's, yet the content and tone of each one were unique. More importantly, the stories I was hearing from these women were poignant and revealing. The life history approach in which the conversations were grounded, placed whatever, if any, drug-related activity into layered and complex, personal, familial, national and international contexts.

At the beginning of our conversations I tried to steer the interview process into their experiences of youth and adolescence. I was interested in having them sketch, with their own words, a portrait of the kind of relationships they had at that time with their parents, peers and boyfriends. The questions I asked followed a chronological order: Where and how did they

⁴ On one occasion, during after-hours field work, senior high-school students talked about being almost certain that the other researcher and I were undercover agents linked to the United States Drug Enforcement Agency!

⁵ The mirror reflected back then a straight, long haired anthropologist (in-training), wearing rimless round spectacles -an endeared gift from Mimi, the pious yet best *charada* teller in the small town of San Gabriel.

grow up? What kind of jobs did their parents have? How did they remember their schooling years? How did they meet their boyfriends and men? How did they handle romantic relationships, pregnancies and child care? What kinds of work experience had they had? How did they end up in jail? On several occasions, they just took over the conversation and transformed into a venue for expressing their urgent needs, for venting, for ranting, sometimes for crying out emotions and feeling.

By the time the interviews were completed, I was positive they had trusted me with insights into important parts of their own lives.⁶ I thought our conversations were sincere and study-relevant; sorts of windows into a paradoxical and implacable organisation of social life.

After a period of over three months visiting the DCW, I arrived at a turning point in my study. Thanks in part to some of my personal and cultural identity "features" -young, male, middle-class, catholic-schooled, clear-skinned, with an able body- I had managed to survive long academic and bureaucratic processes. Also, I had been able to cope with my apprehension and fears of meeting the Other in prison. As I sat at home charily looking at the boxes of recorded tapes, I recognized I had completed a rite of passage: Academe, government institutions had demanded that I follow a rigid protocol. Lisa, the group of women in jail and classmates had twisted the discursive hierarchies and official procedures into a *living*, complex and layered personal experience.

The claims of validity, reliability and generalisation the final report (Bastidas, 1993)

⁶ A strict following of the demographic sample would have required interviewing twenty four women. I had overestimated my capacity to handle the personal engagement and emotional watershed the interview process demanded. Furthermore, the exactitude of the sample was being greatly overshadowed by the richness and diversity of women's life histories. I stoppea after the fourteenth interview.

offered to the reader, were accepted by the academic supervisor. After a series of methodology courses and special-topic seminars, the final outcome was a rather *dry* account of a particular social problematique in Ecuador. The study sat astride quantitative and symbolic aspects of women's involvement in the illegal drug trade. The conclusions pointed to how the androcentric nature of gender relations and the *terminal* indicators of Ecuadorean social-life organization, were literally condensed and reflected in the women's life accounts. The report read, in a canonical form, as a thoughtful, sometimes convoluted attempt to explain a statistical (over) re-presentation using the languages of cultural anthropology, feminism and history of drugs.

The women's testimonies were edited following a chronological protocol of analysis. What they had to say about, for instance, the kind of relationship they had with their parents, the nuances of early romantic and erotic experiences, about their participation in illegal activities, and their experiences of the criminal justice system, comprised the content of the last one-third of the study. When deemed pertinent, some generalizations based on the commonalities in the testimonies and *originals* in the reference literature were presented. Formally, the last chapter read as a succession of standard paragraphs and footnotes. Their testimonies were transcribed in italics, in single-spaced lines, while comments were presented double-spaced, written in upright, standard font.



Three years later, I obtained the *Licenciatura* degree. Shortly after, with the black, bound document in my suitcase, I flew to Toronto, Canada. Then, during cold yet bright days in February, we drove to Halifax, Nova Scotia. After a stay of over a year in Quito, Lisa and I were finally back *home*, with a four month old child tucked between us.

Second

By going back to graduate school I wanted somehow to recollect and to re-organize my past professional experience with the tools and language academia offers. I wanted to enhance my capability for generalization and abstraction. The previous years had been very rich in meaningful events and experiences.⁷ The desire for private autonomy, for active anonymity, for the opportunity to act out the rules of identity hide-and-seek play, all these were drawing me to graduate studies.

Since I had been drawn back to the classroom for the educational value of "adult reflection within authorized knowledge frames," finishing graduate work in a timely manner and without major debt was the pragmatic, implicit goal. Writing a Master's thesis, itself a whole, was also just a part of a larger context, *life* around me. The thesis topic had somehow to engulf, to embrace and to sustain daily life, mine and the lives of those living around and close to me. Going back, recalling the processes and outcomes of other academe-gestated experiences into (re)contextual frames, to expand my understanding of a social science topic within the *world now* in my life, became a resilient idea.

The original piece had lived through the Ecuadorean particularities of the "crisis of representation" period in anthropology and social science. Several years later, through a graduate course⁸ designed to open the art(s) for students to explore alternative modalities for

⁷ In Halifax, I worked facilitating learning for young adults in inter-cultural contexts. This work grounded me in Canada. The federal government offered Lisa a position in Ottawa. We moved again. I stayed home parenting Lucas for a year. It was then time for me to move deeper. My life-cycle was ready to be renewed. All these experiences had sharpened the frames, tools and concepts for efficient delivery of information and for sharing of knowledge.

⁸ "Arts-informed research perspectives and practices in education." OISE/UT course AEC 3131/L0102. Fall 1999. Ardra Cole and J. Gary Knowles, instructors.

research design and presentation, the idea of representing "*Virgen o serpiente: Antropología, género y sustancias ilegales*" (Bastidas, 1996) evolved into a more defined project. New and refreshed notions of qualitative research, of report's form and representation started to reveal themselves.

The idea of staging a fictionalized conversation based on the women's testimonies collected in jail fit very well within the perspective of the course. I brought into class the bound manuscript, seeking somehow to assure myself of the artifact's validity and relevance. I mused about the possibilities of representing it, of somehow writing and producing a performance text. A field test of the seminal idea took place in-classroom. Four people read a short script edited from the English translation of the interview texts. Afterward, the audience pointed out the diversity of formal elements to be addressed, as well as the potential for sense making.⁹

The new found context for the *Licenciatura* thesis prompted me to explore the perspectives of other researchers. Through a renewed methodological approach, I was expanding my self-awareness of the similarities between past and current learning processes. This approach provoked the creation of new ideas and the fusion of old intuitions. Some of

⁹ We students struggled in trying to shed ourselves from the positivist and modern pre-understandings higher education had imprinted on us. We found challenging and demanding to convey – by arts-informed, course-relevant modes of presentation – our knowledge claims about in-classroom presentation topics. We were stuck in a frame of mind that demanded positive, prescription-like protocols to approach the analysis and dissemination of information. It felt as if we had been stripped of creativity to come up with presentational modalities and forms better suited to transmit our personal fragments of truth. With different degrees of method *tightness*, each of us eventually found a content-fitting form: poetry, dialogue, drama, photography, video. At the end, perhaps we only realized the burden of narrowly defined standards for academic work, however, we gained awareness of the immense potential for artful sense making in social science.

them will be presented later in the text.

The author's imprint – mine – on this text is undeniable; however, the form in which it is presented has been crafted being mindful of considerations for reader and audiences, in an attempt to (b)reach out physical and moral spaces, beyond normalized and highly procedural institutions.

Readers theatre is a simple, yet rich alternative for the presentation of qualitative research information. In a concise manner, similar to an actors' reading rehearsal before the staging of a play, readers theatre takes place when several people read aloud a script, for themselves or in front of an audience. Readers theatre seemed to be, and continues to be, an appropriate modality for (re)presenting my previous scholarship. The qualitative information I had collected is well suited to fulfill the interactive potential implicit in the readers theatre's form.¹⁰ The one-on-one conversations which we held in jail, each conversation unique, correspond to each other in form and substance. When put together, as if a group conversation were taking place, the conversation reflect something larger. Individual or personal contexts become collective and social backgrounds, and social patterns may become evident to ears and eyes of the audience.

Readers theatre' simplicity allows public replicability; its ductility actively allows readers and audience to perform learning. Readers theatre holds a liminal meeting point with other people's experiences of life. It might create and help to sustain, bonds of active empathy and solidarity. It seeks to transform passive delivery of information into a sense-making participatory reflexion. Also, readers theatre allows me to gain knowledge and dexterity with

¹⁰ Please refer to the section *Form a persuasive fiction* (pp. 122-130) for a more detailed introduction to Readers Theatre.

an inclusive, boundary-breaching, artful inquiry into social science.

By the time I decided to pursue the goal sketched above, two academic terms had passed. Fall and Winter train-commuting between Ottawa and Toronto was over. A new life was due to *Spring* into our home mid-Summer. I continued entertaining the project against broad and diverse readings. I was drawn mainly to inquire how the socio-logic surrounding illegal drugs had evolved in five years or so. I was also interested in revisiting standard social-science writing, addressing current and dynamic, social, political and economic forces affecting women involved in the illegal trade of mind-altering drugs. Due to the abundance of related literature, the situation in the United States appeared very well depicted. It was appealing. From above, it seemed as if corporate drives-to-profit manipulated race, class and gender inequalities to ram the commodified prison inmate against the wall. At ground level, women's location within the global political economy of the "war on drugs" appeared to have changed and not to have changed. The backdrop was different, though the characters seemed to have remained the same.

I was also interested in finding a personal voice to speak from and within the discipline of anthropology. I groped among *messy* issues such as the ethics of fieldwork, the gender politics of academic representation, my rights for *othering* women in jail, the limits and possibilities of discursive authority versus personal narratives. Although nothing came out as pristine truth, the process assisted me in recalling relevant academic issues. In the background was the previous attempt to imprint myself in thesis writing. This was a timid approach rejected once and again by higher learning institutional advisors. Now the context was different. The internal voice searching for a way to express authorship in my knowledge claims was resonating strongly.

Another event relevant to be mentioned here took place in Ecuador. It was an overdue visit. Over Christmas "Y2K" and new year 2001, family and friends generously offered beautiful things and events. To be immersed in previously known *sittings* and sets was very refreshing.

Since my last visit in 1998, changes had happened and had not happened. Though the background was vast, the differences were evident. I talked to people familiar with the topic and I collected literature relevant to the larger context. The information was rich and diverse: the impact of drug legislation reform; the political accomplishments by the women's movement; human rights advocacy work; the rapid deterioration of the services the Rehabilitation Office offers; the increased managerial approach to the drug problem. This information will assist readers when trying to make sense of this work.



After five days in the Amazon foot-hills, at aunt-and-uncle's *Shicama* – a farm named in the Quichua language after a local crustacean usually dwelling in and around cold creek mouths – we returned to Canada and to winter. February came with unfamiliar amounts of snow, with lengthy, under-freezing points and with other figures: a resilient flue, an ageing car and a despotic land-lord. The visit to Ecuador was certainly lovely for everyone. Yet, as distant as the farm was from Quito, Ottawa was from Ecuador. Our bodies were back home; I was still coming back. It was time to turn *home* around, inside-out, outside-in, with my lived experience's limbs and senses.

LISTEN TO THE (IN)MATE: THE READERS THEATRE SCRIPT

- *Meandering the script*
- *Inviting readers*
- *Setting, stage and reading instructions*

Meandering the script

In this section I intend to guide the reader through the script's form and to detail a *protocol* for readers theatre participants. While reporting on previous and immediate decisions relevant in carrying the script to this point, the emphasis here is on "how the script works."

I approached the expansive text in Spanish with renewed ambition and creativity. I wanted to represent my knowledge claims in a creative mode: cohesive, integral, layered, mindful of audiences, frocking and frolicking with academic authorship, mine and reader's. Editing the Spanish text and creating a new narrative took the breath out of me. Being *in* and *out* of the text, immersed in and attending to several, and sometimes parallel, accounts of lived experience, deciding on order and flow, emphasis and economy of meaning, all demanded resilience and conviction in the pedagogic value of readers theatre as modality of (re)presentation.

This version has been read and used, *reduced*, aspiring to hold attention and to dissipate boredom. It is shorter than the previous drafts. Certainly the pressure to obtain an even shorter one will always be latent. I hope layers of editing, language translation and formal decisions are held together by a vital substance of personal interest and emphatic beliefs. However, you shall not miss the whereabouts of the translator's accent.

Along the journey from *then* to *now*, from Ecuador to Canada, all and each of the testimonies have been treated with care for form and with respect for meaning or *absence* of it. Ideally there would be an individual English translator for each character, adding additional layers of interpretation and language diversity. However, this was not the case. The original Spanish grammar and vocabulary may stick out like thorns to scratch the reader from beneath the more or less even, yet sandy, surface of the English translation. Slang terms, sentence syntax, paragraph synthesis were and **are** contextual; this time they aim to address wider and diverse audiences. Above all, I have tried to maintain the authenticity and integrity of the voices.

Inviting readers¹

Following the acceptance and commitment to participate, readers will have the option to read the whole text or just parts of it. The sections in this thesis entitled: *Seven women in jail*, *Backdrop*, *"I" from them*, and *What have I done to (un)deserve this?* – the actual readers theatre piece – may be bound and unbound according to readers' preferences and needs. All

¹ This section also works – in different contexts and as part of a different edition of this thesis' text – as invitation to potential readers to participate in the readers theatre presentation.

seven character profiles the narrator reads at different points thorough the script are presented together in the section *Seven women in jail*. Only some parts of *Backdrop* and parts of *An "I" around them* are part of the script. Also, *What have I done to (un)deserve this?* can be divided into the specific texts corresponding to each character.²

The broader purpose for the reading of the script is to muster a group of people to read other people's life histories *written into* a text. The purpose is: to muster in the sense that somehow each of those present as audience and/or as participants in the reading, will form a whole, larger than its parts; to gather a group of people in the sense that together they may display an inclusive sense and awareness of what is written in and around the text; to muster in the sense that an *artifact* is being used collectively and pragmatically to educe and to evoke meaning from it and from the reader's personal lived experience; in short, to reenact ephemerally one's life in provisional "vessels of alterity" (Seremetakis, 1994).

Setting, stage and text provide context and content to be harnessed. Participants and audience are invited to try to make *personal* sense(s) of what is displayed around and in front of them. Lapses, withdrawals from reading, and *eloping* with a character are allowed. These sense-making strategies will certainly contribute to the performance's overall success.

It seems appropriate to think of the *casting* for a public (re)presentation of this readers theatre piece in terms of a successive and expanding sharing of relevant information on character(s) and background references. The reader engagement process may be conceived as an enticement, a minimal artful seduction, attracting and charming readers into the script.

² It is implicit here that this thesis' readers and readers participating in *What have I done to (un)deserve this?* constitute different audiences. Thesis readers may or may not read the entire thesis, however they have in their hands the whole text, the bound thesis. Readers in the readers theatre piece will have in their hands only what they want or intend to read.

Before its public reading, readers may engage themselves with the whole readers theatre script's form and content; they may arrive at the reading setting with a thorough understanding of how the artifact works and *who* the character is. However, these ideal circumstances are not indispensable.

The simplicity, ductility and versatility of the readers theatre permit the sustaining of a *porous* relationship with readers. Aside from being able to read, this modality of presentation demands from the reader only a predisposition to participate. In this sense, the reader may skip part of, or even the entire engagement process, and come to the reading with just a concise idea of what it is all about – perhaps only the name of the character he or she is supposed *to read* – not having previously read anything else. In short, admission to the event requires only to bring one's life in context.

One may consider at least four possible reference *containers* the readers can choose from:

- The whole script – that includes the text for the reader's particular character, and the entire background information.
- The text for one character and all the character profiles.
- The text and profile for one character.
- Background information only.

The reason behind having multiple options for the reader honours the importance of context, process and personal decisions throughout the entire experience. The diversity of contextual material should mold itself to the learning needs of the theatre reader and audience. Readers' previous knowledge of the topic may not be canonical and encyclopaedic, yet may be reflecting lived experience and (in)direct references to other settings and arguments. A

successfully engaged reader would come to the reading space without major expectations, yet with volition to inquire into the topic in further detail, and with a willingness to be carried by the direction and force of the group's sense making.

While reading the script, readers can opt out any time and remain silent. The pauses between scenes and acts might well serve to address pressing questions and issues brought up by any reader or audience member. The conversational mode the script seeks to elicit should remain throughout the reading. The central role of the learner on the stage and auditorium calls for flexible rules and the rule of *the unexpected* happening.

The script consists of three acts. The first one takes us into prison and then goes back in time to recall what has happened since the women were apprehended by the police. The second act inquires further into their lived experiences and bridges the life span that separates childhood from having children, parents from lovers and spouses. In the final act, the women trace their memory back to the chain of events that materialize the absurd – or not that remote – possibility of being in jail into a daily experience of life.

Each act has five or six scenes. Each of these is centred around ordinary and meaningful events in the women's lives: family then and now; loving and not-so loving partners and peers; schooling; the law, lawyers and prison; illegal market and commodities; knowledge claims and living conditions. Together they represent the *flotsam* and *jetsam* of daily and unusual life events.

Setting, stage and reading guide

The presentation purposes and expected audiences should reflect each other in the qualities and dimensions of the space. However, the space and time requirements for staging

and reading the script are minimal. Chairs or stools and any sort of living, board or class room are all that is needed to accommodate readers and listeners. In the situation where readers and audience are one, there would be no need to remove tables or other furniture. When an audience is going to participate, having access to a raised platform or even a large carpet to demarcate the stage, and the capability to manipulate elemental lighting contrasts between stage and auditorium, would certainly give the space some depth and comfort. However, these logistics are as desirable as they are dispensable.

A reading of the script, and the time devoted to open conversation and comments from those present, may require ninety minutes or so. It could go on longer or have a shorter duration – maybe reading an act or two – yet one hour and a half signals to audience and readers the standard, expected time span for a dramatic context and content.

Seven chairs forming a concave crescent are placed on the stage-to-be area. These are for people reading the characters. Two additional chairs for the narrator(s) are placed outside and behind the crescent, at the borders of stage left and stage right.

In Act One, Cynthia sits in the chair in the centre of the crescent. Grace, Alba with Luisa at the end, sit on the (audience's) left half of the crescent. Lucero, Edilma, and Nancy sit stage right.

In Act Two, Grace sits at the centre. Alba, Lucero and Cynthia at the end, sit in stage left. Nancy, Edilma, and Luisa at the end, sit stage right.

In Act Three, Edilma sits at the centre. Alba, Grace and Nancy at the end, sit on the stage left. Luisa, Lucero and Cynthia at the end, sit stage right.

At the beginning of the reading, and between scenes throughout the presentation, the narrator reads from the chair on stage right. In between acts, the narrator reads from the chair

on stage left.

Note to the thesis reader

Before the thesis reader continues on, she or he may find useful a brief "road map" into the following sections. Until this point, after reading *Lifeline(s)*, you may have a clear idea of relevant contexts for the research topic, for how field work was done, and you may also be able to locate me, the researcher, against and within these contexts. Also, in the preceding pages in this section, I have illustrated a guide for both, thesis readers and script readers, so they can grasp an elemental understanding of how the script works in a presentational context. Now, in the following paragraphs, I am going to introduce the central ideas connecting the remaining sections of this thesis.

The readers theatre piece *What have I done to (un)deserve this?*, has been edited to stand by itself, apart from the rest of the thesis. The script includes – in the text to be read by the Narrator – paragraphs from *Backdrop*³ and from the section "I" from *them*, and repeats all the character profiles presented in the appendix *Seven women in jail*.

Backdrop zooms out the script into snapshots of a large social science-informed context. The Ecuadorean particularities of the economic chaos, social and political implosion, currently affecting the Andean Region – in the wake of expansive and expanding forces of global nature, financial and otherwise – are this time zeroed in to qualify the current status of Ecuadorean women and the extent of women's movement recent achievements. Then, I call

³Also, the thesis reader will notice in the main text of the section *Backdrop*, the repetition of footnote number three in *Lifeline(s)* (p. 5). This editorial discretion anticipates non-thesis readers' needs for relevant, contextual information.

the reader's attention to look into the relationship between drug-legislation, and its enforcement, with socio-demographic indicators of the population in Ecuador jails. Before the *Backdrop* closes, it brings to the foreground an international *mirror* to reflect how the kind of situation women endure in Ecuadorean prisons are related to the weight and scale of the United States-led "war on drugs." The war-related "crimino-legal complex" shackling to jail vast numbers of drug offenders in the United States zooms out the reader from Ecuador without missing the focus on women in jail.

Performance, life history and readers theatre defines a dramatic and pedagogical space for the thesis' research (re)presentation and the script's public presentation. In this section I invite the reader to consider the intrinsic links connecting lived experiences with performative and performing aspects of learning. I advocate the usefulness and interactivity of learning when this is delivered in a performance text. From a critical point of view and against standardized, single-specimen thesis formats, I endorse the principles forward by arts-informed scholarship (Cole and Knowles, 2001a, 2001b) regarding formal and substantive considerations for qualitative research and graduate work presentation: the paramount importance of context, the mindfulness for audience, the nuances connecting researcher's and audience's authorship, the pedagogical value intrinsic in the use and consumption of identity conferring performances.

"I" from them contains four singular pieces of biographical, reflexive writing. The thesis reader may find useful these renditions of events, from my lived experience and past field work, when you wonder about "where do I come from?" These pieces work as temporal positions of myself, postcards for the reader describing *where* I have been when unsuspectingly collecting seeds for this work. These pieces are *visits*: to my mother's small-

business office and the street market outside the house I grew up; to a house on a hill when buying *goods*; to Quito's Detention Centre for Women during the "inmate's day" celebration; and to a home, this time on a *meadow*, to witness how two girls and their mother were suturing John's wounds.

3

WHAT HAVE I DONE TO (UN)DESERVE THIS?

Act One

- *The prison*
- *Proof and evidence*
- *Interrogation*
- *The lawyers*
- *The law*

NARRATOR: The Detention Centre for Women consists of a set of parallel buildings or pavilions, long and narrow, three storeys high, enclosed behind a five-metre high, brick and mortar wall, crowned with barb wire, and surrounded by family residential units.

To enter on visit days, one must line up on the street sidewalk, outside a sliding gate made of iron and black painted sheets of brass. After leaving a piece of id. at reception, one goes through another door, where an armed guard unlocks the way into the pavilion's ground floor.

A dark, artificially lit hallway separates two rows of rooms. The ground floor, originally designed as a rehabilitation activities area, is a mix of tiny convenience stores, elemental kitchens preparing food for sale, and knitting rooms, all abuzz with conversation.

SCENE 1: THE PRISON

NANCY: I hope some cuts come our way too. We ache for cuts. We've been hoping for them and if we get them, then a lot of people will be cleared out of here. You know. I tell you, sometimes when I'm thinking in bed, I think that I wouldn't wish jail even on my worst enemy. Because the can is the worst. It's a graveyard, but a graveyard of living people. Not bad ones, because when visitors' day comes, so do flowers, food and everything else. It's sad.

CYNTHIA: Yeah. My uncle works for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal; my other uncle is a prof at the National Cultural Centre; another one is a Customs officer and my aunt is a teacher. I have family who could help me, but nobody does, nobody.

NANCY: This prison is a sad world, where mothers are kept with their children. In here I think a lot about things. Everyday I read, and I'm writing my own book, like a diary story.

CYNTHIA: Yeah, I didn't just ask one person, I asked every soul who knew me. But you know, when you end up in the hole, guilty or not, the whole planet forgets about you. Everybody thinks you're a low-life slime, and that you are the worst person they ever knew.

LUISA: In Germany, in Germany, the prisons there are spotless, so clean that you can eat off the floor.

LUCERO: Because we live here, how can I say...angry, right? Sometimes, the system, the same atmosphere, makes me upset. Sometimes I would like to exploit...I don't know. Sometimes, I don't even recognize myself. Because to the other inmates, like the ones living in the wing, when I'm going to heat some water, I want to beat them up. Sometimes, I don't know, there are days that I wake up with another mind, right?

CYNTHIA: Nobody wants to give us a hand because they're afraid of getting in too deep, they don't want to mess around in this kind of world. I don't have any credentials, not even a highschool diploma because when I asked my sister if she had done as I asked her, she said she was nervous, afraid, and didn't want to feel tarnished if anyone found out that I was here.

LUCERO: Being in here, in this environment, is what gets to me. I think and think all day about all of my problems, and this is what makes people in here moody. You can get pretty rough in here, I don't know, I guess I'm getting like that, aggressive... anything can set me off... make we want to punch somebody, or lash out with whatever I've got in my hand.

EDILMA: In here, you can't trust anyone. It's dog eat dog. And you know, my man is in the hole too. And get this: each Friday we get to visit our men and the guards give us body searches that I can't, I mean I really can't handle. If it was like a formal thing with a doctor, well that's different, at least he changes gloves after each check. But these guys just wrap their hands in a plastic bag and strip us bare, and feel us up in places our own lovers haven't gone.

LUCERO: Even if you don't smoke up , you walk around all tensed up, sometimes pretty mean, and if you've taken something more, it can be even worse. Sometimes the stuff can mellow you out, but in here it can bring out the worst in you. If you've been a smoker and then you come in here and only smoke up a bit – it can drive you nuts. I just couldn't take it, so I just stopped smoking up altogether even if people gave me stuff anyhow. When I first came here, like the first three months, I smoked tobacco a lot and I felt really bad, so now I don't smoke at all.

EDILMA: Look, I'm in here for trafficking, but I'm not about to start trafficking in the can, see? I don't like getting myself messed up with that kind of stuff. So I'm doing alright. Well, not alright, let's face it, I miss my family, my kids, and everything, but

at least, I haven't got any problems in here, I'm just putting in time.

LUISA: But I don't want, I mean I couldn't stand to have my sister come here, or her husband, and I don't want my boyfriend to see me here, or my brother. Nobody, nobody, I am the only one who can see myself in this hole.

CYNTHIA: You know there are some things that just, well, they just start chipping away at you. They make you close up and harden. God knows I need my freedom back and that is my main hope. I can't even think of having another relationship with someone. Sometimes I just feel so bitter with life, bitter and full of resentment. And being in here just makes it worse.

NARRATOR: Cynthia. A four year old girl with black, long hair and round eyes, goes out of the room. She couldn't resist the allure of other children playing outside. She comes back in one more time, running now. She rests her head on Cynthia's lap while looking attentively at the tape recorder. She recovers her breath; her light green legging covered legs don't stop moving. Off she goes again.

Cynthia smiles and continues talking. Her daughter is the most important part of her life. Yet, Cynthia can't make sense of her current situation. Her mother, her daughter and herself are in jail. "It's absurd," she says. She talks eloquently about the injustice that governs law enforcement and justice administration institutions. Her short and strong hands, open and closed, wave back and forth from her chest, gesticulating desperate shapes in the air, anger and frustration as she sits in the children school's desk. Through her eyes one can see, that inside her body her emotions are very much alive, captive, seeking any opportunity to come out.

Cynthia grew up in different cities. Her mother carried the family from cities in the coastal plains to cities in the highlands and back. She, her five siblings and her mother eventually settled down in the commercial core of Quito's colonial downtown. She thinks of herself as an accomplished student for she often had represented her class in school events. She finished junior high.

At age fourteen, Cynthia fell in love for the first time. She then got pregnant by her boyfriend, an older man, owner of the shoe factory where Cynthia and her mother used to work. Deceived and unable to continue studying, Cynthia and her daughter became part of a hard-working, extended family, professing strong values and work ethics.

Four years later, a former neighbour and family friend – a woman that stays overnight at Cynthia's house, to rest in between business trips back and forth from Colombia – returns one afternoon with a group of eight undercover narcotics policemen. They ask for the woman's suitcase and find inside its double bottom, two *family size*, chocolate bar-like, packages wrapped in golden paper. After the family friend incriminates Cynthia and Cynthia's mother, the three of them are sent to jail. Cynthia has been imprisoned for nineteen months. She is sentenced to eight years in prison because, in her words, "she was over eighteen and was at home when the police arrived."

SCENE 2: PROOF AND EVIDENCE

ALBA: They told me that I knew where the stuff was, but my man didn't have anything on him. They took him in and he was clean.

CYNTHIA: And I'll tell you something else. You can have all the protection in the world, or none of it. When the Interpol comes knocking it doesn't matter if you are with your whole family or not, or if you're an old lady or not. They'll take you in even if it's just to ask questions. They put me in here for a year and a half just to be interrogated. And then they convicted me and gave me 8 years.

NANCY: They really ran one over on me. They planted the stuff on me. It's the Interpol agents..., they're the buyers and the sellers. They're the ones who do the deals, its because of them that a lot of the people in here are locked up.

ALBA: They just kept saying that it was because I had gone home and got rid of everything I had there.

EDILMA: Well you know.... After I had left the suitcase in the hotel and left to walk around a bit, around 9 at night, I came back and Interpol was there waiting for me. I even knew one of them, he was a friend of mine and didn't want to cause any trouble for me, but his partner, who I didn't know, didn't think the same way.

LUISA: It was at the airport. They took me aside and told me that the dogs smelled something in my suitcase. I didn't believe them because my suitcase hadn't even left the weighing station. Someone blew the whistle and said "such a day a Spaniard this size and that, is carrying a kilo of cocaine" right? That's what happened.

GRACE: For sure..., for sure there was a whistle blower.

LUISA: Deep down inside, I crumbled. I fainted, and I made a big scene. I kept on saying that I didn't know anything, that the suitcase wasn't mine, that I was there to take a suitcase full of emeralds. Thank God that the man in charge told the Interpol that he knew what was in the suitcase, that I didn't know what was in there.

EDILMA: He said: "Ahhh missy, let me see your papers." And I said: "Certainly, here they are." I gave him the papers and everything was fine. Then he asked for the suitcase and I said I didn't have one. But I had my keys in my hand, and since they were on a wooden key ring, I couldn't hide them. So he told me to give him the keys and I said: "There they are." They took them away from me and opened up my room. They came and went straight to where my books were and ripped them apart. "Ah – he said – you didn't carry anything, eh?"

NARRATOR: The most conspicuous indicator, the *identity* between women in jail and

drug charges, has not changed at all since 1992 . In 2000, there were seven hundred and eighteen women incarcerated in Ecuador. Seventy two percent of them are locked in for drug trafficking, sixteen percent are accused of property crimes and around ten percent are accused of violence against people.

In comparison with their male counterparts, women's crimes are much less violent. Women in jail tend to be older than men, less likely to have a spouse, are more educated or more literate than men, and are more frequently from another country.

Female inmates do not escape from nor die in jail as often as men do: twenty three men died in jail in 1999, half of them due to inmate violence. Women in jail have lesser access to professional help (i.e. physicians, social workers), yet tend to request psychological assistance more often.

SCENE 3: INTERROGATION

CYNTHIA: With Interpol there are the interrogations. And there are some dungeons that are even smaller than the cells here. They demand all kinds of papers to find out if you've ever been detained before, they want to know how old you are, they want documents and proof of any credentials, and then they check and see your file for other problems or arrests.

NANCY: Oh, it was just horrible. I don't really remember it all, and really I hate to talk about it. It just makes me so sad. It's really horrible, it is an ugly scene, ugly. I wouldn't wish prison even for my worst enemy.

GRACE: I said that it was mine, but then they asked why did I claim it if it wasn't mine, but I kept on saying that it was mine because the guy who stayed at our place said that it belonged to my brothers, but I didn't want that.

CYNTHIA: The interrogation!! They never put down what you say. When you are told that you have been arrested, it means you lose all your rights as a human being, the right to even be a person. You might as well not say anything because no one believes you anyway. You can't say anything because either they don't believe you or they will twist your words around.

EDILMA: The next day they asked me who I worked with. I had already told them I didn't work with anybody. "Who does this stuff belong to?", they asked. I said that belonged to a man. They asked me if I knew the man. I said I wasn't sure. So I asked them how they came to know about the stuff in the books. And they said they couldn't tell me anything like that just yet, only that the person was practically part of my family. I asked how could that be? I asked them to take it easy and at least give me some kind of idea. No, they wouldn't tell me anything.

LUISA: When they did the interrogation with me there weren't any women. It was at night and there was this sergeant, I think. I had to sit down.... Well, they sat me down because I was really messed up. I had blacked out a lot. And he said to me and the others: "Stay calm ladies, calm." But there was no way. It was brutal, the worst is to have to go through Interpol. I don't know if they still beat you up, but I'm pretty sure they do.

NANCY: Really, the way the Interpol does things. I could accept a conversation about what was going on, but they only want to know if you are a trafficker. I mean they want to squeeze lies out of the truth, and everything is done through torture and beatings.

ALBA: I told them that I had gotten rid of everything, that I wasn't even with my husband, that I had been with my sister. She didn't even know anything and they went and took her in too.

EDILMA: Once they had brought me here, he said to me: "Mary. It was her that did this to you." And well, I asked why, but he just asked me what I had done to her. But I hadn't done anything to her. That explains why she never backed me up or came to visit me. You know..., just eight days before they picked me up, they got her because of immigration papers. I went to try and fix things up and get her out, so I thought that she would've also given me a hand, or at least get in touch with my family.

CYNTHIA: Our economic situation was made really difficult by the Interpol because they had taken so much of our merchandise. They took all of the candy we had bought just a week before, worth about 400,000 sucres. They made off with five big bundles that they made us pack for them. They even took underwear and pyjamas.

NANCY: They burned me, like I was some kind of terrorist. I have the scars on my legs where they did it, but I don't know what they used to burn me with. They put me in this big tank. I'm not a trafficker. They told me that if I didn't tell them the truth that they would kill me, and dump me in a field for the animals to eat. What could I say? You tell me. I wasn't a trafficker. I didn't know anyone who was a trafficker. I didn't know anything about trafficking. I told them to kill me for telling them the truth.

LUISA: There was this woman. She gave me this stuff to drink to make me go to the bathroom, but I didn't have anything inside, so then they wanted to take an X-ray. Then the sergeant came in and stopped everything. He said that I didn't have anything to do with drugs. He believed what I had to say and I told him that I didn't know anything. But then I ran into some really bad luck because then this stupid, country bumpkin police officer claimed that my passport was false. He said that I wasn't German or Spanish but a Colombian – leach drug pusher. I told the guy that my passport had been issued at the Spanish embassy in Germany. Then I told him that he was an ignorant asshole who couldn't read or write. And well, he didn't let me explain anything, and so that night they brought me here.

GRACE: They drove me around in this car and gave me a real blood bath, they gave it to me with their fists. We rode through every street in Quito looking for my brothers because this other man had said that it wasn't me, but my brothers. They just kept on slapping and punching me, there was so much blood.... They threw me up against the glass, they wouldn't stop. I didn't know where my brothers were. I just didn't know. I couldn't think of where to find them. And they just kept on beating me, and I couldn't tell them anything that would make them stop, and when I asked them what could I do to make them leave me alone, they asked for two million sucres.

LUCERO: Well look, right in front of the Prosecutor I said to them: "Look, you guys picked that kid up, you guys went around talking and let him go." But since we didn't have any money to give them, well they brought us here. They were asking for three hundred thousand sucres but I didn't have it. If I had the cash I would've given it to them, anything to get them not to bring me here. In here I've lost everything, I've lost my money, I've lost my things, everything. I even have my own kid in here, he's going to be four soon. I've got to send him somewhere else, but in other places they treat the kids really badly, they beat them.

ALBA: They were interrogating me, saying all kinds of things, and then they hit my husband right in front of my daughter. I think that's why she is so traumatized. She only thinks about her father, she wants to get out of here to be with him. She can't stand being in here.

GRACE: So they told me that if I couldn't give them two million, they would sentence me to eight years. But I didn't have that kind of money, where would I get it? So I told them that I didn't have any way of getting them the cash, and so they beat me up some more. When they brought me down to the Interpol, they hung me up with those sticks and they left me only with my underwear on. Then they put me in that big tank with gas, with all that junk in there. They made me stay there for eight days.

LUISA: It was already dark out when they picked me up. They took me and were going to bring me to the prison, and they tried to rape me. There were four guys, they were young, like younger than me, around eighteen or nineteen years old. They drove around for a really long time saying that they didn't know where the jail was. I told them not to tell me stories, that they knew how to get there better than the route to their own homes. So anyway, we hung around this place for a long time, it was really dark out, and they parked the car and one of the guys started to take his pants down and they both were saying that I was such a pretty thing and a lot of other crap . I was already crying and crying and I couldn't take it any longer. I was desperate so I kicked him in the knee and then gave it to him right in his private parts and I screamed that they had to take me to the jail right now or else I would smash the windows. So they brought me here. They brought me here.

ALBA: They didn't beat me. I had just given birth to my daughter.

LUCERO: They didn't beat me up. But really what does it matter if they don't slap us around when they sink us so badly in their written reports?

LUISA: What I have been through in here! But the morning after I get out of here, I am going to the biggest business in Germany and I'm going to tell them what Ecuador is all about and what the Interpol is because nobody has the right to beat up anyone else.

LUCERO: I have been here six months already and I haven't been sentenced. This type of thing is a big problem here in Ecuador. Instead of doing things quickly and giving me a sentence or letting me go, or charging me with a fine, whatever, they don't do anything and so you don't know what's going on. You could be here for three or four years without having been sentenced, and they keep you locked up anyway waiting.

LUISA: So now there is nothing. I am the big loser. I had a house and I had a car and now I don't have a thing. And once you've got a record, it's pretty hard to try and get other people to help you out, like helping to set you up with a job someplace else, like in Europe. I am the loser.

NARRATOR: Perhaps the most dramatic indicator of the very precarious situation women face in jail is the number of infants and young children living in jail with the inmates. On average, three hundred and seventeen children lived in jail on any day through 1999. Only two rehabilitation centres, one in each of the two largest cities, provide an already over-flooded child care service. The situation elsewhere challenges the imagination. In two small-city jails, sixty percent overcrowded, with inmate self-employment ratios among the lowest in the country, and where over ninety percent of the seventy inmates are accused of drug trafficking, at least fifty children live in with their mothers.

SCENE 4: THE LAWYERS

EDILMA: In here I don't have anything, and I don't know anything. I know that I left a lawyer out there, but I don't know if he's doing anything or not. My mom came around six months ago and told me that the lawyer wasn't doing anything.

CYNTHIA: Once I was here for about eight days the jail gave me a lawyer. The director called me in and told me that these two lawyers wanted to help me and she asked me if I wanted their help. One of them said that she wanted to defend me because of my daughter and because I was really young. I told her fine, but I said that I didn't have anything to pay them, not a penny to support my own defence.

LUCERO: I don't have a lawyer, I don't have anything, nobody to give me a hand with this problem. This is my greatest worry, because of my son. For me, they could

lock me up and make me knit, or anything else, but my son, this is what really mortifies me and gets me depressed.

CYNTHIA: When they sentenced me to eight years, right away she appealed... But I'm still waiting. But she has been really good with me, she's a really good lawyer.

GRACE: So look, when my hearing began, the lawyer, Mr. Steel, presented only 4 papers for me, nothing more. Then for the guy who was on trial with me, his lawyer presented a dossier yay thick, and so I asked my lawyer why he hadn't gotten anything together. I didn't even have a defence! All he said was that I was a person who never had any problems with the law and that was it. He didn't defend me. There just wasn't any defence at all.

ALBA: We have a lawyer who knows my oldest sister. So he is helping us out, but he hardly ever comes here. We've seen twice here, but not more than that. He came after we had been here for one month, and since then, not again. It's been nine months.

EDILMA: I think that my case hasn't been closed yet.

NANCY: Well, I'll tell you, my lawyer and about five other lawyers have defended me very well. But what for? They tried their best to help me, but it's all the same, I've been sentenced and when it's over, I go free.

ALBA: My mother told me that no one has said anything about when we are going to be able to leave. Our case has been dropped, no one is accusing us of anything anymore so we should be able to leave here, but we can't leave here.

CYNTHIA: After being here for ten months, I went to the tribunal, and that took another fifteen days. I was told that I had to pay five hundred thousand. But I didn't have it, so I was given eight years. When they told me to give over the money, and I

said I couldn't, they told me three hundred thousand. But still I couldn't manage it. I would've sent the money if I had it. And for all the bad luck in the world, the Prosecutor who demanded the money was present at my hearing.

GRACE: And, that was the same way I was sentenced for eight years.

ALBA: My mom has given the lawyer everything, over half a million sucres and still nothing happens. She says the lawyer needs it for the Prosecutor, the judge, to get papers prepared, but he doesn't do anything and now the case is in court. My mom has my things, everything, even though I don't have a thing because I had to sell it all. Yeah, I needed the money to pay the lawyer.

NARRATOR: Lucero. Lucero ran away from home when she was eleven years old. She wandered through many streets, in different cities, in Colombia and Ecuador, and drifted from one adoptive family to another. Along the way she learned the skills to successfully manage the *informal* economy of street markets and open air plazas, selling produces and diverse manufactured items. She also developed a dependence on smoking *basuco*, a volatile mix of tobacco and cocaine sulfate or *base*. Later on, she settled in Quito with her spouse and their son, sold Peruvian clothing in the streets and smoked up regularly. One rainy day, after she met her dealer around the University Campus, and while she was finishing the transaction, the narcotics police captured her. She doesn't have enough money to match the price policemen put on themselves. So, she was sent to prison under the charges of drug possession – around sixty grams of base of cocaine – and drug dealing. The police agents let the dealer go. Six months later, with no resources to hire a lawyer, without any support from outside, she waits and waits for her trial and sentence.

Lucero is an energetic and outspoken young person. She talks without pauses, collecting early childhood memory events as if they happened just moments ago. In a way, she presents her fast-paced, ever-changing life as a sort of a pitch sale in the street. She knows very well why she is in jail, but she will never accept being

undersold by moral standards and punitive legal figures. Her life it seems has always belonged to her, and her capacity to overcome adversity and remain calm in extreme conditions speaks of adaptability and self reliance. There is no remorse nor deep sense of being a victim due to a precarious childhood or a body-punishing addiction. She seems willing and ready to forgive herself and to jump start life again.

She looks fit and well groomed: her hair is combed and tied back in a pony tail, her clothes are clean, their colours are fading. Her presence transmits the kind of physical fitness and sense awareness that has been shaped by life in the streets and constant public interaction with customers and male friends. The revealing and ageing effects of frequent tobacco-and-base – *pistola* – smoking have almost disappeared from her face and fingers. When she speaks of her son, her only visit from outside, ineluctably shared with her mother-in-law, her facial expression doesn't change. She remembers herself.

SCENE 5: THE LAW

LUCERO: This really doesn't seem real. Justice here is so, so ignorant.

CYNTHIA: Look, it's just something that you never forget.

LUCERO: No, look, really check it out: A couple of agents nabbed me, but they let the guy who sold out on me go. So then they wanted three hundred thousand sucres to set me free, but since I didn't have it, they took me to the Interpol, but they let the real guy go.

CYNTHIA: All that happens with the Interpol, when you get picked up and all the humiliating things that go on are hard to talk about. They are real experiences, personal experiences. But maybe its good to let it out so that you can know and maybe do something about the law.

LUCERO: You know, they let the guy who was dealing go, and then they accused us of doing the dealing.

CYNTHIA: I don't believe in paying for eight years. Look, I'm nineteen years old, I'm going to die if I have to stay here.

LUCERO: Just try to imagine this, it really seems unreal; the justice system in Ecuador is so ignorant and so, so tight.

CYNTHIA: My daughter, even though she has a father who has everything, he doesn't even remember her, so I can't rely on this.

LUCERO: Look, get this, for one or two grams, they give us 8 years. This is unreal.

CYNTHIA: And if we can talk to you about these things, our experiences, maybe you can do something not just for me, but for all of us who are here, and in many other places. This would be so good, and a step forward, something productive.

LUCERO: Look, if somebody is caught with two or three kilos, they get eight to twelve years. See, it's the same. The same penalty. This just can't be. If somebody is caught with a small amount, then they should do less time.

CYNTHIA: Because having us here for so long, eight, twelve and sixteen years, like how the law is applied now, is just fatal for me. You learn good and bad things here. Look, I never before in my life knew what being a lesbian meant, and here this is all over the place, you know what I mean?

LUCERO: The law here is stupid.

CYNTHIA: Here you learn. Here life itself beats you up. We are always under the bar,

so many rules, we can't say yes or no to something we don't think is right, we must obey the rules. The ones that suffer and pay for this are our kids. Look, my daughter is three years old, and my greatest suffering comes from watching her grow up.

End of Act One

Act Two

- *Family*
- *Schooling and peers*
- *Work*
- *Spouse*
- *Pregnancies*
- *Children*
- *Splitting and new relations*

NARRATOR: We were invited to sit around a table. The first minutes of the exchange were used to explain my presence to our hosts: a woman folding clothes and a man *unfolding* each word I was saying. When I paused, he got up from the table, lifted up his t-shirt, and pointed to several knife, ice pick and machete scars on his torso and flanks.

The woman's presence was quite even and steady. The home, by all standards austere: one large room, dirt floor, no in-house bathroom nor running water — was tidy and cozy. The visible domestic order — beds made, clean kerosene stove, swept floors — appeared to be for a moment the thread and needle suturing blade and sharp end caused wounds.

As we were preparing to leave, two girls walked in. They had long, jet-black hair, combed and in place since the early morning hours. Their bright eyes seemed surprised to meet mine. They promptly proceeded to place their school bags by their shared bed. They wore white cotton, narrow-pleated, down to the calf skirts and long sleeve shirts, and blue acrylic wool sweaters — a school uniform, a dress-code that embraced parental aspirations for a balanced and *matching* life. Each of those many and long, perfectly delineated pleats, seemed to be ironed as if tracking the parent's past and recent imprisonment into an homogenizing yet *normal* time in a classroom

with friends.

SCENE 1: FAMILY

LUISA: I don't remember much though. I had a very nice childhood. We've always been a very united family, very close. I've never seen my parents fight over anything. If there was a problem, it was solved in the family. My parents love me very much and I love them very much. They are very sacred for me. And despite everything and the problems that I've caused them, in the year that I'm here, they've never failed me. They call me every Sunday. Anything I need, they send it to me.

GRACE: Well, during my childhood I enjoyed very much helping my parents. My mother was a vendor in the stadium and I always helped her. I was the youngest child and my siblings were all married at that time. I always helped my parents a lot in their business. That is why they love me very much. I was everything for them. Then, well, of my youth, I can't tell anything else because I came here when I was eighteen.

ALBA: My mom has always loved us all. She has, like, always supported us. My mom has, like, been like a friend. She hasn't been like my dad, bad. She's never beat us up. Mom's never beat us up.

LUCERO: Yeah. My mother. She couldn't say, like, anything because if she did, my father beat her. So she didn't get involved, because of fear.

GRACE: "Bad sons" said my father. My mother, my mother, like, stick up for her sons and said: "Children are like that. What can we do? It's life," and then they argued. Dad didn't know anything about it.

CYNTHIA: My mom is a very strict person, very straight. She doesn't like things that

put a person down. Mom is very straight and in the circle my mom raised us, there weren't that kind of things. Mom always raised us like nice girls, she always wanted the best for us.

GRACE: My mother knew that they used to ask me: "Grace do this, Grace do that," everything. But my mother always said to me: "Be careful. Watch it. Don't you...." "No, no!" [I said]. "They just asked me to store it. I will give it back to them. That's all. Nothing happens." Nothing had, like, happened to me, so I wasn't afraid.

NANCY: Honestly, of my childhood, I can tell you that it wasn't like so and so. How can I tell you...I was the happiest girl in the home I grew up. Not with my parents but with my grandparents. They raised me because I was the first grand daughter.

EDILMA: When I was around fourteen, I got married, and before I turned fifteen I had my first son. My childhood wasn't, like, very nice. Since then, I've lived a life – how can I say – more serious, more complicated with my home, my husband, right? I didn't have, like I said, much luck, much happiness when I was a kid. With my mother it was all right. Maybe that is what it took me to do this mad thing of being here.

GRACE: My father, never had, like, another woman. So, he's always belonged to his home. My mother the same. So, in that department there was never a thing to say, like, he disrespected us or something.

ALBA: When I was little I suffered a lot because of my father. My father was always bad with my brothers and my mom, with all of us. Like he beat us up a lot, my mom too. One day, when I was ten, he burnt her clothing. My mother has suffered, like, a lot. Even now she suffers because of him. He beat my oldest sister all the time.

LUCERO: My father beat us, beat us for anything.

EDILMA: Dad always wanted to get everything through violence. So I tell my Dad: "You don't intervene in anything, in anything, in nothing! Let things alone then I, if I can, you know, I do things my way."

LUCERO: Well, the truth is that I grew up like...being a kid it was very hard, right? Like, there was not a good childhood, like, no understanding between my father and my mother. Always fighting, arguments, always disagreements on everything, for anything they fought. I saw that and when I was, like, eleven, I ran away.

CYNTHIA: My childhood was very hard. It was very hard because my mother was widowed when I was nine so I had to look after my three year old sister. It was very hard because my mother had to work. She didn't even have a place to live. I quit school for a couple of years and I fell way behind in my studies.

LUCERO: I left home. I left and grew up, like, in places, with people like...sometimes I was with this lady, she had me for some time, then I'd leave. Frankly, I had, like, a hard childhood, right?

ALBA: My mother works hand-washing other people's laundry. I have five brothers and sisters. My mother's bedroom was downstairs. The six of us always shared the other bedroom upstairs.

LUCERO: Altogether, we are twelve in my family. I'm the fourth, fifth, wait, the third. My mother worked in the market selling potatoes, fava beans, everything. My father worked there too.

GRACE: One of my sisters looks after my father and my other sister looks after my brother that is sick. He's sick, he's not, like, a madman, he's sick but he drinks too much, too much. We thought of putting him somewhere so he would leave the booze. But we couldn't find help anywhere. Even my brothers didn't do a thing. I was the one

who used to bath him and shave him. I cut his hair, I dressed him. Because he's like a baby. He's twenty six, but he's like a baby.

EDILMA: With my sister I get along okay. But I've always had my moments of being upset, right? And I've always had responsibilities with them. In these days, lately, I was responsible for the house right? For my sisters, my children, my nephews, for all of them. My first husband died seven years ago.

ALBA: My sister is here with me. We always get along well.

NARRATOR: Grace. She grew up in the neighbourhood ascending over a singular, round and symmetric hill. On its top there is a large sculpture of a Catholic virgin overlooking the northern part of Quito. Being very young, Grace started working at her parents' small business, selling food in the Stadium during weekend soccer games. She also cared very much for her older brothers. One of them is a alcoholic who used to depend exclusively on her. Two others are well-known petty robbers. From time to time, they ask Grace to sell stolen goods – television sets, car stereos – for them. They are regular users of illegal drugs and sometimes Grace secretly keeps their stuff at her place. She has never tried any drugs.

During a Police raid of her parents' place, one of her brothers fled through the roof, leaving behind four grams of cocaine "according to the law." Grace took all the responsibility to prevent her parents from being charged. After a prolonged and brutal police investigation she was locked in prison. At that time she was eighteen, recently married and caring for a four month old baby. Now, she is about to complete the fifth year in her eight year sentence.

Grace's body is tall and lean. Her hands are long with strong gripping fingers. She talks in long stretches and seems to recall past events without much effort. Sometimes though, her voice fades away, overcome by tears, pain and sadness. Her abundant black, long and wavy hair frames a face with strong features: high cheekbones, thick eyebrows, fast moving eyes. When she's not talking, her lips are clenched

and her neck muscles are tense.

She wears track pants, a long sleeved sweater and sandals. Under the tough look and attitude life in prison imprints on anybody, Grace seems to nurture a compassionate, giving and forgiving self. She smiles often while talking about her five year old son's thriving life with his care giver and his achievements in kindergarten. She looks forward to the weekend, when he comes and stays overnight. She looks forward fifteen months from now, when the sentence is over, to live with her family, to look after her aging father and helpless brother again.

SCENE 2: SCHOOLING AND PEERS

CYNTHIA: In school I enjoyed very much running, jumping and especially playing soccer. I always participated in academic contests. I won the first place in a Spanish contest. I was always a very good student. My mother took very good care of us. She cared for our uniforms, text books and school supplies. Life in school was very nice. I finished junior high.

GRACE: I was a good student. I always passed everything. Teachers liked me and everything like that. They liked me lots. I also finished junior high.

ALBA: Well, I studied until grade seven. I got along well, had good marks.

LUCERO: For me, it wasn't, like, a nice childhood, say like "my parents raised me or gave me education." No. I finished grade six, like, because God only knows, right? Because there wasn't anything else, like, somebody that would give me school, like, my parents, nothing.

NANCY: After I graduated from high school, I went to another school. I was like an accountant and I'm like an executive secretary too. Then, after I finished my studies, I

got married and after I came here. That's everything I can say about my history. My life's been -how can I say- not too nice, not too good, but not, like, too ugly, one would say.

LUISA: I've been very lazy. I don't like school much. I've always been pretty bad for math. After school I got into the hairdressing profession for three years. In Germany you learn three years of hairdressing. I finished three years of hairdressing right? Over there is very straight.

NANCY: I got out every six months. I was like a boarder. My parents always visited me when I was there. I compare this circumstance that I'm in jail with... in school, since I was a girl, I think I knew I was going to be in jail. At least Sundays, they would let me go out, like, to my parent's. Here they don't. Like a jail, right? With the difference that here one has to do everything.

EDILMA: My school, well...I got to study until grade five only. That's it, no more. Thanks to my mother's efforts and mine too. Only that.

NANCY: I've always liked having friends, but, like, distant friends. I've never been friendly, friendly, if you wish, but distant friendship, right? Until now that I have my wrinkles, I've not found an ideal friend, you can say. A friend like I can feel satisfied with, and to say: "Well, I found a friend."

LUCERO: Look, speaking like that, I've never had girlfriends. I've always been, like, distant, because girlfriends always go to someone and tell something. It's a problem. They go and say: "She's like this, she's like that." I haven't had girlfriends in Colombia, nor in Ecuador. I've always been alone. If I had any friends, they were male friends, but not intimate. Friends like: "Hi, what's up," like that.

GRACE: Yes, but, like, how can I say this. I like having friendships. Until now I'm

like that. I don't like injustice... I don't like it. I like everything being fair, right? To look after people that need something. Even if I need something, other people need it more, you understand? So, I like that, being like that...and do whatever is at hand.

CYNTHIA: I am the most lonely person. How can I say? I do not enjoy having many friends and I haven't had luck either. My life has been my family, my home, my studies, my siblings and work. That's it. I've never liked making girlfriends or compromises neither.

LUCERO: Like, for example, not even now, in this place where I am, I don't have friends. I don't speak with nobody. We say hi, we laugh, three, four words, no more. With my room mate we talk, sometimes we comment about something. Or I listen to my music, smoke my cigarette and start knitting. I don't hang out. I'm distant, a little sour. It's like everybody cares for their life and leave alone the person next to you.

EDILMA: Friends were okay. Not fine, but okay. I try to fit in, although for me it is difficult. I've always lived alone, isolated.

LUISA: I've had, I don't know why – for sure because of the education my parents gave me – I have many, lots of friends, that love me very much, that I love very much. But boyfriend, boyfriend...Mike's been my first boyfriend. He's forty already, he's fifteen years older than I am. My parents don't like him.

NANCY: Look, I tell you, sincerely, I never hung on with boyfriends. I was into my studies. My life until I was twenty, when I had my two professions, I tell you sincerely, I never gave myself to a man telling me: "I like you." Because I went from my school to my home, and from home to school. I never got fixed on anybody.

LUCERO: About boyfriends? I haven't had many boyfriends. I've always been distant from that. When I was thirteen I had a guy but I failed with him. After that failure, I

distanced myself from everybody because I had already been pushed away.

GRACE: Well, boyfriends...in high school, I had friends, boyfriends, but something light only. When I was seventeen, I married and had my son, and after I got married, I didn't have more boyfriends. Also, I married when I was seventeen. I was about to turn eighteen when I came here.

NANCY: Sometimes they said: "Miss Nancy." Well, I didn't pay attention. I didn't swear either. I was committed to my studies, to study and study. In my house I had a room only to study and... like, I didn't even eat because I loved to study, right? I wanted to move forward and not get stuck.

CYNTHIA: Look, I never had intentions of having a boyfriend. My first boyfriend was my daughter's father. He was my first kiss, my first embrace. My life was always from home to school, from school to home, from work to home. I didn't have the opportunity to go dancing or go to the movies. In that aspect, I suffered because my first kiss came from my daughter's father. So, I didn't have boyfriends, I didn't go out. I knew everything with him.

ALBA: We lived in "El Rolo." There were nice people there and everything. But later the neighbourhood started to rot. It rotted completely.

GRACE: People were afraid. They said: "He's like this, he's like that." Maybe that is why I'm distant from everything. I, like... one thing that I do... I like being alone, in my room, alone, knitting. I've liked to walk alone, I like loneliness a lot, and I've been like that outside. I never liked reunions and stuff. Because in front of other people.... What a shame: "Your brothers are this, your brothers are that. I'm scared of them." People ran away from me. So, maybe I have a complex and until now I carry it with me. I stay away so people won't talk to me. It has been like this...because everybody knew, everybody was afraid and everything.

NARRATOR: Ecuadorean women are now enduring pressing circumstances emanating from state policies and from evolving gender relations. Their participation in the *public* sector of the economy is taking place in a context of profound social changes: structural unemployment, precarious labour relations and disappearing social protection. The nature of social relations within the *private* sphere modify accordingly: there are more non-nuclear family arrangements and reproductive patterns are changing.

Women's *liberation* in Ecuador has meant increased work loads, particularly for those considered *single*. Women's visibility in traditional calculations of employment rates has increased because the proportion of married women who work outside home has also increased. Meanwhile, *un-married* women who are responsible for the subsistence of others, more often fall under the official poverty line. Women household-heads usually have under their care family members other than their children. These women receive on average, over a third less of primary rent than male-headed households do. They are more often illiterate.

SCENE 3: WORK

NANCY: I never had a work experience. Even with my profession. I know how to do things. But now that I've passed through here... I'm a widow, I lost my husband and now I have to work because I don't have anybody to look after me. Now is very different.

GRACE: I sold food stuff in the Olympic Stadium.

LUCERO: Look, when I was selling in the market, I sold all kinds of produce. I got bored of that and left.

CYNTHIA: I never, never worked for somebody else. I've always worked in our own

business. We had a shoe store.

ALBA: I've never worked. I stayed at home, studying, until I got married.

EDILMA: When I was thirteen, I went to work, like a domestic servant. My father was very strict, and he always said to me that he wasn't my father, that he didn't want me at home. Well, I ran away.

LUISA: My father works in the Opel car factory for twenty five years now. He has influence there and got me a job. I worked there for a year and a half. They paid me well. But I like working with people, so I quit.

LUCERO: I found another lady, she, like, knew me also. She sold clothing and other stuff. She said: "Do you want to help?" I said: "Sure". And I started to sell pants, shirts, all that, in the market, like a street vendor, right?

CYNTHIA: Later, we left that job, that business. My dad started to sell boxes of Colombian candy in small towns. We've always worked for ourselves, only with our money.

EDILMA: I stayed at my uncle's, working. They gave me only food and clothing, no money. But that was a lot for me. I suffered there because some days they had, some days didn't have, anything to eat. I wasn't, like, with a millionaire, but at least I was far away from my father's punishment.

LUISA: Then I met my boyfriend. He's German, but he doesn't like Germans. He knows many things. We started to work very hard. I worked in a disco at night, and in a boutique in the mornings.

GRACE: I had, like, a stall in the street market. I sold goods. My mother-in-law gave

me the spot. She said: "Since you're with him, it's time you get married and I'm going to give you this stall." Because she had several spots in the market.

LUISA: It was hard, very hard. And at that time I started taking drugs.

EDILMA: After I married I looked after my home. After I widowed, I started to work selling clothing and whatever I could. And then I got into drug trafficking because I saw that it was more profitable, right? ...So, I worked in that..., it wasn't for a long time. After a while I got here.

LUISA: So, at that time I took lots of drugs until my body said: "Here I am". Because you cannot take in so many problems. But look, until the body says: "I am here!"... So, I quit drugs. But not smoking, or a line of cocaine from time to time. But I quit drugs. I had to be at work, and in Germany you're nothing without work.

GRACE: At the photo shop I worked for six months. But the boss wanted me to do a lot. He said that I had to work weekends too. At home I had to wash, to iron, so I couldn't do it. I had to work in the market, every Sunday at the stadium. The boss, like every boss, got upset. So, I quit.

LUISA: Then, I got tired of working there because they paid little, and I wanted to live in Spain very much. Mike and I got some money together and went to live in Spain together.

NARRATOR: Alba. Alba was born and raised in the old working class neighbourhoods on the hills surrounding Quito colonial downtown's core. A home-maker since an early age, she cared after her two young daughters and assisted her spouse during drug-buying trips to Colombia, and also by packaging and selling small amounts of cocaine sulfate or *base* to a diverse clientele "including bank employees." After Alba watched how the Police – following a client finger pointing – apprehends

her spouse in a park, she went home to destroy any remaining evidence. Later in the same day, along with her daughters and sister, she went to the Police station to ask around about her spouse's case. Based on tips from Alba's landlord and her spouse's confession, the Police arrests her and her sister. Alba's daughters also live in prison. She says they need medical care and prescription drugs. Defence lawyer fees have almost depleted the family modest wealth, without any positive results. Outside prison walls, only Alba's mother fights back bureaucratic oblivion and systemic corruption.

Alba's presence may not be grasped, one of a kind, fluid and invisible. She seems to have the skills for entering and leaving places without being noticed. Her voice is almost a murmur, slowly yielding her speech with question-fitted answers and austere memory recollections. She doesn't talk much. Her posture and body are observant, taking everything in. Alba looks and dresses like her sister, and her daughters look alike. Her hair is long and straight, tied at the back, the colour is black, so are her large round eyes. Her complexion is dark, olive and brown.

She wears a grey skirt, plain, below-the-knee length and a long sleeved blouse under a cardigan. Loose around her shoulders and neck she wears a *chalina*, a small shawl. She sits down, shy and curious, wrapping the shawl around her bare legs and feet. She walks briskly, her face partially hidden behind the *chalina*, This has an acrylic tone of a deep sea blue, resilient wool.

SCENE 4: SPOUSE

EDILMA: I met my husband... He was a guy in the neighbourhood, younger than me. We lived together four months, his parents liked me. And then, like in those times you just got married...we married.

LUISA: I met Mike long time ago. We've been together for six years. But I know Mike longer because he's my brother's friend.

ALBA: I got married when I was fourteen. It was wild... I was four months pregnant.

GRACE: I met him in the neighbourhood and I was his girlfriend when I was fifteen.

LUCERO: I left home and, like, never came back. When I was around sixteen I got a man, the father of my son, right? Because I have a son.

CYNTHIA: The father of my daughter was the owner of the shop where we worked. We knew each other since I was nine.

NANCY: My husband was very mature. You imagine, I met him when he was forty. When I got married he was forty, I was twenty.

EDILMA: He was the only boyfriend I had. After I widowed, well...I tried two more boyfriends.

ALBA: We are still together. But he's older, he's thirty-five.

GRACE: At fifteen, I liked playing basketball, swimming, right? I didn't care much for a boyfriend. I liked more having fun and...I think I saw him once a week, in the neighbourhood, at school. Then...I got closer to him and married him when I was seventeen.

NANCY: He started to get serious. I was, like, playing, because I never think of love like something serious. Just hanging out, like, a ride in the bus together, right? I never had the idea of getting married or something serious, never. I wanted to have a job first, to know how to do things, be independent. Not being, like, looked after by a man and everything else.

LUISA: Mike's girlfriend worked with me in the disco. But he got attracted to me

because of my big eyes, the dark hair. He got attracted to me.

LUCERO: And I made my life with him. He gave me, like, everything. He had me living in a room, he gave me everything I needed. I quit selling in the market, quit everything, right? So, that's my life.

EDILMA: Well, the guy was a hard worker. Since he was ten, he'd been very thoughtful. He had his land, right? With crops and everything, he had savings and a supporting family. I eloped and went to live with him. Everything worked perfectly.

GRACE: We're the same age. He's a retail merchant like his mother. He travelled to Peru to buy goods and brought them here to sell at the street market downtown.

ALBA: We had only a civil wedding.

CYNTHIA: He's much older. I'm nineteen, he's thirty-eight, I think. We met, we fell in love. I started skipping classes at school. We're boyfriend and girlfriend when I was fourteen.

NANCY: He went on and, like, asked me for my address, my telephone number, and called me many times. But I said: "Wait a moment." One sees so many things in life, like so many homes destroyed. Well, excuse me for this. Right? But men sometimes do things to make fun of women, to blackmail them.

CYNTHIA: But, many times, not everything is what one thinks it is.

NANCY: I was like terrified of that, terrified. I saw, like, in the paper, in the news, so many things happening. I said to myself: "What if this, like, happens to my life? Tomorrow or the day after? If he asks me to divorce? ...I thought the worst, the last thing, right? Because of the soap operas, the cheating, feeling betrayed. I tell you, my

life is like a soap opera, I felt like one of those women.

CYNTHIA: My mother didn't know anything. I hid it from her. I used to go with him downstairs to the shop and let him ask my mother for permission to go out. My mother didn't have any problems with that because he was going to be my confirmation godfather. It didn't happen that way. I got pregnant.

NANCY: I never thought of that. I told him: "I can't get married. I'm afraid"...afraid of a man beating a woman for anything. I was afraid of all those things. Because I've been a spoiled daughter, everything was given to me. And getting married, I'm going to suffer, I'm going to cry a lot, I'm going to die.

EDILMA: He was an excellent father, despite he was much younger. Very responsible, loving. Maybe, nobody else that I find will match him.

LUISA: We sold everything we had and one day I told my father: "Look, I'm thinking of moving to Spain." They didn't like the idea, but ultimately I'm the one who knows how to make my life. So, I went with Mike and set up a business on the beach, a bar. It went very well and in Spain they are so...like, there are more drugs in Spain, more freedom. They smoke up in the streets, smoke up. We're fine. It was the first year I had my own business and went very well.

NARRATOR: Nancy. As Nancy steps in the room, her presence is immediately felt. She's taller and bigger than most Ecuadorean women. Her shoulders are wide, her legs seem to be long under her clean, loose clothing – polyester pants, acrylic wool sweater in bright, plain, primary colours. Lots of thick, black, curly hair, that hangs down to her shoulders, frame an intense, anxious gaze. She sits down in front of me.

She looks pale, older than she is. Her dark-bronze complexion, by the window's sunlight, can no longer hide the effects of poor diet and lack of fresh air. Her eye-lids have darkened revealing the bones underneath. She looks at me:

confident, tough, intimidating, unassuming, not harbouring any expectation. She seems trying to shed, one more time, one more day, the thick shadow of anger and pain that life-in-jail imposes on her.

"My life is like a soap opera" she exclaims in a clear, strong voice. "It's like one of those women in TV"

From an early age, Nancy was raised by her paternal grandparents living on a small farm on the coastal plains of Ecuador. She was sent to an evangelical boarding high school, and graduated with a certificate in accounting and office administration. However, she was never able to profit from it. She settled down with an older, widowed man, in a fast growing city in the Andes foothills. Nancy got involved in local party politics, and somehow another woman blackmailed her with drugs, or maybe the Police agents actually placed the drugs inside Nancy's house.

While she was in jail, a hearth attack took her husband away forever. Nancy's two children live with her father on the same farm by the river where she grew up with her grandparents. She is serving the last year of a six year sentence.

SCENE 5: PREGNANCIES

GRACE: When I was pregnant I thought that something was wrong, that maybe it was the car ride, right? And I ate, I ate, there in the street, I ate something and threw up. I went to the pharmacy and they asked me: "What's happened to you?" I said: "Nothing, nothing, it's car sickness." Then, oh my God, what's happened to me. I didn't want to eat anything because I vomited it right away. I didn't think I was pregnant.

EDILMA: I didn't notice my first pregnancy. I didn't pay attention to it. I never felt any discomfort. I didn't notice any baby's movement, and I didn't know anything about child birth either, right? When I had sex the first time, I thought that was the end. I hadn't heard anything about it. I hadn't experienced something like that. I didn't know the consequences, nothing. I was naive.

GRACE: I remember I went to see a doctor and told him that I couldn't handle it anymore. I had headaches, stomach aches...so he asked me how old I was. I told him: "Seventeen." So he goes: "Do you have parasites? Have you taken anything for stomach parasites?" "No, I haven't taken anything," I said. Then he says: "You are pregnant." I almost died.

EDILMA: My pregnant sister had arrived earlier and it happens that she gets in labour at that time, in front of me. So, at the point where the baby was about to be born, my mother called me and said: "This is what is waiting for you." I look at it and, no.... I wanted to die right there. I didn't want to go through that. "I rather die", I said to myself. Well, next day it happened to me, right? But the very moment my son was born, I was by myself, completely alone.

GRACE: When I gave birth, like the first day, it hurt. First, I bled, like, a haemorrhage, right? I didn't know what was going on, but my stomach hurt. They took me to the doctor's. He told me I was going to give birth and that I had to relax and wait. I gave birth after six days.

EDILMA: I left him there, left him with everything. Like a little animal, right? I left him with everything. Then, when they got in, I've already washed myself, and I was on my feet looking at the bed right? To that little baby boy, because he seemed very small, like a premature baby.

GRACE: I couldn't give birth. It's, like, I can have problems with other pregnancies because the placenta doesn't come out very quickly, they told me. But from that time on, I haven't got pregnant again.

EDILMA: With all my children it was like that. I was alone, without any company. I got used to it. I called somebody to help me wash them. I laid in bed for three hours or so, and then got up to look after the other children. My husband? He was only present

in one birth because the farm was far away, a six hour hike.

CYNTHIA: I didn't know. So many things had happened. I didn't know. I distance myself from him. Later on, I got sick many times and had to take lots of medicine. One day, before a school function, I got dressed and my aunt was going to paint my nails. So, I got up and she says: "You're getting fat." "I don't know," I said. So my mum goes: "This Saturday we go to the doctor's." The doctor said I was four months pregnant.

LUCERO: Hmm, my pregnancy was very sad because when I was two months pregnant my husband got in trouble and went to jail.

ALBA: My first child died, it was a boy. I fell and he died inside of me. I was eight months pregnant. I was in the hospital for a month. Later I had my second child.

NANCY: My child, my son, he was, I tell you, he was a little more...they always say that girls are very delicate, like a woman, right? Not like boys, a boy is very strong, very strong. I remember when I was eight months pregnant, I slipped on the wet floor. I scared myself big time. I said: "Here he goes, I threw my son away." But it didn't happen that way. He's strong.

LUCERO: He had a problem with this woman. I didn't know what really happened. Her husband found her with my husband, and there were problems. He stabbed him and everything. I gave birth and everything else alone. When my son was six weeks old his father got out of jail.

CYNTHIA: Once he knew I was pregnant, he said: "No!" That we shouldn't have the baby, that I should think of my life, my youth, my studies, my family, that we shouldn't have the baby. When I saw all that I realized he didn't love me as one must do, right? As I loved him, above everything. Because I stick up for him against my

Mom, my family, against myself. I couldn't stop the love I felt for him. So, in a way it has given me much experience for the rest of my life.

GRACE: After I told my parents, they scolded me. They said that I should've told them earlier and everything else. My husband, to the contrary, said that if we have to get married, we'll get married. As I was three months pregnant, we got married.

LUCERO: We lived in Bogotá until my son was seven months. Then we moved to Cali for three months. Then we stayed for a while in Pasto, and then I moved to Quito.

CYNTHIA: Many things changed. My life changed. I couldn't study anymore. My family made a big deal of it. My Mom almost had a heart attack.... From then on, I've suffered a lot because I had a horrible pregnancy, very horrible. I couldn't do anything because they had to rush me into Emergency in the hospital. I'm telling you, the nine months of pregnancy, for nine months I cried. I cried tears, and I'm still crying, tears of blood for falling in love.

NARRATOR: More than a quarter of the female national work force work as *cuenta propia*, "on their own," or self-employed. At home, in somebody else's home, in open-air markets, busy street intersections and crowded side walks, women's hands more often deliver retail commodities to customers.

Domestic ingenuity motivates a daily search among fruits, vegetables, animal protein, raw and cooked, Asian plastic, fabric and metal items, and foreign industrial *dumping*, discernibly seeking for minimum margins of profit.

This work is usually performed while looking after children and feeling a hurting body. Age-related, high-risk pregnancies, which are common, and obstetric unrest compound a struggle for survival that inexorably continues to be the only possible way to keep family indigence at bay.

SCENE 6: CHILDREN

ALBA: My daughter is three years and three months old, and the little one is fifteen months old.

GRACE: My son was six months old when we got here. Now he's in kindergarten.

ALBA: My daughters live here with me. My mother can't help me because she works and she doesn't have the possibilities to look after them. I feel that they are better here than alone in that neighbourhood.

GRACE: My husband pays this lady from the neighbourhood to look after my son. I asked my two sisters, but they said they're busy. It's, like, your very own family turn their backs on you. So, I spoke to this lady and she agreed to care for my kid until I get out of here.

ALBA: My daughters needed medical treatment when we were outside. But here, they do not have it anymore. There is a doctor, but we don't receive any help to buy medicines. My mother takes them outside, brings the prescription, I take it to my husband, and sometimes he doesn't have any money to buy pills, remedies, needles. A month ago my daughter got very sick. She went to the hospital. They gave her an intravenous because she was very sick.

GRACE: This lady tells me that he behaves well, eats everything, and that he's obedient. Sometimes he calls her Mom, sometimes he calls her Mrs. He's all right, but when he comes here he asks me: "When are you leaving this place? Why you're not outside? Why?"

NARRATOR: Since 1999, new legislation and legal reforms in the labour, family, electoral and penal codes provide women with new benefits and a set of normative

principles and procedures: free prenatal and post-natal care; mandatory electoral quotas – thirty percent of candidates in the political parties electoral lists must be women; the penalization of the procurement of women and of sexual harassment.

On paper at least: an institutional network is in place to enforce the implementation of this legislation; special courts have been established for the hearing and the sentencing of perpetrators of violence against women and against families; the National Commission of Women has been established as an adjunct to the President's office, to oversee and to coordinate public policies on gender equality; a permanent parliamentary commission responsible for women, youth, children and family affairs has been created.

SCENE 7: SPLITTING AND NEW RELATIONS

LUCERO: While I was childless, it was good. We didn't fight, we got along well, we understood each other. He'd go out, sometimes, and I stayed home. He liked rooster fights. Sometimes, he'd take me out for a stroll here and there. We had a good home.

ALBA: I didn't like him being all the time with his family. He passed more time with his family than with my daughters and I. Sometimes, off he went, slept there and didn't come back. Yeah! So, I told him that if he wanted to stay with me, well, stay with me, or leave and live with his family.

EDILMA: I widowed when I was twenty one. Oh no! It was fatal for me. During one year I didn't leave home. For a full year I didn't do anything. I was completely depressed. My parents took me to their place so I could recover. Also, because I was pregnant.

GRACE: He hit me lots... yes, he hit me because they came home and asked me if I could sell for them this and that. So, I went and sold it. Then Patricio told me that I

don't have to behave like that, because some time I was going to be asked questions about it and end up in jail.

LUCERO: He was here three months or so ago. After that, we split up. We had a problem, we didn't understand each other. He was too jealous, lots of fights, he hit me. So, looking at that, I walked away from him.

GRACE: When I got in here, he left me for a year and a half. He said I was bad news for my family. He didn't agree with what I did. He said that I shouldn't have done it, that they are men and they could've handled it. And that if they really loved me, they wouldn't have hurt me this bad. And, well, he was very upset.

EDILMA: They killed him so they could steal from him. We had sold our land to move somewhere else. So, the day he went to get the money he got killed. It was simply because of the money.

LUCERO: When I had my boy, he started, like, to change, right? He wasn't the same anymore. He yelled at me for anything, bitching because supper wasn't ready on time. Kicking me, right? So, what do you do? He hung out with bad company, dated other women, drank, and so on.

EDILMA: We had sold everything. I had nothing. So I had to go and live with my parents. I didn't want to stay with my in-laws. After I had my son, my mother convinced me to go out and get some distraction. I started to travel and do things. And then I got tangled up with trafficking.

LUISA: Mike and I used to smoke up a lot. But Mike doesn't like coke at all. One time we tried speed and that was it. We enjoyed smoking up. But coke never. Never! I couldn't afford coke in Spain or Germany because it's too expensive.

EDILMA: After a year and a half I started going out. I met this other guy. He helped me lots, I must say. I fell in love with him. He treated my children very well and that was the most important thing for me. He was also younger than me, and he hadn't had any experience with women. So I was his first woman. We had our first daughter, everything was perfect. Then, another chick crossed his path. He liked her. So we started to drift apart. After the second pregnancy, he rarely came home. So, I decided to stay away from him. I had my daughter alone.

GRACE: He didn't do drugs. He only knew about it when I got here.

LUCERO: He doesn't even smoke tobacco. A drink once in a while, but not too much. He liked going out dancing.

ALBA: He didn't drink. A bit of base, from time to time, not everyday. And alone, I didn't like his friends coming over. So he smoked up and I looked at him, his reaction. He was like scared, looking afraid. He stayed wherever he was, not paying attention to anything. He didn't eat.

EDILMA: Well, lastly, here in Ecuador I've gotten another...another commitment. But it doesn't work well either. Maybe just go and visit him, but not to carry on a relationship. It's because I'm lonely. Maybe that's why. But I don't think about anything else. A love in jail.

LUISA: He was here, he came three months ago. He calls me Saturdays every two weeks to know what is going on. I believe above anything that he loves me very much.

GRACE: Well, he comes from time to time because he travels. Better, my son comes often, since he's alone. He comes Saturdays, Sundays. Yeah.

End of Act Two

Act Three

- *Familiarity with drugs*
- *Illegal activities*
- *Accidental involvement*
- *Captured*
- *Interpol*
- *Final*

NARRATOR: *Cargarse* – to stock up – was a dangerous and thrilling task. Recalling accounts of police brutality and the miserable conditions of cells in precarious detention centres usually prompted throats to dry and hands to sweat. Once in the streets of the unfamiliar neighbourhood the sense of being a neon-bright alien was often overwhelming. Yet, with prudence and calm, I would proceed to knock at the door. The house could have been any in the working-class street block.

While waiting for an answer, after checking up and down the street for plainclothes agents or plate-less cars, the eyes settled for a moment on the populated hills rolling over from the city and the valley above. School and relatives were there. Down the street, deep below the cliff, ran the brown and foamy river relentlessly carrying the city's effluents and water from the Andean divide.

A woman opened the door and by the end of the salutation exchange the purpose of the visit was understood. "How much" came wrapped in a sheet of used children's math notebook. Transaction completed. Brief niceties. Back to the street, rushing into the protective anonymity of modern downtown.

SCENE 1: FAMILIARITY WITH DRUGS

EDILMA: I know about it since I was very little. One day, a friend of my father came home with marijuana seeds as a present for my father. I didn't know that it was a drug or something like that. Then my father asked: "What are these good for?" His friend said: "These are good for many things. To smoke, to bewilder your head. Also are good in water to bath with." My dad accepted the seeds and later sowed them.

ALBA: Of course I knew there were drugs because in the neighbourhood I used to live, guys smoked up. A friend showed me: "This is marijuana, this is powder." I've always known.

LUCERO: I was twelve. But I never thought I would become a user. I always watched my friends smoke up and everything. I just watched them. You know. Walking the streets one meets lots of people...I started smoking marijuana. It felt good, it puts one in another place. It's like, how can I say..., anything one suffers for goes away quick, right?

EDILMA: I remember, a priest came looking to buy some of those leaves because he had rheumatism. My Dad just gave him some and told him to come back any time he needed more. The priest came by during some time. I don't know if he got better or worse but he stop coming. Later on, he had denounced it to the authorities.

CYNTHIA: My mother always told me about it. Me coming home from school she would said: "You never accept anything people offer you, because there is much evil in people, guys have much evil inside." She said: "Drugs, there are pills to make one fall asleep. Do not take anything they gave you because they can drug you up, put you to sleep." In this manner I knew that drugs were around, but not in such a way to bring me here to jail.

EDILMA: My father gave seeds to several people. So, one day, I was alone on the farm, when a friend came running and asked for my father. I told her he was away. So my friend said: "Watch out. They are catching people. Go and see in front of the court house. There is a pile of it and they are going to burn it." So I went to town and looked around . They had caught this lady. She had been cultivating marijuana.

NANCY: I tell you, honestly, I've never been involved with drugs. So, forgive me, but I can't talk about drugs. I've seen it in movies, like in commercials. But I never was like interested in seeing drugs or something like that.

EDILMA: I got scared. Somebody said they were after my father. I got scared. So, I went and dragged all those plants. There were four out houses, so I dragged the marijuana plants and filled those holes to the top. The cropping lot was large, like a hectare, and had everything: cilantro, parsley, cabbage, fava beans, everything.

LUISA: In school they show you what drugs looks like. What they do to you, how dangerous are. They explain everything in school, very, very well.

EDILMA: Then the police arrived to search the farm. They lifted some of the dried branches and asked me about it. I told them that it was branches of parsley that I had thrown it there because the branches were dry. The police said that the branches were too big to be parsley. I said that I didn't know, that it was parsley. I was little but my mind had already cleared up by then. My grandmother hid the bag of seeds inside her blouse and went away. But my father couldn't come back anymore. Only my mother did. My father moved to the Putumayo region and later he sent us some money so we could move there as well. We moved there.

ALBA: I only tried marijuana once. I was with a friend. One feels good, as if one was doing other things. One wanders, not thinking of what one is doing. It's like...if one is far away from everything. It feels good.

LUISA: Yeah! That's it! And one flies...but not like you really fly. One just goes away and enjoys the moment.

LUCERO: I used to go to work, to do my vending. The drug distracted me.

LUISA: I got to know about drugs because of my brother. He is an addict. I learnt to smoke hashish with him.

CYNTHIA: Never. Not even through my uncle who works for customs. We've never seen what it looks like. Never before, until the police agents got themselves in our home. And I'm detained one year and seven months since then.

EDILMA: Around six months, when the little plants are twenty centimetres high, my husband said: "Let's take the yellow leaves so they will grow more." "But, what do you do with this?" I said. "Somebody is going to teach us how to prepare this...and this gives more money than sowing corn, sowing bananas, sowing yucca" he said.

LUISA: Look, to be honest, I like drugs. Here I'm going to be very open. I enjoy my coke, my hashish. And I've always thought that the one who likes it should take it. The one who doesn't like it should leave it. Of course drugs bring a big problem to this world. But let's be realistic, drugs bring money. That's why people traffic with drugs. Do you know how much they pay to bring a package to Germany? Ninety thousand dollars for a load of five kilos.

EDILMA: He went to see this guy who knew how to work this right. My husband came back with a couple of grams of powder and said: "This is what we are going to harvest – base of cocaine. I really don't know what it is exactly, but we are going to work with this."

LUCERO: I smoked up until I got here. I used to smoke up a lot. I stopped here, six

months ago. When I was outside, I hid from my husband, escaped home to somewhere and smoked up. Many times I smoked in the room we rented as well. I waited until my husband went to work in the morning or after lunch, and I found my ways to smoke up. I was like an addict, my body called me for more, the body herself asks to give her that thing. One goes crazy. It feels like vomiting, when one sees how addicted one is.

EDILMA: Well, I dedicated myself to it. Sometimes, even I told him where a cut of leaves, a crop harvest, was for sale. We worked together. We paid someone to teach us, we learnt the process. But I never went to sell the product. He always did.

LUISA: That is risky. And if you like risks, well...you do it. I believe people in jail, women, men, are the most courageous people in the world. To live in a jail is very hard. I never thought I was going to end up in jail, in this one so far from everything. I'm a person that likes drugs, but I've never been a trafficker. I've never sold drugs in my life. Never!

LUCERO: I've been thinking, and sometimes I regret it. It's never is too late for regret, right? I don't want to go back and consume again. I want to go, like, away from it. I want to recover my freedom. Put myself to work, either here or somewhere else, but not go back to the temptation of drugs. Because they destroy, they age people, they make them thin. I was very skinny, almost anaemic. I didn't feel like eating, Smoking powder fools your appetite. One only wants to smoke and smoke and smoke, no matter what is offered to you. You do not want it, you're not hungry, you loose weight. I've recovered some here.

LUISA: Listen, this stuff about drugs – politicians have to find a solution! I believe a time is coming to legalize a limit for any kind of drug. In Holland, it is legalized. You go to a coffee shop and you buy your hashish, they give you rolling paper. There are pastries with hashish and pastries without hashish. For those addicted to heroin, there is a little cabin where you go. They give you a syringe so AIDS won't be spread. And

there are no problems.

LUCERO: I've become more mature. Life has hit me hard but I've matured. I have moved around, like working here and there selling things. Now with my son, this problem of being locked in jail is getting worse. I've made a promise to leave drugs behind, never come back, because of my son...to think in a different manner about life. I have a responsibility – my son – and I don't want to give him the same kind of life I had... I want to give him a better life.

NARRATOR: Since 1990, drug enforcement in Ecuador has been driven by a legislation of an almost exclusively prosecuting, punitive nature. This Machiavellian – to say the least – body of legal *(dis)figures* fulfilled all but one of the United States, State Department's expectations: extradition.

Sentences up to twenty five years in prison were prescribed for those cultivating plants and trading drugs. Wearing a t-shirt printed with a cannabis leaf had a jail sentence of three to six years. In the absence of tabulations for quantities and qualities of substances, the law hardly recognized differences between user, addict or trafficker. Those sentenced for trading drugs were not allowed the modern correctional benefits such as sentence reduction, controlled freedom or parole, that are adopted elsewhere.

SCENE 2: ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES

ALBA: Well, my husband liked to smoke up a lot, so we went away on a trip together and we brought some stuff back. Only base, because I've never sold any marijuana.

GRACE: They stole appliances to get money for their habit. All the agents knew him, so he couldn't go out. So he asked me to go to the market and sell things for him. Some women at the market would buy things from me. I let them know what I had,

like for example a t.v. set. So. I sold it and gave him the money later.

EDILMA: To grow and process. Exactly. I learned how to do that...then, after I widowed, I even bought a couple of harvests of coca leaves. I paid my workers, sent them to harvest and some would help me with the processing. Only then I would go and sell. This brought in good money. So this friend of mine told me: "Why don't you buy base and re-sell it? He said: "Go and buy it for a good price and then sell it for an even better price." So, it changed. I stopped doing harvests. I only bought base and then distributed it to other people.

LUCERO: Sometimes I would spend thirty or forty thousand sucres. And I smoked it slowly. Because, sometimes when I had money – things went well, because before, I sold a lot of clothes and other things. Sometimes I would buy fifty grams that would sell for fifty thousand sucres. That would last me for a whole week.

LUISA: I used to go to Morocco with my boyfriend and bought myself a quarter pound of hash that I hid. We kept it in my place, only for ourselves.

EDILMA: Look, I bought base in my own town and then I came here to sell it. I could double the money. If I came here with a kilo that would cost me one hundred thousand pesos at home, I could make over a million sucres. Imagine. That was a good profit for me. Sometimes I brought two kilos, sometimes one and a half. I did this for two years.

ALBA: Sometimes he travelled alone, other times we both went. We went to Colombia by bus with my two daughters. There we bought the powder. He brought it and I came along with my daughters. So, I started trafficking, but I never thought that I would end up here.

LUCERO: I bought it in different places. Sometimes at the university campus. It was there where I got nabbed.

EDILMA: In my town you had to pay like a tax, fifty thousand a month, to the police, so you could work in peace. You could sell your stuff anywhere in town and nobody ever said anything. If you paid your taxes, there were no problems. If I had continued working there, this would not have happened to me. That's really what I regret: having gotten mixed up with things over here. For getting a few extra pesos, I lost my freedom.

LUCERO: There is bad base, with no oil, it doesn't burn well. They mix it with baby powder, with anything, I think. Other stuff, you can't even smell it. That's is the worst. Then, there is the very good stuff. You pack it in a half emptied cigarette, light it up, and then the oil seeps through the paper. You smoke it deep and before you'd think, it's over.

EDILMA: Dry leaves don't yield anything...they have to be fresh. If you want to get more powder, you chop down the leaves. Then you pour in the soda and with beasts or yourself, tread the leaves very well until they turn black. Then you pour on gasoline or kerosene with some water in it. Leave it for a while, but always stirring it, until the gasoline takes all the colour from the leaves, and until the mix gets transparent. Then, you strain the leaves very well, and separate the water from the gasoline. It's in the water where the product is.

ALBA: We used to buy one hundred grams for fifty thousand sucres. After my husband tested the quality. I sold small packages, half a teaspoon, one thousand sucres each. We sold around three hundred grams per month, half a kilo maximum. We never mixed it with anything. Some days we sold well, some days were bad.

LUCERO: One package is good for one cigarette.

ALBA: I worked half days around the neighbourhood. My husband went to other places. We had all kinds of clients, young, old, owners of cars, bank employees, good

people in general.

EDILMA: I always hid it in a case, never in my body. I hid it in different things. Inside of books. I always travelled alone.

ALBA: I put it in my hand bag, in my shoes. Yeah, but nobody knew, not even my family.

EDILMA: When I'm working, I like to be friendly with police. It's a point in my favour, it works to my advantage. I know that any of them are going to like me. Then, for a moment, I'm going to flirt with them. But that's it, nothing else. I'm a serious person always.

LUISA: One day the police in Spain caught me in the streets. I had twenty five grams or so of cocaine. I told them it was a gift, that I was a user. "Fine," they said. "Give us half of it." So I did and off they went. There, police officers smoke up as well, and don't bother if you're smoking up in the street. Unlike in Germany. But, I say, the one who wants it, just leave him alone.

ALBA: This is my first time in jail. My husband has been in prison more times. He's had eighteen arrests. For break-and-enter...one for marijuana possession. After we got married, he never was caught until this time.

EDILMA: At the border, I was everybody's friend. I even used to take my loaded case into the police station and leave it there until the evening. They didn't have a clue where I was carrying the stuff.

GRACE & LUCERO: I never had problems with the law. This is the first time.

EDILMA: There is this police officer that from time to time comes by to visit. He

goes: "You foxy lady! Weren't you clever? You used us so much." "No," I said. "You guys let yourselves be used. I'm not the one to blame."

NARRATOR: Edilma. The expression in her face is relaxed, confident, somehow she has done this before. She is in good shape and has good looks: bright brown eyes with *drop of water*-like shape, thick and long, black eyebrows and healthy looking hair. Her stature is average for an Ecuadorean or Colombian woman. Yet, she carries herself as women in the lowlands do: with a natural, uninhibited self awareness of her body, her shoulders are pushed back, her back and neck are straight. She wears a grey wool, below the knee-length skirt, and a dark brown short sleeved turtle neck. She sits down, and slips her bare feet off the rubber sandal ubiquitous in jail. We start talking. Her teeth seem complete, unusual for a woman inmate.

After the initial rapport is established, the conversation flows with ease. She enjoys remembering events in detail. She opens up her lived experience without shame or remorse, she knows well why she is in jail.

At an early age Edilma became familiar with cultivating marijuana. Her father introduced this cash-crop to other neighbour farmers on the Colombian eastern slopes of the southern Andes. In one occasion, a very young Edilma saved her father from a Police raid. The family was forced to move out to the Putumayo region. At fourteen she eloped and gave birth to a child literally on her own. Her partner at that time learned how to cultivate the coca plant and later both learned how to process coca leaves into paste of cocaine. Years later, widowed and head of an extended family, twice a month for two years, she excelled at crossing the Ecuadorean border with up to two kilograms of base of cocaine. The younger woman Edilma was raising like a daughter, out of revenge, blew the whistle to the Police. Her criminal process is stagnant. Edilma is in her early thirties.

SCENE 3: ACCIDENTAL INVOLVEMENT

CYNTHIA: It came from a girlfriend we had. Her husband gets fired from the army, becomes a thief and starts to beat her up. Often, she had a black eye, a swollen mouth. My mother used to talk to her, telling her to stick up for herself. Telling her that she was still young, that she better think about the relationship. Well, we developed a friendship, a superficial friendship. Not a deep one.

LUISA: My father was fed up with my brother because he didn't want to work. He bummed around every day smoking up or snorting stuff. I talked to my boyfriend and said: "Let's help my brother to get rid of those buddies." So, in our house, I set up a room for him, my car was at his service, he only had to work at the bar. It was a mistake. Because in Spain there were even more drugs.

CYNTHIA: One day, this girlfriend we hadn't heard from for a long time, started to visit us. We opened our house to her, and restarted the friendship. She told us that she worked bringing Colombian goods into the country – leather jackets, shoes, boots, pants. We're pleased to know she had left her husband and now was working. She looked great. Well dressed, elegant. She always brought a small case into the house.

LUISA: My brother met many people. He ran around here and there all day. Never did his job. He had a friend with Colombian contacts and got into a business that didn't work. My brother went back to Germany, and then they forced me to come here to make a deal. They told me if didn't, something was going to happen to my family, to my parents.

GRACE: I'm here because...I'm paying for my brothers, because they liked to smoke up, to sell things.

NANCY: Like, I got here because, I tell you, they blackmailed me. The traffickers. I

don't know. That's why I say friendships don't bring good consequences. It's, like, you have to know who your friends are. That is the reason why I'm here. Because I've liked, I like very much...to be honest, I like politics very much. And politics has been very dirty. Like, they like to stick in drug trafficking and everything else. So, like, they wanted me to get involved in certain things.

LUISA: Look, I don't know anything about Ecuador. During the two weeks I was in Quito, I locked myself in the hotel room. I didn't go out, didn't visit any place, a disco, bars, nothing. I didn't have company to go for a drink, or somewhere else. This country scared me a lot because when I got here and I was leaving the airport, fifty cab drivers were all over me: "Mrs, where are you going." That moment, during that scrambling, they stole my bag with plane ticket, passport, money. I had to go from the airport straight to the Spanish Embassy.

EDILMA: I was still pretty young when I decided to take care of this twelve year old girl. Now she's seventeen. I considered her my daughter, so I trusted her. She knew about everything. How I travelled with my stuff and everything. So, one day she tells me that she didn't want to stay home anymore, that she wanted to go and work in town, on the Ecuadorean side of the border. So, fine. "I'm going to help you," I said. "I'm going to get you a job where you can work." After she moved out, I often visited her because I was concerned, right?

LUCERO: The Police had arrested this other woman. She's also an addict. She's the one who told the cops who I was.

EDILMA: One day, I went to visit her. At her job they told me she was at her place. I went there and found her in bed with this guy. That moment the world fell on me. I, like, wanted the best for her, right? So I said to her: "What are you doing? Do you realize?" I said. "This is why you like it here, right? Because you can do whatever you want. Not like at home, with me." That day she..."Ah," she said to me: "Well you're

not even my mother." I said to her: "Look, all that I've done was for your benefit. If you don't want it, fine. You'll see." Then she said that I was... "Look," she said, "any day now I'm going to tell somebody everything about you." But I didn't take it seriously. I didn't. Maybe she would do it in a moment of.... And then, her boss also got upset with me.

NANCY: Sincerely, I can't explain these things. Because, until now, really, I don't understand my situation. Why am I here? I always walk around, thinking: "Why am I here?" I...I know I'm here because of trafficking. I know. Reality is, I'm serving a sentence that is too long. For something I haven't done. I haven't spent, sold or bought anything. Only because they wanted to put one on me. Fine, I say. In life one has to learn two things: to win and to lose.

NARRATOR: The drug law enforcement had a considerable impact on the judicial and correctional systems. The number of inmates with drug-related charges almost doubled between 1989 and 1997. The administration of justice was overwhelmed by the number of trials waiting for process. Lack of institutional capacity and endemic corruption worked against a fast growing jail population that waited, and waited, for a fair trial or – at least – for a sentence.

In the mean time, those inside had little to do in the face of a weak, improvised, under-staffed and under-funded penal rehabilitation policy and institution. Crumbling buildings, over-crowded cells, diminutive outdoor space, abusive defence lawyers, un-trained correction officers, unmotivated therapists and instructors, signalled a looming collapse.

SCENE 4: CAPTURED

LUCERO: The day was rainy, kind of an ugly day. I got up, hung up the laundry, made breakfast and fed my son. Then I showered, and started to cook – all those pots

filled with soup were left behind.

CYNTHIA: I remember clearly. I'll never forget that day – September fourteen. She came around four in the morning and said: "I've been travelling, and I had to change buses because mine broke down on the road." She was all covered in mud, so we offered her a shower. In the morning, she left our house around ten.

LUCERO: I got mad because my son had all his dry clothes dirty and the rest was wet. And I said to him: "You rascal, what do I put on you? I'm going to leave you here." I was going to lock my son in and leave. But then I said: "No, poor little guy." So I dried a pair of pants with the iron and off we went. I was in the mood to buy shoes for my son and *something* for me.

ALBA : Well, like...look! We were, my husband, my sister and other friends, we were sitting in a park. We were not doing anything wrong, just waiting for my husband's mother.

GRACE: One day, I had just recently married, I walked up to visit my parents and help them, because I was the only help for them and my sick brother.

CYNTHIA: She came back around five in the afternoon with these men, and they said: "How long this lady has been coming by?" My mother said: "Three, four times a week... She brings goods for sale." They asked to see her small case. It was small, just for a pair of pants, underwear and a toothbrush. The moment my mother handed them the case, they identified themselves as narcotics police. Eight of them got in the house.

GRACE: I told them to wait a moment. When I was going to close the door, they aim their guns at me and said: "Interpol." I started to scream, and told them there was nothing here, nothing. I screamed so my brother would listen and realize the cops were there, right? When I ran inside, he had already fled through the window. But a friend

of his stayed there.

LUCERO: So, I held the guy's arm and we walked talking and laughing. I said to him: "Look, let's go over there to get this done." Then, this other guy says: "Look brother! Interpol cops." I was going to run away, but my boy was with me, and I carried a bag. So they got me by the neck and also got the guy. They talked and talked and, I don't know, they let the guy go.

ALBA: Then, these men came down and put their guns on us. They got my husband because they said he was a *brujo*, a dealer. They wanted the powder: "Where is it?" they said. They beat him up and took him away.

CYNTHIA: They ripped the case apart and didn't find anything. Then, one of them opened the bottom and found two packages, like those family-size chocolate bars, wrapped in gold and brown paper. They open them up in a plastic bag, a brownish coloured dust came out, and they said that it was drugs. Then, the lady said that it wasn't hers, that the case belonged to my mother. My mother said: "No! The case is yours."

GRACE: This friend of my brother couldn't run away. Also, my brother left his stuff on the bed. So, I grabbed it with my hand to throw it away, right? But the agents saw me. They grabbed me and asked me who the owner was. I told them it was mine but the other guy goes: "She doesn't have anything to do with it. It belongs to her brothers." And, like, the agents knew my brothers, they started to beat us.

ALBA: The cops just took him away because they had arrested this guy who told them my husband had sold some stuff to him. They let my sister and I go. Then, in the afternoon, I went home and got rid of it. I was very nervous. Then, in the evening, when we went to see my husband at Interpol, they got me, my daughters and my sister too.

GRACE: When he said it was my brothers', I knew there was going to be a big racket there. So, I said: "Look, sir. Unfortunately, my brothers don't have anything to do with this. This guy gave it to me." That's what I said. Because there wasn't anything else to do. Because he wanted to go free, he started to yell: "It belongs to her brothers, it belongs to them." And then, all the agents started to hit me so I would tell them where my brothers were hiding. "Look," I said. "I'm going to tell you the truth. It's not my brothers'. He gave it to me to sell. To sell to other people, and I don't know where he got it from." He's also in jail, for sure.

LUISA: In the morning, I got up, walked to the corner. Where else could I go? I was afraid something else would happen to me. I was a little nervous, right? The day I was leaving, oh my God, I was content I was leaving. But when Interpol asked for my passport, I knew I was going to stay here. And what a strange thing: I didn't want to get up that day. It was like I felt something was going to fall. I felt something.

NANCY: Look, until right now, sincerely, I tell you. The agents arrived at my house and told me: "Mrs., You have drugs in your house." I told them to look anywhere, everywhere. But, really, they didn't find any drugs. Who had brought drugs in was this other woman who used to visit me. But I didn't know her. It is in my declaration. I'm paying for somebody else's broken dishes because I was the room's owner. Because I was the owner of the room.

EDILMA: Right when I was being taken to the dungeon, my girl and her boss were leaving. But I didn't know then she had done it. So I said to her: "Mary, I just want you to do one more thing for me, don't say no. Write a note to my Mom and ask her to come tomorrow. Tell her what is going on." She said: "I don't want to get involved. Don't ask me for anything." I didn't know why she snapped at me like that.

CYNTHIA: My mother said: "Mrs. Fanny how could you do this to me. For God's sake, my children. You don't have any children. Help me." Later, on New Year's Eve,

downstairs, during supper, she talked to my mother. She cried and apologized for hurting us so much, because what she did is unforgivable. Then, later on, when this lawyer from the court house came here, Fanny said she wanted to sign a paper where our innocence was certified. The lawyer then asked my mother: "Where was the case? Where were the drugs?" And the lawyer goes: "Mrs. Carter, because the case was in your house you will also have a sentence."

EDILMA: I told my mom: "Look. I'm a vengeful person. I can be nice and I can be bad, very bad. Any little mistake anybody makes on me, I don't forgive it ever." I look around everywhere but...I'll get my revenge somehow. I considered her my daughter. But, I told my mother that until I see her dead, I won't be content.

CYNTHIA: So, Fanny said to my mother: "If you're going to have a sentence anyway, I'm not going to take the charge for everything. You fight for your years, I'll fight for mine." The brawls started again. Fanny spoke poorly of my mother to the other lawyer. She wanted to sink my mother, saying that my mother was the one responsible for everything, responsible for Fanny being here. Things like that.

EDILMA: My sister found Mary and beat her up to check if truly she was the one. So, my sister tells me that she did what was needed, that I shouldn't do anything else. But I want to have the pleasure to do it by myself. By myself. It doesn't matter where she goes, I'll find her. And she's going to pay for what she did to me.

CYNTHIA: Fanny escaped from here with another Colombian woman. She jumped from one of the new buildings and climbed the wall.

GRACE: But, I thought, like...I imagined that once I got in here.... I said, well, they are my family, my brothers, that in a week I would be out. I thought like that. Well, it wasn't like that. It wasn't.

NARRATOR: Luisa. Born in Germany to a working class Spanish immigrant family, Luisa obtained a high school diploma and worked in different jobs until she meets her partner Mike. Both moved to coastal Spain and set up a thriving bar on the beach. Then she invited her drug addicted younger brother to move in with her with the hope he would straighten up. On the contrary, he got involved with the local mob, a drug deal went sour and he fled back to Germany. Then Luisa caved in to the mob threats and travelled to Ecuador to pick up a suitcase of cocaine. After a two week stay fraught with fear and paranoia, she was captured at the Quito airport, moments before her flight back to Spain.

Her family calls from Germany every Sunday and Mike has come all the way from Spain to visit her. She does not blame her brother. Luisa is in her early twenties.

SCENE 5: INTERPOL

CYNTHIA: It was humiliating, very humiliating.... They came in and said: "Nobody moves!" And they ordered us to sit on the dining chairs. There has never been a problem in my house, ever. So, we sat in a single line: my mother, my three sisters and Fanny. They turned the house upside down, threw the mattresses, blankets, clothing and dishes on the floor. They emptied sugar and rice containers, everything was upside down.

NANCY: Sometimes I think that if I was an ordinary trafficker they would've searched everywhere and taken everything. But in my case they didn't. They simply blackmailed me. The agents said they found drugs in my house, but really they brought the drugs in.

EDILMA: After they found what I had, they asked me to strip off my clothes. I said to them: "I won't undress in front of you, I won't. I don't have to. Bring me a police woman and I'll strip. I don't have to show my body to you."

CYNTHIA: The moment Interpol gets into your house, they just knock at the door and come in without answering any questions. Or they simply knock the door down because they had this order to enter and search from the district attorney. They didn't even consider the fact my mother was seven months pregnant. She almost died here. She had eclampsia attacks.

NANCY: This police captain was my husband's cousin. He was in shock when he saw me at the police station. "Who did you kill?" he said, because he thought I had murdered somebody. Because I'm a violent person and I had told him before everything happened that the moment my husband cheats on me I would come to jail for murder. But the captain couldn't help me at all. He said that everybody turns their backs to traffickers. He said that nobody even wants to look at them.

LUCERO: Once they caught us...they said: "You know what? Give us three hundred thousand right now and you can go." But money, I didn't have any money. Then, they took me to the Interpol office.

EDILMA: "Let's make a deal" I said. "How much you want? I give you a million." They said no. I told them to put it a price. Then they went on to say that I didn't have any money, that we couldn't make a deal. I told them that I did have money, that I'll give them the money. The one who was my friend said to the other: "Let's arrange this, I know how this lady is like." But the other officer absolutely rejected the idea. I had the money, I did.

NARRATOR: Illegal drugs have become commodities with highly contested meanings. Andean peasants, female international drug-couriers, metropolitan drug lords, young suburban drug-users, older global law-enforcers, all subscribe, impute and assign new meanings to illegal drugs and to the people next to them.

Illegal substances, a set of protean, sumptuary commodities, in a meandering, significant-altering social-life, connect the United States of America's *Drug Czar*

office with low-income Ecuadorean households headed by women. What may begin as a woman's strategy to generate some sort of income to support children and relatives, evolves into "threats to national security," and certainly returns in the form of indiscriminate, brutal law enforcement.

SCENE 6: FINAL

GRACE: I took charge because I thought they were going to help me. They are my brothers right? But now, I'm going to be five years here, I've never seen them. The only one who used to visit me was my mother. But she died two years ago, and everything was over. Everything. I don't know what they thought. That once I was outside I was going to hand them in to the police? I wouldn't have done that. They are my brothers, right?

EDILMA: When it got to the Putumayo for the first time, it was difficult to find someone who knew how to process it. But these days, everybody knows how. Even my fourteen year old son knows how to. He knows it very well since he was younger. He used to go to my in-laws' farms and learn there.

LUISA: I know my brother suffers very much, because he knows deep inside what happened, why I'm here. I have to talk with him. But I don't bear malice to anybody. I love my brother very much. And I thank God that I'm here and not him because he's the only boy in the family. He's had everything and my parents had great expectations for him. That's why I thank God for him not being here. He's used to having anything he wants. My mother irons his clothing, cooks whatever food he wants..., my brother.

CYNTHIA: It's humiliating. One doesn't know until one lives through it. It's humiliating because...sometimes, no matter how hard I think and think, I don't understand how the law works. I've being detained here for a year and a half. And I

can't, I can't figure it out how the law works. Why is it like this? Why do they humiliate people so badly without knowing if one is a trafficker or not.

End of Act Three

BACKDROP

- *An imaginary line dividing the planet in (un)equal halves*
- *Women in Ecuador*
- *Law one-o-eight*
- *Who is in prison?*
- *Pow(d)ers*

An imaginary line dividing the planet in unequal halves

Ecuadorean children learn in geography class that the equator is an imaginary line dividing the planet in half. As adults, most realize that in fact Ecuador, the nation-state, is also a product of the imagination, a tale coming from somebody else's memory, a foundational fiction without authorship, except for the official history written by and for the owners.

Economists and international developers considered the 1980s Latin America's *Lost Decade*: hyper inflation, plummeting currency devaluations, huge international trade deficits, foreign debt payback, structural adjustment prescriptions. A sound bite for Ecuador in the late 1990s could be: "trapped and nowhere to go", "bankrupt country for auction."¹ Since 1979,

¹ In the last thirty years, Ecuador has gone from being one of the fastest growing economies of the planet, to being one of the poorest and arguably one of the most unstable countries in Latin America.

heads of governments have in turn changed their ministers of finance on average, every 340 days. Ministers have not been able to solve problems such as tax evasion and corruption *overhead*, in the administration of private and public funds, calculated at more than \$US four and a half billion dollars – nor the national burden of allocating fifty percent of the national budget to service the foreign debt (Cornejo, 1998).

The blatant incapacity of traditional political power elites to manage an adequate government is in part due to the financial burden imposed by supranational and multilateral institutions. Since 1983, Ecuador has signed nine "letters of intention" with the International Monetary Fund. Not one of the financial and monetary measures implemented has produced significant, positive results. Much to the contrary, the implemented measures have had devastating effects. Since 1989, social spending has decreased from fifty to twenty percent of the annual budget. In 1999, servicing the "Brady bonds" emptied the treasury's coffers, with the result that all government employees did not receive their salary for three months.² Over the years, the quality of public education and health services has deteriorated dramatically: hospitals without basic supplies; teachers striking for months at a time (Acosta, 1999). Neo-liberal Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have decreased the role of the state at the expense of the quality of life of the vast majority of the population.

The economy of Ecuador can well be described as a pyramid with a wide base and a diminutive apex. The national wealth is distributed among Ecuadoreans in an unjust manner. In 1993, ten percent of the wealthiest population living in the highlands retained forty two

² The "Brady bonds" was a mid-term foreign debt relief strategy thought out by a United States congressman with the same last name. Portions of Latin American countries' foreign debt were sold in the financial markets to private investors. Payment and interest returns were guaranteed by ad-hoc legislation.

percent of the regional income while fifty percent of the poorest retained only eighteen percent of the income (World Bank, 1995). By 1999 the gap between rich and poor had widened considerably: the total income of five percent of the people better off was over two hundred times larger than the income retained by the poorest five percent of the national population (Acosta, 1999).

In a country that exports oil, bananas, shrimps and flowers, there are some two to four million people who that cannot satisfy their nutritional needs even if they could spend all their income on food only (World Bank, 1995; CECIM, 1994).

This is the context in which the enforcement of the 1990 drug legislation has taken place – a highly volatile political and economic context. Sloppy public sector adjustment programs, stiff foreign debt interest payment, low prices for oil and other export commodities for most of the decade, de-regulation of financial capital transactions, widespread corruption, constant currency devaluation, the eventual dollarization of the whole economy in the year 2000, all of these forced two presidents out of office and the collapse of seventy percent of the private national banking system.³ To cope with these dire conditions, large numbers of Ecuadorean *middle class* men and women have mortgaged their assets to purchase a ticket to Spain, to work as maids and labourers. For the poor, there is no other option: to *hunt and gather* some income within the unregulated, informal economy.

³ Ecuador had 4 presidents in four years (1996-2000). Relatively pacific social movements ousted two of them. Congress removed Abdala Bucaram on grounds of "mental insanity" in 1997. His successor was able to manage the whole transition period, yet is now in jail on corruption charges. In January, 2000, a coalition of social forces, led by the indigenous peoples movement and a group of Army officers successfully forced Jamil Mahuad to step down.

Women in Ecuador

Since 1999, new legislation and legal reforms in the labour, family, electoral and penal codes provide women with new benefits and a set of normative principles and procedures: free prenatal and post-natal care; mandatory electoral quotas – thirty percent of candidates in the political parties electoral lists must be women; the penalization of the procurement of women and of sexual harassment.⁴ On paper at least: an institutional network is in place to enforce implementation this legislation; special courts have been established for the hearing and the sentencing of perpetrators of violence against women and against families; the *Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres* [National Commission of Women] CONAMU, has been established as an adjunct to the President's office, to oversee and to coordinates public policies on gender equality; a permanent parliamentary commission responsible for women, youth, children and family affairs has been created..

Among the most significant achievements of the Ecuadorean women's movement, is the translation of women's domestic oppression into a matter of public and legal concern. Violence against women is no longer a *private* issue.⁵ It is also relevant here to point to the trimming of men's over-representation in public office effected by the legislation that will

⁴ FLACSO & Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales (1992, pp. 83-94), Cantos (2000) and Valdez (2000) provide an overview of the evolution and current status of women in Ecuadorean legislation.

⁵ It was a private issue until 1989 when the Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees suspended Article 27 of the Penal Code. This article sanctioned, as legal, the aggravated assault or murder of a woman caught in a illegitimate carnal act by her father, grandfather or brother (FLACSO & Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, 1992, p. 89).

eventually increase the number of women holding decision-making positions.⁶

Perhaps it is accurate to say that it was only by the end of the twentieth century that women have become *more* citizens in Ecuador. Yet, to what extent? This recently achieved permeability of the private/public *wall* has still to manifest itself in women's daily lives. Androcentric cultural patterns⁷ and political and economic forces of global scope still remain, still continue to impede, to drag down any advance toward a less unjust society.

More and more women are being pushed to participate in the market economy to obtain the necessary subsistence resources for them and their families. In national contexts of state-reform, the "feminisation" of labour reflects the "masculinization" of unemployment (Pautassi, 2000, p. 76). Adjustment policies, the corporate ruling of transnational economies and the new international division of labour all directly impact on the size reduction of employed national work forces. The future of the fully employed male bread-winner is therefore very precarious. Instead, the present seems to be organized around daily survival strategies in which women's work and income generated by women play a crucial role.

Ecuadorean women are now enduring pressing circumstances emanating from state policies and from evolving gender relations. Their participation in the *public* sector of the

⁶ The proportion of elected women MPs is less than fourteen percent. However, in the May 2000 elections almost thirty percent of the elected municipal councillors were women (Asociación de Mujeres Municipalistas del Ecuador [AMUME], 2000, p. 27).

⁷ During a six month period in 1998-99, only seven percent of the cases of violence against women prosecuted at the "Women's Courts" actually received a sentence. However, since these courts were created in 1995, over one hundred thousand women have had the opportunity to publicly denounce violence against them (Salgado, 2000).

economy is taking place in a context of profound social changes: structural unemployment,⁸ precarious labour relations and disappearing social protection. The nature of social relations within the *private* sphere modify accordingly: there are more non-nuclear family arrangements and reproductive patterns are changing.⁹

Women's *liberation* in Ecuador has meant increased work loads, particularly for those considered *single*.¹⁰ Women's visibility in traditional calculations of employment rates has increased because the proportion of married women who work outside home has also increased. Meanwhile, *un-married* women who are responsible for the subsistence of others, more often fall under the official poverty line.¹¹ Women household-heads usually have under their care family members other than their children. On average they receive over a third less of primary rent than male-headed households, and they are more often illiterate (Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres e Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [CONAMU & INEC], 2000, pp. 15-17, 32).

More than a quarter of the female national work force work as *cuenta propia*, "on their

⁸ Women's unemployment rate is twice that of men. Twenty eight percent of female workers versus forty percent of the male work force are on salary. Only half of those receiving regular income has a contract (CONAMU & INEC, 2000).

⁹ In 1998, in the urban areas, there were one hundred thousand **more** households headed by woman that in 1988 (CONAMU & INEC, 2000; FLACSO & Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, 1992).

¹⁰ Only six percent of the households headed by women include a spouse. Meanwhile, nine out of ten households headed by men include a spouse (CONAMU & INEC, 2000, p.16).

¹¹ In 1995, half of the total houses headed by women fell in the two lowest quintiles of spending capacity (Desarrollo y Autogestión DYA, 1995).

own," or self-employed.¹² At home, in somebody else's home, in open-air markets, busy street intersections and crowded side walks, women's hands more often deliver retail commodities to customers.¹³ Domestic ingenuity motivates a daily search among fruits, vegetables, animal protein, raw and cooked, Asian plastic, fabric and metal items, and foreign industrial *dumping*, discernibly seeking for minimum margins of profit.¹⁴ This work is usually performed while looking after children and feeling a hurting body. Age-related, high-risk pregnancies, which are common, and obstetric unrest compound a struggle for survival that inexorably continues to be the only possible way to keep family indigence at bay.¹⁵

In the face of structural constraints on social policies demanded by the economic globalization of capitalism, the most common option for low-income Ecuadorean women (and men) is to engage themselves in the long chain of informal, commodity retailing. The self-employed, "on-their-own" people, selling vegetables, hand-made or industrial items, in streets and in open-air markets, try, by all available means, to escape, or at least to delay poverty. Mothers and other women, through an active and dynamic search for income, overcome the precarious labour conditions affecting the male work-force – the traditional home bread-

¹² Only twenty percent of working women receive a salary. An additional eight percent work as domestic workers in a very unprotected and volatile sector. Only one in ten of the female domestic workers, is affiliated to the Social Security Institute (CONAMU & INEC, 2000, pp. 21-26).

¹³ There are seventy thousand more women self-employed than men (CONAMU & INEC, 2000, p. 26).

¹⁴ Over seventy percent of women in the quintile with the lowest spending capacity work in the "informal" economy (World Bank, 1995).

¹⁵ According to the World Bank (1995), the income generated by mothers' insertion in the "informal" economy better enables households to cope with poverty.

winners.

Women household-heads clinging at the fringes of the social protection fabric as they are, have an impoverished capacity to overcome state-enforced political and economic policies. This unbalance of power is somehow levelled by adopting desperate, defensive survival strategies. In face of draconian drug legislation, stepping into the small-scale trade of illegal substances is a very risky option. For some women, however, whether they have been forced to participate, or are willingly participating in the drug trade, the risk is assumed as an extreme response to both personal circumstances and to the overall lack of socially acceptable, viable alternatives.

Law one-o-eight

Drafted on templates provided by similar laws in the United States and elsewhere in the world,¹⁶ the 1990 bill (numbered "108" in Ecuador's legislation official registry) was the subject of reduced public debate. Officers in the Foreign Affairs Ministry, sympathetic to US anti-drug strategy, lobbied it over alternative, *domestic* proposals. The bill was sanctioned as national law by a so-called 'social-democrat' government. This law eventually became a "successful enclave of foreign legislation within the Ecuadorean state" (Bonilla, 1993).

The overwhelming political and economic weight the US has on regimes governing peripheral countries such as Ecuador, makes resistance a futile enterprise. In many cases, ruling political elites implement without opposition the same "scape goat" approach used in the US. A "common enemy" is rhetorically identified and therefore a national battle must be

¹⁶ The 1986 United States' federal "Anti-Drug Abuse Act" and the 1988 United Nations "Vienna Convention" resolutions.

launched. "Narco-guerrilla" or "narco-subversion" provide blanket-type meanings to hide complex social dynamics beyond the scope of the illegal drugs. National electoral campaigns, political alliances, legislative reforms are often bound to what polls and focus-groups determine how the public values, uses and misuses such meanings.

Over twenty countries must submit to the US government their national drug policy for assessment and for approval of an annual *grading* pass. Trade and tariff preferences are granted to those countries 'effectively fighting' drugs. Those who fail the certification process, automatically experience cuts in the flow of investing capital, the suspension of *imperial* dispensations when renegotiating their foreign debt, or delays in the process leading to obtain loans and grants from global institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank (Tokatlian, 1997).

Since the 1980's all Ecuadorean regimes have promptly aligned themselves with the principles and procedures of the US drug foreign policy.¹⁷ Governing elites have recycled U.S. institutions' rhetoric and legislation. With very little musing, they have adopted the singular meanings ascribed to drug, trafficker, user, and punishment.

For the last ten years (since 1990) drug enforcement in Ecuador has been driven by a legislation of an almost exclusively prosecuting, punitive nature. This Machiavellian – to say the least – body of legal (*dis*)figures fulfilled all but one of the State Department's expectations: extradition. Sentences up to twenty five years in prison were prescribed for those cultivating plants and trading drugs. Wearing a t-shirt printed with a cannabis leaf had a

¹⁷ In the context of the so-called "Plan Colombia", the recent "lease" to the US government of a military base and airport in the coastal city of Manta, without the approval of the Ecuadorean Congress, speaks eloquently of the kind of international relations forged by this regional "consensus" on drug matters.

jail sentence of three to six years. In the absence of tabulations for quantities and qualities of substances the law hardly recognized differences between user, addict or trafficker. Those sentenced for trading drugs were not allowed the modern correctional benefits such as sentence reduction, controlled freedom or parole, that are adopted elsewhere. Nevertheless, the law rewarded any police informer with up to two thirds of sentence reduction, and sanctioned as permissible police's 'surveilled delivery' ["*entrega vigilada*"]. This was sort of a staged and premeditated 'legal procedure' to incriminate a suspect being tracked by the narcotics police. The "surveilled delivery" contradicted the fact that the same legislation prescribed eight to twelve years in prison to the public servant acting in bad faith to incriminate someone else (*Ley de sustancias estupefacientes y psicotrópicas, y reglamento, 1992*).

A long time passed before the claims for law reform emerging from within the country were heard.¹⁸ Only after ten years since its original creation has the public institution mandated to implement drug legislation – the *Consejo Nacional de Control de Sustancias Estupefacientes y Psicotrópicas CONSEP* [National Council for Control of Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances] – been able to create some decision-making autonomy apart from United States policy.¹⁹ Drug use, the "surveilled delivery" strategy, the administration of confiscated monies and goods, and money-laundering, are currently being re-considered (Ponce, 2000).

¹⁸ Only in 1997, was drug possession for personal use formally de-penalized, and drug addiction considered an illness and rehabilitation prescribed.

¹⁹ This despite a broad formal representation of political power: the executive board of the CONSEP is presided over by the Solicitor General and has representatives from six national ministries.

The drug law enforcement had a considerable impact on the judicial and correctional systems. The number of inmates with drug-related charges almost doubled between 1989 and 1997. The administration of justice was overwhelmed by the number of trials waiting for process. Lack of institutional capacity and endemic corruption worked against a fast growing jail population that waited, and waited, for a fair trial or – at least – for a sentence. In the meantime, those inside had little to do in the face of a weak, improvised, under-staffed and under-funded penal rehabilitation policy and institution. Crumbling buildings, over-crowded cells, diminutive outdoor space, abusive defence lawyers, un-trained correction officers, unmotivated therapists and instructors, signalled a looming collapse.²⁰

The crisis in the justice administration system could not wait any longer. The new 1998 Constitution established a twelve-month maximum duration for the "preventive prison."²¹ Over seven hundred and fifty people benefited from the new rule. Almost three hundred of them had been held in prison for drug-related charges. Also, the Catholic Church "Jubilee Year 2000" campaign managed – through ad-hoc Congress legislation – to reduce sentences for pregnant women, sick and elderly inmates. An additional four hundred people recovered their freedom through this initiative (Dirección Nacional de Rehabilitación Social [DNRS], 2000).

Due mainly to these reforms, by the end of the year 2000, the population in jail had decreased to the 1992 level. However, the total number of inmates is still thirty percent larger

²⁰ In June, 1995, the population in jail was forty seven percent larger than the correctional system "installed capacity" (DNRS, 1995).

²¹ Until then, the proportion of Ecuador's jail population without sentence was the highest according to United Nations standards. On average, a prison inmate would have had to wait two years before being sentenced (Arguello, 1991).

than the space built to host them (DNRS, 2000).

Who is in prison?

As international couriers or local retailers, as indicted men's relatives or companions, more women, all over the world, are being incarcerated for drug trafficking than for any other crime (see Stern, 1998). In Ecuador, the statistical information desegregated by gender offers few penal or socio-demographic variables. However partial the available data is, the data unveils the urgent, dramatic — and by all standards — unjust conditions affecting women in jail.

A collective profile of the female inmate population depicts a woman who is around 30 years old; is single or in a common-law relationship; is the mother of two or more children; has had relatively few years of schooling; was working, before being incarcerated, as a primary care giver and/or in the informal economy. Therefore, very few have the resources "to buy justice" from a lawyer or judge. While in jail, they have to wait up to two years to hear a judge's sentence, and they can expect (guilty or not) up to 25 years without parole. Very little rehabilitation activities are designed and implemented. Most of them feel abandoned by family, spouse and society (Bastidas, 1996, pp. 104-108).

The most conspicuous indicator, the *identity* between women in jail and drug charges, has not changed at all since 1992 . In 2000, there were seven hundred and eighteen women incarcerated in Ecuador. Seventy two percent of them are locked in for drug trafficking, sixteen percent are accused of property crimes and around ten percent are accused of violence

against people (DNRS, 2000).²²

In comparison with their male counterparts, women's crimes are much less violent.²³ Women in jail tend to be older than men, less likely to have a spouse, are more educated or more literate than men, and are more frequently from another country.²⁴ Female inmates do not escape from nor die in jail as often men do: twenty three men died in jail in 1999, half of them due to inmate violence. Women in jail have lesser access to professional help (i.e. physicians, social workers), yet tend to request psychological assistance more often (DNRS, 2000).

Both men and women in jail over-represent the sector of the Ecuadorean population that is without secure means of subsistence. Thirty seven percent of the total jail population declared not to have a job before they got arrested by police and an additional fifty percent said they worked as self-employed vendors or artisans (DNRS, 2000).

Perhaps the most dramatic indicator of the very precarious situation women face in jail is the number of infants and young children living in jail with the inmates. On average, three hundred and seventeen children lived in jail on any day thorough 1999. Only two rehabilitation centres, one in each of the two largest cities, provide an already over-flooded child care service. The situation elsewhere challenges the imagination. In two small-city jails,

²² Due to the law reforms and human rights advocacy (see *Law one-o-eight*), in the year 2000 there were three hundred fewer women in jail than in 1995.

²³ Twenty eight percent of male inmates are accused of violent crimes, thirty one percent of drug trafficking and thirty percent of theft (DNRS, 2000).

²⁴ The apparent *invisibility* of women's public activities makes them ideal candidates for crossing, unnoticed, international borders and narcotic agents' vigilant gaze. Almost all women from another country in Quito's jail are accused of drug trafficking (DNRS, 2000).

sixty percent overcrowded, with inmate self-employment²⁵ ratios among the lowest in the country, and where over ninety percent of the seventy inmates are accused of drug trafficking, at least fifty children live in with their mothers.

Structural oppression, economic violence, downward mobility, the daily and relentless realization for millions of people of how inaccessible daily life-supporting means and resources are, explain penal and criminal statistics in Ecuador.

For some of those holding political power in Ecuador, the way to handle social unrest emerging from people living at the margins of society and stricken by hard-poverty, is by transferring to them overwhelming masses of violence (Sanchez-Parga, 1999). Delinquent bank executives²⁶ were hardly targets of any police prosecution. The petty robber or small-scale drug dealer therefore becomes the single most sought after culprit for prevalent social inequalities. Pickpocketing the poor has aphorisms such as "structural adjustment programs," "international commodity pricing" or "downsizing public services." For picking rich pockets one must *do time*.²⁷

²⁵ Women-only jails have higher indexes of self-employment (DNRS, 2000).

²⁶ In March, 1999, US\$ four billion – roughly the equivalent to one quarter of the national e(x)ternal debt – fled Ecuador's private bank system. The country's president imposed a "banking holiday" suspending for a week all bank transactions. When banks re-open, thousands of people learned that their savings had literally disappeared. By the time government announced a time-line to return to bank customers their money – over periods of time as long as ten years – those directly responsible were beyond justice's reach. With one exception. To ease the social unrest, the Armed Forces, without presidential approval, arrested the CEO of the – until then – largest bank. The country would later know that he had been a major donor to the president's electoral campaign.

²⁷ In the year 2000, for the first time in ten years, the number of male inmates accused of property crimes was higher than the jail population with drug related charges (DNRS, 2000).

In a sui generis intercourse, global politics, class exploitation, gender/sex manipulation and ethnic subordination have led to the jailing of over seven hundred women under the charges of possessing, transporting or dealing relatively insignificant amounts of cannabis and industrial derivatives of the coca and opium poppy plants. In Ecuador, the secular crusade against drugs has produced a significant number of "collateral casualties". It has manufactured, by design of foreign law and agency of police, myopic brutality, its own subject of domination: the petty drug trader in *Bananaland*.

Women in jail provide facts and qualitative information that enables almost anyone to question the current social contract's definition of *Justice*. Their testimonies make credible the belief that whatever crime they committed, if any at all, has been law-codified and that punishment has been prescribed by policy makers suffering delirium tremens after trading stocks for too long. Their experiences speak loudly of the pervasive and corrosive nature of gender subordination from early childhood to maturity to senility. Their solitude and segregation is a bleeding metaphor of an anthropophagic social organization that uses guilt and blame as indicators of progress and democracy.

Whatever *victimhood* qualities we may ascribe to them, the most valuable asset they have is an accumulated and sophisticated experiential learning drawn from an active participation in the fringes of the formal economy. Proving that resistance and dissent do work within the system and while managing an overwhelming risk of return, women, coming from some of the most impoverished households in human society, may profit, for their own benefit and their children's sake, from a particular set of illegal commodities.

Pow(d)ers

The business of holy stamps flourished and on particularly active weekends when a heavy shipment of cocaine was sent out, not a single one of those bearing the image of Saint Jude – the patron saint of desperate causes – could be found within the confines of the city (Roldán, 1999, p. 169).

Drugs and people have been the subject of countless academic, artistic and legal representations. With no intention of exhausting possible combinations, relying on my own subject understanding and on the interpretations available from the ever expanding literature,²⁸ some of the topics have included: how official treaties, policies and strategies confront encoded stratagems in streets, cottages and air strips; how *epidemic* urban misery turns into individual personal choice in high-powered private offices and vice versa; how leaves, seeds and flowers, syringes and vials, connect social dramas and tragedies;²⁹ *Ethnic Cash Crop Hopes with Sunset Boulevard Carn(al)ival with Penitentiary Despair*; how needs, desire and pleasure evolve into prescription, dose and punishment.

Illegal drugs have become commodities with highly contested meanings. Andean peasants, female international drug-couriers, metropolitan drug lords, young suburban drug-users, older global law-enforcers, all subscribe, impute and assign new meanings to illegal drugs and to the people next to them. Illegal substances, a set of protean, sumptuary commodities, in a meandering, significant-altering social-life (Appadurai, 1986), connect the United States of America's *Drug Czar* office with low-income Ecuadorean households headed

²⁸ The bibliography on mind-altering drugs in Paul Gootenberg (1999) provides a comprehensive outlook on what has been written so far, particularly in history and anthropology of drugs.

²⁹ The showing of movies and documentaries depicting aspects of the drug trade in the year 2000 was prolific: *Traffic*, *Blow*, *Requiem for a Dream* and *Grass* created some media buzz.

by women. What may begin as a woman's strategy to generate some sort of income to support children and relatives, evolves into "threats to national security," and certainly returns in the form of indiscriminate, brutal law enforcement.

Towards the end of his second term in office, the entourage of United States President Bill Clinton stopped briefly in Cartagena, Colombia. A city built to repel pirate attacks, the old and fortified colonial architecture of the port-city offered a rather appropriate backdrop for the event. Protected by perimeters of security devices and personnel, Clinton and the president of Colombia, Andres Pastrana, heralded to the world the new strategy for the Andean front of the war on drugs: "Get tough(er)". Weapons, military training, satellite surveillance, aerial spraying, enforcement in the jungle, indictment in the streets, all included in a \$US 1.3 billion "capacity-building" package. The Colombian government had eventually caved in to a long lasting political pressure, and it had decided to import the North American model to deal with the drug problem (Tokatlian, 2000).

The United States' model is a "drug-war habit" that has a price tag of forty billion US dollars a year.³⁰ Although the junkie is usually portrayed as an individual lacking a network of meaningful relations, drug addiction now seems better to depict an illness of a complex and highly organized society (Bateson, 1994).

Militaristic and pharmacocentric approaches dominate the production, dissemination and consumption of the strategic meaning of illegal drugs (Gootenberg, 1999). Although evidence undermining such totalistic perspective is now eloquent and powerful, the United

³⁰ Governor of New Mexico's estimate of how much United States spends in drug enforcement, prevention and treatment, at home and abroad (Miller, 2000).

States is still very far from any substantive reforms. For those caught by the system, there is no alternative but jail.³¹

The overall rationale follows a simplistic "get-it-done" approach: "Get-tough, lock-them-up, and make'em-brake-rocks." Since the early 1980, successive acts of federal legislation have hardened how the justice system treats drug offenders: "Three-strikes-out," mandatory sentences, elimination of parole, user accountability, are just some of the legal strategies aimed to optimize the capture, trial, sentencing and jailing of the drug offender. The increasing number of new convicts has flooded the system, creating the need for new cells and prisons, becoming another opportunity for a thriving capitalist enterprise: private jails.

The year two thousand was also the year of "inmate two million." The prison population in the "most powerful nation on Earth," has grown fast and steadily in the last 25 years. One of every one hundred and fifty five Americans, including newborns and elderly, is locked in jail (Mauer, 1999).³² The mammoth scale of the crimino-legal complex is such that the US national unemployment rate would appear significantly worse if prisoners were counted (Alexander, 2000).

Political campaigns, state budget allocations, crime legislation, now have to take into account acceptable profit margins and forecast acceptable returns for investors and brokers. The commodification of the prison inmate fuels a vast and complex industry. With a workforce calculated around six hundred thousand employees (Mauer, 1999), the jail industry

³¹ Sixty percent of the federal inmate population is incarcerated because of drug charges (Bloom & Chesney-Lind, 2000).

³² Only one other country, Russia, incarcerates its population at higher rates. Canada's ratio is six times lower (Mauer, 1999).

already constitutes an interest group able to resist policy changes undermining its growth or stability. If decreasing investment in public-funded education is at all a measure of success, then the influence, power, and lobbying capacity of the jail industry has proven successful (Alexander, 2000).

Since Ronald Reagan's administration years, the petty drug trader has become the easy and everyday catch for the criminal system. The majority of cells are occupied by blacks and Hispanics, low income males from inner city neighbourhoods (Mauer, 1999 ; Peters, 2000). However, the quintessential, young, violent, dark-skinned, gun-totting male criminal is as absent in prison cells as he is omnipresent in the late night, paranoia-inducing, newscasts (the new millennium's nursery rhymes). By all means, citizens' real concerns with lethal violence and physical harm, caused by guns and bullets, have not been addressed (Pitts, 2000). The prison population has been *manufactured* by political hands and will.

The impact on women is at least equally unjust. The massive incarceration of men creates for women additional burdens: the care of children and the elderly becomes their exclusive responsibility. The gradual dismantling of social programs, which benefits the correctional industry, only makes more acute, the lack of social support and scarcity of entry-level jobs in the service sector – the most important source of employment for women (Danner, 2000). This indirect institutional violence towards women, and their gradual marginalization from a buoyant economy and from sources of income, have induced a rapid increase in the female prison population – between 1980 and 1995 the female prison population almost doubled the male prison population's growth rate (Mauer, 1999). In 1991, some seventy percent of the female inmates in the federal system were held because of drug charges (Bloom & Chesney-Lind, 2000). The female inmates were first-time, non-violent,

low-level offenders, who are "more often...Hispanic, having higher educational levels, and displaying fewer behavioural problems in prison than other inmates" (Peters, 2000, p. 29).

It seems that the war on drugs has become a war on women, particularly poor women of colour. In a rather warped manner, those responsible for the protection of the vulnerable and defenceless – legislators and law enforcers – have become the unwitting perpetrators of violent offences against women. Class, ethnic and gender oppression, and structural violence in North American cities are compounded within the drug trade (Burgois, 1989). This constitutes symptoms of social deviation rather than of individual deviation; a national addiction to quick fixes; and a stubborn fixation with the illusionist's capacity to disappear women in a *box*.

PERFORMANCE, LIFE HISTORY AND READERS THEATRE

- *Performance, public perception and understanding*
- *A str(art)egy for life history research presentation*
- *An allegory for the "decay of the aura"*
- *Form a persuasive fiction*
- *Curtain*

Performance, public perception and understanding

Located within parts of the valuable, rich and vast qualitative research and scholarship in social science, this work aims to become a personal rendition of the fluid and permeable divide connecting lived lives, the arts and social science; to be an arts-informed communicative strategy for report presentation. The overarching disposition holding this academic approach relates more to the reflexive and communicational nature of report-writing's processes and outcomes, and to the usefulness of form and deliverance of content. In the following paragraphs I explain how a public performance of this thesis' form and content will bring these elements together and how the performance will foster conversation and discussion, promoting public and audience participation, in and around the spiral vicinity and synchronicity connecting my own, the participants', and the audience's learning and lived experiences.

A performance, "the execution of an action," acquires particular properties when considered in relation to its context. Thanks to the agency of the people involved, a performance fulfills its context, accomplishes its form. Performance is an action. Through order and ritual, a performance formally unfolds the author's knowledge claims, the audience's references and questions; and imputations of the audience to social events or its defence. Against a backdrop – natural or built tridimensional spaces, a stage, a *text*, a street intersection while meeting other people – performers have something to carry out of context and something to achieve against that context. Death is performed during the last moments of one's life.

The work of Victor Turner (1982) on the cultural performance (ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, poetry) as a "social metacommentary" frames an anthropological perspective for this work: "the proper finale for an experience." Turner suggests that the contextual re-enactment of such social and cultural commentaries – grasped by means of ethnography as "dramatic social agency" – enhances the understanding of both social and personal human experience. Turner, in this manner, advances a plea for the inter-cultural communicability of "both political and cognitive structures by dramatic empathy, sympathy, friendship, even love" (p. 101). In pedagogical terms, a performance renders social laws explicit.

A performance allows participants to experience things and events in *and* out of context. The performing act works for the gazer as a *topological* space and mirror-like surface – one unaltered by elastic deformation – reflecting a distorted image of the subject/context relation. The ephemeral relation with unfamiliar settings activates reflexivity and demands an active, immediate reaction. While we see our selves distorted, we redress by personal and cultural means a new sense, a new understanding of the performance's subject.

"For no one likes to see himself (sic) as ugly, ungainly, or dwarfish. Mirror distortions of reflections provoke reflexivity" (Turner, 1982, p. 105).

Victor Turner's work becomes instrumental for my readers theatre text because his work renders as relevant and viable, the translation and re-presentation of social commentaries across cultural borders. I grasp his insights into the potential reflectivity a dramatic presentation may induce in performance's audiences and participants with a pragmatic sense: to deliver and to enhance individual and public understanding of my thesis topic.

The modality in which this text is presented also serves the purpose of situating it within the dramatic arena of gender relations. The researcher, a *son* of patriarchy, meets and talks with a group of women *in jail*. The meeting in itself comments abundantly on the politics of gender oppression – it is not my intention here to commit the rhetorical equivalent of a masculine hara-kiri. Instead, I opt for inviting those interested to a *dress rehearsal*. This reader theatre piece is an open invitation to try to see gender constitution and gender relations *wearing someone else's apparel*.

Judith Butler (1988) calls for a "subversive repetition" of gender-constituting performative acts. Prior to natural or discursive essentialities, Butler considers gender identity "the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity" (p. 520). Her definition of gender is relational and makes the social dimensions of life vulnerable to the individual's volition:

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender *is what is put on*, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure

(p. 531, italics mine).

Social roles and role-playing are connected -throughout the script- by jail cells and jail sentences. Clearly, playing the role of a jail inmate does not include doing time for dealing drugs. However distant and cushioned a theatrical context might compare with the theatrical context's *real* reference, the scope here is to reenact the *real*, to re-experience it, not to resuscitate the lived experiences of the women in jail. This work aims to subvert the political power that protects *innocence*-believing and that systematically feeds us with blame and seclusion from the other.

The performance of this text does not intend to *liberate* either the group of women or the author. Inmates and those of *us* who consider ourselves *free* are shackled with more than drug legislation or privileged academic status – and the chain links go down and deep into colonial history, global politics, gender relations and symbolic references. The further we go into tracing origins and causes, the more personal voices and circumstances become fossilized, calcified by positive references and authority claims. Instead, performing this text intends to be a "construction site."¹ This site is an ephemeral context where meeting and getting to know *other* people would be otherwise impossible. Into this theatrical space, self and other – through text and dialogue – *construct* each other.² Even better: a performance of the lived experience of the *other* expects to renovate social communication and historical

¹ "*Construction site* of multiple identities" is how Sarah Bryant-Bertail (1994, p.8, emphasis in the original) translates the use of the French term *mise en scène* – literally "staging" – in Judith Butler (1988).

² I wonder on the effects of having the reverse procedure in place. Having a readers theatre in jail, with jail inmates, being the script built on the life experiences of a group of *us*, outside and *free*.

change.

The performing context and material this work produces consider the reader a "coparticipant in the creation of meaning" (Bochner in Angrosino, 1998, p. 41). Meaning and identity, the mirrors of self and other, are constructed in and changed by social interaction. Interpretation and reflexivity are drawn upon by understanding lives in context. A performance seems to bring to the foreground a greater array of possibilities to curve, to ground, and temporally *to shackle* learning to personal understanding.³

A str(art)egy for life history research presentation

Deep and thoughtful was the re-encounter among the contextual literature for this work. with "a bountiful Rambler, full of leaves, dried fruits and flowers." For a while I followed, sometimes tip-toed, the path and work of anthropologist Ruth Behar. Some time ago, I had met her rather briefly in Quito. She had travelled to Ecuador for the first time with her son and partner, for the purpose of conducting a graduate seminar on life history methodologies. Her writing was unfamiliar to me then, yet the short-lived occasion we shared was meaningful and engaging.

The reading several years later of Behar's (1996) now often quoted work rekindled my relationship with anthropology and, in particular, with the topic of author's location in relation to fieldwork participants and ethnographic text audiences. I welcomed her emphasis

³ Marianne Paget (1995, p. 241) foresees a broad learning potential within a performance: "The multiple interpretive acts of performance enhance, rather than diminish, the intelligibility of the text as a scientific account because these multiple interpretations enhance our understanding of the complexity of the reality to which the text and the science of the text allude."

in opening up questions regarding the author's voice within the text, both at the stage of field inquiry, and during the writing period: how are pivotal events in an author's daily life, her or his personal contexts, articulated to the production and presentation of academic work? how does fieldwork memory become an emotional "body of experiences" seeking a way out during the writing act? for whom do researchers try to make sense of temporal and distant experience in the field site? why is this senses making relevant in the first place?

Her researcher's voice resonates with strength and honesty. Through her writing's form and narratives she represents herself in the mirror of the other as an active, yet truthful participant. Questions of power in the representation of inquiry subject are presented openly, challenging readers to take political positions. She seemed to suggest an implosion of the public – academe, profession, advocacy work – into an expanded notion of the self, a notion that includes the presence, the memory, the body, the soul, the emotions, and the feelings of the other.

The "peripheral visions" of Mary C. Bateson (1994) on learning, memory and writing, also have a broad and deep scope. She writes about how by "living and learning we become ambidextrous," and about how "pleasure and survival are linked by learning" (pp. 9-10). It was insightful to understand my learning from lived experience through her notions of "observation and participation in a dense inter-cultural world," and of "how to become routinely sensitive to patterns, even with minimal cues, suspending judgement and looking for how they fit together" (p. 222). She points to the fluid and ever changing landscapes of the individual's memory of experience to look for meaning and to advance learning. Her optimism regarding the role and agency of the culture-imbedded individual to be constantly re-inventing her or his own self – even under extreme, burdensome circumstances – is

inspiring.

Behar and Bateson were both instrumental in planting an unsuspecting approach to thesis writing. Bateson's delight in presenting a clear sense of contemporary aspects of social life, using the "periphery" of formal, rational, positivist observation, implicitly values knowledge claims emerging from my own (and from any other's) lived experience. Behar's writing generously offers the kind of sensitivity and introspection needed to begin uncovering and reshaping field work memories as necessary and as politically relevant. Both helped me to re-vitalize the ongoing, expanding and contracting pulse of sense making and writing.

I was being inspired by carefully crafted writing, narratives and authorship. Thesis-relevant literature also needed to be understood in a different manner. The context was different, so the qualities and relevance of reference texts and ideas had to be assessed with seemly and comely parameters. I looked around for books and articles that somehow honoured my experiences in the field. I found new questions and possibilities to the form and content of my previous work.

John Van Manen's (1995, pp. 7-8) definition of a "realist" studio portrait – "tightly framed, sharply focussed, unnaturally bright and shadowless" – may correspond to my previous thesis (Bastidas, 1996). With some loosely connected symbolic elements appearing and disappearing in the background, that thesis has a standard layout and visible traces of positivist arguments. Nevertheless, more important is how it belongs to me; how its pages summarize *forgotten*, latent, and active, learning; how that thesis has become an inextricable *bond* to participants and experiences during field work.

The heuristic value Van Manen assigns to "the textuality of ethnographic facts" when layered over "the factuality of ethnographic texts," assisted me in understanding this thesis as

a palimpsest: an already written text, fading away over a fabric-like surface, encompassing a period of personal and professional life. "Textuality replaces factuality but only after previous views have been dislodged and new facts move into place. These new facts are as firm as the old but are supported by a new and different perspective" (Van Manen, 1995, pp. 22-23).

The new textuality for which I am looking also demands two additional qualities. The first is that it be written in an artful manner, one able to claim closeness to the definition of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997, p. 12) of a portraitist craftsmanship: a "crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving and shaping, reflecting and imposing, mirroring and improvising. The effort to reach coherence must flow organically both from the data and from the interpretative witness of the portraitist." The second quality is that the text should allow itself to be experienced by both writer and audiences so that it is a performative and performing text, linking author and participants, indeed a text that is "intended to inquire about its possible meanings and values in a way that rides the active currents of lived experience without fixing them once and for all" (Ellis & Bochner, 1992, p. 98).

Looking for patterns, suspending judgement, without fixing them once and for all, open and vulnerable to mirroring and improvising, that is the art of writing inquiry.

This work follows an intuitively thought-out, non-specific, methodological approach. It tries to address academic backgrounds rich with sound suggestions about how to *meet and get to know* other people through conversation. It borrows for a while the language and communicative strategies advocated by diverse authors, hoping to eventually deliver (my) knowledge claims on a subject.

The artful approach seeks to ground this thesis within the written work of inspirational

and instrumental researchers as artists as teachers and conversely teachers as artists as researchers. The work by Ardra Cole and J. Gary Knowles (2001a) presents how wide and deep, yet inviting, are the methodological venues of life history research. They emphasize presenting life history research as encompassing notions of *context*, clarity of purposes, relationships and public representation. They invite researchers to sustain an "ongoing reflexivity and responsiveness" (pp. 76-182), logging accounts of stages and process during field work, report writing and representation. Cole and Knowles demand empathetic and ethical consideration when meeting and leaving the 'other' at the inquiry's beginning and end. The personal and collective natures of self and of learning demand the authors to assert the importance of voice polyphony and of authorship dispersion in the re-presentation and communication of knowledge.

This thesis rests on the contingency of temporal and spatial contexts. The present context is a sort of round, a mirror-like surface reflecting researcher-and-subject relations in academic settings, in which are built landscapes, stratified and eroded by intellectual status, political power and economic supremacy. Understanding lived life is about the relations and the contexts that have shaped and/or are shaping that life. There is the caution, however, that "we can only ever 'come close' to understanding the experiences or life of another and we can only go so far in unravelling the complexities of the broader social condition" (Cole & Knowles, 2001a, p. 24)

The insights of Wilhelm Dilthey (1977, p. 143) into the paramount importance of context at the moment of recalling and sharing knowledge are relevant here. He defines "the Form of Understanding: an induction which derives, from partially ascertained bits, a context which determines the whole." Inquiring, writing and reporting on lived experience, are

contextual re-enactments of a *meaning* one already knows. Re-presenting what "I think I know" turns into "knowing what I think." It seems that the researcher's task begins only there, in discovering *living* contexts for the representation of lived experience.

Michael Angrosino (1998, p. 32) defines life history research work as an interactive document: "[a] life history may well provide us with nuggets of insight about...a culture..., most significantly, [is] a document of interaction – primarily between the 'subject' and the researcher, and secondarily between both of them and their potential audience." Subject(s), researcher and audience are participants in the recreation of knowledge.

Researcher's subjective claims, partial and ephemeral, should be contested and contrasted by inviting diverse public interaction. Sense-making is only achieved by appropriately addressing the communicative and social nature of knowledge creation and learning. Philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey considers learning complete only after it has been shared or told to somebody else. Sense making, the *understanding* of some thing "is never truly completed until it is 'expressed,' that is, until it is communicated in terms intelligible to others, linguistic or otherwise" (In Turner, 1982, p. 12).⁴

Laurel Richardson (2001) says she searches in papers or monographs for a "creative expression of reality". How "true" and credible they read is a consequence of both enhanced creativity and scientific enterprise. Susan Finley and Gary Knowles (1995, p. 139) see this as an expression of the text "usefulness" beyond elitist and classist knowledge competencies and aesthetic sensibilities. Creativity emerges in a scribbler-like disposition to witness the multiple "real". Lorri Neilsen (2001, p. 271) considers research and text poiesis as driven by

⁴ In Turner (1982, pp. 12-15), one may find a purposeful and pedagogic interpretation of Dilthey's thought in relation to the value and usefulness of social and public expression.

"courage and humility", permanently seeking for "accessibility, diversity and clarity" with "openness and a willingness to let go."

The present work strives to make sense of and to convey learning from lived experience. It honours qualities of sense-making that usually dwell in risk-taking; intuitive searches; daring *to tell* about it; learning along the way; observing the periphery of contexts; reflecting on partial, ever changing fragments of truth.

I also intend to evoke and to share with readers and audiences a sense of aesthetic experience. The present work dares, with iconoclastic modesty, to claim as owing some of the arts-informed inquiry qualities detailed by Cole and Knowles (2001b). There is in this thesis, and there was during the production period of this work, an "aesthetic quality and appeal." It is a "communicable" and performing artefact, permeable and porous to diverse audiences, ductile to be reshaped in both *outside* and upstage academic locales. It is "holistic." It invites one to momentarily pause on *other's* life to see oneself against a larger, complex backdrop, in Canada, reading aloud testimonies of women in jail in Ecuador. It asks, "How do we make sense of that experience?"

I think of this work as the presentation of a performative and performing *str(art)egy*, an artful strategy, to communicate my knowledge claims. The strategy displayed and implemented throughout this thesis can be recreated and enacted again. This work is the registry and final text of an "identity conferring performance" – mine and belonging to women in Ecuadorean jails. The reader will find elements of this work expressing sensorial, artistic and personal decisions usually hidden in other works (un)like this one.

Other(ing) wo(men)

Why is an heterosexual male, anthropologist/educator "othering"⁵ women in jail anyway? Is this a case of gender appropriation or personal naivete? Another imperialising ethnographic gaze? Decentering and refuting androcentric perspectives on social and women's issues are long standing political objectives of academic feminism (Rubin, 1975; Butler, 1990).

The political agency motivating this work honours such critique at the same time resists any paralysing, antiseptic domain of political correctness. It calls for an empathetic, inter-gendered location, one enabling us to shift focus, from the male-personal to public agency, to the (un)gendered-public. Perhaps only my political desire entitles me to amplify the voices of women locked up in jail.⁶

Western anthropology and feminism – as discipline(s) and political outlook(s) of the world – framed and motivated the original work from which this paper emerges. Both were appropriated and reformulated in "third world" contexts of prevalent ethnic subordination, androcentric gender relations, blatant class exploitation and United States neo-colonial dominance. The discipline and outlook assisted me in searching for an academic voice within a feminist self. The gendered other, *Woman* and women, unreducible, multiple and inevitable,

⁵ Brown (1996, p. 131) argues that "othering" is an inevitable communicative strategy in "constructing the mindedness and 'agency' of Others". Mike Gane (1996, p. 158) suggests that men's alliance with feminisms demands the creation of a new male's self-image: "As feminisms become more effective, so men are confronted with many different images of themselves in a complex, contradictory context of patriarchal and anti-patriarchal strategies."

⁶ "A community with phalluses, rather than the community as Phallus, need exist only as a threat to the existing patriarchal order, not to women individually or to feminism as a movement" (Boone, 1990, p. 25).

now expresses through powerful voices, humbling male traditional claims. These pages aim to perform a break-away from our own past(s). To discover the "I" and to become aware of exploitation by the other, and to claim that the "I" may be consciously used to represent the other (anthropology).⁷

Autobiography

The act of writing a non-canonical depiction of academic subjects makes any attempt of self-effacement futile. The "I" in the eye of the observer is always present. My ethnographic, pedagogical authority implodes into my exposed vulnerability to public scrutiny. Fragments of my life-experience resonate strongly in the women's accounts of their lives. These are relevant fragments in the sense that they provide a self-to-reader answer to the question "where do I come from?".⁸

The autobiographical entries in the text reveal to readers relevant aspects of my position regarding sexual difference, socio-economic class, capitalist markets or illegal drugs. They point to my (the observer's) *vulnerability*, reveal implicit values and emotions, and especially highlight my own limits when trying to understand social phenomena and to

⁷ Marilyn Strathern (1987a) signals a way out from the "awkward" relationship between feminism and anthropology. Her ideas assisted me in positioning myself within feminist vocabulary and politics.

⁸ Ruth Behar's "vulnerable observer" portrays the current educator (anthropologist) as an always expanding self, within and beyond discourses, and as an always retreating other, reflecting and self-aware. "In my view, it isn't an accident that the effort to engage with the emotions in current anthropological and feminist writing follows upon Freudianisms, structuralisms, and poststructuralisms. I think what we are seeing are efforts to map an intermediate space we can't quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life" (1996, p. 174).

convey an interpretation of it.⁹

Personal narrative fractures political and discursive totalities.¹⁰ Usually dismissed as subjective, temporary, local or provisional, personal narrative exposes in personal and social landscapes, crevices, cliffs, cul-de-sacs inaccessible to the mental prospector and to the behavioural guru of the human condition. Yet this narrative opens an always familiar topography, with sign posts and mirrors all the way around.

In this work, the retrieving of field, felt and filed experiences, the locating of them in an academic, political, performing act, is a process perhaps more attuned with the craft of wearing off, than of mending and patching garments and costumes. I have donned the expansive and continuous fabric of higher education, scholarship, and professional institutions for terms and months. This thesis rips that fabric open. Self agency and lived experience patch it, and bring to the foreground almost see-through knees and elbows, revealing frayed cuffs and collars, areas where my body-memory has been more active, locations where the "I" has been rubbing the surface off the political totality.

In the *seams* keeping the pieces together, readers may point to the vast *otherness* separating me (you) from the women locked in jail. Their voices resonate in my memory of experience in (un)usual, *unconnected* and diachronic places. They speak loudly of unfulfilled political commitment and incomplete ethnographic alliances. They talk about their own and

⁹ Wilhelm Dilthey (1976, pp. 214-216) explains the pedagogic value of autobiography for *understanding* life: "The power and breadth of our own lives and the energy with which we reflect on them are the foundations of historical vision which enables us to give new life to the bloodless shadows of the past" (p. 215).

¹⁰ Academic canon has privileged the superiority of the mental, of categorical threads, of totalistic and continuous outlooks, connecting and homogenizing reality. For the epistemological and heuristic relevance of "the sensorial" see Seremetakis (1994).

other women's strength and resilience in the face of hardship and despair. They (and myself) have composed a shared yet disjointed life-line worth telling.

An allegory for the "decay of the aura"

all'egory, n. 1: the expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths about human existence; also: an instance (as in a story or painting) of such expression 2: a symbolic representation: **EMBLEM**.

aur'a, n. Subtle emanation (from flowers etc.); atmosphere diffused by or attending a person etc. (esp. in mystical use as a definite envelope of body or spirit); (Path.) sensation as a current of cold air rising from some part of body to head, premonitory symptom in epilepsy & hysterics.

aure'ola, n. Celestial crown won by martyr, virgin, doctor, by victory over world, flesh, or devil.

The content of courses' assignments, class presentations and final papers, are frequent conversation topics in hallways and class rooms. Yet, at the onset of a Master of Arts program, a bound thesis, may work as an allegorical site for reminiscing graduate work: a catalogued spot, in a shelf, in a library, in a higher-education institution; an object, place and form for the last pre-requisite so the author could be granted *something* larger than it.

Thesis content is a matter of student (my) decisions and advisor encouragement, as diverse and singular as scholarships are. However, thesis form is typically a standardized item. Its dimensions, layout, internal organization must follow a series of long standing, periodically revised conventions. In social science, the modality in which thesis content is usually presented favours the written, positive word. *Form* remains mostly a single-specimen field.

In the following paragraphs – anchored in Walter Benjamin's cultural criticism of modern aesthetics – I argue for the relevance of formal considerations in the creation and presentation of (graduate) knowledge claims. From a critical perspective, the final form of

conventional thesis work may be considered harbouring knowledge and learning that rarely goes beyond academe limits. Thesis form, bound and certified, traditionally lacks qualities and capabilities to deliver and to communicate author's experience of learning . Through this critique I aim to present the form this thesis has chosen as honouring the fundamental notion that human learning and knowledge creation is social and collective. Also the form of this thesis emerges from political beliefs that consider the social researcher responsible and accountable for the use-by-others value his or her graduate work eventually gains.

"The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" is considered creating auratic, "authentic" texts, with "cult" value and for "ritual" use when either natural or cultural objects are produced, contemplated and consumed in a free-floating arena separating the social from the cultural and vice versa (Benjamin, 1968). Public and audiences for auratic cultural texts are drawn by a cinema-like, "equipment-free aspect of reality" that "has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology" (p. 233).¹¹

Scott Lash (1990) "reconstructs" Benjamin's analysis into seven implications. An elusive and ambivalent definition of auratic/non-auratic cultural texts encompasses all seven and the relations among them. Lash says that "the auratic cultural (or natural) object is characterized...by its 'unique appearance', its 'semblance of distance', and its 'duration'" (p. 159). What is of my interest now is to see how tightly conventional thesis work fits within some of these implications.

¹¹ This is Benjamin's ironic way to render with aesthetic value the contemplation of human self-destruction advocated by the *Futurist* Marinetti: "War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns"(Benjamin, 1968, p. 241).

In its vast majority, bundles of bound pages, organized in colours according to year of graduation, sit in libraries, away from an audience and lasting for ever. Only very few of them transcend, by mechanical means of reproduction (publication), the modernist prerequisite of singularity and uniqueness. However, even those which reach wider audiences, may be considered auratic when the modalities of consumption are taken into account. The scholarly book is still consumed in a state of individual immersion opposed to conditions of collective distraction (theater, cinema, television) governing the reception of non-auratic objects.

The role institutional technology plays in the creation of the auratic object is irrefutable. The *master's piece* is a product that passed standards and procedures controlling, in Lash's words (1990, p. 164), "discourses and narratives through which aesthetic experience is received" in Lash's words (p. 164). Usually museums, graduate school in this case, are venues where the auratic object is validated as such and reproduced as such. In semiotic terms we may understand the institutional life of graduate school as sustained by a constant emission of signifiers – theses. Library spaces provide the altar for its *contemplation*. More often than not, pragmatic and *political* values of theses are obliterated. Very little attention is focussed on the usefulness delivered by theses or on the quality of craftsmanship displayed by them.

On authorship, the auratic object imposes a very restrictive process. It demands *objectivity* in the topic treatment, *purity* in the craft of making it and author's *closeness* to canonical ways of doing it. Auratic institutional ritual and culture demand from novice and initiated the practice of sustained restraint from creativity. In traditional positivist terms, author's subjectivity in social science should be expressed the least; in a semiotic language

"by the radical separation of the *signifier* from the real (and social) and by a formalism of the signifying material." (Lash, p. 167, italics mine). The *signifier*, the context(s) where the author makes sense from (in, to) and the language modalities she or he uses, are usually considered little relevant, their personal voice is muted.¹²

Central to my understanding of this work's purposes is the notion that the creation of academic knowledge is simultaneously a biographical, social and cultural event. Authorship and audience should remain linked – by-passing restrictions imposed by institutional recruitment or professional accreditation – through inter-subjective exchanges of values, *meaning* and fragments of truth. And social in a sense in which oppositional practices of creation and imagination only end up expanding the individual's capacity to contest the validity of current social contracts.

Form a persuasive fiction

"In theatre...things are always seen *from somewhere*" asserts Roland Barthes (1985, p. 96, italics in the original). The spectator's point of view appreciates and evaluates first of all a "geometric basis of representation", one determined by dimensions, volumes and shapes, of objects and people. Transformed in a context for some thing or body, form and content modify each other with specific qualities: depth, scope, backdrop, foreground, emphasis, wholeness, parts, its sequences, beginning and end. Furthermore, however sophisticated the form/content relation might be, Barthes considers one pre-seating condition: "there must be a

¹² Ardra Cole (2001, p. 300) hollows out a casting of what we may find within this academic aura: "The ideas that research can be creative and that writing and inquiry can be one and the same are far-fetched for most students, especially those who have excelled at conforming to academic social science convention."

fetishistic subject in order to project this tableau." While the context is *alive* and after the curtain is closed, viewer and participant take what they witness back *home, somewhere*. "This point or origin is always the Law: law of society, law of struggle, law of meaning. Every militant art must therefore must be representative, legal."

The relativistic nature of the viewer's point of reference is contained in a recipient-like, in its presentational form. Either being in the open air or within walls and a roof, the form an event takes frames and renders intelligible whatever relevant personal experience the viewer may have. Aesthetic literacies and trained sensibilities aside, the observer and his or her reference capability are held temporary hostages by the features of the form which ephemerally bonds the "fetishistic" subject to the content and meaning of the presentation. How the content is delivered effects what the subject is capable of reading.

A thesis like this one may be considered a cultural artifact, the object of a social contract binding a higher learning institution, the author and a specific public.¹³ As a literary artifact, it claims to contain a more or less defined reference to the real, or to what the author considers part of a "reality." Also, institutional representatives and target public rely solely on the communicable qualities of this work – how it reads – in order to validate it and make sense of it. Subject *representation*, object *legitimation* and language of *operation* may well broadly define also the trials and tribulations of contemporary social science.

In his search for the "alternative social science text" Andrew Sparkes (1995) digs out a comprehensive array of genres, styles and authors. Researchers so far have mainly told

¹³ I endorse Fredric Jameson (1981, p.106) understanding that "genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact."

"scientific" and "realist" tales, those in which the author is objectively absent and the reality described and interpreted is considered unique and apprehensible. However, the successive crises of representation, legitimation, textuality and authorship social science seems to have gone through, have partially opened academic doors for the reception of different kinds of cultural texts. Confessional and impressionist tales, ethnographic fictions and dramas, poetic representation and narratives of the self, have been written both to expose and to address the debate around the crises. The focus now seems to be shifting to how to assess the viability and the validity of blurred genre tales; the ones that stride on paradigmatic as well as narrative modes to order experience and construct reality.¹⁴

The form of this text attempts to honour the personal experience of fieldwork and authorship within the context of academe and social science. "It is the experience which chooses its own form to make its presence felt" (Verma, 1991. In Sparks, 1995, pp. 187). This work cannot be void of interpretative and generalization claims, nor be blind to the limits a complex and exhaustive reality imposes on the author. However discouraging reality's complexity may be, a way out for my knowledge claims was found in a conversational mode: with women in prison, with researchers as artists. Through these different voices academic learning tries to squeeze sense from lived experience.

Learning in academe; experience in the field; language acquisition so one is able to tell a story; literary licences and dexterity with tropes so one can have an audience; a *persuasive fiction* (Strathern, 1987b) that hopes to shed some clarity on the topic as well as it hopes to

¹⁴ A multiple, partial and situational nature of validity is advocated in Lather (1993). Her "voluptuous" validity is "disruptive", "leaky", "tentative", "engaging", it creates a "bound" and "unbound" questioning text, it brings ethics and epistemology together (p. 686).

shade the topic with a particular clarity; a ready-made montage of fieldwork inquiry, biography and narrative styles; a "hybrid figure...., that is the very embodiment of the syncretism of incomplete modernization" (Seremetakis, 1994). Such embodiment – the thesis itself – is delivered to readers and audience while we momentarily agree that "life is translation, and we are all lost in it" and that "the passage is still from the immediacies of one form of life to the metaphors of another."

An(other) re(presentation)

The process, through which I have arrived to this point, has been creative, rich in envisions, yet sometimes stagnant in time and places. However diverse it had been, what kept the process moving was the convergence of histories of life, those histories of others and mine, converging with a form, with a particular mode of (re)presentation. The women's testimonial renditions – and my voice in and around them – are now held together in a hammock-like weave and thread, a sort of recipient for them. This represents an inclusive conception of what an (my) academic text can do. I believe this recipient-like form tailors the written word with usefulness and deliverance.

In the following paragraphs I locate this communicative strategy as an alternative presentational modality – a readers theatre piece.

How the text performs is barely considered in social science. Rational, cognitive and expository text-reading may well qualify by far the most privileged medium for report presentation. Marianne Paget (1995, pp. 230-231) diagnoses the reading text with blandness, stagnation, spinning rhetorical calisthenics in front of a still audience.

We read papers written to be read silently by others; we read them on the way to publications, out loud. We give them analytic and technical – rather than expressive –

readings.... Our meetings usually keep us in the conceptual real, producing a conceptual and abstract science. Our meetings do not intend to invoke or produce experience but suppress involvement, emotion, and imagination – thus the brief, badly read presentations, the endless abstractions, and the boredom.

From a view point not as high in academe, my experience of social science report, in-room presentation is similar. However strong is the contrary push, however convincing the arguments advocated for some of the researchers called throughout this text, there is a sort of mood disorder when we try to communicate among each other and with those outside higher education walls. In a photographic language we are shy of being *over-exposed* by light or by revealing substances. We protect ourselves by presenting oneself and one another, ideas and personas, in formulaic, ritualistic, cult-like, manners. There is an auratic quality around it.

I am advocating a performance quality be included in the text-report, for a usefulness to educe experience in participants and myself; a quality in which the text's *meaning-exchange* value pulses with private and public recalls of sense-making, in a dramatic, collaborative manner.¹⁵ A quality in which the text's *meaning-use value* is anchored in elemental cognitive readers', audiences' competencies. "The performance text is the single, most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meaning of lived experience" (Norman Denzin in Saldaña, 1998, p. 182).

Dorinne Kondo's experience of an artful approach to report presentation is worth considering. Writing on the political implications of dramatic representation of ethnography,

¹⁵ There is not a single ridge for the hike into meaning-making. Lookouts and points of reference are multiple and unique. Some of them are even secret. However, they belong to the sum of all of us. We may (or may not) want to emphatically exchange them during a staged conversation.

Kondo (1995, p. 62) renders a very attractive set of qualities and effects:

Art forms, including theatre, produce a kind of politics of accountability very different from that of conventional academic discourse, arising from a different kind of authority and a different stake the audience might have in what it sees. This is, theatre – or most theatre – presumes no cult of expertise or arcane jargon, no credentials necessary to respond or evaluate. Moreover, its impact can occur in multiple levels, engaging multiple senses, producing a more visceral impact than does textual prose and hence eliciting greater intellectual/emotional response. Consequently and rightfully, everyone can claim to own the representation, because everyone can be affected by it and authorized to respond.

The formal and presentational decisions implicit in this text appeal to challenge narrow and elitist definitions for ownership of academic representations of reality. The validity of such claim rests in the principle that knowledge, and knowledge dissemination, are processes socially constructed (Kvale, 1995). Reality is foremost a collective entity. In representing aspects of reality one should render visible locations for collective authorship and honour the central role audience plays during the entire process.

Pitch it so they can hit it !

Life history research in anthropology and adult education talks eloquently about the persuasive power of well told stories. The social creation of knowledge feeds and expresses itself through different languages, modalities and forms, at the same time, in different places. The formal reductionism report presentation bows to, was criticized as auratic, and as lacking usefulness; because of its mute, static and rigid formality. I try to address this concern informed by my beliefs in the social validity and responsibility of formal considerations.

A key argument in this section considers the text's presentational form as determining – in a large degree – the quality of relationships an audience develops with the text's content. The impression, indentation or engraving which the author's text leaves with the audience, are both the process and the outcome induced by the formal embodiment of the text. Then, perhaps, it is possible to believe that the knowledge, information and the learning educating-power, harnessed by the form, correspond to how the form articulates its social responsibility. Roland Barthes (1985, p. 93) advocates a *militant* and *legal* awareness for the artifact's form:

(F)orm, aesthetic, rhetoric can be socially responsible, if they are handled in a deliberate manner. Representation...must inevitably come to terms with the social *gestus*:¹⁶ as soon as one "represents" (as one projects, as one closes the tableau and thereby makes the totality discontinuous), a decision must be made as to whether the gesture is social or is not.

Readers theatre is a minimally "staged presentation of a piece of text or selected pieces of different texts that are thematically linked. Selections are sometimes performed by individuals and sometimes read chorally by the ensemble or a subgroup of ensemble members" (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995, p. 406). A readers theatre is a presentational rather than a representational style of reality. It follows fewer rules and conventions than a full piece of drama. Readers theatre is austere in technical requirements and production costs. Its emphasis is on local knowledge and thick description. There must be

¹⁶ Bertold Brecht's *gestus* "is a gesture, or a set of gestures (but never a gesticulation), in which can be read a whole social situation. Not every *gestus* is social" (Barthes, 1985, p. 93).

an interaction among the various selections so a whole, greater than its parts, is created. The sense making of readers theatre is always contextual.

For the audience, readers theatre makes meaning from what is suggested rather than from what is literally shown. Imagination must complete what is missing. Since readers theatre appeals to interpretation, the audience does not get lost in the "virtual reality" being enacted on the stage. It's purpose is "to give us a concrete reference to talk about... a rich, engaging particular from which we might be able to extract something a bit more universal... applicable to other times and places" (Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995, p. 423).

The readers theatre definition and purpose stated above are *elemental*. Ideally, readers theatre opens up the text's content to a wider public's consideration. The meaning-exchange value of the text – the capability of the text to generate immediate interaction between researcher, participants and audience – is actually performed during the presentation. The immediacy of public response bypasses the emotional filters imposed on individual and collective sense making by discursive modes of knowledge. A readers theatre presentation puts into real, yet brief, time-and-space dimensions, the contextual reconstruction of reality the researcher has done prior, during, and after field work. The performance of the script in this thesis, of any readers theatre piece, turns (my) field work, this (any) thesis *vulnerable*.

A readers theatre piece allows itself to be represented many times, and every time as a different collective performance, in a different form, a public event, in front of diverse audiences. The staged conversation formally demands to join in, to be part of, to react and to reply to what it is being read and said. It allows itself to be talked over and inquired into by other people, any people really. Simple, contextual, informative, persuasive, evoking, theatrical – readers theatre is all of these.

A readers theatre presentation invites and educes a collective construction of meaning. Yet, at the same time, at the individual participant level, the performance of a readers theatre piece evokes – whispering from somewhere – personal lived experience.

Sense making – I believe – is grounded in public, contextual places where lived experience, the memory of the senses, bring us back, together, to the present, to reenact form, content and context for past events. Lived experiences are referential to many layers of personal, social and public understandings of the world(s) around us. Performing a readers theatre piece may educe the renewal of my as-researcher lived experience – the answers found inquiring into social problems, the joy of realizing how socially relevant are academic, personal accomplishments – into a useful, apprehensible, reference-rich context where text-readers and audience may begin their own inquiry.

Curtain

My thesis-work has been recording conversations with a group of women in jail; listening to those tapes, transcribing and reading the conversation once and again; revisiting, editing, and translating them into a different language; finding form, content and presentation with a different aim. My thesis is a performative text performing in public the author's learning and knowledge claims, claiming to be a communicative strategy bypassing official versions of life and sentences to jail. This text is a palimpsest written over again, a vulnerable ready-made montage, a pastiche of lived experience, of gender *impersonation*, academic intuition and of pieces of truth. The thesis' form is an open, arts-informed invitation to diverse readers and audiences to engage in reflexive work about lives in (marginal) contexts; an invitation to grasp an understanding of new moralities "being born from amoral acts."

Having reached this paragraph, you may well know what this work is all about. Perhaps you might wish a clearer order and would not mind some redundant ideas taken from the text. The work surely meanders through the "I" and through other people's writing, flooding some *fields* and leaving others dry and wanting. However incomplete it may be, it has arrived to this point driven by political desire, by memory, by agency of the senses, by personal need and by resilience. Let me bring closure to it.

This work points to the "descriptive limits of official ideology and institutional discourse." The form and how it is presented, and the subjects it brings forward, work against "monophonic, stratified information cultures and cultures of the state." I endorse Allen Feldman's (1993) rejection to construct a totality through writing. He advocates a political will to move academic authorship from the performative¹⁷ to the performance: the "active construction of novel social narratives," and to immerse oneself "in popular memory [searching for] the chasms between everyday life experience and the aesthetics of official ideological formulations" (p. 241). His principal political question is relevant here and resonates throughout this work: "How, in the context of our own public culture(s), do we translate the dead, the dying, the terrorized, the disappeared from media-constructed phantasms; rumours, to a condition of historical actuality?" (p. 248).

This *translation* of field work experience with women in jail, will provoke you and other audiences to address this question from different directions, with different answers. However diverse, praising, critical and deep they may be, the *answers* will identify each other

¹⁷ This thesis is performative in the sense that I *declare*, that I express myself publicly in claiming a particular knowledge on some *thing*. It is also performative in the sense that the text is *contractual*; it addresses the procedural academic protocol presenting itself bound, whole and partitioned in an auratic academic context.

through a performed commonality. I wish that the wonder of the audience reading a research report from antipodes and dealing with illegal drugs and women in jail, be somehow grounded in what Nadia Seremetakis (1994, p. 23) calls 'reflexivity': the ineluctable passing "through a historical reenactment of perceptual difference."

Other audiences, you, and I, gather to *listen* to what this work has to tell: stories from lived experience brought into a (re)contextual present, a context that is also *stored* in you. Seremetakis proposes understanding a performance as the liminal place where sensorial memories renew and make sense of themselves. A "moment where the unconscious levels and accumulated layers of experience become conscious through material networks , independent of the performer." What emerges is not a particular essence or essentiality, "but rather it is a mutation of meaning and memory that refracts the mutual insertion of the perceiver and perceived in historical experience and possibly their mutual alienation from public culture, official memory and formal economies" (Seremetakis, 1994, p. 7).

During a performance, audience and actor – readers in this case – trade back and forth the meaning stored in the memory of the senses – "the embodiment and conservation of experiences, persons and matter in vessels of alterity" (Seremetakis, 1994, p. 28). A public performance then is a privileged venue for interpersonal exchange, for a subject or *thing* to make and to produce sense through the senses and through social and historical reflexivity. A dramatic performance induces learning from personal, lived experience. As well, a dramatic performance realizes the epiphany of learning within sight of an horizon of understanding, without teleological or essential meaning. It locates a personal landscape of identity and circumstances within a historical topography of material forces. A dramatic performance is a private sense-making of public or turned-public events.

"Like those birds that lay their eggs only in other species' nests, memory produces in a place that does not belong to it" (de Certeau, in Behar, 1996, p. 34). The cuckoo's reproductive practice is the pedagogical metaphor for performing conversations held in the Detention Centre for Women. I just hope you and other *birds*, will make yours and nurture with the senses and historical reflexivity whatever *offspring* this work may induce in you.

"I" FROM THEM

- *Home-school's breaks*
- *Buying*
- *The day of the woman in jail*
- *In John's Meadow*

Home-school's breaks

At age seventeen, my group of close friends had similar backgrounds: upper and middle-class male adolescents; attending a Jesuit high school; children of retired senior navy officers, a police colonel, a lawyer, senior municipal bureaucrats. Parents knew, most of the time, what the boys did: sport team practices in the afternoon, physics and math study groups the evenings before term exams, the regular weekend dancing parties in houses of female friends attending the *sister* high-schools. For the benefit of teachers and priests, it was a homogeneous group of non-problematic young men, growing up within the principles of the liberal Catholic church, en route to become part of the country's ruling elites.

Among us, social and economic status differences, if any, seemed to be replaced by contests of sportsmanship, academic success and performance in courting girlfriends. However, the role my mother's work played within our household separated me from the rest

of the group. None of my friends' mothers generated any income; none of them worked outside their home. They were women devoted to their children and husbands, daily weaving a tight fabric of social relations, connecting nuclear and extended families, modern and international tastes and aesthetics with traditional moral values.

My mother's job involved a fair amount of physical work and *messiness* – aspects of domestic work usually relegated to domestic servants in my friends' houses. The wholesalers would usually arrive Mondays before dawn and unload twenty thousand eggs into my mother's small office. Egg yokes and whites, old cracked shells stuck to aniline coloured cartons that were all over the driveway. My mother's manual classification and retail of weekly shipments of eggs, from a small room under the stairs that climbed to the landlord's family home, generated the income to fund *particular* – as opposed to public – education for my siblings and for me. Her work helped to consolidate the means and the resources that were so far out of reach for the families and children of the ambulant vendors crowding the fenced market-place across the street. The one-two-twenty eggs, endless transactions throughout the day and often on into the late night, provided us with a shell against hardship and scarcity.

The successful insertion of my mother's small business into the expanding informal economy of Ecuador was in part due to her hard-working drive, her customer friendly-persona, and the unregulated nature of the vast majority of commercial transactions. Street and sidewalk vendors selling vegetables, fruits and whatever items a household may need, did not require a selling permit nor a public health license to set up shop. Instead, as in the case of my mother, municipal law enforcers would come for a chat and leave with thirty eggs in a washed, inside out, "litre of milk," recycled plastic bag. Whatever regulations existed on paper, they certainly did not govern the exchange of money and commodities in the *Mercado*

America.

Back from school in the early afternoon, the market on *Buenos Aires* street was still busy and buzzing. The harvested landscape of the highlands and beyond was depicted in many colours, shapes, aromas and textures. A soiled, half-naked toddler, running away from his mother while she finished a sale, was caught in the sea-shell-cocktail vendor's smiling gaze. Down the street, a voice yelling: "Thief, catch the thief! My purse, he has my purse!" froze all transactions, for seconds only.

Buying

Cargarse – to stock up – was a dangerous and thrilling task. Recalling accounts of police brutality and the miserable conditions of cells in precarious detention centres usually prompted throats to dry and hands to sweat. Once in the streets of the unfamiliar neighbourhood the sense of being a neon-bright alien was often overwhelming. Yet, with prudence and calm, I would proceed to knock at the door. The house could have been any in the working-class street block.

While waiting for an answer, after checking up and down the street for plainclothes agents or plate-less cars, the eyes settled for a moment on the populated hills rolling over from the city and the valley above. School and relatives were there. Down the street, deep below the cliff, ran the brown and foamy river relentlessly carrying the city's effluents and water from the Andean divide.

A woman opened the door and by the end of the salutation exchange the purpose of the visit was understood. "How much" came wrapped in a sheet of used children's math notebook. Transaction completed. Brief niceties. Back to the street, rushing into the protective

anonymity of modern downtown.

The day of the woman in jail

In 1871, nuns from the Good Shepherd order in Montreal, Canada were brought to Quito, Ecuador to run the first "house for the correction of childhood protection." The house's mandate was to "correct women lost in the path of vice and immorality." A hundred years later, in the 1970s, Quito's first jail for women became a wing of the Penitentiary for men. The complex was built – ironically – between the hilly city neighbourhoods called *La Libertad* (Freedom) y *El Placer* (Pleasure). About the same time, the administration of the national corrections system ceased being a patronage, a matter of pious volunteers, and the National Office of Social Rehabilitation was created.

In the early 1980's, a new facility was completed in the North end of Quito, in a working class neighbourhood called *El Inca*. The neighbourhood occupied a fertile plain one time populated by *Mitmacunas*. These people were pre-colonial, indigenous populations, originally from the central Andes, who had been forced to migrate, to integrate and to pacify local Chiefdoms resisting Inca's rule.

The Detention Centre for Women consists of a set of parallel buildings or pavilions, long and narrow, three storeys high, enclosed behind a five-metre high, brick and mortar wall, crowned with barb wire, and surrounded by family residential units.

To enter on visit days, one must line up on the street sidewalk, outside a sliding gate made of iron and black painted sheets of brass. After leaving a piece of id. at reception, one goes through another door, where an armed guard unlocks the way into the pavilion's ground floor.

A dark, artificially lit hallway separates two rows of rooms. The ground floor, originally designed as a rehabilitation activities area, is a mix of tiny convenience stores, elemental kitchens preparing food for sale, and knitting rooms – all abuzz with conversation. At the other end of the hallway, in a larger room, a group of women manually and silently glue cardboard boxes for cough medicine jars. A pharmaceutical company provides this activity – the only formal *employment* venture the prison administration has been able to establish.

Outside, in the facility's only recreational space – a cemented backyard the size of a basketball court – people sit under the morning sun in groups of two or three, opening bags of necessities that visitors have recently brought. Others briskly power-walk around the court, breaking news about lawyers' requests and family state of affairs. Children chase each other everywhere. In one corner of the yard, where the sunshine has not yet reached, a young woman has finished washing her hair in cold water and is folding her hand-washed laundry. Eventually she will take her laundry upstairs to dry in her cell, where only registered, intimate visitors are permitted to enter.

This visit day marks the celebration of the "day of the prison inmate". On a makeshift platform at the end of the court, sound technicians are testing microphones and amplifiers. The jail-loud speakers announce that the program will begin in fifteen minutes. Above everyone and everything, male armed guards walk the edges of the building roof tops. The crowd gathers. It is sunny and the air is clear.

The master of ceremonies opens the program thanking the National Office representatives and prison administration officers, sitting at the front, for their support in making the day possible. A woman inmate welcomes everyone to the showcase of artistic

talents of her fellow inmates. For the next ninety minutes or so, women poets, song-writers, interpreters, musicians, and the theatre group from the men's penitentiary, take the audience from light-hearted and romantic ballads to satiric sketches of prison administration politics.

Before the last song, an older woman, on behalf of the prison's population, delivers an articulate and passionate account of personal sorrow and transformation, and a plea for a humane and fair treatment of criminal offenders. None of the representatives from the Rehabilitation Office takes the stage. It is the day of the prison inmate.

A sudden shower clears the yard of after-lunch conversations. A group of people find shelter inside the *classroom*, a room with a blackboard, no chalk and few children-size desks. Literacy classes, poorly attended in the past, have been replaced, despite opposition from the prison director, by workshops on empowerment, human rights and conflict resolution, facilitated by consultants advancing feminism and lawyers advocating harm-reduction. Also in this room, professional writers and painters now and then deliver art-as-therapy courses, offering drawing, painting and auto-biographical writing. Enrolment is low, yet the support and the solidarity from *outside* are always appreciated.

Next to the *classroom*, under a sentry box, is the office of the mostly male professionals, the *technicians*, five in total: physician, psychologist, dentist and social workers. Some of them are present, joking with inmates and visitors. These technicians are poorly paid, under equipped, and have a low morale. Some of them were hired lacking the proper expertise or credentials. Together, they offer a low-grade service that barely helps a clientele overwhelmed with emotional and medical needs.

The rain stops. Shortly, a siren signals the end of the day for outsiders. People say goodbye to each other. The guard on the roof hangs his wet poncho inside the sentry box.

Several men scurry downstairs after intimate visits. For a moment, children stop playing.

Outside, a blanket of rainwater steams swirls over the warm asphalt, quickly rising and fading away.

In John's Meadow

I had met Punki earlier, at the beginning of my contract as researcher responsible for an ethnographic account of Quito's youth illegal drugs use. Fieldwork for the research project *Users* was underway. Its qualitative aspects included meeting and talking with recreational drug users living in working-class neighbourhoods.

Punki was a well groomed, intense, personable young man. He had opened his network of friends and *contacts* to the project's purposes. Furthermore, he had become a 'field prospector', spreading the word about the *friendly* anthropologist wanting to talk about drugs.

In one of our incursions into the *realms* of drug retail, we ended up walking "John of the Meadow Street." With the exception of a canteen already busy with loud patrons at ten on a Monday morning, there was nothing particularly criminal about the street. A couple of street blocks stretched over a hill overlooking the east end of colonial Quito. Houses were similar to those in other *good* parts of the city: small, attached, garage-less, well maintained houses with doors and windows right into the sidewalk. Despite what I was seeing, Punki's accounts of the street dwellers reputation resonated strongly with fear and a sense of vulnerability.

We had come to meet a petty trader at his home. As Punki went inside the house to okay the visit, I walked to the near-by grocery store to buy cigarettes. The gaze in the vendor's eyes diluted whatever disguise I had pretended to carry. I became either an undercover cop or a guy from the *North* part of the city buying *pow(d)er*. I realized

anthropologists were a sort of both.

While I waited for Punki, a group of children started kicking a ball. The chorus of drunk men in the bar grew louder, at points deafening the rockola juke box, singing "Why did she go? Why did she die? Why did the Lord take her away from me?"

The entrance to John's apartment was at the end of a narrow hall. We passed by a woman hand-washing clothing, pouring water over soapy garments with a reused margarine container. The shallow, open ditch channelling the laundry water down to the paved street, continued up the hall, into other units in the house.

We were invited to sit around a table. The first minutes of the exchange were used to explain my presence to our hosts – a woman folding clothes and a man *unfolding* each word I was saying. When I paused, he got up from the table, lifted up his t-shirt, and pointed to several knife, ice pick and machete scars on his torso and flanks. He then proceeded to lecture Punki, and especially me, on the importance and consequences of telling the truth, particularly when *pigs* may be lurking from above. I re-assured them of the confidential nature of the visit, yet my harmlessness had been assessed the moment I walked in.

The next couple of hours passed sharing smokes and stories; inside and outside the legal domain; of sources, routes, disguises, and hideouts; of the characters in a risky play of stretching to make ends meet; of weights, prices, packaging, and customers; of constantly assessing the permeability of enforcement screens and un-suspecting eyes; of loyalties, alliances, and set-ups; of the volatile form and substance(s) of a daily life organized around the management of odds.

During all this time the woman's presence was quite even and steady. The home, by all standards austere – one large room, dirt floor, no in-house bathroom nor running water –

was tidy and cozy. The visible domestic order – beds made, clean kerosene stove, swept floors– appeared to be for a moment the thread and needle suturing blade and sharp-end caused wounds.

As we were preparing to leave, two girls walked in. They had long, jet-black hair, combed and in place since the early morning hours. Their bright eyes seemed surprised to meet mine. They promptly proceeded to place their school bags neatly by their shared bed. They wore white cotton, narrow-pleated, down to the calf skirts, long sleeved shirts, and blue acrylic wool sweaters – a school uniform, a dress-code that embraced parental aspirations for a balanced and *matching* life. Each of those many and long, perfectly delineated pleats, seemed to be ironed as if tracking the girls father's past and recent imprisonment into an homogenizing yet *normal* classroom.

Back from John's meadow, walking down the hill by Punky's side, something was different. Drug-related public policies and their academic discourses seemed mere rhetorical calisthenics.

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APPENDIX

SEVEN WOMEN IN JAIL

(Profiles of the women interviewed)

ALBA

Alba was born and raised in the old working class neighbourhoods on the hills surrounding Quito colonial downtown's core. A home-maker since an early age, she cared after her two young daughters and assisted her spouse during drug-buying trips to Colombia, and also by packaging and selling small amounts of cocaine sulfate or *base* to a diverse clientele "including bank employees." After Alba watched how the Police – following a client finger pointing – apprehended her spouse in a park, she went home to destroy any remaining evidence. Later in the same day, along with her daughters and sister, she went to the Police station to ask around about her spouse's case. Based on tips from Alba's landlord and her spouse's confession, the Police arrested her and her sister. Alba's daughters now live in prison. She says they need medical care and prescription drugs. Defence lawyer fees have almost depleted the family's modest wealth, without any positive results. Outside prison walls, only Alba's mother fights back bureaucratic oblivion and systemic corruption.

Alba's presence may not be grasped, it is one of a kind, fluid and invisible. She seems to have the skills for entering and leaving places without being noticed. Her voice is almost a murmur, slowly yielding her speech with question-fitted answers and austere memory

recollections. She doesn't talk much. Her posture and body are observant, taking everything in. Alba looks and dresses like her sister. Her daughters look alike. Her hair is long and straight, tied at the back, the colour is black, like her large round eyes. Her complexion is dark, olive and brown.

She wears a grey skirt, plain, below-the-knee length and a long sleeved blouse under a cardigan. Loose around her shoulders and neck she wears a *chalina*, a small shawl. She sits down, shy and curious, wrapping the shawl around her bare legs and feet. She walks briskly, her face partially hidden behind the *chalina*. This has an acrylic tone of a deep sea blue, resilient wool.

GRACE

She grew up in the neighbourhood ascending over a singular, round and symmetric hill. On its top there is a large sculpture of a Catholic virgin overlooking the northern part of Quito. Being very young, Grace started working at her parents' small business, selling food in the Stadium during weekend soccer games. She also cared very much for her older brothers. One of them was a alcoholic who used to depend exclusively on her. Two others were well-known petty robbers. From time to time, they asked Grace to sell stolen goods – television sets, car stereos – for them. They were regular users of illegal drugs and sometimes Grace secretly kept their stuff at her place. She had never tried any drugs.

During a Police raid of her parents' place, one (or more) of her brothers fled through the roof, leaving behind four grams of cocaine "according to the law." Grace took all the responsibility to prevent her parents from being charged. After a prolonged and brutal police investigation she was locked in prison. At that time she was eighteen, recently married and

caring for a four month old baby. Now, she is about to complete the fifth year in her eight year sentence.

Grace's body is tall and lean. Her hands are long with strong gripping fingers. She talks in long stretches and seems to recall past events without much effort. Sometimes though, her voice fades away, overcome by tears, pain and sadness. Her abundant black, long and wavy hair frames a face with strong features: high cheek-bones, thick eyebrows, fast moving eyes. When she's not talking, her lips are pursed and her neck muscles are tense.

She wears track pants, a long sleeved sweater and sandals. Under the tough look and attitude life in prison imprints on anybody, Grace seems to nurture a compassionate, giving and forgiving self. She smiles often while talking about her five year old son's thriving life with his care giver and his achievements in kindergarten. She looks forward to the weekend, when he comes and stays overnight. She looks forward to fifteen months from now, when the sentence is over, to live with her family, to look after her aging father and helpless brother again.

LUCERO

Lucero ran away from home when she was eleven years old. She wandered through many streets, in different cities in Colombia and Ecuador, and drifted from one adoptive family to another. Along the way she learned the skills to manage successfully the *informal* economy of street markets and open air plazas, selling produce and diverse manufactured items. She also developed a dependence on smoking *basuco*, a volatile mix of tobacco and cocaine sulfate or *base*. Later on, she settled in Quito with her spouse and their son, to sell Peruvian clothing in the streets. She smoked up regularly. One rainy day, after she met her

dealer around the University Campus, and while she was finishing the transaction, the narcotics police captured her. She didn't have enough money to match the price policemen put on themselves. So, she was sent to prison under the charges of drug possession – around sixty grams of base of cocaine – and drug dealing. The police agents let the dealer go. Six months later, with no resources to hire a lawyer, without any support from outside, she waits and waits for her trial and sentence.

Lucero is an energetic and outspoken young person. She talks without pauses, collecting early childhood memory events as if they happened just moments ago. In a way, she presents her fast-paced, ever-changing life as a sort of a pitch sale in the street. She knows very well why she is in jail, but she will never accept being undersold by moral standards and punitive legal figures. Her life it seems has always belonged to her. Her capacity to overcome adversity and remain calm in extreme conditions speaks of adaptability and self reliance. There is no remorse nor deep sense of being a victim due to a precarious childhood or a body-punishing addiction. She seems willing and ready to forgive herself and to jump start life again.

She looks fit and well groomed. Her hair is combed and tied back in a pony tail. Her clothes whose colours are fading, are clean. Her presence transmits the kind of physical fitness and sense awareness that has been shaped by life in the streets and by constant public interaction with customers and male friends. The revealing and ageing effects of frequent tobacco-and-base – *pistola* – smoking have almost disappeared from her face and fingers. When she speaks of her son, her only visit from outside, ineluctably shared with her mother-in-law, her facial expression doesn't change. She remembers herself.

CYNTHIA

A four year old girl with black, long hair and round eyes, goes out of the room. She couldn't resist the allure of other children playing outside. She comes back in one more time, running now. She rests her head on Cynthia's lap while looking attentively at the tape recorder. She recovers her breath; her light green legging covered legs don't stop moving. Off she goes again.

Cynthia smiles and continues talking. Her daughter is the most important part of her life. Yet, Cynthia can't make sense of her current situation. She, her mother, and her daughter are in jail. It's absurd, she says. She talks eloquently about the injustice that governs law enforcement and justice administration institutions. Her short and strong hands, open and closed, wave back and forth from her chest, gesticulating desperate shapes in the air, of anger and frustration as she sits in the children school's desk. Through her eyes one can see, that inside her body her emotions are very much alive, captive, seeking any opportunity to come out.

Cynthia grew up in different cities. Her mother carried the family from cities in the coastal plains to cities in the highlands and back. She, her five siblings and her mother eventually settled down in the commercial core of Quito's colonial downtown. She thinks of herself as an accomplished student for she often had represented her class in school events. She finished junior high.

At age fourteen, Cynthia fell in love for the first time. She then got pregnant by her boyfriend, an older man, owner of the shoe factory where Cynthia and her mother used to work. Deceived and unable to continue studying, Cynthia, with her daughter, became part of a hard-working, extended family, professing strong values and work ethics.

Four years later, a former neighbour and family friend – a woman that stayed overnight at Cynthia's house, to rest in between business trips back and forth from Colombia – returns one afternoon with a group of eight undercover narcotics policemen. They ask for the woman's suitcase and find inside its double bottom, two "family size," chocolate bar-like, packages wrapped in golden paper. After the family friend incriminates Cynthia and Cynthia's mother, the three of them are sent to jail. Cynthia has been imprisoned for nineteen months. She is sentenced to eight years in prison because, in her words, "she was over eighteen and was at home when the police arrived."

NANCY

As Nancy steps in the room, her presence is immediately felt. She's taller and bigger than most Ecuadorean women. Her shoulders are wide, her legs seem to be long under her clean, loose clothing – polyester pants, acrylic wool sweater in bright, plain, primary colours. Lots of thick, black, curly hair, that hangs down to her shoulders, frame an intense, anxious gaze. She sits down in front of me.

She looks pale, older than she is. Her dark-bronze complexion, by the window's sunlight, can no longer hide the effects of poor diet and lack of fresh air. Her eye-lids have darkened revealing the bones underneath. She looks at me: confident, tough, intimidating, unassuming, not harbouring any expectation. She seems trying to shed, one more time, one more day, the thick shadow of anger and pain that life-in-jail imposes on her.

"My life is like a soap opera" she exclaims in a clear, strong voice. "It's like one of those women in TV."

From an early age, Nancy was raised by her paternal grandparents living on a small

farm on the coastal plains of Ecuador. She was sent to an evangelical boarding high school, and graduated with a certificate in accounting and office administration. However, she was never able to profit from it. She settled down with an older, widowed man, in a fast growing city in the Andes foothills. Nancy got involved in local party politics, and somehow another woman blackmailed her with drugs, or maybe the Police agents actually placed the drugs inside Nancy's house.

While she was in jail, a heart attack took her husband away forever. Nancy's two children live with her father on the same farm by the river where she grew up with her grandparents. She is serving the last year of a six year sentence.

EDILMA

The expression in her face is relaxed, confident, somehow she has done this before. She is in good shape and has good looks: bright brown eyes with *drop of water*-like shape, thick and long, black eyebrows and healthy looking hair. Her stature is average for an Ecuadorean or Colombian woman. She carries herself, as women in the lowlands do, with a natural, uninhibited self-awareness of her body, her shoulders are pushed back, her back and neck are straight. She wears a grey wool, below-the-knee length skirt, and a dark brown short sleeved turtle neck. She sits down, and slips her bare feet out of the rubber sandals ubiquitous in jail. We start talking. Her teeth seem complete, unusual for a woman inmate.

After the initial rapport is established, the conversation flows with ease. She enjoys remembering events in detail. She opens up her lived experience without shame or remorse, she knows well why she is in jail.

At an early age Edilma became familiar with cultivating marijuana. Her father

introduced this cash-crop to other neighbour farmers on the Colombian eastern slopes of the southern Andes. On one occasion, a very young Edilma saved her father from a Police raid. The family was forced to move out to the Putumayo region. At fourteen she eloped and gave birth to a child literally on her own. Her partner at that time learned how to cultivate the coca plant and later both learned how to process coca leaves into paste of cocaine. Years later, widowed and head of an extended family, twice a month for two years, she excelled at crossing the Ecuadorean border with up to two kilograms of base of cocaine. The younger woman Edilma was raising like a daughter, out of revenge, blew the whistle to the Police. Her criminal process is stagnant. Edilma is in her early thirties.

LUISA

Born in Germany to a working class Spanish immigrant family, Luisa obtained a high school diploma and worked in different jobs until she met her partner Mike. Together, they moved to coastal Spain and set up a thriving bar on the beach. Then she invited her drug addicted younger brother to move in with her with the hope he would straighten up. On the contrary, he got involved with the local mob, a drug deal went sour and he fled back to Germany. Then Luisa caved in to the mob threats and travelled to Ecuador to pick up a suitcase of cocaine. After a two week stay fraught with fear and paranoia, she was captured at the Quito airport, moments before her flight back to Spain.

Her family calls from Germany every Sunday and Mike has come all the way from Spain to visit her. She does not blame her brother. Luisa is in her early twenties.