

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LEAVING LABOR: REVERSE MIGRATION, WELFARE CASH, AND THE SPECTER OF
THE COMMODITY IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

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GREGORY DUFF MORTON

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This dissertation is dedicated to Maria Silvani Vieira Ferraz, who taught me the most important lesson, a lesson about welcoming other people.

Dedico essa tese a Maria Vieira Silvani Ferraz, que me ensinou a lição mais importante, uma lição sobre o acolhimento. Durante muitos dias e noites, eu escutei, assisti, sorri, comi, dormi, e melhorei ao lado dela. Aprendi que saber receber bem é saber amar. Espero mostrar para outras pessoas na vida pelo menos um pouquinho da generosidade que ela tem comigo—e com tantos seres humanos, de todos os tipos, todos bem-vindos na casa dela.

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Acknowledgements

Some sunny day in the middle of fieldwork, I realized that I was late for an interview. I had been talking to farmers who lived in a low valley, far from the main village, and I had quite some distance to travel if I wanted to reach the interviewee, whose house sat on the plain. No-one except me seemed to pay much attention to the times that I set for interviews, but nonetheless, taken with a sense of importance, I started to run along the footpaths that led towards the plain.

Soon I overtook an older man I knew. He was walking the same direction on the same path. “Slow down,” he proposed to me, smiling, “And we’ll get there together.”

I would like to suggest that graduate education has been a process of arriving together with fellow travelers, some of them unexpected. That suggestion would be accurate, in part. But – if the truth is to be told – on that day I did not slow down for the older man; instead I dashed ahead to my interview. During my graduate education, I have sometimes done that as well.

The first person to acknowledge is my aunt Whitney McCauley. Whitney’s overwhelmingly brilliant poetry and art is only slowly being discovered by me. Sometimes I feel that she left her work as a gift for us to unwrap over time, and she also left a powerful and particular sense of justice and duty towards the world. If I am only gradually discovering Aunt Whitney, though, then it should be noted that she, as she once told me, knew me before I knew myself. When I was an infant she moved several thousand miles in order to take care of me. Later in life, when she faced difficulties, I lived close by her for several years, but I left to go to graduate school. I hope that she is present to see my education nonetheless.

Whitney shaped me alongside other people. My parents and my sister remain, to this day, the most creative and energetic people I know. My mother’s sharp artistic analysis made me

want to interpret the world – and her relational gift-giving, to people around the world, is unquestionably the reason that I wanted to become an anthropologist (with a corresponding rain coat.) My father has a special generosity that he expresses most fully by speaking – words with the openness of curiosity – and I always yearn for someone to whom I can talk the way that I talk to him. My sister’s stunning ideas have constantly motivated me, and so has her crystalline writing, but both of these pale in comparison to her unashamedly loving spirit. Emily’s genius inspires me at every turn and, since we first met each other, has made me strive to be a better person. I feel so grateful for this inspiration, and I am even more grateful for the generosity of her love.

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Although I only studied with Moishe Postone in a single (extensive) class, his intellectual influence has been extraordinary. Every day I think inside the framework that he offered, and it is responsible for helping me to replace perilous reductionism with openness.

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Introduction

The call came at the worst time. Alexandra had just days to go before she graduated from her business management class. She held the phone in her hand, and she was one among the millions in Belo Horizonte, the city where she learned how to chat with drug dealers, the city where she ran into soap opera stars at the supermarket. On the other end of the line was her mother, talking to her from a village in the dust of the high plains.

“Oh Alexa,” her mother ordered, “you come back, because—I’m sick. I’m not, I’m not managing to do anything anymore.”¹ Then she mentioned Alexandra’s children. “Come and take care of the kids. And Anastacia, she’s starting to cause me trouble. So you’ve got to come back.” (*Ó, Alexa, você vem embora, porque—estou doente, eu não estou, não estou conseguindo mais fazer nada. Vem tomar conta dos meninos. E Anastacia, já ela começa a me dar trabalho. E aí você tem que vir embora.*)

Anastacia was not the only problem, as it turned out. Alexandra’s sister Selma had recently traveled to the village with an infant son, and along the way, somehow, a suitcase had gone missing. Selma lost all of her belongings.

It was, as Alexandra described it to me later, “one tribulation after another” (*uma tribulação uma atrás da outra.*)

Alexandra hung up the phone. She contacted the bus station. She went down to the business school. At the school, unhelpful staff explained to her that she still needed to finish a

¹ Throughout the text, all personal names have been changed, except for the names of cited scholars and major leaders. Maria Zilda, Manoel Bomfim, and Fábio Santos’ names have not been changed. In some cases, insignificant personal details have been modified in order to preserve confidentiality. The place names “Maracujá” and “Rio Branco” are fictional, but other place names are real.

When quotations are in quotation marks, between parentheses, or indented, the words in question are direct transcriptions from field notes, recordings, texts, or other source material. When quotations are placed in italics and written in English, the words in questions are paraphrases—either paraphrases taken from field notes that were not written down verbatim or paraphrases of words that were quoted with more exactitude earlier in the dissertation. When quotations are placed in italics, between parentheses, and written in Portuguese, the words are verbatim quotes that have been translated immediately before in the text.

little maze of tasks: complete her work in various subject areas, submit her school identity card, pick up the actual diploma.

Alexandra calculated that it would take her all afternoon. The bus left before then, and she had already obtained her ticket. The ride to the village lasted nineteen hours in total, including transfers, with the last stretch on a coughing behemoth driven by a local who did not work every day. If Alexandra did not use the ticket she had, if she stayed to graduate, she would have to wait maybe a week or more to travel—it was unclear how long.

“And there,” Alexandra remembered afterwards, “I had to choose.” (*E aí, eu tinha que escolher.*)²

A year and a half earlier, on that same bus, Alexandra had arrived. She had opened her wide eyes to see the bowl of hills around Belo Horizonte, crested with concrete skyscrapers, and beyond that the forests and the wall of red mountains. What made the mountains red was iron.

The iron drew in Alexandra’s brothers some years before, part of a flood of young people from the village of Maracujá. They worked as subcontracted fire fighters for Vale, one of the largest mining conglomerates in the world. Vale guaranteed Brazil’s place in the global commodities boom of the early 2000s: the company released a flow of iron ore that poured like a metal river through the shipping lanes of the world’s oceans, up to the ports of China. Her brothers labored to make that river run. When they grew tired, they would quit their jobs and return to their parents and wives at Maracujá— only to head back to the city again, usually after a few months.

² This was not the first time. Years prior, Alexandra had nearly obtained a high school degree while studying in a boarding-school program for promising rural students. She made it to the last months of that program. Then her youngest daughter became painfully ill, Alexandra heard the news, and she returned to the village, giving up her high school plans.

Alexandra's sister Selma had gone, too, during one of the trips to the city. She found work as a servant in the house of a wealthy family. When Selma and her husband got pregnant, everyone asked Alexandra to go help her. And Selma herself offered to pay for something that Alexandra aspired to do: a business management class that culminated in an official diploma. So Alexandra went to the city, not to save up a stock of money, as many people did, but to care for her sister and to take a class.

The city proved itself giant and fearsome. Alexandra recalled a time that she went to the bakery with her brother Danilo. They came across a young man on a bicycle, someone who, she thought, sold drugs. He was surrounded by a clutch of men he hadn't paid. While she watched, they beat him on the head until blood flowed.

And us—me petrified but Danilo knew what to do. He was like, “Just don't look back. Go on ahead—go on ahead and don't look back. There's nothing that's yours here.”

E a gente—eu apavorada mas Danilo sabia o que fazer. Ele, “Só não olha para trás. Rompe—rompe e não olha para trás. Não tem nada que é seus aqui.”

Once they were home, Danilo summed up the lesson.

It was really simple: “You saw it there, it's over.” You didn't have to—get in the middle. Nobody messed with you if you didn't mess with anybody. [...] There we made friends both with good people, with honest people, people with good character. But I made—people – for example, with thieves, with those—little smokers, people like that. With everything.

Simplesinho: “Você via lá, acabou.” Não tinha que—intrometer. Ninguém mexia em você se você não mexesse com ninguém. [...] Aí nos fizemos amizade tanto com pessoas boas, com pessoas honestas, pessoas de bom caráter. Mas eu fiz – pessoas—por exemplo, com ladrão, com esses—fumadorzinhos, assim. Com tudo.

#(Entrevista w/ Alexandra)

Alexandra did not let her fears get in the way of her duties: studying, taking care of her sister, and finding a job. At first, the job seemed to be the hardest. She started out by spending five days as a servant alongside her sister. “But there,” she concluded, “I didn't feel myself to be

– a domestic worker. I preferred more things.” (*Mas ali-- eu não me sentia doméstica. Eu preferia mais coisas.*) To get closer to those things, however, she would have to overcome the racism and contempt behind the phrase that she heard repeatedly: “You’re a Bahian. Every Bahian is lazy.” (*Você é baiana. Todo baiano é preguiçoso.*)

Bahia was the Afro-Brazilian heartland, and Alexandra came from a village in the Bahian plateau. Belo Horizonte was the capital of a very different state. Alexandra understood the challenge in the words *you’re a Bahian*.³ So she started her business course, and she looked for employment.

At the bakery, she overheard strangers saying that one of the employees at the Hotel Paris could not handle the work. “And so I took the risk,” Alexandra remembered. “I went there.” (*Eu arrisquei, fui.*)

She deposited a fresh résumé and applied for a front-desk job. During her interview, the hotel boss asked her a searching question, which she recalled as she talked to me:

He said—then, what really was my objective there? I said, my objective was to be with my sister and to take a class [...] Then he put it just like this: “OK, then. You’ll work here.”

Aí ele falou que—que então qual era meu-- objetivo realmente lá. Eu falei, meu objetivo realmente era estar com minha irmã e fazer um curso [...] Aí ele falou assim, ‘Então tá. Então você fica aqui.’

Objective was a word that Alexandra used repeatedly while she told me the story. Her journey to the city was full of questions about objectives— and her answers to those questions kept changing.

Alexandra started working at the hotel, but she did not stop looking for work; she had new possibilities in mind. At the bakery one day, she bought a newspaper along with her bread

³ For a historical view on laziness and racism in a Brazilian context, see Borges 1995.

and milk, and there it was: a help-wanted ad from a luxury grocery store. That was how Alexandra got a job she was excited to have.

Once, Alexandra had been scared of the drug dealers in her neighborhood. Now, she said, “My terror was the salads. [...] There were a thousand types of salads.” (*Meu terror era as saladas. Era mil qualidades de saladas.*) To Alexandra’s delight, she ended up assigned to the dried fruits section. She was placed in charge of the Brazil nuts, of which there were only four types.

Alexandra said that she felt glad to work at the grocery store. She felt glad to send money to her parents every month. She felt glad to spend her spare time at one of the city’s shopping malls—even if it was only to ride the elevators up and down, since she knew that every spare cent really needed to go back to the village. She remembered the malnutrition that she herself had suffered there. As she told me:

We’ve been through a lot of hunger. [...] And there [in the city]—I was always thinking, “Gosh, do you think that Mom is eating? Do you think that Dad is eating?” Early in the morning, I would take coffee with milk in it, with bread, and I always thought, were my children eating? Was my mom eating?

A gente já passou muita fome. [...] E aí—eu sempre pensava, “Nossa, será que Mãe está comendo? Será que Pai está comendo? De manhã cedo, tomava o café com leite, com pão, e eu sempre pensava, será que meus filhos estavam comendo? Será que minha mãe estava comendo?”

And so her goal began slipping, until it became something new. Now she lived the city in order to earn “that little sacred money [...] to send back home. That was what the objective was, there. Not partying and not fun” (*aquele dinheirinho sagrado [...] para mandar de volta. O objetivo lá era esse. Não farra nem curtidão.*) And not just to help her sister and take a class. The city was for cash.

Alexandra’s sister Selma gave birth, then quit her job and returned to the village. Alexandra’s class moved along to new topics: computer skills, public presentation, accounting.

At work, Alexandra was growing, too. She learned to bake panettone; she earned a position as a VIP employee. On Easter she won a coupon that entitled her to four giant candy eggs. She sent them, she remembered, “to my babies” (*para os meus bebês.*)

Alexandra, now the VIP employee, found herself more comfortable. And bolder. During work hours, she would snack on the merchandise. Her bosses scolded her at a store meeting: “Little Bahia girl, you’re eating too much! And you even do it in front of the security camera” (*Baianinha, você está comendo muito! De frente da câmara ainda.*) She told them, “I don’t have any need to be taking it back home. So if I’m eating, it’s because I’m hungry!” (*Não tenho precisão de levar para casa. Então se eu estou comendo, é porque estou com fome!*) “I always ate live,” she recalled, live and in front of the cameras, “for them to see that I was eating, that I was hungry” (*Eu sempre comia ao vivo, para eles ver que eu estava comendo, que eu estava com fome.*)

And then came the call from her mother. Problems rushed in with the dust from a thousand kilometers away. Standing in the business school where she almost had a diploma, Alexandra needed to make her decision.

Between the bus schedule and the maze of diploma requirements, Alexandra felt the pressure of village against city. She mused about what her objective really had been— and what it was.

When you leave to go work, you have to have an objective. “I’m going, and I’ll work, and I’ll save up some money,” and that stuff. I did not go for that. But I, I— got the opportunity of employment.

Quando você sai para trabalhar, você tem que ter um objetivo. “Vou, eu vou trabalhar, e vou juntar o dinheiro,” e coisa. Eu não fui para isso. Mas eu, eu—tive oportunidade de emprego.

That opportunity had changed the possibilities she faced. She considered what she might be able to get in the city. “I don’t know,” she pondered.

I might even not get it, you know? That thing, a, a life that's more—whatever, you know, for, for my children. But— [...] We, me and my brother, we would already be financing a house! Because it's like this. With my salary— [...] with proof of our jobs, then that would be, like, really big. Because anyone who works in that grocery store is a privileged person.

Eu não sei. Poderia até não ter, né? Essa, uma, uma vida mais—coisado, né, para, para meus filhos. Mas— [...] a gente, eu e meu irmão, a gente já estava financiando uma casa! Porque assim. Com meu salário— [...] com indicação dos nossos empregos, então assim era muito grande. Porque quem trabalha naquele supermercado é uma pessoa privilegiada.

She turned it all over in her head, and then she decided.

Nothing more valuable. I said it just like this: “I didn't come here to earn money. I didn't come here to do that. I came to be close to my sister. To something that's my family. Now I'm going there.”

Nada mais valioso. Eu falei assim, “Eu não vim aqui para ganhar dinheiro. Não vim aqui para fazer isso. Eu vim para ficar perto da minha irmã. Do algo que é minha família. Agora eu estou indo para lá.”

She quit her job. She said good-bye to the school. She got on the bus.

Another side of growth

When Alexandra returned from Belo Horizonte, Brazil was in the middle of an extraordinary episode of economic growth, a decade during which the people in the poorest tenth of the nation's population increased their real incomes by 91.2%. Even more extraordinarily, this growth came along with a significant *decrease* in income inequality. Over that decade, the people in the wealthiest tenth of the population saw their real incomes rise by only 16.6%.⁴

And during those same years, every week, ramshackle buses carried waves of people like Alexandra out of the city and into the villages of Maracujá and Rio Branco, in the sertão of southwest Bahia. Martinho came after he spent the night tied up by the thieves who were robbing the chemical factory where he worked. Laura came after she quit her job as a chef and converted

⁴ See Chapter 6. Data from Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada 2012: 6 and 19.

to evangelicalism. Seu Jairo came with determination. “I don’t ever want to work for anyone anymore,” he declared. “No way” (*Não quero mais trabalhar para ninguém mais não.*)⁵

This dissertation is about their act. I ask about the reason that Alexandra, Seu Jairo, Martinho, and Laura left, and I ask about the connection between the place they left and the place they went to. Perhaps most importantly, I want to know how this connection solidifies into a durable difference—a difference that relates sugar cane to iron ore, drylands bus to ocean boat, village house to foreign port. In the moment of leaving labor, I try to understand how labor comes to have coherence as a category, and I inquire into the relations of value that persist after labor is left, converting the motion of the exit into one arc of a circle, connecting that circle to a world market and its history.

To move to Rio Branco or Maracujá in the early 2000s meant walking away from work. It meant exiting a booming labor market—a market that, for the first time in at least thirty years, was opening the widest door for the poorest workers. Why would people exit this market? What was the place to which they were going?

These are questions about how to see growth from the perspective of people whose wages shrink.

Why leave labor

All along the dirt roads that the bus traversed, people were perching on seats where the fabric had long ago vanished, speeding past thornbushes, heading back to Maracujá and Rio Branco. They were leaving jobs as construction workers and nannies, as street merchants and factory hands. A large number came off the enormous new mechanized plantations, where they

⁵ Seu Jairo actually arrived in Maracujá in the 1990s, somewhat before the economic boom. He came with the landless movement—a story told in the next section.

earned salaries to plant coffee or irrigate vegetables. Some had worked in Belo Horizonte or São Paulo, some in the nearby metropolis of Vitória da Conquista, a regional hub. And all of them were going to live as peasant farmers on tiny, parched plots, more than a hundred kilometers from the local city, in villages with inconsistent electricity and no running water. They would gather firewood for cooking; they would carry water on their heads in pails.

Many of them had grown up in these places. For some, the bus ride back home became a repeated tradition, since, like Alexandra's brothers, they would live at the village for a spell and then go back "outside" (*fora*) once they sensed the call of labor. For others, especially workers in their 40s or 50s, the move marked a turn towards permanence.

Some people came by way of the MST, Brazil's landless movement. They marched onto plantations and dug defiant holes in the ground, fitting sticks in the holes and shaping the sticks into huts covered by black plastic. Then they lived in the huts. They occupied the land with passion and squalor, asking the government to redistribute parcels, daring the plantation owners to kick them off first.⁶ Murilo was a frustrated office clerk from São Paulo with a penchant for reggae, and when he came to the countryside to attend a wedding, he found the movement. He liked the idea. "If there's no boss to give orders," he proclaimed, "I'll go. [...] A boss leaves you naked if he can" (*Se não tiver patrão para dar ordens, eu vou [...] Patrão deixa você nu se puder.*) And he did go: he squatted and won himself a tiny house. "The people are hardy, for sure," he told me admiringly. "They've got the rhythm of this place. [...] They don't have salaries" (*O pessoal são resistentes mesmo [...] Já tem o ritmo daqui [...] Não tem salário.*

#3lagint2p55)

⁶ There is an extraordinary and lengthy literature on the MST, in many languages. For basic overviews in English, see Branford and Rocha 2002, Ondetti 2008, and Wolford 2010. For an excellent textbook in Portuguese, see Morissawa 2001. For a revealing analysis in English, see Rangel Loera 2010.

Seu Valentim, age 79, spoke more simply. “After many years,” he said, “I was no longer any good for employment. I came to the landless people” (*Depois de muitos anos, não servi mais para ser empregado. Vim para os sem-terra. #caldint5p58*)

In the region around Maracujá and Rio Branco, land occupations reached a peak in the late 1990s, at the very end of Brazil’s twenty years of economic stagnation. But during the growth years that followed, people still flowed into the countryside through the landless movement, often because they requested fields in the villages that had been created on expropriated plantations.

The MST was not the only collective actor making change in the villages. By the early 2000s, for the first time in Brazil’s history, the federal government itself had begun providing a series of basic social supports to its rural citizens.⁷ Some of these had started in the 1990s, including universal old-age pensions and universal school access. Others arrived after the election of Brazil’s first left-wing president, Luíz Inacio “Lula” da Silva, in 2002. Lula’s government responded to the discourse created by the MST and Brazil’s other social movements, and a menagerie of countryside programs sprang into action: community health projects, rural electrification ventures, special preference given to small farmers when the government purchased food. Above all, there was Bolsa Família, the largest conditional cash transfer in the world, which became an international model by providing poor mothers with debit cards that gave them modest monthly payments if they vaccinated their children and sent them to school. All of these supports made life in the countryside into a much more imaginable option. As Alexandra told me, “If it weren’t for that Bolsa Família, no one would exist here, except for the

⁷ For an excellent discussion of these programs and their implementation, see Ansell 2014.

retired people” (*Se não fosse essa Bolsa Família, não existiria ninguém aqui, a não ser os aposentados.*)⁸

And yet if social movements and social programs can in part account for the return to the countryside, they cannot explain it—or, at least, they cannot explain it the way that people explained it when they disembarked from the raggedy bus. Over and over again, migrants said, to me and to each other, that they were coming to the village because they loved it. Their particular journeys might have been sparked by a misfortune, like Alexandra’s phone call. But, as Alexandra had done, migrants tended to describe their ultimate decisions in terms of something they adored.

Alexandra had returned to Maracujá because of *something that’s my family*, and she found *nothing so valuable* as that. In migration stories, people typically emphasized four major reasons for moving to the villages. The countryside offered an opportunity to become an owner (Chs. 7-8) and, in particular, to live independently with no boss. This independent life implied a new kind of relationship to objects, which would no longer need to be deserved through employment. Along similar lines, in the countryside one could reckon and set one’s own hours, producing alternative modes of time that could stretch into longer and longer cycles (Chs. 1-2). The countryside also felt safe from unpredictable violence. Finally, a move to the countryside allowed migrants to grow closer to their families. This last point did not simply imply a voyage to see one’s ageing relatives. Building kinship was a forward-looking project perhaps best

⁸ Bolsa Família is a nationwide program, available in countryside and city alike. The low cost of living in the countryside, however, makes subsistence on Bolsa Família considerably more feasible there than in the city. Moreover, Bolsa Família provides a regular cash flow that enables rural families to stay in the countryside during crop failures, dry seasons, and other agricultural fluctuations that might otherwise force them to seek work in the city in order to meet their basic needs. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that even in the villages, Bolsa Família acts as a supplement rather than a foundation: every single household receiving the benefit in 2011 also had another major source of income. (See Ch. 3).

captured by the ambition that Russo harbored. He wanted to open up a supermarket where all four of his daughters could work, so none of them would ever need to labor for another person.

Migrants usually anchored their explanations in at least one of these four reasons: independence from a boss, time freedom, safety, or family. And starting from such principles, migrants waxed eloquent about everything they loved in the villages. Some could not wait to build their own kitchens, big and elegant enough to welcome friends and strangers for dinner. Some relished walking down a dirt path and knowing every face in every house. Some talked incessantly about the joyful panic of digging holes all over the forest in pursuit of an errant burrowing armadillo—a hunt as illegal as it was beloved.

These stories were far from the dismal yarn in which impoverished workers, deprived of all aspiration, find themselves tragically pushed into the countryside and out of modernity. To the contrary. These were stories about dreams. On one of the bus rides, a seventy-nine year-old man told me about the place from which many migrants returned: São Paulo, the wealthiest part of Brazil. “There, it’s oppressed,” he explained pityingly. “Nobody trusts anybody.” When people came back from São Paulo, he noted, they found something better. “In Bahia, there’s freedom. You can see that in Bahia there’s no government.” (*Lá é oprimido. Um povo oprimido. [...] Ninguém confia em ninguém. [...] Na Bahia, tem liberdade. Você vê que na Bahia não tem governo. #cad12013p45*)

Dona Cássia spoke about this freedom, too. “Now here,” she told me – just after detailing the poverty and deprivation that her family faced at the village – “it’s a lovely land for living in” (*Agora aqui é um amor de terra para viver.*)

“Pardon me?” I asked her, startled (*Como assim?*)

“We—” she began. “Even in the friendship of the people, there’s friendship with God. Here, nobody bothers anybody. Nobody persecutes anybody. Here, we do how – however much we can or we want to. You know?” (*A gente, até na amizade do povo tem amizade com Deus. Aqui ninguém aborrece ninguém. Ninguém persegue ninguém. A gente faz aqui o qu—o quanto a gente pode ou a gente quer. Né? (#int w/ c153)*)

Labor, value, class: A theoretical frame

Alexandra found herself caught in a dilemma. With only one foot in the city, she was neither inside the permanent wage-labor force nor outside of it. This dilemma gave structure to the narrative that she told me about her time in the city, and it manifested itself nowhere more clearly than in her musings about the convolution of her own goals. In Alexandra’s words, her objective changed. It changed repeatedly, wrapping her decision in a blanket of ambivalence. Alexandra, like her neighbors, spoke of departing from the labor market, and yet she could not fully erase it from her life. She told me that she could not discount the possibility that she might want to return to it. She could leave labor, but not end its cycle.

Drifting objectives, here, provide more than a psychological diagnosis that explains why workers leave labor. These objectives offer a clue as to the unstable quality of the social conditions that keep people in a state of oscillation, disrupting the formation of a smooth discourse about singular motivation, drawing them like comets into and then out of the zone of formal employment.

In facing her dilemma, Alexandra joined an invisible fellowship of workers, manifest at sites around the world, who seem somehow to elude the classic category of wage-labor. There are the temps, the self-employed, the interns, and the street vendors (Rosen 2011). In wealthy

countries, there are the independent contractors. There are the toilers in the petite bourgeoisie, newly rechristened “small entrepreneurs,” whose disappearance was so confidently predicted by Marx, Engels, and Weber a century ago (Marx and Engels 2005 [1848/1888]: 74-5, Marx and Engels 1998 [1846]: 78, Weber 1968 [1922]: 305). There are the microcredit recipients and the long-term unemployed (Dubbeld 2013, O’Neill 2014, Schuster 2014). More relevant for Alexandra’s own life, there are the 13 million women living from Bolsa Família, a payment cast as an investment in the future of their family’s human capital. And, like Alexandra, there are the cyclical migrants, never distant from the permanent labor force, never a part of it either.⁹

None of these personages is new. And yet, in the great reordering of global wealth that marked the move into the millennium, they find themselves thrust into a new position of prominence. They have become the avatars of wageless life (Denning 2010). If the privileged sign of labor was once the steady wage,¹⁰ with its characteristic scale that motivated workers by linking time to money (Marx 1981 [1894]: 1025, Weber 1968 [1922]: 931), then a new kind of scaling seems to have been made available. Or, better, a profusion of new scalings—an assortment of patterns for measuring one’s work and the zone outside of it.

Such a moment opens up, again and in a new way, the question of what labor is. In this dissertation I search for insights about this question by considering the projects undertaken by Alexandra and her neighbors, the jobs they work and leave, the wealth they save, and the ambivalences they express. To ground the analysis I turn to Elson (1979). For Elson, labor’s

⁹ Many cyclical migrants do earn wages for a time, as Alexandra did. By definition, however, their wage-earning is sporadic and discontinuous, hence quite different from the steady rationalization associated with the wage in the long-term labor market. The cadence of cyclical work includes the wage, but it also features a different cycle – the cycle of entry and return.

¹⁰ For sure, the steady wage never was the reality for the majority of the world’s workers, including a large number of women. Nonetheless, in modernist social science the wage achieved a hegemonic status as the criterion that defined what it meant to be a worker. Wage-labor was cast as the goal to which residual sectors were being assimilated, the marker and telos of modernization (cf Marx 1976 [1867]: 763 and Weber 1968 [1922]: 931). The problem that I raise here involves the widespread replacement of this vision – everyone will eventually earn a wage – with a series of other models for what work could mean.

preeminent social tendency, under conditions of capital, is to become abstract. Alexandra toiled to arrange particular Brazil nuts in the grocery store, but her efforts appeared to the store's owners as a quantity of generic human labor. And so labor, in the view I take, involves more than employment. It involves a relationship with homogeneity. In its abstract mode, labor is the use of homogeneous time to produce homogeneous objects.

This perspective focuses on labor as the act of making a kind of time, regular and self-identical, at once cyclical and progressive (Whorf 1956 [1939], Anderson 2003 [1983]; see Ch. 1). It looks at the habits that people use to weigh the hours and schedule the months of their work.

The perspective also considers the objects that labor produces, labor's objectified results. It inquires into the process that makes so many different things – pineapples harvested, tables waited at a restaurant, children watched, classes taught, Brazil nuts sold – seem similarly standard and alienable (Lukacs 1999 [1923], see Ch. 7). It takes note of the hedges that workers build in order to guard against this alienability.

When seen in this light, labor implies – it requires – a semiotic practice of abstracting. This is an abstraction that Alexandra carried out (as we will see) when she anticipated the ticking of the time clock and when she sold her lunch-hour breaks. This abstracting process, which one might think of as homogenization, is certainly not the only possible form of abstraction, and a main concern of this dissertation will be to document the many other options for abstraction available in the villages. Nor is abstract labor a single, a priori category. As we will see, toil in the fields can become more or less abstracted and the methods for abstracting it can change (Ch. 2). Hence the most pertinent question is not whether or not agricultural work at Maracujá and

Rio Branco does or does not count as abstract labor, but rather *how* workers use signs to render it abstract at a particular moment—or overcome that rendering.

And the rendering is difficult to overcome: homogeneous time and homogeneous objects have a striking hold. People can homogenize time and objects when they plan the expenditure of their welfare money, when they count the painful hours of their unemployment, and even when they plot out their potential exits from labor. There is a homogenization that can persist even when one has left one's job.

But what does *homogeneous* mean? By invoking homogenization, I tiptoe down the road that leads to a discussion about value. My argument, here, is that time and objects become homogeneous through a bracing encounter with the dynamics of value. This encounter – the fitting of time and objects into the exchangeable shape of the value-form – is a cultural process,¹¹ and much of this dissertation is devoted to understanding how the category *value* arises inside social interaction at a particular cultural conjuncture.

¹¹ Although this is not the place for an extended discussion, I conceive of culture as shared production—as the human capability to produce together with other humans. My view is inspired by Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (1995), who writes:

“To announce my cards, let me put it this way: there are, grossly, two different views about what culture and identity mean. The first sees culture and identity as *things*. Identity is to be identical to a model, with which one identifies oneself. It is therefore to be equal to oneself, somehow unchangeable. As for culture, it is then conceived as a given set of items, rules, values, positions that, in a Durkheimian way, shape cultural identity. We could call this position “Platonic,” for convenience.

As against this, one can view identity as simply the awareness of continuity, as a flow, as a process. Correspondingly, culture would not be a set of products but instead a process of production. We could call this view after Heraclitus, for well-known reasons” (282).

“Truly traditional culture is that which invents new myths, new ceremonies, that which preserves its initiative in cultural production. It is a living culture” (288).

“Precisely because culture is production and not a product, we must be attentive in order not to be deceived; what we must guarantee for future generations is not the preservation of cultural products, but the preservation of the capacity for cultural production” (290).

(She references her own paper “Etnicidade: Da Cultura, Residual Mais Irredutível” from the book *Antropologia do Brasil: Mito, História, Etnicidade* (1985, São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense) and Eunice Durham (1977), “A dinâmica cultural na sociedade moderna,” *Ensaio de Opinião*, no. 4, 1:32-35, also published in *Arte em Revista*, ano 2 no. 3, March 1980, São Paulo: Kairós/ CEAC.)

Although value must become legible at a cultural location, it can never remain limited to that location. I ultimately follow Sahlins in conceiving of value as a social form that comes in from the outside (2013; see Ch. 6). Value, on this view, is a representation inside culture of a space beyond culture.

In describing value as external, I refer to two kinds of externality. First, I argue, value is external in the sense that it is an unmoving standard. Value can regulate exchange activity because the rules for measuring value do not move, but remain fixed and unchangeable in the moment of the exchange. The rules stand outside the exchange.

In a second sense, value comes in from outside because the parties to a commodity exchange act as if the exchanged object had its origin in a location so foreign, so socially distant, that a social relation between people becomes impossible. Producers and consumers relate to each other only through the mediation of value, and they relate to the produced object as to a thing that belongs outside either of them.

The category of value, I argue, gets created as the intersection-point between these two senses of *outside*. A standard can sometimes become a standard precisely for the reason that it is portrayed as originating far away from the human world of the people present—and such is the case with value. Standardization and distance, combined, are keys to value's dynamic.¹²

Value serves (to cite Elson's title) as the representation of labor under capitalism—the representation of labor as something standardized from the outside, beyond one's control. But value can represent more than just labor. As I will briefly suggest below, the notion of value might usefully be grounded in the practice of tribute-giving. In all of its manifestations, however,

¹² Many very grateful thanks are due to Yazan Doughan and Julie Chu for perceptively spotting this distinction and explaining its importance to me.

value operates a relation of representation – of one object standing in for another – and thus value calls for a semiotic analysis.

If abstract labor is understood as the use of homogeneous time to make homogeneous objects, and if value is understood as the representation of that labor, then social class comes into focus under a new light. One of the main goals of this dissertation is to move towards an understanding of class that can help portray the present historical moment— and in particular that can describe the rhythms of wageless work, the toil of the subject of investment or the circular migrant or their peers described above.

A theory of class attempts to connect what might seem like purely economic issues – for example, Murilo’s earnings as an office clerk – to patterns of belonging, modes of aspiration, and techniques of assessment and distinction. As I consider the workers who are heading back to the villages, I suggest an approach that understands class as a group’s relationship to labor and hence to homogeneous time and homogeneous objects.¹³ Class, then, is a matter of time and things. It is about how people tally their minutes, make claims of ownership over their belongings, represent the product of their work, and explain why they leave work behind. Class is about a relation to labor, but not necessarily only about employment or even subsistence. Rather, class has to do with the social forms – the categories and practices – that make labor conceivable and communicable, like units of time, scales of measurement, and habits of subordination. Workers can make use of these forms even without receiving a wage, and so labor means much more than wage-labor.

¹³ The class concept will receive extended treatment in Chapters 1, 2, and 8, where I respond to other possible theorizations of class. For here, though, let me note that I ground myself basically inside the tradition of Lukacs, for whom “the division of society into classes is determined by position within the process of production” (1999 [1920]: 46). In other words, class emerges from the process of production as a whole, and not (pace Marx and Engels 2005 [1848/1888]: 39) from legal relations of ownership per se. See Ch. 8 for a lengthier discussion. Also see Wright, ed. 2005, Thompson 1963, Weber 1968 [1922], and Bourdieu 1987.

On the other hand, class means more than a way to labor. Ultimately, I will argue that people can produce class, as a durable social position, precisely in the moments when they create distance between themselves and labor. It is the limits imposed on labor's dominion that may be the most characteristic signs of class, and, indeed, in the workplace, each timekeeping norm and each reified exchange also amounts to a collectively-generated restriction that allows labor to come this far and no farther. Hence one can detect homogeneity through its negative images, that is, through the techniques that people use to speak of and act towards a desideratum that is singular, incommensurable, and discontinuous. One can read homogeneity through the weekend or the resignation letter; one can sense it through its inversion in places like Rio Branco and Maracujá.

These breaks with labor help to define what labor is, for a particular group of people. Labor relies on the creation of a zone outside of labor, and it is by not working that people come to recognize work. Through the production of the limits that define the zone, class gets produced, so that, for example, one lives as a semi-proletarian not merely when one is putting in long hours at an iron mine or the kitchen of a wealthy family's house, but, quite precisely and most characteristically, in the moment when one leaves. This is why class persists longer than any particular job: it is a position built to endure both inside and outside the space of labor. People can have a class long before they begin working, and they can retain a class long after they have stopped.

Methods

Maracujá and Rio Branco became my research sites through a series of fortuitous accidents, but not without reason. The two villages are located in Vitória da Conquista, a

municipality whose dramatic growth has made it into a center for the “new Northeast,” the transformed version of Brazil’s impoverished quadrant. Conquista has had a Workers Party mayor since 1997, and because of his government’s widely-acknowledged competence, the municipality serves as something of a national showcase for leftist policy. Maracujá and Rio Branco themselves can boast of fascinating histories. Located next to each other, the two villages face similar climactic and economic constraints but have contrasting pasts. Maracujá was founded in 1996 as an MST land occupation on a coffee plantation, while Rio Branco has been inhabited by small farmers probably since the late 19th century. The two communities are spaces of autonomy etched out of the terrain that hides at the edges of the great landholdings—but etched out for different reasons.

The research project was planned as an ethnographic venture, although with a mixed-methods background. My first encounters with Maracujá began in 2005, and in 2011 I finally went to Rio Branco. After 2005 I made trips back and forth, spending 17 consecutive months in the two villages from 2011 to 2012. During this time, the primary research approach involved participant observation bolstered by open-ended interviews, which meant endless hours attending church, visiting houses, listening to stories, and scribbling down gossip. The project also included two more quantitative aspects. First, I carried out a census of all households, which used questions based on the PNAD (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios, a nationally-representative household survey conducted annual by IBGE, Brazil’s statistical service.) The census attempted to measure total income and the value of all assets in 2011. It also included a series of open questions – including, perhaps most significantly, inquiries about each person’s work history.

Second, once the survey was complete, I chose nine “focus households” – selected for their diversity in age, income, and household composition – and began to conduct weekly interviews that recorded their expenses and income flows. The quantitative elements of the project were probably important less for the numbers they produced and more for the relationships they inspired, since the census gave me a reason to meet every household and the follow-up interviews helped me return to a diverse set of households every week. (See appendix for details on the surveys.)

Because the dissertation’s research methods focus on *leaving* labor, the ethnography tends to portray a one-class situation. It depicts villages whose inhabitants have striven to extirpate supervision and class distinction from their lives, and thus it has little direct to say about the interactions between, for example, bankers and domestic servants, or factory managers and factory workers. Instead of examining these interactions, the dissertation approaches class primarily by considering the categories and practices that underlie labor.

This account may seem strikingly non-relational. But relationship is not absent from the argument. On the view taken here, class is indeed a relationship to other people, but only at a second degree. Class is a relationship to other people – those of one’s own class and those of other classes – as first mediated through labor. It is a relationship to others, but the terms of the relationship are pre-set by the concrete conditions on which one is available to labor. What is particularly notable is the way that these conditions shimmer through even when people are not in fact laboring for any boss. The conditions glow in people’s fireside stories and in their accounting habits, in the houses they build and, above all, in the commodities they purchase. The project’s research methods are designed to explore these conditions.

To reveal the conditions that make labor possible, the dissertation employs an analysis that is by turns semiotic and biographical.¹⁴ Each of these approaches has a role to play in constructing an argument attentive to people's reasons for leaving labor.

Semiotics, as I use it here, is a method that investigates communication in a social context by turning towards the signs themselves. It is an effort to take the sign's-eye view (Silverstein 2004: 631).¹⁵ What becomes visible, once we take this view, are not just signs but the contingent interactions between them, their emergent effects, as these effects undergird the creation of routine social action. In this spirit, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 lavish attention on the words and gestures that rural Brazilians use to sell a cow, to negotiate a wage, or to account for the profit from a new field. These signs come together to compose the manifold scales, the many measurement systems that Brazilians invoke as they assess the time and objects around them (Carr and Lempert 2016)—one cow twice as valuable as the next, one work-day half as burdensome as the last. But why does this examination of signs belong in the middle of an investigation of class?

Semiotics has an important contribution to make to class analysis for at least three reasons. First, a semiotic approach tracks inequality very closely, following the particular signs by which one object is marked as more valuable than another—this chicken worth more because it is older, or this worker worth less because he is less urban. Such an analysis does not assume a pre-existing scale, like income, and then locate different people or objects at different points on

¹⁴ These approaches inevitably overlap, since biographies, as told or recorded, are necessarily created through signs, while signs are (often) uttered and received by biographical people, at a point in time that can be rendered biographically. So there is no firm line between a “biographical” approach and a “semiotic” one. The distinction, here, is a question of emphasis. In the middle chapters, I focus more closely on signs as they appear inside interaction, using an approach informed by linguistic anthropologists. In the opening and closing chapters, I consider people's accounts of their own and others' biographies, fitting these inside a framework of life changes that they and I connect to a notion of history.

¹⁵ Here, I employ semiotic methods as developed within US linguistic anthropology. Many thanks go to William Feeney for kindly explaining this distinction (and so many other elements of the semiotic tradition) to me.

the scale. Instead, it pays attention as people themselves create scales and determine, inside discourse, what counts as more or less important on these scales. When seen in this light, inequality is not only a macroeconomic *result* that scholars can observe with surveys. Inequality is also an everyday *process* – a process of un-equalizing – that people constantly carry out by ordering one object in relation to others (Carr and Lempert 2016). Class, I will argue, has everything to do with this process. What I focus on is class as the act of classification.

As a matter of process, class involves the patterns through which labor is represented and becomes a real category at varied points throughout the social world—as much in an early-morning chat between two farmers as in a presidential proclamation about economic policy. Semiotics makes it possible to observe these varied points and sidestep the distinction between micro and macro, a distinction that runs the risk of blindfolding analysis by naturalizing the very processes that make some interactions seem more powerful than others (Carr and Lempert 2016). A semiotic approach directs attention to these processes. When understood as a matter of signs, class and value are not overarching social phenomena from above that influence or impinge upon interactions at the interpersonal level. Instead, class and value become real through certain familiar templates for sign-making, templates that emerge out of the smallest and the grandest moments alike. Marx, along these lines, urged an approach that understood economic domination by considering the quotidian and inevitable representation of labor in specific social circumstances (1976 [1867]: Ch. 1).

Semiotics also has a second strength to offer to an investigation of class. Commodity signs and commodity relations persist like specters in the villages, subordinating the workers who are now ex-workers. A major concern here is to explain why rural Brazilians retain a class position that remains stable when they enter labor and when they leave it. I will argue that this

stability comes, in part, from an ongoing relationship to the commodity. Once they have returned to the villages, people continue to rely on commodities for the mundane details of life, and in their engagement with the commodity-form, villagers rehearse the key abstractions that characterize the labor relation, from progress and expansiveness to standardization and externality.

This engagement with the commodity can be diagnosed through a close look at sign use. In their relationships to the objects they exchange, rural Brazilians construct the category *value*, and their construction, I claim, posits value as a power from the outside to which they must submit. They refer to the true value of a cow as the price cited on television; they negotiate the sale of their crops through a discursive dance around what they guess to be the “market” valuation. It is as if their things already contained the memory and the prediction of abstracted work. Semiotics helps to reveal this memory in action, although, as I will propose in Chapter 4, this semiotics adopts the commodity rather than the word as its key sign.

Semiotics matters to this project for a third reason as well. A semiotic method allows for the (temporary) bracketing of assumptions about individual motivation and intentionality. The emphasis is on the signs, not on the motives that are driving the speakers. This bracketing has a salutary effect. It holds in abeyance the impulse to impose a model in which actors maximize their way towards some self-evident goal, like greater status or more money. It is that very impulse that disables an understanding of class, by moving too quickly to reduce social life to individuals and their singular aims. After such a reduction of people to goals, it might not be easy to understand how Dona Cássia could see the village *both* as a place of miserable impoverishment *and* as “a lovely land to live in.”

A semiotic view opens the possibility that people may be speaking and acting inside shared logics where the stakes and the heuristics for making judgment are not translatable into any immediately-obvious model of interest. In other words, semiotics replaces *homo economicus* with an inquiry about the social conditions that allow someone to claim to have made a decision.

If the dissertation includes extended investigation of the semiotic details of particular social interactions, it also carries out analysis of a different kind. It engages with rural Brazilians' personal trajectories and (pace Bourdieu 1986) the construction of biographies. Biography is not used here simply for the purpose of illustration. Biography circulates in Maracujá and Rio Branco as a social fact, a fact recounted, gossiped about, criticized, and emulated.

And biography features its own modes of time, modes that diverge from the homogeneous. To recapitulate a fundamental structural-functionalist insight, a system of role relations can be held in place, producing a sense of stability, while many different biographical individuals cycle through each role (Fortes 1970 [1949]). The time of the factory (Ch. 2) or the time of day-labor (Ch. 1) might be depicted as degrading by the person who had to toil within their monotonous strictures, but for that particular person, work could be contextualized inside a biographical time of plans and possibilities, children and retirements, and so the unchanging temporality of labor was transected by the arc of a specific lifetime. As we will see (Ch. 2), Ana described her work on an assembly line as distressingly regimented, and yet it was also an exciting element in her aspirational project to move to the city and transform her life. She talked about herself changing while the labor process stayed the same. And beyond the move to the city stretched still other possibilities: building a house in the village, obtaining cattle, spending old age in the countryside. Inside an unchanging context, one might always chart one's own changes over time.

The divergence between labor time and biographical time helps to account for people's expressed ambivalence about labor, which they often describe as both intolerable and hopeful. More than that, the difference in the two temporalities goes some way towards explaining the conservatism of a class system— a system in which people can remain perfectly aware of their hierarchical ranking and even dislike it, yet continue to reproduce the conditions that make it possible. For this explanation, neither false consciousness nor strategic selling-out is necessary, only the relatively stronger development of the time of the biographical imagination. To analyze that development, the dissertation pays attention to people's biographies, as they and as others describe them.

Social immobility: Brazil's golden decade in global context

Seen through a particular lens, Rio Branco and Maracujá make up one segment in a segmented labor market: they are a zone of long-term low incomes, bounded by a semi-permeable barrier that allows only some people to cross into a higher-income zone (Yellen 1984, Cain 1976, Dickens and Lang 1988). Seen through another lens, they are a pole in a semiproletarian circuit. In either view, however, the villages take part in a world inequality system that, over the past decade, has made an unexpected change in direction.

Brazil's recent drop in income inequality¹⁶ is part of an epochal and confusing shift in the global income distribution. Income discrepancies remained relatively constant for much of the second half of the twentieth century, both inside and between nations. Inside countries, welfare state compacts and labor market regulations put an effective cap on the level of inequality.

¹⁶ According to the World Bank, Brazil's Gini coefficient fell from 63 in 1989 to 59 in 2001 and then to 53 in 2012. Data from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=BRA&series=&period=#>, accessed 8/26/15.

Internationally, a stable Cold War regime maintained countries at relatively fixed points inside the “three worlds” system.

By the turn of the century, this constancy had vanished. Fueled by the expansion of trade, hundreds of millions of workers entered the global workforce, while national governments swept away their earlier systems of social protection and engaged in projects oriented towards “primitive globalization” (Sites 2003). Income inequality grew rapidly inside world’s wealthiest nations. And yet, at a global level, over these same years, income inequality seems to have *decreased* (Milanovic 2012, Ortiz and Cummins 2011: 1-10, Warner et al. 2014, Ravallion 2014; for more ambivalent views, see Jaumotte et al. 2013 and Lakner and Milanovic 2013).

This decrease corresponds to a changing international division of labor (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). It was driven in part by people like Alexandra: workers in middle-income countries who moved closer to the center of the world market. They belong to a new global working class, one whose income levels and life conditions have started to converge across borders, from Poland to the United States and China to Bangladesh.

The present dissertation research project was planned as an effort to investigate the convergence. In particular, I aimed to explore the impact of Brazil’s progressive state interventions, with a focus on the microdevelopment programs, such as Bolsa Família, that have played an important role in fueling the change in inequality. The research quickly ran into a problem, which I believe to be general: while income levels have changed, the lines separating poor and rich have not. Positions of subordination and dominance are tenaciously persistent, even when the content of economic activity seemed transformed.

And so the dissertation opens a window onto the puzzle of limited social mobility. Even though income inequality decreased remarkably during Brazil’s golden decade, the economic

rank ordering of Brazilian citizens does not appear to have changed by nearly as much.¹⁷ In other words, the distance between rich and poor diminished, but Brazilians, by and large, remained at the same hierarchical locations in the income distribution: the same rich were still richer than their neighbors and the same poor were still poorer than theirs. It was as if the rungs on the economic ladder had grown closer together, but the same people still stood on each rung. Indeed, this is a problem that Alexandra lived out. She participated avidly in Brazil's economic growth, raising her own income and improving her education, and she returned to substantially the same relative position as her parents. This dissertation investigates her act – the act of leaving labor – in order to understand how a society that grows can nonetheless maintain its system of ranks.

The persistence of rank, even in the midst of falling income inequality, ultimately provides an essential foundation for the existing structure of labor relations. Alexandra's circular migration reveals the possibilities and limits of these relations, in her place and time. They are relations that help to predetermine who will produce what, under which circumstances and under

¹⁷ The definition and measurement of social mobility create extraordinarily complicated problems, but for recent evidence from Latin America, see Ferreira et al. 2013. They make the following observation:

In intergenerational terms, Latin America is not a mobile society, and the signs that it is becoming a little more mobile are tentative and so far limited to educational attainment. This picture is consistent with what is known about the high degree of inequality of opportunity that continues to characterize the region (9).

Also see Peliano 2013, who draws the following conclusion:

The moral of the story: income inequality fell over the past decade, but what remained solidified was the rigid occupational and business structure, in the form of a pyramid.

Resumo da estória: caiu a desigualdade de renda na última década, mas ficou solidificada a rígida estrutura ocupacional e de negócios em forma de pirâmide.

In Ferreira et al.'s helpful terms, I am talking here about "mobility as origin independence" (that is, about the question of how much one's parents and background determine one's subsequent economic position.) The issue at hand could also be considered a question of positional movement (how much each person's relative economic position changes over time) (25).

whose supervision. Or, to put things differently, when inequality changes, what persists is social class.¹⁸

Class sometimes seems like a concept in its dotage, a term too old to inspire new fights or new insights, long since superseded by other descriptors for stratification. And yet, over the last few years, an unanticipated profusion of academic literature about inequality (Piketty 2014, Putnam 2015, Lamont et al. 2014) has led to a repeated question: inequality of what? What organizes the many observable economic differences? The shift in the global income distribution, it seems, rather insistently puts class on the table again. And not only for researchers. When rural Brazilians go to work for urban multinationals and then later abandon their jobs, they are crafting an ingenious response to the identitarian dilemmas of the world's new workforce.

The act of leaving labor creates an unusual opportunity to inquire into the deeper ties that bind people into economic positions. It makes it possible to ask how class means more than a job and how value means more than money. Rural Brazilians go to work in the city, and yet some constraint limits their climb; then they turn down both jobs and money, and yet some axis still binds them to their rank.¹⁹ And so reverse migration, as an example, helps to reveal how particular elements of a hierarchy have the force of durability.

¹⁸ Not just social class. Gendered and racialized discrimination also persist, along with many other forms. The approach to class will be elaborated in Chapter 1, 2, 7, and 8.)

¹⁹ On a Weberian reading, this axis corresponds to the persistence of status in the face of class change (Weber 1968 [1922]; thanks are due to Jean Comaroff for this insightful point.) Indeed, one could analyze in Weberian terms the problem of low social mobility in the presence of growth; it would correspond to the distinction between Weberian status (continued social position) and Weberian class (increased property and better access to the market.) By this logic, from 2001 to 2011 rural Brazilians improved their class while retaining their status.

And yet this Weberian analysis would have little to say about the aspiration to leave labor itself. It would not account for the strange ambivalence by which rural Brazilians seek out labor relations and feel themselves oppressed by these same relations, ultimately turning away from them. So my goal is to describe Weberian class and status alike as manifestations of value – of a sort of power that is both necessary and always external, hence always subordinating to the person who engages with it. The overlap between necessity and externality captures the telltale ambivalence, which, I will claim, characterizes the simultaneous impulse, widespread under capital, to labor and to

When inequality changes, how does class stay the same? This is a version of a venerable social science question (Bourdieu 1984, Veblen 1965 [1899]). It forms a backdrop to the dissertation, not fully answerable here, but guiding the project. Already, I have suggested putting time and objects at the center of the analysis. Also I have argued that this ordering emerges in the moments outside of labor. I will conclude by proposing that this zone outside of labor has a hierarchical dimension to it. Rural Brazilians, I claim, help to nurture the system of economic rank when they create the special forms of time and special kinds of objects that are supposed to be preserved from the vagaries of value creation.

Often, the particular practices of laboring can be readily learned, and these skills do not by themselves draw the enduring dividing-line between classes. What perdures is something else: the kind of home that one is allowed to purchase for retirement (see Ch. 8), the sort of savings one strives to leave for one's relatives (see Ch. 7 and Borges 1993: Ch. 7 for an elite parallel), the forms of the good life that one could possibly imagine. Dominating classes manage to monopolize their own typical heirlooms, their characteristic resources in the realm beyond labor; access to these resources becomes a key diacritic for discrimination and thus, ironically, a determinant of who can obtain which positions in the labor process, since access to jobs is rationed by class status. The space outside of labor is not only what makes class, as I argued above, but also what keeps class in place.

The analysis, then, comes to sound something like a theory of the non-leisure class. It tracks the ceaseless "conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1977: 239). But the focus here is on the opposite of competition. I hope to take seriously the argument that migrants make: that they are leaving labor because of the things that they love. Instead of

leave labor. I follow Elson (1979) in arguing that value is the representation of abstract labor. Thus a reckoning with value also implies an engagement with the act of labor.

asking how people attempt to advance, I ask how they create a discursive imagination that renders the social world significant and livable even when it remains static.

Literature about the rural Northeast and its resonances elsewhere

The labor process in Northeastern Brazil emerges out of a lengthy historical tradition. Murilo and Dona Cássia, Alexandra and Seu Valentim had all gone back to a place that, in its agricultural techniques and resource base, seemed strikingly similar to the plantation-driven economy that dominated Northeastern Brazil from the 17th until the mid-20th century. Work with the hoe, manioc as a staple, unirrigated drylands waiting for rain: the technology looked the same, but the relations had changed so much. This dissertation is therefore in dialogue with the extraordinary ethnographic literature that has surrounded that plantation world.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, US-based anthropologists crafted a set of “community studies” that outlined the nuanced class structure of the rural and small-town Northeast (Forman 1975, Johnson 1971, Harris 1956, Hutchinson 1957.) These studies emphasized the rigidity of the vertical ties that fixed the client-patron system into place, and they explored the importance of the concomitant horizontal ties that allowed members of each class to achieve equality with each other. The community studies covered much of the same territory as Antonio Candido’s magisterial *Parceiros do Rio Bonito* (1964), a work of anthropology that emerged almost accidentally out of Candido’s efforts to collect folk material as background for his literary criticism. Conducted on a semi-abandoned plantation in rural São Paulo state, *Parceiros* put a spotlight on peasant farmers’ skill at building autonomous spaces within a world economy, an issue to which I will return.

Candido and the community ethnographers found themselves unavoidably responding to modernization theory, the grand thematic narrative of their time. They thus became caught up in the explosive modernization debate that rocked the Brazilian left wing during the 1960s and 70s: the argument over whether Brazil's plantation system should be considered feudal or capitalist (Prado Júnior 1963 [1942], Frank 2005 [1964], Wright 2005 [1971], Ianni 2005 [1971], Gorender 2005 [1978]). This seemingly scholastic distinction turned out to have strikingly political consequences, since the feudal position implied support for a bourgeois revolution as a necessary preliminary to socialism, while the capitalist position tended to point towards the importance of immediate agitation that targeted the peasants as workers. (This latter viewpoint undoubtedly informed the MST's strategy.) Although the sprouting of agribusiness since the 1990s has rendered the debate itself an archaic one, I seek inspiration in some of its core questions. In particular, I inquire into what *capitalism* meant to the debate participants, and I ask if, in their efforts to describe it, they may have detected important trends in the treatment of time (Chs. 1-2.)

Modernization theory, as taken up by Candido and the community ethnographers, found itself considerably complicated by the Anglophone literature on comparative Latin American peasantries. This literature began with a rather straightforward modernization research program, Julian Steward's People of Puerto Rico Project (Steward et al. 1956). It was quickly pushed off-path by the Cuban Revolution, dependency theory—and, most of all, the complexities of the region's history.

Already in its early incarnations, the comparativist dialogue was oriented towards history and “structure” – that is, socioeconomic relations – rather than cultural content (Wolf 1955). At their apogee, the comparativists launched a full-scale challenge to the traditional modernization

account (Mintz 1973, Mintz 1985, Wolf 1966, Trouillot 1992). They insisted on tracing the links between colonialism, state power, and the creation of the peasant classes, casting off in the process any romanticism about the immemorial roots of folk society. In the Brazilian and Caribbean cases, in particular, these scholars uncovered what was in effect a history of reverse modernization. Large-scale capitalist production had dominated the region as early as the 17th century, with slave plantations run by central labor coordination, time-labor discipline, and international capital inflows— slave plantations that looked like industrial factories *avant la lettre*. In response to this dark modernity, laborers strove to escape by running away or earning a measure of autonomy. They used the available marginal spaces to start small farms and villages, creating a *post*-capitalist peasantry. Maracujá and Rio Branco are spaces of this sort, and their example demonstrates the continued relevance of the dynamic that the comparativists emphasized: modernization not as an arrow pointing forward but rather as a constant alternation between the modern and the place that the modern must reach.

In Brazil in the late 1960s, an anthropological program emerged to ask many of these same questions, albeit under unusual circumstances. The nation's military dictators had purged leftists from most social science departments, but anthropology, considered the domain of apolitical curiosities, was largely spared. Young Brazilian anthropologists thus managed to launch a major collective project to explore the social and economic structures of dependent capitalism by focusing on an interconnected web of communities in Pernambuco's sugar-producing zone (Sigaud 1976, Sigaud 2007, Palmeira 1976, Leite Lopes 1976).

The Pernambuco project had revelatory results, demonstrating, in particular, the process through which the most varied forms of production – peasant farming, plantation agriculture, factory labor – were knitted together to produce a coherent economic system. Early in the

project's life, Lygia Sigaud perceptively observed the early stirrings of the historical cycle that, by the 2000s, would dominate Maracujá and Rio Branco.

Caught between the logic of the traditional situation, where the morador's independent plot²⁰ served as a key element, and the logic of proletarianization, which privileges the salary, the worker imagines that the ideal situation for him would be the status of a proletarian-peasant, above all a peasant, who would have his land to work inside the sugar-mill grounds and who would sell his labor power for a salary only when the field and the plot were not remunerative enough (1976: 322).

Imbuído da lógica da situação tradicional, onde o sítio era uma peça fundamental, e pela lógica da proletarização que privilegia o salário, o trabalhador imagina que a situação ideal para ele seria a de um proletário-camponês, sobretudo camponês, que tivesse sua terra dentro do engenho para trabalhar e vendesse sua força de trabalho pelo salário, apenas quando o roçado e o sítio não estivessem compensando.

Maracujá and Rio Branco have long been spaces on the edge, and at the time of fieldwork, this meant that they provided one pole for the semiproletarian circuit. By Wallerstein's definition (2003 [1983]: 26), semiproletarian households are those that supply only limited (and often sporadic) quantities of labor-power to the capitalist market for wage labor. These households cover a significant proportion of their basic needs through home production—such as peasant farming. Thus their members, when they do enter the labor market, can be made to accept wage rates far lower than the minimum established for fully proletarian households, which have little autonomous production and must derive most or all of their sustenance from wage earnings.

The *semiproletarian* label opens up useful parallels with scholarship in southern Africa, where for more than a century workers have circulated between industrial labor in the mines and their more stable homes in small farming and ranching communities. Sometimes referred to as a *peasantariat* (Parson 1984), this group bears important resemblances to the residents of Maracujá and Rio Branco. They go to labor when young and energetic, leaving children, the

²⁰ A morador is a farmer who resides on a plantation, often supplying work to a plantation-owner and receiving an independent plot from the plantation-owner in exchange. See Chapters 1-2.

elderly, and the disabled in villages where a living can be eked out of the land. They return to the villages periodically, when out of work or tired. Thus they save the urban economy from bearing the full social costs of the life cycle, foisting many of these costs – like schooling and care for the elderly – onto an alternative rural system.²¹ Moreover, these workers flexibly enter the labor market in times of high demand, only to exit it during moments of unemployment. They serve as a prototypical industrial reserve army: a group of transient laborers, at the margins of the market, whose threatened competition helps to hold down wages across the board.

In southern Africa, semiproletarianization has received special attention from Ferguson (1985) and the Comaroffs (1987, 1991, and 1997). These analyses demonstrate the double game that sustains a reserve army. On the one hand, the village must remain always in the worker's view as a zone of autonomy, desirable because of its "traditional" externality from the world of labor. On the other hand, the village's seeming externality is precisely what makes it such a crucial element in the overall labor system. Only because workers *plan* to return there can they be hired as low-wage temporaries. The villages serve as a linchpin in the labor market structure, providing a buffer that contains labor costs. Indeed, the very feeling of externality rests on a series of oppositions – village and city, strict time and loose time, labor and rest. In these oppositions, the village acquires its significance through its relation to its foil, the realm of wage labor. And so the system offers no genuine outside; in fact, the appearance of an outside becomes a key constituent of the system itself.

²¹ See also the following insightful observation: "The migration that regenerates the laborer inside the peasant – and that regenerates the peasant inside the laborer – is only possible due to the use of the work of peasant women and children. They, in turn, regenerate themselves as peasants through the extra work performed by the father of the peasant family. As can be seen here, the subordination of the labor-power of one family member makes it possible for the family as a whole to reproduce itself inside the peasant class." (*A migração que recriaria no camponês o operário e que recria no operário o camponês, só é possível devido a utilização do trabalho da mulher e das crianças camponesas que se recriam também como camponeses através do trabalho acessório do pai da família camponesa. Percebe-se que a subordinação da força de trabalho de um membro da família possibilita a reprodução de sua totalidade como classe camponesa*) (Bersani and Arlindo 2012: 6).

Outside and inside: this is a dialectic that underpins the dissertation, as a mode for mapping migrants' movement back and forth between country and city. Although this motion is circular, workers nonetheless use it to generate biographical trajectories that point forwards, because for the worker her or himself, semiproletarian status does not always snap shut like a trap. The delays and hedges that it supplies are real, and they really do suspend the presence of labor. They do allow for the education of children and the sustenance of grandparents. And at the end of one's own labor career, they do present the possibility of a new and different chapter. This seemed to be the hope of an enthusiastic man I saw one day on the dilapidated bus that ran from the city to the villages. He laughed for everyone around to hear, and he proclaimed, "I'm not going to work for anyone any more. Not even for myself." (*Eu não vou trabalhar para mais ninguém. Nem para mim. (#cad7p87)*)

History in the villages

Even in the pastures that stretch out dry, even in the small valleys where corn grows next to beans, one can already see the smoke and hear the voices that seep upwards from a long line of houses: it is the Maracujá Land Settlement, where Alexandra grew up and to where she returned. A dirt road leaves Marcujá. After 15 kilometers of cactus and several flocks of green parakeets, that road arrives at Rio Branco. At Rio Branco the earth is harder-packed, and it has patches of mica flakes that look like spills of tinsel or diamonds. Otherwise, though, the two villages today seem quite similar, like siblings that have become twins over time.

Their past, however, sets them apart. Rio Branco began about a century earlier. I could find no-one who remembered the first inhabitants of Rio Branco, but Dona Marilda, age 69, thought that it might have been her great-grandparents, and other residents offered similar

chronologies. That places the founding of Rio Branco somewhere around the years between 1870 and 1900. The founders came, according to stories, from other small towns in the southwest of Bahia. They probably would have thought of Rio Branco as a wild land available for the taking.²²

And wildness is still a part of the regional identity. Rio Branco and Maracujá both sit, as every schoolchild in the villages knows, at the intersection-point between the semi-arid *cipó* forest biome and the extremely arid *caatinga* steppe biome. More simply, though, the area might be called *sertão*. *Sertão* is a multilayered concept in Portuguese, referring to remote backlands regions in general and, more specifically, to the drought-prone interior of Brazil's Northeast. *Sertanejos* are the inhabitants of the *sertão*. When the founders arrived at Rio Branco, they marked themselves as *sertanejos*.²³

Rio Branco began as a profoundly isolated site, with not even a dirt road until the 1960s or 70s. The nearest market town, when accessed by mule, was an hour or more away, while the city of Conquista took at least a day to reach. No priest, no police, no school, no doctor, no military: the national state, indeed, barely appeared there at all. Dona Zaida, in her 80s, remembered that she and her neighbors in childhood did not know that cities called “São Paulo”

²² So far as I can tell, there is no remaining evidence of indigenous presence in Rio Branco, beyond rumors about an Amerindian graveyard on the grounds of a neighboring village.

²³ Note the use of *sertão* in Ansell 2014, Johnson 1971, and Pires 2009, all of them works that have inspired my own understanding of the region where this research takes place.

Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “*sertanejos*” to describe the inhabitants of Rio Branco and Maracujá – a usage that is not without its problems. People from the villages would not usually employ the term *sertanejo* to describe themselves in daily discourse. When talking to outsiders, they might refer to themselves by citing the name of the village where they lived; more often, they would simply say that they came *da roça*, “from the fields.” But the corresponding noun, *roçeiro*, is in extremely rare use in the villages.

Perhaps the more important point here is that people from Rio Branco and Maracujá tend not to formalize their local group identification with a noun of any sort. Politically, their representation tends to run through the MST – which encourages collective identification as *camponeses* (peasants) – or through the apparatus connected to the rural union – which sees them as rural workers. The lack of a locally-particular noun serves, I believe, as something of a diagnostic of a political situation in which they, as subjects, lack specificity.

This situation posed a writerly dilemma for me. Ultimately, I settled on the use of *sertanejo*. Partly this was an effort to stay in dialogue with the scholarly authors mentioned above. Partly, though, it came from the fact that people in the region, when I asked, responded to my questioning by telling me clearly, even enthusiastically, that they did think of themselves as *sertanejos*.

and “Rio de Janeiro” existed. Money, however, did exist, exclusively in the form of coins and in particular the enormously-valuable, large-sized silver *pataca* coin.

Rio Branco’s inhabitants lived as small farmers on land to which they had legal title.²⁴ Thus they differentiated themselves from *moradores*, the resident farmers who inhabited the region’s vast plantations. *Moradores* did not own land; they toiled for the plantation-owner and received small personal plots on a provisional basis (see Ch. 2.) And, since Abolition had finally come in 1888, Rio Branco’s farmers were also not slaves. Nor were they sharecroppers or farmers who rented land, like some of their more distant neighbors. To live at Rio Branco, then, meant something special. In a remote corner of the backlands, it meant to have one’s own place.

Farmers at Rio Branco practiced subsistence agriculture. They worked together to dam up several small reservoirs, which allowed for the cultivation of manioc, beans, corn, and in some areas rice. The predominant sustenance activity, however, was the rearing of goats and sheep for meat consumption; prosperous farmers might also have cattle.

Quotidian social relations in Rio Branco ran – and still run – along powerful kin lines: lines both literal, since marriage to cousins was encouraged, and fictive, since *compadrio* (godparenting) sealed the bonds between people. Households operated as independent homesteads anchored by a focal couple, each with its own production on its own land. Although households thus maintained economic separation from each other, they relied on *mutirão*, a rotating shared labor practice in which farmers pooled their efforts one day per week and spent that day collectively working on the farm of one or another neighbor from the village.

²⁴ This implies that state-based land ownership also existed, and indeed, people at Rio Branco tell stories about disputes and intrigues involving legal land titles in the region going back at least to the middle part of the 20th century, but I have no sense for when the village’s inhabitants began registering their ownership of the parcels with the municipal government. People today are quite attentive to this titling process, being careful to register even changes in ownership from one sibling to another.

After-work hours were shaped by the same distinction between the independent household and the village group. Some days, the members of a household would pray just with each other, exhausted, and fall asleep soon after dark. On other days, though, villagers enjoyed the sertanejo talent for hospitality. Adults sat by lamplight in their neighbors' kitchens, regaling each other with a genre of boastful and unreliable stories called *causos*. They might even assign someone to beat a drum, someone to tickle the triangle, and someone to play the accordion tirelessly while everyone else *kicked up dust* (*levantar poeira*) with feet that danced until sunrise.

The objects that circulated in Rio Branco bespoke the importance of independent sustenance. Around the mid-twentieth century, inhabitants largely grew their own food. They did not have access to cement or roof tiles; they built houses from adobe or *enximento* (a very mud-based wattle and daub) and made roofs from palm fronds (see Ch. 2). They produced their soap out of unscented tallow and ashes. They devoted a significant portion of their days to fetching water from open, stagnant holes that they dug in the ground (*tanques*) or, on donkey-back, they brought it from the distant river. In keeping with this task, they developed a tradition for crafting saddlebags (*buracas*) entirely out of raw leather, with no metal components at all; at least one person still makes the bags today.

But Rio Branco's inhabitants had money for a reason. Although distant from the city, they belonged to a single economy with it. They took their agricultural goods to fair in the market town, and they brought back metal hoes, pots for cooking, and photographs of themselves. Although most people seem not to have read, they recognized the importance of land titles, and they aligned even their kinship practices to urban standards, aspiring to get married or have their children baptized in a chapel with a priest.

Perhaps the closest connection with the city, however, came through the intermediation of the plantation-owners. In the early years of the twentieth century, an energetic man, o Velho Nato, began purchasing tracts of land in the region. He had no relation to Rio Branco, but he came to own a vast area abutting the village. The land, which was eventually split between his children and then again split by his grandchildren, became a chain of plantations focused on cattle.

On the edge of these plantations, with still other plantations beyond them, Rio Branco was a pocket of smallholders in a landscape dominated by magnates. And Rio Branco's farmers did not live independently from the magnates. Sometimes, people from Rio Branco would find employment on the great plantations. Even more pervasively, though, Rio Branco depended on the political power of the plantation-owners. Dona Eva recalled this power:

There was no such thing as a poor person's opinion, no way. An opinion was something for a rich person. [...] Oh, Duff, let me tell you something here. [...] One time, Dad made a fence here. Here was my dad's field, and here was my uncle's field. My dad put up his fence and ended up touching some of my uncle's field. So what happened? With the pastures all full of animals. The next day, early, when we got to the fields, my uncle had gone here, up to that fence of my father's, and torn it out. The part that touched his fence. He tore it out and threw it on the ground. [...] So what happened? Today, there are the courts to deal with these things, you see? [...] My dad went looking for a rich person. [...] Mario Nato [the owner of the adjacent plantation]. [...] Mario Nato left here, and he went to Conquista. He looked for one of his sons-in-law, and they arrived, they came there, where Dad was, with my uncle, the two of them together. And those two guys, the rich people, they went and settled that question. [...] The poor person here, in the old days, was below everyone.

Não tinha opinião de pobre não. Opinião era do rico. [...] Ô Duff, deixa eu te falar aqui uma coisa. [...] Pai fez uma cerca aqui uma época. Aqui era a roça do meu pai, aqui era a roça do meu tio. Meu pai veio com a cerca dele e pegou na roça do meu tio. O que é que aconteceu? As mangas todas cheias de criação. Quando foi no outro dia cedo, que nós chegou na roça, o meu tio tinha ido aqui, nessa cerca do meu pai, e arrancado. Isso que pegou na cerca dele. Ele arrancou e botou no chão. [...] Agora o que é que acontecia? Tem a Justiça hoje para acertar essas coisas, não vê? [...] Meu pai ia atrás de uma pessoa rica. [...] Mario Nato. [...] Mario Nato saía daqui, e ele ia em Conquista, buscava um desses genros dele, e aí vinha, chegava lá, onde estava Pai, mais meu tio, os dois juntos. E eles dois, os ricos, iam, acertavam essa questão [...] O pobre aqui antigamente era por baixo de que todo o mundo.

Plantation-owners had the capacity to render judgments, and this capacity was connected to their kinship networks and their familiarity with the nearby city—as evidenced, in this narrative, by Mario Nato’s ease at traveling to the city of Conquista and his impulse to search for his son-in-law there.²⁵

Around the same time as Dona Eva’s family conflict, the Nato family was making another judgment call. They, along with many of the surrounding owners, were turning their plantations towards coffee—a transformation that practically created Maracujá. Before midcentury, Maracujá had been just one piece of o Velho Nato’s plantation empire, a cattle outpost staffed by a few resident moradores. It turned into a separate property when o Velho Nato’s vast lands were broken up for inheritance. In the 1960s and 70s, Nato’s heir ordered the planting of a long swath of coffee trees. These required a sizeable migrant labor force during harvest season, and so, each year, Maracujá would swell in size, becoming the home of hundreds of workers.

²⁵ Dona Eva’s story also hints at a major transformation that rocked Rio Branco around the 1960s and 70s: the changing of the fences. During the earlier part of the 20th century, sheep and goats had roamed freely over the village lands, and no-one stopped to think who owned the plot where a sheep or goat was grazing. When farmers planted fields, they laboriously fenced in the crops, building barriers out of stakes of wood shoved into the ground so close together that not even “little livestock” (*criação miuda*) could get through.

Sometime after midcentury, however, certain farmers at Maracujá had a new idea. Manioc had become a much more remunerative product, they argued, and it made sense to turn more village land into fields. To enable the switch, they insisted that each farmer should henceforth fence in his or her livestock rather than fencing in the crops. Fields could then be planted without needing to erect extensive barriers.

This suggestion ignited a vast and long-lasting argument at Rio Branco, but the new idea largely prevailed. A miniature enclosure movement ensued. Fences blossomed all over the village. Animals could no longer wander freely. With grazing lands suddenly delimited, land ownership became a more salient constraint on daily activity.

The increased demand for manioc may have been related to widespread changes occurring throughout southwestern Bahia in those years. Plantation-owners had begun to switch from cattle to coffee production, and, at the same time, they faced a bevy of new labor laws. Both factors made the owners less friendly to the idea of a resident labor force. This new situation led moradores to move off the plantations where they had been living as retainers of the plantation-owners. As the moradores shook off their morador status, they came to reside in towns and work as day-laborers, for cash, on the plantations (see Ch. 2). Deprived of the subsistence plots that they had once cultivated on the plantation grounds, the ex-moradores had difficulty planting crops for their own sustenance, like manioc. This may explain why Rio Branco’s manioc production became a more important source of supply to the regional market. Thus, along with the ex-moradeores who now lived off cash, Rio Branco’s farmers were swept along in a general tide of monetization, of which the bitter enclosure argument would be one element.

While Maracujá grew, Rio Branco changed as well. A school was built and, starting in the 1980s, a teacher offered classes through fourth grade. A priest began to visit and say Mass every month. Adventurous young people from the village set out for spells of labor in São Paulo, a journey so uncertain that their families would set off fireworks to let the whole village know when they returned. The government put through a dirt road, although it remained incomplete because it lacked a bridge over a seasonal stream; the villagers negotiated, obtained government reimbursement for materials, and collectively built the bridge themselves during a series of Saturdays.

These changes would receive a prodigious impetus when, in the mid-1990s, the landless movement arrived. The MST's extraordinary history of land occupations in Brazil dates to 1984, the end of the dictatorship (Branford and Rocha 2002, Morissawa 2001), and landless activists began to mobilize southwestern Bahia in 1987. By the early 1990s, a local group of landless farmers had staged repeated occupations without success. Their efforts came to a head in 1994 at Mocambo, a plantation in the rainy zone more than a hundred kilometers away from Rio Branco. Exhausted and dispirited after repeated evictions, the farmers were living in a camp they had set up along the side of the highway that led to Mocambo. Repeated disputes had already erupted with the landlord. On October 29th, the landlord's gunmen began shooting into the camp. Eleven farmers were wounded. Maria Zilda and Manoel Bomfim were killed, and, in the ensuing melee, fought with farming tools, so was the brother of the landlord (Oliveira Soares and Locatel 2011).

The deaths shocked the region. Bahia had a reputation for peaceful land occupations, and, in fact, no further MST activists would be killed in southwestern Bahia until the assassination of

Fábio Santos, a brilliant speaker and Catholic organizer who was executed by a death squad on April 2nd, 2013.²⁶

After the deaths of Maria Zilda and Manoel Bomfim, the federal government swiftly expropriated Mocambo. The plantation was too small to accommodate all of the landless farmers in the camp, and so a group reorganized themselves for a further occupation. They had heard rumors about another promising plantation: Maracujá.

Maracujá made for an appealing target. Its size was enormous and its coffee trees in poor shape, increasing the likelihood that federal inspectors would certify that the plantation met the constitutional requirement that it be “unproductive” in order to be eligible for expropriation. The heir who owned it had taken up residence in the city and seemed inattentive. In 1996, the landless activists filled a giant truck, drove up to the plantation’s gate, and announced their occupation.

Their initial audience was the shocked family of moradores who maintained the owner’s herd of cattle. The activists took care to explain that they felt no animosity towards the moradores, and one leader had the gallantry to proclaim that the elderly mother morador would be under the MST’s protection. The friendliness worked: as the landless occupiers built their shack village out of sticks and black plastic sheeting, the moradores began cooperating with them. Ultimately, the moradores themselves would join the occupation.

The landless occupiers were a mixed group. Some came from the band that had assembled at Mocambo. They, often, were first-generation city-dwellers who were attracted to the movement because they had been raised on farms and hoped to return to agriculture—but this

²⁶ Fábio was a wonderful speaker and a determined leader, and he continued organizing in the face of death threats. These threats were ultimately fulfilled by gunmen who assassinated him while he was driving; they killed him in front of his wife and daughter. People at Maracujá knew Fábio well and he spent time in Maracujá. Most of his organizing, however, took place in the municipality of Iguai. Because Fábio’s story has received insufficient attention, and because of its importance, I am including some documents related to it in an appendix.

time without a boss. Others occupiers had been drawn into the Maracujá encampment through the careful preliminary organizing that MST activists carried out before the occupation. During a series of meetings, the activists reached out to frustrated day-laborers living in the area's agricultural towns, the very people who had been moved off of the plantations when coffee arrived some thirty years prior. MST activists also organized moradores currently living on plantations in the area. And so the group that occupied Maracujá, with their plastic huts and their red flags, included urban workers and moradores, rural day-laborers and idealistic wanderers.

The occupation dragged on for months. With little to eat, isolated far from the city, the occupiers could sometimes count only on the support of an Italian nun who trekked out to bring them supplies and encouragement. But their calculation had been largely correct. The heir had little will to fight, and he ultimately reached a settlement with the federal government, received his compensation for the fair value of the land, and handed over the plantation. Maracujá Land Settlement was born.

This dramatic, peaceful success helped to escalate what Rangel Loera (2010) has called "the spiral of encampments" Seeing Maracujá as an example, hundreds of other landless families flocked to the MST, and the movement began progressively occupying the neighboring plantations. Within a decade, all of the heirs to Velho Nato had ceded their land to Incra, the federal land reform agency. The plantation empire he built at the beginning of the 20th century had become an unbroken chain of MST villages. Nor were his descendants necessarily upset. Many years later, an MST teacher was making small talk with a man at a gym in Conquista. When the teacher mentioned that he taught at Maracujá, the man grew wistful and said, *I used to own all of that.* He was Velho Nato's heir. *At first we were upset,* the heir remembered. *But those were failed coffee plantations. And the government compensated us very well.*

At Rio Branco, the small farmers watched the occupations with suspicion. MST activists, however, knew how to make friends. The movement regularly held protests to demand that political leaders supply the new settlements with various supports. These supports included schools and artesian wells, electricity and bus lines, farm credits and community health workers. The MST did not forget to request the same benefits for their new neighbors at Rio Branco. A warm relationship soon developed and Rio Branco achieved government services it had never anticipated; in 2006, electricity finally arrived. But by then, the alliance had already taken on a more classic form: across the divide that separated the century-old village from the new landless occupations, couple after couple fell in love and got married.

Maracujá and Rio Branco in the present

By 2011, Rio Branco had become 35 neat adobe houses, each one near a field, spaced out along a net of thin dirt paths that ran on for several kilometers. 103 people lived there. The paths converged to a soccer field, meticulously scrubbed of all vegetation by the young people who gathered to play in the evenings. Seu Gaspar, who lived at one end of the soccer field, had extended his porch so that he could put out metal chairs and sell liquor to the spectators. His competition was his sister, Dona Eva, who built a one-room bar a few feet away. Behind Seu Gaspar stood the tin-roofed schoolhouse that doubled as a Catholic chapel, and in front of him was the Protestant church. In the absence of a priest, Diógono ran the Catholic celebration each Sunday. His father, Seu Cátulo, was the Protestant pastor. The two of them scheduled services that did not overlap with each other.

Maracujá looked more imposing: its 120 houses stood in four tight lines, making a sizeable rectangle at the high point on a gently curving plain. The houses were white with blue

shutters. All of them had been built by the government land reform agency, two years after the expropriation, to lodge the landless farmers, who were still sleeping in huts. But the dry earth in the village fields proved challenging, and so did a series of leadership disputes, and many farmers left. By 2011, 62 households lived in Maracujá, with 205 inhabitants. The empty houses stored people's beans or housed their visiting cousins (and anthropologists). Otherwise, Maracujá had the same features as Rio Branco: a giant soccer field, bars in people's houses, a school, and a Catholic and a Protestant church. At Maracujá, though, the Protestant building had been located at the very edge of town, so that its amplified late-night services would not bother those farmers who rose Monday before dawn.

Both Maracujá and Rio Branco were criss-crossed by extensive kin networks. The basic unit of residence and economy, however, was the household. At both villages, some households consisted of single adults; more were nuclear families, sometimes including a collateral relative or a third generation.

When they encountered people from outside their own households, sertanejos practiced what was perhaps their highest virtue: hospitality. Families strove to welcome each other, outdoing themselves with decorated cakes and coffee or tea made to the visitors' tastes. Even more extravagant was the gift of hospitality time. Any person showing up at a door, at any time of day, would cause the adults of the house to drop their activities – laundry in the suds or food on the fire – and sit down for a chat.

By the standards of the region, the two villages were considered difficult places to earn a living. Their semi-arid land yielded harvests that varied dramatically with the rainfall, and even in good years, the distance from the city made it hard to sell agricultural products. Nonetheless, nearly every household had access to at least one field, and nearly everyone planted crops or

raised livestock, at least for subsistence. Villagers planted manioc, beans, corn, squash, coffee, sugar cane, passion fruit, urucum dye, watermelons, and pineapples, and they raised cattle, chickens, pigs, guinea fowl, turkey, and ducks. During the coffee harvest season, villagers often traveled to the nearby plantations, where they could earn pay by the liter for the coffee berries they harvested off of the bristling trees.²⁷

Beyond these two basic sources of employment, villagers often had specialties that they exercised in addition to farming. A small number of sertanejos received coveted government positions that had been created by the expansion of the welfare state—positions like community health worker, teacher, school van driver, and school cook. Other villagers ran bars and grocery stores out of their houses, but this work involved the unavoidable aggravation of extending petty credit and the constant disruption of one's home life by customers, and few people sustained a store for more than a year. Some villagers cut hair; some filled tires, sewed clothes, tamed horses, or baked gorgeous manioc biscuits called “fliers” (voadores).

Villagers supplemented all of these jobs with income from remittances and from two key government programs: retirement pensions and Bolsa Família (see Ch. 3). The pensions, in particular, gave some farmers enough financial stability to hire their neighbors as occasional day-laborers for their fields. These day-wages, in turn, provided an important boost to the incomes of younger, poorer residents.

Counting all sources together, incomes at the villages were far below the national average. Household per-capita income tended to cluster between ½ and 4 times the World Bank-endorsed poverty standard of \$2 US per day (see graphs in Ch. 1.) The distribution in each village included a few wealthier households—although from a quick visit to the villages, it

²⁷ During the research period, plantation owners were beginning to experiment with mechanical coffee harvesting machines, which posed a serious threat to the livelihood of workers throughout the region.

would be hard to tell whom. Sertanejos took to heart the often-repeated maxim *Don't think that you're better than the others*, and even the most prosperous tended to live in conditions similar to their neighbors.

The agricultural calendar in the villages turned on a great and a small axis: the heavy *rains of the waters* (chuvas das águas) in September or October and the lighter *rains of the fogs* (chuvas das neblinas) in March, both high seasons for planting. The periods without rain were marked by festivals, of which the two greatest were Christmas and the June Festivals. The latter served as something like an opposing pole to Carnival – rural rather than urban, cold weather rather than hot, based in the home rather than the street. During the June Festivals, which span the feasts of St. John the Baptist, St. Anthony, and St. Peter, urban family members flooded in from throughout the county, sleeping on couches and floors. The feasts called for enormous bonfires, peasant garb, dances all night long, and full days devoted to hospitality.

Both Maracujá and Rio Branco enjoyed relatively autonomous self-government. At Maracujá, the MST had set up an elaborate series of regular community meetings, run by village officers chosen on a two-year cycle. The meetings tended to elicit verbal conflicts, and they addressed major issues, including, above all, the entrance into the community of new landless people who had declared interest in farming a field there. Rio Branco had much less turnover and much more peaceful government. Diógono, the village's community health agent, would occasionally convene meetings in the tin-roofed school to discuss the shared water pump or other question of common interest. More commonly, though, problems could be managed through a series of visits and chats between all of the people involved.

One of the key skills, in both villages, was leaving. Working-age adults remained alert to labor opportunities in the cities or on large plantations, and often, they created migratory chains:

one worker would find a successful job in a new city, then bring a friend, and then another, until the village had established an outpost in an urban neighborhood somewhere. Teenagers usually longed to travel to these places. Going to labor, however, required a significant investment. It took money, knowledge, and connections to buy a bus ticket, pay rent, purchase food, and find a job. Once the outlay had been made, some villagers would establish permanent residence in the city, adding themselves to Brazil's booming urban working class. Others, though, would come back.

Provisional look at a theory of value

“Real value comes from madness”

-Whitney McCauley

This dissertation uses the word *value* in a particular sense, a sense that is pointedly different from its broader meanings, such as “importance” and “worth.” This difference has a reason behind it. It aims to question and denaturalize the association between economic forms endemic to capital, on the one hand, and the general human capacity to evaluate, on the other. These two are not necessarily fated to be the same. Value, in the sense I use the term, is an economic form—and not at all the value that Alexandra considered when she decided that there was “nothing more valuable” than her family. In this section I offer a somewhat more detailed look, grounded in scholarly literature, at the approach to value I outlined above. To carry out the project of denaturalization, I attend to scaling (Carr and Lempert 2016), and I attempt to trace the notion of value to its particular origins in a moment of European social theory.

The luminous dream of a value theory comes down, still today, through the line of the classical economists. Smith, Ricardo, and Marx all sensed – dreamed, perhaps – that they were living through an almost unspeakable change in the world of ordinary objects and mundane routines. To understand this change, they hoped to give an account of a single dynamic. They did not imagine this dynamic as the only source of motion in the system, but rather as a dominant tendency, a universalizing pressure. The tool that allowed them to give such an account was value.

Smith, Ricardo, and Marx differed in their definitions of this tool. According to Smith, a given commodity's value could be represented as the amount of labor that this commodity allowed the owner to purchase (or “command”) on the labor market. Smith also gave a second definition, which he presented as roughly equivalent to the first: a commodity's value was equal to the amount of subsistence grain – “corn” – that it could be exchanged for in the marketplace (Smith 1786 [1776]: Book I, Chs. 5-6). Thus Smith laid foundations for both a labor theory of value and a market-basket theory of value.

Ricardo largely agreed with Smith's first definition, although he inverted the formulation. For Ricardo, a commodity's value was the amount of labor-time embedded in it—the number of human hours that had been required to produce it (Ricardo 1908 [1817]: Ch. 1). Marx, very taken with Ricardo's idea, added a modification: what the analyst had to consider was not labor-time but *socially necessary* labor-time. The value of a bolt of cloth was not equal to the number of hours actually spent making that particular bolt, but rather the number of socially-necessary hours, that is, the number of hours generally regarded necessary for producing that kind of bolt, given the current techniques and conditions of production.²⁸ If a novice worker produced a bolt

²⁸ What is “general” about the general regard? How does a standard become general, and what processes might resist the standardization? These empirical questions underpin much of the investigation in Chapters 5 and 6.

slowly, that specific bolt did not thereby gain more value, and if a particularly alert firm invented a better way to produce cloth, their bolts were not rendered immediately less valuable (Marx 1976 [1867]: Ch. 1; my interpretation is influenced by Harvey 2006 [1982]).

Marx's amendment, although modest, managed to transform the meaning of value theory itself, adding a semiotic dimension. For the kind of labor in question was now something strange—not merely human exertion, but rather the representation of human exertion as a general social possibility under given conditions. Each hour of labor had acquired a “dual character.” It was a period of concrete activity—the moment in which a particular cow was milked or a particular hotel room cleaned. But that same labor hour was also imaginable as one exchangeable, interchangeable unit inside the total supply of available social labor time, one piece like every other piece, measurable in terms of a necessary average. It had become abstract labor. Such an abstraction was unthinkable inside systems of social relation where time was considered irreducible, non-fungible, or not subject to exchange. For religious intellectuals in the European middle ages (to take only one example), time belonged to God and could not, fundamentally, be sold as a source of profit (Le Goff 1960). The abstraction of labor-time thus appeared as a historical option specifically in the context of industrial production and commodity exchange. And indeed, labor's dual character found its parallel in the duality of the commodity—the object that was the result of someone's specific work and yet, at the same time, an indistinguishable drop in an ocean of similar saleable objects, destined for the consumption of people who would necessarily approach them as the abstract, mundane talismans of a productive power that had been rendered invisible. Elson explains the abstraction as follows:

Value is not the *same* as a quantity of socially necessary labor time: it is an objectification or materialization of a certain aspect of that labor time, its aspect of being simply an expenditure of human labour power in general, i.e. abstract labor. This is a rather peculiar kind of objectification. As Marx says, “Not an atom of matter enters into

the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects” (1979: 132; Marx quote from *Capital*, vol 1 (1976[1857]): 138).

Value’s objectivity was not the objectivity of matter; it was the objectivity of a collective representation.

Because of these claims, it has become traditional among Marxists to underline the profound gap between Ricardo and Marx. And yet there is much that unites these thinkers. Value, for all of the classical economists, was *social*. Value did not sum up states of private desire. It aggregated the general and generalizing properties of a whole social system: technologies and labor relations, market arrangements and worker recalcitrance, colonial policies and class structures. Value was the sign that, given all of these factors, captured economic life at a specific time and place; it was the representation of labor under particular historical conditions.²⁹ Hence the affinity between classical economics and semiotics, an affinity explored in Chapter 4.

The classical tradition, however, found itself faced with a decisive break at the end of the 19th century, when Jevons, Menger, and Marshall pioneered the marginalist revolution that would come to lie at the heart of neoclassical economics. In the work of these neoclassicals and their descendants, value increasingly dropped out of view, its place taken by utility. “Utility,” here, referred to a subject’s personal, internal enjoyment; it was, the marginalists admitted, unmeasurable in any direct sense, but its presence and magnitude were revealed by the subject’s

²⁹ The phrase “representation of labor” comes from Elson’s (1979) title. Note that Postone raises strong objections to an approach in which capitalism is held to favor “individual” over “social” prerogatives. According to Postone, the very dichotomy between individual and social is characteristic of capital. “Far from treating the opposition of the social and the private as one between what is potentially noncapitalist and what is specific to capitalist society, [Marx] treats the opposition itself, and both of its terms, as peculiarly characteristic of labor in capitalism and of capitalist society itself.” (1993: 47)

In arguing that the classical economists understood value as a pre-eminently social form, I am not attempting a blunt endorsement of the social as the sole proper arena for analysis and action. Instead, I want to point out that all of the classical economists – not Marx alone – used the value concept to assess the social side of the characteristic dichotomy that Postone identifies.

economic decisions. And just as utility was unmeasurable, its origins proved largely unknowable. Investigation was not directed to the causes of utility, but rather to the strategies of utility-maximizing actors. The replacement of value with utility thus signaled a shift towards methodological individualism, transhistorical principles, and thinking at the margins rather than thinking in terms of averages—that is to say, analyzing particular decisions rather than analyzing general social norms.

From Mauss and Malinowski onwards, twentieth-century anthropologists had a response: they avidly defended the dream of a value theory, so much so that “value” became a keyword for anthropology just as economics was learning how to forget it.³⁰ Anthropologists took the value concept as a spur. It impelled them to interrogate the cultural and historical details of each economy; it pushed them to understand the irreducibly collective logic that makes exchange and production possible. In their eagerness to secure the kernel of sociality at the core of value theory, twentieth-century anthropologists devised more and more nuanced portraits of value as a total organizing principle that could explain, for example, conceptions of selfhood, cosmological power, marriage exchange, and the ritual dynamic of festivals.

For nearly a century, these portraits have provided a tremendously important critique of utilitarianism as social theory, particularly in the English-speaking world. My aim is to contribute to the critique by emphasizing the specificity that the classical economists bequeathed: an analysis of value not as a fundamental human predicament, but as a social form that emerges under the conditions that we have come to know as “capital.” To highlight this specificity, I aim

³⁰ Anthropology has of course had its proponents of a utility approach, starting, in the early twentieth century, with Firth and Herskovitz. It is notable, however, that even these early Formalists (Hart and Hann 2006) felt an obligation to translate neoclassical theory so that it applied to the local conditions of one or another field site. By acknowledging that utility was not immediately recognizable in these contexts but had to be identified, these scholars made a gesture towards the sort of historical and cultural specificity associated with a value theory.

to return, quite directly, to the matters of prices and wages that so fascinated the classical economists.

The dissertation's overall approach to value receives detailed attention in Chapter 4, but an introductory overview is warranted here. My position, although idiosyncratic, is molded by Elson (1979), the Comaroffs (2000), and Postone (1993). In this approach, value theory fits into a much larger project, a project that rests on the supposition that social life inside modernity can be modeled as if there exists a central essence that pushes to convert more and more of human existence into abstract labor. This central essence is capital. Labor, in turn, is a category that emerges and becomes abstract inside history (Comaroff and Comaroff 1987); it is the practice in which a person uses homogeneous time to produce homogeneous objects. Labor allows so many hours of Alexandra's life to be converted into so many Brazil nuts sold.

To be homogeneous, time and objects must be rendered homogeneous through shared human action – that is, through culture. This is one reason why anthropology has such a vital role to play in the critique of value. Anthropologists sniff out the edges of the categories that seem boundless and paw at the cloak of inevitability that has been thrown over them; ethnography, when done well, does not replace these categories with a void but rather with a story about their origins. Thus anthropology can carry out a useful and historical displacement of a homogeneity that might otherwise seem total.

But anthropology, too, cannot live without its categories, and so, in this dissertation, the epochal cycle of capital and labor is rotated by the small gear of value. Value is, in Marx's terms, "the dominant subject of this process" (Marx 1976 [1867]: 255). The dynamics of value – its accumulation and dispersal – are believed to provide the energy that moves the system forward.

In my reading, “value” does not predict prices or crises. Instead, I seek value as it is deployed in the assumptions with which people under capital must wrestle—the assumptions they can move with or against, but cannot ignore. According to this point of view, Marx’s *Capital* features a critique of value that functions on two levels. A first level criticizes the uneven distribution of value and labor; a second level criticizes the categories “value” and “labor” themselves. The first level could be referred to as the *distributional critique* and the second level as the *categorical critique*.

The first level asks readers to imagine the economic world and to make not money, but rather labor-time, the first focus of their attention. It is like taking an x-ray in which labor-time shines most brightly.³¹

Certain relations then become clear. Unequal exchange, not exchange of equivalents, predominates: most workers are donating work to those who work less. They are giving a day of labor-power and receiving in return a basket of commodities that took less than a day of labor-power to produce. The surplus from this exchange gets directed towards a center that uses its resources constantly to revolutionize the means of production. Through these improvements, the center – transiently incarnated by one or another corporate headquarters – increases the hours of human life that people give away to this very same center, generating a recursive cycle.³²

³¹ Money does not disappear in this x-ray; far from it. However, money does play a role different from its function in other economic analyses. It does not exist as a veil or a pure measure that lubricates a pre-ordained network of exchanges. Instead, money emerges historically and, in its emergence, it changes the forms of social activity that are conceivable.

³² In asking how these increases occur, one begins to track the accumulation of surplus value. Marx holds that such increases can come about because current workers are rendered more efficient and thus the effort needed to produce for their subsistence decreases, augmenting the time available for surplus labor (relative surplus value.) Alternatively, an increase may occur because the rate of remuneration is diminished (absolute surplus value), because workers devote more hours to work (again, absolute surplus value), or because new workers are recruited into the system (primitive accumulation as a method for generating absolute surplus value) (1976 [1867]: Ch. 16).

The center only ever takes shape in provisional form. A firm may have a central office to co-ordinate production, but the central office in turn must respond to the firm's board, which is responsible to the shareholders, each of them held accountable by the market. What prevails, in other words, is a dynamic of centering. Everyone in the system orients towards one or another presumed center, but no center can be found: rather than standing at a center, everyone points to a center. Through this centering, workers are deprived, whether slowly or suddenly, of the means of producing their own subsistence outside of capital; they become incapable of enacting different relations of production.

This first-level, "distributional" critique points towards a particular political conclusion. Workers have been unjustly deprived of the fruit of their labors, of the value that they themselves create.

Marx's argument also includes, however, the second-level critique of value. This second, "categorical" level begins with an observation: the first level relies on the categories of value and abstract labor-time, categories that have their origins in the process of capital itself. These categories emerge inside capitalist history, and they emerge alongside a dominant organizing category, abstract labor. Each person's creative relation to the social nexus became thinkable predominantly in the terms of abstract labor (Elson 1979: 148).

Once value is seen in the light of this second-level critique, it becomes clear that exploitation does not unfold exclusively or even primarily in the sphere of exchange; it is not simply a matter of buying or selling labor-power for an unfair price. Exploitation is already made possible inside the concepts and relations on which the productive process depends. Abstract labor, as the dominant social mediator, presupposes the power of an abstracting center, a point of visibility and control through which labor is assembled into a meaningful whole. Even if this

center is only ever presupposed – even if it never exists fully, except as a prophecy or nightmare – it is already present in the category of abstract labor itself. When one acts as if one’s labor were abstract, one already prepares for the distancing, the standardization, and the expropriation of that labor.³³

The irony is that the center does not in fact exist. Capital itself serves as the center, and capital is a diffuse social essence, definable precisely by its intangibility. Abstract labor becomes the defining form of social labor by way of a notoriously indirect apparatus, *the market*, which determines the socially-necessary allocation of labor time to the production of each commodity. The market, in turn, constantly obscures the manifestation of value relations, allowing its participants to see these relations only in their smudged reflections, prices in the place of values and profits in the place of surplus labor.

The second-level, “categorical” critique argues that this smudging does not occur by accident. To note that prices deviate from values is not to identify a technical shortcoming in Marxist theory; it is to diagnose a fundamental aspect of the capitalist relation. Market actors cannot directly know the value of any commodity precisely *because* no market actor is the central coordinator and hence no-one can stand at the center of production and exchange. If price remains an imprecise measure, this imprecision manifests the subjects’ shared non-control, the fact that value is outside of all of them. They all occupy the position of ignorance. Thus the second-level critique includes an explanation for why the dynamics described in the first level

³³ The presupposed center lies at the heart of Thomas Gray’s proposal for labor-time credits, a proposal made famous by Marx’s response (see Marx 1973 [1858], Notebooks I and II, “Attempts to overcome the contradictions by the issue of time chits.”) For Gray, the center would be a national bank that would certify the number of hours invested in each commodity and issue a corresponding number of credits to the producer. But, Marx pointed out, for such a bank to exist, it would have to embark on much more than a project to issue currency. It would need to calculate and stipulate the amount of labor socially necessary for the production of every commodity circulating in the economy. In other words, it would become the coordinator for every productive act, the “papacy of production” (Marx 1973 [1858]: 156.) If democratic, the bank would amount to nothing less than the full realization of the socialist polity; if totalitarian, the complete reign of abstract labor over human work.

cannot be detected, except through their obscure traces. The first level is disguised by the mystification proper to capital, by capital's refusal to recognize itself. Value appears, in Marx's terms, as the "social hieroglyphic" (1976 [1867]: 167).

The political imperative of the first-level, "distributional" critique, understood from this perspective, comes to seem more and more like a demand for capital to reveal itself fully. In asking for every labor hour to be properly accounted and remunerated, agitators are pushing capital to fulfill its own promises, to leave behind any vacillations, and to make everyone equal by capital's own standard of equality. The agitators aim to render the categories of capital truly universal. And so the imperative to "give workers the fruits of their labors" is, ultimately, a proposal to accept and amplify the dominance of value over human existence.³⁴

The second, "categorical" level, then, points to the conclusion that labor and value are, themselves, forms generated by capital. On this argument, labor, so often capital's antagonist, comes into being as capital's manifestation inside human life— and value as its reflection. Marxism thus acquires a historical mission not only to valorize labor, but also to abolish abstract labor and value.

Overview of the text

The dissertation is written in three sections. It begins by considering *labor and time*, moves to an engagement with *commodities and value*, and concludes with an interpretation of *ownership*, which, here, refers to objects in their relationship to labor.

³⁴ "A forcing-up of wages [...] would therefore be nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not conquer either for the worker or for labor their human status and dignity. Indeed, even the equality of wages demanded by Proudhon only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labor into the relationship of all men to labor. Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist." (Marx 1988 [1844]: 81-2, Manuscript 1, "Estranged Labor," XXV.)

In the first section, Chapter 1 assesses the different accounting habits of a rural farmer and an urban fruit vendor. It concludes that neither money nor urbanity creates the relevant difference between the work done by the two men; timekeeping does. Chapter 1 concludes with some musing on social class and homogeneity, and the topic is raised again by Chapter 2, which strives to present a synoptic account of the different modes of time accounting that have become possible at different moments in the history of the villages. Chapter 3 turns towards the non-laboring toil that sertanejos carry out as they juggle, transform, and accumulate the most basic constituent objects in a sertanejo household – beans, stoves, and sofas, for example. The chapter evaluates the effects that Bolsa Família has had on women’s and men’s ability to own these objects, and it reflects on the difference between women’s and men’s efforts to use the income from Bolsa Família to generate permanence.

The second section begins by shifting the emphasis to the process by which sertanejos create and recreate value as a category inside social life—in particular, inside their spoken interactions. Chapter 4 examines verbal negotiations over prices in the sertão. It suggests a possible distinction between three language techniques for comparing objects to each other: presential calibration, nomic calibration, and projective calibration. These techniques make a reappearance in Chapter 5, which introduces counterscaling, a term I coin in order to understand the methods that sertanejos use to weigh their cows and evaluate their manioc. “Counterscaling” refers to the creation of scales that do not commensurate with the urban market. Sertanejos can achieve this non-commensuration by refusing to account, by building scales that do not match up with market scales, by accounting imprecisely, or by earmarking separate monies for separate purposes.

Chapter 6 returns once more to the three language techniques from Chapter 4. It considers negotiations over wages, and, by detailing the words through which sertanejos conduct nomic calibration inside these negotiations, it proposes a possible understanding of value. Value, on this view, always comes in from the outside. People speak in terms of value when they compare their own familiar objects to an external, unchanging standard, a standard they presuppose. With this approach to value, Chapter 6 attempts to model a process of abstraction, and thus it brings into focus the abstraction that generates abstract labor.

At the beginning of the third section, Chapter 7 switches to the new consideration of objects, and objects of a very particular type: the animals that children own. By investigating these objects in the light of the anthropological literature on property, Chapter 7 proposes an approach that understands ownership as the agency of making others remember oneself inside discourse. Chapter 8 continues the exploration of ownership, adding in a focus on the ownership of houses. It floats the notion of the premio – an object that originates as a commodity, but that promises an exit from the commodity world. The solid sertanejo house, earned over years of labor and then offering rest from labor, serves as a key example of the premio. The premio marks out labor's limits, and thus it helps to construct a specific relation to labor, or, in other words, a social class.

Section 1

Labor and Time

Chapter 1

How Work Counts:

Time, Self-Labor, and Wagelessness in the Sertão

There are clearly limits to the extent to which the circulation of money departs from the production of commodities; or, in other words, to the extent to which price departs from the magnitude of value. [...] These limits must take the form of some pressure on commodity producers to represent labour-time expended in production in money terms, to account in money terms for every moment

Elson 1979: 170

Some people count their work time and some people have it counted for them. And then, perhaps, there are those whose time is never counted at all.

Peasants toil to the ticking of an unwatched clock, their time never accounted as value, their minutes never measured in money. Or at least that has been the conclusion of several generations of anthropological research on peasantries. It is time to review this literature and challenge it. Because peasants are not only peasants. Like subcontractors and freelancers, like internet stars and home-based garment workers, they are now “self-employed.”

Here is the classic view, as articulated by Mayer and Glave: “It is well known that peasants and artisans rarely include the value of their own labor in their cost calculations and that they tend to sell their products below cost” (2002: 217).¹ Their view echoes Chayanov’s classic formulation:

In a peasant economy [...] labor expended can neither be expressed in, nor measured by, rubles of paid wages, but only in the labor effort of the peasant family itself. These efforts cannot be subtracted from, or added to, money units; they can merely be confronted with rubles (Chayanov 1931, quoted in Wolf 1966: 14-5).

Sigaud agrees:

The peasant and the worker her- or himself, on her or his cleared land, do not account for production by subtracting the expenses in investment, the wear on the means of production, the necessary work time, etc... but represent it as gross profit (1976: 324)

O camponês e o próprio trabalhador em seu roçado não contabilizam a produção subtraindo os gastos em investimento, o desgaste dos meios de produção, o tempo de trabalho necessário, etc..., mas o representam como lucro bruto (1976: 324)

¹ Mayer and Glave argue that “the ‘real’ value of a family’s labor is [...] the most troubling issue in peasant economics” (2002: 236). “Peasants,” they suggest, “evaluate profits or losses of cash crops in terms of a simple cash-out and cash-in flow, ignoring household inputs and family labor. This kind of calculus carries an implicit subsidy (by not counting family labor and household resources) that enables market participation but provides little or no long-run benefit” (206). Because these farmers do not stop to consider the unremunerated hours of work that they themselves have plowed into their products, they are, in some senses, self-exploiting. They agree to participate in a market where they effectively earn far below the minimum wage. Their uncounted work subsidizes the world’s cheap food.

And Bourdieu makes the same claim about Algeria: “In a world in which time is so plentiful and goods are so scarce, [the peasant’s] best and indeed only course is to spend his time without counting it, to squander the one thing which exists in abundance” (1977: 176). Bourdieu’s observation aligns with some well-established dichotomies. Peasants live in the *gemeinschaft* time of the countryside, enmeshed in kinship, relatively insulated from money. When they move to the city they lose control of the means of production and they dive into a world of strangers, a world governed by that iron relation between time and money that is called “the wage.” In cities, workers account all labor according to a single standard of profit. Peasants do not: they measure profit by accounting cash in and cash out. In other words, when they plant a crop, they measure how much cash they had to spend on seed and fertilizer, and then they measure how much cash they earned by selling the crop; the difference between these two amounts is their profit. They never count the value of their labor. Bourdieu cites a Kabyle proverb: “If the peasant counted, he would not sow” (1977: 176).

But this chapter argues the opposite. On the small plots at Maracujá and Rio Branco, under some circumstances, peasant farmers indeed count each of their own hours and even assign it a price. It is as if they were going to pay themselves a phantom wage for their own work in their own fields, using money they do not actually have. Thus they trace out the perilous parallel that turns peasants into self-employees, that turns ownership into labor. And what makes labor, I claim, is not the city, not money, not the boss. What makes labor is the way people count their time.

Or, better, the way people count their time and the way they weigh their things. Already (in the introduction), I have argued that labor, in its abstract mode, can be thought of as the conjunction of homogeneous time and homogeneous objects. It is the making of standard things

inside a standard period of time. Money facilitates the standard counting of time and objects. And the pre-eminent location where people learn this habit of counting – this practice of jointly scaling money, time, and objects – is a market.

Semiproletarians in the sertão have left behind the trappings of the employment relation, but they find themselves unavoidably close to a market. In this way they resemble the independent contractors, the long-term unemployed people, and the many other unwaged groups who have become protagonists of the contemporary global economy (Dubbeld 2013, Denning 2010, Purser 2006, Purser 2012, Dickinson 2014, Rosen 2011, O’Neill 2014, Woodroffe 2014, Wacquant 2014). Through a careful look at labor, these groups come to seem like something more than subproletarian anomalies. The look at labor leads to a reckoning with their relation to homogeneity, that is to say, their class.

This chapter will argue that social class can be understood as a form of adjustment to homogeneous time. Here, I follow the many theorists who have located homogeneous time – standard, substantial, self-identical, sequential time – at the very heart of modernity. No laboring group can avoid this time, but, I contend, no-one can bear it, either. Hence any given class position becomes a particular compromise with homogenous time, a compromise in which the group embraces some elements of homogeneity and rejects others. Such an approach focuses on the relationship between people and time – rather than, directly, workers and bosses. It then becomes possible to see self-employment² as a class relationship, a relationship worked out through a temporal idiom.

The subsequent chapter will listen closely to people’s stories about labors current and remembered, and it will try to trace the arc of class change over hundreds of years in the sertão.

² Or, for that matter, unemployment (Dubbeld 2013), although that is not explored here.

The history runs from slavery to plantation sharecropping, through the upheavals of midcentury and the advent of day labor, and onwards to the twinned positions of the city worker and the countryside peasant. Each comes with its particular mode for accounting time: the work hour, the work day, the annual harvest cycle, the timed minute. Every form of time tracking corresponds to a different class situation. Indeed, class can be reconceived—no longer only as a structured distribution of wealth, but also as a mode of time-making; not just as a matter of money, but also as a matter of time.

Peasants, accountants of the day

Rodrigo farms at Maracujá. He lives in the cool of a whitewashed house, near his children's chatter, only a few steps from his manioc field. He has come back, to all of this, after something terrible. He remembers:

I suffered just like a traveling merchant's suitcase. You know how a merchant's suitcase suffers.³

Eu sofri que nem mala de mascate. Voce sabe como mala de mascate sofre. (calfocfam1p47, 9/9/12)

For Rodrigo, these have been hard-traveling years. Some time ago, before the traveling started, Rodrigo had his fields full of coffee and his pasture home to enormous cows, the best cows in the whole village. And someone, it seems, envied him. Someone, Rodrigo says, put a filthy thing in his sugarcane liquor. It made him drink and drink more, thirstily, then desperately.

When Rodrigo drank, it was as if he forgot how to count. He agreed to toil in other farmers' fields for too little money, and then he spent the money before he even started the job. He worked for people who lied and never paid him. He begged on the streets. He sold everything

³ The suitcase here is the container carried by mascates, merchants who wander from village to village over sometimes-impassable roads; as a container, it faces bumps and blows on its journey.

he had below its cost, unaccountably, letting it all flow out of his family's hands like a stream of meaningless gifts.

Lara, his wife, remembers his terrible deals:

People would call for him. "Come on, I'll trade you this cow for that other cow," stuff like that. And I'd be up here, not seeing any of it, not knowing. And he'd be over there, with that tail stinging him, and he would make the trade [...] And with all of that coming and going, and him drinking, he started finishing things off. When he finished off the few cows he had, then he began to finish off whatever was in the house. [...] People would say, "Hey, will you sell me that?" They would pass by the place. He wasn't even paying attention.

Um pessoal chamando assim, "Embora trocar tal vaca de tal vaca," assim, assim. E eu daqui sem ver, sem saber. E, e lá, o rabo picando ele, e ele trocava [...] E nesse vai e vir, e ele bebeu, e começou acabando. Quando acabou as vaquinhas que tinha, aí agora começou a acabar o que tinha dentro de casa. [...] Pessoal, "Ah, você me vende isso?" Passava para lá. Não estava nem ligando. (c031 entrevista 13, 9-9-12.)

Rodrigo got a bad reputation and became the talk of the village. He says,

I didn't have any value any more in the mouth of anyone here.

Não tinha valor mais na boca de ninguém aqui. (c031 entrevista 13, 9-9-12.)

Rodrigo's relatives finally reckoned that this could not go on. They scraped together their money. They sent him to a healer. She charged the equivalent of two months' wages, and she cured him.

Now Rodrigo needed to rebuild. He exiled himself to a distant farming village where he worked as a laborer. He harvested 56 bags of beans—he remembers exactly. Taking the proceeds, he headed to the state of Espírito Santo.

There Rodrigo found himself alone, in the giant plantations that stretch along the rocky coast, coffee bushes heavier with green berries than anyone in the village could ever dream. For months he picked the berries and earned a standard piece-rate. Then, finally, with a new chainsaw and enough money to buy a television, he came home.

Back at home, Rodrigo loved to take me to his field and show me how he was recuperating it. And it was in the field that I heard him count the money behind his time. Rodrigo was lamenting that he had spent \$R200 to hire a tractor-driver to clear the brush. It was too much. He could have done the work himself by hand and it would have taken a week. Rodrigo noted,

A week is 125.

Uma semana é 125.

What did Rodrigo mean? In this compact phrase, he was presupposing that I knew the standard rate for day-labor in the village at the time: \$R25 per day. With a five-day week, that made 5 times 25, or \$R125.

Now this would have been Rodrigo's own week of work cleaning the brush on his own field. And Rodrigo said it would have been a better deal: his own week was worth \$R125, against \$R200 for the tractor. Even though Rodrigo would not have actually paid himself the \$R125, he was using the 125 to think with. In other words, Rodrigo was accounting for his own time working for himself.

I had heard this accounting before. During interviews, I asked farmers to tell me about their farming expenses. And I got the same answer over and over. Alongside the money spent on fence nails and cattle vaccines, the farmers would list, as an expense, their own time.

Ademir, for example, said:

The expenses are just for clearing the land. Which is—well, I think not, because we're the ones who do the clearing ourselves. But that counts, right? Because the person spends the day [...] The time.

O gasto é só para limpar. Que é -- Eu acho que não, que é nós mesmos que limpa. Só que conta, né, que, eh, a pessoa gasta o dia [...] O tempo. [Ademir, calint1p55]

Zima described a fence that she and her family had fixed:

Zima: We just fixed the fence.

Duff: D—do you know more or less how much it cost?

Z: It was just a repair. It was just two days of work, by two people. Let me see. Forty, on the other day another forty. That makes eighty. On top of that were the two days of Renan [her husband]. Because that counts, because it's two days of the person's work, even though he doesn't receive any money. But two days worked, you know?

Zima: Só consertou a cerca.

Duff: S, sabe mais ou menos quanto custou?

Z: Foi só consertada. Foi só dois dias de trabalho, de duas pessoas. Deixa eu ver. Quarenta, no outro dia mais quarenta. Dá oitenta. Aí veio os dois dias de Renan. Porque conta, porque é dois dias de trabalho da pessoa, por mais que não recebe. Mas dois dias trabalhados, né?

[interview w c158, 2-6-12]

Other farmers went even farther than Zima: they assigned a monetary value to their time spent. Salomão answered my question about expenses by saying,

The expense is mine myself

O gasto é meu mesmo. [calint1p18]

In the next month, he explained, he planned to spend \$R150 *of his own labor* because he wanted to clear a part of his field.

Bruno was even more insistent.

We spend time. The investment of ourselves.

Gasta tempo. O investimento da gente.
[calint1p28]

Bruno estimated his expenses at \$R250 for the year 2011.

Just my work.

Só meu trabalho.

That money corresponded to the time *he* had spent clearing land, setting fence posts, and burning brush to make new fields.⁴

⁴ Here are other examples. Each one is a separate answer given, on a separate occasion, by a farmer when I asked about agricultural expenses.

What Bruno, Zima, Salomão, and Ademir alluded to is the universal wage. Every day has the same cash value, the standard rate of \$R25 a day, no matter who works it, even if it one works it for oneself. The farmers were speaking in a logic was exactly the opposite of the framework outlined by Mayer, Bourdieu, and so many other scholars since Chayanov.

And indeed, the farmers' logic reflected the local realities of work. Almost everyone at Maracujá and Rio Branco had access to land, and so a farmer might toil as a day-laborer on someone else's plot and then, at a later point, hire someone else to toil on hers. Any given farmer could thus imagine herself as either a laborer or an owner. When she accounted for her own time, a farmer was doing both: she was thinking as simultaneously the boss and employee of herself.

It is important to note, however, that the sertanejos' universal wage applied to some acts – and not others. What the wage could account for was projects. Farmers used day-wages to

Sydney: Me myself. [...] Our own thing, you've got to take that into account.

Sydney: Eu mesmo [...] O da gente, tem que botar em conta. [Sydney, calint1p37]

Tadeu: What did I invest in the field? Just my work.

Tadeu: Investir na roça? Só meu trabalho. [calint1p114]

Amadeu: I had expenses, sure. Because if I were to assign a value to that fence I made there, that I built on, on, on the side of the other guy, all of it, that's not very cheap, no way. It'd be a high value. Because—it was my dad who helped me, but if I were to pay to do it—[...] it would have been really, really expensive. Quite expensive.

Amadeu: Eu tive gastos, sim. Porque se eu fosse valorar a cerca que eu fiz, essa do, do, do lote do rapaz que eu cerquei ali tudo, não é muito barato não. É um valor alto. Porque—foi meu pai que me ajudou, mas se eu fosse pagar para fazer—[...] —tinha sido bem, bem caro. Bem caro mesmo. [Hernandes/ Amadeu, calint1p221]

Romario: It was my labor, which I don't put down.

Romario: Foi minha mão de obra, que não boto. (caldint5p113)

Daniel: [Reflecting on his manioc.] [F]or it to be good, we have to remove the brush again. So everything's an expense. What are we going to spend on that? Maybe fifteen days, twenty days. We work—our whole lives in those plots of ours. [In response to a question from me, he specifies that he will probably work those fifteen to twenty days himself, although he sometimes hires a worker.]

Daniel: [P]ara ela ficar boa, nós tem que limpar ela de novo. Então tudo é gasto. Nós vai gastar lá o que? Uns quinze dias, vinte dias. Nós trabalha—por vida nesses lotes nossos. (int w/ c151)

Indeed, among the farmers at Maracujá and Rio Branco, this logic was so widespread that the term *gastos* (“expenses”), when applied to agriculture, seemed to default to labor expenses—either one's own labor or the labor of hired hands.

measure discrete activities like building a fence or clearing a field, activities that might show up in an annual reckoning of agricultural achievements. Of course, there were also more prosaic tasks that went into sustaining farm life. Farmers needed to milk their cows every day; they had to feed their pigs, mind their plants, and water their seedlings. I never once heard a farmer account for the time that she spent on such banal toil.

In Chapter 5, I will observe a crucial difference in the time scales that account for the flow of daily cash. Farmers who *employ* day labor can remember their day-labor expenses on an annual basis. By contrast, farmers who *are employed* as day laborers can only remember their day-labor earnings on weekly basis. I claim in Chapter 5 that this difference had to do with the scale in play: day-laborers work by the day, earn by the day, and spend by the day, while employers plan in terms of the annual harvest cycle. In the present chapter, this distinction has appears as well, but in a different form. Here, farmers track their *own* daily grind in wage terms—but only when it is project labor, that is, when it is work on a major new initiative whose effects will become visible at the end of the harvest year. They monitor the new coffee field to see if it has been worthwhile planting, or they evaluate the repaired fence to see if it made a difference in the manioc. By contrast, when farmers toil at a task considered basic and mandatory, like cow-milking, then they do not measure their work. In other words, farmers only count their days for themselves in the hope of adding up those days of labor into a full year, into a visible result.

In the next chapter, I will argue that this distinction – between accomplishments and mundanities, between that which is tracked and that which goes uncounted – is a clue. It demonstrates that what is at hand is something far more complex than the inexorable spread of

the wage mentality. Serteanejos, rather than accepting the temporality of the day, are striving to stretch it into the temporality of the year and then to stretch it beyond.

Fruit vendor: Money versus profit

From here, the confusion only increases. Because if the contemporary peasant farmer uses tighter accounting than Bourdieu would have imagined, then the city, as it turns out, is home to a time that is far *less* standardized than the rural day-wage.

With its many options, the city is a place of plurals. When farmers go from the two villages to the city, often they work in factories or construction sites or wealthy families' homes, earning a monthly salary. But also they often work as street merchants.

José left the countryside to sell fruit on a cart in the city. His son Suso followed him. As Suso explains it, every day the ambulatory merchant accounts her money in two chunks. The “merchandise money” is the sum that she needs to replenish her fruit the following day. The “profit money” is the rest. Suso remembers that he would his seal his merchandise money away in special pocket. The profit money he stored nowhere special.

This is cash-out cash-in accounting. It is exactly to the accounting system that Mayer (2002) described—for peasants. And as with the peasants in Mayer's paper, Suso and his father did not bring their labor into the account. As a matter of fact, this labor did not have *any* sort of stable value over time.

Suso describes how the monetary return to work was constantly changing. At the beginning of the day, the merchandise money still had to be made.

Suso: Then you would start off selling [fruit] for \$R2. You would keep selling the same price, balanced. Then, when you got to the real end of the afternoon, you would start to sell for \$R1. Per

Suso: Aí voce começava a vender a dois reais. Continuava vendendo o mesmo preço, equilibrado. Aí quando chegava no finalzinho de tarde, voce começava a vender a um real. O litro.

liter. You would start to sell cheap. You know why? Because it's just profit. So whatever you make – it's just, just profit, it's just profit.

Duff: But why, why sell cheap? Because you *could* make more profit. You, you—

S: You could, you could make more. But it's like this—sometimes, when you've already made your money by noon, you – if you've made your merchandise money by noon, you get lazy now about going to work. You—sometimes you want to get out earlier, and you start selling everything. [...] “Hey, take it here, for \$R1. Take it here.” That's how you go rolling around. And you don't want to go out any more. You don't want to roll around the neighborhoods to make merchandise. You want – to just leave it.

Começava a vender barato, sabe por que? Porque é só lucro. Então o que você fizer – é só, só lucro, é só lucro.

Duff: Mas por que, por que vender barato?

Porque você poderia fazer mais lucro. Você, você--

S: Poderia, poderia fazer mais. Mas assim, às vezes, quando você já fez o dinheiro até meio-dia, você, se você faz o teu dinheiro da mercadoria até meio-dia, você fica com preguiça agora de ir trabalhar. Você—às vezes quer ir embora mais cedo, e você começa a vender tudo. [...] “Ô, toma aqui, a um real. Toma aqui.” Assim você vai rodando. E você já não quer mais ir embora. Não quer mais rodar os bairros para fazer mercadoria. Você quer—deixar lá. [entrevista com Suso sobre trabalho fora, 12-10-12]

The fruit vendor does not labor by any standard wage. Each day's take will differ, and in fact, the value of each hour changes, varying with fatigue and desire. There is no moment of reckoning, no point when everything gets measured against the wage.

Suso, the urban vendor, here sounds like nothing more than the ideal “satisficing” peasant. When he has earned enough, he goes home. Profit is not the main human drive. It is something small and unimportant, something negligible. *It's just profit*, he says.

Indeed, what matters to the fruit seller is not profit. What matters is money. Suso explains the attitude of the quintessential vendor, his father:

He's a guy who's – really, you know, about money. And, and every hour—every hour he's touching money. Every hour he has money. [...] Every hour he likes to go in his pocket and have money, to buy I don't know what.

É um cara que é – muito, assim, por dinheiro. E, e ele está toda hora – e toda hora ele está pegando em dinheiro. Toda hora ele tem dinheiro. [...] Toda hora ele gosta de ir no bolso dele e ter dinheiro, de comprar não sei o que. [entrevista com Suso sobre trabalho fora, 12-10-12]

This is not the careful, fictitious money that accounts for the value of one's own wage work. This is not money as a measure of value. This is money as a means of exchange, money as a thing in your hands. Suso recalled some advice that his father gave him.

If you go up to one of those guys – from Insinuante [a major department store], who works all nice-looking, all well-dressed – and ask him, if you go up to him and ask him for \$R1, he won't have it, you understand? If you go up there, and if you say, "Let's go over there and have a snack," he won't have any money, you understand? [...] Because he only gets paid—end of the month. And when he gets paid at the end of the month, he already owes it. He's already got to pay something. [...] And on the other hand in that whole marketplace there [with the street vendors], if you say, "Let's have a snack," then the guy will go right up and say, "Let's go."

Se você chegar em um cara daquel—do Insinuante, que trabalha todo bonitinho, todo arrumado – e pedir, chegar para ele e você pedir ele um real, ele não vai ter, entendeu? Se você chegar ali, Ó, se falar, "Vamos ali fazer um lanche," ele não vai ter dinheiro, entendeu? [...] Porque ele só vai receber – final de mês. E quando ele recebe final de mes, ele já está devendo. Já tem que pagar alguma coisa. [...] E já na feira ali todinha, se você falar, "Vamos fazer um lanche," aí o cara vai e fala, "Vamos."

This kind of money was made to be spent. As Suso said of his father,

He invests in—spending, in spending, in spending.

Ele investe em—gastar, em gastar, em gastar.

The pursuit of money turns out to be antithetical to the pursuit of gain:

He was never interested in buying not even a, a cow, to put it out to pasture there. A thing that could bring a return to him.

Ele nunca foi de comprar nem seja uma, uma vaca, soltar lá. Uma coisa que pudesse dar retorno para ele.

Thus, in this story, to go to the city is to account more like a peasant.⁵ To live a rationalized life, José would have to buy cows and return to the countryside. The city is the place of the unstandardized hour. The country is the place of the monotonous wage.

And so what makes the wage the wage, what makes labor labor, is not the presence of money. What matters is what *kind* of money it is; what matters are the practices through which

⁵ Note, too, the shift in the meaning of the word *profit*. In Chapter 5, I will note that farmers use *profit* to refer to the lasting items that they seek to preserve and grow, items like a cow or a pig. Suso excoriates José for lacking this sensibility. From the perspective of a street vendor, profit is not incarnated in a durable asset; instead, profit refers to a particular stock of cash that the vendor sets aside each day. This stock has comparatively little importance – *it's just profit* – and, unlike a cow, it does not grow on its own.

people use it. City vendors use a presentist money that is the opposite of profit. Rural farmers use a wage money that is not actually present.

These are utterly different practices – and they are practices that people learn inside particular markets. Here, the market for labor is what makes the difference between the farmer and the street vendor. As we noted earlier, the villages have a relatively egalitarian labor market, in which many farmers participate, earning a set, universal rate. But for urban fruit vendors, there is *no* labor market. This is a business where individual sellers have highly particular employment relations. Some own their own businesses. Some split their profits half and half with an owner. Some earn a straight fee. Many cheat. And nowhere is the hallmark of a labor market: a single, standard system of wages.

From a market, people learn how to scale time and money together. And so peasant farmers can talk in terms of a wage – even when they are working for themselves – while fruit vendors talk in terms of money – even when they are working for others. What makes the wage is not a boss, not the city, not alienation from the means of production. What makes the wage is not even the payment of an actual wage. What makes the wage – what makes labor – is a particular habit of measuring time.

Homogeneity as a modern condition

José as fruit vendor and Rodrigo as farmer faced significantly different labor market situations; in fact, perhaps counterintuitively, Rodrigo in the countryside confronted a labor market much more directly than José did in the city. This difference helped to explain their distinct accountings of money and time.

But José and Rodrigo did their different accountings in front of a shared social backdrop, the great modern scrim of homogeneous time. Both the farmer and the fruit seller had to respond to the particular aura of standardness with which time had been invested. Both of them, moreover, had to shield themselves from this aura, and they did so through practices that marked their characteristic positions.

But what exactly was this force against which they were shielding themselves? What did it mean for time to be homogeneous? And how had they come to live in a world where the standard was definitionally *homogeneous* – rather than, for example, *exceptional* or *exemplary*?

In one of the opening moves of Western critical theory, Lukacs answered these questions by suggesting that commodity-structure had become “a general phenomenon constitutive of the whole of bourgeois society” (1999 [1923]: 210). Every “relation between people,” Lukacs argued, “takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’” (83). This phantom objectivity manifested itself in a great and generalizing pressure to rescale everything: not merely the items of merchandise in a market-place, but also risks and plans, ideas and philosophies, times and spaces.

Lukacs directed his attention, first of all, to the object of work and the worker’s relationship with it. This object, he found, had become profoundly homogenous, from the moment of its mechanized production to the moment of its anonymous sale. But the work-object was only the starting-point. Lukacs went on to identify the emergence of a special mode of time:

Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ (the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality) (90).

Benjamin would subsequently plumb the heart of bourgeois historicism and find in it this same homogenous time, a sort of chronos against kairos (1968 [1940]). Anderson, in turn, detected

Benjamin's historicism not only among academic historians, but also, more insidiously, inside the mentality of each national citizen: these citizens synchronized themselves to a time "marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar" (2003 [1983]: 24). Chakrabarty, in his criticism of secularized history, described the same species of anti-messianic time.

This time is empty because it acts as a bottomless sack: any number of events can be put inside it; and it is homogeneous because it is not affected by particular events; its existence is independent of such events and in a sense it exists prior to them. Events happen in time but time is not affected by them (2000: 73).

But perhaps the most extraordinary description of homogeneity came from linguistic anthropology. Whorf, pointing out that the word *time* is a mass noun in many European languages, argued that Europeans tended to speak of time through constructions that presumed time to be an essential substance held in standardized containers: *two years of time, five hours of time, one minute of your time*.⁶

OUR objectified time puts before imagination something like a ribbon or scroll marked off into equal blank spaces, suggesting that each be filled with an entry [...] The formal equality of the spacelike units⁷ by which we measure and conceive time leads us to consider the 'formless item' or 'substance' of time to be homogeneous and in ratio to the number of units. Hence our prorata allocation of value to time, lending itself to the building up of a commercial structure based on time-prorata values: time wages (time work constantly supersedes piece work), rent, credit, interest, depreciation charges, and insurance premiums. No doubt this vast system, once built, would continue to run under any sort of linguistic treatment of time, but that it should have been built at all, reaching the magnitude and particular form it has in the Western world, is a fact decidedly in consonance with the patterns of the SAE languages (1956 [1939]: 153-4).

⁶ Whorf's argument is that mass noun phrases in "Standard Average European" (SAE) usually follow a particular pattern: [number] + [unit "container"] + "of" + [formless substance]. The resulting phrase might be *two pounds of butter, three buckets of water, or fifty years of time*. In such a phrase, Whorf thinks, we can see the emergence of a concept of substance and of a mode for quantifying it.

⁷ It is worth noting the amazing overlap between Lukacs' and Whorf's formulations: Lukacs, too, described social practice that "reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space" (1999 [1923]: 89).

Thus Whorf identified a set of language forms that, through their dialectical development over history,⁸ made possible the emergence of homogeneous time. He even referred to this linguistic practice as “objectification.”

What, then, are the qualities that make modern time homogeneous? First, this time is an underlying *substance*. It has an indefinite expanse, stretching beyond the subject’s view in all directions. Such substantial time begs for a form that can divide it into equal parts—for a container like the hour or the year.

Second, once time has been divided into such units, the units are *self-identical*. Each one looks exactly like the last, remaining indistinguishable from it.

Third, events in time are linked through *temporal coincidence*, not prefiguration. Two events may coincide in time, one occurring right after the other so that they overlap just at the edge, and their coincidence becomes the basis for inferring that one has caused the other, as if they were lined up like “the beads of a rosary” (Benjamin 1968 [1940]: 263). But homogenous time does not allow for one event to flash up, disappear, and guarantee an event at some disconnected point in the future. The cause and the effect must remain linked through some mechanism – a chain of other proximate events leading from one to the next – otherwise the claim to causation will be judged illegitimate. Actions may not prophesy or promise; they must occur and then yield to the next action in the sequence.

This, as Lukacs pointed out, is the temporality of routinized menial work, in which every day follows the last without any one day changing the others. It is similarly, as he hastened to add, the timing of the judge, the administrator, and even the philosopher under capital, since all

⁸ Whorf takes pains to argue against any sort of one-way causation here. He is not referring to a pre-existing, unchanging language structure that subsequently causes history to develop along certain lines. Instead, Whorf contends that certain forms of speaking inform certain types of practice in other domains of culture— and that these other kinds of practice then reflect back, deepening what he calls the “grooves” of language and reinforcing those initial habits of speech.

of them must produce a sort of sameness inside a structure of unchanging consistency.

Homogeneous time becomes unavoidable. And yet, I argue, it is also unbearable. No-one can actually put up with homogeneity, and so groups seek their own ways to break its power. A particular class position is a particular compromise with homogeneous time, an adaptation to it.

Or, to phrase things differently, each class position is a particular kind of opposition to homogeneous time. In their oppositional dynamics, José and Rodrigo mounted entirely different strategies. They negated different elements of time's homogeneity. For José and others in his position, like Suso, time had nothing self-identical about it. Every moment of time was unlike the last moment, so much so that prices had to be continually re-negotiated. But if the fruit sellers' time shined with self-difference and diversity, it could not escape from the third quality: temporal coincidence. Events followed one after the next, never anticipatory or prefigurational, never carried out in the hope of a dramatic change. Although José could have a snack whenever he felt like it, he lived by the flow of the ultimate homogeneous object – money itself – and his sequence of events never jumped, never led forward. In fact, it was the same, selling the same fruit, every day.

Rodrigo made a different compromise. For the farmers who count out their days by the day-wage, time has become self-identical, and in a precisely measureable sense. Each day counts for exactly the same as the last. But Rodrigo found a way push back against the principle of temporal coincidence. Like the other farmers, Rodrigo hoped for a leap: he measured his days so that maybe, at some incalculable moment, he would have an incredible harvest that would make him wealthy enough never to have to count the days again. As we will see in Chapter 2, setanejo farmers fixate on long-term dreams of production, dreams that seem implausible and yet that the farmer must guarantee, believe in. This hopeful vision does not position events one after the

other, but instead sees today's actions as portents of much later fulfilment. So Rodrigo accepted time's self-identity today, but with the vision of undermining its principle of coincidence through a prefigurational leap.

Fruit seller, peasant farmer. The class positions are also time positions, a break with one of the qualities of homogeneous time and an acquiescence to the other qualities. Rodrigo took the more common approach. He and his fellow farmers, like so many other workers, embrace the routine of the identical time unit in the hope of breaking out into a new and dramatic form of prosperity. Rodrigo's approach might even be thought of as a version of the ideology of progress, an ideology that plays along with the monotony of time accounting by holding out the hope, repressed yet necessary, of an eventual transformation.

Neither José nor Rodrigo, however, could deny the first principle of homogeneity: that time was a substance. This substantial quality made time come into conflict with another substance, the self.

Self-employment and class

A time system can be understood as a discourse, not a consensus; a set of possible stances, not a single viewpoint. As we have seen, some sertanejo farmers avidly tracked each day of their work, in an additive effort to string these days together into project-time, the time of the independent investment, the time the year. *We spend time*, said the hard-working Bruno. *The investment of ourselves*. And then he estimated his investment for me: \$R250 in one year.

But not everyone endorsed this approach. Perhaps the most vibrant dissent came from Seu Ícaro. A self-taught electrician, Seu Ícaro had left the bustle of São Paulo for the quiet of Maracujá. Seu Ícaro said that at Maracujá,

I myself don't work much, you know? [...] Some work, a little bit of work for me to do for me to earn my bread.

eu mesmo não trabalho muito, né? [...] Um trabalho, trabalhozinho para mim fazer para mim ganhar meu pão.

Seu Ícaro's position surprised me, and I asked him about it.

Duff: You said that you don't work much. Why?

Seu Ícaro: Because the – the – the – the – time, sometimes the time is little [...] Because with us, when we work too much, time gets long.

D: Ah—I like that [...]

Seu Ícaro: And then there's something else. You, when you work too much, you bring yourself to an end even more quickly.

Duff: Você colocou que você não trabalha muito. Por que?

Seu Ícaro: Porque o – o – o – o tempo, às vezes o tempo é pouco. [...] Porque a gente, quando trabalha demais, o tempo fica longo.

D: Ah—gostei. [...]

Seu Ícaro: E logo uma coisa. Você, quando trabalha demais, você se acaba mais ligeiro ainda.

(int w c044)

So, about the importance of hard work, Bruno and Seu Ícaro disagreed. And in their fields, the disagreement showed: Bruno had sold 12 tons of manioc that year, while Seu Ícaro was not selling his produce. And yet their disagreement was made possible by the encompassing framework of a single shared discourse. Time, for both of them, had become a thing, a substance that one could spend. And this substance had a special affinity with work. Time and work grew in tandem with each other: to work hard was for time to be long. Indeed, it was telling that once I brought up work, Bruno and Seu Ícaro, like so many other farmers I knew, both shifted the conversation to the topic of time.

Time and work thus expanded together, but for Bruno and Seu Ícaro, as time and work expanded, there was something that shrank: the self. Longer time meant less self. *You bring yourself to an end*, Seu Ícaro argued; work-time was, in Bruno's words, *the investment of ourselves*. Bruno opted for increasing this investment in time, while Seu Ícaro headed the other direction and supported the self. In both cases, time and self lived in tension with each other.

Inside this sensibility – the feeling of a struggle between time and selfhood – one can detect the contours of an ongoing disputation over the labor relation. For centuries in the sertão,

people have produced and contested the social hierarchy by creating, and then fighting over, a line to separate work-time from everything else that defines a person. How does this line emerge? What makes the line move, or shift its appearance? These are the questions that stake out and lend concreteness to a class position inside the flow of historical change.

Both Bruno and Seu Ícaro worked for themselves, as did José, and as did Rodrigo, after his troubles had ended. Perhaps what makes the work-line most intriguing is that it does not require a supervisor. Indeed, the line itself sometimes seems to supervise work. Vitor, who toiled in his own field at Maracujá, put it this way:

V: Our work is eight hours.

D: Mm hm.

V: You know? By the—government law, the law from the, the—president, that stuff.

D: Mm.

V: But we work like—we get up at five in the morning.

D: Mm hm.

V: And we go until six at night.

D: Mm hm.

V: That means that's beyond—um—eight hours. We work twelve hours in a day.

D: Mm hm.

V: You know?

D: Wow.

V: So that means that we're going beyond the limit, there, of—of work. You know. But—since it's for us ourselves, we can't file a grievance, or complain. Com—complain, you know, to whom? Just to God.

V: O trabalho da gente é 8 horas.

D: Mm hm.

V: Né? Pela—a lei do governo, pela lei do—do, da presidente, tal.

D: Mm.

V: Mas a gente trabalha que—a gente levanta cinco da manha.

D: Mm hm.

V: E vai até às seis da noite.

D: Mm hm.

V: Quer dizer que passa das, das, das, das oito. Trabalha doze horas em um dia.

D: Mm hm.

V: Né?

D: Wow.

V: Então quer dizer que está passando do limite, lá, do—o trabalho. Né? Mas—como que é para a gente mesma, a gente não pode queixar, ou lamentar. Aí, lame—lamentar, né, com quem? Só com Deus.

Since it's for ourselves, we can't complain. Vitor's phrase is a challenge. For the past forty years, social scientists have consistently pointed out that class is about unequal alterity, that class is a relationship to others (Bourdieu 1987, Thompson 1963: 9, Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979 [1977]: 10). So then how does one complain when one seems to find oneself in a relationship to

oneself? It is common to conceive of class as a relation of struggle (Marx and Engels 2005 [1848]). But struggle with whom? When work is work for yourself, against whom are you struggling? This is a problem insistently posed since the 1970s (Foucault 2010 [1979]: 226), a condition of confusion for social movements, a source of stress for Vitor.

To whom can Vitor complain? I want to suggest that we *should* understand class as a relation to others – but only at a second degree. As a first degree, I argue, class is a relation to labor. That is, we do class analysis in order to understand how it comes to pass that, by relating to labor, each of us ultimately ends up relating to others at a remove.

In this view, class is not primarily about the relationship between the boss and the worker. Class exists in the absence of work, and people have a class before they have jobs (and afterwards, too.) Class cannot be read off of a person's current employment relationship, but it *can* be read off of a group's nexus with labor: the group's collective representations about homogenous time and homogenous objects.

In this chapter, we have looked at the first of these. Vitor does not know a boss. But he knows the hours, and so he ends up in a wrestling-match *against* time, against the twelve-hour day about which he cannot complain. This battle, where time stands in as the enemy, is the class struggle. Vitor knows very well that, at a second degree, he relates to the world market, and through it to the untold others who, ultimately, underpay him for his agricultural product. But this conflict takes on, for him, a necessary form of appearance—as a struggle not against a boss, but against time.

In this light, the sense that one is fighting time becomes a class symptom—for street vendors, for pensioners, for women receiving conditional cash transfers. In the absence of a boss, each of these people may live out class through a struggle over time.

In this struggle, Vitor had a clear strategy suggestion. The state makes laws, Vitor argued, and limits the hours that urban employees can work. So the state should similarly set a maximum hourly schedule for *self*-employees. Vitor was hoping for a new addition to Brazil's famous body of labor legislation: a law that would prevent people from working too much for themselves.

Explaining the proposal, Vitor felt optimistic.

V: But one day we'll have that— I believe it, you know?

D: One day we'll, we'll have what?

V: That law like that, for us. Don't you think?

[...] Our country is quite advanced. And I believe that one day it will happen.

V: Mas um dia nós vai ter essa-- Eu creio, né?

D: Um dia vai, vai ter o que?

V: Essa lei assim, para nós. Não vai não? [...]

O nosso país está bem avançado. E eu creio que um dia vai ter.

Labor as a kind of time

Rodrigo was delighted to be back on his field. And yet he, like Vitor, found himself facing up against an outside force. Measured by the day, his time itself turns into something alienated and foreign, less his own. Rodrigo did not say, "My week is 125." He said, "A week is 125."

"A week is 125." In a sense, that sentence was the end-point of Rodrigo's travels, of his days as a suitcase. He had remembered how to count. Now he could live on his field, on the place that was his own, and yet his experience as a laborer would stay with him still, folded into his discourse. He could be an owner without escaping labor.

Labor is a mode of tracking time by the day and the hour, tracking time so that one's time fits into an exchange system with others; tracking time so that time becomes a thing that has a value – a thing that *is* value -- and that must be optimized in itself, regardless of the importance or meaninglessness of what one does with that time. The two semiotic linchpins of labor are homogenous time and homogenous objects. Here we have explored the first, because through it, we can start to think through certain questions that, at many sites around the world, have recently

become unavoidable. What does it mean to be self-employed? Is entrepreneurship a kind of labor? Why, when you own your job, do you still feel like an employee?

When sertanejos counted, the thing that they were counting turned out to go beyond its limits. Their work for themselves became foreign, uncontrollable, a thing outside themselves. Rodrigo put it succinctly. He stood near the field and considered his toil, for others and for himself. Then he turned to me and said,

Work doesn't end. What ends is us.

O trabalha não acaba. O que acaba é a gente.

Chapter 2

Not to Know the Hours:

The Kinds of Time in the Sertão

By age 14, Russo had already gone to the city. Every day he filled his hands with auto parts. He strained to haul them around a mechanic's store, and that was how he earned his living in 1990. He quit that job. He got another, caring for illegal roosters, helping to sustain the underworld of the urban cockfight.

Then Russo grew tired of the city altogether. He floated around plantations, found the landless movement, and joined a land occupation: within a few years, he was living at Maracujá.

Russo remembered the city as a place of time strictures. In the city, he said, you have to give a commitment every day. tem que dar compromisso todos os dias.

The fields of Maracujá were different. Working there, he thought, was

1000 times better than working for other people [...] Working for other people is not good. Because there's always that exact hourly schedule. [...] Here, I'm independent.	1000 vezes melhor que trabalhar para os outros. [...] Trabalhando para os outros não é bom. Que sempre tem aquele horário certo. [...] Aqui sou independente. Caldint5p134 (32m c193)

Russo sounded just like so many of his neighbors, the people who, like him, had left labor and returned to farm the sertão. What made them come back? Often, they said, they were looking for a kind of time.

As he wandered the city and the plantations in search of work, Russo said that he had known *the day* ("every day") and *the hour* ("exact hourly schedule.") These two units of time appeared over and over again in farmer conversations, and they appeared in connection with a particular sort of labor. As Russo put it, to think in terms of the day and the hour meant *working for other people*. And the farmer's tiny, independent plot of land became a site for a different kind of time, for time freedom.

Anthropologists and their allies have long investigated time as a constituent of social action (for only a tiny sample, see Evans-Pritchard 1947 [1940]: Chapter 3, Fortes 1949, Fabian

2002 [1983], Munn 1992, and Hodges 2008). The current chapter responds, in particular, to a specific subset of this tradition: the line of scholars fascinated by the nexus of time and work, a nexus that they take to be the crucible of modern class identity.

One might begin this line with Le Goff and his investigation of the time system that marked the European 14th century. As Le Goff explains, church bells, and then later the town clock, turned into tools to track the work day in the textile zones of northern Europe. No longer the signal for local festivities or emergencies, the bell became the sign of labor:

What was clearly new [...] in the contribution of the work bell or the city bell used for purposes of work was that instead of a time linked to *events*, which made itself felt only episodically and sporadically, there arose a regular, normal time. Rather than the *uncertain* clerical hours of the church bells, there were the *certain* hours [...] Time was no longer associated with cataclysms or festivals but rather with daily life, a sort of chronological net in which urban life was caught (1980 [1963]: 48).

Several centuries later, Thompson picked up the thread. In industrializing Britain, he argued, workers similarly learned a set of new practices for using time— practices of discipline that adjusted the minutiae of the work process in order to coordinate the simultaneous efforts of many thousands of workers. These practices became a focus for labor struggle:

The onslaught, from so many directions, upon the people's old working habits was not, of course, uncontested. In the first stage, we find simple resistance. But, in the next stage, as the new time-discipline is imposed, so the workers begin to fight, not against time, but about it. [...] They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well (1967: 85-6).

Jean and John Comaroff traced this same process in 19th-century South Africa, where the mechanical clock played a major role in the early stages of the colonial project (1991: 191-2) and then, later, would get cemented into the very walls of the church:

Temporality was literally built into LMS and WMMS churches from the start, their chiming clocks soon being supplemented by the school bells and hooters that punctuated the daily round; such were the sonic markers of fungible, commodified time and labor (1997: 300).

It is Thompson, perhaps most of all, who articulates the strong version of the argument connecting time and class. With brilliance, he poses time as a problem for the emergence and development of capital. And yet he does not stray far enough from the modernization story, the tale in which homogeneous time progressively conquers the earth.¹ This tale hardly begins to explain the complexities of leaving labor, how Russo would abandon the *exact hourly schedule* of his city cockfights for the *independence* of a field. Much less does it account for Rodrigo's peregrinations from village to plantation and then back again to his own farm, where he, strangely enough, would track the day-wage that he did not pay to himself.

If there indeed exists one form of homogeneous time that makes capital possible, then this homogeneous time is never fully present, precisely because people refuse it, adapt it, resist it, and make it available in forms more adequate to their worlds. To "fight back," in this way, does not (pace Thompson) necessarily mean that workers have "accepted the categories" and decided to grab more homogeneous time for themselves. It also involves transforming the categories—redefining time itself. As they give a particular shape to homogeneous time, a group of people comes to define itself as a class. This shape is a modification of homogeneity, not a full acquiescence to it, and thus every class, even an elite class, contains within itself the possibility of becoming a stumbling-block to capital.

To explore temporality under capital, then, is to explore the *types* of time that people have brought into existence. And every type has its own internal complexity. In the last chapter, I suggested that a class position can be understood as a particular time system, a specific compromise with homogeneous time. The current chapter will argue that each of these time systems does not consist of a single monolithic scale; instead, a time system is made up of

¹ See similar criticism in a very important argument advanced by Chakrabarty 2000: 48.

several options. Peasant farmers, for example, can reckon by the day or by the year. Formal employees can speak in terms of either the hour or the month. Rural laborers can work day-labor or *empreita* labor, the latter accounted by the job.

And so a class position is less a single scale for sorting time and more a set of possibilities, some favored over others. Farmers, as we saw in the last chapter, strove to leave behind the logic of the day and think more and more about the year, which was the proper frame for vision and planning. Similarly, laborers preferred *empreita* to day-labor, and employees dreamed in months while moaning about hours. Inside any given class position, in other words, sertanejos faced an array of better and worse chronologies, and the smallest units were generally held to be the worst. Thinking in tiny increments was the sign of subordination; to have to account minutely meant to suffer degradation.

Hence sertanejos aimed not to know the hours. Instead, they sought to stretch time into the months and years, the longer and longer segments that promised a view of the grand total. The available chronologies assembled themselves into a motivational matrix, with shorter time frames to be despised and more expansive ones to be cultivated. It was the particular shape of this matrix that allowed sertanejos to explain what they were hoping to get out of work – that allowed them to talk, from one or another class position, about how they would like to emplot their lives.

The matrix has come to matter through a long trajectory of time changes. Over the centuries that the sertão has spent inside the capitalist world economy, forms of time have arisen and faded, just like the evanescent commodities – sugar cane and cattle, cotton and coffee – that boomed and wilted in the sertanejo soil. This is not exactly a march of progress, however. Each possible chronology appears at a point in history and subsequently dwindles, but does not

disappear. Older temporalities remain available. And sometimes, for some people, they flash into brightness again, as with Russo and his neighbors. For these sertanejos, as they wound their way out of the city smog, as they unplugged themselves from the plantation's new machines, to become a peasant suddenly looked like the most modern move of all.

Changes in time

On a red-clay hillside at Rio Branco, Dona Zaida, already in her eighties, marked her days by waking up in the morning, wandering slowly over to the house where she could no longer live, and sitting. She sat on top of flowing, multicolored textiles; they covered her chairs with ruffles. Along the plastered walls above, she had hung graying family portraits. Every face in the portraits looked serious, but the photographer had embellished them, as was the custom in the sertão, by painting in a bright detail or two—maybe a tie, maybe a dress. Next to the portraits were Catholic pictures that might have been cut from a magazine.

Dona Zaida's chairs faced a table with two books on top, one held open by a light-green vase full of fabric flowers. Someone had given her the books, she explained, and she did not know how to read, so she put them in a place of honor.

Dona Zaida had lived through most of the twentieth century. She was born well after the end of slavery, but she saw its aftermath. In Dona Zaida's childhood and youth, nearly all of the land in the region had ended up in the hands of a few plantation owners, and her family, like so many others, worked for these owners. Dona Zaida and her parents were residents on a plantation—*moradores*. They lived in a wattle-and-daub house, under a roof of coconut fronds tied tightly enough to keep out the rain. The wages they earned were miniscule. In those days, the wealthy had enormous herds of cattle that overran the region's unfenced expanses. Her

father, for his part, depended on the few animals of his own that he had managed to raise, and he dreamed, it seems, of the privilege that certain other workers gained: the right to plant a field of his own on a few good loamy acres of the owner's territory.

One day Dona Zaida's father told her to stay in the back room, since he was receiving a guest. The guest came with words of seriousness. He wanted to marry either her or her sister, and although Dona Zaida had never seen him, that very day he and her father reached an agreement. She met the guest for the first time at the chapel on her wedding day; she was 18.

The guest, now a husband, took Dona Zaida to live at Rio Branco. Thus she entered a world in which people owned their own homes and fields, at a distance from the plantation, and worked day-labor for the plantation owners. She stayed with him for about a half of a century. They farmed, and they raised children. They would hold parties on the good nights, finding someone to hit the triangle, someone to bang the drum, and someone else to play the accordion, and they danced until the sun rose over the forest.

All of this Dona Zaida did in a house on a reddish hill that overlooked a patch of corn with a mango tree in the middle. Around the hill, the fields slowly began to shift over to coffee, and more and more owners hired day-laborers and contract workers. The workers started moving off of the plantations, into the villages and towns.

As her husband grew older he became disabled, until finally he could no longer leave the bed. She cared for him over more than a decade. Around that time, Dona Zaida's grandchildren and their friends began migrating to the large cities. There they could find jobs as domestic servants or stone-masons, earning monthly salaries.

Some of these relatives eventually returned. When I met Dona Zaida, in 2012, she was living under the generous care of her grandson's wife. While he labored in the city, his wife

moved into the village to sustain a peasant household: she cared for the farm and their children, and the two spouses reunited through long and dusty bus trips on the weekends.

Dona Zaida eventually began sleeping at the wife's house. And yet Dona Zaida walked, every morning, over to her own home. She spent the days there by herself, cooking her own meals, too afraid to pass the night alone, too independent to give up her place.

Over almost a century, Dona Zaida lived through the unfolding of successive new modes of time, and her own storytelling, as we will see, was shaped by them. And by that which had come before, since, as we will see, the first mode began long in the past. Plantation slave labor, the nadir of the work relation, had been present practically at the inception of colonization, and it ran on a constant and centrally-coordinated time. Dona Zaida herself knew a second mode, the free-labor plantation, on which time was eclipsed by space as the idiom of work discipline: there, masters and moradores spoke to each other not about wages, but about the house that was ceded to the worker as a long-term form of payment. The advent of labor law and of new crops, during the middle of the 20th century, gave rise to a third mode grounded in day-labor time. Later, rural-to-urban migration opened the possibilities of a fourth mode, based on monthly time (the salary) and hourly time (the time-clock.) And contemporary peasant farmers, for their part, invent a fifth mode by stretching the day and the month into the year.

Each of these five time systems emerged from the definite circumstances of labor. And yet each has had a staying-power beyond the scope of those circumstances. Sertanejos still carry the memory of these time-systems, and sometimes sertanejos still carry them out in practice, too. The rest of this chapter will consider how each of these systems persists among sertanejos. That persistence helps explain what sertanejos are doing when they account for their work days. It

gives context to Dona Zaida's stories. It helps make sense of Russo's decision to leave labor—and of the hope that motivated him, the hope for time freedom.

The time of slavery

One day I asked Dona Zaida if she knew anyone who remembered stories about slavery.

Oh, man, that thing there was a long time before. [...] In my—people suff—worked a lot but already it was different. [...] We worked a lot, like this, for ourselves. And some worked for other people.	O, moço, isso aí foi muito em antes. [...] De meu—gente sof—trabalhava muito mas já era em diferente. [...] A gente trabalhava muito, assim, para a gente mesma. E uns trabalhavam para os outros. (int w/ t063)

For everyone I met in the sertão, slavery existed as an absence: as a past that had been left behind. And yet it became known, sometimes loudly so, because of its difference. Everything about work in the sertão was, as Dona Zaida put it, *already different* from slavery. Slavery marked out that which work could no longer be.

To work a lot for ourselves, in Dona Zaida's conversation, stood as the opposite of slavery. Of course, working for oneself was not the only kind of work: *some worked for other people*. But the possibility of working for oneself retained a special place in sertanejos' dialogues with each other, as an aspiration, as an option that made the other labor options make sense.

And when these other labor options became too oppressive, workers – especially women – could accuse them of being like slavery. Dona Maya once leveled such a claim. Coming back to Maracujá after a bad job on a plantation, she remembered the defiant words she had spoken there.

I said, 'I've worked in the fields before, but to be a slave, no way.'

Eu disse, 'Eu já trabalhei em roça, mas para ser escrava, não.' (cadint12013p51)

Sertanejos may have nurtured few discrete memories of slavery, but in the moment of an accusation like Dona Maya's, memory came flooding back in another, negative mode, as the strong sense of a limit that must not be crossed.

What defined this limit? What made some work more similar to *working for ourselves* and what brought other work closer to slavery? Many qualities mattered, but here I focus specifically on time. Slavery came associated with a limitless time, a time not measurable even by money, and the rejection of this limitlessness may help explain why women, in particular, sometimes seemed specially qualified to object to certain jobs as slavery.

Brazil's plantation slave system, through the 19th century, relied on intensive time management. Stein has catalogued the elaborate impositions of time order during the day on a 19th-century coffee plantation: three roll calls, periodic trumpet blasts, and techniques used by the overseer to maintain a specific pace of work in the fields (1985 [1958]).² Gorender argues that this form of time organization was a fundamental characteristic of Brazil's slave production process, which needed time discipline because it united an unusually large number of workers under a single command (2005 [1978]).³

² Stein here describes the central role of timekeeping in the Vassouras coffee plantations of the mid-1800s.

The slaves' work day was a long one begun before dawn and often ending many hours after the abrupt sunset of the Parahyba Plateau [...] The sun had not yet appeared when [...] the tolling of the cast-iron bell, or sometimes a blast from a cowhorn or the beat of a drum, reverberated across the terreiro and entered the tiny cubicles of slave couples and the separated, crowded tarimbas, or dormitories, of unmarried slaves [...] Tardy slaves might appear at the door of senzallas muttering the slave-composed jongo which mocked the overseer ringing the bell:

That devil of a *bembo* taunted me
No time to button my shirt, that devil of a *bembo* (1985 [1958]: 161-2).

Stein is also careful to record the resistances. "If surveillance slackened, gang laborers seized the chance to slow down while men and women slaves lighted their pipes and leaned on their hoes momentarily to wipe sweat away. To rationalize their desire to resist the slave drivers' whips and shouts, a story developed that an older, slower slave should never be passed in his coffee row. For the aged slave could throw his belt ahead into the younger man's row and the younger would be bitten by a snake when he reached the belt" (164).

³ Gorender offers a synoptic description of sugar-cane plantations.

The large plantation, then, bore a close resemblance to Thompson's industrial zones (1967), with their time-discipline, their single-point command, and their transformed division of labor. Indeed, Gorender refers to a plantation as "a primitive factory unit" (*uma unidade fabril primitiva*, 2005 [1978]: 168). But a core difference separated the British mill from the Brazilian plantation. That difference was the wage. For mill workers, all of the techniques for ordering time ultimately came together under the aegis of the wage. The wage linked factory structure to personal motivation, creating, first of all, a reason for the worker to work, and second, a reason for the factory-owner to implement labor-saving schemes. A slave system lacked both of these reasons.

The plantation was marked by a time no less homogeneous than the factory's time, and yet different from it. From the worker's perspective, plantation work-time had no connection to money. More or less work did not mean more or less money for the slave. And, since plantation-owners could extend the work day at will with no wage pressure, work-time might extend indefinitely, subject only to the limits of physiology and resistance. This was a time homogeneous not in its limits but in its limitlessness. Stein quotes Laerne quoting the *Jornal do*

Laborers, in greater or lesser numbers, carried out the principal tasks while organized in teams ("gangs," as they were called in the English colonies) that obeyed the sole command of the planter or of his chief overseer. With the exception of the tiny garden plots of the slaves themselves – when these plots were permitted – there were no autonomous activities. Everyone obeyed an administration integrated in time and space, from the preparation of the land to the final transportation of the product to a location for sale. Thanks to its characteristics – unified administration, rigorous discipline, and the integration of all tasks – the plantation system [*plantagem*] was a form of economic organization appropriate for the use of slave labor, in which the autonomous initiative of the direct work agent was zero (2005 [1978]: 151).

A mão-de-obra, [...] mais ou menos numerosa, executa as tarefas principais organizada em equipes (*gangs*, como se chamavam nas colônias inglesas), que obedecem ao comando único do plantador ou do seu feito-mor. À exceção dos minúsculos cultivos dos próprios escravos, quando permitidos, não há atividades autônomas, todos obedecem à direção integrada no tempo e no espaço, desde a preparação do terreno ao escoamento final do produto para a venda. Graças às suas características de direção unificada, de disciplina rigorosa e de integração de todas as tarefas, a plantagem foi uma forma de organização econômica adequada ao emprego de trabalho escravo, em que a iniciativa autônoma do agente direto do trabalho era nula (2005 [1978]: 151).

This careful temporal integration, Gorender argues, allowed the plantation to achieve an increase in both the quantitative and qualitative division of labor – both more people working on a single task and more capacity to break a task down into specialized component parts.

Comércio from 1884: “The slave works without let-up 14 or 16, even up to 18 hours daily” (1985 [1958]: 168).

Contemporary sertanejos may have few distinct memories of this system to pass along. Indeed, the region around the villages was probably never home to large-scale slave plantations.⁴ And yet the memory survives, as for Dona Maya, in the form of an objection. A particular kind of time – time without limits and without pay – can still provoke the accusation of slavery. This is the kind of accusation that Analis made.

Analis, in her mid-forties, toiled alone in her own field at Rio Branco, and often she came home to find me at her unpainted wooden door, next to her tiny barking dog, waiting to talk. One day she told me that her body felt tired from agriculture, and I asked if she had thought about going to work in the city. Foreseeing a job as an urban servant, she retorted in a flash.

Domestic labor is slavery.

Casa de família é escravidão.

Then she explained why:

You work the whole day and still earn a pittance. [...] I don’t like working any more. Trabalha o dia todo e ainda ganha mixaria. [...] Eu já não gosto de trabalhar. (cad9p57)

Analis was not the only one to speak this way. At Maracujá and Rio Branco, domestic labor – or *casa de família*, literally “a family house” – brought many young women to the cities, since employers considered rural women to make the best maids and nannies. And the work evoked regular comparisons, like Analis’s, to slavery.

⁴ Moreover, the connection between contemporary sertanejos and slavery has a tenuous quality to it. Although Bahia’s various backlands regions – the different parts of the sertão – had economic importance from the beginning of the colonial regime, the particular villages in which I conducted research were, as far as I could tell, created in the late 19th century. The residents of the villages may have been descended in part from enslaved people, but no-one told me any stories related to this. The level of memory appears to be higher in other places: a nearby village has achieved quilombo status and sustains a much more vibrant set of traditions. It is worth noting that the history teacher and historical researcher in one of the villages believes that the residents were in part descended from freed or runaway slaves; she notes that the approximate date of founding for the villages corresponds closely to the date of Brazilian Emancipation.

What made domestic labor like slavery? Not the compulsion to labor. These jobs were famously simple to leave; women would often quit within six months, return home to the countryside, and then go back to the city and find new houses with new bosses in them.

But if one could easily end the job in its entirety, it was sometimes extremely difficult to end *a day* on the job. Domestic employees had serious trouble getting a boss to allow them to stop working and go to sleep. When a servant lived in the boss' house, the notion of work hours might simply disappear altogether, since the servant could be called on to toil at any time. Instead of setting work schedules, employees found themselves struggling to establish *leisure* schedules—times when the boss would agree not to bother them.⁵ As Analis put it, *You work the whole day*.

⁵ Note that unending work schedules and low pay were not the only objection to domestic labor. Women also highlighted the limited opportunities for mobility and the personal disrespect that sometimes accompanied the work. Dona Guadalupe, who had left domestic labor and settled with her husband Seu Benjamin on a distant field at Maracujá, spoke brilliantly about this:

Dona Guadalupe: [Some bosses] have consideration [*consideração*] for us. They have respect for us. Now many of them, no. There are many who think – who think that we're slaves, you know?

Duff: Mm hm.

DG: Now there are some that are good—to work for. [...] [Others] shout at us. There are some that mistreat us. Even to—even our meals, ah, ah,— we have to wait for them to eat first, and then they give the leftover food to us. [...] There are a lot of lousy people still.

She continued:

Dona Guadalupe: [A good boss] considers [*considera*] us, you know? Treats us like we're part of the family, you know?

D: Mm hm.

DG: Now there are those, those who treat us like that, just like—a slave, you know? And—Now there are many who don't.

Dona Guadalupe: [Alguns patrões] [t]em consideração pela gente. Tem respeito pela gente. Agora tem muitos, não. Tem muitos que acham – que acham que a gente é escravo, né?

Duff: Mm.

DG: Agora tem uns que é bom—trabalhar. [...] [Outros] gritam com a gente. Tem uns que maltratam a gente. Até pra—até a comida da gente eh, eh—a gente tem que esperar eles comer primeiro, dá as sobras de comida para a gente. [...] Tem muita gente ruim ainda, Duff.

Dona Guadalupe: [Um bom patrão] considera a gente, né? Trata a gente como da família, né?

D: Mm hm.

DG: Agora tem os, os que trata a gente assim, que nem—escrava, né? Eh—Agora tem muitos não.

Dona Guadalupe concluded by telling a story about bosses of hers who had moved from São Paulo to the colder city of Curitiba. She went with them, and she became sick because of the cold. Her bosses – good bosses – took her to the hospital.

The whole day: domestic servants roundly criticized this limitlessness. And what made it worse was the disconnection between time and money. Domestic labor did not get remunerated by the hour, but by the month, and typically at rates well below the legal limit. Thus money placed virtually no constraint on work; bosses did not have to consider the expense of their employees' time. In Analis's words, *You earn a pittance*.⁶

The comparison to slavery has force in the sertão. Not every bad job deserves the term, and what makes it stick is not simply terrible conditions or labor coercion. It gains force when work hours come to seem limitless, unmoored from the wage. This limitlessness points backwards, not to a personal memory, but to a dominant ideological model from Brazil's past: the oppression of the slave plantation. Women in domestic labor have become used to identifying such limitlessness. Sometimes, they call it by its name.

Moradores on the plantation: Space instead of time

Na grande plantação, o homem que sai ou entra em sua casa está saindo ou entrando em uma parte da propriedade. Assim, nenhum aspecto de sua vida escapa ao sistema de normas que disciplina sua vida de trabalhador.

On the great plantation, the man who leaves who enters his house is leaving or entering a part of the property. In this way, no aspect of his life escapes the system of norms that discipline his life as a worker.

And my boss stayed at home one week taking care of me
[...] Like part of the household, you know?

E minha patroa ficou uma semana em casa cuidando de mim [...] Como de casa, né? (int w/ c182)

Dona Guadalupe suggested that what made domestic labor like slavery was the non-family status of the worker. The closer the worker came to being treated like kin, the weaker the connection to slavery.

⁶ If unbounded work, loosely connected to the hours of the work, set the stage for an accusation of slavery, then this was not just with regard to domestic labor. On one occasion I heard Maria draw this connection—in reference to activism. She and another village leader had been asked to do the work of landless organizers, but without receiving an organizer's stipend. Their hours would be long and unpredictable. Now, with a few friends clustered around her house, Maria was weighing the offer out loud. She concluded, *They're treating us like slaves*.

--Celso Furtado, from (1964) *Dialética do Desenvolvimento*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fundo de Cultura, pp. 141-142. Cited in Ianni 2005 [1971]: 132.

In Maracujá and Rio Branco, personal historical memory begins after the 1888 Emancipation, with the era of free labor. More specifically, it begins with the era of the free-labor plantation. This was the period that sertanejos had heard about from their parents and grandparents; many had lived it themselves. As she sat in her house underneath the pictures of saints, Dona Zaida remembered her childhood on such a plantation in the early 20th century.

Oh, my God—it was work in the field without relief. From the time I was—8 or 9 years old. It was in the field, in the field, in the field, because there was no other amusement. No-one went to a party, no-one went to a Mass, no-one went on an excursion. No-one went to any place at all. Just from the house to the field. Just from the house to the field.

Ó, meu Deus-- era um trabalho na roça sem alívio. De hora que eu estava—de, de, de 8 a 9 anos. Era na roça, na roça, na roça que não tinha outro disfarço. Ninguém não ia em festa, não ia em missa, não ia em passeio. Não ia em canto nenhum. Só da casa para a roça, só da casa para a roça. (int w t063)

From the house to the field: Dona Zaida did not name these two locations by accident. The house and the field, residence and work, had a peculiar and powerful bond with each other on the free-labor plantation. Workers on these plantations were known as *moradores* – literally, “inhabitants,” or “livers.”

A morador’s most salient point of connection to the plantation-owner was not the wage, but rather the house. And around this point of connection, moradores and owners developed a full-scale work relationship cast predominantly in the categories of space, not time—a relationship where the spatial language of houses and fields tended to substitute for the time-money of wage payment.

Moradores were people who had arrived at the plantation’s vast expanse, walked up to the owner’s great house, and offered their work in exchange for a place to live. At the owner’s pleasure, they received a modest residence somewhere on the sprawling grounds, rent-free. It

would be perhaps a mud-brick construction with a thatched roof, not far from five or ten other morador families, or more – as many as seventy, during the heyday at Maracujá.

During times of heavy work, the moradores toiled for the plantation-owner. But they also received plots on which to farm their own produce, and when the plantation-owner had fewer demands to make on their time, they planted their families' sustenance. And indeed, moradores had children and raised families in these houses; they brought in kin from afar; they set up gardens. The plantation became a small village, sometimes with a chapel and a schoolhouse.

The moradores organized their village according to overlapping cycles of time. There were the daily rhythms marked by the rooster, the noonday heat, and the sunset. There was a weekly period of rest on Sundays. The Catholic ritual calendar set forth annual holidays, including Holy Week, Christmas, the June Feasts of St. Peter, St. Anthony, and St. John the Baptist, and others of local or personal importance. And the rains and harvests also came by the year. These basic cycles have persisted until the present in rural Brazil. But they have been imbricated, at different points, with widely varying systems for measuring the cadence of work.

The morador system, in its various incarnations, stretched across Northeastern Brazil. Johnson saw it at a cotton plantation in the drylands of Ceará in the 1960s:

The fazenda [plantation] always gives [...] to all moradores a house, which may be in good or poor condition, depending on chance. Houses are erected at the expense of the fazenda (1971: 128).

Nearly a thousand kilometers away, in the sugarcane zone of Pernambuco, Sigaud (1976) and Palmeira (1976) explored the same system during the 1970s. They found an employment relation that operated, pervasively, through the idiom of the house. To ask for work on a plantation, one asked for a house; to quit a job, one turned in the key to the house. In fact, the greatest honor a morador could receive was eventually to be granted a house on a large field where he could plant

fruit trees, whose perennial harvests he would then possess— thus grasping a bit of permanence on a land not his own.⁷

As with Ceará and Pernambuco, so with the sertão of Bahia. Along the edges of Rio Branco, deep inside the carpet of coffee fields that curled over the highlands, Mathias spent many years in the morador system. He was 49 when I met him in 2012, and he recalled for me his time under the aegis of Paco, a plantation owner:

I lived—I worked with him thirty, thirty-something years.

Morei—trabalhei com ele trinta, trinta e poucos anos
(int w t082)

Mathias made a telling stumble at the beginning of his sentence: in a primary sense, did he *live* at the plantation or did he *work* there? This conflation, as it turned out, was symptomatic. Palmeira had observed the same overlap in Pernambuco, where moradores would correct the question “What plantation do you work on?” with the response “I *live* on Plantation X” (1976: 306).⁸

⁷ Johnson observed much the same search for permanence in Ceará:

Certain conventions recognize the morador’s temporary possession of the land he is working on [...] The complete labor of establishing and caring for a field is viewed as entitling the worker to all the future produce of the plants (1971: 48-9).

⁸ Intriguingly, some of the farmers at Maracujá spoke in quite similar terms about their decision to enter the landless movement. Lourenço, a young sertanejo, said that he had come to the MST

to see if I could get a little piece of land, you know? A place to live.

para ver se conseguia um pedacinho de terra, né? Um lugar para morar. (int w c173)

His neighbor Seu Ícaro, the electrician who had left São Paulo for the MST, seemed to think along the same lines. He described his mindset when first entering the movement:

Ícaro: I didn’t have any political consciousness. But after I entered the agrarian reform, then I started— getting close to it, and it started, really slowly. And it started—entering my mind, you know?

D: Mm hm.

I: That this was thing that I was chasing after, to find a little piece, a little piece of land for me to work and a little house for me to live in.

Ícaro: Não tinha consciência política não. Mas depois que eu entrei na reforma, aí eu fui-- chegando perto dela, e lá vai, devagarzinho. Aí foi-- entrando na mente, né?

Duff: Mm hm.

I: Que era daquilo que eu estava correndo atrás para encontrar um pedacinho, um pedacinho de terra para eu trabalhar e uma casinha para eu morar. (int w c044)

Explicitly connecting work and the house, Ícaro understood agrarian reform as a joint matter of toil and residence, a little piece of land and a little house. The decision to enter MST activism, then, became something like an effort to

I asked Mathias to explain how a person became a morador at the plantation, and he again dwelled on the topic of the house.

Mathias: All we have to do is listen. We would get there searching, searching, for a, a job assignment. And then he just would give us the house for us to live in. He would give us job assignments and he would give a house for us to live in. So then you would stay living there until—as long as it was going well. When it didn't go well, we would settle accounts with him and leave.

Duff: Mm hm.

M: He would settle accounts with us so that he could give us the rights that we had. And we would go out looking for another place.

Mathias: É só a gente escutar, a gente chegava lá e procurava, procurava o, o serviço. Aí ele já dava a casa para morar. Dava serviço para a gente e dava uma casa para a gente morar. Aí você ficava morando lá até o—quando dava certo. Quando não dava certo, a gente acertava com ele e saia.

Duff: Mm hm.

M: Ele acertava com a gente as contas para dar os direitos que a gente tinha. E a gente saia procurando outro lugar. (int w t082)

In Mathias's words, beginning work meant getting a house; leaving work meant finding a new house, *looking for another place*. This was employment understood through the prism of residence.⁹

affiliate with one more plantation-owner: a search not just for a new kind of labor relation, but also for a new space in which to live.

⁹ His neighbor Dona Verónica, when she remembered her childhood as a morador, spoke even more clearly about the plantation where she grew up. She had been born around 1958.

Dona Verónica: I was born, and I got married, at the age of 22 years, living there. [...] Hard life. We worked, a lot. Things were very difficult. [...] We would plant some little fields for our sustenance.

Duff: Mm hm.

DV: A little bit, but we would plant. [...] We worked because we lived [there]. And we worked on our little field. And we would work for other people too, on the outside, to earn our bread. [...] The plantation owners only gave land.

[...] D: Really!

DV: Yeah. In that time, my father's time, it was like that. They only gave the land to live on.

Dona Verónica: Nasci, e casei, com a idade de 22 anos, morando lá. [...] Vida difícil. A gente trabalhava, muito. As coisas muito difícil. [...] A gente mexia com umas rocinhas para despesas.

Duff: Mm hm.

DV: Pouquinho, mas mexia. [...] Nós trabalhava porque a gente morava. E trabalhava as rocinhas da gente. E trabalhava para os outros também para fora, para ganhar o pão. [...] Os fazendeiros só davam a terra.

[...] D: É mesmo.

DV: É. Naquele tempo de meu pai, era. Eles só davam a terra de morar. (from int w t016)

We worked because we lived there: Dona Verónica had hit the nail on the head. She was referring, here, to work for the plantation owner – in contrast to *work on our own little field* and *work for other people*. Work for the plantation owner was work that one did because one lived in the place.

On top of the residential tie, plantation owners did, in fact, also tend to have cash relations with moradores. These payment arrangements seem to have varied widely by locale.¹⁰ In the Bahian sertão around Maracujá and Rio Branco, where cattle predominated as a commercial product until the mid-20th century, the monetary bond between owners and moradores was a comparatively relaxed one. These moradores typically had no obligation to turn over a part of their crops, and crops, in any case, were apparently not the plantation's main source of profit. The moradores paid no rent. They did not have to work days for free. Moradores could decide to work certain days for the plantation-owner in exchange for day-wages, and some skilled cowboys among them received monthly salaries, but, although they were generally expected to supply some amount of labor, moradores did not face a specific requirement in this regard. Here, in the Bahian drylands, the morador system was designed to keep people geographically close to the plantation as a potential labor force, not to bind them to a particular quantity of work.

In other areas of the Northeast, moradores faced sharecropping arrangements, mandatory work days, and *corvée*. But from Ceará to Bahia, from sharecropping to day-labor, what brought the morador system together as a whole was the relative lack of emphasis on wages—and the concomitant salience of the house. Indeed, wage rates typically remained so low that moradores had little reason to focus on them. Johnson noted that in Ceará the day-wages were worth considerably less than what moradores could make by farming the fields that they had been

Note here, also, that Dona Verónica's word *despesas*, which had a dictionary definition of "expenses," referred in the villages to certain crops that one grew in order to sustain one's family consumption—in particular, beans and corn.

¹⁰ On a cotton plantation in Ceará, Johnson says, moradores could work as *meeiros* – "half-ers" or sharecroppers – who farmed a field, gave a part of the produce to the plantation owner, and sold the rest of it. They could also work for pay as day-laborers (*diaristas*) for the plantation owner (1971). In Pernambuco, Palmeira speaks of certain days of the year when moradores were obligated to work for the plantation owner without pay, while on other days they could either cultivate their own fields or work for day-wages (1976: 306-8). Sigaud describes Pernambucan moradores who were paid by the volume of work completed each day (1976: 319; also see 2007: 132).

granted by the plantation-owner (1971: 83), while Sigaud observed that, in Pernambuco, wage rates were actually announced by plantation-owners *after* workers had completed their tasks, thus making it impossible for moradores to plan for or negotiate over this form of remuneration (1976: 317-8; see a similar account in Dabat 2007: 605). At Maracujá, even at the very end of the plantation era, in 1996, the day-wage was a mere \$R5 per day, well less than half what workers were earning on the same land (after adjusting for inflation) in 2012.¹¹

With such low and unpredictable wages, moradores backed away from waged labor and instead prioritized their own personal production on the fields they had been granted.¹² The morador system, as a whole, hence oriented its participants towards spatial concerns: moradores were most concerned with the size of a field, the location of a house, the nature of one's position inside the plantation's land. In such a system, to look for employment meant, as Mathias put it, *to look for another place*.

If the plantation system rested on a core of spatial categories, then the plantation's conflicts turned into conflicts about space. Moradores seemed to fight rarely over their wages. Instead, they contested the quality of the house they received or the placing of their fields. They

¹¹ According to Daniel, who lived as a morador at Maracujá before the landless occupation and who stayed on as a resident on the land settlement, at the time of the occupation the prevailing day-wage was \$R5. By 2012, the day-wage was transitioning between \$R20 and \$R25, and by 2015 it had reached R\$35. Following the inflation calculations at www.fxtop.com, this means that the day-wage at the time of the occupation was well under half the value that it would reach by 2012.

¹² For a similar situation in a different context, one can turn towards the immigrant *colono* farmers on coffee plantations in São Paulo state at the turn of the 20th century. Holloway (1980) suggests that, for these farmers, the wages paid by the plantation owner mattered less than the field that the owner granted them for the purpose of growing their own crops. Holloway cites Pierre Denis, a French observer, who in 1909 reported on the colonos' situation: "What really enables the colonists to make both ends meet is the crops they have the right to raise on their own account [...] They often think more of the clauses in their contract which relate to these crops than to those which determine their wages in currency" (Denis 1911: 202-3, cited in Holloway 1980: 78).

angled for a *sítio*, a plot of land where they could plant the fruit trees that would establish their long-term privileges in the place (Sigaud 2007).¹³

Palmeira (1976) noted an even more pervasive, indeed daily, manifestation of this tension. On the Pernambucan plantations he investigated, *moradores* could either allocate their efforts to their own homes and fields or to the plantation owner's. They preferred to work on their own. But they were constantly channeled to the owner's through a series of machinations that did not involve the wage rate—machinations like mandatory work days, emergency appeals from the plantation owner, and reductions in the size of the field allocated to the *morador*.¹⁴ And so, in the place of contestation over wages, plantation owners and *moradores* could understand their relationship as a fight between the *morador*'s plot and house, on the one hand, and the owner's great field, on the other. Each pole had its magnetic pull, and each actor tugged in one or the other direction. Just as day-laborers would later juggle different modes of time, *moradores* confronted different kinds of location: the owner's field versus the *morador*'s plot, constraint versus freedom. Rather than struggling over time, the denizens of the plantation world struggled over space.

In this conflict, the *morador*'s ultimate recourse was physically to leave the plantation. As Mathias put it, *When it didn't go well, we would settle accounts with him and leave. And we would go out looking for another place*. So common was this particular spatial solution, Sigaud (2007) reports, that people referred to it as *vontade de andar*, the desire to walk.

¹³ Johnson also observed these conflicts:

The manager [...] allocates fazenda [i.e. plantation] housing. This activity sometimes causes great resentment among the workers, for in running the fazenda efficiently he must often move one family out of a desirable house in order to move another in (1971: 122).

¹⁴ This dynamic became particularly salient in Pernambuco in the 1960s, when a rise in sugar prices led the owners to take over for themselves more and more of the farmland previously allocated to *moradores* (Palmeira 1976).

And indeed, moradores often possessed quite varied work and residence histories, since they had moved around so much. Seu Florestan's father, for example, had been a morador, and when I asked how he had ended up on the plantation where Seu Florestan grew up in the 1940s, Seu Florestan replied as if the answer were obvious.

Well, from another plantation. Really, from a long way—(snaps fingers) and again, again, from another plantation. He lived on a lot of plantations, you know? [...] A lot of living-places.

Ah, de outra fazenda. Já, de muito—(snaps his fingers) já, já de outra fazenda. Ele morou em muitas fazendas, né? [...] Muitas moradas. (int w c103)

Free-labor plantations thrived with just this sort of mobile labor force.

The morador system did not just rely on space. Above all, it broke with the logic of wage standardization by generating kinship bonds between workers and plantation owners. And space, indeed, could facilitate these bonds. Mathias enumerated the constructed spaces of the plantation where he lived, using them as metaphors for the compassion of the owner, Paco:

There was a school there. On the plantation. There's a church. There's everything there. [...] He would give the house to live in, with – there was everything. Running water—there's everything there. Electricity. My mother still lives there today. [...] He helped us a lot. He helped.

Lá tinha escola. Na fazenda. Tem igreja. Tem tudo lá. [...] Dava a casa para morar, com-- tinha tudo. Água encanada—tem tudo lá. Energia. Minha mãe mora lá até hoje. [...] Ele ajudava muito nós. Ajudava. (int w t082)

Paco was not above luxuries – he became known for purchasing cases of imported Scotch – but he did not forget to help. In the city, Paco owned a pharmacy, and he gave free medicines to his moradores. He took care of their illnesses. He became the godfather of Mathias's brother.

M: Imagine a Catholic man—that's him.
D: Mm!
M: He's crazy about the Catholic Church.

M: Pensa em um homem católico, é esse.
D: Hm!
M: Gosta de igreja católica demais. (int w t082)

At stake, here, was the creation of a kinship tie. Paco sent Mathias to be schooled in tractor-driving and cattle management; he cared for Mathias's mother in old age. Mathias reflected,

He was the one who taught me how to work [...] I was raised working for him. I respected him just like I respected my father.

Foi que me ensinou a trabalhar [...] Criei trabalhando para ele. Respeitava ele igual a meu pai mesmo.
(int w t082)

The morador system is far from finished in the contemporary sertão. One family at Rio Branco lived, in 2012, as moradores on the estate of an urban professional. The professional would come stay on his land for only a few weeks each year. Seu Inácio, the father in the morador family, had a bond with the professional's family that stretched over thirty-five years: he raised their cattle, harvested their coffee, made bricks for them, and sometimes helped to run their store in the city. When I asked Seu Inácio if he *worked* for the professional, Seu Inácio agreed, but then raised a doubt:

But you can't even really say that, because he gives me—600 reais.

Mas não pode nem falar, que ele me dá—600 reais. (int w/ t090)

The professional paid Seu Inácio less than the minimum wage and, moreover, had not “signed the card” to register Seu Inácio as a formal employee with rights. Seu Inácio thus remained ambivalent about thinking of his activity as employment.¹⁵

If it was unclear whether or not Seu Inácio really counted as a worker, there was no doubt about the relationship when it was viewed under a different light—in terms of the house. Seu Inácio looked around at the low-slung adobe dwelling where he was raising children and grandchildren. For several months now, it had been without electricity, and the professional had not yet fixed the generator. Seu Inácio noted,

Here belongs to him. I don't have a house, no way.

Aqui é dele. Eu não tenho casa não.

¹⁵ Seu Inácio added:

He pays—600 reais. That's not the salary [i.e. the monthly minimum wage], no way, dude. [...] In that whole time that I've been working for them, he never signed the card.

Ele paga a—600 reais. Não é o salário não, moço. [...] Desde essa idade que estou trabalhando para eles, nunca assinou carteira.

Seu Inácio was used to this kind of life. He had never owned land, and when he looked back on his various jobs, it was all

Just for other people. Just work for other people.	Só para os outros. Só trabalho para os outros.
[...] Here, really, I only work for them because I don't have land.	[...] Aqui mesmo eu só trabalho para eles porque não tenho terra.

So Seu Inácio drew the inevitable connection between land and work. His labor relation with the professional was based on space—his landlessness, his need for a house. Just like Dona Verónica, Mathias, and so many other moradores, Seu Inácio worked in order to find a place.

And many did in fact find it, in a more lasting sense. Moradores often harbored fervent hopes about gaining a little piece of land where they could live in their own right, with no plantation owner.¹⁶ Seu Florestan remembered how he himself had ceased being a morador:

Then it was struggling and struggling and struggling and struggling, until I managed to buy these five hectares of land.	Aí é lutando e lutando e lutando e lutando, até eu conseguir comprar esses cinco hectares de terra. (int w c103)

For most of the twentieth century, this kind of aspiration remained largely unrealized in the area around Rio Branco and Maracujá. A few large plantations dominated the region. Some people always managed to hold onto tiny plots in the less fertile territory – most of Rio Branco was in the hands of small farmers from the late 19th century onwards – but these smallholders stayed subordinate to the plantation owners. Economically, the smallholders relied on the plantation

¹⁶ Johnson also saw this in Ceará in the 1960s:

One of [a morador's] major goals is to own his own land, if only as a symbol of independence [...] Many people do make an escape from the dead end of plantation life. Once free of [...] the conditions imposed by a landlord for their use of a house, they may hire out as wage laborers to nearby fazendas [plantations], practice some craft, or seek the support of their nearby sons and daughters (1971: 46).

owners for the periodic employment they offered.¹⁷ Politically, the smallholders counted on the plantation owners for their elite connections in the city.

But the drive for one's own place would eventually win out. By the later twentieth century, the dynamic that had motivated Seu Florestan would transform the structure of the *sertão*. Moradores like Seu Inácio became rare. Sertanejos increasingly lived in their own houses, working day-labor on the big commercial farms nearby. Occasionally, in the more out-of-the-way places, sertanejos would cultivate their own small plots. This was the niche that Rio Branco and Maracujá, by the turn of the 21st century, had come to provide: they gave farmers the chance to own tiny fields and carry out autonomous production, largely for subsistence, in the distant backlands.

The morador system had imposed space-discipline through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, and this seems to have happened for a particular historical reason. After Emancipation, it was no longer possible for plantation owners to retain their labor-power in the countryside by force. By offering the geographical bargains of the morador system, plantation owners created the conditions in which free workers could establish employment relations that had a voluntary quality to them, relations that could be left by walking away. But since the predominant negotiation was for space rather than wages, a perfectly-competitive, monetary labor market did not emerge. The owners did not have to compete in direct money terms. They could deal in the less fungible, more specific, more durable terms of the house or the field. And once whole families had set up homes, with crops and neighbors and dreams of fruit trees, these terms made the relation harder to exit.

¹⁷ This employment was often day-labor in the fields or cattle management—the latter sometimes remunerated by the month.

Harder to exit, perhaps – but not necessarily harder to critique. Just as moradores negotiated in spatial terms, they expressed exploitation in spatial terms. Dona Zaida, sitting underneath the pictures of the saints, recalled the difficulties and unfairnesses of her father's work.

Dona Zaida: He just walked around working for those people who had more power to do things, working for those people, in order to be able—to buy bread to give the children to eat.

Duff: So—he—he—he—worked for whom? For the plantation owners?

DZ: Yes, for the plantation owners. In that time there were plantation owners.

D: AAaah!

DZ: And he would work for the plantation owners. He would leave the house in the morning and only come back at night. [...] He lived on the land of other people. [...] He lived on the plantation of the rich people. So he was ordered around by rich people. The rich people did whatever they wanted.

Dona Zaida: Ele só andava trabalhando para aquele povo que podia mais, trabalhando para o povo, modo de poder—comprar o pão para dar aos filhos para comer.

Duff: Então—ele—ele—ele—trabalhava para quem? Para os fazendeiros?

DZ: É, para os fazendeiros. Nesse tempo tinha fazendeiros.

D: AAaah!

DZ: E ele trabalhava para os fazendeiros. Saia de manhã da casa, só chegava de noite. [...] Ele morava na terra dos outros. [...] Ele morava na fazenda dos ricos. Então era mandado dos ricos. Os ricos faziam o que queriam.

Here was exploitation, understood as a question of space: *He lived on the plantation of the rich people. So he was ordered around by the rich people.*

Duff: And how were the plantation owners at that time? Did they treat people well, or did they treat people badly, or—

Dona Zaida: They, a lot of them, the way they treated people was bad, my son.

D: Really!

DZ: It was bad, bad, bad, like—what they had was just for them. The other people, if they got a, a little thing—if they worked, if they spilled their sweat, left at the hour when the day started dawning, went to the field and just spoke the word “hoe” for the whole entire day, and only got back to the houses at nighttime. But now the ones who worked, the plantation owners would pay them really cheap, in whatever way they wanted. Because at that time there was no price.

D: Mm hm.

Duff: E como é que eram os fazendeiros naquela época? Eles tratavam bem ou tratavam mal, ou—

Dona Zaida: Tratavam, muitos, era mal, meu filho.

D: É mesmo!

DZ: Era ruim, ruim, ruim, que—o que eles tinham era só para eles. Os outros, se recebessem uma, uma coisinha—se trabalhassem, derramassem o suor, na hora que o dia ia clareando, pegavam, iam para a roça, só falavam “enxada” o dia inteirinhozinho, só chegavam nas casas de noite. Mas aí agora os que trabalhavam, esses pagavam, baratinho, do jeito que eles quiser, que nesse tempo não tinha preço.

D: Mm hm

DZ: But what there was, the income [*ganho*], was really just that.

D: “At that time there was no price” – pardon me? There was no – what is – explain to me a litt— how was there no price?

DZ: That there was no price?

D: Mm hm.

DZ: Because there really was no price! Because they didn’t know what it was to give value to the work of the poor person.

DZ: Mas o que tinha, o ganho, era só esse mesmo.

D: “Nesse tempo não tinha preço” -- - como assim? Não tinha—o que é que—me explica um poquin—como é que não tinha preço?

DZ: Que não tinha preço?

D: Mm hm.

DZ: Porque não tinha preço mesmo! Porque não sabia o que era dar valor no serviço do pobre.

Dona Zaida spoke clearly about the temporal aspects of exploitation: her father, she said, *left at the hour when the day started dawning and just spoke the word “hoe” for the whole entire day.*

She also noted, however, that this temporal aspect could not get expressed as a price. At that time, *there was no price.* Not because labor was not actually paid in cash – her father’s was – but rather because no cash market existed for labor, no real negotiation for wages, and rich people paid *in whatever way they wanted.* Space, rather than time and money, predominated.

Dona Zaida: Yes. The – rich did very little. You know what a disdainful person is, who doesn’t care about others?

Duff: Mm hm.

DZ: The disdainful person, you already know that it’s people who want to be – big and rich. And a little poor person comes up, he doesn’t even invite him to enter.

D: Mm. Mm hm.

DZ: It was that way.

D: Wow. So you wouldn’t even into, into the house of a rich person?

DZ: And we wouldn’t even go into the house of the rich people, no way!

D: Really?

DZ: We would work, ah—in the little house there outside. There were some little constructions, some, some little shacks outside. We would stay there. We would stay at our work.

Dona Zaida: É. Os -- ricos faziam muito pouco. Você sabe o que é pouco-caso que não faz em outro?

Duff: Mm hm.

DZ: O pouco-caso, você já sabe que é gente que quer ser—ricão. E chega um pobrezinho, ele não manda nem entrar.

D: Mm. Mm hm.

DZ: Era desse jeito.

D: Uau. Então nem na casa do, do rico entrava?

DZ: E nós nem na casa dos ricos não entrava não!

D: É mesmo?

DZ: Trabalhava, ah-- na casinha lá fora. Tinha uns ranchinhos, ba, barraquinhos lá fora. Ficava lá. Ficava no trabalho.

Not just labor exploitation was at issue. Dona Zaida expressed the experience of prejudice in spatial terms, too—as exclusion from the neighbor’s house, a denial of the most basic act of hospitality.

DZ: A little poor person would come up to the house asking for a plate, a—a, a, a little thing to eat. But if there was some good food there on the inside, they wouldn’t give that, no way. They would take the weakest little food they had and give it—to that person –

D: Ahm!

DZ: -- on the outside to eat.

D: Hm!

DZ: And he or she wouldn’t even enter their house.

D: Wow.

Dona Zaida: Ah, I was raised in a time that was very—

DZ: Um pobrezinho chegava na casa pedindo um prato, uma—um, um, uma coisinha para comer. Mas se tivesse uma comida boa lá dentro, eles não davam não. Panhavam a comidinha mais fracasinha que tinha e davam-- àquela pessoa—

D: Ahm!

DZ: --do lado de fora para comer.

D: Hm!

DZ: E não entrava nem na casa deles.

D: Uau.

DS: Ah, eu fui criada num tempo muito—

Dona Zaida did not finish her sentence.

The rise of day-labor: Space into time

Seu Florestan came of age as the child of a morador on a plantation, four leagues, he told me, from the nearest town. It was the 1940s. Seu Florestan’s father had always been a morador, but Seu Florestan felt determined to do something else. He took the opportunity he could find. In a field not his own, he planted a field of tall green sugar cane, with a promise to give half to the landowner. And from his half, Seu Florestan made *cachaça* liquor. Then he repeated the process over and over, time and time again for ten years, until finally he had hoarded enough to buy a plot. The plot was tiny, but on it, Seu Florestan saved a bit of space to sow the new crop that had just arrived in the region: coffee.

Seu Florestan never got to harvest his coffee. On the new land, he argued with his brother-in-law, and the argument grew so fierce that Seu Florestan feared that one of them – either one – might end up hurting the other. So he sold the plot. He took the money and bought a house in the city. Seu Florestan and his wife raised five children in the house, and to do this, he hired himself out as a worker to the great landowners, in their fields of coffee that rolled along, green and full, for many kilometers outside the city boundaries.

Seu Florestan's travels followed, in several senses, the main line of 20th-century history. By shortly after midcentury in the area around Maracujá and Rio Branco, moradores were leaving the plantations, moving into homes that they owned or rented. Towns and even cities sprang up on the outskirts of the giant plantation lands (Costa Sena 2007). These were agrarian conurbations; their inhabitants would head out early in the morning, with lunch in a metal pail, and go to the fields, where they found employment as day-laborers. They toiled, increasingly, in coffee. Their work was often accounted and remunerated by the day, and this form of temporality gained increasing importance. The workers, however, tended to aspire to something different than day-labor: *empreita*, or contract pay by the job, which allowed some margin of time freedom and granted a certain prestigious autonomy to the worker.

Dona Zaida saw this change when she looked at her children. They had stopped being moradores. Their houses no longer served as their connection-point to work. Now their work lives were external, occurring, as she said, *out of the houses*.

Dona Zaida: They all work. Out, out of the houses. All work for other people.

Duff: Mm hm.

DZ: For other people, I mean like this. The plantation owners.

D: Mm hm.

DZ: The way they live, it's all like that. They live in their houses, but every day they go out to

Dona Zaida: Tudo trabalham. Fora, fora das casas. Tudo trabalho para os outros.

Duff: Mm hm.

DZ: Para os outros, assim. Os fazendeiros.

D: Mm hm.

DZ: Vivem tudo é desse jeito. Moram nas casas deles, mas todo dia saem para trabalhar.

(int w t063)

work.

As a form of remuneration, the house had been eclipsed; things were to be counted in days, *every day*.¹⁸

What had made these changes happen? In part, the roots – quite literally – lay in transformed agricultural production. Around Maracujá and Rio Branco, in the dry lands of Bahia, coffee had been introduced in the 1960s and 70s, and it came to replace cattle. Daniel remembered that as a small child he had been one of the first to help plant Maracujá’s neat “streets” of coffee, which grew and grew until they held nearly half a million coffee trees.

Coffee required intensive labor for only part of the year, during the harvest. In that season, hundreds and hundreds of workers would flood into Maracujá. But such a short-term labor force did not need to be housed on the plantation on an ongoing basis, and so the shift to coffee justified a switch to habitation in towns and cities. Sigaud (1976: 132) and Palmeira (1976) observed a similar transition in Pernambuco. There, rising global sugar prices led the plantation owners to shift towards a model that rested on intensified production, wage labor, and non-resident workers.

And yet the new crops, by themselves, do not explain the change (Sigaud 1976: 318). After all, coffee and sugar cane had been farmed for centuries by the live-in workers on large

¹⁸ Seu Jacinto, age 58, spoke of the changes, too. There were no more

SJ: Rich people.

D: Mm hm.

SJ: Rich, I mean like this, to have movement on the plantation. [...] It seems that there’s still movement on the plantations today only if there’s an owner of coffee fields. Because then they have to bring in people for real.

D: Mm hm.

SJ: For the harvest. But—for us here today, to live as a live-in worker on a plantation, [incomp], that’s not going on any more, no way.

SJ: Gente rica.

D: Mm hm

SJ: Rica, assim, para ter movimento na fazenda. [...] Parece que ainda tem movimento de fazenda hoje só se dono de roça de café. Que aí tem que colocar gente mesmo.

D: Mm hm.

SJ: Na colheita. Mas—a gente hoje aqui, morar de agregado aqui, [incomp], não esta tendo mais não. (Dona Verónica and Seu Jacinto, from int w t016)

plantations elsewhere in Brazil. The crops had an impact at mid-century because they arrived in combination with another new factor, which was ubiquitously referred to as “the rights.”

In 1963, Brazil’s National Congress voted in the Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural (Rural Worker Statute, or ETR.) ETR served as an exemplar of the democratic *reformas de base* (“base reforms”) that immediately preceded the 1964 dictatorship; the statute guaranteed to agrarian workers the same sort of labor rights that had been extended to urban workers and sugar-cane cutters during the Vargas era,¹⁹ including a minimum wage. ETR proved to be more of a signpost than a masterstroke.²⁰ Rather than instantly achieving equality, it set off a chain of further laws and implementation disputes that continue to the present day. But ETR did immediately open a new field of discourse: the demand that bosses comply with “the rights.” And in the states where it was assiduously implemented, such as Pernambuco, ETR had dramatic results, increasing rural wages by 500% and allowing moradores to purchase, for the first time, such luxuries as mattresses and transistor radios (Sigaud 1976: 321).

The new minimum wage was known as *o salário* (“the salary,”) and Seu Jacinto, at age 58, had vivid memories of the time before and after the salary.²¹

This business of the salary, it caught on somewhat recently. [...] So now there’s the minimum wage. But be, before all of that [...] There wasn’t that table of salaries.

Esse negócio de salário, pegou, foi de um tempo para cá. [...] Aí tem o salário mínimo. Mas em, em antes disso aí, [...] Não tinha—essa tabela de salário.

(from int w t016)

¹⁹ Note, in particular, Vargas’ Estatuto da Lavoura Canavieira, which in 1941 guaranteed a minimum wage to sugar cane workers. Thanks go to Dain Borges for this important point.

²⁰ The fear that ETR might eventually lead to a land reform program – and in particular to a program where moradores could make claim on the owners’ land – may have also lead owners to evict moradores starting in the 1960s. Thanks for this point go to Dain Borges.

²¹ Note a similar dialogue in Dabat 2007: 605.

Indeed, tables played a vital role in the creation of the rural minimum wage. In Pernambuco, regulators in 1963 crafted a series of tables that translated between an area of work to be done and a certain pay rate. These tables were designed to insure that the worker achieved the daily minimum wage.²² On the tables, for example, 726 square meters of “easy-grade” land were determined to take a normal worker eight hours to clear. Eight hours corresponded to one work-day. Thus, if the employer paid her workers by area rather than by the day, then she needed to offer at the least the legal minimum day-wage for every 726 square meters cleared (Sigaud 2007: 132 n14; Callado 1964: appendix pages I- V).²³

These tables quite forcefully guided the transition from space into time. As a scaling mechanism, the tables hooked a field size into a standard time rate, generating an equivalence between the spatial discipline of the plantation and the wage discipline of the urban industrial economy. And the hook worked. By the early 21st century, at Maracujá and Rio Branco, the basic

²² The tables applied to sugar-cane workers, not all workers in general, but they are part of a process that had far-reaching effects. Callado 1964: 88-9 offers a truly extraordinary account of the negotiation of the tables. In the appendix, he reproduces the “tables” in full. They were negotiated by a team of union and Liga Caompnesa (Peasant League) activists, on the one hand, and sugarcane producers, on the other, under the auspices of Pernambuco’s progressive governor Miguel Arraes. The Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural passed in March 1963, and the tables were completed in July of the same year.

For a particularly clear demonstration of the degree to which the day-wage had achieved hegemony as the dominant and basic form for evaluating work, see “Point Four” in the tables, which covered situations in which workers and bosses could not agree on how to fit a particular job into the tables’ criteria:

Whenever an agreement cannot be reached as to the classification of a job in the table stipulated above, that job will be carried out on the basis of the day-wage. This choice, to be made by the worker, can only be made at the beginning of the job (Callado 1964: appendix page V).

Tôda vez em que não se chegar a um acôrdo quanto à classificação dos serviços da tabela acima estipulada, será executada na diária. Essa opção por parte do trabalhador só poderá ser feita na ocasião no início do serviço (Callado 1964: appendix page V).

²³ The tables’ authors devoted considerable effort to coordinating their units. The tables actually use *contas* rather than square meters as a unit of area. At the beginning of the tables, a conta is defined as 10 square *braças*, and a braça as 2.2 meters. The authors specify that this measurement will be valid throughout the entire state, hinting at the geographical variation in scalings and the consequent difficulty of implementing a standard minimum wage.

The tables go into extraordinary detail about work classifications. Weeding, planting, fertilizing, and a wide number of other tasks receive defined rates, often specified differently depending the degree of difficulty of the land.

remuneration for agrarian labor was a day-wage – a time scale – that closely tracked the national minimum wage.²⁴

Not all *moradores* left residence on the plantations during the epoch of the reforms– but all workers and all plantation owners became familiar with “the rights.” By law, *moradores* were now long-term employees, and they had acquired at least theoretical access to certain annual benefits, including vacation pay and a holiday bonus (*décimo-terceiro*). Poetically enough, as if to mark the transition to temporal logic, the *moradores* referred to these new benefits as *os tempos* – the times.

Talking to me in 2012, Mathias explained how *moradores* could benefit from this right, the right to the times.

Mathias: It’s by the year. Maybe you work for two years. Then, when you leave, you have the right to vacation-time, to the thirteenth salary.²⁵

Duff: Aaaah ha.

M: The guarantee fund.²⁶ They pay all of it.

Mathias: Isso é por ano. Às vezes você trabalha dois anos. Aí quando você sai você tem direito em férias, *décimo-terceiro*.

Duff: Aaaah ha.

M: Fundo de garantia. Eles pagam tudo.

²⁴ Closely, but not automatically. It still took effort each year for workers to persuade bosses to increase the day-wage. (See Ch.6). And the day-wage was often somewhat below the legal minimum wage, depending on how terms were defined.

The standard day-wage in the villages was undoubtedly linked to the national minimum wage. But when discussing wages in the villages, *sertanejos* did not explain this link as a matter of employers following labor legislation. The legislated minimum wage was not the directly relevant factor. What did have relevance, here, was the retirement pension amount. The standard rural retirement pension was equal to one monthly minimum wage each month. Retirees did much of the hiring for day-labor, and so, *sertanejos* repeatedly told me, when the minimum wage went up, then workers knew that the retirement pensions had also gone up, and hence their employers had more money to spend.

²⁵ The thirteenth salary (*décimo-terceiro*) is a venerable tradition to which Brazil’s formal-sector workers are generally entitled. At Christmas, the worker receives an extra month’s wages (or, occasionally, the worker receives half at Christmas and half at St. John’s Day, or another similar arrangement.)

²⁶ The Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço (FGTS) is a worker protection fund to which employers must contribute. FGTS money generally serves as an unemployment insurance account, although workers can also draw down from it for the purpose of financing a house.

Moradores generally received the times in the form of a single payment at the time of departure from the plantation. But as Seu Milton noted, the times were difficult to access.²⁷ When a morador left a plantation, Seu Milton said, that morador

Doesn't have a right to anything. I mean to say—she or he has a right! You know? To the times. It's just that the plantation owner doesn't want to pay. The times. For them to pay, you've got to put it in the courts, fight in the courts to have the right to the times.

Não tem direito em nada. Que eu falo—direito tem! Né? Nos tempos. Só que o fazendeiro não quer pagar. Os tempos. Para pagar, tem que botar na Justiça, brigar na Justiça para ter direito nos tempos.
(Interview w Seu Milton, 8- 1 -2013).

Why did moradores deserve the times? Seu Jacinto described the times as an extra payment for reliability, a surplus that the worker built up over time.

I believe this, the responsibility that the person had for that time [...] You've got to pay—here they say “the time of the person.”

Eu acredito assim, que a responsabilidade que a pessoa teve esse tempo. [...] Tem que pagar— aqui eles falam “o tempo da pessoa.”

I asked for an example.

Seu Jacinto: So then you keep paying me a salary. Let's say, a salary. [...] Every month.
D: Mm hm.

SJ: Now, when it's at the end, of that firmness that I stayed, ah, with your plantation, then you pay me another thing that's different from –

Seu Jacinto: Aí você fica me pagando o salário. Vamos supor, salário. [...] Todo mês.
D: Mm hm.

SJ: Agora, quando for no fim, dessa firmeza que eu fiquei, eh, com tua fazenda, aí você já me paga outro diferente de – outro dinheiro

²⁷ Seu Jacinto observed the same problem:

Seu Jacinto: Here there's this law here, that a guy stays in a place for a time, years, on a plantation, they pay his times.

Duff: Mm hm [...]

SJ: And they don't want to understand that. In the state of Minas, they have it, but in Bahia they don't want to have it.

D: Hm! [...]

SJ: A worker [*camarada*] like that stays thirty years on the plantation, one of these plantations here, see. He leaves with the change of clothes that's on his body [...] You've got to take them to court.

D: Mm hm.

SJ: Here, there's this thing. [pause] And this is – now it's become a law. This thing here comes, it comes from a, from a president.

Seu Jacinto: Aqui tem essa lei aqui, que o cara fica ali um tempo, anos, na fazenda, paga os tempos dele.

Duff: Mm hm [...]

SJ: E eles não querem compreender isso. No estado de Minas tem isso, mas da Bahia não quer ter.

D: Hm! [...]

SJ: Camarada assim, fica trinta anos na fazenda, dessas aqui, Ó. Ele sai com a muda da roupa dele no corpo. [...] É preciso botar na justiça.

D: Mm hm.

SJ: Aqui tem isso. [pause] E isso é -- está sendo de lei. Isso aí vem, aí vem de um, de um presidente.

another sum of money that's different from what I already earned.

D: Aaaah!

SJ: So that's the person's times. The time of work.

diferente do que eu já ganhei.

D: Aaaah!

SJ: Aí é os tempos da pessoa. Tempo de trabalho.

And so the times were, in Seu Jacinto's words, the *time of work*—a remuneration that the person had earned over time, a sort of benefit for employee faithfulness whose amount was measured by the number of work years. The times were loyalty read inside the logic of the wage.

Often, plantation owners tried to re-read that loyalty back into the logic of space. Often they made an offer to their moradores. When a morador left the plantation, in payment for the times, the plantation owner would buy the morador a house. This house, located somewhere outside the plantation, would stand in for the plantation owner's legal obligations, allowing everyone to avoid a court battle.

Mathias explained how this worked.

Sometimes, the guy would work ten years on a plantation, ten, fifteen years. Then, when he would leave, the boss would go and buy a house to give him to live in. So that the guy didn't end up in the street. [...] That works to pay the times. [...] They reach an agreement, and – and give [pause] a house to pay the guy's times. And the guy ends up having a place to live, you know? Because many people don't have anything. Sometimes the guy would have looked for the job [in the first place] because he didn't have anywhere to live. So [the plantation owner] would have given him a house to live in. And when the guy – didn't work out any more on the plantation, he would make an agreement and buy a house and give it to the person to live, and in that way he would pay the times.

Às vezes, o cara trabalhava dez anos numa fazenda, dez, quinze anos. Aí, quando saía, o patrão ia e comprava uma casa para dar ele para morar. Para o cara não ficar na rua.[...] Dá para pagar os tempos. [...] Acerta, e—e dá para [pause] uma casa para pagar os tempos do cara. E o cara fica tendo onde é que mora, né? Que muita gente não tem nada. Às vezes o cara ia procurar serviço porque não tinha onde é que morava. Aí ele dava a casa para morar. E quando o cara – nao dava mais certo na fazenda, ele acertava e comprava uma casa e dava à pessoa para morar e assim e pagava com os tempos.

The purchased house thus came into being as a re-invention of the plantation owner's spatial bond, her duty to care for her moradores by providing them with a place to live.

In buying such a house and convincing the morador to accept it, the landowner circumvented the legal trouble that came with the strict enforcement of the right to the times. And so, even absent this enforcement, the times still mattered. It was because of the times that moradores could look forward to a place, in retirement, far outside the plantation's bounds. The times had changed the way that owners and workers related to each other.²⁸

The option of home ownership had a profound impact on sertanejos' understandings of their work trajectories, an issue I will take up again in Chapter 8. It certainly mattered to Seu Inácio and Dorotea, the family of moradores who lived at Rio Branco in 2012. Talking to me

²⁸

Lara's father, 67 years old, had benefitted from the times. He had been a morador:

Lara: When he left, he got the profit of time [...] He received a house. I don't remember what the value was, more or less. But it was the time that he lived on the plantation. He didn't leave, like, without receiving—without having the right to anything, you know?

Duff: Mm hm.

L: He received a house, because we were living in [the town of] Abelhas. It was the plantation owner who gave it to him. He bought it, he finished up the construction work that needed to be done, and – and gave it to him. [...]

D: He paid the times? [...]

L: People say that. It's like—he paid the times, like, of living there, you know? Because he lived – if I'm not mistaken, it seems like it was – I don't know if it was eighteen or if it was seventeen years. Of really living on the plantation. From when he entered working for the boss. [...] So then people say it like that. "The plantation owner paid so-and-so's times," you know?

D: Mm!

L: Of that residence time, that time the person stayed in the place [...] And in spite of everything, at the end, he still received the house, still. For free. It was bought, "Here, here, it's yours. [...] You do whatever you want. You sell it, or you give it away." Right? And so he knew that it belonged to them.

Lara: Quando ele saiu, ele teve o lucro de tempo. [...] Ele ganhou uma casa. Eu não lembro mais ou menos, no valor de quanto. Mas foi o tempo que ele morou, de fazenda. Ele não saiu assim, sem ganhar—sem ter direito a nada, sabe?

Duff: Mm hm.

L: Ele ganhou a casa, que nós morava nas Abelhas—foi o fazendeiro que deu a ele. Comprou, terminou o acabamento que faltava, e—e deu para ele. [...]

D: Pagava os tempos? [...]

L: O povo fala assim. Mais—paga os tempos, assim, de morada, né? Por causa ele morou—se não me engano, parece que foi—não sei se foi dezoito ou foi dezessete anos. De morada mesmo na fazenda. De quando ele entrou trabalhando para o patrão. [...] Aí então o povo fala assim. "O fazendeiro pagou os tempos de fulano," né?

D: Mm!

L: Daquele tempo de moradia que a pessoa ficou durante aquele tempo no lugar. [...] E a pesar de tudo, no final, ele ainda ganhou a casa, ainda. Grátis. Comprou, "Aqui, aqui é sua. [...] Você faz o que você quiser. Ou vende, ou dá." Né? Mas sabia que era deles.

(from c031 interview 10, 8-9-12)

inside the house with the burned-out electricity, Dona Dorotea invoked the future. She spoke with a certain sure vehemence:

It's our right. [...] The right to a house. É o direito da gente. [...] Direito em uma casa.
(from cad6p81)

She and her family had spent many years on that land, a land that the owner rarely visited. When they left he would have to buy them a house, wherever they chose.

If the owner refused to buy the house, Dona Dorotea said, he would need to pay her husband for the times.

They will have to give the times that he stayed. Tem que dar os tempos que ele ficou. [...] Em
[...] In money. dinheiro.

Dona Dorotea imagined for me the places where the house might end up being. Perhaps in Inhobim, the countryside town with its one main street and its two grocery stores, both owned by the same family. Perhaps in Conquista, the bustling city that ran all the way up a mountainside. Either way, the owner would have to do it. Over sixteen years, Dona Dorotea and Seu Inácio had not managed to make the owner pay the minimum wage, and they had not persuaded him to sign Seu Inácio up as a registered employee. But they would get the right to a house.

By the turn of the 21st century, however, Dona Dorotea's troubles and her hopes were becoming rarer and rarer in the sertão. The prevailing legal, social, and agricultural trends had combined to reduce significantly the number of moradores; in the area around Maracujá and Rio Branco, the landless occupations of the 90s dealt the coup de grâce. The predominant temporality of the new agrarian work, in that part of the backlands, was the day.

To be sure, day-labor was not the only option. As rural workers moved into their own houses in towns and cities, they participated in a number of different payment schemes.²⁹ Some

²⁹ Maciele, who had been born as a morador in the dry plain at the top of Maracujá, described these arrangements. When she got married and left the plantation for a nearby town, she found that "There we worked for other people.

worked *na meia*, “by half,” in an arrangement that mirrored certain older sharecropping practices; the worker would approach a landowner and receive a field to plant or cattle to raise, ultimately returning half of the total product to the owner. Sertanejos might also try the similar but more egalitarian *de sociedade* approach, in which both the owner and the worker agreed to subtract each party’s expenses before splitting the final product in half.³⁰ And workers sometimes earned a standard piece-rate per unit produced. The most widespread piece-rate system involved the coffee harvest, during which the harvesters would earn a fixed amount for every liter of coffee beans plucked off the spiny branches.

And yet, by the early 2000s, the day-wage reigned in the countryside, the most common and most standard form of remuneration. Indeed, other payment approaches were assessed against the day-wage. As I will note in Chapter 6, the day-wage was a constant source of intrigued conversation, and its standard quality emerged as the fruit of ongoing discursive negotiation. Because the day-wage dominated rural labor practices, the day itself, as a unit of time, became dominant as well. In Daniel’s words,

A plantation owner only pays mostly by the day. Fazendeiro só paga mais por dia. É difícil
It’s hard to find a plantation owner who pays by fazendeiro pagar por mês.
the month.

Nor were plantation owners the only ones. Small farmers paid their neighbors the day-wage to dig cisterns. Parents paid their adult children the day-wage to plant manioc. And, as we have seen, people even paid the day-wage to themselves – at least in the calculations of their minds. The day-wage rate was an omnipresent and universalizing figure.

We worked for the plantation owners.” (“La a gente trabalhava para os outros. Trabalhava para os fazendeiros.”) In the town, she noted, “If you plant, it has to be *na meia* (“by half”) with the plantation owners” (“se plantar, tem que ser de a meia com os fazendeiros.”)

³⁰ See description in Ch. 5.

Visible everywhere, the day-wage was also hated everywhere. First, it was too low—much lower than its equivalent in the metropolitan centers. Second, it was lower still for women, whose standard pay rate fluctuated around 50% of the male rate. As Lara saw it, she did not deserve this patent injustice:

Lara: I think that I work a lot. It's just that—the income is less, you know? (Both D and L laugh.) Because it's like this. When you—for me, being a woman—I grab on, you know, to the hoe. There's no—I don't have any laziness.
Duff: Mm hm.
L: Out there, it's – vap, vap, vap, working.

Lara: Eu acho que eu trabalho muito. Só que—o ganho é menos, né? (Both D and L laugh.) Porque assim. Quando você—para mim, que sou mulher mesmo—eu pego, assim, na enxada. Não tem—eu não tenho preguiça.
Duff: Mm hm.
L: Ali é – vap, vap, vap, trabalhando.
(from int w/ co31)

And, in a vague but important sense, something else rankled, too. The temporality of the day itself seemed dangerous. To get paid in terms of the day meant to get trapped thinking small, never moving beyond the chain of todays and tomorrows. Daniel put it aphoristically:

If you sell the day, tomorrow you end up owing it. Você vende o dia, amanhã você está devendo ele.

For all of these reasons, day-labor was widely despised. Already in the 1960s, Palmeira's Pernambucan interlocutors referred to it as “captivity” (*cativeiro*) (1976: 309). Rodrigo considered it something of a personal insult:

When a guy talks to me about day-labor, he's swearing at me. Quando um cara fala em diária para mim, está me xingando.

And Maria spoke even more directly:

Miserable work, that work by the day. Trabalho miserável, o trabalho a dia. (int w/ c194, 3m)

So the temporal goal of rural work was to move beyond the day. This goal might involve finally converting oneself into a smallholding peasant – as we will discuss below. But the goal could be advanced, in a more modest sense, by grasping hold of chance to work *empreita*.

Empreita was a form of employment in which the boss and the worker agreed, ahead of time, to a certain total price for the completion of a particular job—a fence-mending, a weeding, the clearing of a field (see Ch. 5). Empreita jobs generally lasted more than a day, but rarely more than a month. Empreita, unlike diária, was largely unsupervised by the employer, which made bosses chary about paying empreita to workers who might not exhibit devotion. This reluctance increased even further because of the tradition of paying some part of the price as an advance. Hence workers had to prove themselves in order to move up—from the time of day-labor to the time of empreita.

It was in 1974 that Seu Benjamin made this climb. He, like so many others in those years, had left an isolated farm and moved into a house in a town. And, again like the others, he had discovered the option of working by the day. But he wanted more than that.

Benjamin: I went to the town of Abelhas, I moved to Abelhas.

Duff: Mm hm.

B: -- and Seu Bartolomé wanted to dig out an alqueire³¹ worth of fields. [...] So there he was, chasing down an *empreiteiro* to take charge of it. So then he tests me. “If you’re good at working, here with us, here in day-labor, then from being a day-laborer you’ll get to be an *empreiteiro*. And take charge of the alqueire of field for me.”

Benjamin: Eu fui para Abelhas, mudei para Abelhas.

Duff: Mm hm.

B:-- e Seu Bartolomé queria cavar um alqueire de roça. [...] Aí caçando *empreiteiro* para tomar conta. Aí prova eu. “Se é bom de trabalho aqui mais nós, aqui na diária, diarista, você passa a ser *empreiteiro*. E toma conta do alqueire de roça para mim.”

Seu Benjamin took the challenge. He toiled four months as a day-laborer for Seu Bartolomé. By the fifth, he was already working empreita.

B: So then I went to take charge of the alqueire of field. To dig holes for planting, to spread fertilizer, and to plant coffee. [...] (laughs) The first call.

D: Wow.

B: Then afterwards I went along getting one alqueire [of work] from one person, two alqueires from another, and I went along doing

B: Aí eu fui tomar conta do alqueire de roça. Para covar, adubar, e plantar o café. Está certo? [...] (laughs) A primeira chamada.

D: Wow.

B: Aí depois eu fui pegando um alqueire de um, dois alqueires de outro, e fui fazendo.

³¹ A land measurement that varies by state, but that in this context is probably equal to 20 hectares.

it.

That was how Seu Benjamin's career got started.

As Seu Benjamin made clear, *empreita* allowed a worker to escape the temporality of the day by shifting back into the language of space. In *empreita*, an employee could account for her work by area – *one alqueire from one person, two alqueires from another*. These areal calculations conveyed a certain autonomy that the accounting of the day denied. The worker had space, literally, to figure out his approach to the job.

And *empreita* broke with the temporality of the day in another sense as well. Sertanejos frequently said that they preferred *empreita* because its time was monitored differently than day-labor: more loosely, more independently, and, above all, in lengthier units. This was not the tightly-watched day. It was a chance to work on a project.³² As Seu Milton said,

Empreita, it's better. [...] Because you come in at the time you want, you leave at the time you want. [...] In *empreita*, the more you push yourself hard, the more you earn. And in day-labor it's the same amount [each time.]

De *empreita* é melhor. [...] Porque você entra a hora que quer, sai a hora que quer. [...] Na *empreita*, quanto mais você puxa, mais você ganha. E na diária é o mesmo tanto. (cad12013p63)

Empreita, it seemed, created a door onto time freedom, and even if it only conveyed a modicum of this freedom, it nonetheless re-opened the definition of value. In the words of Hugo, a young farmer at Rio Branco:

Empreita is good, like this. Because day-labor, you have to kick it off at 7. From 7 in the morning until 11, from one until 5 in the

A *empreita* é bom, assim. Que a diária, você tem que pegar de 7. De 7 da manhã às 11, de uma às cinco da tarde. E na *empreita*, não. Tu vai, tu vai

³² Dona Marilda also sounded this theme.

[The day-laborer] sells the day [...] The person who works *empreita*] has the right to come in at the hour that he or she wants, to leave work at the hour that he or she wants.

[O diarista] vende o dia. [...] O *empreiteiro*] tem direito de entrar na hora que quer, sair na hora que quer. (3lagint1p46)

And on a bus, I overheard a woman describing her husband's work patterns in a strikingly analogous manner:

Working *empreita*, my husband has no set hour to stop.

De *empreita*, meu marido não tem hora para parar.

afternoon. And with *empreita*, no. You go, you go work at the hour that you want. We're worth whatever we want.

trabalhar a hora que quiser. A gente vale o que quer. (int w/ t066)

The transformations of mid-century broke the spatial system that *moradores* had used to reckon their remuneration. Those same transformations ushered in a new constellation of time concepts: the minimum wage, the right to the times, the day-labor rate. This constellation took the day as its structuring principle. The day became ubiquitous as an accounting category, so ubiquitous, in fact, that people preferred *empreita* work precisely because this work contravened the strictures of the day. The day had managed to shape a new definition of freedom – freedom as the time that was not the day, freedom as the time that stretched beyond the day.

Empreita, to be sure, was not the only way to extend oneself beyond day labor. One could also aspire to the salary, that is, to monthly pay. But Seu Jacinto noted with sadness that the salary did not come so easily.

Seu Jacinto: And I was never a man who earned a salary.

Duff: Mm hm.

SJ: I never earned a salary. [...] Soemtimes my work was, like, indifferent. It wasn't signed work. The whole time it was like that. They would pay me like, per day.

D: Mm.

SJ: By the day. Which, here, what we call it is day labor.

D: Aaaah ha.

SJ: Yes, it was just day labor. The wish to earn something, to have the salary, I've felt that. But I have never reached that—that position, no way.

Seu Jacinto: E nunca fui homem de ganhar salário.

Duff: Mm hm.

SJ: Nunca ganhei salário. [...] Às vezes meu serviço era indiferente, assim. Não era um serviço firmado. Assim, direto. Eles pagavam assim, era a dia.

D: Mm.

SJ: Por dia. Que aqui a gente fala, é diária.

D: Aaah ha.

SJ: Ó, era só à diária. Vontade de ganhar, de ter o salário, eu já tive. Mas nunca alcancei essa—essa posição, não.

(3lagint1p81) (from int w t016)

The salary lived, as it turned out, in the city.

Work in the city: the hour and the month

Sitting with her under the saints, I asked Dona Zaida about the big cities—Salvador, São Paulo. She answered

Some of these younger ones, they're the ones who are getting to know them. But the older ones, no. Those places, it was only recently that we started—heard of them, and we even ended up meeting people from there. But in that time of my childhood, nobody had heard of them, no way.

Alguns desses mais novos é que estão conhecendo. Mas os mais velhos não. Esses lugares, foi de pouco tempo para cá que a gente pegou, ouviu falar, e foi conhecendo até gente de lá. Mas nesse tempo da minha criação, ninguém ouvia falar não.
(int w to63)

People the time of her childhood had some familiarity with Conquista, the city about 100 kilometers away. Yet when a family member set out for Conquista, Dona Zaida said, the others would cry, because Conquista seemed so far.

That would change. During the 1960s and 70s, as day labor came to replace the morador system, sertanejos were also drawn to another option: work in the cities. Some toiled in domestic service, as we have seen; others became factory hands or waitresses, construction workers or college students or clerks. They accustomed themselves to a particular dominant mode of time: the hour, watched and counted. But just as the rural day could be extended into the relative freedom of *empreita*, so, in the city, the hour came accompanied by a more expansive alternative. The hour could grow into the month, the time of planning and self-development.

It was a work accident that taught Ana about the hour. Ana, age 20, had left Maracujá for a job in a Conquista clothing factory, and in that factory, she ended up stapling her finger.

Ana: There was one day there, for real, when I had an accident there. With the—with the supplies there. I cut my finger. [...] Like this—I had to staple the tag on the clothing. When I went to staple it, it cau—the thing caught on my finger.
Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: Teve um dia lá mesmo, que eu sofri um acidente lá. Com a— com o material lá. Cortei o meu dedo. [...] Tipo assim—eu tinha que grampear a etiqueta na roupa. Quando eu fui grampear, peg-- o negócio pegou no meu dedo.
Duff: Mm hm.
Ana: E aí, eu, eu tive que sair aí. Muitos, muitos

Ana: And then, I, I had to leave there. A lot, a lot of people started telling me to hide it so no one could see. But in the entire factory there were cameras, so there was no way for me to hide it. So then they took me there to, to a place, for them to treat me. And even the doctor, he really was on my side, for real. You know? Because he didn't want me to work anymore. But then the woman, my boss, she started saying no. Because I had to work, or whatever— Because otherwise, that second right then, when I had had the accident, those hours, they were going to take that out of my salary.

ainda ficaram falando para mim esconder para não ver. Só que pela fábrica toda tinha câmera então não dava para mim esconder. Aí me levaram lá para o, para um lugar, para eles medicar. Tanto que o médico, ele ainda ficou do meu lado ainda. Né? Que não queria que eu trabalhasse mais. Só que aí a mulher, a minha chefe, ela falando que não. Porque eu tinha que trabalhar, não sei o que—Porque aquele segundo lá, que eu tinha me acidentado, aquelas horas, se não eles já iam descontar do meu salário.

During the work accident, the reality of *that second and those hours* become material.

But not only then. One faced that reality every day, in front of the time clock. Alexandra, who in her late 20s had landed a job in the nuts department of a luxury grocery store, remembered how she would handle the time clock.

I would work starting at six in the morning – because I had to go at six, you know? To punch the time card at seven.

Eu trabalhava de seis da manhã – porque eu tinha que ir seis, né? Para bater cartão às sete.

To avoid danger, Alexandra planned her route carefully, arriving with enough time to take a leisurely coffee with her coworkers.

Orestes, age 23, worked bagging groceries at a Wal-Mart affiliate, and he adopted the same tactic as Alexandra.

Orestes: I always arrived on time. Because I would leave house a little earlier. [...] Like this, leave an hour earlier—

Duff: Mm hm.

O: --from home, to arrive, you know, on time, to—be able to rest a little bit so that I could get going when the time struck [...] I would get there with about—twenty minutes to spare.

Because it's like this, I would rest, you know? I would wait for the hour to strike. You know?

D: Mm hm.

Orestes: Sempre eu chegava na hora. Que eu saía de casa mais cedo um pouco. [...] Tipo assim, sair uma hora mais cedo—

Duff: Mm hm.

O: --de casa, para chegar, né, a tempo, de— poder descansar um pouco para já pegar na hora [...] Chegava lá faltando uns—vinte minutos. Porque assim, eu descansava, né? Esperava dar horário. Né?

D: Mm hm.

O: Para—pegar no expediente, né? Pegar no

O: To—get going with business hours, you know? Get going with the job. There would be a little time for a rest, you know? So that you wouldn't get there—running, get there tired, you understand? [...] To be able really to have—to feel more relaxed. To be able to be responsive to the work, you know?

trabalho. Dava esse tempo de descanso, né? Para você não chegar lá – correndo, chegar cansado, entendeu? [...] Para poder ter mesmo—se sentir mais à vontade. Poder dar a resposta no trabalho, né?

And so the time clock did something more than delimit and reify the hours of the work day. It also allowed workers to reshape their dispositions to time outside of the workplace—to convert other pieces of their lives into labor as well. Alexandra said that she considered herself to be *working* from 6 am onwards, even though her shift began at 7. For Orestes, the unhurried arrival itself was a crucial part of his responsibility; it gave him the capacity to *be responsive to the work* once the work-day began. Orestes thought of rest as an element of the work process: one's rest acquired its meaning from one's work. In fact, one rested, as a duty, in order to be able to work.³³

Beyond the time clock, there was another system that also made Ana's hours become material. The factory monitored her productivity. Supervisors sporadically checked the number of shirts or pants that she ironed and packed up in a day.

Ana: They had—the total, you know, the quantity that they wanted me to ir—to iron in a day.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: You understand? Like, they had—they put down the target. “Today, you have to package, package, iron and package 300 shirts.” On the day—in—the period. The work period. In twelve hours.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: So I had to get to that target, go past that target

Ana: Eles tinham – o total, né, a quantidade que eles queriam que eu pass, passasse no dia.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: Entendeu? Assim, eles tin, eles colocavam a meta. “Hoje, é para você embalar, embalar, passar e embalar 300 camisas.” No dia—na—no período, né? Do trabalho. Em doze horas.

Duff: Mm hm

Ana: Então eu tinha que chegar àquela meta, passar aquela meta.

³³ See Chakrabarty's similar comment: “‘Insofar as the ideas of recreation and leisure belong to a discourse of what makes labor efficient and productive, this ‘religious’ holiday itself belongs to the process through which labor is managed and disciplined, and is hence a part of the history of emergence of abstract labor in commodity form” (2000: 77).

Tellingly, Ana amended her word *day*, replacing it with *work period*. The unit of time that mattered in the factory, she knew, was not the day per se, but rather the number of hours, twelve of them.

Just like Orestes arriving early to beat the time clock, Ana figured out that she could best the boss' time-monitoring if she left a margin—if she monitored herself even more intensely than the boss did. To surpass the factory's desultory supervision, she began recording her own productivity every day.

So then I, I would see, understand? If today it was 300 articles of clothing, I would go and note it down. "No. Today I—ironed and packaged 70. Today I ironed and packaged 100 articles." You understand? To know if I was close to the target or not.

Aí eu, eu ia ver, entendeu? Se hoje era 300 peças de roupa, eu ia e anotava. "Não. Hoje eu—passei e embalei setenta. Hoje eu passei e embalei cem peças." Entendeu? Para saber se eu estava perto da meta ou não.

She would look at this number when she got home from work.

Ana: And when I would get home, I would have (laugh) written down the quantity of articles that I had packaged.

Duff: You would note it down? (incredulous)

Ana: I would note it down.

Duff: Hmm! And why would you write it down?

Ana: Because—because it was like that. You know? I wan—I wanted to know, for myself, if I was evolving, understand? Because if I—

Duff: Wow!

Ana: --was evolving a little each day—for example, today I ironed, I ironed and packaged, seventy articles of clothing, I would write that down.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: Tomorrow, I would see if I decreased my work or increased it.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: Because from that I would know for sure if I was going to continue in the factory or not. If I was having good results in there or not. And

Ana: E quando eu chegava em casa, eu tinha (laugh) anotado a quantidade de peças que eu tinha embalado.

Duff: Você anotava? (incredulous)

Ana: Anotava.

Duff: Hmm! E porque é que anotava?

Ana: Porque—porque era assim. Ne? Eu quer—eu queria saber, para mim mesma, se eu estava evoluindo, entendeu? Porque se eu—

Duff: Uau!

Ana: --estivesse evoluindo de a cada dia—por exemplo, hoje eu passei, passei e embalei, setenta peças de roupa, eu anotava.

Duff: Mm hm.

Ana: Amanhã eu ia ver se eu diminuía meu trabalho ou aumentava.

Duff: Mm hm

Ana: Porque daí eu ia ter a certeza se eu ia continuar na fábrica ou não. Se eu estava tendo rendimento lá dentro ou não. E a mes-- e, e eu anotava e mostrava para meu encarregado, para

then—and, and I would note it down and show it to my supervisor, too, for him – you understand? – to know if I was producing or – or not.

ele também – entendeu? – saber se eu estava produzindo ou – ou não.

The boss felt delighted with Ana’s ingenuity.

And then, when I started noting things down, my supervisor said, like, “Oh, that’s good, for real.” You understand? He liked my idea. “Every day you note down – the quantity of clothing that you ironed. Because then we will know if you’re increasing or diminishing.”

E aí, quando eu passei a anotar, meu encarregado falou assim, “Ó, é bom mesmo.” Entendeu? Gostou da minha ideia. “Todo dia você anota—a quantidade de roupa que você passou. Porque aí a gente vai saber se você está aumentando ou diminuindo.”

Ana, however, was not sure how delighted she felt. Within less than a year, she would return to the wide fields of Maracujá.

In the city, one’s hours could be turned into objects – not one’s days, but one’s hours.

And once transformed into objects, they became bearers of value in all sorts of unexpected ways.

Alexandra found methods for converting them into money. Tellingly, she referred to her day as “24 hours:”

Alexandra: I worked on, on—December, I worked 24 hours.

Duff: Wow!!

A: I didn’t sleep. I didn’t have a day for sleeping. I would work 24 hours. I would sell my, my time off. I would sell my lunch hour. [...] And we had—always we had those overtime hours that we sold. Those holidays that we sold. I myself—my time off was on a Thursday. I would rather work than stay inside the house (*dentro de casa.*)

Alexandra: Eu trabalhei no—no—Dezembro, eu trabalhava 24 horas.

Duff: Wow!!

A: Eu não dormia. Não tinha dia de dormir. Eu trabalhava 24 horas. Eu vendia minhas, minhas folgas. Eu vendia meu horário de almoço [...] E a gente tinha—sempre tinha as horas extra que a gente vendia. Os feriados que a gente vendia. Eu mesma—minha folga era em uma quarta. Eu preferia trabalhar de que ficar dentro de casa.

When a worker saw her hours objectified, she could speak of herself as the owner of herself in a new sense. She could cast herself as the possessor of her hourly time. This sort of ownership made Alexandra happy, since it allowed her to sustain her family. She sold her lunchtime and her time off, she said

For me to earn—for me to send to Leonel, Anastacia, Mom, Soraia [her mother and children] at the end of, at the end of the year.

Para mim ganhar—para mim mandar a Leonel, Anastacia, Mae, Soraia, no final do, no final de ano.

And she did not just send money at the end of the year.

I worked, worked, studied a lot. To send it. But every month I would send it. My 400 reais for Mom.

Eu trabalhei, trabalhei, estudei muito. Para mandar. Mas todo mês eu mandava. Meus 400 reais para Mãe.
 E trabalhei, trabalhei, estudei muito. Para mandar. Mas todo mês eu mandava. Meus 400 reais para Mãe.

The 400 reais, Alexandra emphasized , were *hers*. They held the time, the part of herself, that had become an object and that she would now give, as a gift.

But if one’s hours were a thing – if time, money, and selfhood were all intertwined – then one could also begin to track one’s self as a thing that was being taken away. One could understand selfhood as an object, an alienable substance. That seemed to be how Ana saw it. There was some quantity, she said, that the clothing factory was taking from her:

They just wanted to suck our energies. [...]
 All of our talents they sucked up.

Só queriam sugar as nossas energias. [...]
 Toda nossa capacidade eles sugaram.

Hence exploitation appeared for Ana— just as it had for Dona Zaida when she stood shut out of her neighbor’s house. And here it appeared not as a question of spaces, but as a matter of substances – of “energies” and “talents” – substances that flowed inside time.

When the hour floated into view as the dominant temporality of the city, the worker’s vision became constricted. The hour was a tiny unit of time, rather like the day in the countryside, and to focus on it was to suffer a sort of degradation against which one buffered oneself.

But another alternative existed. One could stretch one’s hours into longer units, as Alexandra had done: she sold her lunch *hour* and gave her children money *at the end of the year*,

while also forwarding cash to her mother *every month*. If the hour was the time of work, then the month and the year were the times of satisfaction. One labored by the hour and got paid by the month. Hours felt homogeneous in an oppressive sense; the rhythm of the month and the year weighed more lightly.

While in the city, Alexandra enrolled in a business management course, and there, she told me, a teacher gave her a metaphor for expressing this better rhythm. Life, Alexandra's own private life, was like a staircase. The teacher explained

Alexandra: It was very important, because she taught me to, to be looser. To have less shame. I was very timid. I would get very red. So then—she taught me, because she would mostly give Human Resources class. So then she taught me. She would say, like, “Oh, Bahia Girl, you should never listen too much to people. Don’t pay too much attention when people talk about you. You be yourself.”

Duff: Mm hm.

A: “Because that way you’ll be able to climb one more little stair-step.”

Alexandra: Muito importante, porque ela me ensinou a, a, a soltar mais. A ter menos vergonha. Eu era muito tímida. Eu ficava muito vermelha. Quando eu ia falar, eu ficava muito vermelha. Aí—ela me ensinou, porque ela dava mais na aula de recursos humanos. Aí ela me ensinou. Ela falou assim, ‘Ô, Baiana, sempre você não vai dar muito ouvido para as pessoas. Você não dá muito, assim, importância porque as pessoas falam de você. Você seja você mesma.’

Duff: Mm hm.

A: ‘Porque aí você vai conseguir subir um degrauzinho a mais.’

The staircase metaphor seemed to be a common one among sertanejos who were searching for words to describe the city. I heard it, also, when Laura recounted the lessons she had learned as a luxury cook in São Paulo.³⁴

Step by step, stair-step by stair-step. [...] Every phase that I end up passing through, I go and put money in the bank. The life of us people is stair-step by stair-step.

Passo a passo, degrau por degrau [...] cada fase que eu vou passando, eu vou colocando dinheiro no banco. A vida da gente é degrau por degrau. (cad5p85)

³⁴ Seu Ícaro offered similar advice on work in São Paulo. There, he said, it was a place for “working night and day” (*trabalhando dia e noite*.) And just as with the staircase, one had to work up slowly. “We can’t advance all at once,” he noted. “But I have patience.” (*A gente não pode avançar de uma vez [...] Mas eu tenho paciência.*)

In the city, this big time – the time of the stair-step – was pre-eminently the month. The month hardly existed in the countryside, where farmers worked with weeks and seasons and years; there, the only people to worry about months were those who had a direct connection to the state, such as Bolsa Família and pension recipients.³⁵ But in the city, the month reigned. Most formal employment, even entry-level employment, paid a monthly salary. Hence the month was quite literally the *step*, as Laura said, at which one could *go putting money in the bank*. The month measured one's income, one's rent, one's utility bills, and one's debts. The month was the time of planning and obligation; it was the time in which one saw one's total situation.³⁶

But along with its monthly charms, the city had its monthly pains. Seu Lealcindo, nearly seventy years old, had decided that he preferred to avoid the city and its rhythms. He did not want, he said, to be a

person who goes to sleep thinking, “Oh my God, at the end of this month I have to pay such-and-such amount.”	pessoa que dorme pensando, ‘Ó, meu Deus, esse final de mês eu preciso pagar tanto.’ (3lagint1p25)

³⁵ A small number of sertanejos in the village did have formal employment that paid by the month – generally, state jobs such as teaching and health care provision, although a few cowboys also earned monthly salaries. Mascates (merchants) also tended to pass on a monthly basis to collect installment payments for household objects, and the electric bill arrived every month, but both of these were widely delayed and often ignored. The new social benefit programs, however, had fundamental significance to the rural economy, and one can imagine that the month may be expanding its power in the countryside.

³⁶ Another comment came from Francisca, who was hoping for a formal-sector job. She used the month as a marker for her aspiration. She liked that kind of job, she said, because

at the end of the month, we'll have a little money.	no final do mês, a gente ter um dinheirinho.

Seu Ícaro knew about this timing. That was how he used to get his electrician pay.

In the city [...] you're going to earn your [monthly] salary. [...] And here [in the village] you don't have a salary.	Na cidade [...] você vai ganhar seu salário. [...] E aqui você não tem salário. (33m, int w c044, caldint1p99)

The city moved on the power of the month.

And these were the sort of considerations that, in the middle of an economic boom, drew sertanejos back to the countryside, to leave labor and head into a different zone: the world of the peasant.

The peasant farm: the day and the year

O parceiro deve obedecer a um certo ritmo de trabalho, inscrito nas diferentes unidades de tempo—que são para ele o dia, a semana, e o ano agrícola. Para o operário urbano, com a jornada fixa, a hora e frequentemente o minuto assumem relevo marcado, indicando o rendimento imediato do esforço e os elementos temporais em que se decompõe uma operação. Não é assim para o trabalhador rural, que *lavora* de sol a sol, e cujas tarefas se completam em períodos mais longos, só se perfazendo, na verdade, segundo o ciclo germinativo.

Para o colono ou o assalariado, o mês é unidade fundamental, que regula o recebimento do dinheiro; mas não para o *aforante*, cujas contas se fecha ao cabo do ano agrícola, e para quem os trinta dias nada significam. O ritmo de sua vida é determinado pelo dia, que delimita a alternativa de esforço e repouso; pela semana, medida pela “revolução da lua,” que suspende a faina por vinte e quatro horas, regula a ocorrência das festas e o contato com as povoações; pelo ano, que contem a evolução das sementes e das plantas.

The *pareceiro* small farmer must obey a certain work rhythm, inscribed in the different units of time – which are for him the day, the week, and the farm year. For the urban worker, with a fixed workday, the hour and often the minute take on a marked importance. They indicate the immediate output of effort and the temporal elements into which an operation can be decomposed. It is not so for the rural worker, who slogs away from one sun to the next, and whose tasks are completed over longer periods, only concluding, in fact, according to the germination cycle.

For the *colono* worker or the salaried worker, the month is the fundamental unit, regulating the receipt of money. But it is not so for the *aforante* worker, whose accounts close at the end of the farm year, and for whom the thirty days mean nothing. The rhythm of his life is determined by the day, which marks out the alternating moments of effort and rest; by the week, measured by the “revolution of the moon,” which suspends toil for twenty-four hours, regulating the occurrence of feast-days and contact with other villages; by the year, which includes inside itself the evolution of the seeds and the plants.

-Antonio Candido (1964: 95)

Our own field is better.

Roça da gente é melhor.

Rodrigo was a few steps from *his* own field when he spoke these words to me. He had returned to this field after suffering like a traveling merchant’s suitcase, after drinking his cows

away, after receiving the cure, after laboring outside the village and remembering how to count his work. He had planted beans in faraway fields and picked coffee on the waged plantations that stretched along the coast. Now was back in his own farm, in his own field.

Rodrigo preferred his own field, and Lara, his wife, agreed. Both were in their 40s, and they had experience. She explained their conclusion:

When we work for ourselves, it's a work that's – not very tiring. Does it tire you out? It does tire you out. Right? But when you're working for yourself, you know how it is. You work the hour that you want there, you stop the hour that you want, because the task is for us ourselves, right?	A gente trabalha para a gente, é um trabalho— não é muito cansativo. Cansa? Cansa. Né? Mas você estando trabalhando para você mesmo, você sabe. Você ali trabalha a hora que você quer, você pára a hora que você quer, porque o serviço é da gente mesma, né?

Rodrigo was one of many who returned to the countryside— although it was not always easy to understand why. Sertanejos who lived outside the village could earn wages higher than any they had seen in their lives. By leaving labor, by returning to the village, they were turning their backs on a boom. They were leaving behind increasingly lucrative jobs, swimming against a tide of rising wages, and re-entering a rural zone in which they would earn far below the poverty level. How did they explain this act? They said it was because of time.

Farmers overwhelmingly cited a reason for coming back to the village: in the countryside, they said, their time was more free. This is the story that Russo had told me, and everyone seemed to share his view.³⁷ Seu João Ramon, age 51, for example:

³⁷ Vitor, age 48, struck a similar theme:

The difference from the city? Why the difference from the city? There are the hourly schedules determined by the laws of the, um, um, um, companies, of the firms—
D: Mm hm.
R: --of the projects. And in the countryside that doesn't exist, you know?

A diferença da cidade? Porque a diferença da cidade? Tem os horários determinados pelas leis do, do, do – das empresas, das firmas—
D: Mm hm.
R: --dos projetos. E na roça não tem, né?

Lara noted that time freedom came with certain weather benefits.

It's really very different. Because here we work, we work for the ent—here in the landless movement, we work as self-employees, you know? [...] And we work the hour that we feel – like – we want to. The day that we want to work, or we don't work. [...] So it's a whole lot better, you know?

Muito mais diferente. Que aqui a gente trabalha, a gente trabalha para os ent-- aqui no MST, a gente trabalha conta própria, né? [...] E a gente trabalha na hora que a gente tem – dá – querer. O dia que quiser trabalhar, a gente não trabalha. [...] Então é muito mais melhor, né?

There was also Ademir. In Belo Horizonte, Ademir, age 23, had worked as a subcontracted laborer for Vale, one of the largest mining companies in the world. He fought fires around the giant mines that spit iron ore out into the air, onto shipback, and over to China. Then Ademir returned to the village. He explained:

A: There, it's a company. We can't rest. We have to start at the right hour, and stop at the right hour. Inside here, no way. Here we work a little hour, come back inside the house.

D: Mm hm.

A: In the company, homeboy? You've got to take a job the right way—valued. And here it's not like that. Here it's—work a little hour, homeboy, and come back inside the house, and rest. That's why over there the work was heavier.

Lá é uma firma. A gente não pode descansar. A gente tem que pegar o horário certo, e parar no horário certo. Aqui dentro não. Aqui a gente trabalha uma horinha, vem dentro de casa.

D: Mm hm.

A: Na firma, velho? Tem que pegar certo um serviço--valorizado. E aqui não. Aqui é—trabalha uma horinha, velho, e vem para dentro de casa, e descansa. Por isso que lá era mais pesado.

Working for a company meant working *the right hour*, but working for oneself in the village meant working *a little hour*. Ademir's terminology, here, pointed towards a curious fact. When workers said that they were returning to the countryside because of time freedom, they almost always used one word to describe the time. They talked about the *hour*.

Lara: If I'm working for myself here, and that misty rain starts, I'm going to stay taking that only if I *want* to.

D: Mm hm.

L: If I don't want to, I run to my hut, I stay there. You know? The sun is too hot, I work up until that time, and if the sun is too hot I drag myself over to the hut, and I stay there. And when you're working for other people, it's a thing where we—where we can't keep doing that, right?

Se eu estou trabalhando para mim mesma aqui, começou aquela neblina, eu vou ficar tomando ela só se eu *querer*. D: Mm hm.

L: Se eu não querer, eu corro para meu barraco, fico lá. Ne? O sol está quente demais, eu trabalho aqui até aquele horário, o sol está quente, eu arrastro para o barraco, fico lá. E para os outros, é uma coisa que—que a gente não pode ficar assim, né?

To Celso, who had recently quit an urban yoghurt factory, the countryside felt like the space of generalized freedom, the freedom of the hour:³⁸

³⁸ Also note the comments from Aldo and Simão. For Aldo, *not knowing the hours* meant losing money. And yet it was still worth it:

Aldo: Here is more calm, you work for yourself, you know? You—you are working for you.

Duff: Mm hm.

A: You stop at the hour that you want, start at the hour that you want, and—and there, on the outside, no way. When you're working for other people, no. You've got to fulfill your hourly schedule, those things. But out there you're making money.

D: So here, in some sense—

A: Yeah, working for ourselves is better than working for other people, right?

Aldo: Aqui é mais tranquilo, você trabalha para você mesmo, né? Você—você está trabalhando para você.

Duff: Mm hm.

A: Você pára na hora que você quer, começa na hora que você quer, e—e lá fora, não. Para os outros, não. Você tem que cumprir horário, essas coisas. Mas por aí você está ganhando dinheiro.

D: Então aqui, de uma certa forma—

A: É, trabalhar para a gente é melhor do que trabalhar para os outros, né?

Simão contrasted his life on his own field with his memories of the hours he had worked in the city:

Simão: I get up and—I go to the field, you know?

Duff: Mm hm.

Simão: Then at noon I come back. And, ah, then, some time, like, in the afternoon, if I feel like it I go back there.

D: Mm hm.

Simão: Which is better than in the street [i.e. the city], right? Because in the street, if you're working, you have to leave in the morning and come back at noon—

Jussara (his wife): At the hour that, that, that it turns—the hour that's been set.

Simão: Right? When it comes—the nighttime comes, you've got your place. You arrive at home, you have to take your bath and rest for tomorrow. And here, no. Here you work more for – for – ourselves, you know?

D: Mm hm.

Simão: So then, if you want to go, after noon you go. If you don't want to, you go out there a little later, you—can do that. When the sun gets cooler, you go out.

D: [pause] Yeah. I like that [...]

Simão: There's no one to be saying, "Hey, guy, you arrived late. You—"

D: Mm hm.

Simão: "—don't do that anymore, no way," you know? Because [incomp] when you're work—"

D: Mm hm.

Simão: --you've got an hour to come in and an hour to leave.

D: Ah ha.

Jussara: Sometimes you don't even leave at the hour that's scheduled.

Simão: Eu acordo e—vou para a roça, né?

Duff: Mm hm.

Simão: Aí meio-dia eu venho. E, ah, aí, de tardezinha, assim, se der vontade eu volto.

D: Mm hm.

Simão: Que é melhor do que na rua, né? Que na rua, você trabalhando, você tem que sair de manhã e voltar meio-dia,

Jussara (his wife): A hora que, que, que dá—que está marcada.

Simão: Né? Tornar, chegar de noitezinha, você tem já seu. Chega em casa, você tem que tomar seu banho e descansar para amanhã. E aqui não. Aqui você trabalha mais para – para – a gente mesma, né?

D: Mm hm.

Simão: Aí, se você quiser ir, depois de meio-dia você vai. Se não quiser, você vai mais tardezinha lá, você – pode fazer. Quando o sol esfriar, você vem embora.

D: [pause] É. Gostei [...]

Simão: Não tem ninguém para estar falando, "Eh, rapaz, chegou atrasado. Você—"

D: Mm hm

Simão: "—não faça isso mais não," né? Que [incomp] na hora que você está no trabalho—

D: Mm hm

Simão: —você tem a hora de entrar e a hora de sair.

D: Ah ha.

Jussara: Tem hora que nem sai no horário que é marcado.

You go to sleep at the hour you want, go out at the hour you want.

Você dorme a hora que quer, sai a hora que quer.

Celso's words practically echoed one of the verses from a popular song about a farmer's bucolic idyll:

I don't know about the hours
But I see the dazzle of the dawn
God and me in the backlands

Das horas não sei
Mas vejo o clarão
Deus e eu no sertão

Why the hour? Why did people explain their decision to come back to a particular place – the village – by referring to a particular kind of time – the hour? It was, we have seen, a class trajectory, a path through history. To leave the hour meant to leave behind the limits of labor in the city. It amounted to a rejection of the tiny calculative increments that dominated working-class life in the urban wage economy.

Of course, many sertanejos abandoned the hour only to find themselves enmeshed in the day. For villagers whose fields did not flourish, day-labor became the primary source of sustenance. And even the most successful farmers, as we have seen, measured their *own* work in days, as if they were paying themselves a day-wage. In other words, they had cast off the hour, only to then measure themselves by the day.

The peasant's challenge, then, was to convert from the day into the project, to build a discursive bridge that would allow her to speak about a day of hoeing or field-clearing as if it were a contribution to a plan to advance the long-term expansion of her farm. As we will see, it was because of this discursive bridge that employers who *hired* day labor could remember their day-labor expenditures on an annual basis, while employees who *worked* day labor could only think of their day-labor earnings on a weekly basis (Ch. 5). The employers spoke in annual terms because they were imagining the whole project.

Similarly, the discursive bridge explained why farmers used the day-wage to account for their own labor on projects – like fence-building – but not for their own labor of maintenance – like milking cows. Maintenance tasks had to happen every day and did not build into a visible outcome. Farmers did not track such mundanities. They counted their labor for the purpose of watching their days turn into projects, so that they could remember, at the end of the harvest, exactly how much of themselves they had put into the new corn crop or cattle pasture.

And indeed, farmers spoke about their projects with great eloquence. As Seu João Ramon put it:³⁹

JR: The work is already planned out every day.
D: Mm hm. Mm hm.
JR: What's for today—"I'm going to make, I'm going to make—this day, if I'm going to make—Tomorrow, I'm going to make a fence." [...] It's planned out, you know? In reasoning. In the head.

JR: O trabalho já fica programado todo dia.
D: Mm hm. Mm hm.
JR: O de hoje— "Vou fazer, vou fazer—tal dia, se eu vou fazer—Amanhã, vou fazer uma cerca." [...] É programado, né? No juízo. Na cabeça.

Planning, moreover, generated objects that could be owned. Lara pointed out that the pleasures of planning and the pleasures of ownership went together.

Lara: We're going to go out and work that thing that we're doing, and the profit will be for us—the responsibility is with us ourselves, you know?
Duff: Mm hm.
L: It's a thing that, if you did work there, you can plan—
D: Mm hm.
L: --that work. "That work, that field that I planted here is mine."

Lara: A gente já vai trabalhar aquilo que a gente está fazendo, já é o lucro que seja para a gente—a responsabilidade está na gente mesma, né?
Duff: Mm hm.
L: Já é uma coisa que se você fez um trabalho ali, você pode planejar—
D: Mm hm.
L: --esse trabalho. "Esse trabalho, essa roça que eu plantei aqui é minha."

³⁹ He also said:

In the countryside, sometimes, it's bet—it gets better. Because you—plant beans. You plant some, some corn. You plant some, some, manioc. You plant one thing and another. You plant some sugarcane. You plant some kind of tree—a fruit tree. And you go along passing time.

Na roça, às vezes, é melh—torna melhor. Que você—planta feijão. Planta um, um milho. Planta um, um, um, uma, uma, uma mandiva. Planta uma coisa e outra. Planta uma cana. Planta um pé de planta—de, de, de frutas. E vai passando o tempo.

D: Mm hm.

L: If I sell it – I can do whatever I want with it.
Because it's mine, you know?

D: Mm hm.

L: Se eu vender— eu posso fazer o que eu
querer com ele. Porque é meu, né? (from int
w co31)

By planning, Lara cut out the contours of certain objects—“that work, that field that I planted there.” She also defined the edges of “us ourselves,” the owners, the subjects whose identities came into sight as they asserted their ownership through planning.

Farmers had a covert chronology that they could use for planning projects: the moon month. In a peasant village, the calendar month might, as Candido suggested, *mean nothing*, but farmers paid careful attention to the phases of the moon. Each phase was reputed to be good for planting a particular crop— reputed quietly, however, since farmers knew that the agronomists rejected these notions. Agronomists notwithstanding, farmers tended to carefully map out their work on a lunar schedule. But when it came to establishing which phase of the moon was best for which crop, sertanejos disagreed widely. These disagreements, in fact, underscored the need for a personal plan. Since one could not rely on a single standard practice, each farmer had to think through his own strategy.

The moon mattered, for planting in particular, but the pre-eminent time of planning was *the year*. Farmers carefully recalled the exact quantity they had produced on their own fields in each annual harvest. And farmers thought about the future of these fields in terms of years.

Staring out at the coffee trees he had planted behind his beans, in 2012 Rodrigo projected:

2015, I want to be secure inside this place here.
2015, 2016.

2015, eu quero estar sossegado aqui dentro.
2015, 2016.

Carlos had similar thoughts:

Two, three years from now, I want to work just
for myself [...] I don't want to work for other
people.

Daqui uns 2, 3 anos, eu quero trabalhar só para
mim [...] não quero trabalhar para os outros.

The year marked the time of the harvest, and it was in terms of years that one could plan out the prospects for one's plot—some orange trees maturing here, some pasture to leave there.⁴⁰

So the move from urban labor to one's own field was also a move from accounting by the hour to accounting by the year. When a sertanejo returned to the countryside and gained her own field, a new struggle emerged. The day of day-labor needed to be converted into the year of the annual project. This challenge involved stretching out the units of time—expanding them so that one could plan over greater and greater periods, see farther and farther into the future.

Conclusion: the total

The specialisation of skills leads to the destruction of every image of the whole. [...] Despite this, the need to grasp the whole – at least cognitively – cannot die out.
--Lukacs (1999 [1923]: 103-4)

This chapter opened with a supposition: that class is, among other things, the way one reckons time. Inside the arc of sertanejo history, each class position could be understood as a particular style of time accounting. We have seen the limitations of this supposition, however. A class position turns out to include not one temporal mode, but several. Day-laborers can speak *either* in terms of the day *or* in terms of the empreita job. Urban migrants will gesture *either* towards the hour *or* towards the month. Returning peasants will conceive of *either* the labored

⁴⁰ Candido noted this temporality, among *caipira* peasants in rural São Paulo, half a century ago:

The agrarian year is the great and decisive unit of time, which defines the life orientation of the caipira, by defining his economic possibilities and obstacles, and by marking the direction of the following year (96).	O ano agrícola é a grande e decisiva unidade de tempo, que define a orientação da vida do caipira, ao definir suas possibilidades e empecilhos econômicos, e ao marcar a direção do ano seguinte (1964: 96).

And Chayanov agreed:

Since the principal object of peasant economy is the satisfaction of the yearly consumption budget of the family, the fact of most interest is not the remuneration of the labor unit (the working day), but the remuneration of the whole labor year (Chayanov 1931, quoted in Wolf 1966: 14-5).

day *or* the planned year. Indeed, the whole drama of class, it seems, is to move from one of these modes to the other.

In the sertão, each class position can be understood not as a singular kind of time, but as a set of temporal options. Sertanejos seem always to be facing both a small time and a big time. At the first extreme, they use a minimal unit of time, a smallest possible way to track their temporality: the hour or the day. The smaller this unit, the more degrading one's situation, and people strive to avoid its miniscule discipline. Hence the importance of *not knowing the hours*.

But discipline can redeem itself, on the other hand, if it builds towards a larger unit of time. Days become useful when they get added together to form annual projects; hours have honor when they become converted into a monthly gift to one's mother. In any given class positions, sertanejos face a maximal unit of time. The month, the year, the decade, and even the indefinitely permanent can all function as maximal units, and they orient people's aspirational horizons.

With longer time units, sertanejos come closer to a sense of overall vision. They build a view of the *total*—as my interlocutors put it. And, indeed, at the most varied conjunctures, the total could emerge with real force. Ana, caught inside the factory, complained about her supervisors: *they had the total, the quantity that they wanted*. Ana aimed to win the total back by beating them at their own game, counting her hours by herself to know her overall productivity.

As Maria reflected on her day-labor in the coffee fields, she sounded remarkably similar to Ana.

Day labor, you hardly rest at all. Empreita, you look at the total.	De dia, você quase não descansa. Empreita, você olha o total. (caldint5p143)

For Maria, the shift from day-labor to empreita provided the road to the total.

Lara, with her struggling small farm, had to decide whether to work for other people or devote effort to her own field. Working for others brought in more money quickly. But it was on one's own field that one could see the total:

Lara: Because you're going to make a little field of manioc. Maybe a tarefa [1/2 hectare] there, a tarefa there. So then you're going to have to wait a while for you to be able to sell it. But if you sell it all, or if you make all of the manioc into flour, you know that you produced one more result, that you got all of that money all at once, right? If it was enough for you to pay for a good shopping trip (*feira*), or if it was enough for you to buy a pig, or if it was enough for you to buy a chicken—right? Or if it was enough for—something like that, then we know that—

Duff: I love it. I'm writing that down. (Lara laughs.) [...] L: Like, sometimes, you buy a chicken, right? You say, 'I sold such-and-such thing, I bought the chicken.'

D: Mm. Mm hm.

L: Or sometimes it's a little more money, you buy a pig.

D: Mm.

L: Or sometimes we are without any food supplies at home. And you were able to go to the supermarket, you bought goods to last—you bought some little things that last a week, and maybe you can pay for a better shopping trip that lasts a month or more, right?

D: Mm hm.

L: And so forth. You say, "This thing here was from my field, it was that profit that I struggled so much for there, for us to get such-and-such thing." Right?

Lara: Porque você vai fazer uma roçinha de mandioca. Seja ali uma tarefa, ali a tarefa. Ali você vai demorar um pouco para você vender. Mas se você vender ele todo, ou a mandioca toda então em farinha, você sabe que você fez mais um resultado, que você pegou aquele dinheiro todo de uma vez, né? [...] Se deu para fazer uma feira boa, ou se deu para comprar um porco, ou se deu para comprar uma galinha, né? Ou se deu para—alguma coisa assim, aí a gente sabe que—

Duff: Adorei. Estou anotando isso. (Lara laughs).

[...] L: Assim, às vezes, compra uma galinha, né? Fala, 'Vendi tal coisa, eu comprei a galinha.'

D: Mm. Mm hm.

L: Ou as vezes é um dinheirinho a mais, compra um porco.

D: Mm.

L: Ou as vezes a gente está sem uma feira em casa. E já foi no supermercado, já fez uma feira para durar—compra umas coisinhas que duram uma semana, pode fazer uma feira melhor que já dura o mês ou mais, né?

D: Mm hm.

L: E assim por diante. Você fala, "Isso aqui foi de minha roça, foi aquele lucro que eu lutei tanto ali para nós conseguir tal coisa." Né?

When you planted your own manioc field, the total showed up in the form of the item that you could buy with your manioc, the pig or the chicken, and so you could look at that total and say to

yourself, *I sold such-and-such thing, I bought the chicken*. Maybe you could stretch that total into a week's worth of food. Or maybe even *a month or more*.

Factory worker, day laborer, peasant farmer: Ana, Maria, and Lara occupied different positions, but they all sought to think in terms of the longest possible time unit and thus to see the total. They wanted to be able to plan their work, to decide autonomously how to go about hoeing an *empreita* field, or to look at the long-term fruits of their own cultivated land. This was, it seemed, the positive version of time freedom. This was freedom not just as freedom from the smallest unit, but freedom as freedom for the construction of a point at which everything would become visible.

Capitalism, it is often said, distinguishes itself from other forms of social order because capitalism has a labor market at its core (see Wolf 1982, Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]).⁴¹ But what does this labor market *do*? My argument, here, is that what the labor market does is not to assimilate, progressively, all of the people in its ambit. It does not modernize and rationalize by integrating. Maracujá and Rio Branco offer proof enough of that, as does any urban neighborhood with a high unemployment rate. These are places full of people who feel a distance between themselves and the labor market, and, in some cases, people who have placed that distance there themselves.

A labor market has power for a very different reason: because it creates a system of scaling. Once the scale is established, it effects a transformation in people's understandings of themselves and each other, propagating its categories such that people rank their activity – and

⁴¹ “For Marx, the capitalist mode of production came into being when monetary wealth was enabled to buy labor power” (Wolf 1982: 77).

“Capitalism [...] relies primarily upon the mechanisms of a market – the promise of financial rewards or penalties – to motivate men and women to work and to hold them to their occupational tasks [...] In the place of tradition or governmental authority, capitalist societies control people and work tasks precisely as they control goods and capital—through a market system” (Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]: 4-5).

ultimately rank themselves – by labor-time even when they remain outside of the labor market. People use the scale of labor to measure themselves even when they are not working. Sertanejos think of the day-wage even when they toil on their own land; they arrive early to jobs even when they do not have to. The total serves as perhaps the strongest example, since the wish to see the total is also, for sertanejos, a wish to stand back from the labor market – to command, to plan one's work. The total is a self-distancing from labor. Just as Lara hoped to gain some autonomy from labor on her own field, she also hoped that the field would let her see the total of her work. But striving for the total does not exempt anyone from the categories of the market. Indeed, the total exists, here, as a sum of standard values.

Inside a labor market, the wish to see the total is a wish that blooms as a species of impossibility, since the basic principle of commodity exchange is that one cannot know the endless sequence of other people with whom one is entering into relationship. That unknowability is why a market exists. The market has the total, and you do not. This does not, however, deter the project of trying to reach the total; it does not cancel out the powerful sense that people can move from small time units towards larger time units, eventually reaching something enormous. Sertanejos demonstrate a persistent hope in the possibility of shaping time itself. At the end of one protracted interview, I apologized for having taken too long. Tadeu brushed off my apology with a declaration of faith:

Tadeu: No, we have our time. Because we're the ones who make our time, dude.

D: Mm hm.

T: Right?

D: For sure.

T: We're the ones who make time.

Tadeu: Não, nós temos nosso tempo. Porque é nos mesmos que faz nosso tempo, moço.

D: Mm hm.

T: Não é?

D: Com certeza.

T: É nós que faz o tempo.

(C045 entrevista 2—6-18-12)

Chapter 3

Access to Permanence:

Gender, Wealth, and Circulations in the Backland Home

Sometime near twilight each day, the bus made the turn into Maracujá or Rio Branco, lumbering and tilting from the weight it carried. It always came filled with people headed in from the city, but people only accounted for part of the weight. The rest was from the things they brought. The bus's empty seats held towers of plastic bags. Its luggage compartments were bursting with household appliances. Its wheels sagged from the burden: wheat flour and stereo systems, discount sodas and green floor wax.

When sertanejos left labor, they took objects with them, and the rhythms of mundane village life depended on these objects. Urban merchandise arrived in the rural world and mingled with the items of exchange produced in the countryside – chickens, beans, manioc biscuits. The merchandise changed hands, cycled between people, and, ultimately, found its way into a household.

Sertanejos devoted great effort to coordinating the cycles that circulated the objects around them, imports and native goods alike. This effort involved taming a set of temporalities that differed from the temporalities of labor, temporalities tracked by special numbers, like the number of days it took beans to spoil or the number of years a family would make installment payments on a stove. As they did with the times of the field, sertanejos strove to push these object-times away from the short term and towards the long term.

This project of scaling was intricately gendered, with particular tasks for women and men. It was, moreover, profoundly influenced by the cash that flowed in each month from the government program known as Bolsa Família. An understanding of Bolsa Família in the sertão calls for an exploration of these cycles. And an understanding of the time-scales of labor calls for an engagement with the time-scales of the household.

Bolsa Família and autonomy

A woman, really, she doesn't do anything. Really all she does is take care of the food, of things inside the house. She helps in the harvest. She helps clear the land as well. She helps with everything. Sometimes there's firewood out in the forest and I go cut it.

Mulher mesmo não faz nada. Só faz mesmo cuidar da comida, das coisas dentro de casa. Ajuda na colheita. Ajuda a limpar também. Ajuda em tudo. Às vezes tem lenha na mata e eu pego.

These are the words that Nicola used to describe her daily work, as a woman and a homemaker in the drylands of Maracujá. Helping with everything, Nicola told me, still amounted to not really *doing* anything.

Nicola lived at the place where the street ends and the bean and coffee fields begin, in a white house with two bedrooms. She, her husband, and her children barely fit inside. Nicola toiled in the family's field, and her husband sometimes got gigs as a rural day laborer, "one day for one, another day for another" ("um dia para um, um dia para outro.") "I think that I work too much," she judged as she talked to me. "I go to the field in the mornings." ("Eu acho que eu trabalho demais. Vou para roça de manhã.")

Like many others in the village, Nicola's household received a monthly payment from the national conditional cash transfer program, Bolsa Família. Bolsa Família money is available to households living below an income level that approximates the World Bank poverty line, and Nicola's family qualified. With this benefit, she acknowledged, her situation

changed. 'Cause this is what I mean—if it weren't for that money, there wouldn't be anything here. The money we have here, it's just that money.

mudou. Que eu falo assim, se não foi esse dinheiro aí, não era nada aqui. O dinheiro que nós tem aqui é só esse.

Nicola used the pronoun "we" to represent the owners of the money, and thus she avoided declaring herself the individual owner of the benefit. She explained:

The person who receives it is my husband.
He's the one who signed up for it.

Quem é que recebe é meu marido. Foi ele que
fez o cadastro.

A few meters away from Nicola, in a practically identical house, Francisca lived with her husband and two sons. Francisca began a conversation about Bolsa Família with the following observation:

I know it was a door that opened up for me.

Eu sei que foi uma porta que abriu para mim.

The pronoun “me” already signaled her view of the benefit, a view that she later made clear.

Before Bolsa Família,

Francisca: Never would I buy anything. I never made debts because I knew that I wouldn't be able to pay them. I never—even though José [her husband] works and gets paid, he never gave me money. He would say, “Go over there, and buy something,” and that would be fine, you know? Like that. But for me myself to go up and buy a thing, no. I never bought. I had never bought. It was after Bolsa Família came that I got to buy. I've bought furniture for inside the house, clothes—

Duff: Really!

F: Me? Yep, I have. DVD—I buy everything. Today I buy. [...] The money from Bolsa Família, I'm the one who gets it, and I manage it. I buy things for the kids, and I buy for myself. [...] There are people who say this kind of thing, “Oh, but that's a right we have.” But who ever thought about our rights before? Nobody ever thought about our rights!

Francisca: Nunca eu comprava nada. Nunca fazia dívida porque eu sabia que eu não podia pagar. Eu nunca-- independente de que José [o marido dela] trabalha e recebe, mas ele nunca me deu dinheiro não. Ele falava, “Vai lá, e compra,” e tudo bem, né? Pronto. Mas eu mesmo chegar e comprar, não. Nunca comprei. Nunca tinha comprado. Depois do Bolsa Família que eu passei a comprar. Já comprei móveis para dentro de casa, roupa--

Duff: É mesmo!

F: Eu já. DVD, tudo eu compro. Hoje eu compro. [...] O dinheiro do Bolsa Família, é eu que pego, e eu administro. Eu compro coisas para os meninos, e compro para mim-- [...] Tem gente que fala assim, “Ah, mas é um direito da gente.” Mas quem é que já pensou no direito da gente antes já? Nunca ninguém pensou no direito da gente!

And, as if she wanted to eliminate any possible doubts as to the identity of the people in the group that she referred to as “we,” Francisca added a conclusion about Bolsa Família.

I think that it's a woman's dream, right? To be independent, to have your money. To be there with no-one to be ordering you.

Eu acho que é o sonho de uma mulher, viu? De ser independente, de ter o seu dinheiro. Estar com ninguém estar mandando.

How to understand the difference between these two visions from two neighbors? In the first, women appear as people who do nothing, only help; the money from Bolsa Família belongs to “us;” the husband receives the benefit. In the second, women are presented as the bearers of rights and dreams; Bolsa Família money goes “for the kids, and [...] for myself;” the woman manages the government cash. For sure, a wide variety of psychological and biographical processes must have separated the two neighbors from each other, but their divergence is not a merely personal one. Inside the village, many women told stories similar to Francisca’s, and several women offered the same responses as Nicola.

The difference can perhaps be illuminated through an economic fact. Nicola lived in one of the poorest households in the village, and Francisca’s household, although it had a very low income by national standards, was locally recognized as one of the most prosperous. This connection seemed quite common in the communities where I conducted research. In interviews, the women who associated Bolsa Família with a discourse of personal autonomy were normally those who lived in households with relatively higher incomes, while the women who identified the benefit with their families (or with their spouses) were the poorest. In every household, the federal government makes strenuous efforts to give Bolsa Família cards only to a woman.¹ But there is some difference that nonetheless distinguishes the way the money is effectively received in poorer and in more prosperous households. Why this difference?

Since its inception in 2003, Bolsa Família has had effects both mundane and profound on an immense number of beneficiaries – over 13 million households, or approximately a quarter of

¹ By federal policy, Bolsa Família is paid “preferentially” to one woman in each beneficiary household. A man can be registered to receive the money if the household has no adult woman. In practice, men can also become the de facto recipients of the money if they hold onto the debit cards (through which the benefit gets paid) and know the passwords. In Nicola’s case, I do not know why her husband was “the person who receives it.”

the nation's population, according to the federal government.² The beneficiary group is notable for its heterogeneity, a heterogeneity not always visible in research about the program. Research projects have tended to produce results on “Bolsa Família recipients” as a general set, and so it is now the task of ethnography to contribute an analysis of the set's diversities.³

In this chapter, I attempt to explore economic diversity. Once more, it should be emphasized that even the people I call “prosperous” are small farmers who face serious deprivations when their situation is compared, for example, to the national GDP per capita. Many of the “prosperous” households still confront sporadic hunger, cannot pay for eyeglasses, and have difficulty buying shoes. But the households benefited by Bolsa Família are not all equally poor, and in the divergence between Nicola and Francisca, we can perhaps detect a difference that has significance in the backlands of Bahia.

Women in comparative poverty speak of Bolsa Família in connection with family and husband, while women in comparative prosperity speak of Bolsa Família in connection with personal autonomy. And this observed relationship cannot be simply explained by differences in schooling. The women who craft a discourse of autonomy do not necessarily have more formal education than their counterparts.

Instead of education, then, I start with an economic explanation. In the more prosperous households, couples tend to divide the household's money into (at least) two budgets, money for the man and money for the woman. The poorest households cannot make such a distinction. The divided budget, in other words, is a privilege of the prosperous. It is only in the domestic accounting of the more comfortable families, therefore, that Bolsa Família would appear as an increase in specifically female money.

² www.mds.gov.br, accessed on 11/27/2012.

³ For overall results, see, for example, the important work by researchers in AIBF-1 and -2, reported in Vaitsman et al. 2007 and DeBrauw et al. 2010, and Rasella et al. 2013

Over the course of this chapter, I will strive to demonstrate that this economic explanation is correct, but needs to be augmented. Why do the poorest recipients not separate the household budget? Why do the more prosperous divide their money? In the context of the villages at the field site, what is the meaning of “autonomy” – the state that Nicola describes as “being independent?” These are questions that call for analysis, the kind of analysis that investigates the practices that villagers use to assimilate Bolsa Família money into a local ideology.

The field site

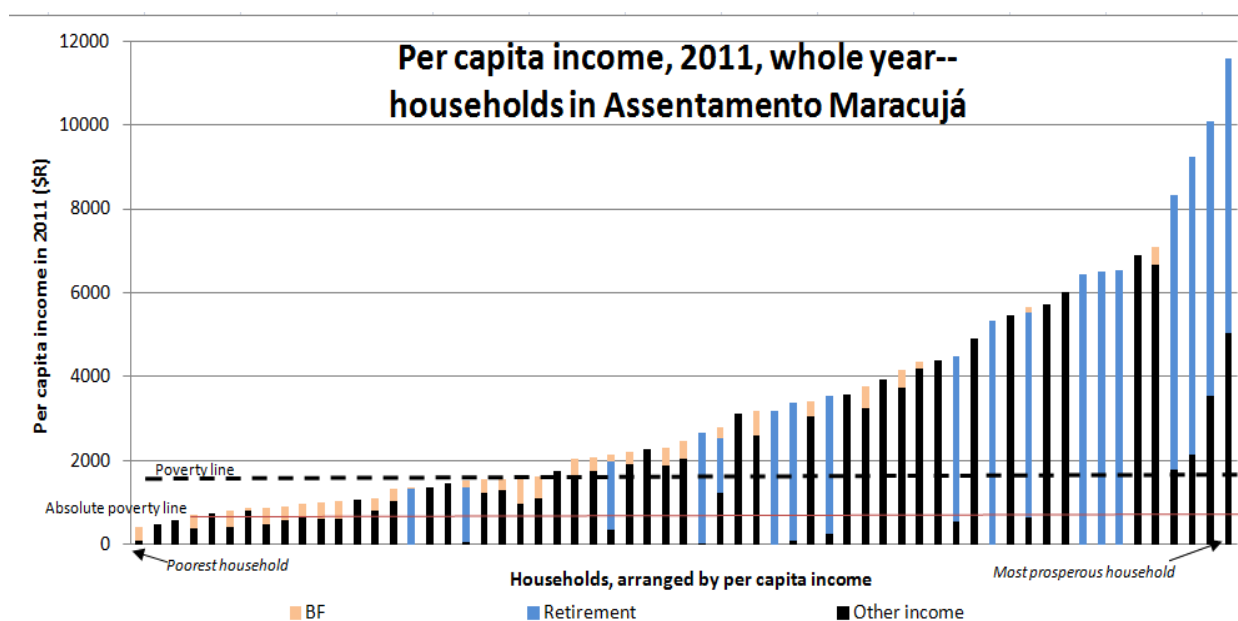
Alongside the roosters’ crow, alongside the creaky cart wheels, in morning-time the sleepy streets of the villages filled with young voices pronouncing the word *bênção*—“blessing.” “Blessing, Mom,” children shouted, or “Blessing, Uncle,” “Blessing, Grandma,” and the elder replied, “May God bless you, my daughter or son” (“Deus te abençoe, minha filha/ meu filho.”) The first time a child saw an older relative after the dawn of a new day, the child was required to ask for the blessing. And thus, with each sunrise, the kin network was re-articulated.

And for important reasons. At Maracujá and Rio Branco, extended kinship played a determining role in strategies for daily survival. There were very few “isolated” households composed of an adult with children and without any other adults.⁴ In most cases, children lived together with an adult couple, even if the members of the couple were not both parents to the

⁴ 5 of the 62 households in Maracujá had only one adult with children—the adults being one man and four women, and it should be noted that two of the four women had parents who lived in other houses in the same village. None of the 35 households in Rio Branco had only a single adult with children. It is true that, in a number of cases, a household would include a father or a mother who did not live with a partner, but who instead resided with her or her children and other adult relatives (grandparents or siblings.) Three households in Rio Branco (of the 18 that had children in the house) fit into this category, as did 5 in Maracujá (of the 40 that had children in the house.) These cases cast some doubt on my decision, in this chapter, to pay attention only to couples. My decision, here, runs the risk of reinforcing a model that stereotypically takes heterosexual coupling to be the default normal. The other cases merit a detailed analysis.

children. In this chapter, I will focus on these couples who live with children, leaving for later analysis the less frequent but very revealing situation faced by single parents.

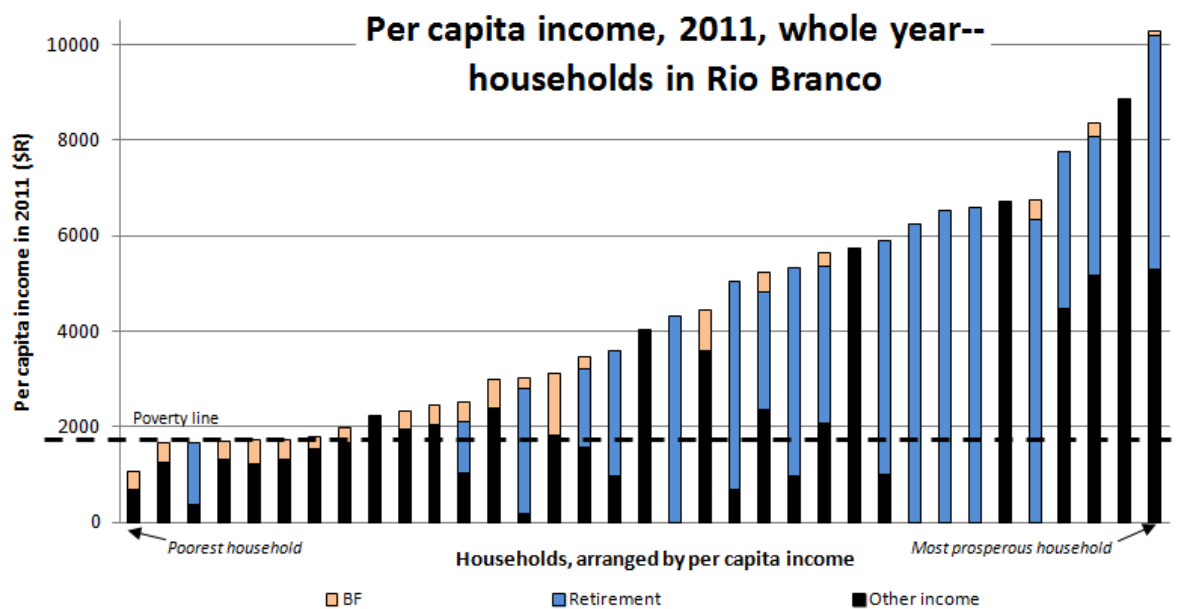
When I first visited the Assentamento Maracujá in 2005, I already felt impressed by Bolsa Família's dramatic impact. The research strategy outlined in the Introduction – in particular the census interviews and the “focus household” follow-ups – were planned in order to investigate this impact. The results of the census, presented in graphs 1 and 2, demonstrate a surprising level of income inequality in the villages. The most prosperous households are generally those that receive rural retirement pensions from the government and those that earn income from employment in the school or the health team. Among families that lack these



Graph 1: Income distribution by household in Maracujá, 2011

sources of revenue, Bolsa Família usually complements a mixture of other resources, including production in one's own field, money sent by relatives in the city, and day-labor jobs—this last category being predominant during the coffee harvest season in the region's plantations.

In looking at the graphs, it is important to note the diversity of income levels among households that receive Bolsa Família. For the poorest of these, the benefit makes up a major portion of the household's income; for those slightly less poor, Bolsa Família gets added to other means of subsistence to compose a diversified base for the household's economy. It is also important to note that the graphs do *not* inform us about whether or not any households are



Graph 2: Income distribution by household in Rio Branco, 2011

receiving Bolsa Família despite being above the eligibility cutoff line.⁵

The residents of Rio Branco and Maracujá find themselves, today, in the midst of a period of transition and conflict around gender ideology. In the discourse of some villagers, men and women are separated by a fundamental difference, a difference frequently expressed through the metaphor of the *house*, which stands out in the following passages (taken from several separate interviews):

[Woman, 33 years old:] He is the head [or “owner”] of the house. And the boss of the family.

[Man, 32 years old:] She just takes care of the house itself. She takes care of the house, takes care of me.

[Woman, 27 years old:] [The man is] the commander of the house.⁶

[Mulher, 33 anos:] Ele é o dono da casa. E o chefe da família.

[Homem, 32 anos:] Ela só cuida de casa mesmo. Ela cuida de casa, cuida de mim.

[Mulher, 27 anos:] [O homem é] o comandante da casa.

Other villagers insist on the value of equality, almost always expressed through the juridical metaphor of *rights*:

[Man, 26 years old:] ...the woman wants to struggle for equal rights...

[Woman, 27 years old:] The woman is the same thing as the man [...] It's both of them

[Homem, 26 anos:] ...a mulher quer lutar pelos direitos iguais...

[Mulher, 27 anos:] A mulher é a mesma coisa que o homem [...] É os dois iguais [...] Os dois

⁵ Let me restate this caution emphatically. We cannot conclude, based on the data shown in the graphs, that some households receive Bolsa Família despite having income above the program's legal eligibility limit. Three obstacles prevent a direct comparison of our data with the criteria for program eligibility. A) Our method for calculating annual income diverges, in some details, from the PNAD, since we take greater care to record income from agricultural sources and also agricultural expenses. B) The household units defined in our research may differ from the household units registered in CadÚnico, Bolsa Família's application system. A parent with children, for example, might have entered CadÚnico as a complete household, when in our research we might have considered them to be part of a mixed household with grandparents. C) Here we are presenting income for the year as a whole. Income can vary over the course of a year, and after several months of prosperity, a family may run into difficulties and request Bolsa Família.

The poverty line used here corresponds to \$R140 per person per month, and the absolute poverty line corresponds to \$R70 per person per month, the same standards used by the Bolsa Família Program; these figures approximately match the World Bank's criteria.

⁶ Throughout the chapter, when the interviewees' ages and genders are identified, the passages are taken from several different interviews; when the interviewees' names are cited, the passage comes from one single interview.

equal [or “the same”] [...] Both have the same rights. têm os mesmos direitos.

These two ideological tendencies are not necessarily incompatible. In the passages cited above, the same 27-year-old woman argued that both men and women “have the same rights” and, later, identified the man as “the commander of the house.” The *house/ rights* opposition helps to quiet any contradiction. This double metaphor points directly towards a constellation of classic and stable oppositions (*private/ public, kin/ citizen, house/ street* (DaMatta 1985)), and such a structure provides a certain symbolic equilibrium to the simultaneous existence of unequal roles *in the house* and equality *in rights*.

Nonetheless, the inhabitants of the region, when they speak in the language of rights, do not hesitate to highlight a historical transition, whether positive or negative:

[Man, 69 years old:] The woman today is having more freedom than the man [...] And the man doesn’t have the right to anything. Just the right to work.

[Man, 59 years old:] We’re starting to get out from under the sexist law [...] The woman is knowing what it is that she wants, what it is that she has to say.

[Man, 73 years:] The woman has been a nation that’s put up with a lot of insolence from the man. And today she’s not taking any more, no way.

[Woman, 35 years old:] I think that the woman, she’s already acquired her equality.

[Homem, 69 anos:] A mulher hoje esta tendo mais liberdade do que o homem [...] E o homem não tem direito a nada. Só tem direito a trabalhar.

[Homem, 59 anos:] A gente começa a sair da lei machista [...] A mulher tá sabendo o que é que ela quer, o que é que ela diz.

[Homem, 73 anos:] A mulher já foi uma nação que elas aguentou muito desaforo de homem. E hoje ela não está aguentando mais não.

[Mulher, 35 anos:] Eu acho que a mulher, ela já adquiriu a igualdade dela.

It is inside of this contradictory context that women and men must formulate the practices that create a household, using the resources at hand, in particular Bolsa Família money. And the unity

of such a household does not imply a lack of conflict. One had only to listen to the frustration in Josefa's voice:

Joesfa: Filipe [her husband] doesn't do anything, not at all. It's me.
Filipe: Sometimes I wash a plate.
Josefa: Stop your talking.

Josefa: Filipe [o esposo dela] não faz nada não. É eu.
Filipe: Às vezes eu lavo um prato.
Josefa: Deixa de conversa.

Bolsa Família in the world of conditional cash transfers

The governments of 45 countries today offer conditional cash transfers, and Brazil's program is the world's largest. Like most of these transfers, Bolsa Família sends small monthly payments to households whose children attend school and complete their vaccines; women generally receive the benefit. A variety of program assessments have identified modest but important impacts on child schooling and health (see Ballard 2013 and Lomelí 2008 for international summaries; Lindert 2007, DeBrauw et al. 2010, Vaitsman et al. 2007, and Rasella et al. 2013 for salient information on the Brazilian case.)

An active debate swirls around the gendered effects of Bolsa Família. Almost all Brazilian researchers emphasize the program's popularity among women who receive the money (Suárez e Libardoni 2007; Pires 2011), and De Brauw et al. find evidence that Bolsa Família increases the number of household decisions made by women (2010). On the other hand, the program is criticized for linking, at the level of essences, "being a woman to being a mother" ("o ser mulher a ser mãe") (Mariana and Carloto 2009:904); for increasing the work of women (Molyneux 2009; Mariana and Carloto 2009:902, Gomes 2010:94); for not providing an infrastructure, such as day care services, that could encourage entry into the workforce (Lavinás e Nicoll 2006); and for placing the responsibility for domestic care squarely on the shoulders of

women, without asking for “greater involvement by men” (“um maior envolvimento dos homens”) (Gomes 2010: 78).

The problematic of the “public sphere” (Rego 2008:169) occupies a central position in the Brazilian debate. A number of thinkers argue that conditional cash transfers “should diminish women’s social isolation and increase their visibility, principally in the public sphere, something not observed in Bolsa Família’s current state” (“deveria diminuir o isolamento social feminino e aumentar sua visibilidade, principalmente na esfera pública, algo não observado no estado atual do PBF”) (Gomes 2010: 77). Suárez and Libardoni detect a double disadvantage: women who receive the benefit are isolated in neighborhoods where they can find little information about jobs and also isolated in their daily work process, which is frequently solitary, “preventing them from living a life in political articulation with others” (“impedindo-as de levar uma vida em articulação política com os outros”) (2007: 126). For all of these authors, citizenship appears as a solution to isolation—but a solution that Bolsa Família has not managed to promote (Rego, 2008; Gomes, 2010: 72; Suarez e Libardoni, 2007: 142). This theoretical orientation in favor of political life in the public sphere finds its primary inspiration in the work of Arendt. In a broader sense, the orientation corresponds to the fascination – evident in the academy at a global level – with new engagements with the concept of modernity. Speaking of Bolsa Família, Rego draws attention to the analysis of “modern universalism” (“universalismo moderno”) (2008:153); Pires dedicates herself to studying “the change from patterns considered traditional to patterns considered modern” (“a mudança de padrões considerados tradicionais para padrões considerados modernos”) (2009: 8).

In this project to formulate a modern and public form of citizenship, *autonomy* appears as a keyword (cf Rego and Pinzani 2013). Suárez and Libardoni invoke the “progressive conquest,

by subjects, of political and social autonomy” (“conquista progressiva, por parte dos sujeitos, de autonomia política e social”) (2007: 154). The discourse of autonomy similarly informs Lavinas and Nicoll (2006: 61), Pires (2009:8), and Molyneux (2009:54). One of the Suárez and Libardoni’s interviewees also employs the concept. Asked about the effect of Bolsa Família on the women who receive the money, she replies, “Now they have more autonomy” (“Elas agora têm mais autonomia”) (2007: 145).

Autonomy, citizenship, modernity: these are themes that indicate a renewed and progressive vision of the public sphere. To contribute to the understanding of these important issues, I seek, in this chapter, to examine the inverse. What ideologies structure the reception of Bolsa Família in the private sphere? If there exists, as I have already suggested, an opposition between “house” and “rights,” then we require analyses of each of the two sides in order to understand the symbolic system as a whole.

For this purpose, we are exploring a path identified by Pires. She aims to describe the “relations and the family structures” (“relações e as estruturas familiares”) of a cultural unit that she calls, elegantly, the *casa sertaneja*, the backlands home (2009:1). This chapter will attempt to follow Pires, crossing the doors of the homes in the sertão, the backlands. Pires asks how the “so-called ‘government payments’ interfere and force a reinterpretation and reconfiguration of traditional, native values in regard to child socialization and family structure” (“as assim chamadas ‘bolsas do governo’ interferem e forçam uma re-interpretação e re-configuração de valores tradicionais nativos no que diz respeito à socialização infantil e à estrutura familiar”) (2009: 1). This chapter’s project is to complement Pires’ question. Instead of investigating the ways in which the payments modify the values of households, we will try to see how the households modify the values present in the payments. In other words, we want to explore, to use

Pires' terms, "the moral structure of the backlands home" ("a estrutura moral da casa sertaneja") (2009: 2), foregrounding its surprising capacity to assimilate and transform resources from the world outside of itself.

Mapping the backlands home

For this purpose, we begin with the concept of the household as an environment built by its inhabitants. We do not take the household to be a mere bureaucratic myth, but we also do not understand it as a fundamental category in all human societies. Following Weber (1968 [1922]), we assume that the household emerges at a particular historical moment and that its structure responds to the great demands of its epoch.

In an effort to understand the contemporary reality of Maracujá and Rio Branco, we consider the household as a *center-point of circulations*. Beans circulate from the field to the house, where a part is sold, a part is kept in plastic soft drink bottles to be planted the following year, and a part is prepared and consumed, nourishing those who will work in the fields again. Money enters, gets divided, multiplies itself, and leaves. A calf is lovingly raised and, after several years, slaughtered, with the profit used to buy other calves. People also circulate, traveling to work and returning under the force of attraction of the family's land. The household appears as a symbolic axis that orients all of these circulations – circulations of objects, money, plants, animals, and humans – around a single point. And the household's shared signs provide the unity necessary to bring together the efforts of people who must work in partnership in order to coordinate the varying orbits.

These circulations do not all operate on identical temporalities. Some of the circulations function in the short term (the corn that is harvested in three months); others in the long run (the

calf that is fed for five years.) To understand the calibration of these unequal circulations, we return to the notion of *conversion*, a classic concept in economic anthropology (Bohannan and Bohannan 1968; Guyer 2004, ch. 2). A conversion is a process in which a person manages to alter the destiny of common objects, exchanging them to obtain a prestige item; the Bohannans' classic example is the exchange of food for brass bars among the Tiv. This transformation, at once economic and ethical, has been theorized as a leap from a mundane sphere to an elevated one, and everyone strives, in particular, not to make a backwards conversion—not to trade a prestige item for a common one. Conversions carry a moral weight that separates them from normal exchanges.

In our model of the backlands home, the central conversion is the transformation of short-term circulations into long-term ones. Chickens, who lay eggs quickly, make it possible to buy pigs, who can take a year or more to mature; the results of pig production get invested in cattle, raised in a cycle that can take five years or longer. A new landless farmer arriving at Maracujá can plant 60-day beans, then use the yield to later plant manioc, which is only harvested after 18 months or two years. Inside the house, the circulation of food, a daily activity, is carefully restricted (“taking food out of the mouth,” in the common phrase—“tirando comida da boca”) so that it is possible to buy clothes, which run in a six-month circuit and renew themselves during the two great purchasing seasons, the June Festivals and Christmas.⁷

The mark of a prosperous household is its capacity to hold (*segurar*) the long-term circulations. In the field, there will be manioc and not just beans; in the house, durable furniture. The pasture will be full of cattle that are not sold young. The house itself, made out of the circulating income saved from harvests and livestock sales, will be built to last for years. To all

⁷ Sigaud observed a similar distinction in circulation speeds among rural workers in Pernambuco in the 1970s: the monthly salary, they told her, was supposed to be spent on food, and the annual benefit (“thirteenth salary”) was supposed to be spent on clothing (1976: 323).

of this is added the most important circulation, that of humans. Parents dream of the chance to keep their adult children (and sometimes other relatives) close by, a goal reached by some, who use the fruits of their labors to build adjoining houses and sustain themselves there without needing to participate further in the rapid circulation of temporary jobs in the city. In the image of the prosperous household, then, the principal quality is permanence, incarnated in two key objects: the cattle that the farmer prides himself on not selling, and the solid house, both already set aside as an inheritance for the children, thus perpetuating the current state of affairs.

Everything happens as if the inhabitants of the household wished to transform everyday objects into eternity. The circulations prolong themselves until they exit time altogether, seeming to confirm Weiner's hypothesis, according to which the objects most crucial to the construction of a collective identity are those that get taken out of the cycle of exchanges to become "inalienable" (Weiner 1985 and 1992). This, indeed, is exactly the conclusion that Sigaud (1976) and Palmeira (1976) reached during research in Pernambuco in the 1960s: rural families work so that they can turn short-term bean fields into long-term fruit orchards, temporary residences into permanent homes.⁸

⁸ See Sigaud's beautiful explanation of the system she observed in Pernambuco:

It was habitual for the bosses and the administrators of the sugar-mills from the sugar factory to grant some *moradores* (resident farmers) a "plot" (*sítio*), which consisted of a house in a location distant from the center of the plantation, where they could plant fruit-bearing trees and not just the short-cycling products that were grown in the *roçado* land that other workers were allowed to use. The "plots" were highly valued by the *moradores*, who saw in them a special prize: to be graced with a plot indicated that one was appreciated by the boss, and it served as a sign of stability (Sigaud 2007: 137).

Era costume os patrões e os administradores dos engenhos de usina concederem a alguns moradores um "sítio," que consistia em uma casa em um local distante da sede do engenho, onde poderiam cultivar árvores frutíferas e não apenas produtos de ciclo curto como nos terrenos de "roçados" facultados a outros trabalhadores. Os "sítios" eram valorizados pelos "moradores" que viam nele um prêmio: ser agraciado com um "sítio" indicava ser bem-visto pelo patrão e constituía um sinal de estabilidade (137).

In the conversion from short-term circulation to long-term circulation, women and men contribute differently. The man's main tool is cattle, the animal that makes it possible to transform diverse sources of agricultural income into stable wealth (cf Ferguson 1985, Comaroffs 2005). Cattle ostentatiously display the permanence of a household's prosperity, and they incarnate the specifically masculine power, enacted through the work of caring for a herd, to fix this prosperity in bovine form.

But women also have a tool for carrying out conversions. That tool is payment on credit. In rural Brazil, virtually all household items can be bought on credit. The item is delivered immediately, and the household continues to make monthly payments for an extended period of time, under the theoretical threat of repossession; in fact, renegotiation of the debt is far more common than actual default. At Maracujá and Rio Branco, villagers typically buy from *mascates*, itinerant salespeople who drive around the countryside in impossibly dusty vehicles stuffed with merchandise, each *mascate* cultivating relationships in a chain of villages that she or he visits monthly. (The term *mascate* derives from the name of the medieval trading city of Muscat on the Indian Ocean—which makes rural Brazil, appropriately enough, into the final outpost of the Ibero-Mediterranean world.) Although the *mascates* charge vastly more than a store in the city – usually twice as much, a *mascate* told me – they offer certain advantages to their customers, with whom they create close bonds. *Mascates* do not run formal credit checks, they come to people's houses each month to collect the money, and they tolerate almost constant changes in payment practices from month to month.

In planning for their deals with the *mascates*, women frequently chart out a long-term scale of durable goods to be obtained. This might begin with a sofa, and then a gas stove, and later a new mattress. When the *mascate's* car pulls into the village, (or, less frequently, when the

family travels to the city to shop at a store), the woman makes the credit agreement and establishes the terms of the monthly payment. The woman is also responsible for giving explanations and requesting an extension during the months when the family cannot make its payments. The furniture and appliances inside a house, therefore, bear witness to the woman's capacity to transform the circulation of monthly money into objects that perdure. We can even surmise that these female accumulation goods might occupy, today, the same symbolic place as the older Bahian institution of the bride's *enxoval*, or trousseau.

Some objects, then, circulate in long-term cycles – cattle, furniture – and it is these long-term objects that can be individually owned inside a household. All of the relatives will know how to name the owner of each head of the household's cattle. The probability of such individual ownership diminishes as the speed of circulation increases: pigs infrequently have individual owners, and chickens almost never (the exception being children who play at being chicken-owners, the adults acknowledging with a laugh these avian rights; see Chapter 7.) Furniture and appliances, also long-term objects, can sometimes belong to a specific person; if not, usually everyone remembers who bought the item and when. The rules and practices that apply to this intra-household property – the individual possession of a cow or of a television – differ markedly from the legal rights and obligations associated with a liberal property regime. Others in the household can use and even sell the object without the owner's permission. After the sale, what remains is the obligation to remember that a part of the family's wealth is owed to that person.

If cattle and furniture circulate in long-term cycles, there is another kind of object that iconizes rapid circulation *par excellence*. It is food. With its daily circuit, food enters and leaves the house in a rush, and during its trajectory, more than any other object, it recreates the most basic domestic relationships.

Food has a number of special qualities that separate it from other quotidian items. In contrast to long-term objects, food cannot be individually owned: a series of strong rules rigidly prohibit food from becoming alienable property. No-one may withhold food from another who requests it. The prohibition on food ownership also manifests itself, on the positive side, through the imperative to commensality. The mandatory sharing of food is immediately obvious as a core practice in the everyday world of the region, a practice on display at lunchtime, when everyone nearby is called to come inside and eat, and even in the purchases made by children, who buy more than one piece of candy at a time, knowing that when they eat they will need to share with their companions.⁹ In the semiotic economy of the backlands home, food circulates as a good to be obligatorily shared.

Food, not being the exclusive possession of anyone, remains the responsibility of a specific person: the man. According to the common phrase, the man must “put food inside the house” (*botar comida dentro de casa*) (or, in Francisca’s words, “put beans inside the house” – *botar feijão dentro de casa*.) Food expenses – and, according to some people, medicine expenses – are his special obligation, and they define his role as a man, in opposition to the woman, who transforms the purchased or harvested food into edible nourishment.

[Man, 73 years old:] [The man] has to put things inside the house for the woman to be in charge of them.

[Homem, 73 anos:] [O homem] tem que botar as coisas dentro de casa para a mulher tomar conta.

[Man, 72 years old:] [The man’s role is] to buy food just the right way [...] so that there can be food inside the house.

[Homem, 72 anos:] [O papel do homem é] comprar alimentos direitinho [...] para ter alimentos dentro de casa.

⁹ It is worthwhile to emphasize the importance of the element of visibility in the obligatory sharing of food. “Três sol” (“three sun”), an eye infection, is caused, it is said, when a pregnant woman or even a pregnant animal looks at the food that someone is eating and feels the wish to eat as well. If the eater does not offer the food, he or she will suffer from três sol – even if he or she did not know about the other’s wish to eat. According to another account that I heard, greedy people will close the doors and windows of their houses during lunch, so as not to run the risk that a passer-by might see the food; if that happened, then the greedy people would be obligated to invite the passer-by to eat.

[Woman, 44 years old:] The man has to figure things out so he can do the food shopping [*fazer a feira*.] [She explains that in twenty years of marriage, she herself has only done the food shopping three times, more or less.]

[Mulher, 44 anos:] O homem tem que se virar para fazer a feira. [Ela relata que em 20 anos de matrimônio, ela mesma fez a feira só umas três vezes.]

To represent the man's duty, some couples differentiate *despesas* (roughly, "expenditures") and *compras* (roughly, "shopping items.") The word *despesas* refers specifically to food (*despesas* being "of the stove," *do fogão*;) *compras* include clothes, furniture, and shoes. Anyone can purchase the *compras*, but the *despesas* must come from the man. A nine-year-old girl, overhearing my interview with her parents, explained to me: "Daddy buys the food, Mommy buys the clothes, and Dona Maria [her grandmother] buys some things" (*Painho compra a comida, Mãinha compra a roupa, e Dona Maria [avó] compra algumas coisas*.) Gift of the father, prepared by the mother, food weaves the relations between the genders and produces one of the sides of the backlands home, the side that is most shared, most public, most mobile, and most quotidian, the side where the household becomes most equal to all of the others.

Enter Bolsa Família

When I conducted my first interview with Dalia, she was dreaming of a sofa. Dalia was 17 years old and the mother of a small girl. Despite several attempts to register, she did not receive Bolsa Família.¹⁰ She and her husband had great difficulties in finding day-labor jobs in the fields, and sometimes they spent the week with not even beans in their home, making do by

¹⁰ Sertanejos have trouble getting Bolsa Família for many reasons. Bolsa Família is not a right, but rather a social program. Each municipality is granted a limited number of Bolsa Família slots, and once these are filled, new applicants have to stay on a waiting list. Moreover, the program's status as a non-right makes it difficult for potential recipients to demand effective and speedy treatment. For more on problems in receiving Bolsa Família, see Morton 2014.

eating with relatives who lived nearby. Dalia told me that she had never had a sofa, and that was what she really wanted.

Ten months and many interviews later, Dalia's situation had changed. She was the mother of a second girl. Her husband had found temporary work, which increased the family's disposable income. Helped by the special privileges granted to expecting mothers, Dalia had finally started getting Bolsa Família. And one day she gracefully invited me into her house, smiling a proud smile, asking me to have a seat on a soft brown couch that still smelled like a furniture store.

When Bolsa Família money enters the backlands home, it generates a challenge: how to convert this resource into an object that circulates over the long term? Bolsa Família is paid out on a monthly cycle – a temporality that is rare in rural areas, where incomes tend to follow the rhythm of the harvests. This monthly sum must get converted; it must be transformed into acculturated wealth inside of the household. As it turns out, the conversion is carried out in one manner by the poorer villagers and in an entirely different manner by their more prosperous neighbors.

In the poorest households, the money is often used to cover expenses with food, and perhaps with electricity, medicine, some clothes, or school supplies. These expenses are described as “little consumption” (*comsumozinho*):

[Woman, 37 years old:] I use it more for food in the home.

[Mulher, 37 anos:] Eu uso mais para alimentação de casa.

[Woman, 50 years old:] It's really just to keep up the basic expenses [*despesas*] [...] really for inside the house [*dentro de casa*.] [The woman's husband adds:] A piece of meat.

[Mulher, 50 anos:] Só é mesmo para manter mesmo as despesas mesmo [...] para dentro de casa mesmo. [O marido da mulher acrescenta:] Pedaco de carne.

[Woman, 19 years old:] It's more for food [...] School supplies [...] Something for inside the

[Mulher, 19 anos:] Mais é alimentação [...] material de escola [...] alguma coisa para

house [*dentro de casa.*]

[Woman, 61 years old:] I would buy things to eat, things for the child [...] anything for inside the house [*dentro de casa.*] [...] it wasn't enough for a big thing, not at all. It was really just for little consumption.

[Woman, 54 years old:] [Bolsa Família goes for] little consumption of the house [...] something to eat [...] About dealing with some item for the house— nobody can say that it's enough to get that. [The woman's husband notes that the owner of a store, in the city, lied and told his customers that Bolsa Família could be spent only on staple foods and other "basic expenses," or "despesas."]

dentro de casa.

[Mulher, 61 anos:] Comprava coisas para comer, coisas para a criança [...] qualquer coisa para dentro de casa [...] não dava para coisa grande não. Era mesmo para consumozinho.

[Mulher, 54 anos:] [Bolsa Família vai para] consumozinho da casa [...] alguma coisa para comer [...] Sobre movimento de coisa de casa ninguém pode dizer que dá para isso. [O esposo da mulher relata que o dono de uma loja, na cidade, mentiu e falou para os clientes que o Bolsa Família precisava ser gasto só com cereais e outras "despesas."]

Pires observes the same dynamic in the backlands of Paraíba: "What seems to happen [...] is the prioritization of the whole family in situations of extreme poverty [...] In these cases the benefit is largely consumed in the form of food for the family" (*O que parece ocorrer, no entanto, é a priorização de toda a família em situações de extrema pobreza [...] Nestes casos o benefício é largamente consumido com a alimentação da família*) (2011: 3).¹¹ In the poorest households,

¹¹ Also see Pires' similar observation in a later work (2013: 126-7 n4).

then, Bolsa Família money circulates almost exclusively along short-term circuits. In more prosperous households, Bolsa Família has a quite different destiny. A woman will save a sum each month to make the installment credit payment for an already-purchased item of furniture or an appliance. She will carefully plan this conversion, with an exact calculation of the monthly payment that the family can afford and with a series of purchases – first the stove to be paid over ten months, then the mattress to be paid over five – all thought through ahead of time.

Martina explained to me that she always set aside part of the Bolsa Família money for a main credit payment, on a large object. Over ten years, she had managed to buy a television, a

We would like to emphasize that it is necessity that seems to determine the distribution of resources [from Bolsa Família inside households]: in very poor families, the benefit is spent on food as a priority, but in poor families – in other words, those who have another source of income – the benefit has a wide range of applications. Bills such as rent, electricity, and water were mentioned as family priorities. Many mothers take the “papers” – the water and light bills – at the same time they go to withdraw the benefit. “Just receiving and then paying,” they told us. The benefit also pays for expenses with medications. Durable goods, like electric appliances and furniture, are bought, generally, through installment payments both in the city’s furniture and appliance store and in the stores of the neighboring city. Sofas, stereos, DVD players, and TV sets seem to be the most frequently purchased goods. Such arrangements generally occurred, as we have already noted, in families that are able to count on other sources of income. However, Bolsa Família money is not only used for expenses. Both families and children manage to save part of the money, whether for an unexpected need or in order to purchase a durable good without resorting to credit. Along with this, the money is also used for tithing at evangelical churches and in the Mass offering at the Catholic church (Silva, 2011).

Gostaríamos de destacar que é a necessidade que parece determinar a distribuição dos recursos: em famílias muito pobres, o benefício é consumido prioritariamente com alimentação, mas em famílias pobres, ou seja, que contam com outra fonte de renda, o benefício tem a uma larga gama de empregos. Contas como aluguel, luz e água foram mencionadas como prioridade familiar. Muitas mães já levam os ‘papéis’ da água e da luz quando vão retirar o benefício. “É recebendo e pagando”, como nos foi dito. O benefício também paga gastos com medicamentos. Bens duráveis, como eletrodomésticos e móveis, são comprados, geralmente, através de parcelamento tanto na loja de móveis e eletrodomésticos da cidade quanto nas lojas da cidade vizinha. Sofá, aparelho de som, de DVD e TV parecem ser os bens mais frequentemente comprados. Estes arranjos ocorrem, geralmente, como já foi dito, nos casos das famílias que contam com outras fontes de renda. Todavia, não é apenas em gastos que o dinheiro do PBF é empregado. Famílias e crianças conseguem poupar parte do dinheiro, seja para uma necessidade inesperada, seja para a compra à vista de um bem durável. Além disso, o dinheiro também é empregado no dízimo das igrejas evangélicas e na oferta da missa na igreja católica (Silva, 2011).

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blender, a gas stove, and a sofa. But she did not dedicate more than fifty reais each month (approximately \$25 US) to this main credit payment, so that she could use the remaining fifty for more rapidly-circulating objects, like vegetables, fruit, or clothes. Like many other people in the villages, Martina made a distinction between “basic foods” (or, in another phrasing, “cereais”) like rice and beans, which are the man’s vital responsibility, and supplements like fruits and vegetables, which she could optionally buy as supplements.

Martina: Bolsa Família isn’t enough for you to buy things, only if you put together money from several months, you know?

Duff: Mm hm.

Martina: Then you can get something together. But if you don’t have a financial situation that lets you get the money together, then you buy on credit. I myself, I always buy something like that, something that costs around fifty reais. Because then you’ve got—I’m going to make the monthly credit payment, and I’ll have another fifty left over. So I always buy like that, on credit, and I pay and pay. Every month that I get Bolsa Família, I go right there and make the credit payment. [...] Always my credit payments are like that, fifty or below. ‘Cause there’s got to be a little left over for me, so that I can buy something for me, too.¹²

Martina: A Bolsa Família não dá para você comprar, só se você for juntando várias meses, né?

Duff: Mm hm.

Martina: Aí você pode juntar. Mas quem não tem condições de juntar, você faz uma prestação. Eu mesma, eu sempre compro uma coisa assim, no valor de cinquenta reais. Que aí vai-- eu vou pagar a prestação, vai me sobrar mais de cinquenta. Então, sempre eu compro assim, a prestação, e vou pagando. Todo mês que eu recebo Bolsa Família, eu já vou lá e pago a prestação. [...] Sempre as prestação minhas é assim, cinquenta abaixo. Porque aí tem que sobrar um pouco para mim, modo de eu comprar alguma coisa para mim também.

¹² Martina went on to add the following:

Her neighbor Eva explained that “most people” (*a maioria da gente*) used Bolsa Família for monthly food shopping:

Sometimes, there, sometimes most people go food shopping [*feira.*] They even go food shopping, you know, with that money, because there are a lot of people that were going through hard times, you see, Duff? When that money didn’t exist. And now, it’s here, and it’s just a huge help.

Às vezes, lá, às vezes a maioria da gente faz a feira. Até a feira faz, né, com esse dinheiro, que tem muita gente que passava necessidade, viu, Duff? Quando não tinha esse dinheiro. E hoje, já tem ele, que já ajuda demais.

But Eva differentiated herself from “most people:” her Bolsa Família allowed her to acquire lasting objects.

Eva: And sometimes, I’ve bought, right now just recently I bought this stove with the Bolsa Família money.

Duff: Really!

Eva: Yep. [...] I bought a sieve [for harvesting beans and other items.] When I used to get sixty reais, I bought the ceramic tiles for this

Eva: E às vezes, eu já comprei, agora esses dias eu comprei esse fogão com o dinheiro da Bolsa Família.

Duff: É mesmo!

Eva: É [...] Eu comprei peneira. Quando eu tirei sessenta reais, eu comprei a cerâmica dessa casa. Aí eu fiz uma prestação de

I buy fruit, I buy vegetables. You know? Sometimes even medicine. Clothes. Shoes. I use that money. Sometimes, when I’m making a credit payment of fifty reais, then there’s fifty-two reais left over. And that gives me enough for a credit payment on some kind of clothes, even a pair of shoes or sandals. And still I’ll buy fruit, I buy vegetables, when I get the payment [...]

Duff: And the more basic things from—rice, beans, all of that. It’s not Bolsa Família that you use for that, right?

Martina: Well, like this, I myself, really, I don’t buy that stuff, because Hortensio [her husband] already has his wages, you know? So he gets his payment, and he already buys all of those things with his money. So for me, what’s left over is the lighter things, I go and buy the lighter things. Vegetables. Fruit. I make a credit payment for a clothing item for me, for Janice [their daughter.] Even for him, right? Now to go—buy stuff like that, rice and beans with that money, I’ve never bought that. Because there’s no— it was never needed, too, you know?

Eu compro frutas, eu compro verduras. É? Às vezes até remédio. É roupa, é calçado. Tudo. Eu utilizo desse dinheiro. Quando eu estou pagando, às vezes, uma prestação de cinquenta reais, aí sobra cinquenta e dois reais. Aí eu tenho a prestação de uma roupa, até de um calçado. E ainda compro frutas, compro verduras, quando eu recebo o pagamento [...]

Duff: E as coisas mais básicas da-- arroz, feijão, tudo isso. Não é Bolsa Família que você usa para isso, né?

Martina: Ô, porque assim, eu mesma, assim, não compro, porque Hortensio [marido] já tem o salário dele, sabe? Aí ele recebe o pagamento dele, ele já compra essas coisas tudo com o dinheiro dele. Então para mim, vai ficando as coisas mais leves, eu vou comprando as coisas mais leves. É verduras, é frutas. Pago uma prestação de roupa minha, de Janice [filha]. Mesmo dele, não é? Agora para fazer-- comprar assim, arroz e feijão com esse dinheiro, eu nunca comprei. Porque não, nunca teve necessidade também, né?

house. Back then, I made a monthly credit agreement for fifty reais. So I'd pay the fifty reais for the credit payment on the tiles. Then, after I finished the tiles of this kitchen – let me see what I bought with it. It went up to seventy, it went up to seventy-six reais. Yeah. Then I bought – that kitchen cabinet there, look at it. I bought that kitchen cabinet, too. It was with their money [...] If you put it in that [i.e. if you put all of the Bolsa Família money into credit payments], the problem is that there are times when you need it for other things. You can't be just investing in that, right? But you've got to leave some. The end of the year comes, you've got to buy things for the kids. For Márcio [grandson] and for William [son], really. Then you've got to buy books, that stuff. Notebooks. So you can't put all of it there [into credit payments.]

cinquenta reais. Aí eu pagava os cinquenta reais da prestação da cerâmica. Aí, depois que eu terminei a cerâmica dessa cozinha-- deixa eu ver qual é que eu comprei com ele. Ele foi para setenta, foi para setenta e seis reais. Foi. Aí eu comprei-- esse armário aí, ô. Comprei esse armário também. Foi com o dinheiro deles [...] Se você botar ele naquilo ali [na prestação], o problema é que tem hora que você precisa para outras coisas. Você não pode estar investindo só nisso, né? Mas você tem que deixar. Chega no final do ano, você tem que comprar as coisas para os meninos. Para Márcio [neto] e para William [filho] mesmo. Aí tem que comprar livro, essas coisas. Cadernos. Aí você não pode colocar tudo ali.

Through this careful, premeditated conversion, a sum that circulates monthly gets transformed into a long-term object.

Zima offered a particularly clear view onto the different uses of Bolsa Família in poorer and in more stable houses. She went through a time of very serious deprivation, and then she found a temporary job cooking at the school, where she could earn modest but stable wages.

Zima: It's like this, when I wasn't cooking for the school, then, when I would get it—at that time I was getting one hundred and sixty-four—

Duff: From Bolsa Família.

Zima: From Bolsa Família. Then I'd go, I'd get it, I'd buy a little bit of vegetables, a spice, something for the kids' school, a pair of sandals, sometimes, like, like, some thing, some shampoo, some thing, you know? And also, I would buy a little rice, and, and, pasta, something for the house, you know? Some kind of thing, a snack, something for me to bring back. But today, since I'm cooking for the kids at the school and we have food at home, what do I do with it? I buy a real item

Zima: Assim, quando eu não estava cozinhando para a escola, aí, quando eu recebei ele – nesse tempo eu estava recebendo cento e sessenta e quatro--

Duff: De Bolsa Família.

Zima: De Bolsa Família. Aí eu ia, pegava, comprava uma verdurinha, um tempero, uma coisinha para a escola para os meninos, uma sandália, às vezes, tal, tal, uma coisa, um creme de cabelo, alguma coisa, né? E outro, eu comprava um arrozinho e, e, e macarrão, uma coisinha para casa, né? Uma coisa, uma merenda, alguma coisa para mim trazer. Só que hoje, como eu estou cozinhando para os meninos da escola e a gente tem a comida em casa, aí o que é que eu faço com ele? Compro

for the house. Just like I bought them a bed, right? For the two of them [her daughters.] I bought the mattress. The cabinet for them to put their clothes. [...] And for me, it's a blessing, Duff. You see? And if I didn't have this... job in the school, it's with that money that I would be eating. I and these five kids that I have inside the house.

coisa mesmo para casa. Igual eu comprei para elas cama, né? Para elas duas [as filhas dela.] Comprei o colchão. O guarda-roupinha para elas pôr roupa [...] E para mim, é uma bênção, Duff. Viu? E se eu não tivesse, esse, emprego na escola, era com esse dinheiro que eu estava comendo. Eu e esses cinco filhos que eu tenho dentro de casa.

Families, differences

When Dalia finally started getting Bolsa Família, in the first days after the benefit arrived she bought the sofa on credit. She also went food shopping with her husband, Natan, at a discount store on the outskirts of the city. To carry their purchases from the store to the streetcorner where they would catch the rural bus back to Maracujá, they needed a taxi. “That we divided,” Dalia remembered. “Natan and I.” (*Aí a gente dividia. Eu e Natan.*) Dalia and Natan each paid for half of the taxi. And it wasn't only the taxi that they divided. Dalia started to make the credit payments for the couch; Natan paid for food. When it came time to buy clothes, “Then, the sandals was me. Natan bought a dress.” (*Aí a sandália fui eu. Natan comprou um vestido.*) With the arrival of Bolsa Família, almost without noticing the difference, Dalia and Natan had created a divided budget: the Bolsa Família money, in their understanding, belonged to her, and the wages from his work belonged to him. These separate income sources would buy separate items. Bolsa Família had helped to mark a division.

If Dalia and Natan managed to divide the household's budget, this was, in part, because with two sources of income they had quickly transformed themselves into a relatively prosperous family. In the poorest households, such a divided budget normally did not exist. During the weekly interviews, when I asked about recent income and expenditures, a clear difference could immediately be perceived between households that divided the budget and those that did not

divide. In the households that divided, which generally had considerably higher per capita income, people remembered each expense as the expense of a specific person (“that was with João’s money”); in the households that did not divide, people would report expenses without identifying a person and, when asked about this, explain that everything was spent together. This does not mean that the inhabitants of the poorest households refused to assign ownership to specific sources of income. What got unified was not income; it was expenditures. In the words of a perceptive farmer at Maracujá, father in one of the poorest households:

Her money is hers, mine is mine. It’s just at the time when we buy that we buy everything together.	O dinheiro dela é dela, o meu é meu. É só na hora de comprar que nós compra tudo juntos.

This union of purchases can be understood more easily when we remember that the poorest households spend the majority of their resources on objects that circulate rapidly and, in particular, on food. Food being an obligatorily-shared substance, the poorest households are devoting most of their money to precisely the items that cannot be divided.

Although it has no owner, food does remain the responsibility of a particular figure, the man, and thus the unified expenses are associated with him. In these households, then, the money from Bolsa Família does not appear as the woman’s money, because of a process of double separation. In the first place, the money becomes a resource for collective consumption, not a form of wealth owned by the woman; second, the money helps the man carry out his own paradigmatic task, food acquisition.

It is this context that helps us to understand the domestic fights that arise around certain expenditures—not expenditures on masculine luxuries, as some politicians imagine, but expenditures on rice and beans. A woman interviewed by Suárez and Libardoni described this conflict:

My husband doesn't give anything for inside the house. According to him, the Bolsa money is just to buy food, but I don't think so. I buy other things. I invest in the house. I decide. (2007:145).

Meu marido não dá nada para dentro de casa. Para ele o dinheiro do Bolsa é só para comprar alimentos, mas eu não acho. Compro outras coisas. Invisto na casa. Eu decido (2007: 145).

I heard the same story from Francisca:

Men don't know how to manage money, like this one here [...] He wants to go shopping right away, buy beans and rice [...] The woman thinks about buying some sandals.

O homem não sabe administrar o dinheiro, tipo esse [...] Ele quer logo fazer compras, comprar feijão e arroz [...] A mulher já pensa de comprar umas sandálias.

Nalta, who had started receiving Bolsa Família only a few months before the interview and who lived in a household with an income that was neither the highest nor the lowest in the village, was still deciding, when I interviewed her, if she would use the money for credit payments towards a major item, or if she would devote more of it to food.

I'm not going to make any more credit payments. I need some kitchen cabinets, I said, and I'm going to buy them. I don't know if I'm going to buy them anymore or not. 'Cause it's dumb. Just like I was saying about the credit payments—I'm going to leave a little for myself. To eat, too. Buy something to eat. Ronaldo [her husband] always tells me that. "How does this happen? You've got Bolsa Família—they, they say it's for food. You keep putting it towards credit payments." Now I'm going to tell him, "But—I'm helping you, too. Even if I'm buying things for inside the house [instead of food]. But I'm helping you."

Eu não vou mais pagar prestação. Estou precisando do armário, falei, eu vou comprar. Não sei, se eu vou comprar mais ou se não. Pois é chato. Nem que eu falei em prestação, vou deixar um pouco para mim. Comer também. Comprar alguma coisa para comer. Ronaldo [esposo] sempre me fala isso. "Como é que você tem o Bolsa Família, já, já fala que é para alimentar. Você fica colocando em prestação." Agora eu vou falar para ele, "Mas--estou te ajudando, também. Mesmo comprando as coisas dentro de casa. Mas estou te ajudando."

In these conflicts, the men think about using Bolsa Família primarily to fulfill the man's responsibility to obtain food. Faced with this imperative, the women who manage to gain space are generally those who live in the more prosperous households. In such households, after food has been purchased, there still remains some money that can be carefully converted into objects

that circulate over the long term. These objects have owners – everyone remembers who bought the television – and, once a couple begins accumulating these objects that can be assigned to separate owners, it seems easy to divide the household budget altogether. In the first month after Bolsa Família arrived, Dalia and Natan had already started the division.

The practice of dividing the budget seems to produce an individualizing effect, an ease in speaking from the position of the I.

[Woman, 30 years old:] Then this Bolsa Família came for me.

[Mulher, 30 anos:] Aí que veio esse Bolsa Família para mim.

[Woman, 44 years old:] My Bolsa Família, I use it to buy something for myself [...] I make a credit payment [...] and then I buy something that's really for myself.

[Mulher, 44 anos:] Meu Bolsa Família, eu compro alguma coisa para mim [...] pago uma prestação [...] e depois compro alguma coisa para mim mesma.

This individualizing effect can principally be perceived in the rhetoric that women use when they speak about the long-term objects that they have managed to buy. These objects, patrimony inside of matrimony, represent the share of household permanence that the women have been able to construct – the circulatory flux that they have managed to decelerate and fix inside the home and that therefore is associated with them individually. One can clearly hear the “I” and the “my,” declarations of individual possession:

[Woman, 27 years old:] With faith in God, I'm going to finish [the credit payments for the stove] [...] I'm going to buy my kitchen cabinets.

[Mulher, 27 anos:] Com fé em Deus, vou terminar [a prestação do fogão] [...] Vou comprar meu armário.

[Woman, 57 years old:] The electric washtub that I have here, I bought it with that money [from Bolsa Família] [...] I go along struggling and I go along making the credit payments.

[Mulher, 57 anos:] O tanquinho que eu tenho aqui eu comprei com esse dinheiro [do Bolsa Família] [...] Vou lutando e vou pagando a prestação.

[Woman, 44 years old:] Look, I've already bought a lot of things, with Bolsa Família money. Yep. My television. I bought it with the Bolsa Família money. My blender was also

[Mulher, 44 anos:] Ô, eu já comprei bastante coisas, com o dinheiro do Bolsa Família. É. Minha televisão. Eu comprei com o dinheiro do Bolsa Família. Meu liquidificador também foi com Bolsa Família. A-- deixa eu ver. Já

with Bolsa Família. Ah—let me see. I bought—I bought a gas stove, too, with Bolsa Família. I helped buy the sofa, too, with Bolsa Família. [...] What I most buy with my money, it's fruit and vegetables. And, aside from the credit payment's it's – it's that stuff. And so it helps me a lot. Thank God.

comprei-- já comprei um fogão a gás também, com Bolsa Família. Ajudei comprando o sofá também, com Bolsa Família. [...] É o que eu mais compro com meu dinheiro, é frutas e verduras. E tirando das prestação, é – são essas coisas. Aí me ajuda bastante. Graças a Deus.

But this individualization did not benefit women only. If some money was left over after buying the collective food, then, several women explained to me, the woman had the responsibility of balancing out the personal needs of each child:

[Woman, 30 years old:] [After finishing with the credit payments for the fridge,] now I myself don't want to spend on a big thing, nope. [...] I'm thinking that the children need shoes—and clothes [...] I'm going to spend on them [...] and on the new school supplies.

[Mulher, 30 anos:] [Depois de terminar a prestação da geladeira,] agora eu mesma quero gastar com coisa grande agora não [...] Estou pensando que os meninos estão precisando de calçado, de roupa [...] Vou gastar com eles [...] e os materiais novos para a escola.

[Woman, 34 years old:] What I want to buy for myself, and for Chico [her son], Bolsa Família will be enough for all of that.

[Mulher, 34 anos:] O que eu quero comprar para mim, e para Chico [filho], o dinheiro da Bolsa Família dá.

[Woman, 54 years old:] One day I give some little thing to one of them, and one month I give to another one [...] because they know that the money I get is for inside of the house [...] Their father, he's different. What he earns, what he puts inside the house, it's just for the family.

[Mulher, 54 anos:] Um dia eu dou uma coisinha para um, um mês eu dou para outro [...] porque eles sabem que o que eu pego é para dentro de casa [...] O pai já é diferente. O que ele ganha, o que ele bota dentro de casa, é só para a família.

Perceptively, the 54-year-old woman identified the conflict between individual needs and the shared need for food—food that the father “puts inside the house.” The mother thought of the individual needs; the father thought of the food. We can witness, here, an ironic inversion.

According to Pires, the Bolsa Família's administrative ideology paints the woman as the

incarnation of the entire family, while the man, with his supposed luxury expenses, gets cast as the figure of individualism. “As is known, it is the mother of the family who receives the Bolsa Família benefit. According to the program’s architects, it is she, and not the father, who best administers the family budget, making decisions that benefit the family as a whole and not individuals” (*Sabe-se que a mãe da família é quem recebe o benefício do PBF. De acordo com os idealizadores do programa, é ela e não o pai, quem melhor gere o orçamento familiar, tomando decisões que beneficiem a família como um todo e não indivíduos*) (2009: 8). Mariana and Carloto make the same observation (2009: 904).

But if such a model inspires the program’s administrative planners, a different symbolism is at work inside the backlands home. Here, it is the man who represents the totality of the household. That which is shared, the collective resource, has been set aside as his responsibility, and it serves as a fundamental pillar for sexist power. The wishes and projects of the man appear as general wishes and general projects of the family. The women’s projects, in order to become visible and comprehensible, must be represented as the particular interests of some person—either as her own or as those of a child.

More than a few women managed to express themselves, and even to become inspired, inside of this particularist grammar, the language of the I and its interests:

[Woman, 44 years old:] Before, I depended on asking to be able to buy things. Now, thank God, I have my own. [She explains that she used to plant an individual field in order to have her own money.] Today I don’t have to do all of that any more in order for me to buy something for myself.

[Woman, 27 years old:] I’m happy when my money comes.

[Mulher, 44 anos:] Antes, eu dependia de estar pedindo para comprar as coisas. Hoje, graças a Deus, tenho o meu. [Relata que antigamente ela fazia uma roça individual para ter dinheiro próprio.] Hoje eu já não preciso fazer tudo isso para mim comprar uma coisa para mim.

[Mulher, 27 anos:] Tou alegre quando chega meu dinheiro.

If there is a vision of autonomy here, that vision involves one's capacity to use objects to change relationships between people. The power of this autonomy can already be detected in the declaration that a man made when I asked him if Bolsa Família had changed the situation of women.

That happens, because the woman gets kind of bold [...] She starts throwing it in the husband's face. If she buys something, she's like, "I've got this thing here because of the Bolsa Família money" [...] just like an independent woman who works. If anything happens, she's all, "I work, I don't need you."

Acontece, porque a mulher fica meio ousada [...] fica jogando na cara do marido. Se comprar alguma coisa, é, "Eu tenho isso por causa do dinheiro do Bolsa Família" [...] que nem mulher independente que trabalha. Qualquer coisa, "Eu trabalho, não preciso de você."

The man here has identified a critical moment, a turning-point for gendered power. And the critical moment revolves around the purchased object. The woman's imagined declaration – *I've got this thing here* – implies the act of pointing at something. The woman, in pointing, highlights an I → thing relationship so as to transform her relationship to the husband, an I → you relationship. What matters for autonomy, here, is therefore not the money, nor is it the Bolsa Família program in general. What matters is, in a specific way, the thing: the man understands the woman's autonomy *through the object*, in other words, through the concrete form in which wealth was fixed inside the household. *I've got this thing here*: in order to be able to make such a declaration, the woman must have in the house a culturally-recognized object towards which she can point. And not any object will do. As we have already seen, some items, like food, cannot be perceived as someone's property. Others, circulating over the long term, can be clearly and permanently identified with a person. One can only imagine how many mattresses and refrigerators have stood in the middle of this kind of argument.

The logic of the secret

If women in more prosperous households convert Bolsa Família money into objects that circulate over the long term, this does not mean that poorer women do not also try to use the money to create forms of permanence. Living in a difficult situation, one in which everyone recognizes the necessity of dedicating resources towards food, the woman may find it hard to initiate the visible and regular project of buying an object on credit. She can, sometimes, use the secret.

In constrained circumstances, women sometimes have to create savings by concealing them. At Rio Branco, in one of the poorest households, I heard about a way to hide money:

Fernanda: I—if I counted, if I counted on my husband, there wouldn't be anything. [...] Money in his hand is the same thing as water, the way he spends. [Duff laughs.] To be spending like that—the situation here is difficult already. If you keep spending like water, then—[she explains that she saves money.] [...] I don't have a bank account, no I don't.

Duff: But your brother-in-law does.

Fernanda: 'Cause my brother-in-law, my brother-in-law [...] he found out about it. But my husband doesn't know, Duff. No way.

Duff: He doesn't know?

Fernanda. Nope. No way.

Duff: Then how do you do it?

Fernanda: I send the money to my brother-in-law.

Duff: Wow!!

Fernanda: I tell Jacobo [her husband], "Look, this is going there for your brother. He's going to help out." And my brother-in-law knows to put it in his bank account. Because otherwise, he'll spend it. [...] Sometimes it's fifty, sometimes less. [...] You've got to save, right? [...] So that you can save. Otherwise, you're never going to have anything. So it'll help. I go along getting it together, getting it together –

Fernanda: Eu-- dependendo, dependendo do meu marido, não tem nada. [...] Dinheiro na mão dele é a mesma coisa de água, do jeito que ele gasta. [Duff dá risada.] Estar gastando assim-- já é difícil a situação aqui. Se ficar gastando como água, ai-- [Ela relata que ela guarda dinheiro.] [...] Eu não tenho conta não.

Duff: Mas o cunhado tem.

Fernanda: Que o cunhado, cunhado [...] soube. Mas meu marido não sabe não, Duff.

Duff: Ele não sabe?

Fernanda: Não sabe não.

Duff: Mas como é que faz?

Fernanda: Eu mando para meu cunhado.

Duff: É mesmo!!

Fernanda: Eu falo para Jacobo [o marido], "Ô, é lá para seu irmão, ele vai ajudar." E meu cunhado sabe que põe na conta dele. Que se não, ele gasta. [...] Às vezes cinquenta, às vezes diminui. [...] Tem que economizar, não é verdade? [...] Para economizar. Se não for assim, você nunca vai ter alguma coisa. Então vai ajudar. Vou juntando e juntando-- do pouco que a gente tem, um tanto. [...]

Duff: Aquele dinheiro que você tem lá vai ser para fazer o que?

Fernanda: Ah, Duff. Tantas coisas que eu penso—sei não. Eu penso assim, juntar e

out of the little bit that we have, it ends up being a lot. [...]

Duff: That money that you have there is going to be for what?

Fernanda: Ah, Duff. I think about so many things—I don't know. I think about something like this, to gather and gather to pay for college for the children when they get older. Because today, as hard as the situation is, if you don't start saving right now to pay for college for your children—I myself, since I don't work, what's going to happen, then? That's what I think.

Duff: That's great.

Fernanda: What I didn't have, I want them to have. For them to have a place to study— this, that, the other. I said, "My daughter, the day that I die, you won't study any more. But as long as I'm alive, I want to see you all graduate."

Duff: Really, that's great.

Fernanda: It's a good thing [...] Isn't it through struggle that we obtain ourselves?

ajuntar para pagar uma faculdade para as crianças quando crescer. Porque hoje em dia, como a situação está difícil, se você não começar a juntar de agora para pagar uma faculdade para os filhos-- eu mesma que não trabalho, como vai ser então? Eu penso.

Duff: Gostei.

Fernanda: O que eu não tive, eu quero que eles tenham. Eles têm um lugar para estudar, isso, aquilo. Eu falei, minha filha, o dia que eu morrer, você não vai estudar mais. Mas enquanto eu tiver vida, eu quero formar vocês.

Duff: Realmente, eu gostei.

Fernanda: É bom [...] Não é lutando que a gente se consegue?

Fernanda did not create an object that was immediately visible to the public, much less to her husband. Nonetheless, she managed to convert the monthly government benefit into an entity that circulated over the long term, in the circuit of the planned dream. And it was quite a dream: Fernanda herself had never finished sixth grade. The college education did not represent today's permanence; rather, it stood for change. It differed from furniture or cattle, the lasting goods that attempted to preserve the current situation forever and thus eliminate time. Secret money tries to transform an intolerable present state by means of a rupture between the present and the future. Fernanda's project was to weaken the now in order to build something new.

Conclusions

Ethnographic analysis, attuned to social diversities, has a specific role to play in the evaluation of public policy. Often, new policy proposals do not affect all of a program's beneficiaries, but rather a margin: for example, the people who earn just a little above the eligibility limit, the poor households still unregistered for the benefit, residents of a specific region, or speakers of a specific language. With its capacity to investigate particular groups, ethnography can inform such marginal decisions.

The Bolsa Família Program faces a number of decisions about how to apply its resources. On the one hand, program access could be expanded through increases in the income eligibility limit, allowing households with slightly higher incomes to receive Bolsa Família. On the other hand, the program could make greater efforts to cover its current target population, excluding beneficiaries who earn more than the eligibility limit and focusing energies on the registration of unregistered households. The difference between these two possibilities is a difference that amounts, in a certain sense, to a divergence of visions. In the first vision, Bolsa Família is understood as the first step towards a universal basic income guarantee for all Brazilians, a new social right, as advocated by Senator Suplicy (Weissheimer 2006: 26-31; see also Brazil's Law 10835/2004, championed by Suplicy). In the second vision, Bolsa Família is understood as a temporary social program that must operate flexibly in order to avoid misuse of resources and to prioritize access by the neediest. Or, to return to the ethnographic lens, the first option implies an increase in the number of beneficiaries like Francisca, the woman living in the more prosperous household, who described Bolsa Família as "a door that opened for me." The second option leads to the exclusion of some of these beneficiaries in order to focus on cases like that of Dalia, who periodically went without beans while she waited for more than a year to receive the money.

Inside the geographically-limited context that this investigation has explored, we can identify a tension. By cutting off the households slightly above the income limit, the program would be excluding precisely those families where the money most visibly managed to change gender relations. Francisca, despite the relatively prosperous status of her household, never had the money to go shopping before Bolsa Família, and her situation returns us to the feminist insight that all women who lack control over money suffer from a certain form of poverty.¹³ This insight points us towards a possible solidarity between Francisca and Dalia, in the name of a social right.

To the extent that Bolsa Família attempts to transform gendered injustice in the backlands home, the program's architects must pay attention to women's capacity to build forms of long-term wealth. One should ask to what extent women have access to permanence. To pose the question another way, what responsibility can women take for a part of the house's deeply-desired quality of durability? Towards which permanent objects can they point? And as Ferguson so cogently observed in southern Africa, the problem at hand involves not just money itself, but also the availability of forms that make that money recognizable as someone's wealth: "At issue here is not only where the earnings will go, but what rules will govern the form of property in which they have been invested" (1985: 665). In the case of the poorest women, like Fernanda, who hid money for her children's college, the welfare state has a special obligation to promote their access to permanence.

Bolsa Família, administered as a social program and not a right, tends to subject its beneficiaries to uncertainties, verifications, and sporadic cutoffs that make it difficult to accumulate permanence. Even the program's monthly payout scheme, with no provision made for providing lump sums, does not favor permanence. Bolsa Família's uncertainties – from a

¹³ I owe this observation to the teaching of Jessica Cattelino.

beneficiary's point of view – have been discussed elsewhere (see Morton 2014; for an interesting US comparison, see Dickinson 2014). Perhaps one example here will suffice. The day before I submitted the initial version of this chapter, I went to Dalia's house to show her the manuscript and admire her couch. "This week," she informed me, "a tragedy happened to me." In a cruel irony, her Bolsa Família had been cut off after only three months; Natan's wages were fifteen reais (\$7.50 US) per month above the income limit. When Natan had been unemployed, she had waited more than a year to obtain the benefit. After being cut off, she did not know if she would have to return the sofa to the *mascate* to whom she still owed the credit payments.

What possible public policies can promote Dalia and Fernanda in their search for permanent forms of wealth? We can highlight, in passing, the importance of the rural Maternity Salary program (*Salário Maternidade rural*), which is supposed to guarantee a one-time lump sum payment to rural workers who become pregnant. In further work, I hope to interrogate this program. It is worth noting immediately, though, that at my current field site, the households that receive this benefit usually apply it to the acquisition of a durable good that creates a flow of income – like cattle, for instance – and that becomes individually identified with the mother or with the child. Thus, rural Maternity Salaries have the potential to change the dynamic of permanent wealth inside the household. This potential, however, remains generally unfulfilled because of the bureaucratic obstacles that, in the majority of cases, make it impossible for eligible beneficiaries to obtain the payment to which they have a right.

Bolsa Família also raises questions that go beyond the immediacies of policy change. When Francisca said that every woman wishes "to be independent [...] to be there with no-one to be ordering you," I identified her words with the concept of autonomy, a concept so frequently invoked in the academic literature on conditional cash transfers. In the backland home, what are

the qualities of this autonomy? Here, autonomy does not appear as a primordial separation between people, but rather as a position inside a cultural system. To cite the Comaroffs' dictum: "Power is a matter of personal autonomy, but this entails a position of control within a field of material and social exchange, not merely a state of individual self-sufficiency" (1987: 197). In the sertão, a person gains autonomy to the extent that she becomes the source and owner of objects that circulate over the long term, objects that build the eternity of the house. Through these objects she has access to permanence, that is to say, to one of the central qualities of the acculturated world of the backlands home. In the context of this home, autonomy does not stand outside of culture, but instead the cultural system itself always already defines the meaning of "autonomy," setting aside a particular autonomous space that one can come to occupy. Autonomy is not separation from others; it is a specific kind of position *in relation to* others. From this position, one can speak in the language of "I" and "my;" one can "be there with no-one to be ordering you;" one can answer male commands with the phrase "*I've got this thing here*," "just like an independent woman." Such autonomy does not exist outside of or before the cultural world. Rather, it amounts to a specific form of participation in the culture at hand. It is an autonomy that, instead of existing before others exist, gets produced among them.

If we learn alongside the women and men who produce this autonomy, we can think of a supplement to Weiner's model (1985, 1992). Weiner, as I noted above, emphasizes the process through which people take certain special objects out of the circuit of exchanges and use these objects to create a collectivity beyond the changes and risks of time – as with royal jewels, which, to cite Weiner's example, are never sold and hence provide an identity to the nation. In our context, we have confirmed the importance of this concept of permanence in the backlands home. But we have also seen that permanent wealth is not collective in any simple sense. It

matters very much *how* this permanent wealth gets fixed, and *who* does the fixing. An object can at the same time be collective property and, inside the collective, the individual property of someone; the object can serve as a foundation for collective identity and also help determine the collective's own irregular shape, help set up the differential positions of the people that make up the collective. In a particular cultural context, what possible types of property exist? Which can exist simultaneously and coextensively? What is the difference between ownership and possession? How can we map the practices through which people take a piece of wealth out of circulation and appropriate it as property—or, in other words, what are the processes for creating property? These questions already underline the insufficiency of the distinction between individual property and collective property. In our own historical moment, when the questions of infrastructure and the commons are once again at the forefront of popular discourse, we can launch an anthropological effort to understand the multiple and contradictory modalities of property, as these arise inside human practice (see Chapters 7 and 8).

To raise the question of ownership is to ask about the status of the objects that are being owned—the beans, cows, floor tiles, and stoves that help make a sertanejo household. As these items approach the permanence that Weiner describes, they become like heirlooms; on the other hand, as they circulate faster and faster, they get closer and closer to being like money. In their moment of proximity to money, the sertão's objects are commodities. The task of managing Bolsa Família cash and its associated forms of wealth can thus be understood as the work of mediating the commodity world.

But in what sense do sertanejo objects count as commodities? What commodity qualities do they possess? This question, to be answered, requires some distance from the biographical perspective, since individual sertanejos, in their course of their lives, strive so hard to cancel the

commodity candidacy (Appadurai 1986: 13) of the most important goods they own.

Commodities begin to appear as commodities in the space of exchange between people – a communicative space, and hence one susceptible to semiotic analysis. Over the next three chapters, I will move away from biography and attempt to use semiotics to consider sertanejo objects not as things in a life, but as bearers of value in a system of signs.

And yet each object also fits into the time of some person. It was at the end of 2011 that Nicola said to me, “A woman, really, she doesn’t do anything.” A year later, I went back to ask once again about Bolsa Família. Nicola had found a temporary job cleaning houses. She remembered how she had used the Bolsa Família payment back when she still had no work: “Before, it was just a few things. It wasn’t even enough to get through the month.” (*Antes, era só pouco de coisas. Não deu nem para passar o mês.*) Now, with her cleaning job, the house was transformed and she was proud; she had bought a set of kitchen cabinets, a closet, and shelves for the television, gray with a little bit of black. These objects would probably last longer than the job. Fruit of careful savings, they had the incredible power of prolonging today into the future, getting through more than the month, more than the insecure gig. The furniture, in a world of unpredictable rains and monies, would extend that house’s firmness into a moment so far-off that it might seem like the beginning of forever.

Section 2

Value

Chapter 4

Words Do the Work of Money

In the dry fields of the sertão, money flowed as rarely as water did. The nearest commercial bank was located at the end of a bumpy, three-hour ride, and, since the bus did not run every day and the ticket cost the equivalent of a day's wages, people arranged everything so the local economy could run with only occasional infusions of currency. Margarita sold twenty-five-cent bunches of coriander on credit. Joaquín owed money to Seu Andres for groceries, and Seu Andres owed money to Joaquín for building a bathroom, and the two of them took three months to finally settle accounts. Russo, who ran a general store and bar out of his front porch, had a quiet banking operation: in the dark recesses of the house, he would front you hard cash, stone-faced, at rates of interest that varied depending on who you were. Everyone had debts with everyone, recorded on notebook paper or remembered through regular declarations of good faith. No-one had cash. Everyone replaced it with words.¹

Because currency is so rare at Maracujá and Rio Branco, the two villages provide a valuable vantage point for reassessing money and the speech that surrounds it. This reassessment is well underway in the social sciences more generally. After nearly a century of aspersions, money has had a good academic decade. Once condemned as homogenizing, alienating, cold, disenchanting, and reified² – even the economists dismissed it as a mere veil³ – money has been, so to speak, revalorized. Scholars explore money's capacity to carry multiple meanings, to knit

¹ For a fascinating take on the politics of limited liquidity in post-socialist Russia, see Rogers 2005.

² For only one example, see Kopytoff's reference to "the universal acceptance of money wherever it has been introduced into non-monetized societies and its inexorable conquest of the internal economy of these societies, regardless of initial rejection and of individual unhappiness about it" and "the uniform results of the introduction of money in a wide range of otherwise different societies" (1986: 72).

³ See Fisher's formulation: "Especially should the student be on his guard against every proposition concerning money [...] We live in a complicated civilization in which we talk in terms of money. Money has come to be a sort of veil which hides the other and more important wealth of the world. Our first task is to take off the veil and see the wealth underneath. We shall then see clearly that wealth can be accumulated only as it is actually produced and saved" (1913: 9).

relationships between people, to preserve special zones of intimacy, and to enact magical agencies that leap beyond any utilitarian imagination (Maurer 2006, Chu 2010, Zelizer 1994, Keane 2008).

In the middle of this reassessment, Guyer (2003) has influentially called for closer attention to the construction of scale. As Guyer points out, currencies always operate inside broader social-cognitive contexts, contexts that get created through particular practices of scale-building and scale use. Guyer here joins hands with Latour (2005b) who offers a methodological imperative: researchers should not begin their research by fixing a scale (“micro” to “macro,” “wealthy” to “impoverished”) but rather should attend to the practices through which actors create scales and make them real. By this line of thinking, to examine money or value is to examine money-*making* and *valuation* as processes and, hence, is to observe the building of scales.

I consider a scale to be a system that can juxtapose different objects and rank them in order, according to some property that they all come to share. In the sertão, for example, coffee gets quite carefully scaled, and export-grade beans have more *quality* than domestic-grade beans. Younger manioc has less *mushiness* than manioc that has been in the field too long. Registered cars have more *range* than the semi-legal “pocado” variety,⁴ since the latter cannot be driven anywhere where one might find police. It is through the act of juxtaposition and ranking that this common property – coffee quality, manioc mushiness, or car range – is culturally constructed and foregrounded.

Ranking is crucial to scale. Rank distinguishes “scale” from the more general term “category,” since objects can be categorized without necessarily imposing any single ranking on

⁴ On pocado vehicles, see Coda to Ch. 6.

them. If a scale is a system, then one might say that rank is the way that things get organized inside of the system.⁵ And yet a major claim of this chapter (and the next two) is that scale and rank remain perpetually intertwined—since by ranking the objects, one generates the scale. Whenever someone somehow compares two items, rank arises as the first-order result of this comparison. Scale, then, is the second order. It is the implied system that comes into existence as soon as the comparison takes place. It is the emergent sense that this particular comparison rests on something greater, some principle that might be available for comparisons elsewhere in the world.⁶

The orientation towards ranking is what makes scale a timely concept for anthropology. Thinking about scale allows ethnographers to lavish careful attention on agencies, things, and instrumentalities, just as demanded by ANT and other object-oriented schools. At the same time, however, if the notion of scale implies ranking, then the concept “scale” smuggles in a certain insistence on paying attention to hierarchy, an element often missing from the object-oriented approaches. When we decide to analyze scale, we make a quiet commitment to a social theory that takes inequality seriously.

We also commit to considering process. Scale and rank only come into existence through acts of comparison. “A measure can be held in the hand,” Marx once observed; “exchange value measures, but it exchanges only when the measure passes from one hand to the next” (1973 [1858]: 154). Exchange unfolds as a communicative practice between people, and it involves communicating through both hands and mouths, dollar bills and adjectives, non-oral and oral semiosis.

⁵ For a similar but not identical perspective on scale, see Gal 2013.

⁶ Thanks are gratefully due to Adam Sargent for this view of ranking and scale, which has been deeply influential for me.

Indeed, Marx already proposed a semiotic theory of exchange, one with which I wrestle here. The first chapter of *Capital* is devoted to an exegesis of the process through which one object comes to stand in for another in the marketplace. At the center of this semiotics, Marx placed scaling. He argued that objects could be exchanged, under capital, because their exchange presupposed the existence of some overarching system that rendered them comparable to each other; objects in exchange thereby implied a social totality but did not reveal it. The analysis in *Capital* is oriented towards the pragmatics of this scalar comparability. *Capital* looks into types of machines, grades of flour, and weaving techniques. Marx's semiotics, then, begins not with the word or the utterance, but rather with the details of the commodity. In the world-historical moment that Marx describes, the dominant mode of communication is the exchange of commodities. The commodity is the key sign.

The current chapter agrees. It concludes by identifying the commodity as the ultimate semiotic object for capital, an object generated by virtue of an extraordinary dynamic of transformation that aspires to represent all social wealth under a single sign. This dynamic involves more than just exchange, since commodities must also be produced. But, as Chapter 6 will argue, the exchangeable commodity and its associated standards become the necessary form of appearance through which value is perceived – even, perhaps especially, in the moment when the perceiver lacks his or her own commodities. Even for people who live hand-to-mouth, the commodity form of wealth comes to structure the communications that make life possible.

At Maracujá and Rio Branco, in order to manage the relative scarcity of money, talk about wealth abounds. As I consider the different methods for transacting and talking about wealth in the sertão, I focus on calibration, which – inspired by Silverstein (1993) but not fully in

keeping with his definitions – I understand as the making of a scale by using it.⁷ I distinguish three modes of calibration through which sertanejos build scales. In *presential calibration*, one object, understood to be present in the here-and-now, gets juxtaposed with another object, also in the here-and-now. *Nomic calibration*, by contrast, occurs when a speaker holds an object against a standard understood to be eternal or fundamental, a standard that is presumed to pre-exist the comparison. Finally, speakers engage in *projective calibration* when they make plans about an object in the future or assess that object in the past. To put things another way, presential calibration means making a scale by comparing one object against another copresent object. Nomic calibration means making a scale by comparing a single object against an authoritative standard. And projective calibration means making a scale by comparing an object against *itself* in the past or future. In the sertão, as we will see, any single conversation about an important object – and especially that delicate type of talk required to reach a deal – will involve deft and fluent moves from one mode of calibration to the next.

By carefully examining these modes, we can helpfully reconsider anthropology's recent enthusiasm for money. Much of this literature has focused on money's own capacities – on money's status as a special sign. But money may not be so special after all, or, at least, it may not be special on its own. As they build scales carefully to calibrate objects against each other, sertanejos remind us of Guyer's point: money exists inside regimes of scaling. Put another way, money has to be embedded inside certain kinds of words in order to have any efficacy at all. Often, as it turns out, these words can do the work of money even in the absence of any hard currency.

⁷ Making *and* remaking. Scaling, in my understanding, involves both presupposition and entailment, with people both assuming the existence of the scale and then (re)creating what they have assumed.

Economic theorists typically claim three special functions for money.⁸ Money can serve as a *means of exchange*, enabling disparate objects to be traded among many different parties without the need for cumbersome barter. Money can be a *standard of value* that fixes a stable assessment for an object. Money can work as a *store of value*, an instrument that people use to carry wealth across time.⁹ In carrying it out its triple mission, money is relying on scales built through presential, nomic, and projective calibration. Money's powers are instances of more general semiotic processes, and it is these processes, as they come into being in particular ways at particular places and times, that give money its magic.

Presential calibration

Near the tangle of flowering plants at Lara's front gate, Roberto was telling us how to sell fruit. He lived in the city and, having returned to the village for a vacation, he felt ready to regale us with the methods he used when he worked the streets. "The watermelon," he enthused. "On account—by the size of the watermelon."

He continued, selecting pretend watermelons. "By the size. This one is more – this one is smaller. This one is bigger, this one is bigger. This one is smaller." I nodded.

"Then, if you hit it, and it's soft—" He beat one hand against the other in imitation of his customers' gesture. "Because they hit it. They hit it. If it's not soft, they take it."

"Mm hm," I answered.

⁸ Jevons classically identified four functions of money – means of exchange, common measure of value, store of value, and standard of value for debts (or "means of deferred payment") (1875: 14-18). Textbooks now typically subsume the fourth function into the other three; see, for only one example, Samuelson and Nordhaus 2001: 519. Also see the excellent discussion at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Money#Functions>, accessed 8/4/2015.

⁹ Omitted from this chapter is a deeper analysis of credit. By extending credit, an economic actor can lubricate the cycle of economic exchange and, in some senses, augment the money available. Economists have frequently challenged the classic definitions of money by alleging that they do not fully account for the complexities of credit.

“Now,” he said, energetically building towards what seemed to be an array of possible appropriate prices. “At five, at ten, at three, at four, at twenty, it goes away.”¹⁰ The watermelon, correctly valued, would flow out of his hands and into his customers’.

Roberto was working with presence. In his speech, Roberto built several scales to value watermelon, and he did this by bringing four different (imagined) watermelons together in the here-and-now. He made the melons vividly copresent with each other inside the same moment of discourse. It is this scale-building technique – the construction of a marked present in which items can stand alongside each other – that I refer to as “presential calibration.”¹¹

TABLE 1: SOME DEICTICS IN PORTUGUESE

Words whose meaning depends on the context of use: who is speaking, where, and when.

Place deictics	Proximal: Aqui (here) Medial: Aí, Ali (here but closer to you than me) Distal: Lá (there)
Discourse deictics/ demonstrative pronouns	Proximal (colloquial): esse/ essa/ isso (this) Distal: aquele/ aquela/ aquilo (that)
Time deictics	Agora (now) Aí (then-- colloquial)

Roberto created a first scale, “size,” by setting up a contrast between watermelons (“This one is bigger. This one is smaller.”) Roberto activated the contrast through heavy use of the

¹⁰ Roberto: A melancia. Por conta—pelo tamanho da melancia.

Duff: Mm hm. Mm hm.

R: Pelo tamanho. Essa é mais—essa é menor. Essa é maior, essa é maior. Essa é menor.

D: Mm hm.

R: Aí, se bater, estando fofa—[beats hands in imitation] Que eles batem. Eles batem. Se não estiver fofa, eles levam.

D: Mm hm.

R: Agora, de cinco, de dez, de três, de quatro, de vinte, vai embora.

¹¹ Gal (2013; also see Gal and Irvine 2000) has argued that this sort of scaling can be thought of as a kind of fractal recursivity—as the application of a distinction across many varied social settings. Gal opposes this fractal process to the process of taxonomizing, in which all objects are firmly assigned to one or another category and hence fixed into a single setting.

indexical rhetoric of presence. He introduced the four different melons by repeating the same proximal¹² demonstrative pronoun, “this” (*esse*). He followed each pronoun with a repeated present-tense copula (“this one *is* bigger.”) His speech had a distinct cadence, with four repeated parallel structures (“this one is smaller/ this one is bigger/ this one is bigger/ this one is smaller”); at the level of sound, this metricalization made each watermelon match up with the one before it.

Roberto’s devices achieved a cumulative effect. His proximal pronouns, his present verbs, and his persistent rhythm served to bring the different watermelons into the same indexically-present space. Rendered discursively co-present, the watermelons lent themselves to an immediate comparison with each other, a comparison that made one larger and another smaller, thus constituting, in a particular relative context, a “size” scale.

When customers hit the watermelon, a second scale emerged. Roberto indicated the transition to this second scale by mildly breaking the presentist frame; he started his next sentence with “*aí*,” a medial rather than proximal adverb of place.¹³ The second scale involved the softness of the watermelon, which Roberto explained by rhythmically repeating the present-tense verb that described the customers’ action (“they hit them”) while he carried out that action himself. Importantly, Roberto followed up “they hit them” by describing the desired consequence (“they take it”) in the same present tense and with the same rhythmic structure. “They hit” and “they take” both in the present, as if the acts occurred together: this presentist intensity provided the context for customers to evaluate the scaled quality of softness and immediately act in accordance with the evaluation, by buying a good melon.

¹² In formal Portuguese grammar, “*esse*” is a medial deictic and “*este*” is the corresponding proximal deictic. In spoken Portuguese, however, “*esse*” is used for both.

¹³ In casual conversations, *sertanejos* often give “*aí*” a temporal sense – “then” or “next” – that indicates that one event followed immediately after the last. I have translated the word as “then.”

In his description, Roberto got to the actual sale by ramping up the presence rhetoric even further. He introduced the sale with the word “now.” Then he offered a rhythmic chain of numbers, which I understood as potential prices for different kinds of watermelon. He implied—he practically *predicted*—the actual sale when he uttered a final present-tense verb clause, “it goes away.”

Roberto’s skillful speech helps to demonstrate the power of presence. He built a present zone inside discourse, a present zone that was marked by present-tense verbs, by proximal time and discourse deictics, and even by a rhythm that poetically called attention to the moment of speaking. It was in this zone of presence that the watermelons were made comparable to each other. Thus it became possible for scales to be set up between the melons, with one melon bigger and one smaller, one soft and one not soft. The melons could be presentially calibrated, that is to say, calibrated one relative to the other, inside the present.

As Roberto’s words make clear, presential calibration relies heavily on iconism. The rhetoric focuses attention, vividly and immediately, on the relation of resemblance or non-resemblance between two objects. And this iconicity can become patent within the discourse itself. In Roberto’s case, his gesture – hitting one hand against the other – iconized the customers’ action when faced with a melon. Even his sounds had an iconic element: his rhythmic parallelism made one sound poetically resemble the last.

Sometimes the speaker may make only one object present inside discourse—so that it matches up with another object that her interlocutor has available for sale. Lara, for example, described to me what she would say if she found herself in need. She would draw down on her savings by selling one of her cows, which she referred to as a “thingy.”

Say like this, “No, what I can do is this right here. I have this thingy here, I’m in need here

Falar assim, “Não, o que eu posso fazer é isso aqui. Eu tenho esse negócio aqui, eu estou

now.”

precisando aqui agora.”

Lara showered down a rain of proximal deictics. These included discourse deictics (“this right here,” “this thingy”), space deictics (“here” repeated three times) and a time deictic (“now.”) Her tenses, present simple and present progressive, ratcheted up the intensity. Lara’s speech made the cow co-present with whatever object her (imagined) interlocutor had to trade.

This strong rhetoric of presence frequently operated as an incitement to close a deal. By rendering the objects of exchange vividly present, the seller called on the buyer to act right now—to buy, to consume. Presential calibration thus reinforced a strong ideological association between consumption and presence. To purchase the cow, to take the watermelon home, was to be fully present to it.

In their conversations, of course, Roberto and Lara were merely simulating the practice of selling, a simulation that demonstrated their mastery over the technique. But we can see the same calibration at work, less perfectly performed, in an actual sale attempted by Amando.

Amando was an amicable twentysomething who spent his days herding cattle and his nights pounding out forró music for dances. Unlike Roberto, Amando lived full-time in a village and was not a salesman. One evening, however, he showed up at his neighbors’ door with a proposition. Amando wanted to intermediate the sale of a female calf to Elba. Elba, well-known to be a hard worker, would buy the calf for \$R150 and try to get it to suckle from a cow that was not its mother. If this worked, the calf might flourish—but if it failed, the calf would die. In the conversation below, Elba and her mother Celina expressed skepticism about the possible deal, while Elba’s father Segundo enthusiastically supported it and Amando did his best to persuade.¹⁴

Celina started by asking how old the calf was:

¹⁴ The discourse contains important gender dynamics which in part escape my understanding and which I have left largely unanalyzed. The fact that two women are aligned to question the deal – while two men are aligned to finish it – suggests a gendered architecture to the situation. Many thanks go to Erin Moore for this point.

Celina: How many days since it was born?
Amando: That one there is already—more than twenty days old. [To Segundo:] How long ago did she give birth? Two weeks or three?

Segundo: By now it's already about to be three weeks.

Amando: She [the female calf] is right on the edge.

Celina: She's on the edge of not accepting [to suckle from a different cow.]

Elba: That's what I'm thinking, too. [...]

Celina: In my opinion, I still think that a twenty-day-old calf for 150, that's expensive.

Amando [seemingly surprised]: What's that?

Celina: Expensive.

Elba: Expensive it is. Right?

Celina: Hm. Right?

Amando: Expensive, yeah. Now, after three months, right—
[laughing]

Segundo [thoughtfully]: Yes.

Elba: When the profit comes is afterwards.

Amando: Yeah, no. Because it—Yeah, no. Because it's like this.

Inraneilde: Whether she [the female calf] is going to accept [to suckle from a different cow], that too, right?

Segundo: Yes.

Amando: No, dude.

Segundo: She'll accept. Because we'll—make it so that she accepts, dude.¹⁵

Celina: Aie aie.

Segundo: She'll accept.¹⁶

Amando: And mine there? Didn't all of them accept?

Elba: If she wouldn't accept, I want my money back! [Laugh. Amando also laughs.]

Celina: Com quantos dias de nascido?

Amando: Esse aí está com—mais de 20 dias. [To Segundo:] Ela está com quantos dias de parir? Duas semanas ou três?

Segundo: Já vai fazer três semanas já.

Amando: Ela está no ponto.

Celina: Está no ponto de não aceitar.

Elba: É isso que estou pensando também.

[...]

Celina: Na minha noção, eu ainda acho um bezerro de vinte dias por 150, é caro.

Amando [seemingly surprised]: Como é que é?

Celina: Caro.

Elba: Caro, é. Ne?

Celina: Hm. Não é?

Amando: Caro, é. Agora, depois de três meses, né—

[laughing]

Segundo [thoughtfully]: É.

Elba: O lucro vem, é depois.

Amando: É, não. Porque ass-- É, não. Porque assim.

Inraneilde: Se ela vai aceitar também, né?

Segundo: É.

Amando: Não, moça.

Segundo: Ela aceita. Que nós—faz que aceita, moça.

Celina: Aie aie.

Segundo: Aceita.

Amando: E os meus lá? Se todos não aceitavam?

Elba: Se não aceitava, eu quero meu dinheiro de volta! [Laugh. Amando also laughs.]

Segundo: Aceita, moça! Eu estou falando, faz—

Amando: Ó, moça, a de Seu Gustavo lá. Ó a de Seu Gustavo. Que ele trouxe aí, Ó. O problema dele não é mamar.

Segundo: Bota o sal, moça. Bota o sal.

Amando: Vai lá hoje.

¹⁵ Segundo is here speaking in the present tense, with the idiomatic implication, in Portuguese, that he is speaking about the future. A more literal translation would be as follows: "She accepts. Because we—make it so that she accepts, dude."

¹⁶ Literally "She accepts."

Segundo: She'll accept, dude! I'm saying, it's been--

Amando: Dude, look at Seu Gustavo's female calf there. Look at Seu Gustavo's female calf there. That he brought here. Look. His problem isn't suckling.

Segundo: Put out salt, dude. Put out salt.¹⁷

Amando: Go there today.

Segundo: Put out—put out—

Amando: Go there, so you can see the size of the calf.

Segundo: Bota—bota—

Amando: Vai lá, para você ver o tamanho da bezerra.

The dealmaking, here, was characterized by fluent switches between calibrations. At the beginning of the excerpt, all four of the speakers collaborated to construct a scale of days against which to measure the calf's likelihood of suckling. Amando attempted to extend this time scale projectively into months in order to direct Elba's attention towards future profits from buying the calf, but this scalar expansion was followed by renewed declarations of risk from Elba and Celina. Amando's response was to juxtapose the twenty-day-old calf with his own calves and with Seu Gustavo's, who successfully suckled from cows other than their mothers. Amando and Segundo were, in effect, constructing a scale ranked in order of *likelihood of suckling*. All of the actual calves stood on the *likely* side of this scale, in contrast to the potential calf that had been conjured up by Elba, which was *not likely* to suckle.

The scale got produced through much of the same presentist rhetoric that Roberto had used. Segundo spoke insistently and rhythmically in the present tense, an informal Portuguese idiomatic present that I have translated as English simple future tense. Amando, for his part, rendered the other calves present to Elba by repeatedly urging her to look at them (three times) or see them (one time.) Amando's deictics of place were initially distal ("mine there," "Seu Gustavo's female calf there"), but then he transitioned to a medial deictic ("that he brought

¹⁷ Salt is a common nutritional supplement for cattle in northeastern Brazil.

here”¹⁸), and he ended by impelling Elba to take herself to the distal place so that she could become present with the other calves *now* (“go there today [...] go there.”)

By making the other calves vividly present in the moment of discourse, right alongside the troublesome 20-day-old, Amando and Segundo helped to build a scale in which all of the calves were equivalent, all sucklers – all equivalent to each other, in contrast to the unspoken but patent figure on the scale’s inferior end, the calf that failed to suckle. The immediacy of the rhetoric served to push towards a deal. Like Roberto with his watermelons, Amando and Segundo were speaking words that made the objects so present that one almost *had* to buy something.

As a method for evaluating objects, presential calibration works by creating scales that are ostentatiously relative in the here-and-now: one object gets compared to its immediate neighbor. Presential calibration thus prepares listeners for the transaction of things, the closing of the deal. We can describe this kind of presential calibration as *the use of scale as a medium of exchange*. Economic theorists would refer to money as a medium of exchange in the moment when one hundred and fifty particular dollars -- or reais¹⁹ -- leave Elba’s hands in exchange for one female calf, and then again in the subsequent moment when those one hundred and fifty reais leave Amando’s hands in exchange for, say, a new guitar. These specific units of money become a medium of exchange because they are capable of being immediately present with the calf, and then again immediately present with the guitar (cf Marx 1976 [1867]: Ch. 1.) In a barter economy, the transaction could not take place unless the calf and the guitar could be directly brought together. Money serves as a medium of exchange when it manages to make these objects present to each other at a distance.

¹⁸ The word in Portuguese is “aí,” a medial place deictic that indicates that the object is close to the listener but not the speaker; since English lacks such a word, I have translated it as “here.”

¹⁹ Brazil’s currency is the real; its plural is “reais.”

We can take this capacity of money – its ability to create presence – as an instance of a more general semiotic process, a process that does not reside inside money itself but rather in the practices of sign-making, and, in particular, scale-making. This is the process of presential calibration. In this process, speakers build scales that are relative: particular objects at hand get ranked in relation to each other, immediately, so that some of them may be picked out for immediate exchange.

Presential calibration, in the sertão, makes use of characteristic rhetorical features, including proximal deictics, present-tense verbs, imperatives, and a poetic rhythm that calls attention to the moment of speaking itself. These features alert the listener that a deal is near. The deal approaches because the rhetoric creates a present space inside discourse, a space in which objects can sit together, and this proximity in discourse can make it feasible for the objects themselves to change hands. Can, but does not have to: when Amando left Elba's house that night, she had decided not to buy the calf.

Nomic calibration

Celina disapproved of the calf deal. "In my opinion," she volunteered cautiously, "I still think that a twenty-day-old calf for 150, that's expensive." Her pronouncement differed in frame from Amando's presentist blandishments: Celina was creating nomic calibration.

In nomic calibration, a speaker builds a scale by comparing a single object to a fixed benchmark. Presential calibration involves several objects at once, and it creates a present space inside discourse in which to juxtapose these objects. Nomic calibration, by contrast, juxtaposes *one* object to a standard, a standard that resides inside an eternal space. In nomic calibration, a single cow is judged more or less "expensive," a pile of manioc flour possesses more or less

“volume,” and a plot of land has more or less “square footage.” A nomic scale is presented as absolute, not relative, and nomic calibration, unlike presential calibration, presupposes that this scale preexisted the moment in which the speaker is speaking. In Strathern’s terms, “what is being measured is independent of the means of measurement” (1999: 204-5).²⁰ Or, at least, it *seems* independent. My concern here will be to show how it comes to seem that way.

Celina hedged her first disapproving statement with a preface full of minimizers (“In my opinion,” “I still think.”) The hedge sounded polite, but it served a key purpose. By directing attention to herself, her opinion, and her speaking position, Celina commanded the conversation, and she used this command in order to effect a pivot out of the prevailing presential frame and into nomic calibration.²¹

Celina employed specific rhetoric to activate this new frame. Like Roberto with his melons, she used a present-tense verb (“that’s expensive,”) but the nomic present is a present with a different sense: instead of referring to an immediate situation (“that one is bigger – that one is smaller”), she made a claim about a lasting truth. 150 reais *is* expensive. Celina’s statement, despite every hedge, was strong and non-relativist. She presupposed that there existed a scale for calf pricing – some calves expensive, others cheap – and she located the calf in question at an unambiguous (and unflattering) position along that scale.

²⁰ Strathern’s analysis is remarkable. She notes,

Measuring makes the world available to the imagination in most interesting ways. That is because of the different kinds of relations it exposes. When what is being measured is independent of the means of measurement, we talk of the means of measurement as scales. Space is metered out as distance, so many yards or miles: it is because yards and miles do not change length as he or she goes that the traveller has an independent means of reckoning how far away home is (1999: 204-5).

Strathern’s definition of “scale” would thus correspond only to the activity that I call “nomic calibration,” although, in a footnote, she acknowledges that her definition is unnecessarily limited – for instance, ratios might be scales – and says that she is limiting her scope simply for the sake of argument.

²¹ Thanks are owed to Sue Gal for this insightful point.

But Celina did not actually speak about the calf at hand. Instead, she relied on a carefully-placed indefinite article. She referred to “a twenty-day-old calf,” not *the* twenty-day-old calf (“um bezerro” rather than “o bezerro”); this marked a transition from earlier points in the interaction, in which everyone had referred to the calf as *she*. By thus talking in the rhetoric of generality, Celina simultaneously disavowed direct confrontation over *this particular* calf and also grounded her utterance as a claim about calf prices in general. Celina’s speech here fit into a broader pattern. Presential calibration in the sertão tends to involve definite or demonstrative articles that index the object as a thing at hand (“the calf,” “this one is bigger”); nomic calibration can use indefinite articles to broaden the scope.

Celina’s comment was terse, composed of a single sentence. She placed the strongest emphasis on a two-word ending (“that’s expensive.”) The comment’s brevity contrasted with the extended utterances, often featuring rhythmic repetitions, by Carlos (“Look at Seu Gustavo’s female calf there/ Look at Seu Gustavo’s female calf there”) and Segundo (“Put out salt, dude/ Put out salt.”) The contrast had a reason behind it. Nomic calibration worked by producing utterances that seemed like statements of fact, and in the sertão this involved a sort of poetics of non-poetry: short sentences with little rhythm and hence little attention drawn to the moment of speaking itself, and, conversely, an ostentatious emphasis on the referential function of language. Such extremely brief nomic phrases, through their emphatic simplicity, lend themselves to being replicated later in the dialogue. Iraelide’s closing word “expensive” was repeated by Elba, and then picked up by Carlos. And the repetitions demonstrated that the nomic calibration indeed managed to produce a fact: Iraelide had evaluated the cow along a scale, and she entextualized the result of this evaluation in a brief phrase that made this evaluation easily available for reuse by other speakers.

Celina spoke a single utterance and followed it with silence, but nomic calibration frequently involves an authorizing ritual of measurement. Field size offers a good example. Sertanejo farmers must know the area of a field, because middlemen may look at the field and make an offer to buy all of the unharvested produce in it at a given rate that is set according to field size. Leonardo, a young smallholder, described the process for authorizing knowledge about the size of a field. First the farmer measures a stick or string so that it is exactly a known length. In older times, a farmer would hold his hand over his or her head as high as possible, and the distance from the hand to the floor was defined as one “braça,” a word similar to “arm.” Nowadays, the string or stick can be compared to some standard-length object present on the farm, like perhaps a piece of metal sheeting purchased in the city.

Next the farmer uses the stick or string to measure out the length of two sides of the planted field. A thirty-braça by thirty-braça field is the standard size, and this standard area is referred to as one “tarefa.” If the field is in larger than thirty braças by thirty braças, then the farmer will keep measuring. Every time the farmer adds ten more braças on each side, the field is one tarefa bigger. A forty-braça by forty-braça field is two tarefas; a fifty-braça by fifty-braça field is three tarefas.²² Thus the farmer places the field on a scale of tarefas, and this scale determines the amount of money that the farmer will receive if she sells all of its produce to a middleman.

²² This method of calculation produces results that are at odds with conventional Euclidean geometry. If we assume that one tarefa = 30 braças x 30 braças = 900 braças squared, then the following chart displays the difference:

Leonardo's system		Conventional system	
1 tarefa	30 br x 30 br = 900 braças squared	1 x 900 br ² =	900 braças squared
2 tarefas	40 br x 40 br = 1600 braças squared	2 x 900 br ² =	1800 braças squared
3 tarefas	50 br x 50 br = 2500 braças squared	3 x 900 br ² =	2700 braças squared

As the chart shows, a given field, if measured with Leonardo's system, will be judged to be larger in terms of tarefas. (This holds true as long as the field is more than thirty braças by thirty braças.) According to a (conventional) real estate website, a braça is 2.2 meters, and a tarefa is 4,356 square meters in the state of Bahia. This does indeed work out so that a tarefa is 30 braças by 30 braças. The website notes that different states have different definitions for the tarefa. <http://www.imoveisvirtuais.com.br/medidas.htm>, accessed on 2/15/14.

This measurement ritual features not one but two moments of measurement, and they occur sequentially. First, the stick or string is measured – in the old days, by holding one’s hand in the air; now, by juxtaposing it to some other certified object, maybe a doorframe made from standard-size lumber. Next, the field itself is measured, using the premeasured instrument.²³

The two moments reveal an important property of nomic calibration: its capacity to map backwards across wholesale systems of power. If the farmer determines the length of her string by holding it up against the doorframe, this is presumably because the doorframe’s lumber had once been cut by a carpenter in the nearby town who held against a tape measure— a tape measure purchased in the large regional city, shipped in from a factory in an even-larger city like São Paulo where it was manufactured according to a careful standard length maintained by a national bureau of measures, all tracing back to rules set and maintained in France. To measure the measuring-tool, a necessary preliminary to measuring the field, is produce another link in a chain that reaches, step by step, from village to town to regional city to national metropolis to international center. Thus measurement serves as a clear example of dynamic figuration (Silverstein 2004), the ritual process in which an indexical, here-and-now relation (the connection between the string and the field) becomes an icon resembling a deeper truth (the physical invariants that determine the meter, as initially established during the French Revolution.)

From the analyst’s perspective, perhaps, this icon has an illegitimate air about it. Peirce argued that a yardstick only seems like an icon of “yardness.” In reality, it is an index, since it is

²³ Consider an interesting example from a modernizing plantation that Hutchinson observed in the 1950s. There, the foreman, named Asclepiades, had the “duty to keep track of how much work is done each day and by whom. He walks about the plantation, from field to field, measuring with the six-foot stick he carries and marking down in his notebook the amount of work done by each man. The plantation laborers are paid according to how much each of them weeded, or planted, or to how many tons of cane each cut or conducted to the factory. Asclepiades writes it down in his little black book, and it appears on the daily work sheet which in turn is transferred to the fortnightly payroll” (1957: 51).

underpinned by a chain of actions: the series of measurements that links the countryside doorframe to the tape measure to the meter in France (or, for Peirce, the Yard in Westminster Palace).²⁴ To adopt such a viewpoint is to disenchant the standard, to demonstrate the contingent cascade of events that underlies a measurement— perhaps even to unveil the arbitrary nature of the yard and unmask the power relations that make it appear necessary. It is to open the door to politics of the Enlightenment sort (cf Latour 2005a).

But most of the time, this perspective is not attained. When farmers find the size of a field in the sertão, they do not habitually speak about the original source of the *braça* or the meter, no more than most people anywhere do when carrying out an everyday measurement. In the discourse that surrounds such a measurement, the meter-stick is accepted as an incarnation of meter-ness, and, beyond that, of standardness itself. It figures as the image of that standardness. The index is converted into an icon. (Or, perhaps better, a *rheme*. See Gal and Irvine 2000 on iconization.)²⁵

This conversion hinges on the successful performance of the dynamic figuration implicit in the compact ritual of measurement. Every time a farmer takes out a piece of string to size it against a doorframe, a cosmological principle is invoked: the principle of authoritative, invariant standard length measurement, according to which something called the meter actually exists, not

²⁴ Peirce argues the following:

A yardstick might seem, at first sight, to be an icon of a yard; and so it would be, if it were merely intended to show a yard as near as it can be seen and estimated to be a yard. But the very purpose of the yardstick is to show a yard nearer than it can be estimated by its appearance. This is done in consequence of an accurate mechanical comparison made with the bar in London called the Yard, either the yardstick used, or some one from which it has been copied, having been transported from the Westminster Palace. Thus, it is a real connection which gives the yardstick its value as a representamen; and thus it is an *index*, not a mere *icon* (1998 [1895]: 14).

²⁵ What is relevant here, I believe, is not whether or not the farmers are aware that the meter comes to them from a chain of connections leading to France. They may or may not be; they may call it to mind at some moments and not others. The discourse is the same either way. In the discourse itself, communication proceeds *as if* the string were an icon of the meter principle, an unchallengeable icon. That “as if” orients the way people communicate with each other in the sertão.

in France, but in the abstract. The piece of string turns into a meter, into an icon of this principle, an incarnation of invariant length itself. Then, made indexically present in the here-and-now, the string-as-meter measures the borders of the mundane field, turning those borders, too, into signs of meter-ness. Through processes like this one, whole scales get built: as Gal notes, “models of comparison” become “institutionalized as scalar imaginaries” (2013: 1-2).

Nomic calibration converts indexes into icons. It presupposes the existence of a legitimating authority; indeed, it makes that authority so natural that one need not invoke it in detail. No-one questions the length of the doorframe. Similarly, although she perhaps could have pointed to authoritative moments in which wise farmers purchased similar calves for lower prices, Celina did not even cite a source for her judgment that the calf was expensive. She presupposed the scale. Such presupposition, if carried off artfully, is what makes nomic calibration felicitous.

The presupposition can be pushed backwards a step. On Holy Saturday 2012, as he sat on a tiny wooden stool in an open-air market, Betto felt this pushback. Betto and his brother had come to the city to sell a bag of dried corn kernels along with the manioc flour that their family ground each week, by hand, out of the roots that they grew in their fields. Betto told passerby that the bag contained fifty liters of corn, and he offered to sell it for a corresponding price, scaled by reais per liter. But now a customer in a cowboy hat was doubting that the bag really had fifty liters in it. Betto turned to his brother and patiently explained, “He’s saying that it’s mistaken here. Let’s check again.”²⁶

Like Leonardo with the field, Betto began by measuring the measuring instrument. He produced a can that had once held “Alligator Kerosene,” and there, underneath the red-and-blue

²⁶ “Ele está dizendo que está errado aí. Vamos conferir de novo.”

alligator, was written the can's size – one liter – and the name of the authorizing institution, Exxon.

With the certified instrument displayed, Betto began repeating a loop: he would dip the can in the bag, fill it with hard kernels, even the top with his hand, and drop the clanking contents into another bag. Betto called out the number corresponding to each canful in a loud chant. He would syncopate the time in between the numbers with small side comments: “Forty-one. Hey, James! Forty-two. Forty-three...”

Obviously satisfied, Betto arrived at fifty. “Fifty, you see?” he said to a friend happily. Then, composing himself with greater respect, he turned to the purchaser, “It was just right, sir.”

“For real,” answered the man in the cowboy hat. “You can leave it here, this thing, right here, OK? It was just right.” With his doubt now resolved about the contents of the bag, he explained that he wanted to buy forty liters.

“Forty liters makes twenty—” Betto paused for a moment of calculation. “Twenty-five reais.”²⁷

Betto had confirmed the authority of his original claim through nomic calibration. He had been challenged about his initial assertion that the bag contained 50 liters, and, importantly, he responded by stepping back to a higher level on the indexical chain that authorized the liter: he displayed a can guaranteed by the Exxon Corporation. Nomic calibration grounds a scale in the assumption that there exists some authority outside of the interaction. By pointing towards a distant company in a moment of doubt, Betto found this grounding.

Thus Betto validated the can as a measuring instrument, and he carried out a ritual of measurement. He concluded with a brief, antipoetic statement (“It was just right”), and this

²⁷ “...Quarenta e um. Ó, James! Quarenta e dois. Quarenta e três...” / “Cinquenta, viu? Estava certinho, Senhor.” “Para valer. Pode deixar aí, isso aí mesmo, né? Estava certinho.” / “Quarenta litros dá vinte—vinte e cinco reais.”

statement did, in fact, get replicated by the buyer in the cowboy hat. Indeed, the success of Betto's gesture can be assessed by the fact that the man in the cowboy hat shifted the frame towards presential calibration, with a series of proximal place deictics ("here," "right here") and a proximal demonstrative pronoun ("this thing") that indicated his readiness to close a deal. Betto's nomic calibration had managed to presuppose the existence of a standard scale for volume, to evaluate the bag of corn along that scale, to entextualize the evaluation's result in a brief phrase, and to persuade his interlocutor to repeat the phrase. It was, as Betto and the man with the cowboy hat both said, just right.

Betto's concluding gesture was to hook (Guyer 2003: 50-53) the volume scale into a money scale and generate a price. To carry out the hook, he used the crucial verb *dá*. I have translated *dá* as "makes" – "Forty liters makes twenty-five reais" – but it is a present-tense third person form of "dar," and it would more literally be rendered as "gives."

Dá serves as a keyword for nomic calibration. It is a third-person singular invariant form that takes no subject, and it can mean "appears," "grows," "is possible," or "is measured to be." The conflation of these meanings proves especially useful in nomic calibration.

Seu Milton and his son Demétrio, both of them hardscrabble farmers of the old style, used two different versions of *dá* (and its past tense *deu*) when they described the process for selling a cow by weight in the city:

Milton: The scale—you put her on the scale, she turned out to be (*deu*) fifteen arrobas [one arroba = 15 kilos.]
 Duff: Mm hm.
 M: Now that there have appeared (*deu*) prices of eighty per arroba—
 Demétrio: That's the commercial value.
 M: Yeah. Because a fifteen-arroba cow, at eighty, makes (*dá*) a thousand two hundred, right? Then you find out her

Milton: Balança—você põe ela na balança, ela deu quinze arrobas.
 Duff: Mm hm.
 M: Agora, que deu preço aí de oitenta a arroba—
 Demétrio: É o valor comercial.
 M: É. Que uma vaca de quinze arrobas, a oitenta, dá mil duzentos, né? Aí você fica sabendo o valor dela assim.

value that way.

And a third meaning came to the fore in Carlos's description of his ancestral land, which was large enough that the Brazilian social security system would accept a retirement claim alleging that three different farmers had worked there:²⁸

It's possible (*dá*) to retire three people with Dad's land. *Dá para aposentar 3 com a terra de Pai*

Seu Milton and Demétrio presupposed a weight scale for cows, and then hooked it into a price scale; evaluating a single cow on it, they produced a price. Carlos presupposed a scale of land size that hooked into a government scale of retirees per hectare; evaluating his father's land on it, he produced a number of retirees. In both cases, *dá* did the work. *Dá* serves to locate a number, whether the number is a result on a particular scale ("she turned out to be fifteen arrobas," "there have appeared prices of eighty") or the final outcome produced when two scales get hooked together ("it's possible to retire three people," "a fifteen-arroba cow, at eighty, makes a thousand two hundred," "forty liters makes twenty-five reais.")

Dá presents the number as incontestable, as the result of an act of nomic scaling rather than a personal judgment. Seu Milton did not say, "I think that cow weighs 15 arrobas," but rather, "She turned out to be (*deu*) fifteen arrobas." Carlos did not say, "The staff at the federal retirement office are willing to retire three people with Dad's land," but rather, "It's possible (*dá*) to retire three people with Dad's land." Since the *dá* verb form does not require a subject and

²⁸ Subsistence farmers in Brazil are eligible for retirement benefits even if they do not pay into the retirement system. However, they must prove that they have worked, and they can prove this by documenting their years of connection to an area of land that could plausibly have sustained them. They can either show that they owned the land or that they had an employment relationship with its owner. In practical terms, this requirement means that landless farmers – who tend to work a wide variety of undocumented jobs – try to find someone's land to which they can attach themselves legally. A landless farmer will strive to become a semidocumented employee with a letter from the landowner certifying the landless farmer's status as a worker on the land. INSS, Brazil's social security system, tracks these letters and will not accept that an unrealistic number of farmers are working a single plot. The result is a fascinating system of "favors," in which landowners and workers negotiate over which workers will get the "favor" of the letter recognizing their status as employees for the purposes of retirement.

takes no subject pronoun, it allows a speaker to avoid mentioning the person who made the assessment that is being reported. It introduces the number as the simple result of the scale itself.

Because nomic calibration works by juxtaposing a single object against a presupposed scale, a number often plays a crucial role in the process. But not always. The scale in question may come not from a ritual of numeric measurement, but from another sort of authority, such as, for example, juridical definition. Seu Milton explained to me a crop scale that mattered so much to him when he was a sharecropper: the distinction between long-term and short-term crops. According to contractual principles in Brazil, if a sharecropper worked with short-term crops like beans, then she only had the right to use the land for a short period of time—until the beans were harvested. But if the sharecropper planted long-term crops – like fruit trees – then she enjoyed a right to the land and part of its produce for as long as the crops remained alive. Landowners who denied this right might find themselves in front of a judge.²⁹

²⁹ Full transcript:

Milton: Because there are some types of crop, if I get to the point of planting them – [pause] – from the beginning to the end, if I want to take him to court, I can take the landowner's land. And the law gives me the right because of that crop that I

Milton: Porque tem uns tipos de lavouras, se eu chegar a plantar – [pausa] – do meio para o fim, se eu querer jogar na Justiça, eu tomo a terra do fazendeiro. E a lei me dá o direito por causa daquela lavoura que eu plantei. [...] É o café [...]

Milton: Because there are some types of crop, if I get to the point of planting them – [pause] – from the beginning to the end, if I want to take him to court, I can take the landowner's land. And the law gives me the right because of that crop that I planted.

Duff: Mm! [pause] That's interesting.

M: Either I – either I take – the plantation, or the landowner pays me compensation for that crop that I planted.

D: And why does this happen?

M: I don't know why. Now there are some kinds of crops that are appropriate for compensation. That are appropriate for the person to get to the point of even taking the landowner's land.

D: Like—what kind of law—is it coffee, or—

M: Yeah. It's coffee that you can't plant.

D: Mm.

M: Banana tree. Jack-fruit tree.

D: Ah ha.

M: Or—orange tree. And other, other—crops. That you can't plant.

D: So they are—from what you are saying, it seems that they are the crops that, that last a longer time, right?

M: That last a longer time.

D: Mm hm.

M: Because this thing here, these crops turn out to be (*dá*) – I can't remember what the name is, for this crop.

D: So in this situation you—

M: It's "goods and fruits."

D: Ah!

M: That the name of this crop. It turns into (*dá*) "goods and fruits." You can't plant this crop [...]

M: Because then it's a field that stays – let's just say – stays for an entire life.

D: Mm hm.

M: This field here isn't going to end. And a manioc crop, it only counts as a field while it's still in the ground.

D: Mm hm.

M: You take it out of the ground [to harvest it], and the field is done.²⁹

Milton: Porque tem uns tipos de lavouras, se eu chegar a plantar – [pausa] – do meio para o fim, se eu querer jogar na Justiça, eu tomo a terra do fazendeiro. E a lei me dá o direito por causa daquela lavoura que eu plantei.

Duff: Mm! [pausa] É interessante.

M: Ou eu—ou eu tomo—a fazenda, ou o fazendeiro paga uma indenização para mim, daquela lavoura que eu plantei.

D: E por que é que isso acontece?

M: Eu não sei porque. Agora tem uns tipos de lavouras que cabe à indenização. Que cabe à pessoa chegar até a tomar a terra do fazendeiro.

D: Tipo—que tipo de lei—é o café, ou—

M: É. É o café que não pode plantar.

D: Mm.

M: Bananeiro. Pé de jaca.

D: Ah há.

M: Pé de—de, de laranja. E outras, e outras—lavouras. Que não pode plantar.

D: Então são-- pelo que o Senhor esta dizendo, parece que são as lavouras que, que duram mais tempo, né?

M: Que duram mais.

D: Mm hm.

M: Porque isso aí, essas lavouras dá – eu esqueci como é que está o nome, dessa lavoura.

D: Então no caso você—

M: É "bens e frutos."

D: Ah!

M: É o nome dessa lavoura. Dá o "bens e frutos." Essa lavoura você não pode plantar [...]

M: Porque aí é uma roça que fica – vamos supor assim – fica para toda uma vida.

D: Mm hm.

M: Essa roça aí não vai acabar. E a lavoura de mandioca, ela só é roça enquanto ela está em pé.

D: Mm hm.

M: Arrancou, acabou a roça.

planted. [...] It's coffee [...]

D: Mm.

M: Banana tree. Jack-fruit tree.

D: Ah ha.

M: Or—orange tree. And other, other—crops. [...] Because that stuff there, these crops turn out to be (*dá*) – I can't remember what the name is, for this crop.

D: So in this situation you—

M: It's "goods and fruits."

D: Ah!

M: That the name of this crop. It turns into (*dá*) "goods and fruits." You can't plant this crop [...] Because then it's a field that stays – let's just say – stays for an entire life.

D: Mm hm.

M: This field here isn't going to end.³⁰

D: Mm.

M: Bananeiro. Pé de jaca.

D: Ah há.

M: Pé de—de, de laranja. E outras, e outras—lavouras. [...] Porque isso aí, essas lavouras dá – eu esqueci como é que está o nome, dessa lavoura.

D: Então no caso você—

M: É "bens e frutos."

D: Ah!

M: É o nome dessa lavoura. Dá o "bens e frutos." Essa lavoura você não pode plantar [...] Porque aí é uma roça que fica – vamos supor assim – fica para toda uma vida.

D: Mm hm.

M: Essa roça aí não vai acabar.

Seu Milton presupposed, then made explicit at my request, a legally-anchored scale in which some crops counted as permanent "goods and fruits," while others gave the sharecropper only a short-term claim on the land. Again, *dá* introduced a description of one location on the scale ("it turns into 'goods and fruits.'") This time, the location was not a number, but a legal status: long-term rather than short-term.

With numbers or with terms, with cattle or with jack-fruit, nomic calibration creates a scale by presupposing its existence and then using it to evaluate some object. The calibration gets activated, in the sertão, by rituals of measurement, by the verb *dá*, and by an anti-poetic poetics that uses short sentences with no repeated rhythm. The overall result is a timeless evaluation, and the evaluation seems timeless precisely because the trick of nomic calibration is to presuppose not just the scale but also the authority behind the scale. Challenges can be handled by taking one step backwards and pointing to a higher level of social power, as Betto did with his alligator can.

Thus nomic calibration hints at authority but never offer a full account of its structure or its

³⁰ This principle is well-documented in rural Brazil. See Sigaud 2007, Palmeira 1976, and Johnson 1971: 51; also note discussion in Chapter 2.

history. Celina never explained the grounds on which she found the calf expensive. Seu Milton was more open: when I asked him why some crops differed from others, he answered, “I don’t know.”

Nomic calibration is *scale as a measure of value*. Money gets referred to as a “measure of value” in those moments when it allows an object to be ranked in a fixed manner. But, to repeat a theme, money’s value-measuring capacity turns out to be one instance of a more general semiotic process. And indeed, money can only measure value when it is embedded inside discourse that calibrates money and its referents along nomic lines – discourse like Betto’s, which carefully led to a conclusion, “forty liters makes twenty-five reais.” Money only works as money by virtue of the many tiny semiotic acts that make the objects of the world accountable in relation to a presupposed standard. This discourse has different characteristics in different cultural contexts, and it seems like a fitting tribute to Mauss that in the sertão, its most distinctive quality is the extraordinary range of the verb *dá*—she or he gives.

Projective calibration

“When the profit comes,” Elba pronounced, “is afterwards.” Elba was measuring the twenty-day-old calf, measuring it in some sense, but not with precision. She was not holding the calf up to a timeless scale and not lining it up with other, co-present calves. Instead, she was creating a scale by taking the calf and comparing it to itself in the future.

Projective calibration occurs when a speaker builds a scale by juxtaposing an object to itself at a different point in time. The speaker can project into either the past or the future. What matters crucially is that the discourse must create a gap of time, so that this gap can enable the object to seem different, in a scalable way, at two different points. In the sertão, sertanejos put

this gap to a characteristic use. They employ it to create a palpable sense of *constitutive uncertainty*—the possibility that an object may become unpredictably different from what it is now.

It takes effort to pivot a discussion into a projective frame. During the discussion about the calf, Amando achieved the pivot by laughing. Celina had just pronounced her dour nomic assessment that the calf was “expensive,” and, hearing the deal thus called into question, Amando let out a laugh that broke the flow of interaction. He followed his chuckling with a projective move forward: “Expensive, yeah. Now, after three months, right—”

This open-ended statement, which pointed towards the profitable growth to be expected after three months, prompted Elba’s subtly-negative utterance. Elba’s words emphasized the wait involved in the possible profit. Amando heard the negative tone and began to protest (“Yeah, no. Because it—Yeah, no.”) But Celina jumped in to point out that the wait was also an occasion of risk: “Whether she [the female calf] is going to accept [to suckle from a different cow], that too, right?” Faced with these pessimistic projections, Amando and Segundo moved rather loudly into presential calibration.

Elba got to turn things around once more, however. *She* now laughed, breaking the frame just as Amando had earlier done. Then she shifted the conversation back into a projective mode: “If she wouldn’t accept, I want my money back!” Elba’s use of the conditional-tense verb “wouldn’t accept” felt somewhat grammatically out of place in her sentence, but it effectively signaled a move away from the presential frame that Amando and Segundo were building – and an insistence on considering the future of the cow before closing on any deal in the here-and-now.³¹

³¹ Thanks go, again, to Sue Gal for the extraordinary observation about the role of laughter in creating pivots.

What Elba, Amando, and Celina were creating was a scale to compare the value of the calf today with the value of the calf in the future. On another occasion, Rodrigo used the metaphor of profit to similarly project the value of a seed that he would plant. “A profit like this that God gave us,” he marveled as he looked out at his growing field. “You plant a bean—” He paused. “It gives (*dá*) more than thirty beans.”³²

Rodrigo’s gift rhetoric, and the vagueness of his number – “more than thirty” – were signs of the constitutive uncertainty that accompanied projective calibration in the sertão. Rodrigo was comparing the bean’s current state – 1 bean – to its multiplicative future. And yet, as a gift, the profit on the bean was not precisely calculable. Indeed, exact statements about the future generally seemed uncouth in the sertão, so much so that when sertanejos would utter any future-tense sentence, they would tend to add the phrase “se Deus quiser” (“God willing.”) To precisely specify the future was to express an inappropriate arrogance and, moreover, to depart impolitely from the present moment in which one was sharing life with one’s interlocutor. Thus projective calibration rested on categories like “more” or “less” rather than suppositions about specific numbers.

This careful non-exactitude came across clearly when I watched Carlos and Nicolau knock down trees in what would become a manioc field. The work was arduous; first they felled trees with an axe or machete, then they dragged the wood along the ground or balanced it on their raw shoulders in order to stack it in neat piles by the side of a small dirt road. As they swung and heaved, tiny monkeys dashed away in fright. Carlos and Nicolau were toiling to clear away ground that another man in the village, Xavier, had ceded to Carlos for the purpose of planting manioc.

³² “Um lucro desses que Deus deu para a gente [...] Você planta um caroço [...] dá mais de 30 caroços.”

Nicolau noted to me that things did not have to be this hard: Carlos could simply have cleared the area around the edge of the plot and then set fire to the brush. Burning would have saved nearly a month of back-breaking work, and, since Carlos was paying Nicolau a day- wage to assist, it would also have cost much less money. Nicolau concluded, “He’s spending (*gastando*) a darned fortune.”³³

Crouched on cool logs during a break from the work, Carlos and Nicolau explained why. Wood in the village was absurdly cheap – \$R8 to \$R10 per meter. But in the nearby town, it went for as much as \$R27 per meter. The trick was to get a truck to carry it, and, as it turned out, they knew someone who had persuaded a local mayor to loan out a truck for their use.

At this point in the conversation, Carlos started projecting forward with enthusiasm. He figured out loud that his labor expenses for the land-clearing project would come to \$R900, 40 days of work at the standard day-wage rate of \$R25/ day.³⁴

Carlos turned to his earnings. When the harvest eventually came, he would only keep half of the manioc revenues, since Xavier, the field’s owner, would get the other half. But Carlos would get all of the money from the wood.³⁵

Carlos thus managed to hook together a wide variety of scales: the day-labor rate, the price for wood in different areas, the percentage that a land-owner could demand from a farmer. All of this boiled down to a single quantity: the profit he would gain. His discourse thus projected the field into the future, comparing its present value to the future return. I was

³³ “Ele está gastando uma fortuna danada.”

³⁴ Fascinatingly, these 40 days included Carlos’s *own* work days, even though Carlos obviously was not paying himself any money. He just thought that it was important to include his own work effort in the calculation of the overall project cost (see discussion in Chapter 1).

³⁵ The deal was actually a bit more complicated than that. Xavier reserved the right to ask for some of the wood money. If Xavier decided that he wanted part of the return from the wood, though, Carlos would ask him to pay for half of the work costs, including Carlos’s own work.

surprised that, at the end of his quite extensive calculation, Carlos did not offer even an inkling of how much he expected this return to be. Clearly, it was important, even pleasurable for Carlos to juxtapose the future value of the land's produce with the current productive value of the land – zero. But this pleasure did not come in numeric form. What mattered was explaining *how* the produce would come to be evaluated, not guessing the final profit. Carlos had precisely detailed the wage rates, the total wage bill, and the expected merchandise price, but about the final number – the profit – Carlos left an abiding uncertainty.

This constitutive uncertainty took on a different form when a speaker projected into the past rather than into the future. It shone through during an evening conversation around the gate to Vitor's house. Vitor occasionally earned money by taming horses, and recently one of his charges had kicked him in the chest; he had narrowly escaped a serious injury. He went to the city for a medical examination, and on his return I clustered at his gate with a few other men, all of us welcoming him back and chatting as the sun dropped fully from the sky.

How much do you charge to tame a horse? Félix asked. *\$R80?* Vitor confirmed quietly. Félix noted that an injury like the horse-kick might make the whole enterprise worthless. *How many days did you spend going to the doctor?* Félix inquired. *Three days in the city,* Vitor answered. Then came the cost of the medicine. Then the cost of the work lost due to the injury. Félix concluded, *You've already lost the money you made from taming the horse. It's not worth it.*

Here, Félix was comparing two options from Vitor's past. Vitor could have declined to tame the horse. Or he could have tamed the horse, as he did, and suffered the consequences. Félix spelled out in detail the financial upshot of both options – spelled it out but, importantly, did not count it out. Félix investigated Vitor's exact earnings and the number of days lost, but he

refrained from citing an amount of money to represent the difference between the two scenarios. Even when projecting from the past, the key gesture, in the sertão, was to leave a space of uncertainty.

What is the rhetoric that creates this space? As we have seen, sertanejos employed particular verbal strategies to generate the sense of uncertainty. The simplest such strategy was a polite silence, like Carlos's decision to stop short of predicting the profit from the field, or like Félix's refusal to calculate the loss caused by the horse kick.

Perhaps even more telling, however, was the pregnant pause. Rodrigo made exemplary use of the pause when he stopped after uttering the words *You plant a bean*— The freeze left me waiting for what was coming next. He finished up with *It gives more than thirty beans*. Rodrigo's pause, followed by his unbounded estimate (*more than thirty*), conveyed the sense that the future result might stretch beyond what Rodrigo could express. It might be even bigger than hoped for.

Amando employed the same sort of pregnant pause for similar effect. *Expensive, yeah*, he said to Elba. *Now, after three months, right*— Here, Amando actually left the sentence incomplete. Amando's implication was that the calf would bring tremendous profit after three months, profit greater than the expense to be paid in the present moment, but also greater than Amando's capacity to describe it. The profit would actually exceed words, and to represent this expansive quantity, Amando simply stopped speaking.

Money serves as a store of value in those moments when it carries wealth across time. Once again, money's special power here fits into a broader semiotic process, the process of projecting: money can sustain – or lose – value only because people possess specific cultural techniques for talking about the change in value over time. I have argued that, at least in the

sertão, these techniques rest upon the construction of a constitutive uncertainty. Indeed, this uncertainty is what makes it worthwhile to project. Projection, after all, differs from measurement. One projects value into the past or future because things could be different from what they are, or could have been different from what they were. Projection can thus imply the creation of fear, as when Félix attempted to scare Vitor with the (retrospective) terror of his injury. But projection also traffics in hope, a kind of hope that gains force from its limitlessness. Looking out at the trees he was felling, Carlos did not limit his estimate of his profit to a particular number. Rodrigo described a seed growing into thirty *or more*. And Amando carefully refused to finish his description of the calf's future: "Now, after three months, right—" With such verbal artistry, projective calibration leaves the door open, both in the past and the future, for an undefined number of possible outcomes that stretch beyond that which people think they know for sure.

Conclusion

When they consider a cow or plan their planting, sertanejos calibrate objects against each other and thereby produce scales. This process sometimes seemed shockingly wordy to me. But I came to understand that it was talking with a purpose. Money was scarce in the sertão, both because of the villages' distance from the city and because of their poverty. To spend cash implied a major commitment, one that called for considerable verbal testing ahead of time. Sertanejos could not count on well-elaborated markets to assign value to their calves or their still-uncleared fields, or to loan them the twenty-five cents they needed to buy coriander; they had to find other means. But we should not understand the villages as a non-monetized environment. Money had a place inside all of the scales— and at the core of so many

conversations about wealth. We might think of the villages as money-*deprived*. Largely cut off from access to the predominant medium of the global economy inside of which they lived, sertanejos crafted words to do the work of money.

Indeed, upon closer reflection, what makes exchange in the sertão so striking is not the scarcity of money, but rather its strange omnipresence. Money was rarely available as currency. And yet sertanejos constantly spoke of money; they conjured it up, wrote it down on notebook paper, made promises about it, and remembered it. They organized a wide variety of exchanges in terms of money, carefully using the language of money to account the trade of a cow to a neighbor or the debt owed to a beloved nephew. One might expect that a money-scarce and kinship-dense setting, like the villages, would give birth to a non-monetized economy, a zone replete with barter, restricted-purpose currencies, and special limitations. Not so the sertão. Here, as it turned out, money framed a whole array of human interactions. And so when workers left labor and returned to the village, they did not actually leave money behind, nor did they abandon the commodity. They just instantiated money's semiotic processes in other forms.

In this regard, we can perhaps see sertanejos as particularly-clear exponents of a broader tendency. Money never functions by itself; it is always made to work by a kit of language habits that we learn to forget about. In particular places and times, these habits come to have particular cultural instantiations, like the use of the word *dá* in the sertão. But the habits also possess some qualities that stretch beyond the bounds of village or region. What can be glimpsed, in these habits, is a process proper to the global system of capital, the construction of the commodity itself as a general social form. While we have been tracking habits about money, we have also been uncovering some of the properties of the commodity. Commodities are immediately present, they are incomprehensibly standard, and they are indefinitely expandable.

Commodities exhibit these three qualities because they reflect the three functions of money—presence corresponding to money's function as a means of exchange, standardization to money's function as a standard of value, and expandability to money's function as a store of value. Perhaps it is better to say that commodities express certain potentials inherent in money. The commodity-world externalizes these potentials, turning them into sensibilities inside discourse, so that the things of the world really do seem present, standard, and expandable, just as money is. And the qualities get expressed, become socially material, through the forms of speech associated with the three modes of calibration: presential, nomic, and projective. Let me conclude by considering each in turn.

Purchase as presence: the equivalence between these two is a fundamental commodity metaphor. Commodities feel constantly present, never more than when they are bought. In the sertão, speakers generate this sensibility through the rhetoric of presential calibration. This rhetoric figures the commodity as an object immediately and tantalizingly present to the hearer, a presence only fulfilled in the act of buying. The watermelon came deliciously into the moment in a way so unavoidable that it *had* to be purchased.

As Lukacs observed, commodities are fundamentally standardized (1999 [1923]), and, importantly, this standardization remits to a hazy, unspecified, unchallengeable point of origin. Through nomic calibration, sertanejos work out their relation to a standard. Betto's corn had to be counted out in liters and the calf's cost assessed in terms of days. In order for this standardization to occur felicitously, the standard itself must remain uncontested; no-one may undermine the liter. The key move, here, involves making a declaration as if it were based on some standard, without fully justifying the standard's source: Celina said that the calf was expensive for its age, but never explained why. The commodity derives its homogeneity from a

constitutively vague source, or, to put things differently, the commodity's nexus with broader structures of social power comes from the (successful) refusal to trace its chain of authority. Although it may actually be an index, the instrument of measurement converts itself into an icon. That which is constructed seems natural and inevitable.

Commodities, moreover, hint at the promise of unbounded expansion. In Nakassis' formulation, "The commodity exists in a liminal space, caught between itself and what it is not but what it reaches for, what it can become" (2013: 113). Thus the commodity partakes of a sublime state: it expands indefinitely past the subject's field of vision. What makes the commodity infinitely expandable is that, according to the marketplace myth, it can be exchanged for any other commodity—it can be turned into anything. In other exchange systems, objects circulate inside restricted spheres; Tiv brass bars possess special status and should not be traded for food (Bohannon and Bohannon 1968). In the capitalist market, however, every object has a true "right price" expressible in money terms, and so every object becomes commensurable to every other. Some quantity of beans, if large enough, should purchase a sertanejo's house.

This is a euphoric prospect, even a totalizing one. Every commodity gestures towards the totality of the commodity world – all of the things that it could turn into – although the totality itself remains not fully visible. The possibility of exchanging commodity *for anything* inspires a sort of utopian projective hopefulness. The commodity carries inside itself the dream that it may always grow more than expected, become something more wonderful, bring in a windfall surplus.

This dream comes to the fore when sertanejos use projective calibration to cast a commodity as a store of value, as Rodrigo did when he imagined the future of the bean. It might always be better than he anticipated; it might rise to the sky. To carry wealth over time involves

the possibility of transformation, which can be rendered as risk, but which, inside the discourse of marketing, gets insistently pushed towards the imagination of a sort of positive limitlessness—an excitement that is constructed through the holding-open of an incalculable extra zone, just like Amando's incomplete sentence: "Expensive, yeah. Now, after three months, right—"

Presential calibration, nomic calibration, and projective calibration do not simply mobilize words and money in order to render an object locally comprehensible and transactable. They make the object into a commodity. By examining the techniques, we learn how rural Brazilians generate three underlying semiotic properties of the commodity in a system of capital circulation: the commodity is immediately and tantalizingly present, mysteriously and incomprehensibly standard, and stably and steadily pointed towards an open, even a utopian, future. Importantly, these three properties play a salient role both in the city and in the countryside. You can leave labor, but the commodity-form follows you.

Perhaps the most important habit, though, is the hiding of authority that takes place in nomic calibration. Presupposing the scale and hence covering its origins, nomic calibration, when felicitous, ties money into a whole system of standards that become unquestionable. In the next two chapters, I will argue that it is here, in money's function as a standard of value, that we have to locate the heartland of the concept of value itself.

Chapter 5
Counterscaling:
Acting against Value

Differing weights and differing measures: the Lord detests them both.
--Proverbs 20:10

Introduction

Heading across a barbed-wire fence and towards Maria's kitchen, I could already hear the strange song. It was just one cord repeated over and over again. The song sounded harsh and solitary. And when I stepped inside the mud-brick walls, sure enough, I found Josepe, who lived around the corner, slung out on a worn couch near the big plastic sink, strumming a guitar alone and singing tonelessly. He didn't know how to play. At first the moment seemed to me like a joke, but then I saw that the tears in his eyes were real. Maria floated back into the room – she felt no compunction about leaving guests by themselves in her kitchen – and she stared at him hard. She glanced up at me. She remembered the romantic troubles that I myself had recounted on that same couch. *In this place*, she sighed, with irony and kindness, *it's nothing but lovelorn men*.

For many miles around, everyone lovelorn knew to come spend time in Maria's kitchen confessional. Josepe was no exception. A few months prior he had been a construction worker in Conquista, nineteen years old, earning his money and living away from home. He returned flush. And then he fell tumultuously in love with Andreia. Some days I would find the two of them lounging with Andreia's baby daughter on one of the village's empty cement porches. Other days they would shout and gesture, keeping a charged distance from each other. They lived these pieces of their joint life along the dirt street in front of the home they were trying to build together, a home just across the street from my own white house.

Josepe worked hard and he loved music. Not long after the night he sung, I found him back in Maria's kitchen, this time smiling his characteristic toothy smile, a smile that mixed swagger with friendliness. He was in the middle of an enthusiastic negotiation to purchase Suso's tiny battery-powered mp3 player. Josepe would use it when he did day-labor in the fields,

he told me, so he had something to listen to while he hoed or planted on the land of one of the slightly wealthier farmers, earning wages far below his former urban pay.

Once Josepe left, having sworn to pay for the mp3 player, Suso and Maria started talking about him. *That man gave up a lot of money*, Suso noted sagely. *How*, I asked? Maria explained. Josepe had come back from Conquista after a layoff. He had the right to several months' worth of wages in the form of unemployment insurance, a right guaranteed by a letter that he brought with him when he returned to Maracujá. He kept the letter in the pocket of a pair of blue jeans. Someone washed the blue jeans. The letter got destroyed.

Couldn't he solve that somehow, I asked? I could only imagine him smiling the smile while he looked at the spoiled letter.

Sure, Maria answered, *he could try to get another copy of the letter from the company*.

Well, why hasn't he?

Maria chuckled at my naïve question. *He's just not going after it! Lack of interest*.

No-one in the villages remained unaware of value as measured by money, but people could demean its importance. This dissent sometimes became explicit. Talking to me about women's Bolsa Família payments, Aristeu pronounced

It's with money that you work [...] But respect, no. Money doesn't bring respect.

É com dinheiro que trabalha [...] Mas respeito não. Dinheiro não traz respeito.

Simão, discussing the same issue on another occasion, made a similar claim:

Money doesn't take anyone forward, you know?

Dinheiro não leva ninguém para frente, né?

Rodrigo summed up as follows:¹

We don't pay attention, dude. To money stuff. Nós não liga, moço. O negócio do dinheiro.

¹ Rodrigo made this comment while explaining to me that he preferred to eat the manioc he grew rather than sell it, no matter what the price in the market.

This chapter will pay attention to the ways that Rodrigo does not pay attention. How do sertanejos limit the importance of money? Why does Rodrigo's studied indifference make sense from a particular position in labor market, from the quotidian world of the backlands?

To understand this situation more fully, we need a more detailed examination of the signs and practices through which people produce the sense of an inside. In the backlands, sertanejos often find themselves facing an outside, and, when facing it, they push back. They carry out calculations that create many inside alternative scales and that have the effect of confounding any singular money standard for value, calculations that make it impossible for every object to be compared to every other object (cf Appadurai 1986 on enclaves). I refer to these calculations as "counterscaling." Counterscaling works to make value not fully accountable, not fully precise, not fully exchangeable, and not fully fungible, at least for a moment inside discourse. When people engage in counterscaling, they render certain kinds of objects incomparable, and thus they block the formation of value as a general social fact.

We can identify four types of counterscaling in the sertão. *Accounting refusal* (number 1) involves the outright insistence on not accounting for some objects. *Disparate accounting* (number 2) occurs when sertanejos use two different methods to account for two different types of objects, thus rendering the objects difficult to commensurate. In *accounting ambiguity*, (number 3) sertanejos calculate inexactly, and this produces an acknowledged margin of uncertainty around the calculations. Finally, *earmarking* (number 4) is a form of calculation in which specific sources of money are set aside exclusively for specific objects. In other words, *accounting refusal* blocks a scale, *disparate accounting* multiplies a scale, *accounting ambiguity* blurs a scale, and *earmarking* divides a scale.²

² Thanks to Kate Mariner for her generous suggestion of this elegant formulation.

Counterscaling may involve any of the three species of calibration identified in the previous chapter: presential calibration, nomic calibration, and projective calibration.

Sometimes, sertanejos carry out counterscaling by invoking nomic standards that cannot be made compatible with the urban money standard. At other times, sertanejos build a counterscale by pivoting out of nomic calibration and into a presential frame that creates a vibrant sense of immediacy—or into a projective frame that implicates the past and future.

All of these varieties of counterscaling, though, work to generate an inside. Counterscaling, as a form of talk, marks something special about the interaction between the speaker and the hearer, something incommensurable. When done right, counterscaling also typifies and expands this specialness, so that *this distinctive talk between you and me* becomes a sign of *this distinctive place we inhabit together, this village, these backlands. This inside.*

Accounting refusal

I heard accounting refusal most clearly when I stopped, one day, at the house full of grandchildren. Dona Cássia and Seu Jorge, well into their seventies, had turned their home at Maracujá into a refuge-point for a floating army of kin, most of them children. Like almost everyone else at Maracujá, the elderly couple had a mobile family. Their granddaughters traveled to job possibilities in São Paulo, then back again. Their sons worked day-labor in surrounding fields. Their nephew specialized in smuggling cheap toys and cigarettes across international borders. With all of the movement, inevitably, the family's smallest members ended up, over and over again, left in the arms of Dona Cássia and Seu Jorge.

Dona Cássia struggled mightily to motivate everyone in the house so they would help her pull some kind of living out of the family field. I would see her walking slowly to the bean

harvest, daughter following behind; she even mortgaged part of her retirement pension to buy a few cows. But when I tried to carry out a census interview that asked her to tally up her annual agricultural expenses, she grew increasingly frustrated at the very idea of such a project. We listed the expenditures, which made it seem that the family was losing quite a lot of money because of the field. She started to wonder aloud. “Now where does it go, that money? Where does it go?” (*Agora vai para onde, esse dinheiro? Aonde é que vai?*) Seu Jorge chimed yes, with uncharacteristic vigor. I had lost control of the interview.

“If you were to make an accounting,” Dona Cássia continued, “the budget for everything, for everything, right?” (*Se for tirar a conta-- o orçamento de tudo, de tudo, né?*)

Seu Jorge voiced the conclusion. “That money—there—there are some years that we’re lost, because we don’t harvest hardly anything at all.” (*Esse dinheiro—tem--tem ano que nós estamos perdidos, porque nós não colhe quase nada não.*)

This was a logic that I would hear repeatedly. Maristela and Walter, an older couple at Maracujá, had patiently grown their manioc and paid to have it processed into manioc flour—only to find that the processing cost was higher than what they earned by selling the flour. They observed:

Walter: It’s one of those things where you can’t even – (cough) you can’t even put it down, you know?

Dona Maristela: If you really put it on the scale, I didn’t even get out the money—that I paid.

Walter: É uma coisa que não pode nem— (cough) nem colocar, né? [incomp]

Dona Maristela: Se for colocar na balança mesmo, eu não tirei nem o dinheiro— que eu paguei. (int w c197)

For Dona Suria, who lived at Rio Branco, this was a general principle.

The fields, we spend a lot. We keep struggling along because we already live in the countryside. But we spend a lot. If you were to calculate out what you spend in the fields, what you spend does not – not – not pay you, no

A roça, a gente gasta muito. A gente luta mesmo que já mora na roça. Mas a gente gasta muito. Se for tirar o que gastou na roça, não— não—não paga o que gastou não. Mas como a gente já foi criada, gosta da roça, e tem

way. But since we were already raised [this way], we like the countryside, and we're in need, we plant a field because it frees us from buying [incomp]. Sometimes a bit of beans, some corn, some thing that we have there, we don't have to be buying it.

precisão, a gente faz a roça porque já livra de comprar [incomp]. Às vezes o feijão, um milho, uma coisa que a gente tem lá, não precisa estar comprando. (from int w/ t018)

Or, as Seu Jacinto told me on another occasion,

Expenses, man, in the field we don't even count them.

Gastos, rapaz, em roça a gente nem conta. (3lagint1p85)

Seu Jacinto, Dona Suria, Walter, and Dona Maristela were fully capable of accounting for their rural expenditures. But, having envisaged the possibility of this accounting, they refused it—a double-move that Dona Suria carried out with the enigmatic subjunctive phrase *If you were to calculate out*. Dona Maristela had made use of exactly the same phrase structure (*If you really put it on the scale*) and so had Dona Cássia (*If you were to make an accountings*). They evoked and then canceled the act of budgeting. Like Walter said, *It's one of those things where you can't even put it down*.³

They had a good reason for their refusal. As Dona Suria made clear, she declined to think in terms of a budget because she was attempting to withdraw from the food market itself, to substitute the logic of subsistence farming for the logic of monetary sale. When she considered the beans and corn that she ate from her field, she did not need to use the mediation of dollars or reais. This was a matter of necessity (“we’re in need”) and also pleasure (“we like the countryside.”)

Dona Maristela and Walter, as it turned out, faced a similar situation. The sale of their manioc flour did not cover the cost of its processing – but Dona Maristela did retain a bag of flour for their household. They ate many meals made out of that flour. And so farmers like Dona

³ Another time, I asked Lael about the number of days he worked as a rural day-laborer. He answered, “It’s not even possible to count” (*Não dá nem para contar*) (cadint3p129).

Maristela and Dona Suria were not simply ignoring monetary accounts. Effectively, they were using money to subsidize food production. They were converting currency into subsistence, spending cash from pensions and remittances on an agricultural system that would give them food to eat. The point was to transition out of a monetary sphere and into an agrarian alternative. To cease accounting in money was a part of the process.

But Dona Cássia and Seu Jorge, in the interview where I had lost control, had a somewhat more complex explanation of their motives. “We’re doing this thing,” Dona Cássia proclaimed. (*Nós estamos fazendo aí.*)

And Seu Jorge explained why. “We can’t stay idle, right? If we don’t work, they call us lazy. And that won’t do.” (*Não pode ficar sem trabalho, né? Se não trabalhar, chama a gente de preguiçosos. E aí não dá.*)

For Dona Cássia and Seu Jorge, the money simply didn’t count. What mattered was not just the food, however, but, more fundamentally, the relationship between two collective actors, “them” and “us,” in which the “us” displayed its core capacity to act, “doing this thing,” and avoided the aspersion that the “them” might cast.

In the interview, after puzzling for a minute, I asked Dona Cássia for a broad justification.

Duff: Sometimes, people just think— why is it that they work so much, when the, the money is little, you know? Why do you keep working?
Dona Cássia: Yeah. [pause.] It’s the force of the will, you know?

Duff: Às vezes, o pessoal fica pensando— porque é que trabalha tanto, quando o, o dinheiro é fraco, né? Por que é que vocês seguem trabalhando?

Dona Cássia: É. [pausa] É a força de vontade, né?

Force of the will: this internally-attributed quality, a property of the self, had weight, more so than any ranking relative to others. Dona Cássia spoke of work as if work mattered

because of what it said about *her*. If the money scale allowed for comparisons to other people, then those comparisons were wholly irrelevant, as she told me at the interview's end:

I don't have a dream of being rich. I don't of being anything [...] Just peace.

Eu não tenho sonho de ser rica, não tenho de ser nada. [...] Só paz. [all from c153 interview]

Disparate accounting

I first encountered disparate accounting in the form of a nuisance. During the census that I conducted, I asked respondents to estimate their labor incomes for all of 2011. Among day laborers, this question ran into a problem. Not a single person in the two villages could provide a figure for the total amount that he or she had earned from day-labor over the year. Not even over a month. Respondents, when pushed, would tell me they did not know. Instead, day-laborers could quite clearly report how much they had earned *per day* at day-labor at various different moments: they had excellent memories for the day-wage rate and its variations over time.⁴

Although respondents could not report the annual amount that they had *earned* from day labor, they readily remembered the annual amount that they had *paid out* to other day-laborers. And this recollection occurred frequently: nearly half of the villages' households had hired day-labor at some point in 2011. Even farmers of relatively modest means would commonly employ someone to carry out small projects for a few days.

Marcelo was a well-known young day laborer at Maracujá. As it turned out, Marcelo's own family had a coffee field, and, despite their poverty, at several points in the year they would scrape together enough money to pay a few day-laborers to help complete the basic maintenance work. Marcelo's mother reported their total 2011 labor expenditures to me, in great detail:

Zima: There was one period when we spent

Zima: Teve uma etapa que nós gastamos

⁴ Since respondents usually also could estimate the number of days worked in a normal week or month, I was able to construct census data for annual day-labor earnings. This was my accounting, however—not theirs

two hundred and sixty. First.

Duff: Mm hm.

Z: Then, another time, we spent—another hundred and twenty. [Pause.] After that we spent another—eighty. And it was actually that guy, Nancia's husband, who worked there for us. Yeah. And the biggest job was two hundred and twenty [...] Clearing the land. It was really dirty. The weeds were already starting to talk to the coffee trees. That was just a clearing job with the scythe, like that.

D: OK. Were there other expenses? [...]

Z: Just that we had the fence fixed.

D: D—d—do you know about how much that cost?

Z: It was just a repair. It was just two days of work, by two people. Let me see. Forty, and the next day another forty. Makes eighty.

duzentos e sessenta. Primeiro.

Duff: Mm hm.

Z: Aí, outra, nós gastamos—mais cento e vinte. [Pause] Aí gastou mais—oitenta. Que foi até esse marido de Nancia que trabalhou lá para a gente. É. E o trabalho maior foi duzentos e vinte [...] Roçando. Estava sujo demais. O mato já estava falando para os pés de café. Aí só foi na roçada de foice, assim.

D: OK. Teve outros gastos? [...]

Z: Só consertou a cerca.

D: Sss, sabe mais ou menos quanto custou?

Z: Foi só consertada. Foi só dois dias de trabalho, de duas pessoas. Deixa eu ver.

Quarenta, no outro dia mais quarenta. Dá oitenta.

Why this difference in memories? If farmers could remember the amount that they spent on day labor in 2011 but not the amount that they earned from day labor in 2011, it was because they were doing the accounting along two different scales. They thought of their day-labor *earnings* by the day: they agreed to work by the day, received the money daily (or sometimes weekly), and spent it on the types of goods that they conceived of as transitory, like food and drink.

By contrast, sertanejos accounted their day-labor *expenditures* by the job. Jobs, in turn, fit into a standard sequence that accompanied each annual crop cycle – clearing, hoeing, planting, harvesting. These could be easily aggregated into a sum total for the year. Zima, like other farmers, knew exactly how much she earned by selling her 2011 coffee harvest, and she could calculate her net coffee earnings by mentally subtracting the money she had spent on all of the different jobs for which she had needed to hire labor in her coffee field over the course of 2011.⁵

⁵ Tellingly, when I asked her about the expenditure on the fence repair, Zima spent an extra minute doing out-loud accounting, as can be seen in the interview segment above. The fence protected her entire land, and so she seems not

Indeed, farmers had a startling capacity to keep track of their monetary harvest earnings by the crop and by the year. They would avidly discuss, for example, the difference between the bean harvest three and four years ago.

Thus sertanejos could account income by nomically calibrating their earnings against two different time scales, the day and the year. These two standards did not convert easily, so it became difficult, in casual conversation and everyday thought, to compare one's day-labor to one's own harvest. This, then, was disparate accounting: the separation that occurs when a speaker scales different classes of objects in different terms, like miles and kilometers or feet and light-years.⁶ The speaker maintains a careful distinction between two resulting "spheres" (Bohannon and Bohannon 1968). In the case at hand, the disparate accounting, some in terms of years and some in terms of days, made it hard for sertanejos to compare the amount that they earned from work in their own fields to the amount that they earned from day-labor. The two activities seemed entirely different, even incommensurate. As we will see below, this distinction – between slow, careful, long-term cultivation and the attainment of fast cash – had important ideological implications in the sertão.

But a third time scale also mattered here, or, rather, mattered by its absence: the month. This absence became evident in a conversation among day-laborers that I overheard one rainy day as they stood on a porch, a conversation discussed in more detail at the beginning of Chapter 6. The day-laborers were chatting about the day-wages available in different places. Norberto announced that employers were offering \$R30 in Matinha, and Januário responded, *Wow, in*

to have thought about its repair as part of the yearly coffee harvest cycle. She needed a bit more time to convert that expense into annual terms.

⁶ I received a startling lesson in the combinability of some such scales – just the opposite of disparate accounting – when an older farmer told me the distance between his home and the nearby town: it was “four leagues and four kilometers” (*quarto léguas e quarto quilômetros*.) [cad12013p68; from interview w Seu Milton e seus filhos]

*Matinha that makes \$R180 a week.*⁷ But Januário did not then go on to calculate the wage by the month. Nor, in fact, would most sertanejos. Day laborers very rarely spoke about their pay in monthly terms. Why not the month?

Monthly pay was the privilege of people who had formal-sector jobs. In the formal sector, workers and employers almost always discussed pay as a monthly number, and, indeed, the national minimum wage was set as a rate per month. Formal jobs tended to guarantee at least one month of continual paid work – and even when they did not, the short-term wage would be converted into an equivalent monthly sum.

In the countryside, however, day-laborers struggled mightily to find work to fill their days. The calculation of their actual pay in a given month would have demonstrated (and did, when I made them sum it up with me) that they earned far less than minimum wage. This point was driven home to me one day in 2012, when I found an elated Rodrigo inside his whitewashed home. He had had recently been able to work an unusual number of jobs in quick succession. “It’s like a dude getting the right numbers for the Mega-Six Lottery!” he gushed. “Earning 150 in a week, that’s really good luck.” (*O cara acerta a Mega-Sena [...] Ganhar 150 em uma semana, é sorte mesmo.*) But even Rodrigo’s great week fell below urban standards. The minimum wage at that time was \$R622 per month—or \$R156 per week.

Because day-wages were reported on a daily or weekly basis, the earnings of rural day laborers could not be directly juxtaposed to those of formal-sector workers. The day-laborers were making far less than they would have in the city. They knew this, of course, but the habits of daily speech allowed everyone to circumvent the comparison.⁸ Small farm owners were no

⁷ Here, Januário was apparently assuming a six-day work week.

⁸ It is worth noting, by way of caveat, that Marcelo, Januário, and Norberto, standing on the rainy porch, did explicitly compare their day-wages to the day-wages available in the nearby city (see the opening of Ch. 6). But the comparison took place on the daily accounting scale. This scale served as the dominant metric for calculating wages

different: because Zima accounted her earnings by the year, a wall separated her harvest income from the monthly income of an urban salaried employee. Disparate accounting shattered the money scale into smaller scales, each one wrapped around a different time standard, each one nomic in nature and yet not quite aligned with the rest. These multiple scales, in a certain sense, preserved the specialness of the rural position. Also its inequality.

Disparate accounting, as a form of counterscaling, thus helped to maintain the sertão's segmented labor market. One of the dangers of the singular money scale was that it would render social inequalities too palpable. By speaking of money by the day or year on the one hand and money by the month on the other – by multiplying the forms of nomic calibration – sertanejos soothed this soreness.

Accounting ambiguity

When the manioc roots grew pale and ripe under the ground, after eighteen patient months or more, a farmer would put out the word that she was searching for a middleman. Sooner or later one would show up, driving his oversized truck into the village fields, and, once coffee and pleasantries were finished, he would offer two different options. The farmer could sell the manioc to him for a set price per kilo, or the farmer could sell it to him *na bistunta*. In bistunta, the middleman and the farmer would look over the field together and, without measuring anything, agree on a price while the roots were still in the earth waiting to be harvested.

in the villages; in the city, it applied to the very lowliest of entry-level positions. In other words, Marcelo, Norberto, and Januário were bounding their discourse so that it included most of the jobs in the villages and only the worst-paid equivalents in the city.

Bistunta is an explicit agreement not to measure the weight of the product being sold. It is the creation of uncertainty about the value at hand, and, as a practice of accounting ambiguity, it functions as a form of counterscaling. With bistunta, one quite literally does not use a scale. Sertanejos referred to the middleman's first option, the per-kilo price, as "valor de mercado:" the market value. Thus they cast bistunta as a deviation from the market value, a step away from the market.

I heard this phrasing from Seu Milton and his sons, all of them hardscrabble farmers who cautiously nursed a sugarcane field and several cows at Maracujá. They described bistunta to me at length, emphasizing its rivalries, its competitiveness, and its spirit of play. For them, as for others, bistunta was a high-stakes chance to win or lose money against a middleman. And it was also inescapably funny.

M: There, there in bistunta, there you've got a cow. There you play—you make your estimate, right? It comes out to—fifteen arrobas. [1 arroba = 15 kilos]

D: Mm hm.

M: I'm going to buy this cow from you. I get there, and I ask you, 'What arroba do you want from this cow?' You say, 'Fifteen arrobas.'

D: Mm hm.

M: The buyer—is a big crybaby. [General laughter] He doesn't want to get to those fifteen. Even if he sees. He's seeing the fifteen. But he goes—and says, 'No, that's only thirteen arrobas.' And there it's just like – they say – one goes down and the other goes up. [laugh]

D: Yep, yep.

De: Yeah.

M: And then, you end up negotiating, right? Sometimes you can close it for—for fourteen arrobas. Right?

D: Mm hm.

M: You go down an arroba, I go up an arroba. There, in bistunta it's like that

M: Aí, aí na bistunta, aí você tem uma vaca. Aí você joga—você faz sua base, né? Ela dá—quinze arrobas.

D: Mm hm.

M: Eu vou comprar essa vaca em sua mão. Chego lá, e eu pergunto para você, 'Que arroba você quer dessa vaca?' Você fala, 'Quinze arrobas.'

D: Mm hm.

M: O comprador—é muito chorão. [todo o mundo dá uma risada.] Não quer chegar aos quinze. Mesmo que ele enxerga. Tá enxergando os quinze. Mas e vai—e fala, 'Não, só dá 13 arrobas.' E aí é que nem—fala—um baixa, e o outro sobe. [laugh]

D: É, é.

De: É.

M: E aí, acaba negociando, né? Às vezes pode fechar ela por—por 14 arrobas. Né?

D: Mm hm.

M: Você abaixa uma arroba, eu aumento uma arroba. Aí, na bistunta é assim.

[...]

M: Na bistunta é só na—

[...]

M: In bistunta it's just in—

De: It's just in the look itself.

M: It's just in the—the, the eyes.

De: É só no olhar mesmo.

M: É só no—nas, nas vistas

In his discourse, Seu Milton skillfully carried out the core semiotic shift through which bistunta functioned. He pivoted away from nomic calibration and into presential calibration.

The story began with an assessment of the cow along a nomic scale, through which listeners learned the cow's true weight: "It comes out to—fifteen arrobas." This nomic use of the present tense – the present used to describe a lasting truth – gave way, a few lines later, to a different, strikingly immediate form of the present tense. Seu Milton spent two sentences describing the very moment at which the buyer stood in front of the cow. *Even if he sees. He's seeing the fifteen.* In the second sentence, Seu Milton's redundant use of the progressive present ("He's seeing") served to underline the immediacy of this moment. This immediacy was the sign that the discourse had pivoted out of nomic calibration and into presential calibration.

Seu Milton's story also bore many of the other rhetorical markers that, in Chapter 4, I associated with presential calibration. In order to render the object tangibly present, the speakers invoked visuality, with all of its immediatist implications ("He's seeing the fifteen.") Indeed, Seu Milton and his son concluded by describing visuality as the key quality of bistunta: "It's just in the look itself," "it's just in the eyes." Moreover, Seu Milton employed a repetitive, poetic rhythm. He metrically repeated the word "see" ("Even if he can't see/ He's seeing the fifteen.") Later, he spoke two rhythmic couplets, each one expressing a delicate symmetrical balance in which the buyer and the seller came to occupy opposed and equivalent positions (first couplet: "one goes down and the other goes up;" second couplet: "you go down an arroba, I go up an arroba.") Seu Milton was making use of distinctive rhetorical tools: visuality, repetitive rhythm,

and an immediate present tense. With these tools he built a present zone inside discourse, a zone in which the objects became irresistibly palpable and the deal could be reached.

But what was being juxtaposed in the story was not, in fact, cows. It was the negotiators themselves, or, more specifically, their prices. The presentist rhetoric served to calibrate *the prices* against each other, so that these prices could ultimately reach equivalence.

The same dance – prices bouncing towards equivalence – appeared again in a different conversation, this time with Lara, who was regaling me with a description of the bistunta negotiation that took place when Maurício sold his carefully-cultivated manioc to a middleman. As with Seu Milton, what drove Lara’s bistunta story was the rhetoric of presential calibration. She made a telling shift from the past to the present tense once the deal started to heat up. Above all, she used a poetic and repetitive rhythm.

L: [The middleman] bought it in the bistunta. Maurício said, “You give me (*dá*) how much, hey, in the bistunta there?” “I give you for this much.” Then he says like this, “No. I only give for this much.”

D: Mm hm.

L: The person goes and says, “So then I give you at this much.”

L: Ele comprou na bistunta. Maurício falou, “Você me dá quanto, hein, na bistunta aí?” “Eu te dou por tanto.” Aí ele fala assim, “Não. Eu só dou por tanto.”

D: Mm hm.

L: A pessoa vai e fala, “Então eu te dou a tanto.” (Lara e Rodrigo 9-3-12)

Lara wrapped her storytelling around a key verb – *dá*, “give” – whose uses inside nomic calibration we explored at length in Chapter 4. But Lara deployed *dá* to achieve an effect entirely different from the nomic one that we discussed earlier. *Dá*, here, built a frame for presential calibration, and it did so by establishing a balanced mutuality between the buyer and the seller.

This occurred through a subtle shift in the meaning of *dá*. As it turns out, the first thing that is “given” in bistunta, the first object exchanged between buyer and seller, is neither manioc

nor money. It is *a price*. In their initial offers⁹ to each other, both Maurício and the middleman spoke exactly the same phrase –*dou por tanto*, awkwardly translated into English as “I give for this much,” or, in other words, “I give you this price.” If they had been talking directly about manioc, one would expect to hear different and complementary phrases from the buyer and the seller. The buyer would “give this much” for the manioc (*dou tanto pela mandioca*), and the seller would “give the manioc” for this much (*dou a mandioca por tanto*). But, inside Lara’s account, Maurício and the middleman were not talking, yet, about manioc. They both used the same phrase, *dou por tanto*. *Dá* operated here as a condensed version of an idiom commonly heard in the sertão: *dar um preço*, “to give a price.” Maurício and the middleman were not giving each other manioc and money, but prices.

In bistunta – and, as we will see, also in other transactions like it – the first act of sociable exchange is the exchange of prices, which should be traded back and forth in speech for some time, like tokens of goodwill. Of course, the proffered prices are, in some theoretical sense, prices for the manioc. But they are not initially to be taken as serious offers. They serve a different purpose.

The exchange of prices establishes a ground of equivalence between the buyer and seller. It makes buyer and seller seem like the same kind of person, capable of engaging in the same kind of action; it creates a sense in which the two count as equals. These two actors speak to each other in phrases that are structured exactly the same way: “I give for this much.” They thus set up a rhythm to their speech with each other, casting their utterances as reciprocal verses inside a meter, bringing their prices into the same present space inside discourse. This exchange can act,

⁹ As in the previous chapter, here I am making use of a *report* of a conversation, rather than the conversation itself, as evidence. What justifies this methodology is the status of Lara’s report. She is delivering it to me as a model of social life—a model of how bistunta should be. This model is the proper object of analytic attention. And it should be noted that the model has real purchase: when I examined the negotiation over the cow, in Ch. 4, it bore a striking resemblance to the models of exchange laid out by interlocutors elsewhere.

in itself, as a powerful form of sociability. Once I heard two older farmers consider the sale of a cow from one to the other; after some initial conversation, they simply repeated the same two prices rhythmically back and forth at each other for an extended period of time: “600,” “800,” “600,” “800,” over and over. Neither one changed his price, but the very act of speaking, “giving the price,” reaffirmed the connection between them and expressed faith in the eventual possibility of a deal.

Rhythm, presence, the comparison of two immediate objects inside discourse: this is the dynamic of presential calibration. Sertanejos say that both the buyer and the seller can “give a price,” and thus this act, available to them both, marks an equivalence between them, a sort of dignity. As with Maurício and the middleman, *dá* first means “give a price,” which both speakers do in the same way; only after this initial practice of equivalence has finished can *dá* come to have its secondary, differentiated meanings, “give you manioc” for one speaker and “give you money” for the other. It is these secondary meanings that finally close the deal.¹⁰

¹⁰ If exchanging prices serves as a marker of dignity – dignity in giving and being given – then, by contrast, *not having a price* indicates one’s disrespected and cheapened status. Dona Zaida, a woman in her 70s at Rio Branco, used the idiom to describe the disdain with which the landowners used to treat paid workers like her father. Her account is treated in more depth in Chapter 2, but let me recall the most relevant excerpts:

But then, now, people who worked, those guys would pay them cheap, however they wanted, because in that time there was no price.

Mas aí agora os que trabalhavam, esses pagavam, baratinho, do jeito que eles quiser, que nesse tempo não tinha preço.

I asked her to specify what the phrase meant.

DZ: There really was no price! Because they didn’t know what it was to give value (*dar valor*) to the poor person’s work. [...] A little poor person comes up, he doesn’t even invite him to come in.

DZ: Porque não tinha preço mesmo! Porque não sabia o que era dar valor no serviço do pobre. [...] E chega um pobrezinho, ele não manda nem entrar.

The exchange of prices served, precisely, to make sure that there was not “no price,” that everyone had a price. To be able to have a price and negotiate for it: this was the opposite of the disdain and submission that prevailed between the bad landowner and the poor person.

One can speculatively detect, here, the foundations of a native theory of value that rests on mutualism—a theory in which value is always *given* by someone else. The common phrase *dar valor* (“to give value”) belongs to such a theory. To give and to receive value would then fit inside a broader set of sociable practices, including hospitality rituals, dealmaking, and gestures of ritual kinship, all of which are aimed at bringing the foreigner inside.

The mutuality of seller and buyer was here, however, a competitive mutuality, a form of negative reciprocity (Sahlins 1972: 191). Bistunta, in its ambiguity, created an opportunity for windfall gains—or for spectacular losses. Everything depended on whether it would be the buyer or the seller who would make the better estimate of the item being sold. In the case of Maurício, I watched Lara and her husband Rodrigo console him the evening after the deal closed. He had received \$R1050 for the manioc, and its worth, in weight, turned out to be almost \$R2000.

Importantly, farmers attributed such gains and losses in bistunta to skill. Lara explained why Maurício had done so poorly:

Because he thought it was – he didn't understand, right? I think he thought it was less, right?

Porque ele achou que estava—não entendia, né? Acho que achou que estava menos, né?

And Rodrigo surmised that Maurício would henceforth acquire the skills that he had lacked:

Ah ha! Now he's taken a loss, now he knows what's up. [Laughter]

Ah há! Agora tomou prejuízo, agora já está sabendo. [Risos]

Bistunta was only one of the payment arrangements – to sertanejos, it seemed, it was the *funniest* of the payment arrangements – that could be found in the villages but not in the city.

These rural modes of payment abounded. People could make agreements on the basis of *sociedade*, “society,” in which, at least in principle, both partners would carry out work and then divided the final product in half. For example, two brothers might plant a field together and then split the profit evenly. Alternatively, people could make an arrangement *na meia*, “by the half.” *Na meia* agreements tended to presume that one party owned a resource, while the other partner worked it. A landowner could loan out a field *na meia*; he would be obligated to make sure it

It is notable that Dona Zaida spoke in the same breath of the landlord's failure to give value and his refusal to invite someone into his house.

But if one can speak of a “mutualist theory of value” in the rural sertão, this theory of value nonetheless does not correspond to my own analytic theory of value. The mutualist theory of value would be a prevalent ideology among people living in the sertão; the theory of value-in-scaling, which I am trying to work out in this text, is my ideology, smuggled in from social science debates, and used to illuminate the words of my interlocutors not because they agree but rather because they disagree with it, creating a space of difference.

was already cleared and fenced before turning it over to the worker, and he would have to give the seed to the worker. The worker would spend the season planting, tending, and harvesting, and would then turn over half of the product to the landowner.¹¹

These payment arrangements were subject to unending possible variations. All of them involved, in some sense, the management of uncertainty; they functioned as insurance mechanisms that spread the risk of loss in case of a bad farming outcome. But, unlike *bistunta*, they were accounted in exact terms, not with ambiguity. However, one other major payment practice did rely on the same sort of accounting ambiguity that *bistunta* required. This was the practice of employing workers through *empreita*.

Empreita was a form of contracting in which one farmer hired another for short-term work, but paid by the job instead of paying by the day. The employer and the worker would examine the job beforehand – fencing a field, weeding a crop – and settle on a single price. Demétrio explained it as follows:

¹¹ The examples above come from Seu Milton and his sons. It is difficult to summarize the varieties of *sociedade* and *meia* agreements. They were especially common with cattle. Aristeu, a thirty-something farmer who had fought adversity at Maracujá, staged a financial comeback through a combination of *meia* and *sociedade* cattle-ranching. He described the difference as follows. In the *sociedade* system, you make an agreement with a partner who owns cattle. Your partner turns over the cattle to you, generally younger cows or bulls needing to be fattened. At the moment of the initial agreement, the herd is weighed and a sum total weight is noted down. You then raise the cattle by yourself for an extended period of time. When you return them to their initial owner, the herd is weighed again. This new total weight should significantly exceed the original weight, both because each head of cattle has grown and because the cows have borne calves. You can then keep one-half of the increase in weight: this is your payment for the work you have done in caring for them. Generally, you get paid in cattle; in other words, you keep cattle whose total weight equals the amount you should be paid.

The *meia* system, by contrast, was typically applied to milk cows. In *meia*, your partner gives you a fixed number of cows. You raise them by yourself. When you return the herd to the owner, the number of new calves is counted; you keep half of these calves, and the owner keeps the other half. *Meia* is generally considered less lucrative for the worker than *sociedade*, because, in *meia*, the original cows are eventually simply returned to their owner and any increase in their weight is not compensated. However, in *meia*, any milk can be kept (and sold) by the worker.

With both Aristeu's cow example and Seu Milton's field example, the key difference between *sociedade* and *meia* seems to involve hierarchy. In *sociedade*, the principle is that both partners work collaboratively, sharing the entire outcome that their work produces. In *meia*, however, the logic of hierarchy prevails; the owner keeps his cows or fields, and the worker has the right only to the momentary products (milk, crops) or to the juvenile result (the calves, not the cows.) *Meia* seems to more closely resemble the relationships between landlords and attached resident farmers on the owner's land.

De: Empreita, it's when the person wants you to do a task for him—

Du: Mm hm.

De: He looks for the person to do it. Then he presents the job to you and he sees for how much you'll accept doing that job.

Du: Mm, so then he—Mm hm.

De: Yeah. So then you, you see how much it is, and you're going to say for how much you do it.

De: A empreita, é quando a pessoa quer que faz um serviço para ele—

Du: Mm hm.

De: Ele procura a pessoa para fazer. Aí, ele te apresenta o trabalho e vê por quanto tu pega para fazer aquele trabalho.

Du: Mm, então ele—mm hm.

De: E'. Ai você, você vê o tanto, e vai falar por quanto você faz. (Entrevista c/ Seu Milton e seus filhos, 2013)

As in *bistunta*, emphasis was placed on the capacity of both parties to negotiate and agree on a price. The employer did not simply offer a standard day-labor rate. Instead she “presented” the job – literally making it “present” to negotiation between the worker and the boss – and, in Demétrio’s visual metaphor, the two sides “saw” what price they would accept. Since its price was set through this form of presentist negotiation, *empreita* relied on a practice of scaling that was utterly different from the standardized day-labor system. With day-labor, everyone carefully tracked the time worked; in *empreita*, by contrast, there would be no accounting of the hours it took to finish the job.

Thus *empreita*, like *bistunta*, produced a zone of ambiguity. No-one knew the outcome in advance. The work might prove to be harder than anticipated, or the worker might shirk and irresponsibly delay in completing it. In the face of this uncertainty, *empreita* involved both a looser sense of time and a less stringent practice of supervisory monitoring than day-labor. The worker worked on her own time, with an eye to the whole job, and the boss checked in only sporadically. Particularly since the worker often received part of the payment before completing the work, an employer would typically feel reluctant to hire a worker through *empreita*:

Someone could eat the money [...] Not finish the task.

Come o dinheiro [...] Não acaba o serviço.

But, as with *bistunta*, the ambiguity opened up a space for gain. The worker might work unusually fast and free herself up by finishing the job early. As Seu Milton noted, “With *empreita*, the more you push yourself in the work, the more you gain” (*Na empreita, quanto mais você puxa no trabalho, você ganha mais*): the fast worker earns her money in a shorter time. On the other side of the deal, the employer might save herself the effort of supervising. Thus both parties would win.

Because of the risk involved, only the best workers could obtain *empreita* jobs. To work *empreita* was a sign of one’s skill and trustworthiness.

[The boss] is not going to pay <i>empreita</i> to just anybody, no way.	Não é todas as pessoas que ele vai botar na <i>empreita</i> não.

Just someone who’s good at producing.	Só quem tem uma produção.

Both *empreita* and *bistunta* operated as forms of counterscaling. They both involved blurring the money scale— or, in other words, generating ambiguity by refusing to measure as accurately as one could. In their speech to each other, *sertanejos* achieved this accounting ambiguity by pivoting out of nomic calibration and into presential calibration. Their rhetoric came to highlight the equivalence and respect between the two parties; the external, nomic aspect faded.

Empreita and *bistunta* required a sort of unnecessary restraint, a gratuitous rejection of measurement. Why didn’t people measure the hours of work or the weight of the manioc, when it was within their capacity to do so? The answer points towards an important tool in the construction of the sense of an inside. Not measuring was *interactionally* generative; it was a way to use human interactions in order to produce.

Produce what? In the case of *bistunta*, the production happened through the mode of the tournament—a “tournament of value,” in Appadurai’s terms (1986:21.) At a first level, this

tournament operated as a form of redistribution rather than production. Rodrigo and Lara made this redistribution clear in their comments: *bistunta*, they emphasized, created opportunities for the astute negotiator to extract profit from the unsuspecting.

But, as tournament theory teaches us (Lazear and Rosen 1981), it is through their redistributions that tournaments become productive. At a second level, what *bistunta* produced was a sense of skill. The elaborate negotiations, and the endless stories that people told afterwards, gave rise to a whole finely-graded array of rankings of people. It took no special talent to weigh a cow on a scale, like one did in the city, but to *know* a cow's weight, and to shrewdly bargain for it – that was skill. As Rodrigo and Lara had done, *sertanejos* would follow up a deal with extensive chatting around the village about who had bargained best. *Bistunta*, in other words, gave *sertanejos* an opportunity to talk explicitly about skill. And just as in tournament wage theory, once a particular skilled rank has been constructed and valorized, people will strive to attain it, even if it means trying and losing, over and over, at *bistunta*.

If *bistunta* was competitive and zero-sum, *empreita*, by contrast, could be characterized as collaborative and positive-sum. At a first level, *empreita* produced trust. By agreeing to refrain from counting work hours, the two parties declared their faith in each other. This faith saved the employer the effort of supervising, and it also gave the employee an opportunity to gain by dedicating extra effort to the job.

And *empreita*, like *bistunta*, operated, on a second level, to construct skill. To be hired for *empreita* was to be recognized as a specially skilled worker. Only a talented and trustworthy person could accurately estimate her work time, then follow through with the estimate. *Empreita*, too, created an opening for *sertanejos* to talk about skill in explicit terms: *the boss is not going to pay empreita to just anybody*.

By *not* tracking the days of work, by *not* weighing the cow, sertanejos opened a zone in which their expertise could get tested and recognized. The ambiguity made it possible for farmers to have skill. And these skills became the markers of a particular world. In the city, no-one would know how to guess a cow's weight or plan the number of days needed to clear a pineapple field; these were the indices of the inside, the special talents that made the village into a special place. Empreita and bistunta conjured up a second order of skillfulness in which sertanejos appeared as people who could earn recognition for their aptitude – if they dared to stay and try.

The appeal of this expertise, the possibility that one might augment it, is what helps to explain Rodrigo's cheery opinion about what Maurício would do after losing nearly a thousand reais on his bad bistunta deal:

Yeah, plant another one, and, with the other one, get wise!

É, plantar outra, e na outra, ficar esperto!

Earmarking

One day I asked Carlos, a middle-aged farmer on the drylands at Rio Branco, if all money was the same. He offered a beautifully ambivalent answer.

C: For me, it's all equal. Except— I say that it's all equal, except it's not. Because – see – my situation. Let's see. I, I drink beer. You know? I'll have a beer.

D: Mm hm.

C: On weekends I'll have a beer.

D: Mm hm.

C: But the—I, I drink out of the money from my day-wages. If I work over there, then I'll go over, I'll have a beer, and I'll pay and everything.

D: Mm hm.

C: I, I don't, don't, don't, don't put money from my own field into bar stuff. No way.

C: Para mim, é tudo igual. Só que—eu falo que é tudo igual só que não é. Porque—você vendo—meu caso. A ver. Eu, eu, eu tomo cerveja. Sabe? Eu tomo uma cervejinha.

D: Mm hm.

C: Final de semana eu tomo uma cervejinha.

D: Mm hm.

C: Mas o—eu, eu tomo do dinheiro de meu diário. Se eu trabalhar ali, aí eu vou lá, eu tomo uma cervejinha, e pago e tudo.

D: Mm hm.

C: De minha roça eu, eu não, não, não, não ponho em negócio de boteco não.

D: Mm hm. Mm hm.

D: Mm hm. Mm hm.

C: Any little money that I, I get out is for—sometimes I've got an installment payment to make [...] Like I was telling you, I buy, I always buy shoes, I buy clothes.

C: Qualquer dinheirinho que eu, eu tiro serve para-- às vezes eu tenho uma prestação [...] igual eu estou te falando, eu compro, sempre eu compro sapatos, compro roupa.

When Carlos earned day-wages in someone else's field, he let himself spend the money on beer.

Not so the money he earned from his own field: that went towards more permanent objects, like clothes or credit payments for household items. Carlos remembered some manioc flour that he had made from the produce of his field:

C: Sometimes when I make manioc flour there, I make four, five bags of flour here, I take it to the fair, and I sell it. Then when I come back—sometimes when it's Sunday here, I get there, and it's like, 'Ah! Hey, Mr. Carlos is coming! Come on, let's have some beer!' I said, 'Hey.' I said, 'Money from my field isn't going into a bar. No way, my son.'

D: Hm!

C: Money from my field doesn't go into a bar. No way. Money from my field is for my business.

C: Às vezes quando faço farinha aí, eu faço quatro, cinco sacos de farinha aqui, levo para a feira e vendo. Aí quando eu venho—às vezes quando é no domingo ali, chega lá, e 'Ah! Ô, Seu Carlos está chegando! Embora, embora tomar cerveja!' Eu falei, 'Ô.' Eu falei, 'Dinheiro da minha roça não vai em boteco não, meu filho.'

D: Hm!

C: Dinheiro da minha roça não vai em boteco não. Dinheiro da minha roça é para meus negócios.

Carlos felt so strongly about this issue that he sometimes went into debt at the bar even when he had plenty of money in his pocket. If the money came from his own field, then he preferred to borrow from the bar rather than paying cash for his beer.

Separate money for separate objects: this was the logic of earmarking (Zelizer 1994).¹²

As a form of counterscaling, earmarking worked through a practice of separation, in which certain sources of money could be used exclusively for certain kinds of purchases. The axis of separation was not, as in disparate accounting, separate nomic standards. In earmarking, the very

¹² It is worth noting how much this practice of earmarking departs from the underlying principle of abstraction in a commodity society, as Postone understands it: "Labor [...] becomes a peculiar means of acquiring goods in commodity-determined society; the specificity of the producers' labor is *abstracted* from the products they acquire with their labor. There is no intrinsic relation between the specific nature of the labor expended and the specific nature of the product acquired by means of that labor" (1993: 149). Many thanks to Adam Sargent for this insightful reference.

point was that, for accounting purposes, a single standard predominated – money. What was separate here was not the standard but rather the objects, and each type of object was subject to a separate form of action. The forms of action, in turn, each implied separate modes of time. In the sertão, different objects became separate, above all, because some of them seemed transient – like beer – while for others the speaker carefully crafted an imagined future worth. Earmarking, in other words, operated through a pivot into projective calibration.

As Carlos began to tell the most emphatic portion of his story, he made a temporal shift that was exactly the opposite of the shift we have observed in presential calibration. In Lara's account of the manioc deal, she marked the dealmaking climax by shifting from past to present tense. Carlos did the reverse. He marked the refusal of a deal by shifting from present to past tense. *Sometimes when it's Sunday here, I get there, and it's like, 'Ah! Hey, Mr. Carlos is coming! Come on, let's have some beer!' I said, 'Hey.' I said, 'Money from my field isn't going into a bar. No way, my son.'* In Carlos' "I said," the past tense served as a sign of his seriousness, and it hinted at the reason behind this seriousness: differing senses of time.

This difference emerged more fully in Carlos' accounts of his own action. He associated beer with one kind of activity, "work." *If I work over there, then I'll go over, I'll have a beer, and I'll pay and everything.* Work appeared as a phase in a short-term cycle – working, having a beer, paying – that Carlos depicted as a complete circuit. *I'll pay and everything:* the "everything" indicated the cycle's status as a closed loop. To pay was a part of wrapping up everything, so that cycle reached its appropriate moral completion. In paying for his beer Carlos proved his status as a good actor, and he allowed the day-wage money to reach its altogether-fitting destination.

With regard to his own field, Carlos' mode of action was entirely different. Carlos did not describe his activity in the field as "work." What Carlos did in the field was "getting something out." *Any little money that I, I get out is for—sometimes I've got an installment payment to make.* Carlos thus figured his own field not as a job site, but rather as a patrimony to be grown and maintained into the future. He knew he should not extract excessive cash from it, and he defensively asserted that what he did get out was just "little money." This little money might appropriately be applied to other long-term cycles of patrimony, like household installment payments, or at least clothes and shoes. Money from the field required seriousness, a serious sense of the past and the future, the very seriousness that he created by switching into the past tense in his story and hence establishing a space of distinction between the present and the past. In other words, it called for projective calibration.

But what was most telling in Carlos' phrasing was the extended pause. *Any little money that I, I get out is for—* Carlos stopped, as if he had a hard time imagining the correct future for money from his field. And this was supposed to be hard to imagine. We have seen this same sort of pause in Chapter 4, when Amando hinted at the future value of a suckling calf. *Expensive, yeah. Now, after three months, right—* The pause left room for wonder, for the potentially-infinite expansion of the object's worth. In the sertão, projective calibration involved just this sort of wonder, and although Carlos ultimately came up with examples, his short silence managed to mark the future's distinctive capacity to hold something that could escape imagination.

That indescribable item – that future that Carlos strove not to take out of his field – turned out to be the same thing that drove Lara and Rodrigo, morning after morning, from their house and into a tiny shack built out of mud, sticks, and a sheet of gray corrugated tin. The shack

sat between their planted fields and the pasture that housed the few cows they had scrimped to purchase. Lara and Rodrigo would stop in the shack at the beginning of a day in the field in order to drop off a battered pot of beans for lunch or sharpen a tool on a stone. Then they would toil in their fields— but only if it was a day for working in one’s own field.

Lara and Rodrigo hoarded such days, wrestling with the household budget so there would be more of them. These days were constrained by the realities of earmarking. Lara and Rodrigo had four tiny children. And the money that covered the household’s everyday expenses was earmarked: Lara and Rodrigo committed themselves to paying for these quotidian expenses solely out of the cash they earned by working day-labor on other people’s fields. As Lara explained,

If you know that you have an obligation – food and drink [...] – an installment payment for a household good – then you have to go work for other people.	Se você sabe que você tem uma obrigação – os comes e bebes [...] – uma prestação – lá você tem que trabalhar para os outros (c9p14)

Earmarking was a familiar practice in the sertão. It motivated even the poorest households.

Margarita, who had an income far below the World Bank poverty level, told me that she earmarked the money she earned from painting women’s nails. Thinking of her four-year-old son, she directed it “for his snack food” (*para a merenda dele.*)

Rodrigo referred to such daily obligations as *gastos*, “expenses.”

Those expenses there, I work outside for other people [...] Things to eat [...] Notebooks.	Esses gastos lá, eu trabalho fora para os outros [...] coisas para comer [...] caderno (c9p107)

Since they earmarked their day-labor earnings for food and children’s school supplies, Lara and Rodrigo could earmark their earnings from their own field for another purpose. Money from the field went towards reinvestment in the field. Rodrigo, standing surrounded by that field one day, explained to me:

I've already gotten out a lot of money from inside here, dude. It's just that the money that I get out of here, I apply it right here too [...] I don't spend [*gasto*] it [...] on] those things, clothes, shoes [...] If there's any left over, I buy a little livestock.

Eu já tirei muito dinheiro aqui dentro, moço. Só o dinheiro que eu tiro daqui eu aplico aqui mesmo [...] Não gasto [...] Essas coisas, roupa, sapatos [...] Se sobrar, eu compro uma criaçãozinha.

Lara and Rodrigo hoped to improve their field. So they struggled over the allocation of days: they aimed to spend fewer days as day-laborers in other people's fields and more days as owners in their own.¹³ Because of their strict earmarking, they felt tied down by their household's daily expenses, which obligated them to work for others. Rodrigo saw Bolsa Família sympathetically, he explained to me, because it served as an ally in the fight. The more his wife received in government support for household expenses, the fewer days he would have to work for others, and the more he could spend expanding their own field. Thus Bolsa Família, through an indirect route, generated an autonomy made visible in agricultural ownership.¹⁴ But even with this help, Lara and Rodrigo still felt deeply limited in their capacity to grow their own patrimony.

Carlos sympathetically recognized this dilemma. It was a problem, he said, of time:

People who have a family can't afford to plant a field. They've got to work for other people [...] When you work for other people, you get paid [...] They aren't going to wait a year and a half, two years, to get paid.

Quem tem família não tem condições de fazer roca. Tem que trabalhar para os outros [...] Trabalhando para os outros, você recebe [...] Eles não vão esperar um ano e meio, dois anos, para receber.

Families could not manage to wait the two years required for some crops to reach market. This was a problem very familiar to Rodrigo. But he believed in his field's ability to grow. Projecting

¹³ There is a striking parallel here to the conflict that Palmeira (1976) describes for moradores during the heyday of the plantation (discussed in Ch. 2)—struggling to spend less time in the owner's field and more time in one's own.

¹⁴ Rodrigo was not the only one who felt this way. Dona Eva, at Rio Branco, had this to say in response to critics of Bolsa Família: "They say that it's charity. That—they're giving it to the poor people so that poor people will get more lazy. [But] it helped the poor person to work. The person who gets \$R100 [from Bola Família]—that's enough for the person to – get \$R100 , buy groceries (feira), and spend the week working for himself. To be able to earn—to do something." (Diz que é uma esmola. Que—tá dando para os pobres para os pobres ficar mais preguiçosos. Ajudou o pobre a trabalhar. Quem tira cem reais, já dá para tirar cem reais, fazer uma feira, e trabalhar a semana para ele. Para poder ganhar—fazer alguma coisa.) [Conversa com Dona Si sobre motivos que ela tem para apoiar, 13:30]

the field's worth into an open future, he imagined a time when he might be able to convert some of it to other forms of wealth:

There going forward, if you have your life really lifted up [i.e. if you are really prosperous] [...] then, yes, you can buy your good clothes [...] your car.

Lá na frente, se tiver bem levantada a vida [...] aí sim, pode comprar sua roupa boa [...] carro.

Rodrigo maintained a firm distinction between this long-term, future wealth and the present-day cash that he devoted to his children's food, and this distinction became possible, in part, because of the clear terminology that he applied to it. Clear but, to outsider ears, profoundly strange. Although Rodrigo employed the same terms as an urban accountant – profits and expenses – he thus gave them an utterly different meaning. Profit did not equal revenues minus expenses; profit and expense belonged in entirely different earmarked categories. “Expenses” (*gastos* or, sometimes, *despesas*) were the short-term requisites of daily living, like food. One's long-term agricultural goods, by contrast, were called *lucro* (“profit.”) Staring out at his nicely-growing field, Rodrigo concluded

The profit is this here, my own thing.

O lucro é isso aqui, o meu.

Profit meant the objects that one owned in a permanent sense. Hence the strangest inversion involved in Rodrigo's terminology: profits and expenses were not categories of money, but kinds of things. Only in a secondary sense did Rodrigo use these terms to speak about money. The word “expenses”¹⁵ referred primarily to the ephemeral items of everyday life, while the word “profits” referred, first of all, to the lasting items that one sought to preserve and grow.

Indeed, many sertanejos made use of this same distinction, sometimes adding *renda* (income) as a synonym for “profit.” One day, I naively asked Aristeu, a cattle farmer, if he

¹⁵ In my understanding, this is particularly true of the word “despesas;” “gastos” had a more financial sense.

earned more profit from milk cattle or beef cattle. He immediately responded *no* to indicate the incomprehension behind my question, and then he repaired my misunderstanding.

No. The cattle— The profit (*lucro*) that I have is the cattle. Não. O gado-- O lucro que eu tenho é o gado.

Cattle, in general, *were* profit.¹⁶ Milk, by contrast, served a less glorious cause; it made Aristeu enough money to cover his basic daily expenses.¹⁷

Because the milk—unfortunately, sometimes the milk—sometimes you make a requeijão [a kind of soft cheese], sometimes you make a cheese. So then you go around selling it so that I can get my expenditures. My consumption expenditures. You understand how it is? So then, there I get my sustenance. On top of that milk. While the income (*renda*) that I’m getting is in the calves. Did you understand? The income that I’m getting is in the calves. Which is my profit.

Porque o leite— infelizmente, às vezes o leite—às vezes faz um requeijão, às vezes faz um queijo. Então ali vem para vender para poder eu tirar minhas despesas. O meu consumo de despesas. Você entende como é que é? Então ali eu tiro meu sustento. Em cima daquele leite. Enquanto que a renda que eu estou tendo é nos bezerros. Você entendeu? A renda que eu estou tendo é nos bezerros. Que é meu lucro.

Cattle were profit, and milk covered expenses.¹⁸ Profits versus sustenance: earmarking, in the sertão, operated as a mode of counterscaling. It divided the money scale by rendering some money non-fungible with other money. Sertanejos generated this separation by pivoting into projective calibration, imagining the shorter or longer future of the all of the wealth around them.

¹⁶ Similarly, Sigaud claims that sugarcane farmers in Pernambuco in the 1960s conceived of the mill owner’s profit as the sacks of sugar sitting in the mill after processing (1976: 324).

¹⁷ On another occasion, Félix beautifully summed up the external quality of “expenses,” which did not come from one’s own field. Expenses (*despesas*), he defined, are “what I have here that I buy outside” (*o que eu tenho aqui que eu compro fora*.) The notion of expenses, as Félix demonstrated, joins two key elements: quick circulation time, on the one hand, and a sense of externality, on the other.

¹⁸ A different time, Seu Benjamin told me about how he had harvested his pumpkins and fed them to his pigs. With those pumpkins, he said, “I fattened four pigs [...] So that was the profit.” (*Eu engordei 4 porcos. Então foi o lucro.*) As I understood it, Seu Benjamin was referring to the growth of the pigs as the profit. Profit was not a kind of money; profit was the augmented pig itself. Thus his feeding had converted a temporary, short-term pumpkin into a longer term “profit,” an enlarged pig.

What did this earmarking achieve? It walled off a separate zone for objects that were capable of lasting into the future, the objects that, originating in the growth of one's own field, would belong to oneself in a permanent sense. Rodrigo explained to me how he saw his cows:

I'll go through hardship, but I won't sell them, Passo aberto, mas não vendo não.
no way.

A bit later, he thought of his cows again, and he mused

Why sell them, you know? Vender para que, né? [conversa com Rodrigo,
8/16/13]

Sertanejos were regularly pressed by the immediacy of hunger and want. They risked falling into a trap in which they spent all of their earnings on food, and hence could invest nothing and never build a base of agricultural assets.¹⁹ By earmarking certain monies for long-term investment, sertanejos preserved the *possibility* of ascension. They held onto a set of objects and a stream of income that would allow them, even in difficult financial straits, to sustain a plan to build their patrimony. Of course, at many points, this plan might fail. But its existence gave farmers an important story, a story about how they were moving forward, even if they had to “take food out of their mouths,” as they frequently said (*tirar comida da boca*), in order to get ahead. The alternative was to accept forever working today in order to eat today, a circumstance that Carlos described in dire terms:

It's just like a lizard—working to eat. Just for the— work to eat, and that's it. Hm. You don't do anything, nothing. You don't have a future, you don't have anything.	É igual a lagarto—trabalhando para comer. Só para o-- trabalha para comer, e pronto. Hm. Você não faz nada, nada. Não tem futuro, não tem nada.

Earmarking operated as antidote: it could help you believe you had a future.

¹⁹ Sigaud makes a similar argument about scaling practices in rural Pernambuco in the 1960s. There, she says, farmers allocated each different type of income to a different purpose; she adds that such a system was necessary to prevent all of the money from going to food (1976: 323).

Counterscaling: a value apart?

The sertão overflowed with the language of money, but, as we have just seen, the same verbal calibrations that constructed the commodity could also set it apart. Sertanejos knew a passel of practices that allowed them to dissent from the value set in the city. They could refuse to account at all, *accounting refusal*. Through *differential accounting*, they could account with differing standards that became difficult to commensurate. They could make deals that relied on *accounting ambiguity*. They could *earmark* their sources of income. None of this required an outright rejection of money; all of it involved the use of money language to generate something different from the urban value, something new.

Their dissent often relied on the creation of separate spheres of exchange – profit versus expenses, market value versus *bistunta*, day-wages versus month salaries (Bohannon and Bohannon 1968) – which, following Guyer's (2003) revelatory suggestion, we can now understand as the result of specific practices of scaling. These practices involve the separation of categories that would, in some sectors of the urban economy, have been commensurate with each other along a single money scale. And indeed, we might therefore be inclined to interpret the village world itself as its own distinct universe of value. Perhaps value means something different there. Perhaps the rural sertão has an autonomous value system, one full of creative distinctions and separated spheres, a system with its own standards that align poorly with the standards of urban trade. Perhaps this rural system sits alongside the urban economy – perhaps it even *predates* the urban economy – and the two get stitched together, but only at the cost of great discomfort, since they rest on distinct bases. It would be the task of the analyst, then, to figure out how people assign value in the village world, making careful note of the incommensurability between the value an object has in the sertão and the value it has in the city.

But it is worth observing that at least one group in the villages seemed to believe, quite strongly, in the power of a universal accounting. This was the Protestants. One day I sat chatting on the couch of Amadeu, the slender, energetic cattle-herder who was slowly becoming the leader of the services at the local evangelical church. Amadeu was instructing me and a teenage neighbor about redemption. He explained

We are all going to have to render an accounting.

Todos nós vamos ter que prestar conta.

I felt struck by the economic metaphor, and he continued it. We will have debts, he noted. It will be like our lives are being watched on a DVD.

Just a few days earlier, I had heard the teenage neighbor say something similar. When you become an evangelical, he told me, it is as if the notebook of your life had been thrown away and you started over. From that point on, all of your sins will get written down. You will be forgiven for these sins, but you will need to suffer for them. He clarified this with another accounting term.

You are going to be responsible for the cost of the sin. Vai arcar com o pecado.

Here, the word “notebook” had a particular meaning. When a sertanejo went to a *venda* – a small bar or general store run out of someone’s house – she would often buy on credit, and the owner would record the debt in a worn notebook. These notebooks were veritable diaries of economic obligation, obligations on which people in the villages often defaulted, and to be held to one’s page in the notebook meant, I believe, having to pay the costs incurred in one’s life.

This Protestant discourse worked as the very opposite of counterscaling. It spoke of a world with no earmarks, a world in which all costs would ultimately become legible along a single scale. This vision posed a challenge to the habit of separating value spheres.

And what did the Protestant vision say about the sertão itself? Was the rural sertão a separate value-world, with its own accounts that did not match the records in the city? Or was it more like a page in a giant notebook where everyone's obligations, rural or urban, could be read in the same terms?

If the metaphor of universal accounting had purchase, if it felt persuasive to proselytes, this was because it told at least half of the truth about economic life in the rural sertão—in the same way that the sertão made up half of an economic system. Amadeu's words pointed towards a world in which all things, at the end of days, did become equivalent after all. Separate spheres did not stay separate. Nor, presumably, would the city remain distinct from the countryside.

Long ago, Robert Redfield argued that peasant communities exist as one half of a total social structure, sharing the same fundamental categories and orientations as the city. In his venerable words, "the necessary condition of peasant life is that the system of values of the peasant be consistent, in the main, with those of the city people who constitute, so to speak, its other dimension of existence" (1953: 40). This observation has a peculiar historical resonance in the sertão, where the past five hundred years resemble something like Redfield's model of progress run backwards. In the sertão, the peasant village developed *after* modernization. "Rural native[s]" (Redfield 1953: 31) did not become peasants while on the road to modernity; instead, slaves and unfree servants were imported to run frighteningly-modern plantations that, as early as the 17th century, used industrial discipline to produce commodities for the world market. These workers recreated themselves as peasants once they developed some capacity to break away, by buying land, rebelling, or fleeing. Mintz's description of the Caribbean is applicable: such peasantries come into being as "a reaction to the plantation economy, a negative reflex to enslavement, mass production, monocrop dependence, and metropolitan control" (1973 [1961]:

99). In Chapter 2, we saw how true this description holds for the histories of Maracujá and Rio Branco, two villages where people lived, according to their own words, in order to avoid the city. As a *negative reflex*, the sertanejo peasant dynamic requires a practice of self-distancing that subtly maintains, through opposition, one's links with the entity from which one has distanced oneself. Hence the importance of counterscaling.

Counterscaling, I maintain, is not the relic of an alternative, autonomous rural system of value. It is a critical gesture poised against value. Counterscaling, by making valuation more difficult, manages to build a terrain in which certain objects (like one's own cattle) and certain talents (like one's skill at estimating manioc weight) have importance but not value. That is, they have a significance that makes them resist entry into the cycle of exchange. Counterscaling, in other words, helps to foster non-value.

What is at stake here is the right use of the word "value" as an anthropological term—but, equally, the right way to understand the sertão, that human place that people like Lara and Carlos painstakingly built, that place where Josepe was welcome to sing in a kitchen. If the sertão has become home to peasants of a post-capitalist sort, this is not because sertanejos have managed – ever – to produce a world that has no truck with the logic of capital. People in the sertão do not remain separate from the world economy, but they sustain a vision of separation, a habit of not paying attention to the singularity of "money stuff," and instead looking towards that which might prove more durable than money. Perhaps capital has become survivable, on a day-to-day-basis, only because of such visions of separation, and perhaps this is the case not only in the sertão. These visions precisely express a determinate historical situation, one in which the condition of possibility for modernity is the subordinate suspicion that there might be something

more lasting than modernity itself, as if the whole commodity world were a paper that could get laundered until it lost its meaning, and we, in response, could smile indifferently.

Chapter 6
Getting the Prices Right:
Growth, Value, and the Outside

Note that men have value in different ways, and the surest of all is to have value through the opinion of other men.

(Olha que os homens valem por diferentes modos, e o mais seguro de todos é valer pela opinião de outros homens.)

--Machado de Assis (2012: 28, Ch. 28)

Old days, new days

In the old days, Seu Túlio said, there were caiman alligators and they lived in the pond at the edge of Rio Branco. One kind was black and the other had a snout that turned yellow during mating season. When the caimans were hungry, they would tromp up to the village and steal away piglets.

I heard Seu Túlio talk about the caimans while he held court in the cool of his living room, an old man inside a ring of younger relatives. Outside, the sun beat down heavy on the fruit trees that he had planted near his door long ago. Someone asked him, *What made things different back then?*

The people had faith in God!

O povo tinha fé em Deus!

he answered with insistence.

His wife looked on sharply.

They still do

Ainda tem

she retorted. The real change, she concluded, was something different:

Today the people have another type of studying.

Hoje o povo tem outro estudo. [Cad9p8]

Some months later, I lay in bed after the cookfire had gone out at the end of a day, and I listened while a different couple stayed up to chat. Seu Andres, age 59, was talking harsh. He had no patience, he told his wife, for

the things of the old times, of the backwardness.

coisas de antigamente, do atraso. [cad9p76]

Why, for example, would anyone today run a manioc-flour mill with no power motor?

Later, his wife, Dona Eva, told me about the old times.²⁰

We were born and raised without school. We didn't have here—there was no road, there was no, no bus. [...] We lived here inside the brush, here, you know. There were just the houses for us to be in. [...] Who said there was anything about washing your head? Or taking a bath, or soap? There was that stuff for the rich, but there wasn't for us poor people, not at all! And then [...] this time started coming, and it started getting better, and it started coming, and it started getting better.

Nasceu e criou sem escola. Nós não tinha aqui—não tinha estrada, não tinha, não tinha o ônibus. [...] Nós morava aqui dentro do mato aí, Ô. Só tinha as casas, para a gente estar aí. [...] Quem disse que tinha negócio de lavar a cabeça? Nem tomar banho, nem sabonete? Tinha para os ricos, mas para nós pobres não tinha não! E aí [...] foi chegando esse tempo, e foi melhorando, e foi chegando, e foi melhorando. [Conversa com Dona Si sobre PT]

Dirce, 22 years old, noted how different it was to raise a child now:

Because Duff, today, for you to raise a child, it's extremely expensive. [...] In the old days parents would raise a child, and it was without clothes. [...] It was without shoes. It was with nothing. Just the—Pretty much children didn't wear—like they pretty much didn't take baths.

Porque, Duff, hoje, para você criar um filho, é caríssimo. [...] Antigamente os pais criavam o filho aí, e era sem roupa. [...] Era sem calcado. Era sem nada. Somente o—Quase crianças que não usava, que nem quase tomava banho. (Dirce conversa sobre Sal Mat)

Dona Zaida was sixty years Dirce's senior. She had a more succinct analysis.

It seems that people's natures have changed.²¹ Parece que mudou as naturezas.
(3lagint1p279)

So much had changed in the villages, in so short a time. When workers finished connecting Rio Branco's first electric wire, in 2006, the whole village set off fireworks to celebrate. The wire was the visible sign, the crowning link in a chain of transformations. A road, a school, a water pump, bus service, electricity, community health agents: many of these

²⁰ On another day, Lara, at Maracujá, remembered how bad the old illnesses were. Measles used to run rampant.

Today it occurs, but much less often, because of the vaccines.

Hoje dá, mas dá bem mais fraco, por causa das vacinas.
[cad9p53]

²¹ On *natureza* as a model for people's selfhoods, see Chapter 8 and Johnson 1997: 419.

improvements came subsidized by the municipal Workers Party government that took power in 1996, but their rollout obeyed a rhythm and logic that came from somewhere beyond City Hall. The villages were walking the path of growth.

What, exactly, was making the changes happen? Was it the people's lack of faith, like Seu Túlio said? Or their new studies? Was it vaccines? Governments? And why did everything seem to change at once?

This chapter will think through the undeniable, inexorable changes by examining them in one particular light: by looking at them as a form of economic growth. This was not a foreign idea in the villages. No-one would have denied that the shoes on children's feet had something to do with the rising wages that workers could receive for selling their day-labor in the fields.

The changes, when framed as growth, were patent throughout Brazil. From Lula's election in 2002 up until I heard Seu Túlio's alligator story in 2012, Brazil's GDP expanded steadily. Sertanejos made all of their economic decisions – to build a house or buy a cow, to drop out or stay in school, to leave labor or join it – in concert with this irrefutable growth.

And, at long last, sertanejos were feeling low inflation. It was the opposite of the 1980s and early 1990s, when what seemed to change most was currencies: three different monies in four years. Brazil lived through hyperinflation for a decade. Sertanejos remembered that decade as the time when the coins and bills that so many farmers had carefully buried in the ground, over so many years, became suddenly worthless. In April 1990, inflation reached a high of 6831%. During the Lula years, by contrast, inflation hovered around 5%.²²

The difference between inflation and growth is value. At first glance, inflation and growth look the same: what one sees is a rising number, an upswing in nominal wages or profits.

²² Inflation figures from IBGE data, reported at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/brazil/inflation-cpi>, accessed 1/12/2015.

But inflation is valueless expansion; the same thing costing more. Growth comes from a real change in value. In fact, the classical economists invented the notion of a theory of value in order to explain growth.²³ Corn for Adam Smith, socially necessary labor-time for Karl Marx: value was the substance and metric that made it possible to grasp growth holistically, as a single unifying process that a society underwent together. Value functioned like a dye that allowed the analyst to trace growth. At the same time, the classical economists believed, value had a real

²³ The situation is more complicated than it might seem, because the classical economists did not necessarily think that growth directly corresponded to an increase in value in the economy. Instead, they held that growth was propelled by the dynamics of value-seeking. As each economic actor strove to obtain more value for herself, growth, they argued, was driven forward. Thus the theory of value helped the classical economists to answer the question *why does growth happen?*

For Marx, an object's value is the labor time socially necessary to produce that object. The total amount of value generated in an economy is the total number of labor-hours worked. What underlies the dynamic of capitalist growth, in Marx's argument, is not necessarily an increase in value per se, but rather an increase in *surplus-value*, the amount of value that capitalists appropriate for themselves. Capitalists can expand the amount of *absolute surplus-value* by persuading or coercing workers into working more hours for the same pay. These actions directly increase the number of hours worked and hence increase the total amount of value in the economy, while also generating economic growth, an increase in the capitalist economy's capacity to produce.

But Marx identifies another approach to growth as well. Capitalists can expand *relative surplus-value*. They do this by implementing technical and organizational changes that allow the same number of workers to produce more goods and services in the same amount of time. The overall amount of value in the economy does not increase: the total number of work hours stays the same. But the economy's capacity to produce does increase. What also increases – as long as wage demands can be held down – is the capitalists' surplus-value. This increase in relative surplus-value occurs because workers can now more quickly produce goods and services, and so they can more easily make everything that they were consuming at their previous standard of living. If their standard of living does not increase (or if it increases more slowly than the increase in their capacity to produce), then the extra goods and services will be available for appropriation by capitalists. Thus the total amount of value in the economy stays the same, but capitalists take more of this value. Workers consume goods and services that account for a smaller share of the total social supply of labor. Workers, in other words, spend fewer of their hours producing the commodities that go to themselves and more of their hours producing the commodities that go to the capitalists.

For Marx, the drive to increase relative surplus-value acts as a major impetus to economic growth. Business leaders implement technological changes that vastly expand the economy's capacity—all in the hope of augmenting not the total amount of value in the economy, but rather the surplus-value that accrues to them. "The objective of the development of the productivity of labour within the context of capitalist production is the shortening of that part of the working day in which the worker must work for himself, and the lengthening, thereby, of the other part of the day, in which he is free to work for nothing for the capitalist" (Marx 1976 [1867]: 438; see also ch. 16.)

The classical economists, therefore, did not articulate a one-to-one relationship between value and growth. Growth was not simply, directly, an increase in value. Rather, the dynamics of value and value-seeking explained the force behind growth. Value, as a concept, clarified the social processes that made growth happen.

existence; it really was an immanent social object that circulated and that people could produce in greater quantities over time.

And so the very concept of value entered social theory, in the last days of the 18th century, as a way to talk about growth. Ironically, anthropologists have frequently used the value concept for exactly the opposite purpose. Ethnographers often devote themselves to the task of defining a particular culture's system of value as an enduring whole, a whole that stays the same. As an unfortunate side effect, value, in one or another society, can come to seem more like a fixed principle of that society – more like a rule about how that society works – and less like a thing that could grow.²⁴

²⁴ Two especially clear examples occur in the writings of Graeber and Turner. Graeber's non-growth orientation comes through when he discusses Marx. Graeber summarizes Marx's position on value as follows:

Look at the amount of labor invested in a given object as a specific *proportion* of the total amount of labor in the system as a whole. This is its value [...] Imagine a pie chart, representing the US economy. If one were to determine that the US economy devotes, say, 19 percent of its GDP to health care, 16 percent to the auto industry, 7 percent to TV and Hollywood, and 0.2 percent to fine arts, one can say this is a measure of how important these areas are to us as a society. Marx is proposing we simply substitute labor as a better measure: if Americans spend 7 percent of their creative energies in a given year producing automobiles, this is the ultimate measure of how important it is to us to have cars. One can then extend the argument: if Americans have spent, say, .000000007 percent or some similarly infinitesimal proportion of their creative energies in a given year on *this* car, then that represents its value. This is basically Marx's argument, except that he was speaking of a total market system, which would by now go beyond any particular national economy to include the world (2001: 55).

Turner has a view that resembles Graeber's. "The values of the amounts of socially necessary labour time or productive capacity allocated to the production of two products are on this view defined as the proportion or fraction of the total social supply of labour power or productive capacity which each represents" (1979: 20). (For another similar position, see Simmel 1900: 594.)

The problem with this "social proportion" view of value is that it excludes the possibility that value could accumulate or grow inside a society. If an object's value is the *fraction* of the total social supply of labor time that is required to make the object, then the total amount of value in a society will always stay the same. By adding up the value of every object in the society at any given time, we would always reach the same number: 1. An object could only become more valuable – taking up a greater proportion of social labor – if other objects became less valuable – taking up a smaller proportion of social labor. In my reading, Marx has a quite different position: he argues that value is the amount (not the proportion) of socially-necessary labor time. Hence the store of value in society can increase as workers devote more and more hours of time to production, and this is one avenue for economic growth.

Graeber and Turner are anthropologists who have otherwise devoted themselves to vindicating the importance of practice and action as categories for social analysis. Thus the static tendency in their "social proportion" view of value is ironic – and perhaps unintended and not central to their other ideas about value.

This chapter takes Brazil's episode of growth, lived out at Maracujá and Rio Branco, as an opportunity to reassess the stakes of value theory in anthropology. The chapter's concluding claim is that value comes in from the outside. Value, that form identified by Marx, Ricardo, and Smith – and taken up by so many of their descendants – gets created through a social process in which people posit the existence of an outside realm and then hold up their own familiar objects against this realm. To put things another way, the chapter argues that social analysts should use the word “value” for a specific purpose: to talk about those congealed relations of comparison that have an inextricably external quality to them.

The outside, I will claim, is no matter of self-deception. A commodity has the capacity to travel across great geographic and social divides, passing from hand to hand, and even if its voyage has been shorter, everything happens as if the producer and the consumer had no other connection than the commodity itself. In speaking of *the outside*, then, I have two meanings in mind. On the one hand, the outside is a presupposed social distance; it comes from the assumption that the only possible link between two particular people is a single object. On the other hand, the outside is an unchanging standard. Some metric, itself not subject to negotiation, must regulate a commodity exchange so that the interaction between particular people can turn into *the market*. Or, to say things in more native terms, the market can only function if there exist rules outside the market. This chapter's burden is to show how these two meanings of *outside* come together in the commodity. It is in the act of trading alienated objects, I argue, that sertanejos construct the abstract, stable categories that regulate exchange. The object's social externality merges with its generality.²⁵

²⁵ Grateful thanks to Yazan Doughan and Julie Chu for pointing out the distinction between the two meanings of the outside here, between externality and generality.

The category of value facilitates a commodity's journey, and this category is brought into being through a chain of social interaction between people. Inside these interactions, distance is preserved and amplified, rather than being wiped away or forgotten. Value in the villages can be imagined as the difference between cooked meat exchanged with a friend and a raw cow exchanged with a friend. A meal could never be sold among neighbors; even if the cook bought the meat in the city, he will endeavor to wipe away its origin and present the food as his own product, given directly by him to the person at his table, as if no-one else in the world existed. By contrast, cows, whether live or slaughtered, get transacted among neighbors as commodities.²⁶ The discussion over a cattle sale will be structured so as to emphasize that this cow could be purchased by any number of strangers far away. Even if the cow grew up meters from the buyer's house, discourse will treat it as if it belonged to a great, expansive market. A meal has no value; a cow has value.

And so this chapter returns to some core problems raised in the Introduction. Here, as there, I am trying to make a decisive move away from the goal of finding a theory of value that works for every culture. In particular, I am attempting to depart from the effort to find value inside *each* culture—that is, to look inside many different social worlds and identify in each one some constellation that can be identified as that particular culture's value system.

Anthropologists have often conceived of every value system as a structure internal to one or another culture. That conception has led to important insights, but I hope to part ways with it.

This chapter instead hunts for the roots of value theory in the classical economics of the European 18th and 19th centuries. This means understanding value as a peculiar social form

²⁶ Neighbors, but not kin, as Chapter 7 will note.

developed under capital. Therefore I look for value inside certain core relations that are central to capital: price, commodity exchange, and, above all, this chapter's finishing-point, labor. All of these are understood not as universals that one may seek in any cultural conjuncture, but rather as the specific categories of capital, not available everywhere or in every time.

The chapter does not argue that value exists *only* in capitalism, however. Some of the core dynamics of value can be detected in the practice of granting tribute. Since tribute occurs commonly in human history, value dynamics are surely widespread and quite general. And yet it is during the history of capital that these dynamics achieve an unprecedented dominance, an uncanny articulation with even the most mundane details of human production and exchange—which, as Marx argued (1976 [1867]: Ch. 1), is what made value visible to the theorizing eyes of the 18th-century economists, to his own, and perhaps to ours as well.

Because this chapter is attempting a return to the analysis of value as a form under capital, the examples here tend to involve wages and prices, which served as key areas of interest for the classical economists. Perhaps wages and prices have too much of a place in the chapter: after all, as Lukacs observed (1999 [1923]), commodity logic has tended to pervade every corner of the social surround, and so we would be better advised to attend to the process of abstraction rather than to any particular abstracted object. But my rather clunky focus on wages and prices is, at the least, an effort to consider the core symptomatic categories of capital in their own specificity, without generalizing them elsewhere. The reverse approach can prove dangerous. When anthropologists think of “values” in general as being somehow similar to “value,” or when social analysts allow value theory to explain societies far afield from capital, then, in effect, these thinkers are modeling a very wide range of human interactions as if the interactions were similar to price and wage dynamics. Such value theorists are tacitly suggesting that disparate types of

human action can be usefully fitted into categories designed for describing capitalism. The suggestion may or may not be correct, but it must be argued for. The classical economists, after all, did not explain every society. They examined a particular process of expansion – a very strange process – that they could watch unfolding all around them. Since we are still living through that same process, we can find useful affinities with their theory.

This process of expansion, however, is a process in which some things stay the same. In order for value to appear, certain relations must seem to remain stable—and stability is evident even (or *especially*) in moments when everyone is speaking in terms of the metaphor of growth. In a growth process, as Fortes argued, “time is [...] correlated with change within a frame of continuity” (1970 [1949]: 2).

Growth is not revolution. What makes people collectively recognize a particular cluster of changes as “growth” is that some things get transformed while other things persist. If in revolution the primary mode of comparison is a contrast between past and the future, then in growth the salient difference is between that which has changed and that which remains constant – the latter being celebrated as the yardsticks, the foundations, the fundamental verities or underlying principles.²⁷ At various times, in various growth models, these verities might include the stability of the dollar or the stability of gold, the importance of education or the importance of birth, the sacrosanct leadership of certain corporations or the sacrosanct leadership of the financial markets. What is important is that some things stay steady. In growth discourse, people emphasize these constancies and weigh them against the changes. The constancies ultimately

²⁷ It might be argued that growth and revolution, as notions in the European tradition, originate at the same source; they are different narratives of progress that come from the same Enlightenment crucible. And one might be able to identify a basic divergence between growth and revolution by paying attention to the underlying scaling that occurs when people *talk* about growth or revolution. As a form of discourse, revolution involves projective scaling – contrasting the present to the future, charting one moment in comparison to another. Growth is not immune to this comparison, but what matters far more, in the growth discourse, is nomic scaling: measuring the present against something that is fixed.

correspond to the rigid edges of an underlying class structure, the elements of class relation that do not move and that provide a foundation on top of which other elements can indeed change.²⁸

What, then, stays the same in the sertão? When sertanejos spoke about growth, one feature that remained constant was the position of “the people” (*o povo*); “we poor people,” as Dona Eva put it. “We poor people” continued to be poor, sertanejos noted, while the rich continued to be rich.

Poverty and wealth were the topics of a short speech that Seu Xavier felt moved to give on Holy Thursday 2012. The most observant Catholics in Três Lagoas had gathered under the tin roof of the village’s abandoned schoolhouse to hold a foot-washing, a commemoration of humility. Seu Xavier was a venerated small farmer and activist from the village, and as he looked out across the small crowd, he saw people he had toiled alongside for many decades. *Once*, he said, *you might go work at the house of a fazendeiro, a large landowner, and he wouldn’t ask you to eat lunch at his table. Now we wear the same clothes that the rich people wear. A rich person drives a car that costs \$R100,000. But now you might be able to get one that costs \$R20,000.* [cad8p89]

Seu Xavier had put his finger on an ambivalence that seemed to sum up the historical moment. Now one could wear shoes and collared shirts like the rich people, but, as he pointed out, the same rich people were still rich people. This insight was not lost on Seu Xavier’s neighbors. Vaccines and buses had come and everyone was better off, but when sertanejos talked, they constantly referred to an enduring divide, a divide that almost no-one ever succeeded

²⁸ The constancies, in other words, serve as a base for the enduring power of one or another class, whether that power is grounded in a monopoly on gold, an advantage in education, a grip on the financial markets, or some other special access to an anchor that remains stable.

in crossing— *pobres e ricos*, the poor and the rich. This is a divide, indeed, that recent economic research has also detected.²⁹

“We poor people:” Dona Eva’s words may be the harshest and clearest expression of the constancy that underpinned growth in the sertão. But class difference did not always appear so directly. Constancy was manifest in many other less pointed features of daily economic talk, and these more subtle stabilities played a decisive role in constructing the feeling of growth. For example, price. Sertanejos frequently alluded to a consistent price for things, a true or right price that stayed steady over time. Where did this price come from? And how would someone come to think that it even existed?

Getting the prices right is a catchphrase in development economics.³⁰ It refers, in the first instance, to the imperative to eliminate government policies that change the market prices for specific items. Such policies include subsidies for certain foodstuffs and preferential exchange rates for favored industries; the result is “wrong,” enclaved, or manipulated prices. *Getting the prices right*, in this sense, references the dream of stripping away distortions to reach the prices that would prevail in a well-run competitive market.

At a second level, *getting the prices right* points towards the importance of creating an economy capable of setting prices that everyone trusts. For those who remembers Brazil in the

²⁹ Xavier’s insight seems to be well corroborated by economic researchers, who have recently found a relatively high level of intragenerational economic mobility in Brazil (i.e. households are getting richer over the lifetimes of their inhabitants) but relatively low intergenerational mobility (i.e. children’s outcomes still depend strongly on their parents’ outcomes). This suggests that the nation’s households on average are getting richer – even reducing the inequality gap that separates them from each other – but that the position of each household in the overall social order has not changed much. Wealthy families continue to pass on wealth; poorer families may be less poor, but they continue to pass on their position in the income distribution relative to others (Ferreira et al. 2013, Peliano 2013, and see discussion in the Introduction.)

³⁰ For only one example see Teal 1995.

1980s, this second meaning has great poignancy. It calls to mind the shared goal of ensuring that inflation does not erode general confidence in the price system altogether.

Thirdly, more locally, *getting the prices right* alludes to the process through which people begin to believe in the existence of a single real price for an object— and then know that price and act on it. This is a process that can be witnessed in conversations about day wages and cow sales. For such a real price to materialize, sertanejos in these conversations must punch through the counterscales. The real price then emerges, through discursive stagecraft, like a revelation or a hidden truth.

In all three of its senses, *getting the prices right* implies taming one's demands and ambitions by tying them to a fixed standard. This standard can be orthodox macroeconomic fiscal policy; it can be a stable currency, with its stability grounded in a tacit agreement not to ask for price or wage increases that are too high. The standard can also be the "real price" that, during a negotiation over manioc, a sertanejo farmer accepts as an inevitable external given, as a value that comes in from the outside. In all of these cases, the standard functions as something fixed that allows growth to become visible all around it. The standard stays the same so that other things can get transformed.

One such standard manifested itself at the very beginning of Brazil's growth episode. During his fourth – and first successful – presidential campaign, in 2002, Lula, a left-wing candidate, distanced himself from his earlier economic heterodoxy by issuing a "Letter to the Brazilian People." This letter made declarations about the growth that would change Brazil if Lula were elected. But it became most famous for the things that it promised would stay the same:

One premise of this transition will naturally be respect for the country's contracts and

Premissa dessa transição será naturalmente o respeito aos contratos e obrigações do país.

obligations [...] It is necessary to understand that the room for maneuvering economic policy, in the short run, is limited. [...] Let us maintain the primary surplus,³¹ as much as is necessary to prevent internal debt from rising and destroying confidence in the government's capacity to honor its promises.

[...] É preciso compreender que a margem de manobra da política econômica no curto prazo é pequena. [...] Vamos preservar o superávit primário o quanto for necessário para impedir que a dívida interna aumente e destrua a confiança na capacidade do governo de honrar os seus compromissos. (Silva, Luíz Ignácio da 2002: 2-3).

Thus Lula declared his faithfulness to the debts Brazil owed to foreign creditors, “naturally” anchoring growth in the fixity of existing contracts.

One of the goals of this chapter is to explore this same fixity in a very different setting: in the talk about “real prices” that accompanied economic growth in the sertão. There, the overall price structure remained just as stable as the government's contracts under Lula. Indeed, the widespread acceptance of the price system – the acceptance that wages and prices would increase progressively but methodically – was a precondition necessary for the growth model to work. This acceptance required daily effort from sertanejos, inside countless tiny transactions. The effort becomes visible in these transactions' transcripts. And indeed, in our analysis, the transcripts are not different in kind from Lula's letter. What we are observing, here, is not the effect of a greater social reality on a smaller one. Instead, we are looking at a particular relational pattern, namely subordination to an outside standard. We are looking, specifically, at this pattern's tendency to instantiate itself in disparate places: presidential pronouncements, middleman haggling, economic policymaking, wage negotiations in a manioc field. Across these sites, the pattern becomes a structural homology, a fractal recursion (Gal and Irvine 2000).

³¹ “Primary surplus” refers to the annual sum that the government possesses after paying all of its expenditures except for the interest on its debt. Since the 1990s, one of the main principles of Brazilian economic orthodoxy has been the necessity of maintaining a positive primary surplus every year, a goal that Lula embraced while president.

This chapter examines the language of mundane economic deliberation, investigating talk about prices and in particular about that crucial price, the wage rate. Such talk offers a view onto the category of value in the moment of its construction. Value, coming in from the outside, provides the fundamental constraint, the underlying stable framework on which the growth metaphor rests. Value thus makes change and stasis both possible at the same time. Dona Zaida, age 82, highlighted this two-sidedness for me. During her lifetime, *wealth* had really changed, but *the people* continued to be the same people. In the old days, she said,

a child would cry from hunger [...] The people today is in such wealth that children eat whatever they think of! [...] Ah, my time! Ah, my time!

menino chorava de fome [...] O povo hoje está numa riqueza que os meninos comem o que pensam! [...] Ah, meu tempo! Ah, meu tempo! (cad12013p122)

Where wage increases come from

Rain was pounding the thin roofs and dirt streets of Maracujá, an incredible quantity of rain, and it was delighting everyone by offering the loud promise of a good harvest. A group of young men dashed away from the water and onto one of the many sagging cement porches that dotted the village. Temporarily forced out of the fields, the men dried off and chatted about the day-wages (*diárias*) that they would soon earn on that very land.

Marcelo said, *I'm working and making money. It's \$R25 a day now, not \$R20.*

Norberto answered, *In Matinha [a nearby town] it's now \$R30, and in Conquista [the city] it's even \$R35.*

Wow, exclaimed Januário. *In Matinha that makes \$R180 a week.*

That was 2012. One year later, the numbers had changed. In 2013, on the same dirt street, I ran into a busy and regretful Demétrio. He had been offered a \$R30 day-wage to harvest

manioc inside Maracujá – a 20% increase from Marcelo's old wage. To do this job Demétrio would skip a forró party. The night of dancing, he ruefully told me, would unfit him for a 6 am start to a day of root-pulling.

This was what economic growth looked like. Brazil had become a place where day-laborers could expect to raise their wages from \$R20 to \$R25 one year, and then from \$R25 to \$R30 the next. From 2001 to 2011 in Brazil, mean per capita income went up by 61.2% in real terms. The wealthiest tenth saw their incomes increase by 16.6%; over that same period, the poorest tenth increased their incomes by 91.2% (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada 2012: 6 and 19). In other words, growth happened most quickly among low-income Brazilians, which is to say that people like Marcelo and Demétrio were at the very heart of it.

Rural workers talked about the day-wage constantly. But just as the Marcelo had done on the rainy porch, they would present news of the wage as *news from somewhere else*: at such-and-such place, people are getting some amount. In the villages, it seemed, growth always arrived from the outside. Growth started as a rumor about another place, and only after long discussion would growth settle itself into shape as a new, higher wage at the villages.

Margarita did not usually earn a wage, but growth was on her mind, too. In the sertão women worked day-labor primarily during times of high demand, like the harvest, and their wages were consistently lower. While Demétrio was celebrating the increase from \$R25 to \$R30, women's day-wages were rising from \$R15 to \$R20. Margarita had a small child to raise and she was a single mother. She could not support her family on this inadequate pay, although she worked day-labor whenever she could find it. Other times, going from house to house, she painted women's nails.

One day in 2013, Margarita explained to me how growth had arrived to her. She had increased her nail-painting price to \$R10.

M: Just like I went up—to ten reais—ah, one more real, you know, to do nails. Makes ten, hands and feet.

D: Ah! You, you went up.

M: I went up, Duff.

D: Now—

M: Because unfortunately, over there it went up. Because—nail files—you buy a nail file, it's two reais, depending on the quantity of nail files that you buy. Acetone.

D: Mmm.

M: Cotton. Nail polish. Getting nail clippers sharpened. You know?

M: Igualmente eu aumentei—dez reais—eh, um real a mais, né, para fazer unhas. Que é dez, pé e mão.

D: Ah! Você, você aumentou!

M: Aumentei, Duff.

D: Agora—

M: Porque infelizmente, aí aumentou. Porque – lixa—você compra lixa, está de dois reais, dependendo da quantidade de lixas que você for comprar. Acetona.

D: Mmm.

M: Algodão. Esmalte. Para amolar alicate. Né?

Margarita attributed her price hike, in the first instance, to the price changes that had happened “over there.” It was not that she deserved more money. Her price increase had been carried in on the backs of inanimate objects: nail files, acetone, cotton.

Margarita heard growth, too, in the voice of the knife-sharpener:

M: Just to sharpen nail clippers, now it's headed up to six reais per clipper, to sharpen the clipper.

D: For real!

M: Yeah, it's headed up there. I said, “Sir, how much is it if you sharpen two clippers for me?” He was like, “Ten.” I said, “And you won't give a bargain, right?” “No, because – there's no way to do it because – most things are just tending to increase now, from here on, so as not to lose.”

M: Só para amolar alicate agora já vai para seis reais o alicate, para amolar o alicate.

D: É mesmo!

M: Vai. Eu falei, “Moço, está de quanto, se for para amolar dois alicates para mim?” Ele, “Dez.” Falei, “E não faz menos, né?” “Não, porque—não tem como, porque—o mais é só para aumentar agora, daqui para frente, para não perder.”

Just tending to increase now: this was the very spirit of growth. And although the growth in Brazil was finally real, not an inflationary mirage, it had a non-voluntary quality. *So as not to lose*, you had to go up on your prices as well. Margarita explained how she took this lesson to heart.

M: Then I got sad, you know? I said, “So, if I charge—you know, you know, four for each, hands and feet, that makes eight, right? Then I’m the only one who’s not earning anything, right?” Because you put together the clippers, the nail polish, those things you’ve got to buy. You know? And the time. The labor.

D: What— what do you mean, the labor?

M: That’s my time that I’m going to spend doing the person’s nails.

D: Mm hm.

M: You know? [pause] Then I said, “No, I’ve got to go up, otherwise—”

M: Aí, fiquei triste, né? Eu falei, “Então, se eu for cobrar – uai, uai, quatro de cada, pé e mão, que é oito, né? Aí eu só não estou ganhando nada, né?” Porque junta o alicate, o esmalte, essas coisas para comprar. Não é? E o tempo. A mão de obra.

D: Como, como assim, a mão de obra?

M: Que é meu tempo que eu vou gastar para fazer a unha da pessoa.

D: Mm hm.

M: Né? [pausa] Aí eu falei, “Não, eu tenho que aumentar, senão—”

Margarita did not finish her sentence. The alternative, apparently, was unviable. Growth meant that Margarita had to increase prices or become *the only one who’s not earning anything*.

I practically stopped short when I heard the way that Margarita referred to her work. She had described her own painstaking efforts not as *my time* but rather as *the time. The labor*.

Margarita justified the price increase, in other words, by depicting her work as an input that grew along with other inputs. When she saw through the lens of growth, Margarita did not speak of her labor, but labor in general.

Why does growth come in from the outside? Why do conversations about wages so often begin with a report about wages from somewhere else? If growth comes from a change in the amount of value available, then what makes value feel like it is increasing? And why do people slip into describing their own activity as if it were labor in general? In this chapter, I will argue that this discursive pattern occurs for a reason: it happens because value necessarily involves an encounter with the outside. The comparison to *somewhere else* – a vague, unverified somewhere else – lies at the core of the process through which value is created semiotically. And externality holds its particular power because value comes into being when an object gets compared to a

standard presumed to be fixed from the outside. Or, to put things another way, the category “value” is made through nomic calibration.

Wages in the rhetoric of the nomic realm

Chapter 4 offered a view, in the particular cultural space of the sertão, onto the details of nomic calibration. In carrying out this calibration, speakers presuppose the existence of a standard from outside, a standard that must remain unquestioned inside their discourse. If the standard does get questioned, then the speaker grounds it by invoking yet another standard from a yet-more-distant outside, and the more and more distant outsides come to refer to higher and higher levels of social authority. Or, rather, *presumed* authority. The trick of nomic calibration is to presuppose rather than prove the power of the standard. Thus nomic calibration works by locating the authoritative measure of value in some hazy external site, beyond the command of the people present to the interaction.

When people discuss day-wages in the sertão, they tend, indeed, to employ the peculiar rhetoric associated with nomic calibration: indefinite articles, terse and antipoetic sentences, and the nomic present tense (see Ch. 4). This rhetoric can clearly be heard in workers’ and bosses’ everyday talk. In such conversations, perhaps the most common statement about the day-wage is that it *is* some number. Marcelo used such an utterance to open the chat on the rainy porch. Just as Celina had pronounced the calf “expensive” (Ch. 4), Marcelo declared the day-wage, flatly, *to be* \$R25.³²

³² Marcelo, Norberto, and Januário did of course imply a change in payment over time, which suggests a projective aspect to their speech. The dominant feature of the interaction, however, is not projection, but nomic stabilization. When they spoke to each other, they were concerned not with projecting the future of the wage and certainly not with holding this future indefinitely open. Instead, their talk served to fix the wage on an unchanging scale – against the standard of money.

On another occasion, Rodrigo tellingly abstracted his own work into the day-wage. He was explaining to me that he had recently earned some cash.

Rodrigo: And the day-wage job was fifty, because it was two days.

Duff: Mm hm.

R: It's 25, the day-wage here.

Rodrigo: E a diária foi cinquenta, que foi dois dias.

Duff: Mm hm.

R: É 25, a diária aqui. (c031 entrevista 10—8-19-12)

Some months earlier I had heard Carlos and Nicolau talking about the day-wage that Carlos would pay Nicolau for cutting down trees. One said to the other,³³

20 makes 450 bucks.

20 dá 450 contos.

They then asked me to confirm the math. This required them to explain what they were referring to: 20 days of Nicolau's labor, paid at the standard day-wage rate of \$R25. I suggested that this made \$R500, not \$R450, and they agreed.

Another time, Seu Jacinto simulated a conversation between an old-time boss and an employee over the rate of pay.

It was calculated right there. "It's so much per month." Somebody—"Ah, that doesn't work [dá]." They would go up a little bit more.

Era calculado aí. "É tanto por mês." Um-- "Ah, não dá." Aumentava mais um pouquinho. (from interview w/ t016, 2-10-12)

It's 25. It's so much per month. 20 makes 450 bucks. It was in these terms – clipped and hard-bitten, almost like an allusion to an afterthought – that laborers and small bosses discussed the wage. But what made the phrases sound clipped? It was the nomic properties of their rhetoric. Speaker would move to a discussion of the wage-rate by effecting a pivot towards abstraction. Short sentences predominated, with present-tense verbs (including the ubiquitous "dá") that indicated an ongoing, not episodic, state of affairs. Numbers, rather than people, were

³³ My field notes, unfortunately, do not specify which of the two uttered this phrase.

cast as the subjects of the verbs. To discuss the day-wage, day-laborers and their bosses thus shifted into a style of speech that emphasized factuality, generality, and enduring states.

As a consequence, this style de-emphasized the personal and the contextual. Rodrigo did not say, “*My* day-wage job was 50,” nor did Carlos tell Nicolau, “*Your* 20 days of work make 450 bucks.” Seu Jacinto’s simulated boss did not promise, “*I* will pay *you* so much per month,” nor did the worker respond, “That doesn’t work for *me*.” The point was to move the conversation away from statements specific to the interaction. Each utterance was to sound like the declaration of a fundamental truth, like something from the outside—outside of the particular conversation at hand, and grounded in an unquestionable standard. The rhetoric thus had the effect of abstracting the worker and the boss out of the discussion altogether, such that one was no longer talking about *my* payment from *you*, an exchange between two people, but instead about basic principles involving the value of labor-power: *20 makes 450 bucks*.

Why was it possible for the exchange of labor to become depersonalized? This depersonalization happened, at a linguistic level, through silences and omissions, through shortened sentences and the removal of words that could render an utterance more specific. These excisions activated the dynamics of presumption.

The most obvious presumption involved the wage itself. In the sertão, speakers would often refrain from mentioning the day-wage rate openly; instead of stating the rate, they would presume it. When Carlos and Nicolau discussed payment, they spoke the number of days and the total overall payment, but they left out one particular number: the wage rate, \$R25 per day, which they assumed. This presumption seemed strange to me, given the frequent increases in the wage. But that, perhaps, was the point. By hiding the wage-rate inside discourse, tucking it away

in presumptions, speakers tacitly precluded any negotiation over its amount. A presumed wage rate becomes a social fact.

Such unclarified presumptions, indeed, serve as the motor for successful nomic calibration. When he spoke about selling his beans at the marketplace (in Chapter 4), Betto needed to have no-one to question his assertion that the sack contained 50 liters. Nomic statements can fail, of course, forcing a speaker to fall back on prior layers of presumption and deeper levels of social authority. Betto, challenged about the contents of his bean sack, resorted to the scaling power of the one-liter Exxon alligator can. Just like the purchaser who disbelieved Betto, the men who discussed the wage-rate on the rainy porch were refusing to accept what others assumed: that the day-wage was \$R20. Instead they pushed back to a deeper nomic scale, the geo-economic scale that calibrated Maracujá's wages against an outside, along a city-town-village continuum. Town wages were a little higher than village wages; city wages were a little higher than town wages. By calling upon this scale inside discourse, the chatting day-laborers invoked the presumption that Maracujá's wage should rise in conjunction with (although trailing somewhat behind) the urban rate. The city would stay ahead of the country; the geo-economic scale would remain fixed even as the whole economy grew. It is this sort of presuming – the unquestioned presumption of an outside – that lies, I contend, at the heart of the semiotic construction of value.

Munn has persuasively argued that any valued object or act

may be seen [...] as embodying a differential proportion of some homogenous potency; its value [...] can therefore be expressed relatively in terms of a parameter (the kind of potency involved) along which value is, as it were, 'measured' [...] Value in this sense is general and relational, rather than particular and substantive [...] Thus neither the nature of the value (the kind of potency that is relevant) nor the particular forms it takes are to be assumed; rather, they are induced from the cultural material (1992 [1986]: 8-9).³⁴

³⁴ Munn is directly inspired by Terrence Turner (1979).

We can accept Munn's suggestion that no matter what else "value" may be, it is, at the least, a single homogenous potency that underlies many different sorts of objects. Value is, minimally, a unifying quality that allows diverse items to be measured on the same "parameter" or scale.³⁵ Indeed, people come to believe in the existence of a homogenous potency precisely because they have acquired the semiotic habit of measuring objects along a generalized scale, and value seems like a persuasively real entity because one has seen and used the kind of scale that appears to have expanded to such extremes that it has become capable of measuring *everything*. Value is, in this sense, a standard that has gone wild.

Outside the interaction, outside the sertão

"A homogenous potency:" Munn's definition speaks about the general, but not (yet) about the outside. In the sertão, the outside poses something of a puzzle. Marcelo, Norberto, and Januário all knew that wages were much higher in the city – that was what the three of them were discussing on the rainy porch – and yet they stayed to work in the village without demanding anything close to equivalent pay.

This non-equivalence was vividly demonstrated when Uncle Conrado, a retired man at Rio Branco, decided to fix his house. He employed Carlos, who had recently returned from years working construction in São Paulo and now lived across the street from Uncle Conrado. Carlos relished the job, since construction work was considered a skilled occupation and received a

³⁵ Elson has powerfully argued that such homogeneous potencies are *immanent* measures, that is, qualities constructed to seem as if they exist directly inside the object. For an act of measurement to occur, someone must compare this immanent measure to an *external* measure, just as a chair immanently has height but must be measured against an external ruler, or, in her example, just as a work-day immanently contains labor-time but must be measured against money (Elson 1979: 139).

higher wage rate than standard field labor. Conrado also hired Carlos's brother and neighbor Leonardo to help out with the renovation. But the job turned out to be too big for two of them alone. It was when Conrado decided finally to bring in the third brother, who lived outside, that a non-equivalence appeared.

Carlos: Didier is my brother. He works in Conquista [nearby city.]

Duff: Mm hm.

C: Right now he's working there. The dude pays him \$R90 there.

D: Mm hm. Mm hm.

C: So then he came, he came—on account of some work here at Uncle Conrado's house.

D: Mm hm.

C: Then Uncle Conrado was like, "You can charge YOUR price."

D: Mm hm.

C: "You charge your price. The price that you charge, I'll pay you." "Oh, Uncle Conrado, no. I'm not going to charge the PRICE, no way, because—there I earn \$R90." [...] Then, "I'm going to do it, Conrado. You, since you're my uncle, sir, because – one helps out the other. So, sir, you only pay me seventy."

D: Mm hm.

C: So that's how it was; they agreed. He paid seventy. Then Leonardo and me, there he—he pays fifty.

D: Mm hm.

C: He asked me how much I worked for and—"The price of this place is such-and-such. Fifty bucks."

D: Wow!

C: A skilled construction worker here is \$R50.

Carlos: Didier é meu irmão. Ele trabalha em Conquista.

Duff: Mm hm.

C: Agora mesmo ele está trabalhando lá. O cara paga ele noventa reais lá.

D: Mm hm. Mm hm.

C: Aí ele veio, ele veio—modo de uns trabalhos aqui da casa de Tio Conrado.

D: Mm hm.

C: Aí, Tio Conrado estava, "Você pode cobrar SEU preço."

D: Mm hm.

C: "Você cobra seu preço. O preço que você cobrar, eu te pago." "Ô, Tio Conrado, não. Eu não vou cobrar o PREÇO não, porque—lá eu ganho noventa reais." [...] Aí, "Eu vou, Conrado. O Senhor, como é meu tio, por causa-- um ajuda o outro. Aí o Senhor só me paga de setenta."

D: Mm hm.

C: Aí foi, concordou. Ele pagou de setenta. Aí eu e Leonardo, aí ele—ele paga de cinquenta.

D: Mm hm.

C: Ele me perguntou a quanto que eu trabalhava, e—"O preço daqui é de tanto. Cinquenta contos."

D: Que coisa!

C: Pedreiro aqui é de cinquenta reais.

And so Uncle Conrado had agreed to a \$R70 day-wage for Didier, while coldly informing Carlos that *he* would get \$R50.

In São Paulo, Carlos would have earned \$R90 per day or more. But now, in the village, he made far less—not just less than in São Paulo, but actually less than his own brother Didier

who was working alongside him, on the same job. Why? The pay differential happened because Carlos was now fixed “here,” inside the village. He was assumed to be a permanent resident in the village, Didier a temporary one. To put things another way, Carlos was here, off the urban market: to buy his work, Conrado did not have to compete with potential employers in the city.

But “here” was a culturally bounded location. Carlos *could* have gone to São Paulo at any time. What allowed the bosses to assume that they could pay Carlos less – and, indeed, what helped Carlos to accept this lower pay – was a toolkit full of signs and practices that Carlos used in order to proclaim that he belonged “inside” the village and planned to stay there.

Carlos drank on the long cement porch in front of his cousin’s house, crouching on the metal folding chairs, owing people drinks and being owed. He wore a farmer’s torn T-shirt and jeans. He lived in an adobe home with a firewood stove. He spoke countryside slang. He traveled to other villages—not the city—to watch the rural soccer teams compete. His leisure activities, his housing patterns, his dress, and even his style of speech designated him as an insider, a stayer. And it was this insider status, with its capacity to mark the workers who would remain in the countryside, that walled off the “village” from the “urban” labor force. Thus the boundaries of the labor market were not given geographically; they got produced inside culture, in large part through the dynamics that we have referred to as “counterscaling.”

And yet Carlos’s storytelling demonstrates how counterscaling occurs within the framework of a different scaling process, a nomic process. Counterscaling works because of the relation of inferiority between the city and the countryside. The constant nomic background to counterscaling is the geo-economic scale, where town ranks permanently ahead of village and city ranks permanently ahead of town. As he tried to set his own wage, Carlos found himself face-to-face with this kind of nomic calibration. To look more closely:

C: He [Uncle Conrado] asked me how much I worked for and—“The price of this place is such-and-such. Fifty bucks.”

D: Wow!

C: A skilled construction worker here is \$R50.

C: Ele me perguntou a quanto eu trabalhava, e—“O preço daqui é de tanto. Cinquenta contos.”

D: Que coisa!

C: Pedreiro aqui é de cinquenta reais.

The dialogue rings with a harshness that comes from telltale nomic rhetoric. Uncle Conrado³⁶ referred to “this place” in order to set up a contrast with the wage that Carlos had received (“how much I worked for”) at the last place he labored, São Paulo. Thus evoking the geo-economic scale, Uncle Conrado used that scale’s fixity to make a lower rural wage seem natural.

And the other elements of nomic calibration fell into place as well. The price was announced, after a significant pause, in a short, clipped phrase stripped of person deictics. This utterance and the following one were spoken in the nomic present tense – *a skilled construction worker* is \$R50 – with a verb that indexed the permanent, habitual state of the price. Two lines later, “skilled construction worker” came with no article at all in Portuguese, indicating that the statement applied to any skilled construction worker in general, not to Carlos in particular.

The combined effect of this rhetoric was clear. Carlos had been converted into generic labor. This labor had been held up against the presupposed external scale, the geo-economic scale that linked wages in the countryside to wages in the village, and it had been evaluated: \$R50 per day.

³⁶ Here, of course, I am analyzing Carlos’s story about the interaction with Uncle Conrado rather than the interaction itself, which I did not observe. For clarity’s sake, I write as if Uncle Conrado and Didier had actually spoken these particular words (“Uncle Conrado said...”), when what I am really referencing is the voice or character of Uncle Conrado as animated by Carlos. More broadly, my claim is that we should take the reported interaction as evidence because such reports offer an especially clear view onto the prevailing presumptions about what *should* happen in particular genred interactions. As stereotyped performances of an interaction, these reported interactions are indeed important demonstrations of the semiotic system at work.

Carlos was already available for hire inside the village, but his brother Didier was not.

Uncle Conrado needed to draw Didier in, and he did it through presential calibration. Once again:

C: Then Uncle Conrado was like, “You can charge YOUR price.”

D: Mm hm.

C: “You charge your price. The price that you charge, I’ll pay you.” “Oh, Uncle Conrado, no. I’m not going to charge the PRICE, no way, because—there I earn \$R90.” [...] Then, “I’m going to do it, Conrado. You, since you’re my uncle, sir, because – one helps out the other. So, sir, you only pay me seventy.”

C: Aí, Tio Conrado estava, “Você pode cobrar SEU preço.”

D: Mm hm.

C: “Você cobra seu preço. O preço que você cobrar, eu te pago.” “Ô, Tio Conrado, não. Eu não vou cobrar o PREÇO não, porque—lá eu ganho noventa reais.” [...] Aí, “Eu vou, Conrado. O Senhor, como é meu tio, por causa-- um ajuda o outro. Aí o Senhor só me paga de setenta.”

Uncle Conrado declared himself ready to pay Didier’s price, whatever it was: he was charming Didier with accounting refusal. This refusal got activated through the rhetoric of presence. During their discussion, Conrado and Didier spoke largely in the present tense—but an episodic present, not a nomic one. Their repeated phrases produced a metricalized rhythm whose poetic quality called attention to the moment of speaking itself (“You can *charge* your price/ You *charge* your price/ The price that you *charge*,” “Oh, Uncle Conrado, *no*. I’m *not* going to charge the price, *no*.”)

But most of all, what made the exchange glow with the feeling of presence was the profusion of person deictics. Calling vivid attention to the actual people in the moment, these deictics highlighted the interaction itself. The style could not have been more different from the nomic rhetoric to which Carlos himself was subjected. In place of a personless declaration (“the price of this place is such-and-such,”) Uncle Conrado and Didier used the verbs “to charge” and “to pay,” which both take personal pronouns as subjects. The topic of their negotiation was not “the price,” but rather “your price.”

Through this powerfully presential moment of counterscaling, what got directly scaled was not a day-wage number, but rather two people themselves, people who had been rendered acutely present to each other inside discourse. The linguistic markers of presence served to make a relational point. In his effusive refusal to account, Uncle Conrado was tacitly soliciting recognition of the insider relationship that bonded him to Didier. Refusing to account, after all, was what one did with insiders. “You’re my uncle,” Didier finally confessed. Once they were thus properly scaled in relation to one other, as uncle to nephew, the day-wage rate precipitated out of this relationship.

But “the price” did make an appearance in their dialogue—not in reference to “here,” but as something happening “there.” Didier’s slip from “your price” to “the price” served as the sign that he was talking about the city rather than the countryside. In the city, prices were not personal.

The phrase *the price* worked like an anchor. It grounded the conversation in the overarching nomic framework of the familiar geo-economic scale, with village wages behind “the price,” the city wage. Indeed, the distinction between “the price” and “your price” demonstrated how counterscaling unfolds: as *counter*-scaling. “Your price,” the presential gesture, only made sense because it contrasted with a presumed nomic scale—a scale that Didier eloquently indexed by referring to “the price.” The counterscale never exists on its own; it always appears as a response to an outside.

In Didier’s negotiation with Uncle Conrado, then, the outside emerged differently than it had for Carlos. Carlos faced one limit, the laconic harshness of the price. With Didier, Tio Conrado referenced two different species of limits. First, there was the limit of the village: *here* rather than *there*, Rio Branco rather than Conquista. Second, there was the limit of the interaction

itself: the difference between *this moment of us talking now* and *things and people outside of this moment*.

The trick of Tio Conrado's counterscaling was that he lined up these two different kinds of limits together, laminating them on top of each other, so that they seemed like the same thing. Being inside the interaction was a synecdoche for being inside the village. For Didier to step outside of the interactional frame – for example, by asking for time to think about the offer and thereby refusing the spirit of presence – would have been to betray the village. For Didier to step outside of the geographic frame – for example, by asking for urban wages – would have been to betray the sanctity of the interaction. Thus Uncle Conrado and Didier conducted their entire conversation in the shadow of a double outside, the outside of the event and the outside of the village. And, despite Uncle Conrado's best efforts, this very outside was the force that drew a wage increase: thanks to the reminder of the urban option, Didier won himself a \$R20 raise over Carlos. Growth had come in from the outside.

The puzzle of the outside is that it remains outside. People accept – they even present it as self-evident – that village laborers will earn less than urban laborers. People accept a value-scale in which the outside gets accounted as more valuable. Sertanejos say that they agree to earn lower wages, to be sure, because they care about the things of the village; they adore the sense of safety, the armadillo hunts, and the family loyalties, all of the beauty that visitors can only enjoy on the weekends. In their adoration, sertanejos make efforts to understand and articulate what it means to stay. Without rejecting the dominant scale of value, they build an inside that they do not want to leave. They generate an alternative rationality in which staying counts as the reasonable decision. They create counterscales.

In Chapter 5, we examined the *distances* that people place between themselves and the value form. When sertanejos leave urban labor behind, they systematically reject the opportunity to pursue the highest possible wage. A proper analysis of value thus needs to describe the ways that sertanejos turn down value—the counterscales that rural people use to position themselves inside Brazil’s labor force. The analysis needs to account for the alternatives to homogenous potency that sertanejos unmeasurably produce. Thinking about value, as it turns out, requires us to consider first the construction of non-value—the construction of an importance that is not the same as value.

But once the distances have come into focus, they make sense only in the light of the core value standard. This standard, in turn, depends not on anything present in the shared world of the sertão. It depends on the outside.

The outside: Other dimension of existence

Earlier, I suggested that the category “value” gets created when objects are compared to a standard understood to be fixed from the outside; that value comes from the outside. This outside appeared time and time again in the economic discourse of the sertão. When I asked sertanejos where the price of a cow ultimately came from, for example, I received a clear answer. The price came from television. Sertanejos would watch the national rural news every morning to see the standard cow price, and the whole skilled negotiation of bistunta (from Chapter 5) revolved around that center-point.³⁷

³⁷ Indeed, the bistunta process relied on a dialectic of the outside, a dialectic in which external value was suspended and then reinstated. When the seller and the middleman made a bistunta bargain, the outside value – the “market value” – remained unmeasured and unknowable. But what closed the game was the moment of return to the city’s pricing, when the middleman took the produce to an urban market and discovered its weight. Then everyone would find out who had won. Thanks go to Kate Mariner for providing this insight.

Seu Milton and his sons explained to me just how real this outside value was. I had asked them to describe what would happen if a farmer declined to do a bistunta deal and instead opted to weigh a cow before selling it.

D: And if you put [the cow] on the scale, then you pay the price that—

L: That's on the—

M: Yeah, then you're selling what—what she has.

L: What she is really worth, what—

M: Because the scale showed her weight.

L: Yeah. Which is the market value.

[...]

D: How is it that you are going to find out, ah—what is the market value?

L: Yeah, because—there is the information that we see on television, you know?

D: Aaaahh hm!

L: That they show on television. We see it. How much it's at.

D: E se botar na balança, então já paga o preço que--

L: Que tá no—

M: É, aí tá vendendo o-- o que ela tem.

L: O que ela vale mesmo, que--

M: Que a balança mostrou o peso dela.

L: É. Que é valor de mercado.

[...]

D: Como é que você vai ficar sabendo, he -- qual é o valor do mercado?

L: É, porque—tem as informações que a gente vê na televisão, né?

D: Aaaahhh hm!

L: Que passa na televisão. A gente vê. Quanto está.

Thus Seu Milton's son made the jump from defining the cow's price to defining the cow's value.

The national TV price, he said, when combined with the scale weight, told the cow's true value:

“what she is really worth.”

It would be an oversimplification, however, to think of the “real” rural price as always the same number as the urban price. Often the rural price was lower.³⁸ And it was lower in a systematic way.

³⁸ It bears mentioning that in at least one situation, the rural price was higher. When mascates sold furniture and large appliances on installment in the countryside, they typically charged vastly more than in the city. One mascate told me that the rural price was roughly double the urban price for such items. He explained the difference as the result of several factors. Mascates had to transport the item to an out-of-the-way place. They had to go back to the home each month to collect installment payments. And, perhaps most importantly, the rural credit system functioned on an entirely different basis from its urban equivalent. Unlike in the city, the mascates would not check a rural customer's credit against the federal database of delinquent debtors; instead, the mascate would make the sale on the basis of his or her personal knowledge and connections in the village in question. Moreover, debt collection functioned on an entirely different basis in the countryside. Mascates expected that they would not receive full payments each month. They understood that they would have to travel to the village and bother customers repeatedly, sometimes for years, until the full debt was paid off. This inconvenience pushed up the price of the item.

On the rainy porch, Marcelo had used the geo-economic scale to measure wages, but this nomic standard could be applied to other sorts of prices as well. I heard it at the Maracujá church fair. On a sunny Saturday morning, Jaqueline, efficient and smiling, recruited a crowd of women to haul cardboard boxes full of donated clothing into the dusty school plaza. This was the start of an activity that everyone knew how to do almost automatically. Jaqueline and Jaciara, a quieter woman, rapidly arranged the clothes into piles by price. *But how do you know the right price to charge?* I asked. Jaciara answered:

It's like this. In Conquista [the nearby city], we buy new clothes. So we see the price of new clothing there and make the flea market with the – used ones.	É assim. Em Conquista, nós compra roupa nova. Então nós vê o preço da roupa nova lá e faz a pechincha aqui com as – já usadas.

But as we chatted more, I learned that the church sale clothes were not priced lower only because they were used. They were also marked down just for being in the countryside. Fingering a five-real garment, Jaciara observed

There in Conquista, I've bought items like this, used clothes, for ten reais, in the flea market there. [...] There, yeah. Ten reais. Here it's five.	Lá em Conquista, já comprei dessa aqui, roupa usada, de dez reais, na pechincha lá. [...] Lá, é. Dez reais. Aqui é cinco.

Just like Marcelo with the day-wages, Jaciara priced the church fair clothes by considering the urban price for used clothes – itself a discount from the new-clothing price – and then discounting that. It was a markdown from a markdown. The highest standard of value was located *there*, in the city, outside; the same item had to cost less because it was *here*.

Just a few minutes later, I felt the force of this outside value when I witnessed a transition. During most of the fair, the school plaza rang with laughter. Sellers harangued passers-by – *the proceeds are all going to the church!* – as they picked out the shirts and pants

that they thought might fit each person. I found myself cajoled into buying a tiny woman's T-shirt for myself ("It's a baby tee for men," Jacqueline explained unconvincingly.) Julieta, fifteen years old, made the best personal appeals. She shouted to one person

It's perfect on you!

É tua cara!

and to another

You can play soccer in it!

Pode jogar futebol!

Then a small clutch of people walked into the plaza, and a sudden silence descended. These were people from Conquista: Félix's daughter, son-in-law, grandchild, and their relatives, all barely known in the village. They had come to spend the weekend in the countryside. The sellers in the plaza did not speak until they left.

After Félix's family wandered off, I asked Jaciara what had happened. She hushed her voice and explained

They won't buy. They're from Conquista.

Eles não compram. Eles é de Conquista.

An object in the countryside had no value to urban people, even if it was a familiar object, the same kind of used clothes available in the city. Being in the countryside made it uninteresting. In the silence, one could sense the relational effect of the value differential: a refusal to engage in mutualistic trade.³⁹

³⁹ The interaction acquires even more salience if one considers the contrast between the sales pitch to me and the refusal to pitch to the city-dwellers. I was a familiar person in the villages, and so my outsider status, if anything, made me a perfect interlocutor for such interactions: just like Didier, I had to be brought inside. The sales interaction with me, as with the other customers, was designed to be densely presential, a direct engagement between present object and the person's particular needs-- needs that got indexed in the sales pitch (in my case, my small size, which made me the right target for a "baby tee for men.") By invoking this special knowledge, the pitch presupposed an existing relationship between the seller and the buyer, and, indeed, the low price entailed a continuation of the relationship. The buyer got a good deal; the seller got income that would be materialized in the future of the church; both implied a continued mutual obligation of gratefulness.

The problem with the city-dwellers, in my reading, is not that they came from the outside, but rather that they came from the outside and were comparatively unknown. Little about their presence indicated that their relationship to people in the village had a past or would have a future. No-one had special knowledge about them that would allow for a personalized sales pitch -- *you can play soccer in it!* -- and, similarly, no-one could expect ongoing mutuality from them.

This same value differential appeared for Félix himself when he attempted to sell his maracujá for juicing at the central Ceasa fair in Conquista.

F: So then I went to the fair with, with twenty bags of maracujá to sell. So one of those mid—one, one, one of those middlemen showed up there and talked to me. I gave him the price, you know? So then he didn't accept the price. And then he left, too, you know? And then everybody, everybody who was there in the Ceasa only wanted to give the price that the first one had given.

D: Hmmm!

F: You understand? As if it were a cartel.

F: Aí eu fui na, na feira uma vez com, com, com vinte sacos de maracujá para vender. Aí chegou lá um dos atra—um, um, um desses atravessadores, já chegou lá e conversou comigo. Eu dei o preço, né? E aí ele não aceitou o preço. E aí ele saiu também, né? E aí todo o mundo, todo o mundo que tinha no Ceasa só queria dar o preço que o primeiro deu.

D: Hmmm!

F: Entendeu? Como se fosse um cartel.

To describe the transaction, Félix used the terms of rural exchange, the trade of prices: he gave a price, and he expected the other side to give prices as well (see Chapter 5 on “giving prices”).

But the middlemen turned down the mutualism of the trade. Their single market price seemed, to Félix, like a cartel's tactic, a refusal of exchange.

Félix went on to explain how the market price fit onto the familiar geo-economic scale that systematically pegged rural prices below their urban equivalents. He, from the countryside, would have to sell his maracujá that day for \$R4 per bag; the city vendors would resell it for R\$13.

For all of its inequity, however, Félix recognized the power of the market price, this value from the outside.

You've got to accep—um, sell cheap, because if not, you have to go back [home] with produce [...] Basically, there's no option in selling.

Tem que acei—um, vender barato, porque se não, você tem que voltar com produto. [...] Basicamente, não tem opção para vender.

It was these moments – the moments of reckoning with outside value – that acted as foundation-posts underpinning exchange in Maracujá and Rio Branco. The value of a cow was

set by television; the value of maracujá or manioc was set by the the city fair; the value of clothes was set by the urban flea market. And the value of labor power, Marcelo said, was set by the president. The villagers who could afford to hire day-laborers were, most of the time, retired people who received Brazil's universal old-age pension. Federal law established this pension amount each year, in tandem with the minimum wage. Day-laborers could ask for wage increases when the pension increased, and empreita payments were negotiated so that they exceeded the day-wage. Hence, sertanejos said, their wage hikes ultimately depended on the government.

Sertanejos, when they talked about value, offered a string of causes and explanations that pointed towards the outside. At one level, microeconomic theory can account for this. Labor productivity was undoubtedly low in a village farming context, much lower than in the city or in the large mechanized coffee farms where sertanejos could work on a migratory basis. This low productivity led to low wages. Because of these low wages, sertanejos had little capacity to pay for consumer goods, and so, in order for anyone to be able to sell anything in the village, the price had to be set at a minimum. Hence the lower cost of living: village prices, across the board, remained systematically below those "outside," in the city. The village was categorically devalued in relation to the city.⁴⁰

But if microeconomics explains the low prices, here we have tried to understand why people accept these prices. Why do generations of sertanejos remain in the countryside, or, more to the point, why do they return to it? What is the system of signs through which people build a space of presence -- an inside -- and through which they then understand their position in it? The rural sertão can correctly be described as the lower segment in a segmented labor market. In

⁴⁰ Note, too, that this difference in costs of living operated as a trap, since villagers who hoped to jump into the urban economy would have to acquire what for them was a significant savings in order to pay the relocation costs—bus tickets, rent, food, work clothing.

analyzing counterscaling, what we have tracked is the rhetorical framework that allows this segment to exist. We have followed the scaling techniques that sertanejos use to help create the lowest segment, to render it important and special if not valuable, to make it a survivable and meaningful zone.

But the question may stretch a bit more broadly at second blush, because it involves asking about more than the sertão; it implies an inquiry into the much more general process of market creation. Markets do not exist automatically. They can only come into being thanks to a breathtaking array of shared habits, codes, impulses, speech practices, and tools that all barely fit under the cover term “institutions” (North 1991). One prominent shared tool is the scale. We have seen how participants in a market must know specific scales, the way that Betto and his customer both knew about the liter held in the alligator can. We have also seen that they must know common habits for making scales and for suspending them, as in bistunta. We can now argue, more generally, that market participants need to have a particular disposition towards scaling itself, a template that allows them to put themselves in relationship with a whole class of scales: scales of value. This disposition is one of the structures of understanding through which sertanejos come to enter a market at all.

Earlier, I followed Munn in claiming that anthropologists should understand value, minimally, as a “homogenous potency” that, inside the cultural world of some group, inheres in all objects and renders them comparable. But value can be described more specifically. A theory of value aspires to account for durable, large-scale social trends, but it must also address the minutiae of people’s engagements with each other. It must explain how a speaker can broach the topic of value and how she can persuasively claim that a certain object has a certain value.

Speakers can make this claim by carrying out a set of moves – nomic calibration – that frame the situation in terms of basic assumptions that I refer to as the value template.

When a speaker uses nomic calibration to assign a value to an object, the calibration includes certain characteristic moments. These can be described as five, although the moments do not necessarily occur separately or in sequence.

First, an object is made present inside conversation. This object can be rather concrete, like Seu Milton's cow; it can be quite abstract, like the "the labor" that Margarita described when she talked about painting nails. What matters is that it become an object inside discourse, an object present to the interlocutors.

Second, a scale is invoked in which the object becomes comparable to other objects. The object's "homogenous potency" comes to the fore. As it gets fitted onto the scale, the object may even come to be indistinguishable from similar objects, one liter of beans seeming identical to any another. At a minimum, the interlocutors begin to see the object as the bearer of a quality (or potency) that renders it the same as other objects. It grows closer to these other objects and more distant from the interlocutors themselves. Thus a cow turns into a bearer of arrobas or kilos of meat. A single maracujá fruit turns into part of a sack of maracujá. Margarita's straining efforts turn into "the labor." The object is reified.

The third step could be called the "veil moment;" it is the trickiest and most crucial. In this third moment, the speaker presents the relevant scale as a *fact external to the interaction between the people at hand*. Félix's maracujá price comes from an anonymous cartel of purchasers. Marcelo's rural wages are set in relation to town wages. Margarita's increased charge for nails originates in the cotton and the acetone. What makes the scale so powerful is that it is not just external; its roots are cast as actually unknowable. Félix has no idea how the cartel

worked. Margarita, when pushed, remits the responsibility to a higher persona – the knife-sharpener – and she cites his own invocation of an inexplicable trend that had to be accepted: *most things are just tending to increase now, from here on*. Because of this sense of mystery, the term “veil” seems appropriate here. Value’s authority comes from the fact that the interlocutors act as if value originates outside of them— and, moreover, act as if they cannot even know the reason why it exists. The construction of this powerlessness and ignorance lies at the heart of value.

Fifth, the object is evaluated along the scale. Margarita’s nails come to cost ten reals; day-labor gets paid a rate of \$R25. With this evaluation, the object acquires its value, a value that, by definition, remains outside of the ambit of the people present.

Nomic calibration operates as a semiotic process, an interaction between a specific group of interlocutors. Nomic calibration rests, however, on a set of broader presuppositions that I have referred to as the value template. The interlocutors presume – they act as if – they can treat some element of their shared world as a discrete object. They presume that a scale can measure this object in such a way that it becomes comparable to other objects in a homogenizing sense, perhaps even indistinguishable from these other objects. The interlocutors presume that this scale comes from an outside place and that it pre-exists the moment at hand. Moreover, they presume that it is unnecessary or impossible to know exactly why the scale is the way that it is. If challenged on the scale’s legitimacy, they resort to a higher level of social authority even farther away from themselves. Thus they point directly upwards along the ladder of social power that they are presupposing – and doing their small part to help generate.

These assumptions encode an argument about value: that value is formed through an encounter with the outside. Or, to put things another way, people generate the category “value”

by presuming the existence of a zone beyond themselves and then holding up some local object against that zone.⁴¹ Thus the value template subordinates the people present.

One does not have to make such assumptions in order to exchange. Some modes of exchange involve a very different model: as we have seen (in Chapter 4), to buy a watermelon from Roberto, you dive into presential euphoria. But the value template is necessary in order for you to enter as a fully-ratified participant – a buyer who knows the position of the seller, or a seller who knows the position of the buyer – into a market that has universal ambitions, a world market. This is not just any market. Exchange systems of many varied kinds could be described as markets, but “the market” as a thoroughgoing social ideology (Polanyi 2001 [1944]), the market under capital, relies on the externality of value. In order to participate in such a market, people must have learned a particular disposition towards scaling. We might even say that this market is *made out of* countless people who have come together, each acting as if value resided somewhere outside of any of them. This acting occurs differently in different cultural locations, through different words, gestures, sensibilities, rules of thumb. But for “the market” to come into

⁴¹ Note that a “presumption,” here, is far from an individual mental construct. Value does not come into existence simply because one person imagines it; it requires the participation of a whole cluster of people, a cluster that often stretches beyond any bounds that we could refer to as “a culture” or “a society.” Moreover, value is not exclusively mental. Value is a social form, and it exists as an intersection of words, gestures, practices, objects, and habits. All of these are required for value to materialize. (Thanks go to Joseph Grim Feinberg, here, for his influential – to me – formulation of the notion “social form.”)

For this reason, the person who acts as if value is real is not acting unreasonably. Marx speaks of the fetish of the commodity as a situation in which “the relations connecting the labor of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things” (Marx 1976[1867]: 166; see translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Averling, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>.) As Moishe Postone argued in a class that I took from him, the phrase “what they really are” does not appear by accident. The relations established under capital cannot be dismissed as an individual’s delusion that one could simply wish away; these relations acquire a collective reality and become the way things really are.

being, the countless people must share something: not an agreement or a contract, but a common habit of submission to the outside.

This is a habit that, despite the villages' remoteness and all of their separations, still gets taught and learned in the sertão. Every time sertanejos watch the cattle price that flickers by on an old television set, they find themselves faced with a power from somewhere distant. What they are facing is, in Sahlins' language, the stranger-king,⁴² the value that comes in from outside. It could also be called the commodity fetish. After Lourenço's disastrous manioc deal in Chapter 5, Rodrigo spoke to me about one incarnation of that externality, the middlemen, whose special knowledge gave them the upper hand when assigning value in bistunta.

Those guys from the outside, they're, they're well-studied, dude. They, they know—

Os caras lá fora, eles é, eles é estudados, moço. Eles, eles sabem—

Just before that, Rodrigo had turned his gaze towards the inside, towards *here*.

Here— we're used to doing things just like that. Losing.

Aqui—nós é acostumado com fazer isso assim mesmo. Perder.

Value theories: internalist-recognition versus external

But who, exactly, was losing? My analysis of value has striking resonances with dependency theory, which, a generation ago, quite rightly highlighted the chain through which one peripheral region looked to another slightly-less-peripheral region to set the standards of value: villages looking to towns, towns to regional cities, regional cities to national capitals, national capitals to international metropolises (Frank 2009 [1967]: 10-11 and 16-17; Palma 1978:

⁴² One might think, here, about the connection between Sahlins' stranger-king and Simmel's stranger (1950 [1908]). Modernity, it seems, could be imagined as the condition in which the vast majority of the people with whom one interacts, in the most mundane ways, become like stranger-kings, the bearers of imperious and alien power incarnated in exchange. The market, then, would be the ultimate territory of innumerable stranger-kings dominating one's life. Thanks go to Julie Chu for suggesting (in much more coherent language than mine) this connection.

899).⁴³ Maracujá and Rio Branco certainly stand at the beginning of this chain. Could it be that what I have observed is simply the cultural reflex of the position of dependency? Is it a system of meanings that develops when sertanejos express their subordinate location in the world system? Perhaps my argument about value applies only to the most marginalized.

What I am claiming here, however, is something different. For sure, the super-peripheral status of the rural sertão makes it a good site from which to observe the externality of value, an element that might otherwise get overlooked. But the tales that one tells on the periphery are often tales about the core, too (Taussig 1980). More to the point, the people in question hardly count as neophyte proletarians. Margarita learned to paint nails while working in São Paulo. Félix and Carlos spent years laboring there, too. When I first met him, Rodrigo had just returned from a migratory trip to a massive coffee plantation in Espírito Santo. These are people whose perspective is not static rural marginalization, but rather leaving labor.

⁴³ See Frank's argument:

For the generation of structural underdevelopment, more important still than the drain of economic surplus from the satellite after its incorporation as such into the world capitalist system, is the impregnation of the satellite's domestic economy with the same capitalist structure and its fundamental contradictions. That is, once a country or a people is converted into the satellite of an external capitalist metropolis, the exploitative metropolis-satellite structure quickly comes to organize and dominate the domestic economic, political and social life of that people. The contradictions of capitalism are recreated on the domestic level and come to generate tendencies towards development in the national metropolis and toward underdevelopment in its domestic satellites just as they do on the world level [...] a capitalist structure which renders them dependent on a whole chain of metropolises above them (2009 [1967]: 10-11).

It is a major thesis of this essay that this same structure extends from the macrometropolitan center of the world capitalist system 'down' to the most supposedly isolated agricultural workers, who, through this chain of interlinked metropolitan-satellite relationships, are tied to the central world metropolis and thereby incorporated into the world capitalist system as a whole [...] There are a variety of these metropolis-satellite relationships. There is, for instance, the relationship between the fertile or irrigated flat bottom land of an agricultural valley and its adjoining agriculturally less productive or commercially less valuable hillsides; between the upriver lands and landowners favored by a gravity-flow irrigation system and the less-favored downriver lands; between the latifundia and the minifundia surrounding it; between the owner- or administrator-operated part of the latifundia and its dependent sharecropper or other tenant-run enterprises; even between a tenant farmer (or enterprise) and the permanent or occasional hired labor he may use; and, of course, between each set of metropolises or each set of satellites up and down this chain (2009 [1967]: 16-17).

What if it is the act of labor itself that produces the conviction that value lies somewhere on the outside? The attitude adopted by sertanejos could then be seen, in a more general sense, as the posture of any subject facing value. Value comes from the outside: this notion is a nod to dependency theory, but also an effort to expand, or, maybe, generalize, one of the premises of the theory. For although dependency theory excavates the processes of capital and perceptively discovers there a pervasive dynamic of *centering* – a tendency to orient oneself to a center – this dynamic does not necessarily mean that the center actually exists. Business owners in São Paulo find themselves subordinated to value as dictated by a center in Tokyo; stock brokers in Tokyo submit to the wishes of a center formed by anonymous buyers on the market. To cite an incisive question from Ho’s ethnography of investment bankers on Wall Street:

Although it is quite common to assume that, from the stance of the marginalized, ‘the market’ is viewed as an autonomous and abstract force because they do not have access to its inner workings, what does it mean that a similar apprehension of the market also characterizes the articulations of privileged bankers regarding their own employment insecurities (2009: 182)?

Elites, it seems, can act as inferiors in relation to value. In the moment when they confront value, they too dwell in a relative periphery. Perhaps there is no real place at the center—in other words, perhaps what is fundamental to the system is the disposition to act as if value always lies “outside,” somewhere else.

How could one take seriously the proposition that value has an inescapably external quality to it? How would social theory have to change? The question, here, is again about how anthropologists should use the word “value,” about what fits inside the existing traditions and where they might get reshaped.

Economic anthropology has been profoundly influenced by an implicit tendency that one might call the “internalist- recognition” approach. In this approach, value is analyzed, first, by

considering some actor's assessment of an object. This initial assessment is understood to be internal to the actor, an expression of his or her own viewpoint or position. Then, in a later moment, a group of others "recognize" the actor's valuation, sometimes modifying or transforming it. Value emerges as an outcome of the interaction between the internal assessment and its subsequent recognition.

Here, I will argue for a different account of value, an account that one might consider "external." Sahlins (2013) has articulated the strongest possible version of the external approach. In his view, outside value appears as a very general feature of culture, detectable in diverse locales and ultimately traceable to human powerlessness in the face of life and death. He adduces an impressive supply of evidence: monies made out of objects that originate far away, powerful porcelain given as a gift from the foreign Sultan of Tidore, Amazonian dogs obtained by trade from distant sites even though very similar dogs are available close to home. All of these become powerful because they come from outside. "The value of things," Sahlins argues, "is a function of their provenience in the external realms on which human existence depends" (2013: 171).

One does not have to accept (nor reject) the broad scope of Sahlins' claim in order to investigate the specific conditions under which externality comes to play a role in the construction of value under capital.⁴⁴ Indeed, a large number of recent studies have done just that

⁴⁴ Not just under capital. It is worth noting the parallels between value under capital and the dynamics of tribute, a practice widespread well outside the bounds of capitalism.

In Marx's view, the commodity did not have its historical dawn inside capitalism. Capital, he claimed, "originally finds the commodity already in existence, but not as its own product" (1969 [1863]: 468, in vol. 3, "Addenda. Revenue and its Sources. Vulgar Political Economy," section 2. Also see Marx 1904 [1859]: 53, cited in the body of the text.) The first commodities, in this sense, were luxury goods brought in from far away, redolent of foreign power, the stuff of trade and tribute.

Many of Sahlins' examples involve items of a particular sort: tribute goods. Tribute, as a process, extracts goods from one location and ultimately redistributes them to another place where they are alien, generating political power for the figure who coordinates the transfer.

Tribute has been extensively analyzed by theorists who argue for the existence of a "tributary mode of production" separate from the capitalist mode of production. The notion apparently originated with Amin (1976: 14-15). Wolf developed the concept at length, describing tributary societies as

(on foreign clothes, see Newell 2012 for Côte d'Ivoire and Freeman 2000 for the Caribbean; on authenticity and foreignness, see Guyer 2003 Ch. 5 and Czarnecki 2012; also see Chu 2010 Ch. 5 on the overlap between remittances in rural China and spirit money payments to the inhabitants of the underworld). To help frame all of these varied findings, Sahlins very helpfully points towards a kind of analysis in which value is understood as a form that exists *in* culture without being *fully internal* to any particular single culture or cultural conjuncture. The value-form, for Sahlins, always arises as the artifact of a relationship between a group of people and someone or something beyond that group, such that value is never really just a cultural concept or practice,

states based on the extraction of surpluses from the primary producers by political or military rulers. These states represent a mode of production in which the primary producer, whether cultivator or herdsman, is allowed access to the means of production, while tribute is extracted from him by political or military means (1982: 79-80).

Wolf took care to explain the political functions of the objects that circulate as surplus. Rulers may directly redistribute the surplus product, or, through merchants, they may develop trading networks that exchange it for other goods—often, ultimately for prestige goods that come from far away.

Especially where tributary societies existed in a wider field created by competition or symbiosis among contending polities, long-distance trade in elite goods or luxuries was a frequent and highly-developed phenomenon. Such goods embodied the ideological models through which superiority was claimed, and therefore they had an important political referent. As Jane Schneider has phrased it: 'The relationship of trade to social stratification was not just a matter of an elevated group distinguishing itself through the careful application of sumptuary laws and a monopoly of symbols of status; it further involved the direct and self-conscious manipulation of various semiperipheral and middle level groups through patronage, bestowals, and the calculated distribution of exotic and valued goods (1982: 84; Janet Schneider quote is from (1977), the *Journal of Peasant Studies* 6: 20-29, page 23.)

It is these "exotic and valued goods," I claim, that most resemble the "commodities already in existence" that Marx posits as early ingredients in the expansion of capital.

One does not have to embrace the model of a tributary mode of production in order to focus on tribute as a *practice*. This practice, I argue, helps to generate the overlap between the two kinds of outside identified at the beginning of this chapter—the outside as origin-point for socially distant objects and the outside as source of standards. In a tributary situation, leaders adopt the strategy of conflating these two outsides. By commanding the flow of mysterious goods from an outside locale, a tributary commander acquires the authority to set the outside "ideological models," the standards, that allow exchange in general to function. A recursivity is also at hand, since the "ideological models," once set, tend to sanctify the power and importance of the objects brought in from distant locales.

By this argument, then, the connection between Sahlins' examples and the *sertão* is not a matter of mere theoretical principle. It is historical. The practice of tribute gives rise, inside history, to the commodities exchanged under capital. Or, to put things another way, tribute goods already contain key features of the commodity-form, including, most particularly, the sense of social distance and the connection to standardizing authority. Thus Sahlins' theory, although not necessarily grounded in capital, has much to say to theories about capital, since history connects tribute and commodities.

but rather the concept and practice of beyond-culture. This opens the door to a re-examination of how the term “value” is used in anthropology.

Value is often imagined to be something like a language,⁴⁵ following Saussure’s desultory (one hesitates to say “arbitrary”) analogy between a word and a five-franc note (1985 [1916]: 160). But this view deceives. Value is not a language, that is, it is not a system internal to a limited group of speakers, rich in its complexity, constitutive of shared identity. If by “value” we mean the classical economists’ lodestar that guides exchange as a social rather than a personal activity – if we at the same time mean Marx’s forms of equivalence, forms that enable distillers in Scotland to have a material relation with weavers in India, while whiskey has a social relation with cotton cloth – then value cannot be a language. Value does not enable people to communicate elaborate messages to each other or to layer one more response onto a dialogic text. The Scottish distiller and the Indian weaver are not talking to each other when they trade. Value works precisely by its simplicity, its capacity to reduce all previous history to a single moment in which past messages are no longer legible.

Value, moreover, does not generate a culture or a sense of group; it tries to cross all such boundaries and operate on terms so plain that very different people can transact with only a modicum of mutual understanding. Marx believed that it was social distance that had given birth to the commodity itself.

The exchange of commodities originates not within the primitive communities, but where they end, on their borders at the few points where they come in contact with other communities. That is where barter begins, and from here it strikes back into the interior of the community, decomposing it (1904 [1859]: 53).

⁴⁵ For examples of the value-as-language metaphor, see, for example, the notion of meaning in Turner (1979), who argues that “value is a form of meaning” (20), or in Graeber: “value is the way in which an individual actor’s actions take on meaning, for the actor herself, by being incorporated into a larger social whole” (2001: 67).

Value does not come from the group. It comes from the group's edges.

This, then, is an externalist view of value. It stands opposed to internalist theories of varying sorts. Graeber has been one of the most sophisticated advocates of an internalist approach, and he makes common cause with Turner and Munn, drawing together a school that one might think of as the proponents of a “practice theory of value.” Graeber's aim is to generate a theory of value that focuses on human activity, grounded in a creative capacity that resides in the core of the self.

Value, for Graeber, is a measure of human effort.

Commodities have to be produced (and yes, they also have to be moved around, exchanged, consumed...), social relations have to be created and maintained; all of this requires an investment of human time and energy, intelligence, concern. If one sees value as a matter of the relative distribution of *that*, then one has a common denominator. One invests one's energies in those things one considers most important, or most meaningful (2001: 45).

But value, on Graeber's account, is not an analyst's exogenous measure. It is a measure of human effort as that effort makes sense to people inside their own specific contexts.⁴⁶

Value emerges in action; it is the process by which a person's invisible ‘potency’ – their capacity to act – is transformed into concrete, perceptible forms. If one gives another person food and receives a shell in return, it is not the value of the food that returns to one in the form of the shell, but rather the value of the act of giving it. The food is simply the medium. Value, then, is the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves – though Munn also notes that we are not talking about something that could occur in isolation: in kula exchange, at least (and by extension, in any social form of value), it can only happen through that importance being recognized by someone else (2001: 44-5).

The way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves, recognized by someone else: the “practice theory of value” fits squarely inside the internalist-recognition

⁴⁶ In Graeber's text (2001), moreover, value tends to appear as the solution to local problems about selfhood, or, in other words, value operates as a tool that people can use to describe how they are acting and thereby find what kind of selves they are. He sounds this theme again and again—for example, in his contrast between the Maori and the Kwakiutl (216) and his discussion of name-granting and expressiveness with Iroquois wampum (120).

tradition. Graeber, Turner,⁴⁷ and Munn all craft value theories that are internalist. In other words, they search for value – in one of its aspects – by identifying an actor who, inside him or herself, assesses⁴⁸ some object or action. Value is a predilection that the actor embraces, accepts, takes on as her own. She agrees that the necklace, the Mercedes-Benz, or the Kayapó chanting really is worth it.

Of course, Graeber, Turner, and Munn⁴⁹ do not think that value exists purely inside the self. The other does play a role in their theories of value—and what the other does is referred to

⁴⁷ While Graeber's emphasis on the creative self is particular to him, his interest in human action has strong resonances with Turner. For Turner, values are "goals" that motivate particular actions by particular people. Society itself emerges as the "means" through which these people achieve their ends. In turn, society then reproduces itself by producing more people who hold these values:

Society creates both itself and the reason for its own being: in a word, values, as the goals of social action (1979: 24).

Socio-cultural systems are [...] understood as the means by which people define the values that orient their own acts, realize these values in concrete terms through concerted action and accumulate the value thus produced among themselves (1979: 18).

As a semiotic representation of a relation among commodities, value is a form of social consciousness. As such, it is both a representation of an existing class of objects and a goal (and thus a constituent) of social activity. It is thus not merely a semiotic construction of the objective structural properties of the relations of production and exchange, but an object of subjective struggles to acquire and accumulate that drive the entire system of social production. Value and its semiotic representations thus figure both as the emergent products of activity and the goals or purposes towards which that activity is directed (2008: 51).

Turner's approach, in fairness, does not fully conform to the recognition model. He does allude to it, for example, in "Marxian Value Theory" (2008: 47), where he refers to needs being "socially recognized as a part of the 'value relation' of the system in question." But Turner is generally more concerned with what he refers to as "spontaneous self-organization" (2008: 49), a dialectical movement in which individual striving and collective ideology each come together simultaneously to construct a social system.

⁴⁸ Assesses or, in some versions of the theory, *produces*. As will be discussed below, in one of Munn's accounts, the first step occurs when the actor builds an object, and the object is then assessed when it gets exchanged. By introducing production, Munn brings the conversation closer to Marx. But the key point, for my purposes, is that in all such "recognition" accounts, the story of value is told as if it started with a self and the self's relationship to an object.

⁴⁹ Munn follows a similar, but subtly different, internalist-recognition approach. In her description of food exchanges on Gawa, she begins with the self's desire for the food that the self owns. The second step is a process of "recognition" that occurs when the self acknowledges an other's wish to eat the same food. [Note that Munn's "recognition" here runs in the opposite direction from Graeber's. For Graeber, it is the other (i.e. the public, or even

as “recognition.” The actor’s primary assessment is recognized (and transformed) by another. In the third and final step, the actor is influenced by the recognition, and the assessment stabilizes as value.⁵⁰

society as a whole) that “recognizes” the actor’s action. For Munn, the actor herself “recognizes” the other’s desire at the moment when she acts.]

Ultimately, the self gives the food to the other, and the self’s will and control are thus enhanced; the self’s initial desire for food has been transformed into positive value, the value of the fame that the self has achieved as a generous donor.

Food transmission operates on the self-focused desire of the donor as a sacrificial, separative act that, in effect, accommodates the other’s desire to eat (in this sense recognizing the latter’s will), while at the same time expanding the donor’s will and intersubjective control through basic persuasive means. Positive value, as Simmel (1971: 48) puts it, ‘is the issue of a process of sacrifice’ (Munn 1992 [1986]: 73).

Munn returns to this same theme in her masterful analysis of the exchange of canoes for kula shells, an analysis in which she introduces production as well. She compactly summarizes her view of the principle behind this production-exchange cycle:

A separation from the material work products of one’s own body that yields the work product of another foreign source transcending the (matrilineal) self results in reattachment to the self of a dialectically transformed potency (1992 [1986]: 154).

In other words, the process, in her view, runs as follows. An initial actor detaches something from himself, his “work product”—here, a canoe. This canoe is traded for a beautiful armshell, which is the work product of a foreign armshell maker, and this trade indicates (although she does not emphasize it here) the armshell maker’s recognition of the value of the canoe. Thanks to this exchange, the armshell becomes a transformed sign of the canoe-maker’s inner potency, the potency that allowed him to make the canoe to begin with. The process of exchange and recognition thus converts the canoe-builder’s initial act of canoe-making into an armshell, a form of recognized value.

Munn reiterates the dynamic in her particularly complex exegesis of “fame,” the maximal form of value on Gawa. Fame starts when a single actor, usually a man, manages to successfully exercise his influence and persuade another to trade a kula shell with him. What matters here, however, is that the man’s internal capacity for influence must be recognized – not only by his trading partner, but also by the countless unknown others who spread the news of the trade and thus make him famous. “The virtual third party,” Munn explains, “is the distant other who hears about, rather than directly observes, the transaction” (1992 [1986]: 116). In the final step of the process, the man’s influence, now transformed into fame, comes back to change the man himself.

As virtual influence, fame reflects the influential acts of the actor back to himself from an external source. Indeed, through it, the actor knows himself as someone known by others. As one Gawan said to me: “I am a guyaw (leading man); they speak my name.” It is through fame, then – the fact that he is known by others – that a man may come to know *himself* as a guyaw (1992 [1986]: 118, emphasis in original).

⁵⁰ Graeber repeatedly articulates this approach:

Value becomes, as I’ve said, the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves: normally, as reflected in one or another socially recognized form (2001: 47).

Really, society is not a thing at all: it is the total process through which all of this activity [i.e. human activity] is coordinated, and value, in turn, the way that actors see their own activity as a meaningful part of it. Doing so always, necessarily, involves some sort of public recognition and comparison (2001: 76).

This, then, is the “internalist-recognition” approach to value theory. This approach is not used only by the proponents of a practice theory of value; it enjoys quite widespread acceptance in social thought (see Simmel (1900), for instance.)⁵¹ And it is a venerable feature of the anthropological tradition. Malinowski, for example, embraced it. In his view, what produced value was the move from the “root reality” of individual pleasure to the “indirect sentiment” that accompanies the collective admiration of food.

What is socially enjoyed is the common admiration of fine and plentiful food, and the knowledge of its abundance. Naturally, like all animals, human or otherwise, civilized or savage, the Trobrianders enjoy their eating as one of the chief pleasures of life, but this

Value is the way in which an individual actor’s actions take on meaning, for the actor herself, by being incorporated into a larger social whole (2001: 67).

Graeber clearly explains that the moment of recognition comes *second*. What comes first is the actor’s internal gesture of value creation, which, for Graeber, springs from the basic human capacity for action.

Rather than value being the process of public recognition itself, already suspended in social relations, it is the way people who *could* do almost anything (including, in the right circumstances, creating entirely new sorts of social relation) assess the importance of what they do, in fact, do, as they are doing it. This is necessarily a social process; but it is always rooted in generic human capacities (2001: 47).

Value is not created in that public recognition. Rather, what is being recognized is something that was, in a sense, already there (2001: 77).

⁵¹ In Simmel’s definition, value begins with a person who internally desires an item, and this “subjective-immediate significance [...] is the one originally decisive of the relationship” (1900: 578). But the item only comes to have value in the second moment, when the person recognizes that the item is not actually hers and that she must sacrifice one of her own possessions in order to obtain it. The item’s value is thus ultimately set by the amount of sacrifice that the person must make – that is, by the strength of her feeling of attachment to the possession of hers that she must give up in a trade in order to get the desired item. And, of course, the intensity of the required sacrifice depends, in part, on the desires of the other party to the trade.

The decisive factor is its extension in principle beyond the individual. The fact that for one object another must be given shows that not merely for me, but also for itself, that is, also for another person, the object is of some value. The appraisal takes place in the form of economic value (1900: 580-1).

The object is for us not a thing of value, so long as it is dissolved in the subjective process as an immediate stimulator of feelings, and thus at the same time is a self-evident competence of our sensibility. The object must first be detached from this sensibility, in order to acquire for our understanding the peculiar significance which we call value. (1900: 589)

The detachment generates the necessary “distance between subject and object, in which the latter is represented as of value” (1900: 590). Thus, at the end of the valuation process, value not only creates the space for the valued item to become an “object”— it also makes the desiring self into a “subject.”

remains an individual act, and neither its performance nor the sentiments attached to it have been socialized. It is this indirect sentiment [i.e. display and the pleasure of knowing that one has abundance], rooted of course in reality in the pleasures of eating, which makes for the value of food in the eyes of the natives. This value again makes accumulated food a symbol, and a vehicle of power. (1922: 171-2)

And Firth, when he wanted to address the question of value among the Maori, found himself reaching for even more direct terms. “Economic value,” he argued, is related to

the conversion of individual to social values—the process by which values created by one person and significant for him become recognized by the community as a whole (1929: 390).

The internalist-recognition approach is indeed a common tendency among economic anthropologists and their allies. It provides a resilient framework that underlies a number of otherwise quite different theoretical projects. But what does this framework miss?

To ask things another way, how can the framework fit the people who talk – and live – as if the value they know had its origin somewhere outside of them? For Seu Milton’s sons, what the cow was “really worth” came from television. For Marcelo, the day-wage was set by the president. Margarita explained her price increase as the unfortunate effect of the acetone and the cotton, and she described her own increasingly-valuable work, anonymously, as “the labor.”

It is not only the case that, to reprise a critique often associated with Strathern (1988), the internalist-recognition account of value rests on the unstated presumption that actors have a primary right to own themselves and the objects they make. The internalist-recognition account is also problematic because it has difficulty accounting for a whole range of discourse, discourse made manifest every day in sertanejo conversation. The internalist-recognition approach would lead us to expect that people ultimately embrace or agree with the value system that surrounds them, since value would be “the importance of actions.” But, in fact, people constantly speak of value as an imperative with which they *disagree*.

These people are discursively creating a sense of non-voluntariness. As Félix put it, “Basically, there’s no option in selling.” He and his neighbors do not talk as if they have made a compromise between an initial personal valuation and a subsequent social necessity. They do not embrace the value that they face; quite the contrary. They deal with it as inevitable.

Their words call into question the usefulness of the theoretical move that makes the other appear in the secondary place, under the sign of “recognition.” In their discourse, the other seems, as Sahlins suggests, to be primary. Other people do not merely recognize value. Value has its origins with these others, on the outside.⁵²

⁵² This argument finds an unexpected ally in Annette Weiner. Famously, Weiner argued that value does not arise only through exchange. She claimed that special “inalienable possessions,” such as heirlooms, “are imbued with affective qualities that are expressions of the value an object has when it is kept by its owners and inherited within the same family or descent group” (1985: 210). Thus keeping objects, rather than giving them away, can make them valuable.

Weiner’s account of value, at first glance, seems internalist. What is crucial for our purposes, however, is that it breaks with the model of recognition. Weiner does not understand value as a harmonious middle ground in which individual impulses get moderated through collective influence. Instead, she highlights the antagonistic relationship between the inside and the outside, and she emphasizes that value, as a category, can come into being as a method for explaining the tension and incommensurability at this interface. We might say that, in our terms, what Weiner has described is not value but rather *non-value*: she has catalogued the impulse to preserve certain objects from valuation, to make them priceless. But the core point seems to stand. The notion of value rests upon a distinction between the inside and the outside. The imperative of value is to reorganize one’s world in terms of the outside standard, and any struggle against this imperative will require effort.

Along similar lines, it may be possible to re-read Parry and Bloch (1989), Gudeman (2001), and Mayer (2002) in the light of an externalist approach to value. For Parry and Bloch, money mediates a distinction between short-term cycles of acquisitive exchange (like those that churn through the marketplace) and long-term cycles of reproductive exchange (like those that characterize the temple or the home). Gudeman identifies a different crucial split:

I argue that economy consists of two realms, which I call community and market. [...] By community, I refer to real, on-the-ground associations and to imagined solidarities that people experience. Market designates anonymous, short-term exchange (2001: 1).

Mayer, similarly, draws the line between “house” and “field,” on the one hand, and “money” on the other (2002: 1).

Each of these binaries runs the risk of creating an undue diremption between the home and the market (see, for example, the criticism in Guyer 2003: 20-21). But this dichotomization may be avoidable. Perhaps the distinctions above can be read not as the boundaries between actually substantive categories – home and market as really existing and really separate things – but rather as the effects of a relentless single process of externalization. In other words, maybe people come to act as if value exists somewhere on the outside of the place where they are, and this presumption generates a difference between home and market, long-cycle and short-cycle. The distinction itself then becomes a trace of the externalizing power of value. Home and market appear not as transhistorical entities, but as categories that get formed through a particular instantiation of value dynamics.

Nor is this outside a false one, the pretending of people who actually generate value inside their culture and then mislabel it as an external necessity. According to the externalist view, value does not just *seem* external. It arises through relations with others who *are* external. The markets where Félix had “no option in selling” were markets that reached, ultimately, across borders, languages, and traditions. Value does not exist inside a single culture; value is necessarily made through contacts that traverse spaces so socially remote that the people in question can only ever have the most attenuated and mystified relations. Social distance is what makes the category of value possible.

In advancing this argument, I part ways with the (often-insightful) practice theorists of value, who tend to describe value as a system inside a particular culture, with the Kwakiutl having one system of value and the Tiv another. I also depart from the tendency to see capitalism, itself, as a culture or cultural process. I claim that culture is not coterminous with value. The line of cultural identity, even when understood broadly or processually, does not correspond to the limit of a value system. Quite the contrary: value only gets formed across great difference. Such is the historical experience of capitalism, which from its very start has operated by knitting together chains of production – sugar over the Atlantic, furs from Canada to France – chains that break through anything that one could call a culture. Still today, in the contemporary sertão, capital brings in the stuff of alterity, Chinese plastic toys and Finnish telephones by the bagful, just as global stock exchanges function because of (not in spite of) the tremendous human gaps that must be bridged in order for sertanejo coffee to reach Helsinki. This transected difference plays a fundamental role in the cycle of capital and in the concept of value. Value is the presence, manifested inside culture, of something beyond a cultural divide, beyond culture itself.

And yet value has to become visible and comprehensible inside each particular cultural situation where it operates. In this chapter, I have examined the words and practices through which value is rendered visible and tangible in the sertão— for example, the clipped phrases and omitted pronouns that bosses and workers use to speak to each other about wages, thereby constructing the feeling of an outside standard. But this feeling, by itself, does not make value. Value comes into existence when the feeling allows sertanejos to produce and exchange in conjunction with a lengthy chain of distant others who, in their own distant ways and contexts, have constructed an analogous feeling. In other words, value is a coordinating category across systems.⁵³ Thus sertanejos could not hope to demystify value by simply thinking and talking differently among themselves. To do so requires undoing and redoing the relations of a whole world.

Politics of value, politics inside value, politics against value

On a darkened path near Maracujá, I wandered through the night air alongside Vitor. He was a little drunk and he balanced himself on a patient donkey, bottles of diesel fuel dangling from the saddle. Vitor was telling me that he would start demanding \$R30 rather than \$R25 for his day labor feeding the fuel to the village water pump. He had to get up early, he argued, since the pump was far from his house. He deserved more money for his work.

Benjamin spoke to me by daylight, in the wooden hut where he lived, surrounded by his cows and the patches of green corn he had planted in a low-lying flood plain. If he sold the corn in the city of Conquista, he told me, he would not receive its true worth. “The people of

⁵³ Thanks go to William Feeney for this insightful observation.

Conquista live with us,” he noted, and then he explained what kind of living this was: “They have a profit because of us.” (*O povo de Conquista vive mais nós [...] Eles tem um lucro por causa de nós.*) Benjamin said that this profit happened because Conquista’s merchants bought for a low price to later sell for a high price. Then Benjamin spied the shape of birds in the field. In the middle of his speech he grabbed a shotgun, running outside to protect the corn.

Analís met me on her return from the village where she used to live. She had found no news from her son, who was in São Paulo for work. Dejected, she talked to me about the changes in the world. “In the old days, nobody would sell,” she recounted. “Rather give than sell.” (*Antigamente, ninguém vendia. [...] Antes dar do que vender. 3lagint2p30*) But now people had “so much acquisitiveness with things” (*muita ganância com as coisas.*)

The acquisitiveness had an effect, Analís observed. “God changed things” (*Deus mudou as coisas.*) This changed happened “due to the pride of the people” (*devido ao orgulho do povo.*) Maybe, God got angry at people for selling everything, and maybe, for this reason, He changed the rains, drying up the rivers and parching the hilltops.

For Vitor, Benjamin, and Analís, value did not remain above reproach. The three of them challenged value’s imperiousness, and their challenges opened up the prospect that something might change. They made politics possible.

But what kind of politics? Vitor, with his argument about the effort he expended, was jockeying for a higher wage. He was doing this by thinking in the terms of the existing value system itself and by making an argument in those terms: he conducted *politics inside value*. Benjamin, by comparison, was daring farmers to think differently about the importance of their crops, to rate their corn more highly, and to demand a different value system. His was a *politics of value*. Analís was denying the legitimacy of commodity exchange altogether. She enunciated a

politics against value. These three stances – Vitor’s, Benjamin’s, and Analisis’s – find allies of varying sorts in the disparate anthropologies that try to dialogue with them.

The internalist-recognition approach to value offers one answer to the question of value, while its externalist foil provides another. The deeper stakes of the disagreement become clearer if one reads these anthropological theories in the political terms just outlined. The practice theory of value, for at least some of its advocates, is explicitly aimed at articulating the politics *of* value. The externalist approach, on the other hand, inclines towards a politics *inside* value or a politics *against* value.

In the practice theory of value, considerable attention is focused on the steps through which particular actions, carried out by particular people, ultimately generate the shared representations that govern a society. The theory, in other words, explains the mediations that enable internal acts become collectively recognized. In conducting this explanation, the theory relies heavily on the notion of *awareness*. Particular actions acquire their collective quality because the actors become unaware that the group is, in fact, the product of their own acts. Graeber refers to fetishism, which he defines as “people failing to recognize the degree to which they are producing value” (2001: 69). Turner argues that “the higher-level processes of control and reproduction [...] tend in this way to be regarded as beyond the scope of social agency to create or change” (1979: 32-3). The group and its collective representations seem to come from somewhere else. They feel like a constraint, like the heavy hand of society itself.

According to the practice theory of value, however, this feeling is a deception:⁵⁴ what has happened is that people have lost their awareness of their own power.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Graeber repeatedly underlines the importance of awareness – and unawareness. When he outlines a theory of action, for example, he specifies four moments: (1) “an effort to fulfill perceived needs on the part of the producer,” (2) a resulting “system of social relations,” (3) the production of the producer “as a specific sort of person [inside

this system] (seamstress, harem eunuch, movie star, etc.),” (4) the creation of new needs (2001: 58-9). This process holds together, he notes, because

individual actors tend to be aware of only the first of the four moments (the specific thing they are making or doing, the specific end they have in mind); it is much harder to keep track of the other three. One could well argue that all the great problems of social theory emerge from this single difficulty—whether it be Durkheim’s famous observation that even though ‘society’ is just a collection of individuals, every one of those individuals sees it as an alien force constraining them, or Marx’s, about the way in which our own creations come to seem alien entities with power over us (cf. Taussig 1993).

Imagination, then, may be essential to the nature of productive action, but imagination also has its limits. Or, to put it another way, human action is self-conscious by nature, but it is never entirely so (2001: 59).

When he discusses models of the total system of production, he recapitulates:

I have also emphasized that this overall process is always something that tends somewhat to escape the actors. Insofar as their fetishized objects really do embody total systems of meaning, they represent ones that are in fact produced largely offstage (2001: 82).

For Graeber, the system of hierarchical social life coheres because people are not aware.

When describing unawareness, Graeber consistently uses equivocal language: individual actors *tend* to be aware of only the first moment, the overall process *tends* to escape the actors, human action is not *entirely* self-conscious, systems of meaning are produced *largely* off-stage. He is equivocal because of hope. Unawareness, he hopes, is not complete. The political goal of this theorizing is to lift up the blindfold a little farther, to raise consciousness, to make people more aware or, perhaps, to help them become aware of the limits to their awareness.

Turner articulates the stakes even more explicitly than Graeber. In Turner’s view, exploitative social production becomes possible when producers are not aware. “Although people created values and meanings through the forms of organized interdependence they assume to facilitate their own productive activity,” he notes, “they remain unaware that they do so” (1979: 34-35). He explains in detail:

The ultimate forms of social organization, that is, the higher-level processes of control and reproduction that are not themselves directly controlled and reproduced, tend in this way to be regarded as beyond the scope of social agency to create or change. This perception, encoded in a wealth of collective representations, myths and other symbolic forms, has important social and political consequences. One of these is that the key social institutions and processes in question are not perceived as arising from inputs of coordinated social activity. They are therefore not seen as independent parts of a system of social relations and activities, but rather as normative entities with a reality of their own independent of the pattern of social relations that results from their enactment. They are objectified or reified, that is, considered as things-in-themselves that constrain behavior but are not constrained by it [...] Taken together, the whole set of such higher-level reproductive institutions seems directly to constitute the social order itself, so that human actors relate to one another only through them, as it were indirectly. Social consciousness at the higher levels of social structure tends, in short, to be alienated. Alienation and reification are thus to be understood as inherent aspects of the hierarchical structure of social production and reproduction (1979: 32-3).

⁵⁵ In fairness, this summary does not apply well to Munn’s approach. Awareness is not a crucial concept for her, perhaps because her work is informed by linguistic anthropology and hence more concerned with signs and sign relations than with individual human knowledge.

Turner makes explicit the aim of a practice theory of value. By transforming perceptions, theory can help people to understand their own ability to set the standards of value. The expansion of this ability, when appropriately balanced between the individual and the collective, is, for Turner, the core goal of socialism:

I have suggested that the optimization of people's capacity to determine the values that orient their actions, and their ability to accumulate and expand these values through productive activity under their own control, is a general principle that is appropriate both as a political formulation of the basic dynamics of social and cultural systems and as an overall political goal for the struggles of indigenous peoples. I would further suggest that the principle is applicable at both the individual and the collective levels, and that bringing the two levels into some approximation of congruence is a fair statement of a socialist position, not only on the indigenous question but also on the internal struggles of modern industrial societies (1979: 42).

This is the politics of value. It strives to open up a space of possibility in which people might count value differently—might dream up new kinds of homogenous potency, adopt new measuring-sticks for determining what is worthwhile. It tries to convince people that they, together, have the capacity to decide what is valuable. The politics of value is a project to make everyone aware that value can be made to mean new things. Aware, too, of the responsibility that this possibility imposes. Its conclusion is that people really *do* – or can – command their own major institutions of meaning.

Because it orients itself towards these shared meanings, the practice theory of value typically approaches each culture as a total whole. Its proponents, when they analyze social life, tend to focus on consensus, highlighting those cultural forms that achieve near-universal acceptance inside a group. The result is a portrait of value as a full system—a portrait that sometimes makes it difficult to see how some people can come to disagree with value, resent it, or reject it altogether.

The practice theory of value, with its interest in awareness, perception, and consensus, cleaves like a branch to the Boasian tree and to its underlying Kantian roots. Clarifying the limits of awareness – explaining what humans can and cannot know – is at the center of the project. The underlying utopianism, then, derives from the wish to raise awareness about the limits of awareness.

The externalist approach to value chases after a different set of clues. In such an approach, the main issue is the foreignness of value. Foreignness is treated not as a misapprehension of one's own capacity, but as the actual precondition of value, a precondition grounded in the structure of social relations. Value, it is argued, does in fact travel inwards across borders, the borders of class, language, or nation; value comes from somewhere else. Value is understood as the accurate recognition of one's dependence on the outside—on the foreign trader, the distant king, the capitalist or the worker. Under capital, this dependence has everything to do with one's labor relation, that is, one's inability to labor alone, because labor, in the context of capital, has become the key point of social nexus.

Thus an externalist account of fetishism or alienation differs from Graeber's and Turner's explanations. From an externalist perspective, fetishism does not require self-deception, nor does it primarily occur when actors become unaware of the higher levels of social structure. People may have a clear-headed awareness of these higher levels and yet still face fetishism on a much lower level, when they transact the mundane objects around them, because fetishism is a *correct* depiction of the structural divide that separates them from these objects' points of origin. The recipient of a porcelain gift does not in fact know the Sultan of Tidore; the consumer of a Chinese car cannot know the Brazilian miner who extracted the iron ore; and so the human's relation to the object necessarily has a mystified quality, even if everyone is cognizant of the

exploitation behind the exchanges. The vassal is not necessarily cowed by the monarch's glory and the miner is not necessarily blind to the surplus that the company extracts from her low wages. All that is required is that the two of them submit to the situation as a social inevitability.

Hence externalist accounts of value tend to focus on dissensus and disagreement, on the struggle and subjugation of social groups, each one aligned differently in relation to the outside. In these accounts, subjugation is a matter not of relative unawareness but rather of relative relationship, and the dynamic changes not when actors become more aware but rather when they forge new relations with each other and with what is beyond them.

The external approach to value lends itself to (at least) two different forms of politics. One angle is to acknowledge the foreignness of value, accept its terms, and then negotiate for more of the valued objects. One might refer to this as politics *inside* value; it seems to be what Appadurai, for example, envisages when he speaks of a strategy for increasing the circulation of prestige commodities among subordinated groups (1986: 57).

A different horizon of possibility also arises, however. The vision, here, is not to obtain more valued things, but also not to adopt new measuring-sticks for determining value. The vision is to abolish value altogether. This is not a politics *inside* value and also not a politics *of* value, but rather a politics *against* value. In this vision, the category of value itself turns into the target, with the hope of taking apart the very habit of searching for a homogenous potency against which to measure everything else. The dream is to stop calculating value—to discontinue comparisons that presume a single scale. It is counterscaling with nothing to run counter to.

A value system is ultimately the outcome of actions that people undertake together—building and transporting, buying and selling, measuring and comparing. And yet it chafes like an uncontrollable burden. There is, Félix said, no option in selling.

The question of value, when posed this way, appears one iteration of a very general Enlightenment riddle: how do certain social forms, seemingly meaningless in themselves, become powerful once people begin to act as if they had power? Why do dollar bills buy goods and royal orders command respect? The social fact, the social contract, misrecognition, the arbitrariness of the sign, and the performativity of language are all theoretical models that offer answers to this riddle. The fetish of the commodity is another such model. It operates on a quite specific level, addressing only relations under the sway of capital and, in that already limited context, only relations to particular kinds of objects. And yet it explains how these objects acquire the capacity to dominate people, quite independently of each person's desire for the object at hand.

One of the benefits of the commodity fetish theory is that it does not ground the power of social forms in the consensus, either implicit or explicit, of the people subject to that power. It does not assume that people accept the power, whether through free will or deception; it also does not assume that they all believe in it or calculate it to be best for their interests. It makes no claims about shared agreement.

Instead, the commodity fetish operates through specific relations: the relation of one worker to another, since none of them can work independently under capital; the relation of each worker to measured clock-time, long-distance trade, and industrial technique; through these, the relation of all workers to capital; the relation of all humans to capital for the provision of the stuff of survival. These relations create an untraversable gap between the moments of production and consumption, and in this gap, the only possible relation between the person and the commodity is mystification at its power to vanish from one's workplace or materialize in one's market. Value becomes the response to that mystification. Value, as the habit of accepting an

unknowable outside, as an intimate strangeness,⁵⁶ is the disposition one must acquire when faced with the relations of capital. No-one needs to embrace it or endorse it; it becomes the precondition of social existence.

In systems where capital is not the social dominant—the systems that Sahlins charts, for example—value plays out through the dynamics of tribute (Wolf 1982; also see footnote 25 in this chapter). When thinking through capital, however, the externality of value has a different importance, and its anthropology has a different purpose. By documenting value's external quality, social analysts are trying to leave space for understanding dissent. Analysts are thinking about how Analis and Benjamin might find the existing market relations reprehensible – and yet still aim to sell produce, as Benjamin did, or angle for a job in the coffee fields, as Analis did. Value from the outside is value that one can detest and resist while complying with its mandates. Seu Milton's sons may not like selling their cows, and perhaps no-one ultimately does; by taking the externality of value seriously, we can also take seriously their dislike and the resistances they manage to enact. And value from the outside does not depend, except perhaps in the final analysis, on unawareness. Instead value is generated, as a category, through particular relations of difference and inequality, relations that turn into class relations. Often the subjects in these relations can see them with clear eyes, but they cannot simply abolish them. These are relations that one might trace, in a snaking path, around the whole world; one can also hear them at the edge of small fields, in the words said and the words not said.

Bringing the outside in: How wages grow

⁵⁶ Thanks go to Julie Chu for this wonderful phrase.

any more openings.”

D: Hm.

K: Why? Because they knew that those people weren’t going to think like we do. Like, those people weren’t going to think as small as we do.

D: Hm! Ha!

K: They weren’t going to think as small.

[Smiling.] Because, on the one hand, we go there because we wanted to earn—a little more money than what we were earning.

D: Mm hm.

K: Like—washing plates, domestic labor in a home, do one thing and another. And on the other hand, the people from São Paulo state, they were already thinking like this: they wanted much more than they would earn in a, a big corporate firm.

D: Mm hm.

K: So they were going to think more. And with the passing of time, living alongside people from São Paulo state, we started to—have a little better head—

D: Mm hm.

K: We started wanting to think bigger [...] Living alongside them. Because then I opened my eyes. I told [my boss], “[...] The people from São Paulo state, [...] they ask for work here, but they—because – and you don’t give it to them because you know that they aren’t going to be dummies like us.”

D: Mm hm.

K: They’re not going to want to clean the floor, wait a table, do something like that that earns little.

D: Hm.

K: Porque? Porque sabiam que eles não iam pensar como a gente. Tipo, eles não iam pensar tão pequeno como a gente.

D: Hein! Ha!

K: Eles não iam pensar tão pequeno. [smiling] Porque já a gente chega lá porque a gente queria ganhar um –dinheiro a mais que a gente ganhava.

D: Mm hm.

K: Tipo—lavar um prato, uma casa, fazer uma coisa e outra. E lá, os paulistas, já pensavam assim. Eles queriam muito mais que eles ganhavam num, numa firma.

D: Mm hm.

K: Então eles iam pensar mais. Aí com o passar do tempo, com essa convivência com os paulistas, a gente foi—mais tendo cabeça—

D: Mm hm.

K: Foi querendo pensar maior. [...] A convivência. Que aí eu abri meus olhos. Eu ainda falava para ele, “[...] os paulistas [...] Eles pedem emprego aqui, mas eles – porque— e vocês não dão porque sabem que eles não vão ser bestas igual à gente.”

D: Mm hm.

K: Eles não vão querer limpar o chão, atender uma mesa, fazer algo assim que ganhe pouco.

So that some things could grow, other things stayed the same. Bahians earned less than people from the big city: as fixed as a truth and as patterned as a fractal (Irvine and Gal 2000), this same scale appeared everywhere, even inside the city itself. It was an axiom of Kátia’s economic world.

To think as small as we do. How do people learn to think small? In what language do they learn to do it? This chapter has argued that “thinking small” is not a problem of unawareness. Kátia became very aware that she was thinking small, just like Carlos was aware that he earned \$R20 a day less than Didier for doing the same job. But neither Kátia nor Carlos won a pay increase. Rather than a state of awareness, thinking small is a rationality—a system of thought that makes sense on its own terms, with its own words, its own cadences, and its own patterns. One does not have to agree with this rationality in order to use it. So Kátia, Carlos, and their neighbors become accustomed to the situations in which thinking small is the only way to sustain their relationships with important others.

To think small is to acknowledge – and yet disclaim knowledge about – the existence of something big. The big other remains fixed on the outside, serving as a stable point that anchors one’s own sense of growth.

Brazil’s current growth model depends on value that comes in from the outside. The ultimate core to the model is the global export market, which sets the standards for the commodities that flow outward, while guiding the rhythm of their flow (Leiva 2008). Indeed, when one examines the policy discourse that defines Brazil’s growth model, one finds this sense externality manifested over and over again, in the form of a whole colonnade of fixed pillars on which the model rests. Contracts cannot be abrogated. Prices have to rise consistently and deliberately. The currency needs to maintain relative parity with the dollar. All of these represent a decisive turn away from the inward-looking rhetoric of Brazil’s midcentury growth model (Furtado 1959).⁵⁸ The outward orientation was originally implemented in the 1990s by neoliberal

⁵⁸ One might argue that the inward orientation of import substitution industrialization (and its alternatives) was, all along, something of a deception, and that, ultimately, those growth models relied no less on outside capital—the model’s task being, in that earlier era, to fix particular privileged gatekeepers at the point of intermediation between

reformers, but then maintained by the left governments elected since 2002, and its maintenance signified the dawn of the new doxa.⁵⁹

This chapter's purpose has been to argue that the outside does not appear in policy alone. The same feeling of external stability also materializes in the details of interaction: in the kinds of words that people use to talk about prices and wages, the use of indefinite rather than definite articles, the excision of personal pronouns, the difference between "your price" and "the price." Brazil's growth model is a matter of macroeconomics, but also of sertanejos' daily habits.

If Kátia had learned that prices rise consistently and that Bahians make consistently less money than their peers, then these two great constancies, as she herself noted, had a connection. The habits of interaction have a crucial role to play in insuring that inflation does not return and, concomitantly, that the class structure remains relatively stable. By accepting that prices rise steadily and slowly, sertanejos tame their wage demands. They tie their hopes for economic progress to a calendar (next year I will make 2% more than last year) rather than to an invidious comparison with the classes above them (I should make as much as the plantation owners). In this case, to know that prices rise at a measured pace is also to know that the distinction between "the rich" and "we poor" will remain in place. Above all, it is to forego the dream of an earlier moment, the Arraes reforms and the Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural, which in 1963 increased rural wages so dramatically that the structure of rural plantation life was instantly transformed. In that earlier moment, pay was often doubled or tripled (see Chapter 2). Such raises shook the very

the inside and the outside. At any rate, the investigation of the outside in midcentury growth lies beyond the scope of this draft.

⁵⁹ Leiva (2008) argues persuasively that the left version of this approach derives from neo-institutionalist doctrines, elaborated at CEPAL starting in the early 1990s, and that these are an explicit response to neoliberal policy approaches.

ground. Once sharecroppers were able to afford mattresses and transistor radios, the sharecropping system could not survive, and peasants began a transition to day labor. Not coincidentally, one year later, a coup installed the twenty-year military dictatorship (Palmeira 1976, Sigaud 1976).

A generation later, for the people who live in sertão, cyclic migration to the city has become the predominant channel for achieving higher wages – although, as Kátia learned, the channel operates according to certain rules. Faced with the limits that these rules impose, people often return to the countryside, along the channel's return flow. Because of this return flow, the city serves as something of a persistent outside, a place that sertanejos know intimately well but where they do not stay. Thus counterscaling fulfills itself. Counterscaling creates an inside in relation to a presumed outside, and the persistence of this dynamic becomes another feature of the growth model: a pool of labor always near the urban economy, but never fully absorbed by it. One more fixity in the current system of growth.

The spirit of growth is the feeling of increase, the sense that things are going up, first on the outside, but ultimately on the inside as well. Kátia felt this spirit in São Paulo.

K: There, rent keeps increasing—

D: Mm.

K:—the price of food keeps increasing—everything keeps increasing. The, the—even the—the bus, for example, keeps increasing its price. You know? [...] Then, since everything keeps increasing—

D: Mm hm.

K: —then, too, what do people want? To find a job that pays more.

D: Mm hm.

K: Then, because a lot of them oftentimes want to stay in theirs – in the job they've got. But they ask for a raise. Then, the, the – bosses don't understand, they say that we're going too quickly, whatever. We give all of ourselves but

K: Lá vai aumentando aluguel—

D: Mm.

K: —vai aumentando o preço de alimentos—tudo vai aumentado. O, o—Até o—o ônibus, assim, vai aumentado o preço. Sabe? [...] Aí, como tudo vai aumentando—

D: Mm hm.

K: —aí também as pessoas querem o que? Arrumar um emprego que pague mais.

D: Mm hm.

K: Aí porque muitas vezes quer ficar no seu—no emprego que está. Mas pede aumento. Aí, o, os—patrão não entendem, falam que a gente está indo depressa demais, eu não sei o que. A gente dá tudo da gente mas eles não entendem.

they don't understand.

"Going too quickly:" when one asked for a raise, the speed metaphor became explicit. Growth meant a rate of steady increase, a rate that workers were not supposed to alter.

This same sense of inevitability could appear on the side of the boss as well. At Maracujá, I asked Félix how he had decided to raise the wage that he paid the day-laborer who helped out in his small field.

F: When the minimum wage increases, then people also increase the day-wage. [...] He said that—told me that he would work for twenty-five, you know?

D: Mm hm.

F: But then people said, "No! We're paying thirty," I don't know, all of that stuff. And so I went, I said, "Then I'm going to pay thirty too," you know? [...] And we can't pay more, you know?

D: Mm hm.

F: That's the issue. [...] The employer doesn't have the means to pay well. [Pause]. And when it shows up like that, "It's thirty reais," many times they don't even, don't even pay it, you know? [...]

D: Mm hm. [pause] And was it hal—was it, was it he who demanded the thirty?

F: No, he, he, he, he was the one who was talking about twenty-five. Him.

D: Ah, really!

F: He said it. He was working at twenty-five.

D: Mm hm. [pause] And why did you go up to—

F: And then, because everyone said that they were paying thirty.

D: Aaaahhh haa!

F: Then since he was working all properly, and all of that—it was necessary to pay him thirty as well, you know?

F: Quando sobe o salário, aí o pessoal já sobe também a diária. [...] Ele falou que—para mim que trabalhava de vinte e cinco, né?

D: Mm hm.

F: Mas aí o pessoal falou, "Não! Nós está pagando de trinta," não sei o que, e tal. E eu peguei, falei, "Então vou pagar de trinta também," né? [...] A gente também não pode pagar mais, né?

D: Mm hm.

F: Essa é a questão. [...] O empregador não tem condição de pagar bem. [pausa] E quando aparece assim, "É trinta reais," muitas vezes nem, nem paga, né? [...]

D: Mm hm. [pausa] E foi no mei—foi, foi ele que exigiu os trinta?

F: Não, ele—ele—ele—ele que falou de 25. Ele.

D: Ah, é mesmo!

F: Ele falou. Estava trabalhando de 25.

D: Mm hm. [pausa] E porque é que você aumentou, para--.

F: E aí, porque todo o mundo falou que estava pagando de trinta.

D: Aaahhh haaa!

F: Então como ele estava trabalhando direitinho, e tal—teve que pagar ele trinta também, né? (from Félix 2013 interview)

Here Félix sounded strikingly similar to the men on the rainy porch. If for them the day-wage arrived like a fact from the outside – *it's 25 a day now* – then Félix, in his conversation with me,

gave the wage rate a similarly vague origin. “People,” or “everyone,” said that the new wage was thirty. Félix carefully avoided a pronoun when describing his motivations: “it was necessary to pay him thirty.” The wage rate seemed to increase on its own. In Félix’s words, “it shows up like that, ‘It’s thirty reais.’”

But, of course, the wage rate does not increase on its own. Although nearly everyone told me that raises were tied to the increase in the minimum wage, this mechanism is far from automatic. The minimum wage went up in January 2012, but in September of that year I heard a wave of conversation in the villages about upping the day-wage. In other words, it took nine months for the new wage to trickle down. Why? And why did everyone start asking at the same time? If growth served as a given, the circumstances of growth nonetheless remained unpredictable. Each raise required an intricate discursive dance: in every specific wage relationship someone had to propose the increase, insist on it, sometimes watch it fail. Perhaps one of the most striking features of growth talk was how thoroughly sertanejos would subsequently cover over this dance, speaking of the wage rate as an externally-imposed truth. And yet the dance happened.

In the sertão, as we have seen, wage conversations normally took place in the characteristic rhetoric of nomic calibration: no person deictics, short sentences, no repeated rhythms. To demand a wage increase, a sertanejo would flip all of these conventions. The inversion could already be heard in Kátia’s speech:

K: Then, because a lot of them oftentimes want to stay in theirs – in the job they’ve got. But they ask for a raise. Then, the, the – bosses don’t understand, they say that we’re going too quickly, whatever. We give all of ourselves but they don’t understand.

K: Aí porque muitas vezes quer ficar no seu—no emprego que está. Mas pede aumento. Aí, o, os—patrão não entendem, falam que a gente está indo depressa demais, eu não sei o que. A gente dá tudo da gente mas eles não entendem.

As Kátia began to tell the story, she introduced the characteristic pronoun of wage demands: “we.” She achieved this by actually shifting out of a previous deictic frame, in which “they” referred to the workers. In its place she launched a new frame, where “we” indexed the workers and “they” were the bosses. She underlined this shift with a metrical repetition: “[they] don’t understand.”

And indeed, Kátia explained with some happiness how the “we” had in fact assembled itself to demand a raise.

K: They put on a lot of pressure. Any little thing, they were – shh—complaining. It was one complaint on top of another. And they didn’t have the—decency to go there, “Let’s raise your wages at least one real.”

D: Mm hm.

K: So they didn’t raise it.

D: Mm hm.

K: So for us, it got kind of—difficult. [...] Because I thought it was wrong, what he [the boss] would do. He didn’t have the decency to call a co-wor—a, an employee and make a complaint in a place that was, you know, set apart. He would complain in front of customers.

D: Hmm!

K: So I thought that was ugly. And there were many customers who told me that they didn’t know how I put up with a boss like that. Because—he only knew how to complain all of the time and he didn’t value the work that we—were doing there.

K: E eles botaram muita pressão. Qualquer coisinha, estavam—shh-- reclamando. Era reclamação por cima de reclamação. E não tinha—coragem de pegar lá, “Vamos aumentar pelo menos um real de seu salário.”

D: Mm hm.

K: Ai não aumentava.

D: Mm hm.

K: Então para a gente ficava meio que—difícil. [...] Porque eu achava errado o que ele [the boss] fazia. Ele não tinha coragem de chamar um cole—um, um funcionário e reclamar num lugar, assim, reservado. Ele reclamava na frente de clientes.

D: Hmm!

K: Então eu achava feio isso. Aí teve muitos clientes que falou para mim que não sabia como eu aguentava um patrão daqueles. Porque—ele só sabia reclamar o tempo todo e não valorizava o trabalho que a gente-- fazia ali.

The diner had rented a small house where its employees could live. At that house, Kátia canvassed the full range of her fellow employees. She talked to the young men who made fun of the new women at work. She talked to the new women, too. Finally, one day, she got all of them together:

K: We came and had a meeting. We reached the conclusion that we had to resolve this issue. Everyone got together. We started to talk. We thought it was better for us to go up to him and talk to him than for us to keep saying things behind his back.

D: Mm hm.

K: Because I said that I didn't like to keep talking behind his back [...] Because – sometimes a lot of people would go there and gossip to him, whatever. I said, "I'm only entering this thing – to ask for the raise – together if it's for everyone there."

Their strategy involved going over the boss' head.

K: But we weren't going to ask him. We were going to ask another person. And—that other guy is the owner. He's also a business partner. So we were going to talk to him. But then I said, afterwards, to the girls, "Hey, it's wrong for us to do this behind his back. Let's talk to him. Say that we want to meet with him, and we'll talk."

D: Mmmm.

K: So then—he found out that there was a group—that there was a little clique that was making a group to do this. So then I told him that I was in the middle of it.

D: Mm.

K: Of this group.

D: Wow!

K: Yep. I told him that I was in the middle of that group.

D: You were really honest.

K: I was. So then I told him that I was part of it, too, and that we really were planning to go up to the other man—to the—ah, I forget the name. To the—business partner.

D: Mm hm.

K: And ask for a raise, since he didn't want to give a raise to us.

D: Mm. Mm hm.

K: So—he said that that wasn't the right way, that we had to have patience, whatever. I said,

K: A gente chegou e juntou. Chegou na conclusão que a gente tinha que resolver esse caso. Juntou todo o mundo. A gente começou a conversar. Que achava melhor a gente chegar para ele e conversar do que a gente ficar falando por trás.

D: Mm hm.

K: Porque eu falei que eu não gostava de ficar falando por trás. [...] Porque—tinha hora que muitos iam lá e faziam fuxico para ele, não sei o que. Eu falei, "Eu só entro nessa, para pedir o aumento, juntos se for para todo o mundo lá."

K: Só que a gente não ia pedir a ele. Ia pedir a um outro. E também—o outro que é dono. Também é sócio. Aí a gente ia falar com ele. Só que aí eu falei, depois, para as meninas, "Ó, é errado a gente fazer isso nas costas dele. Vamos falar com ele. Que é para juntar, e a gente vai conversar."

D: Mmmm.

K: Aí, depois—ele ficou sabendo que tinha um grupo—que tinha uma galinha que estava fazendo um grupo para fazer isso. Aí eu falei com ele que eu estava no meio.

D: Mm.

K: Desse grupo.

D: Uau !

K: Foi. Eu falei para ele que eu estava no meio desse grupo.

D: Você foi bem honesta.

K: Eu fui. Aí eu falei para ele que eu também estava, e que a gente estava mesmo combinando de chegar para o outro—para o—ah, esqueci o nome. Para o—sócio.

D: Mm hm.

K: E pedir aumento, já que ele não estava querendo dar o aumento para a gente.

D: Mm. Mm hm.

K: Aí—ele falou que não era assim, que tinha que ter paciência, não sei o que. Eu falei, "Está bom." Aí eu falei com ele que eu precisava—

“Fine.” Then I told him that I needed—[...] I told him that I wanted to come here [to the village]. To see my family.

D: Mm hm.

K: Because when I would call there, it was just talk saying that there were problems, whatever—I got worried. I told him that I wanted to go back. And since I’d been there for a year, you know? So he said, “Then let’s make a deal. You go—but when you come back, we’ll sign you up as an officially-registered employee with rights.”

[...] eu falei para ele que eu queria vir aqui. Ver minha família.

D: Mm hm.

K: Porque quando ligava para lá, era só falando que tinha problemas, não sei o que—eu fiquei preocupada. Eu falei para ele que eu queria vir. E como já tinha um ano que eu estava lá, né? Aí ele falou, “Então vamos fazer uma combinação. Você vai—mas quando você chegar a gente registra.”

Instead of getting the raise, Kátia ended up leaving labor and returning to the safety of the village. But her same rhetoric – particularly the density of the “we” – could be heard when people talked about wage increases in the countryside, too. Josef and Demétrio, for example, described a rural day-wage increase in the same pronouns that Kátia had used, “we” and “they:”

J: In the same way that there is going to be a raise in the minimum wage, we raise the day-wage.

Du: Mm hm.

J: And in keeping with the increase in products. In food, you know? In food products. Those things. Then we increase it. Because those things are going to have a higher cost, you know?

Du: Mm hm.

J: So we have to increase the price [pause] of our work, of the value of work, to be able to buy those products.

[...]

De: Yeah, at, at the beginning, they’re not going to want to go up [on the wages], you know? Because he’s the one who’s going to pay. But we say that it’s – necessary to go up, because the costs –

Du: Mm hm.

De: --of life generally increase.

Du: Mm hm.

De: For example, if he gets [a pension equal to] the minimum wage—

Du: Mm hm.

J: Da forma que vai ter um aumento do salário, a gente aumenta a diária.

Du: Mm hm.

J: E conforme o aumento dos produtos. De alimento, né? De alimentação. Essas coisas. Aí a gente aumenta. Porque esses produtos vai ter um custo maior, né?

Du: Mm hm.

J: Então a gente tem que aumentar o preço [pause] do trabalho da gente, do valor do trabalho, para poder comprar esses produtos. [...]

De: É, no, no começo, eles não vai querer aumentar, né? Porque é ele que vai pagar. Mas a gente fala que é – preciso aumentar, né, porque os custos—

Du: Mm hm.

De: -- de vida geralmente aumentam.

Du: Mm hm.

De: No caso, se ele receber um salário—

Du: Mm hm.

De: --aquele salário dele vai aumentar.

[...]

Tipo assim. Tipo por obrigação, ele vai ter que aumentar a diária, né? Que ele vai pagar.

De: --that minimum wage of his is going to go up.

[...] Like this. Like an obligation, he's going to have to increase the day wage, you know? That he's going to pay.

Du: Mm hm.

De: But generally, the one who goes—who, who give it a value, like that, is the person who is going to do the work.

Du: Mm hm.

De: Mas geralmente quem pega—quem, quem dá um valor assim, é quem vai fazer o trabalho.

And Carlos also used the “we” to describe this same process:

C: Because—The ones who hire for day-labor here are the people who get retirement pensions [which are set by the minimum wage.]

D: Mm hm. Ah.

C: So then we go—ah, um. “Dude, the minimum wage went up. Nah, let's increase our day-wage, how about it?”

D: Mm hm.

C: “And now what are we going to work for?”

D: Ah ha.

C: “Duuuude! Hey, twenty-something.” “No! No. Thirty bucks. Thirty bucks.” “Then let's go.” Now you don't work for anyone for less than thirty bucks, no way.

D: And there —you—are there people who don't want to pay thirty? There was that cro—

C: Oh, there are! Now, no. Because now—Holy Mary, it went up for real. But at the beginning, for you to write it down, that—it was twenty-five.

D: Mm hm.

C: So then we went and changed it to thirty. So it's already gone up by five reais.

D: So you—

C: Some of them cried [=complained]. No way, dude!

D: -- did you have to pressure them a little bit?

C: Yeah, then some of them said, “No, dude, see, I pay twenty-seven.” “Nah, nah. [Duff laughs.] Our representative is at thirty bucks. If you want to do it at thirty bucks, then I'll go.”

“Ah, then come on. Then come on.” Then,

C: Por causa que— Quem tem serviço aqui é os aposentados.

D: Mm hm. Ah.

C: Aí nós vai—ah, um. ‘Moço, o salário aumentou. Não, vamos aumentar nossa diária, vamos?’

D: Mm hm.

C: ‘E agora vai trabalhar como?’

D: Ah há.

C: ‘Mooooço! Ah, vinte e pouco.’ ‘Não! Não. Trinta contos. Trinta contos.’ ‘Então embora.’ Agora você não trabalha para ninguém por menos de trinta contos não.

D: E tem—você—tem gente que não quer pagar trinta? Teve aquele mult—

C: Ah, tem! A—agora não. Que agora—Vixe, foi mesmo. Mas no começo, modo de você botar, que --estava vinte e cinco.

D: Mm hm.

C: Aí nós já pegou e mudou para trinte. Então já foi cinco reais.

D: Então vocês--

C: Uns chorava. Não, moço!

D: --vocês teve que pressionar um pouco?

C: É, aí uns falaram, “Não, moço, é, eu pago de vinte e sete.” “Não, não, [Duff laughs.] O vogal é de trinta contos. Se quiser de trinta contos, eu vou.” “Ah, então vem. Então vem.” Aí, por causa de aí—mas aí só aí no começo de ali, quinze, vinte dias. Passou de—vinte dias, pronto, aí todo o mundo já sabe. “Não, mm, fulano de tal cobra—trinta contos.” “Fulano de tal cobra trinta.” Então aí ninguém chora não.

because of that—but that’s only at the beginning, fifteen, twenty days. After—twenty days, it’s done, then everyone already knows. “No, mm, so-and-so charges—thirty bucks.” “So-and-so charges thirty.” So then nobody cries over it, no way.

This was how the increase in the minimum wage turned into a raise for sertanejos: not automatically, but through a conversation, a conversation held in terms of the “we.” Sertanejos, when describing these conversations, often explicitly used the word “value.” *He didn’t value the work that we were doing there.* Or again: *The one who gives it a value is the person who is going to do the work.* It was as if the brief moment of violation, in which the wage rate seemed not immutable but instead *set by us*, was also the moment when value became nameable as such.

These moments happened rarely. In general, sertanejos spoke of wages and prices as a foregone conclusion, an external necessity. When they did otherwise, however, as Kátia did in assembling her teasing co-workers at the company house, they changed the status of value: they brought value inside. Margarita, considering the nails that she herself painted, had spoken of “the time. The labor.” When he spoke in terms of *we*, Josef could say something different. What he talked about was “our work. The value of work.”

Coda to Chapter 6

When Celso returned to Maracujá, he had something to show. Red and metallic, hard and curved, his brand-new Honda motorcycle was constantly being ridden by one or another young person. Celso lent it out with an air of somber generosity, and the riders would kick up dust on all four of the village's dirt streets. I never saw the bike dirty, though. Celso cleaned it with the same meticulous attention that he had once devoted to washing huge vats at a yogurt factory in the city. Six months of this job had been enough to help Celso make the down payment on the motorcycle, and not long afterward, he quit work and rode back to Maracujá, his most tangible urban victory being the very vehicle that took him out of the city.

Back at the village, Celso found himself facing a decision familiar to rural motorcycle-owners. He could continue making monthly payments to the dealer until the motorcycle was paid off, but this would require him to find some regular source of income. Or he could stop paying, and the bike would slowly drift into the demimonde of “Pokémon” vehicles. The term *Pokémon* played on the similarity between the name of the popular Japanese cartoon character and the participle *pocado*, itself derived from a Tupí word meaning “to explode” (Navarro 2005: 463). An “exploded” motorcycle was one that had no legal title because of debt problems. Rural people avidly bought and sold these illicit vehicles, albeit at a steep discount. On a Pokémon motorcycle Celso could ride all around the countryside, where the police rarely checked vehicle documents. But he would not be able to drive it back to the city, under peril of impounding. Moreover, his federal ID number would appear on the national debtors' list: his name, as people said, would get dirty.

So Celso could leave labor and leave the city, but some things he could not leave. The motorcycle bound him. He would always be either its responsible owner or an unrepentant debtor.

Celso's red motorcycle shone as an especially bright example of a very general situation. When it was not motorcycles, it was matches, candy, kilos of rice, or cheap jewelry. Commodities entangled themselves in daily activities in the village, and no-one, not even the poorest people, could avoid it. These commodities circulated *as* commodities, brought in bags on the dusty bus, bought with cash or promises, passed across the worn counter that turned someone's living room into a makeshift general store. They were building-blocks for survival. In order to bathe, dress, or eat, everyone needed them.

Often the sphere of their circulation remained somewhat disarticulated from the equivalent urban sphere—at a protective distance, in some sense, or behind a cushion available only to villagers. Just as Celso could sell an untitled motorcycle inside the bounds of the countryside, a desperate father could “buy” food from a storeowner in exchange for some self-humiliation and a vague declaration of his intent to repay. A daring debtor could get months of free use out of a couch by dodging the roving *mascate* when he visited to collect the installment payments. Commodities, once they entered the villages, might be exchanged for undocumented money, for honor, or for wiles, and these were all markets in which a city-dweller could not participate directly.

But if the people remained restricted to one market or another, the commodities did not. They flowed in from the city, and then, transmogrified into the milk, manioc, coffee, and pineapples that the villages produced, they flowed back outwards again. Commodities – as such— were crucial components in the activity of every person in the villages, every day.

The commodity maintained these people's relationship to capital through a durable, lasting, daily connection. Sertanejos became immersed in commodity relations in earliest childhood, long before they entered the workforce, and they required these relations for sustenance even when unemployed, sick, or retired. In this regard, of course, sertanejos resembled many other people well beyond the sertão. The most regular link between humans and capital is not labor (pace Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]); it is the commodity-form. Inside the reserve army of labor, this link had special importance. It held strong during the episodes of distance from the workforce that sertanejos regularly faced. And the link had something less than totally voluntary about it. Celso could use a motorcycle to exit his job in the city, but he could not simply abandon the motorcycle. He could leave labor, but the commodity followed him.

Through commodities, people continually rebuild their relationship to capital, even when separated from the labor force. This is perhaps one reason why *Capital* begins not with a discussion of labor, but with an analysis of the commodity.¹ In the biography of any particular person,² the relation to the commodity precedes the relation to labor; one begins consuming standardized objects long before one begins working standardized hours. The history of capital, Marx argues, can run along a similar trajectory. Producers may find themselves under the domination of merchant capital as a precursor to the subsumption of their labor.³ So,

¹ I owe this insight to conversations with Joe Grim Feinberg and to the teaching of Moishe Postone.

² At least, any person living in a free-labor situation where capital is well-established as the social dominant. The inducement to labor can precede the commodity in notorious colonizing contexts, such as enslavement.

³ One account, from *Capital*: "It will suffice merely to refer to certain intermediate forms, in which surplus labour is not extorted by direct compulsion from the producer, nor the producer himself yet formally subjected to capital. In such forms capital has not yet acquired the direct control of the labour-process. By the side of independent producers who carry on their handicrafts and agriculture in the traditional old-fashioned way, there stands the usurer or the merchant, with his usurer's capital or merchant's capital, feeding on them like a parasite. The predominance, in a society, of this form of exploitation excludes the capitalist mode of production; to which mode, however, this form may serve as a transition, as it did towards the close of the Middle Ages. Finally, as is shown by modern "domestic industry," some intermediate forms are here and there reproduced in the background of Modern Industry, though

biographically and historically, the commodity has a primordial role to play, as capital's most naturalized, most forgettable, most quotidian, most unavoidable face.

The last three chapters have traced the properties that the commodity acquires when it circulates into the sertão. When sertanejos talk about a commodity, they give it presential, nomic, and projective qualities. They pivot between these modes, so that the commodity becomes, by turns, strikingly present, stably measurable, and changeable over time. Each mode has an essential part to play in the construction of a commodity, but I have argued that the nomic mode is what makes any particular commodity compatible with a system of value—what ties a commodity into the general social nexus ordered by commodity-value.

This nexus is not immersive or suffocating. These chapters have documented the power of counterscaling, which creates a separate sphere of circulation enclaved off from the total nexus. And yet the creation of this enclaved world ultimately reinforces the coherence of the value nexus itself. Value, I have argued, involves a necessary encounter with the outside, or, better yet, an encounter with the totality of possible human relationships as an outside. Value, rather than being taken as a pre-given quality or essence, should be understood as a relational effect that follows from the generation of externality.

But externality does not only live inside the commodity. Externality also lies at the heart of Marx's⁴ understanding of *labor*. Labor, for Marx, involves objectification: the working subject creates a real object outside of herself. What is particular about exploited labor is that the worker becomes so thoroughly separated from her product that it seems it was never hers at all.

their physiognomy is totally changed" (Marx 1976 [1867]: 645; see translation by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch16.htm>).

⁴ It is worth noting the similarity, in a very different context, with Munn's position. Munn speaks of productive exchange as "a separation from the material work products of one's own body that yields the work product of another foreign source transcending the (matrilineal) self" (1992 [1986]: 154). The outcome is "reattachment to the self of a dialectically transformed potency" (1992 [1986]: 154).

The object is turned into a power utterly foreign, utterly external; labor's product confronts it "as an alien power" (1988 [1844]: 61) Marx refers to this process as "alienation." Once the product of labor is so alienated, it gets reborn as capital.

The dynamic of exploitation, then, runs on the same cycle that we have observed in the construction of value: the generation of a realm that looms as the outside. Just as a buyer at the marketplace must learn that the price for passion-fruit comes from the outside, in that same way a field-hand on a mechanized plantation must accustom herself to the notion that she is planting passion-fruit that will go to the outside. The parallel is not a coincidence. Nor is it a coincidence that, as we have looked more and more closely at the role of nomic calibration, we have found more and more examples relating to a particular kind of commodity: labor-power. This commodity is what Margarita referred to as "the time. The labor." Labor-power serves as the master-commodity, the commodity rendered most insistently foreign; the wage serves as the core price.

For this reason, cultural analysis of the language of exchange can demonstrate the importance of the outside, but such an analysis cannot, by itself, show the origin-point of this outside. It can explain how the outside is understood, but not where it begins. That question calls for a map of the territory of labor, a reading of human production and the production of humans.

Section 3

Ownership

Chapter 7

The Act of Owning I: Property and the Speech of Memory

Actually the thing, considered merely with reference to [the owner's] will, is not a thing at all, but only becomes a thing, true property in intercourse

-Marx and Engels (1998 [1846]: 100; The German Ideology, I/ C/ 4).

Children, owners of animals

Núbia, age six, had grown used to the noises of life at the most bustling point in a tiny town. She and her parents lived in the cramped, peach-painted cement house that stood at the heart of Rio Branco— right between the dirt soccer field and the one-room bar where, only a few years prior, the ever-industrious Dona Eva had started selling the first cold beers in the area. Núbia's home was a constant crossroads. By day, women trooped past, guiding laconic donkeys that carried loads of clothes for washing in the chilly river. By evening, teenage revelers beeped by on motorcycles, while workers headed in from the dusky fields. The house did not belong to Núbia's parents: it was in the name of her grandfather. The land also did not belong to them: it had been loaned by extended family. But in this location that so many people shared, Núbia knew what was hers. She owned a chicken.

The chicken had been a gift to Núbia.

In her eye, it was hers
No olho dela, era dela
observed Núbia's mother Marisol. Núbia's ownership only extended so far, however. Her father decided to slaughter the hen, and he didn't bother to ask her permission.

But then, along with the dead chicken, he found that he had a problem on his hands. How to explain things to Núbia? With a loud laugh, Marisol recounted his solution to me. He took the easy way out: he told his daughter that the meat came from another hen.

The deception was, in some senses, a backhanded acknowledgement of Núbia's ownership. She deserved at least the decency of a delicate lie. And she was far from the only one. Children owned a significant proportion of the villages' animals.

But what did it mean for a six-year old to own a chicken? Núbia could not sell or slaughter the hen, and, as it turned out, her ownership could not even prevent it from being

slaughtered or sold by someone else. And yet she owned it. So what was the nature of Núbia's prerogative? In these chapters, I will argue that we can fruitfully understand ownership as a mode of memory. It is not just that each owned object becomes a concrete reminder of its owner; we can say more. Ownership is the capacity to compel memory. Núbia, as an owner, can induce other people to declare that they remember her.

This chapter and the next will focus closely on two sorts of owned objects: children's animals and adults' houses. In the villages, animals enter into a child's hands long before the child has ever worked, while houses accrue to adults as the fruit, often the terminus, of many years of toil. Animals and houses thus stand on either side of a person's labor career. For this reason, I argue, they have a special role to play in the emergence of sertanejo social class. We can use animals and houses to incite a dialogue between the anthropological literature on ownership, on the one hand, and Marxist class theory, on the other.¹

¹ This is the moment to confess that these chapters have a hidden goal, a goal achieved incompletely: to come to terms with the tensions of collectivist ownership at Maracujá. Maracujá was a federal government land settlement, expropriated under the pressure of the MST's occupation, owned by the nation of Brazil, and ceded to the MST to administer. By federal policy, each family received usufruct rights to a field and a house. But no-one could sell land, and families could be made to leave for serious breaches of the community rules. The land settlement was a community run with collective systems, not an assemblage of purely private plots.

This structure created an extraordinary level of local political controversy. Many farmers wished to become outright owners of their plots. Others, and in particular the movement leadership, looked upon such concerns as the expression of a troublesome individualism. From this point of view, excessive individualism threatened to derail the collective projects – shared coffee roasting, shared water, shared marketing – that could lead small farmers towards important technological advancements. Private ownership, even worse, raised the specter of many small land sales to some future plantation owner.

The individualist ownership/ collectivist ownership debate has been covered by an extraordinary volume of social science, including considerable research on the MST itself (See DeVore 2014: 679, DeVore 2015, and Wolford 2010 for a tiny sample). My hope here is not to revive that debate in particular, but instead to provide an oblique view onto it by examining forms of ownership that are *common* to both the semi-collectivist farmers at Maracujá and their non-collectivist neighbors at Rio Branco. Through that view, we may be able to challenge a certain reflexive hostility to ownership sometimes found on the left. It might turn out to be the case that farmers seeking ownership of their plots are, in fact, largely concerned with achieving something other than accumulation. They may be less anti-collectivist than pro-relationalist—that is, less interested in personal gain and more concerned with acquiring the tools necessary to build certain kinds of enduring exchange relations, such as relations of kinship and relations of hospitality. At the same time, allegedly individual forms of ownership may turn out to depend on communicative structures that are patently collective.

And these are traditions that have much to say to each other – if only they can keep up the conversation. They have prattled together in the past, as, for example, in the work of Annette Weiner and Max Gluckman, or, first and perhaps most influentially, when Marx and Engels read Lewis Henry Morgan. Over the past few decades, however, the interlocutors seem to have grown apart. Marxists who analyze class often invoke *the ownership of the means of production*, but the underlying definition of “ownership” tends to suffer from an unwarranted and surprising spirit of legalism. It is as if ownership were a simple fact determined by the law, rather than an always-ambiguous and fraught question worked out in the act of production.² Meanwhile, the communicative view of ownership runs its own set of risks. It often lacks an appreciation for inequality. While detailing the nuances in the process of owning, it can sometimes come up empty-handed when faced with the challenge of explaining why some people own more than others. Nor can the communicative view, by itself, explain why certain objects become capital, that is, the drivers of a productive inequality that grows and grows.

Class analysis can provide an answer to the riddle of inequality. In particular, class analysis offers reasons that explain why inequality *endures*. The notion of class has its ground in the ongoing practice of labor rather than in any single moment of expropriation, and thus, by considering class, we can offer an account of owning as a dynamic act that reproduces social difference on a systemic scale.

Because of this account, an approach to class could help us to move beyond the metaphors of enclosure and exclusion, metaphors that, in contemporary scholarship, have perhaps grown too strong. Property may involve theft (Proudhon 1873 [1840]), but it never just ends there; to turn into property, possession must receive the recognition – often the consent – of

² Production broadly understood here, including the production of social life and social relations.

the excluded.³ So consent combines with expropriation, free agreement takes place inside an unfree relation. This contradictory mix is exactly the kind of dynamic that Marxism knows how to diagnose, both inside the labor relationship and in the many social engagements that ramify outwards from it. Marxism can go beyond the condemnation of enclosure and interpret property as process—the process of building a social world at once stable and unequal.

And ownership, moreover, does not always exclude. An object that is mine may also in some sense be yours, and through such overlaps, an ownership system can generate social bonds. Anthropologists have been especially attentive to this process, with the ownership-as-communication literature serving as a contemporary example of the ethnological insight.⁴ This literature can inspire a careful depiction of the linkages through which groups – such as classes – come to achieve their coherence.

These two chapters, then, will try to make two literatures meet, once again, on the common ground of ownership. Chapter 7, the current chapter, proposes a modest amendment to the ownership-as-communication view, while Chapter 8 uses this background to suggest that we might understand class as a relation to homogeneous objects, with particular emphasis placed on objects we can call *premios*.

The chapters open by interrupting the tendency to think of ownership as a question of rights. In the place of rights, we see agencies: we can describe ownership as a bundle of socially-acknowledged capabilities, of capacities to do one or another kind of action, as recognized by one's peers. Ownership, then, becomes a set of imagined actions that a person can take in regard to other people, through the mediation of an object.

³ Thanks for this wise point are due to Jean Comaroff.

⁴ Both Structural-Functionalism and the exchange literature made similar interventions at earlier moments; see discussion below.

But one sort of action has a special role to play. I follow the ownership-as-communication literature in arguing that the defining agency of ownership, the capacity that underlies all others, is the ability to convey a message about the object. Owning is a communicative process, involving such speech acts as the famous no-trespassing sign. A person can do all of the other actions that, in some particular cultural context, are bundled as “ownership” – actions like using, or selling, or consuming, or bequeathing, or renaming – because that person’s ownership has successfully been communicated.

The no-trespassing sign is a *claim* to ownership, and theorists often conceive of ownership in terms of such claims. Communication, however, consists of more than claims. Communication requires hearers, responses, perhaps over-hearers, and certainly metapragmatics. These chapters try to examine owning as something less like a claim and more like a dialogue. In this dialogue, what is the characteristic position of the owner? I argue that we can think of owners less as *speakers who make claims* and more as *agents who elicit statements from others*.

These statements have a backwards-facing quality to them, since they tend to look back to the way that the owner became the owner of the object. In looking backwards, indeed, the chain can stretch far into the past, and one of the powers of ownership is the power to be remembered as the *former* owner of an object. Up to a certain point. Ownership systems also include a limit beyond which former owners do not have to be enumerated. Ownership, then, is the capacity to compel the discourse of memory; it gets defined by the zero-point, the last moment at which an object’s provenance must be recalled. This chapter will try to trace the chains that lead up to, maybe even beyond, that point.

Where animals come from

From humble donkeys to vengeful guinea fowl, animals surrounded nearly every house in the villages. And a significant proportion of those animals were owned by children. Why did children become owners? This question has a variety of answers. As the next chapter will note, people in the villages commonly responded to such inquiries by invoking the power of luck. But luck was not the only possible reply. In another sense, children had animals because animals were gifts.

Children generally acquired animals, whether directly or indirectly, through gift-giving. Some animals were given as gifts from the adults in a child's life; others were the offspring of animals that the child had previously received as gifts. A father or an aunt might give a duck to a special young relative, perhaps even to a child kinsperson who lived in the city and who would admire her absentee property during visits to the village.

The gift did not have to be a duck, of course: children owned chickens and donkeys, horses and cows. Not all types had the same significance. Adults would generally talk about their children's chickens with a laugh, as Marisol did. The cattle, though, were a serious affair, often given to mark an important life-cycle event. Oziel remembered the cows that he gifted to his family:

Always when [the children and grandchildren] were born, you know? I—gave, you know? It was a present, you know?	Sempre quando eles nasceram, né? Eu—dei, né? Foi um presente, né? (interview w/ c188)

But from the cows' perspective, perhaps not that much changed. Oziel went on to raise the cattle that he had given, keeping them with the same herd. And in general, it was adults who did the work of caring for children's animals—often, the very same adults who had given the

animals in the first place. Thus an animal, when seen in the pasture or the coop, might look exactly the same before and after it was given to the child. All that changed was the ownership.

But what exactly was this ownership? Children could not sell their animals. As Seu Inácio said about his teenage son Régis, owner of a horse:

If he goes to sell it, he can't. Because he's still a minor. He has to talk to me first.

Se ele for vender, ele não pode. Porque ainda é de menor. Tem que falar comigo primeiro. (int w/ t099))

The same was true for the poultry in Lara's household. Her children might trade chickens amongst themselves, but they could not sell them—in fact, they could not even prevent them from getting eaten.

L: So if we raise some little hens—

D: Mm hm.

L: Here, this girl here has “mine,” that boy there has “his.” [...] Moacir has some, Tomaz has some, Noé has some. When you think it's all settled, they put them all there, they leave them all for [their baby sister] Oriana. Like that, you know? [...] There's none of that business like—If we say, “Today we're going to kill one,” we kill it, we eat it. There's none of that business, like, “Hey! You're not going to kill mine.” You know?

D: Mm hm.

L: There's none of that business, like saying, “Well, then, I'm going to sell mine,” or anything like that—Here we agree, really. It's all the same to take any one, like that, and kill it. They don't have any of that business.

L: Se a gente cria umas galinhazinhas—

D: Mm hm.

L: Aqui, essa aqui tem “a minha” aquele tem “as suas.” [...] Tem de Moacir, tem de Tomaz, tem de Noé. Quando pensa que não, eles botam tudo aí, deixa ai tudo para Oriana. Assim, né? [...] Não tem negócio assim-- Se falar assim, “Hoje nós vai matar uma,” a gente mata, a gente come. Não tem negócio, “Ah! Não vai matar a minha não,” né?

D: Mm hm.

L: Não tem aquele negócio de dizer assim, “Ou então eu vou vender a minha,” ou outra—Aqui concorda, assim. Tanto faz pegar qualquer uma, assim, matar. Eles não tem esse negócio, assim. (from c031 interview 9-25-12)

Child owners thus lacked the capacity to stop others from using their possessions, a prerogative that social theorists often assume to lie at the core of property (Busse 2012: 111; Goody 1962: 287; see Maine 1908 [1861]: 225 on the “right against the world”). Along similar lines, Tereza made it clear that she felt no compunction to tell her children about her designs on their fowl.

T: Here it's like this. If the day dawns and I feel like eating the hen, I don't tell either one of them [her children.] (Duff laughs.) I go there and I grab the hen and I kill it and everyone eats. (Duff laughs more.) Nobody says anything. It's like that.

D: Mm hm [...]

Joaquín (Tereza's husband): With eating, there's no—With eating, there's no owner. (Everyone laughs)

T: It's everyone.

J: It's everyone.

T: What—whoever's there at the time eats.

T: Aqui é assim. Se amanheceu o dia, dá vontade de comer a galinha, eu não falo a nenhum deles dois. (Duff laughs) Eu vou lá e pego a galinha e mato e todo o mundo come. (Duff laughs more.) Ninguém fala nada. É assim.

D: Mm hm. [...]

Joaquín (Tereza's husband): Para comer, não—Para comer não tem dono. (Everyone laughs)

T: É todo o mundo.

J: É todo o mundo.

T: O que—quem estiver na hora, come.

(from int w/ t029)

Adults were also entitled to sell or slaughter children's cattle. Oziel, for example, explained to me his relationship to Venâncio's cow. Venâncio, still an infant, had received the cow as a gift. It came from his own father, who had no relation to Oziel. But since Venâncio was Oziel's grandson, the cow joined Oziel's herd.

O: There, I'm the one who takes care of everything.

D: I understand. Ah, that's right.

O: If I want to sell, I sell. If a problem comes up, I care for it. [...] I practically deal with everything.

D: Understood.

O: In his [the grandson's] name. It goes on yielding benefits there in his name.

O: Aí eu que tomo conto de tudo.

D: Entendo. Ah, está certo.

O: Se quiser vender, eu vendo. Se dá um problema, eu cuido. [...] Eu quase resolvo tudo.

D: Entendi.

O: Em nome dele. Vai rendendo aí em nome dele. (interview w/ c188)

This was not merely a situation in which adults claimed guardianship powers to manage a resource in a child's interests. The adults' authority was greater than that. Just as Tereza ate her children's hen because she felt like it, adults could sell a cow in order to achieve goals that, on any narrow view, had little to do with the child's personal benefit. Seu Xavier sold his son's cow to buy more land for himself. Russo sold all of his daughters' cattle so he could purchase a house.

Martinho, thinking of his children's cattle, articulated this as a general principle:

Because, in a time of need, we're not going to be choosy about whose, whose thing it is we're spending, right? Que, precisando, a gente não vai escolher de quem é que, que gasta, né? (from int w/ 134)

Martinho was expressing willingness to use the proceeds from one child's animal to assist the rest of the family. Indeed, this willingness helped to define the limits of the kinship unit itself, since children's animals could be legitimately disposed of by kin – only by kin and only in the interests of people from the kin group.

Ronaldo outlined these limits in similar terms. His son had a donkey:

But it's just that to use it (his son and wife laugh), anyone uses it. Everyone from the house uses it, right? Mas só que para usar, qualquer um usa. Todo o mundo da casa usa, né?

The “anyone” who could use the donkey was really *everyone from the house*.

Child ownership, indeed, helped to produce the kinship unit. Gifts of animals generally flowed along descent lines, from older to younger generations, and the patterns of *animal* descent would subsequently become a quite striking mirror for human kinship. When Noel's cow gave birth to calves, everyone in the village knew how to trace the calves back to their mother, and from there upwards to Noel's (human) father, who had given the cow to Noel to begin with. It was as if the calves were continuing the family's descent out one further degree.⁵

And in this extension, animal gifts helped to resolve a classic kinship strain. Sertanjeo kinship was defined by two distinct circles, the residence unit and the descent unit. On the one hand, animals were managed, consumed, and sold on a day-to-day basis by *households*—the people who lived under one roof, generally anchored by a focal couple and often including a third generation or a sibling or cousin. A child's animal was most directly linked to these people, since, as Ronaldo said about one of his household's animals, *everyone from the house uses it*.

⁵ For a fascinating description of cattle transfers inside kin networks – in a very different context – see Schapera 1955 [1938]: 240-1.

On the other hand, a household typically had ties to both the wife's kin and the husband's kin. These extended ties were maintained by gifts of animals, from grandparents or aunts and uncles on both sides, to children. The gifts reaffirmed the connection. The descent unit was strung together, like a chain linking the various homes of its members, by means of the transfer of animals—what we might think of as the traffic in chickens.⁶

In the face of each individual's perilous life-cycle transitions, these transfers assured the regeneration of the kinship group as a whole (Goody 1962), passing on a sort of shared selfhood.

As Maciele put it:

We who are—are weak [poor], who are little, what we want for ourselves, we want for our children as well.

A gente que é—é fraco, que é pouquinho, o que a gente quer para a gente, a gente quer para os filhos também.
(from int w c058)

The transfers had a decidedly downward directionality, orienting the descent group towards children and the future. Martinho turned towards this orientation when he thought of his daughters:

What I have, too, is theirs too.

O que eu tenho também é delas também. (from int w/ 134)

In a broad sense, *all* animals ultimately belonged to children. Seu Valentim, who at age 79 lived in a mud shack on the edge of his fields, spoke that way about his prized herd of cattle.

Seu Valentim: I say that it's mine, but I am already at the end of life. It belongs to my children. To the two girls.

D: Aaaah ha

SV: When I die.

Seu Valentim: Eu falo que é meu, mas eu já estou no fim da vida. É de meus filhos. Das duas meninas.

D: Aaaah ha

SV: Quando eu morrer. (from int w c181)

And Russo spoke similarly about the herd that he had been nurturing. It was really like a fund for his daughters.

⁶ Thanks to Jay Sosa for this important point and wonderful phrase.

C: We say that it's just mine, but it's all theirs too, because—

D: Mm hm.

C: (long pause) at the point when I die, it all stays for them anyway.

C: A gente fala que é só minha, mas é tudo delas também, porque—

D: Mm hm.

C: (long pause) na hora que eu morrer, fica tudo para elas mesmo (from int w c193).

At this level, ownership remained open and the lines between particular kin blurred, with no distinctions between parents and children ever really sustainable. At this level, all ownership was kinship ownership; the cow was owned, in some ultimate sense, by the descent group itself. And yet, in their daily discourse, *sertanejos* did not remain on such a level. They marked certain animals as the property of specific children; they even insisted on it. But what kind of ownership regime allowed the owners virtually no capacity to do anything – not even to prevent others from eating one's possessions? If ownership did not mean control, then what did it mean? What were the qualities of this property? What marked it? These are questions about which anthropologists have had much to say.

Ownership in anthropology

A critical knowledge of the evolution of the idea of property would embody, in some respects, the most remarkable portion of the mental history of mankind.

-Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1964 [1877]:13)

Anglophone anthropology has had a long engagement with the notion of ownership.⁷ That engagement might be said to have begun with two consecutive Henrys.⁸ In 1861, Henry Maine took the crucial step of dismissing – with modernist flair – the philosophical traditions

⁷ Notwithstanding the distinctions that will be made by some of the authors cited in this section, I use “property” and “ownership” as if they were essentially synonymous.

⁸ Hann suggests that they were preceded by two Adams – Ferguson and Smith. The Adams articulated a historical view in which a society's progression through four stages (hunting, pastoralism, agriculture, commerce) was marked by the emergence of different understandings of property (Hann 1998: 23).

that reasoned from purportedly basic human intuitions in order to deduce how property must have emerged.

These sketches of the plight of human beings in the first ages of the world are effected by first supposing mankind to be divested of a great part of the circumstances by which they are now surrounded, and by then assuming that, in the condition thus imagined, they would preserve the same sentiments and prejudices by which they are now actuated – although, in fact, these sentiments may have been created and engendered by those very circumstances of which, by the hypothesis, they are to be stripped (1908 [1861]: 226).

In suggesting that sentiments might be “created and engendered” by circumstances, Maine made a fundamentally ethnological wager. And he followed up on his wager: Maine looked in great detail at Roman and other ancient law, and he also considered Indian villages, Russian serfdom, and Turkish land policy. Although Maine achieved most fame for his conclusion that human laws tended to progress from a focus on status to a focus on contract, he also called attention to the historically-contingent nature of the right to property. Property was in fact not a single right, but a disparate set of privileges assembled into a “bundle of rights and duties” (1908 [1861]: 158).⁹ Property, in other words, was not a logical abstraction, but an accretion generated by history.

Maine analyzed property relations primarily as an outgrowth or effect of human relations such as kinship, citizenship, and strangerhood. Two decades later, Lewis Henry Morgan – the second Henry – would propose a different notion. Morgan grounded property not in the politics of human relationship but in the economics of human provisioning:

The earliest ideas of property were intimately associated with the procurement of subsistence, which was the primary need [...] The growth of property would thus keep pace with the progress of inventions and discoveries (1964 [1877]: 445).

⁹ This interpretation of Maine is influenced by Hoebel (1968) (Accessed on [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045000754.html), 5/3/2015, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045000754.html>).

Morgan was not, however, a utilitarian determinist. He understood property as a “germ of thought,” a mental form that, although linked to subsistence needs, also had its own logic of evolution. For Morgan, this logic made property into a dynamic force. Property became not an effect of human institutions, but their creator: ¹⁰

The growth of the idea of property in the human mind commenced in feebleness and ended in becoming its master passion. Governments and laws are instituted with primary reference to its creation, protection and enjoyment (1964 [1877]: 426).

Morgan’s telos reached into a future in which the motor-force of property would itself be (dialectically) overcome by the human mind whose germ it had initially been. In his celebrated words:

Since the advent of civilization, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects, as well as the obligations and the limits of the rights of its owner. [...] A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind (1964 [1877]: 467).

Both Maine and Morgan had broken with the Western philosophical practice of speculating about the origins of property. By insisting on the imperative to examine property

¹⁰ See the full quotation:

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of property in the civilization of mankind. It was the power that brought the Aryan and Semitic nations out of barbarism into civilization. The growth of the idea of property in the human mind commenced in feebleness and ended in becoming its master passion. Governments and laws are instituted with primary reference to its creation, protection and enjoyment. It introduced human slavery as an instrument in its production; and, after the experience of several thousand years, it caused the abolition of slavery upon the discovery that a freeman was a better property-making machine. The cruelty inherent in the heart of man, which civilization and Christianity have softened without eradicating, still betrays the savage origin of mankind, and in no way more pointedly than in the practice of human slavery, through all the centuries of recorded history (1964 [1877]: 426).

And also this reference:

The monogamian family owes its origin to property [...] The growth of the idea of property in the human mind, through its creation and enjoyment, and especially through the settlement of legal rights with respect to its inheritance, are intimately connected with the establishment of this form of the family. Property became sufficiently powerful in its influence to touch the organic structure of society (1964 [1877]: 329).

empirically, they laid out a research agenda for anthropology. But they laid out this agenda along different lines. Maine understood property as the effect of institutions; Morgan took it to be the origin-point of institutions. Thus they spoke to a 19th century on fire with left-wing challenges to the legitimacy of property—Maine pointing the finger towards legal arrangements, Morgan towards human production and accumulation.

The Maine and Morgan arguments called out for ethnographic investigation. The call did not go unanswered: the anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century devoted themselves to finding examples of ownership (see, for only a few illustrations, Malinowski 1922, Firth 1929: 351, Thurnwald 1932: Part III Ch. 10, Mauss 1967 [1925]¹¹). Given the empirical evidence, then, what did anthropologists find inside Maine’s “bundle?” What different kinds of relations could be thought of as property? What common thread might hold them together?

These issues were tackled in the *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* 1951 edition, which produced a now-classic definition.

The concepts of property and ownership are closely linked. Ownership is best defined as the sum total of rights which various persons or groups of persons have over things; the things thus owned are property (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1951: 148).

Notes and Queries went on to list a number of possible rights that, in varying circumstances, might or might not be found inside the bundle entitled “ownership.”

a) rights of use; b) right to control the use or disposal of property by others; c) rights of disposal; d) rights to derive an income or other benefits from the use of property by others; e) rights to be described as the titular owner of property without further benefits (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 1951: 151).¹²

¹¹ Note, in particular, Mauss’s reference to “Property Woman” among the Haida (in the section “The Force of Things,” under Ch. 2, Part III), and Malinowski’s evocative phrase: “ ‘Ownership,’ therefore, in Kula, is quite a special economic relationship” (1922: 94).

¹² Also see Sahlins 1972: 91-94.

For *Notes and Queries*, then, property involved the rights of persons over things. This assumption soon came under challenge by Gluckman.¹³ He insisted

Ownership cannot be absolute, for the critical thing about property is the role that it plays in a nexus of specific relationships. Hence in Africa there is no clear definition of ownership: when an African court makes a decision on a dispute over property it states that X stands in a masterful position in relation to that specific object, privilege, or person, as against some other person who is counter-claiming—i.e. the decision is made as between persons related in specific ways. Property law in tribal society defines not so much rights of persons over things, as obligations owed between persons in respect of things (1965: 46).

Gluckman thus redirected the anthropological investigation of property.¹⁴ What mattered was not the relation between a person and an object, but rather the relation between one person and another person *as expressed through* a discussion about an object. Gluckman's claim here matched up with a parallel development in US legal theory, where – as Hunt lucidly explains (1998: 9) – Hohfeld had made an influential plea for property rights to be understood as relations between people.¹⁵

[P]hysical relations are wholly distinct from jural relations. The latter take significance from the law; and, since the purpose of the law is to regulate the conduct of human beings, all jural relations must, in order to be clear and direct in their meaning, be predicated of such human beings (Hohfeld 1917: 721).

¹³ My analysis here is indebted to the detailed and cogent analysis that is (seemingly anonymously) posted at <http://what-when-how.com/social-and-cultural-anthropology/property-anthropology/>. “Property (Anthropology),” <http://what-when-how.com/social-and-cultural-anthropology/property-anthropology/>, accessed 5/4/2014.

¹⁴ Although Gluckman's 1965 book is frequently cited, Goody made a similar argument several years earlier: “As emphasized by Hohfeld and others, we are not dealing with rights of a person over a material object, but rather with rights between persons in relation to a material object” (1962: 287). And let me mention, in footnote form, that this chapter is being written several days after Goody's death—the moment when he has become himself an ancestor. We can only hope that he will bequeath to us some tiny part of his property in knowledge and insight.

¹⁵ Hunt (1998:9) includes a very revealing discussion of the influence that Hohfeld's paper exercised on anthropology. In addition to his orientation towards property as a social relationship, Hohfeld seems to have been sympathetic to the notion that property was a collection of rights rather than a single principle: “Suppose, for example, that A is fee-simple owner of Blackacre. His ‘legal interest’ or ‘property’ relating to the tangible object that we call land consists of a complex aggregate of rights (or claims), privileges, powers, and immunities [...] It is important, in order to have an adequate analytical view of property, to see all these various elements in the aggregate” (Hohfeld 1917: 746-7).

Property was first of all about persons: this union of legal theory and anthropological reason proved effective. Gluckman's relational view of ownership gained such wide popularity that it would eventually get described as the "general" anthropological understanding (Busse 2012: 111).

But in the relational view, why did relations matter? Gluckman had emerged from the British social anthropology tradition, and relations, according to this tradition, had a function. Social anthropologists were concerned with the property as a mechanism for the reproduction of the social structure itself. The inheritance of property was seen, in Goody's venerable words, as "part of the more general process of transmitting the cultural equipment of a specific group from one generation to the next" (1962: 273). Social anthropologists had a special interest in cataloguing the practices of collective ownership—the practices through which clans, moieties, and villages became "property-holding corporations" (Goody 1962: 293). When it owned property, a collectivity became visible and concrete, less nebulous, more analytically tractable for the anthropologist seeking to trace out its contours. The anthropological curiosity about ownership, moreover, was more than a matter for theory. For colonial civil servants, the details of collective property were an everyday problem, and social anthropologists could make quite pragmatic contributions towards solving this problem—sometimes in complicity or compromise with, and sometimes in resistance against, the colonial regime itself. Anthropological dissections of ownership thus had clear purposes, and often these dissections were carried out with great nuance (see, for example, Schapera 1955 [1938]).

By the later part of the 20th century, however, property itself had largely fallen off the Anglophone anthropological agenda. With the waning of direct colonial administration, anthropologists were less often called upon to translate non-European ownership systems into

European legal codes. Moreover, inside the discipline's new subspecialties, property fell uncomfortably between legal anthropology and economic anthropology (Hann 1998: 27; Busse 2012: 116). Perhaps the liveliest debate in this era was the Cold War sparring over the commons—an argument between, on the one hand, scholars who saw the “tragedy of the commons” as a flaw that inevitably marred joint ownership schemes and, on the other, researchers who identified functioning common spaces around the world (for overviews, see Hann 1998: 29 and Verdery and Humphrey 2004).

At the close of the century Hann remarked rather glumly, “During this most recent period, relatively few anthropologists have made property a main focus of enquiry” (1998: 29). That same year, in a different text, Hunt reached a similar conclusion: “The subject of property ought to be of vital interest to the economic anthropologist, and it has not been” (1998: 7). No sooner spoken than solved. Their two edited volumes set off a flurry of new publishing on the subject (Verdery and Humphrey 2004, Maurer and Schwab 2006, Strathern 1999, Strang and Busse 2011; Busse 2012 and Hann 2005 offer summaries.) The new work dove headlong into the details of decollectivization in former Soviet states and privatization in capitalist ones; it looked at the ownership of incorporeal objects like songs and airwaves; it wrestled with the question of whether or not culture can be owned. Above all, it attempted to understand the almost talismanic importance of ownership under neoliberal conditions.

One major line of influence on the new property literature has come from Strathern. She has repeatedly observed that the Euro-American category “property” has a silent but inextricable link to the category “person.” In assuming that property exists everywhere, she argues, anthropologists are smuggling in a conceptual frame that makes a strict distinction between people as subjects and things as objects. This frame does not hold up universally; to ask about

property in one or another context requires an investigation into the nature of personhood in that context. Strathern questions the premises of the debate between Gluckman and *Notes and Queries*, asking whether either persons or things can be said to be fixed. She seeks to

put something in the place of our western paradigm of property ownership which is itself so very much bound up with a special view of the person. In following Mauss's dictum that the thing given is personified, we have of course discovered that it matters also how the person itself is constructed (1984: 173).

Strathern serves as a major influence for Verdery and Humphrey, who challenge the coherence of each of the three main concepts – persons, things, and relations – at the heart of many anthropological accounts (2004: 5). Maurer and Schwab (2006) unfold a similar critique by examining the heartlands of contemporary capital, where, they argue, property has accelerated to such a velocity that property relations now have force entirely separate from (and even against) their former subject, the property-owning person. In this context, reassessments of ownership must therefore also be reassessments of personhood.

A second tendency in the new property literature has been a strengthened orientation towards process. Verdery and Humphrey urge scholars to examine property not as a static principle but as a “process of appropriation” (2004: 11). Along similar lines, Strang and Busse suggest that it may often be better to replace the term “ownership” with “owning.” They want, in other words, to “shif[t] the focus from property and property relations to notions and acts of owning and appropriating which precede, underwrite and inform property relations” (2011: 1). They want to look not at property rules, but at *how* people own.

The process orientation holds out hope for bridging the gap between Maine and Morgan. Do institutions create property? Do people pursuing property create institutions? Through a skillful application of practice theory, the problem is overcome: in looking at the act of owning,

analysts can see how property claims and institutions mutually create each other, every claim presupposing an institution, every institution resting on the claims that it elicits.

What may also prove interesting, here, is the corollary challenge to the notion of property *rights*. According to this perspective, to own means to do specific acts: to put up a fence around an object, or to sell it, perhaps, or to use it but not sell it. More specifically, to own means to be socially recognized as capable of doing those acts, whether or not one actually does them.¹⁶ The permissible acts vary depending on cultural context, and together they make up bundle of possible *actions* – not rights – that an owner is imagined to be able to take. Gluckman anticipated this approach: “what is owned,” he argued, “is in fact a claim to have power to do certain things with the land or property” (1965: 36). Ownership then becomes an issue of capacities for action, of the causal narratives that people tell about who can and cannot do what—as amply demonstrated by the Anglo-American doctrine of adverse possession, according to which a person who acts like a landowner, for a long-enough period of time and in a public manner, actually acquires legal title to the land in question (see Rose 1994: 14-15).

This approach, then, replaces *rights* with *agencies*.¹⁷ The question is not what entitlements one has, but rather what actions one is socially recognized as being capable of

¹⁶ One might be tempted to amend this to say that owning means being socially recognized as capable of *legitimately* doing those acts (i.e. legitimately selling, using, or fencing.) This invites an extended debate on the nature of legitimacy, but here I will argue that we can circumvent the question simply by thinking about owning as a social fact, a “bundle” (in Maine’s terms) of social actions. For children in the sertão, one does not acquire a chicken simply by saying “It’s mine,” just as, in the US, to sell a piece of land is not simply to exchange a piece of paper called a “title” for money. If it turns out that the land was not owned by the person who tried to sell it, then others will say, “She pretended to sell it but it wasn’t really hers,” and if an adult did not give the chicken to the child, then others will say, “That kid is just pretending it’s his chicken.” Selling land is a *social* power in the US, a social fact. It is not merely the case that one cannot *legitimately* do it without being the owner of the land, but also, more strongly, that one cannot really do it at all. Similarly, claiming a chicken is a social power in rural Brazil, and the overhasty claimant is not just illegitimate but actually mistaken.

¹⁷ Here, “agencies” rather than “agency” is used to mark a departure from the assumption that each human has one single, basic capacity to act or choose. The argument here is not about intrinsic individual agency, but rather cultural narratives that give an account of what a person (or other agent) is capable of doing. These narratives are socially recognized and contextual, not universal. Many of them exist, hence “agencies.”

doing. Such a substitution raises a broad set of possibilities – for example, instead of saying that people have a *right* to health, could one say that people should be *capable* of maintaining good health? Or that people should be *capable* of speaking freely? Capabilities would here be understood not as human universals but rather as modes of action constructed inside culture. So the point is not to ask whether someone “really can” freely vote, but whether that mode of action is understood as being available to her, whether it is an imaginable action.

All of these questions suggest a connection to the capabilities approach to social welfare analysis.¹⁸ But to restrict the discussion to ownership – and to return to the ethnographic level – one can note the fascinating issue raised here by Núbia and her chicken. At age six, Núbia could not buy or sell her livestock. The next chapter will introduce her peer Maiara, who received the gift of a chicken before she herself was born. Maiara could not yet verbally claim or even consume the animal. Yet, according to the owning-as-agencies account, the people around Núbia and Maiara must have recognized them as already being capable of doing something with regard to the chickens. Does the account work in this situation? If so, what was their power of ownership?

One way of considering this question is to ask a related one. What kind of acting does owning require, at its most basic level? Ownership may amount to a bundle of actions. But of these actions, which is most fundamental? Which defines ownership? Is it, as in Locke’s account, the act of mixing one’s labor with an object? Is it, as for Kant, the act of occupying? Is it, as Grotius claims, the act of receiving your property through the universal consent of humanity?¹⁹

¹⁸ See, for only a small beginning, Sen 1992 and Nussbaum 2000.

¹⁹ See Rose (1994: 11-12) and Strange and Busse (2011: 2-4) for summaries of these positions.

Legal scholar Carol Rose suggests a different kind of act: communicating. She examines the Anglo-American legal tradition, and she concludes that “the common law defines acts of possession as some kind of *statement*” (1994: 13). To own something is not just to appropriate it, but to appropriate it in a way that communicates to a public that the item has been claimed. Rose notes that when a US theater-goer wants to momentarily step away from the ticket line, he will habitually tell the person behind him that he is coming right back.

Possession now begins to look even more like something that requires a kind of communication, and the original claim to the property looks like a kind of speech, with the audience composed of all others who might be interested in claiming the object in question. Moreover, some venerable statutory law requires the acquirer to *keep on speaking* [...] Possession as the basis of property ownership, then, seems to amount to something like yelling loudly enough to all who may be interested (1994: 14-6).

To own land involves putting up a no-trespassing sign and maintaining it; to own a trademark requires sending letters to people who try to infringe. This kind of communicative “labor” (1994: 16), Rose thinks, is necessary for the shared social purpose of building a marketplace in which any possible buyer knows whom she should approach with an offer. Thus arises

the articulation of a specific vocabulary within a structure of symbols understood by a commercial people. It is this commonly understood and shared set of symbols that gives significance and form to what might seem the quintessentially individualistic act: the claim that one has, by ‘possession,’ separated for one’s self property from the great commons of unowned things (1994: 20).

Strang and Busse, influenced by Rose, expand her insight beyond the careful bounds of the “commercial people.” They propose a more general view:

Ownership is a culturally and historically specific system of symbolic communication through which people act and through which they negotiate social and political relations. This perspective highlights ownership as a set of processes through which people assert and contest rights rather than a static bundle or structure of rights. The acts which constitute possession—which announce it and continue to assert it – need not be verbal, but their intelligibility is critical to their success, as is the power and social positions of the actors making such statements (2011: 4).

In their opinion, owning is “social communication or symbolic action” (2011: 9).²⁰

The present chapter has been deeply inflected by the “communicative” view of ownership. But does the owner have to be the speaker? Here, I ask about other possible ways of conceiving the communicative relationship, hoping to consider an alternative that does not fit into the framework in which owning, acting, speaking, and asserting, on the one hand, all stand opposed to lacking, being passive, listening, and obeying, on the other. After all, Maiara did not communicate her ownership over the chicken while in utero. Ownership, I suggest, involves prompting speech from the other. It means making another person recognize you through an object. Adults have to do the work of saying, over and over, that a particular chicken is Maiara’s.

But if the other speaks, this does not mean that the owner herself is passive. I will argue that we can see owning as the act of eliciting speech from another about oneself, through an object. This speech produces something particular: memory. To own, then, is to make others remember oneself.

Speech

Max’s mother said that she hoped something different for him – something that involved going to school – but at age seven he wanted to be a cowboy like his father. Max already paid

²⁰ One might also note that Goody, in the early 1960s, made an evocative allusion to the notion that the transmission of property should be understood as one kind of “communicative act.” In his words,

The passage of goods can clearly be viewed as a mode of establishing or continuing ties between the relatively discrete local segments of descent groups, a function that may be served not only by transactions in property, but also by the transfer of other exclusive rights [...] Indeed, any communicative act between individuals or between members of different groups can fulfill a similar function, but transactions in exclusive rights, particularly, of course, those that relate to enduring resources, have an intrinsic capacity for promoting what may loosely be called solidarity, because of the ease with which they give rise to relationships that persist over time. I mean by this not only that the exchange itself may establish or strengthen a continuing relationship, but that the expectation of that event at some future date may have a similar result (1962: 293).

attention to the key cowboy words. I was interviewing his father Ronaldo about the household's livestock:

Duff: Is there, ah, a donkey?
Ronaldo: There's a donkey, too.

Duff: Tem, aah, jegue?
Ronaldo: Tem um jegue também.

Max, seeming to hear *donkey*, suddenly jumped into the conversation.

Max (out of the blue): The donkey is mine.
(Duff laughs) [...]
R: Yeah, the donkey there is his. Like he just said. That donkey is his.

Max (out of the blue): O jegue é meu. (Duff laughs) [...]
R: É, o jegue é dele aí. Que ele acabou de falar. É dele aquele jegue.
(from int w t069)

Here was the key component of ownership, as identified by Strang and Busse (2011) and Rose (1994): a statement in which an owner communicated his claim. Here, too, was another component worth emphasizing: a statement by a non-owner who recognized and amplified the claim of the other. This second sort of communication – by *non*-owners – has perhaps not received the attention that it deserves, and yet it may prove crucial in converting an ownership claim into an ownership regime.

In the villages, one could find plenty of children making the first kind of statement, the ownership claim. Seu Inácio heard it from his little grandson:

Duff: And does he know that the cow is his?
Seu Inácio: (Laugh) Ave Maria, he knows, sure!
D: (Duff laughs). Really!
SI: Ave Maria. He comes here—"That one is my cow, there's my cow." The kid is wise. Yep.

Duff: E ele sabe que a vaca é dele?
Seu Inácio: (Laugh) Ave Maria, sabe, aí!
D: (Duff laughs) É mesmo!
SI: Ave Maria. Chega aqui—"Aquele é minha vaca, lá é minha vaca." O moleque é sabido. É.
(from int w/ t090)

And Lara's children would even say it about dogs:

Lara: Even dogs! The puppies there.
Duff: Mm hm.
L: When the mother dog gives birth, they say, "This puppy is mine, that one is yours." But it just stays like that. I said, "Jeez, kids. It's not—there's not, like, that much division with things."

Lara: Até cachorro! Os cachorrinhos, aí.
Duff: Mm hm.
L: Quando a cachorra pare, eles falam, "Esse cachorro é meu, aquele é seu." Mas fica aí. Eu falei, "Nosso, meninos. Não é— não tem, assim, muita divisão com as coisas."
From c031 int9-25)

Adults may have felt by turns bemused and exasperated with the children's declarations. But they also took the words seriously. As it turned out, one principal vehicle through which children obtained animals was by asking for them—not claiming ownership, but recognizing someone else's claim through supplication. Requesting was a child's power, and adults often cast their gift-giving as a story about a request fulfilled. Rúbia and Tadeu remembered one such request:²¹

Duff: And how was it that you decided that the pig would be for, um, um, um—

Tadeu: For Marighel?

Rúbia: Because he himself was already asking, for real, when he would see—

D: Really?

R: --the pig, and despite him being young, but he already sees things, and he recognizes them, you know? He converses [*conversa*]— So then he—decided. “Mom, the little pig is mine.” So then—(laughs)

D: So then who—

R: The first moment that he saw the little pig, from then on he always asked that way, for a little pig, so we decided that the little pig is for him. (laughs)

Duff: E como foi que vocês decidiram que o porco seria para o, o, o—

Tadeu: O Marighel?

Rúbia: Porque ele mesmo já pedia, mesmo, quando via—

D: É mesmo?

R: --o porco, e a pesar dele ser novo, mas ele já vê as coisas, e conhece, né? Conversa— Aí ele— decidiu. “Mãe, o porquinho é meu.”

Então — (laughs)

D: Então quem—

R: Primeiro momento que ele viu o porquinho, aí sempre pedia daquele jeito, de um porquinho, então nós decidiu que o porquinho é para ele. (laughs)

(interview w/ c045)

Mom, the little pig is mine: Marighel's statement might have seemed like a claim to ownership. It took the same form as Max's declaration about the donkey (*The donkey is mine*), and Lara's children's declaration about the dogs (*This puppy is mine*), animal noun + present tense copula + possessive pronoun. Yet Rúbia characterized Marighel's statement not as a claim,

²¹ Another example comes from Maciele.

We give, they sell the animals, the animals end. “Mom, I want more. Mom, are you going to give me one, Mom?” “I am.” I give.

A gente dá, eles vendem, acaba. “Mãe, quero mais. Mãe, vai me dar uma, Mãe?” “Vou.” Dou.
(from int w c058)

but as a request: *he always asked that way*. It was this statement, understood by Rúbia as a request, that ultimately got him the pig.

What, then, is the difference between a request and a claim? What makes a statement into an ownership claim, it seems, is not merely the words from the claimant's mouth, but also their uptake by others. Nor is this uptake a purely individual matter. It fits into a broader ownership regime, a system of ownership norms that gets built through a characteristic repertoire of statements and replies. Often, in such a repertoire, it is the reply that renders the initial statement comprehensible. Max said, *The donkey is mine*, and Ronaldo replied, *Yeah, the donkey there is his*, thereby converting Max's statement into an ownership claim. Marighel, by contrast, said, *The little pig is mine*, and Rúbia turned it into not a claim but a request. In both cases, it was the adult's uptake that determined what kind of speech-act the child had performed. What deserves investigation, to amplify and expand Strang and Busse's important model, is communication about ownership as a dialogue—fundamentally, as a sequence not of statements but of pair-parts.

In the sertanjeo version of this dialogue, adults clearly have the upper hand. But the adults do not determine everything. It is interesting that Rúbia, in her narrative, doubled the moment of decision. Ultimately “we decided” that the pig belonged to the child—but first, Rúbia said, her son himself “decided” the pig was his, based on his ability to *see, recognize, and converse*.

Each of these verbs contains a crucial concept for sertanejos, but none more than *conversar*. A child's request is an important act in the sertão, in part, because it is a key moment of *conversar* – conversing – in which different positions in a hierarchy can for a moment be made equivalent. Sertanejos often referred to conversing as a core gesture of human mutuality. Perhaps the most important type of childhood conversing was the act of requesting a blessing,

dar bênção (see Introduction). Children performed this, their prototypical speech act, when seeing a senior adult relative for the first time in a given day. The child would say “Blessing” (*Bênção*), followed by the appropriate kinship term for the adult – “Blessing, Mom,” for example. The adult would respond

May God bless you, my daughter/ son.

Deus te abençoe, minha filha/ meu filho.

The term for this speech-act was *dar bênção*, “to give a blessing.” But, tellingly, it was the *child* who was said to “give the blessing.” When a child said, “Blessing, Mom,” people would subsequently report, “The child gave the blessing.” (*O menino deu bênção.*) It was as if an inversion had occurred: by conversing correctly, by making a proper request, the child had undertaken the adult’s task of giving the blessing, and the normal hierarchy could only be restored once the adult had spoken the blessing words in response.

In requesting the pig, Marighel had managed to converse well. He had built an equivalence: his act of *deciding* stood in parallel to his parents’ *deciding*.

Children’s requests, as a form of conversing, thus had a particular power. Max’s father Ronaldo told a story similar to Rúbia’s.

Duff (to Max): And how, how was it that you, that you received the donkey? (Ronaldo chuckles.)

Max: Daddy bought it. For me.

D: The— when was it—why was it—because of a birthday, or—

R: No, no way! Because he just kept asking for a donkey, wanting a donkey. So then I—a little donkey showed up there, small, the right kind. So I bought it for him.

D: Mmm hmmmMMMM!

M: Daddy has a little female foal too.

Duff (to Max): E como, como foi que você, que você ganhou o jegue? (Ronaldo chuckles.)

Max: Painho comprou. Para mim.

D: O— quando foi—porque foi—foi por causa do aniversário, ou—

Ronaldo: Não, nada! Que ele ficava só pedindo um jegue, querendo um jegue. Aí eu—apareceu um jeguinho lá, pequeno no jeito. Aí eu comprei para ele.

D: Mmm hmmmMMMM!

M: Painho tem uma poldrinha também.

I asked what it meant for Max to have a donkey.

R: No, just for, really, for him to have – ah –

R: Não, só para, mesmo, para ele ter—ah—

like, to say, you know? That he has it.
 D: Mm hm.
 R: To kill [i.e. satisfy] that wish of his.
 D: Mm hm.
 R: That anxiety he has to have a donkey, you know?
 D: Mm hm.
 R: He barely even rides it, really [...] It's just, really, we have here—it's because—a child asks, and then you say, "I'm going to give it so—he thinks that he has his own thing there."

dizer assim, ne? Que ele tem.
 D: Mm hm.
 R: Para matar aquela vontade dele.
 D: Mm hm.
 R: Aquela ansiedade que ele tem de ter um jegue, né?
 D: Mm hm.
 R: Ele quase nem monta não. [...] É só mesmo, a gente tem aqui, é porque—uma criança pede, e aí você fala, "Eu vou dar para—ele achar que ele tem o dele ali."

Max had conversed well enough to convince his father. And, in turn, what Ronaldo wished for his son was not simply to possess an object, but also to converse further. Ronaldo wanted Max not just *to have*, but also *to say [...] that he has it*. The mark of Max's ownership would be the future things that Max said.

Ronaldo also described his own internal speech. He said to himself, *I'm going to give it so—he thinks he has his thing there*. Here was another sort of talk about ownership. If owners could claim their own property, and if non-owners could request others' property, then owners could also carry out a classic Austinian move: giving away property by saying so.

This sort of speech act, the declared transfer of the animal, had a crucial role to play in child ownership. These declarations actually gave the animal to the child.²² Seu Inácio, for example, remembered the moment when his grandson became a cow-owner.

Seu Inácio: Because it was like this. The cow was his father's.
 Duff: Ah,
 SI: The father of this grandchild of mine.
 D: Ah, ok.
 SI: So then, the father came, and he passed the cow to the child. To his son.

Seu Inácio: Que foi assim. Que a vaca era do pai dele.
 Duff: Ah.
 SI: Desse neto meu.
 D: Ah, certo.
 SI: Aí, o pai chegou, passou a vaca para o menino. Para o filho dele.

²² Maciele, along similar lines, remembered her own words when giving a cow to a child:
 "Now this is going to be for my son." Yeah.

"Agora isso vai ser para meu filho." É.
 (from int w c058)

D: Mm hm.

SI: He said that it was the child's. So with that, we allowed it.

D: Mm hm.

SI: Falou que era do menino. Aí com isso nós deixou.

What convinced Seu Inácio to “allow it” and consider the cow to be the child’s property was that the father *said* it was. In the sertão, such statements had real consequences. They were the contracts. All livestock transactions, even sales between two adults, were conducted orally. Indeed, practically all contracts in daily economic life were oral, since a high proportion of people over forty had never been to school and did not read or write. Hence the ownership system rested, foundationally, on a set of oral statements that could be remembered and reproduced—not only by oneself but also by everyone else.²³ In the villages, even a child could look at a particular animal and immediately identify whose it was. Ownership was common knowledge, but for this common knowledge to come into existence, everyone had to hear and repeat the same story about who had told whom that the pig henceforth belonged to someone else.

The oral system had its dangers. People might disagree about exactly what terms had been reached, whether a deal had been closed, and even whether a particular cow was the animal in question or just another one that looked like it. So for the ownership regime to work at all, people had to spread widely the news of each other’s deals. Even more importantly, people had to share a firm commitment to particular norms about how to speak seriously. Hence the inveterate practice of chatting about deals, and hence, too, the importance of *conversar*. To speak words that had consequences: this was a skill that took practice to learn, and children practiced

²³ For cattle in particular, several non-oral signs also existed. Owners would sometimes, although not always, brand their cattle. Moreover, the state government of Bahia maintained a registry designed to guarantee that cattle had received proper vaccines against epidemics; owners were supposed to register their cows and bulls through an office in the city. But in the villages, everyone knew that neither the brand nor the registry was a completely accurate method for determining whose cows were whose. Some people would exchange cattle without changing the registry or brand. And when it was necessary to determine who inside a household was the owner of a cow – whether the cow belonged to the child or the father, for example – the registry and the brand were practically useless.

deciphering and producing such speech as they talked about their own animal ownership, all inside the safe confines of their kinship circles. Children's speech about animals thus operated as a sort of apprenticeship.

In an oral ownership system, declarations of intention had weight. If someone said that she intended to give, her statement mattered very deeply. Margarita, for instance, told the story of how her four-year old son Moisés had become the owner of an aging television.

Margarita: Ah, it was like this [...] Graziele, she bought a new TV.

Duff: Mm hm.

M: Really big, you know? Graziele, over there, Julinho's wife.

D: I know, I know. Mm hm.

M: So then, she went, and she was like, "Hey, Moisés, when a buy a television, do you want this one here for you?" Moisés said, "I want it, Aunt." "It's pretty old."

Margarita: Ah, foi assim [...] Graziele, que ela comprou uma TV nova.

Duff: Ah hm.

M: Grandona, né? Graziele, lá, a mulher de Julinho.

D: Sei, sei. Mm hm.

M: Aí, ela foi, falou assim. "Ô, Moisés, quando eu comprar uma televisão, você quer essa aqui para você?" Moisés falou, "Eu quero, tia." "É velhinha."

(from Entrevista com Margarita, 9-3-13)

Graziele's declaration of intent ultimately turned into an actual transfer.

According to Margarita's story, this transfer occurred, in part, through a specific kind of gesture: the elicitation of speech. Graziele elicited Moisés's declaration that he wanted the television. In effect, she produced his request for the object.

While Graziele had to elicit Moisés's declaration quite directly, such direct efforts were not always necessary. Sometimes, all that was required was the knowledge that a particular person was the owner. Lara told me how her ownership could provoke speech from her children:

Lara: Sometimes I don't say, "This one here is mine" [...] A chicken. The son says, "Ah, Mom, this one here is mine." I say, "Take it." Then again, Dad buys something. "Ah, Daddy, is it mine?" "It is." So then it just stays like that, you know? [Her children burst out laughing.] Sometimes we just buy it there, give it to them here. [more laughing.]

Duff: Mm hm.

L: The female donkey—their dad bought a female donkey [more laughing.] "Oh, Daddy. Is that donkey mine?" "Ah, take it."

D: Ah ha.

L: "It's for you." So then—[laughs] So then we left it, like, in the spoken word. It's theirs.

Lara: Às vezes eu não falo, "Essa é minha" [...] Uma galinha. O filho fala, "Ah, Mãe, essa é minha." Eu falo, "Pega." Outra hora, o pai compra uma coisa. "Ah, Painho, é meu?" "É." Então já fica ali, né? [Her children burst out laughing.] Às vezes a gente já compra ali, entrega para eles aí. [more laughing]

Duff: Mm hm

L: A jegua—o pai comprou uma jegua [more laughing]. "O, Painho. Essa jegua é minha?" "Ah, panha."

D: Ah ha.

L: "É para você." Aí então—[laughs] Aí ficou no dizer, assim. É deles.

(from int w/ c031)

As Lara noted, she didn't have to assert her own claim at all. *I don't say, "This one here is mine."* Her children's statements did the work.

And here was, perhaps, a key form of agency that came with ownership: the capacity to elicit speech from others. By owning, a person made others talk. Most obviously, a person made those others request the object, as Marighel had requested the pig. But that person could also elicited all sorts of other speech—the offers to purchase, the admiring comments, the gossip around the fire about who had bought which animal. To own was to become the subject of conversation; it was to be talked about. (Also to be talked *with*.)

This kind of agency – the agency to make others talk – may seem strikingly passive, hardly like a form of activity at all. And yet adults obviously enjoyed being talked about and even cultivated this talk in children, as Grazielle did. Indeed, this form of agency is fundamental to the construction of an ownership regime. Such a regime does not hold together simply because one or another person makes an ownership claim. It acquires its coherence when other people speak about the person's claim.

This chapter opened with the suggestion that ownership, in one or another cultural context, could be understood as a bundle of agencies, a set of actions that a person is believed to have the power to do. Now we can see that one fundamental power of ownership is indeed communicative power, as Strang and Busse argue. But this power is not just the power to talk. It is also the power to make other people talk.²⁴

At every step, talk underlay the ownership of animals in the villages. Through talk, people claimed animals, requested animals, and transferred animals. And owning, in general, rested on a whole latticework of comments, constantly uttered and constantly renewed. An owner could only secure her ownership if other people consistently talked about her as the owner of the animal. This was true for no-one more than children, who could not count on a burned brand or a state vaccine registry to identify their possessions inside the household's herd; children's ownership was entirely a matter of speech. As Lara put it, their ownership was *left in the spoken word*.²⁵

In this regard, children's animals served as a tool for making children's class. Specifically, children's animals were an oppositional tool, a tool that marked off the owner's distance from the labor market – the kind of tool that, in the next chapter, we will call a *premio*. These animals were not owned through the written contracts that prevailed in the world of labor,

²⁴ At sites other than the sertão, of course, the relevant communicative mode may not be talk per se, but rather fencing, signage, or one or other specialized type of writing. My supposition is that in most of these cases, the power that matters is not just the power to communicate but also the power to become the topic of communication. Here, however, I confine myself to speaking about animal ownership in the sertão, where talk is what matters most of all.

²⁵ This dynamic can help us towards a re-reading of Bourdieu's argument about the emergence of symbolic capital. In Bourdieu's account, which verges on a modernization narrative, certain societies "lack even the most elementary instruments of an economic institution" (1977: 185), the absence of developed credit, literacy, and educational credentialing being especially salient. Bourdieu's logic points towards the progressive development of more and more complex forms of symbolic capital that are capable of congealing accumulated privilege. What we have seen here, however, is a situation in which formal instruments such as writing are available and yet remain unused. Sertanejos could, but do not, register their cattle. The decision to use or not to use an instrument is not merely a matter of the level of technology developed in a given society; people make decisions about which sort of technology to use, and these decisions, in their very form, can construct a particular ownership regime and thereby achieve particular effects. The refusal to use cattle registration is part of what constructs the household; similarly, oral recordkeeping generates the village's social bond.

the sort of agreement that held sway when sertanejos went to work in the city or the large plantation. Children's animals conformed to different rules. They were lifted out of the normal terms of labor and owned on other terms, the terms of the oral agreement.

This kind of orality lay at the foundation of the peasant's classed identity in the sertão.

Older sertanejos would often assert their dignity to me with a phrase:

I don't have reading [i.e. I don't know how to read], but I know how to converse. Não tenho leitura, mas eu sei conversar.

As a peasant, one wielded the special power of talk, a power expressed in the gravity of serious speech and displayed in the delicate skill of *conversar*. In using animals to teach one's children this power, one rebuilt the foundations of a world where papers and labor-discipline counted for less than the honors of the knowledgeable tongue.

The future of animals

Aldo, perhaps more than anyone else at Maracujá, knew the city. Years ago, he stopped by the village on a vacation, to visit relatives. He fell in love with Selma at Maracujá and married her there; their baby child lived there and so, sometimes, did he. But he oscillated between Maracujá and the noise of Belo Horizonte. Aldo had been the one who opened the job possibilities of that huge city to a whole generation of young people at Maracujá, many of whom followed him to find employment there. He himself labored in a furniture factory. In 2012 he had quit the furniture job and moved back to Maracujá, although he was already thinking about the city again.

In the midst of his trips back and forth, Aldo took some of his money and bought a cow for his infant son. Aldo explained the purchase:

It's like this. He—now it's his future because — we give it to him, you know? If—We might even sell it if, if there were a, a greater need. But—but really we give it to him for—for that very reason, so that we won't sell it. So that it doesn't end, you know? Right away, right away, we say that. "It's his." So then, just if there were a greater need. Something like— bigger, for us to be able to get rid of it. But, otherwise, we just leave it there for him there. [...] Yeah—we gave it to him. It's his. Because—if I have a thing and I don't give it to him, I can sell it. If I say that it's his, then it is. And I can't — my wife, too, won't let me sell it any more. Because if you gave it, it's been given [...] Yeah, when somebody would come by to ask—"Ah, yeah, no, yeah, it's nothing of mine."

É tipo assim. Ele—já é o futuro dele, porque a gente—a gente dá para ele assim, né? S-- A gente pode até vender se, se caso uma, uma necessidade maior. Mas—mas já dá a ele para— por isso mesmo, para a gente não — vender. Para não acabar, né? Já—já fala logo. "É dele." Aí só se for por uma necessidade maior. Uma coisa de uma—maior, para poder desfazer. Mas, por não, deixa aí para ele aí. [...] É—nós deu a ele, é dele. Que—se eu tiver uma coisa e não der a ele, eu posso vender. Se eu falar que é dele, aí é-- já não — a mulher também já não deixa eu vender mais não. Que deu, está dado. [...] É, quando tinha uma pessoa perguntar—"Ah, é, não, é, não é nada minha." (from int w/ c170)

The son's ownership slowed circulation; it steadied the rhythm of the object world and built an alternative to labor. Here, the dynamic bore a striking resemblance to the "bovine mystique" that Ferguson, working in a different pastoralist context, so perceptively observed (1985). Aldo had converted his money into the "signal currency" of cattle (Sansom 1976), a specialized medium designed to facilitate social bonds and to impede re-conversion into the standard cash scales of the markets (for more on this widespread pastoralist practice, see Comaroffs 2005)²⁶.

But what would ultimately happen to Aldo's son's cow? In what sense did an animal belong to a child? Adults and children both had the same answer: in the long run, the proceeds would go towards a major expenditure for the child's benefit. Seu Inácio put it like this:

Seu Inácio: As long as we're here , it [his grandson's cow] is here. So we've got to leave it there. But if we got to the point where we ended up leaving here, we would take it, sell it, and — use the money for him.

Seu Inácio: Enquanto nós estiver aqui, esta aí. Aí tem que deixar aí. Mas se for um ponto, nós chegar a sair daqui, pega, vende, a—aplica o dinheiro para ele.
Duff: Mm hm.

²⁶ Also see the Comaroffs' argument in *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2*: "Because they were the means, par excellence, of building social biographies and accumulating capital, cattle were the supreme form of property here; they could congeal, store, and increase value, holding it stable in a world of flux" (1997: 174).

D: Mm hm.
SI: Yeah—yep. Any other thing for him.

SI: Foi—é. Qualquer outra coisa para ele. (int w/ t090)

Quitéria and Galileu, ages 12 and 13, were dreaming about these other things as they wandered with me down the path that led to the high pastures at Rio Branco. Both children told me that they planned to sell their cows to pay for college in Conquista. Quitéria said that she wanted to do law school – *that’s to be a lawyer, right?* she confirmed – and Galileu said he wanted to study agronomic engineering. *Maybe, Galileu joked, I’ll just sell mine to buy clothes.*

Jaqueline and Oziel’s children had already reached adulthood. One sold his cattle in order to pay for treatment for a spinal problem, although the treatment, sadly, did not work. Another used his cattle to buy a motorcycle. An even more striking example came from the forward-thinking Martinho, who, after lengthy consideration, sold his daughters’ cow so that they could become the first people in the village to own a computer.

Martinho: They [his daughters] had five [cows], too. But then—we went along—trying—to hold onto (*segurar*) a bit of money, and hold on to buy the computer for them—

D: Mmmm!

M: --and the result was that we sold a cow and—bought the computer.

D: Mmm—mm hm!

M: So that’s really a thing that—I think that it gives them more interest (*influência*), because now they have a thing at home that they know they bought, you know—

D: Mm hm!

M: --with their own money. Even though they don’t take care of them [i.e. the girls don’t take care of the cows], because they don’t know how, but, anyway, it’s definitely theirs.

Martinho: Elas tinham cinco também. Mas daí – a gente foi—tentando – de segurar um dinheiro, e segurar para comprar o computador para elas—

Duff: Mmmm!

M: --e resultado que a gente vendeu uma vaca e – comprou o computador.

D: Mmm—mm hm!

M: Aí já é uma coisa que – eu acho que já dá mais uma influência para elas, porque elas já têm em casa uma coisa sabendo que comprou, né—

D: Mm hm!

M: --com o próprio dinheiro delas. Mesmo que elas não cuidam, porque não sabem cuidar, mas – de qualquer maneira, é delas mesmo.

And so, after careful planning, Martinho’s daughters saw the result of their cow.²⁷

²⁷ Martinho continued:

For a child, then, to own an animal was to have a long-term claim to a share in the household's resources. The child's claim became visible in a particular prerogative: the replacement. Adults could sell an animal for their own purposes, but then those adults eventually

M: Yeah, this whole thing was thought out for more than a year, dude.

D: Wow.

M: Like this. In terms of saying, "Let's buy on such-and-such day," we started thinking that way more than a year in advance.

D: And why did you want this, this computer so much?

M: I think that in, in the current age, the information age—

D: Mm hm.

M: —if, if you can get rid of something and buy a computer, I think that's viable.

D: Mm hm.

M: Particularly someone who has children of the age that mine are, in school, you know?

M: I think that it's going to help a lot with, with—with studying.

D: Mm hm.

M: Develop more in studying, a research project. There are lanhouses [internet cafés], right? But it's never—the same as the person being relaxed there, with a cool head, without knowing that his time—looking for the thing that he—needs, you know?

D: Mm hm.

M: In a lanhouse you've got a time, you pay for that time, so you have to be quick—

D: Mm hm.

M: —and precise. At home there's more calm.

D: It's true.

M: There's more time, in a free hour, when you're not—working or in in school. And so it's useful for people who are in school and for people who aren't in school too.

D: Yeah. Yeah.

M: We start discovering lots of good things.

D: I agree.

M: Too bad that there isn't internet here yet, but when there's internet—

D: Yep.

M: —it's going to help a lot.

M: Ah, foi pensado mais de um ano, moço.

D: Uau.

M: Assim, para falar, "Vamos comprar tal data," começou a pensar, assim, antes de um ano.

D: E porque é que vocês queriam tanto esse, esse computador?

M: Eu acho que na, na era de hoje, a era da informática—

D: Mm hm.

M: --quem, quem puder desfazer de uma coisa e comprar um computador, eu acho que é viável.

D: Mm hm.

M: Ainda mais quem tem filhos na idade que eu tenho, estudando, né?

D: Mm hm.

M: Acho que vai ajudar muito na, na—no estudo.

D: Mm hm.

M: Desenvolver mais no estudo, uma pesquisa. Que tem as lanhouses, né? Mas nunca que é—igual à pessoa estar sossegado ali, de cabeça fria, sem saber que tem o tempo dele, procurar aquilo que ele está—precisando, né?

D: Mm hm.

M: Na lanhouse você tem o tempo, você paga aquele tempo, então você tem que ser rápido—

D: Mm hm.

M: -- e preciso. Em casa tem mais tranquilidade.

D: É verdade.

M: Tem mais tempo, numa hora de folga que não estiver—trabalhando ou estudando. E aí serve para quem estuda e para quem não estuda também.

D: É. É.

M: A gente começa a descobrir muita coisa boa.

D: Concordo.

M: Pena que ainda não tem internet aqui, mas na hora que tiver internet--

D: É.

M: --vai ajudar muito.

(from int w/ c134)

had to replace it, “putting another one in its place.”²⁸ Marisol, laughingly remembering how Hugo had killed Núbia’s chicken and then lied about it, concluded:

I think that up until today, he hasn’t put another one in its place yet.	Eu acho que até hoje ele não botou outra no lugar ainda.

Such a debt to a child could stretch out for a long time. Dona Zaira, for example, explained how her husband had bought land with their son Aureliano’s cow.

He sold [the cow] and deposited the money. Afterwards his brother was going to sell a little bit of land. He went, withdrew the money, and bought the land. So then after – when it, it rains, when things get better—to grow some fodder, that’s when he’s going to buy the other one for Aureliano.	Ele vendeu e depositou. Depois o irmão dele— ia vender— um pedaço da terra aí. Ele pegou, tirou o dinheiro, e comprou a terra. Aí depois que – na hora que—que chover, que melhorar o – criar pasto, aí que ele vai comprar o outro para Aureliano. (From interview w/ t050)

Aureliano would not get a new cow for some time. And in a more general sense, animals, when owned by children, managed to activate a logic of the long term. These animals were not to be sold, but rather held. They evoked prospective dreams about major purchases to be made in the future. And, if sold, they entailed lasting debts. They made the family owe something to the child.

Children who owned animals were children who had a lien on a piece of the household, and this lien remained alive and real even when the animals themselves had long ago been bargained away. The lien, as we will see, had to be renewed consistently through dialogue, with family members recollecting the animal and rearticulating the child’s title to compensation. In this sense, ownership meant memory. By owning an animal, the child evoked speech from others, like the phrase that Aldo spoke to people who wanted to buy his son’s cow – “Ah, no, it’s

²⁸ Compare with Schapera’s interesting observation that, among the Tswana in the early 20th century, a father who is managing his son’s cattle “may use the cattle freely, and may even sell or slaughter them, as he thinks fit, on behalf of the son. But he may not dispose of them for his own benefit, and should he do so he is expected to replace them” (1955 [1938]: 240).

nothing of mine” – and also like the statements through which Marisol and Dona Zaira marked their husbands’ duty to replace their children’s sold livestock. These were words that recalled the child. A child who owned an animal acquired the agency of making others talk about herself—and talk about herself in a particular way. Every time the adults of the household made an inventory or dreamed up a long-term plan, the child’s name would have to enter the conversation. To own an animal was to hold the prerogative of being remembered.

Ownership and memory

Because she was the owner of a chicken, Núbia deserved to be lied to, and she deserved to be remembered. When children owned animals, however, the person who needed to be remembered was not only the child. It was also the donor—the person who had given the animal to the child in the first place.

Sertanejos often told stories that explained where a child’s animal had originated. The importance of this gesture became clear to me during a conversation with Tereza and Joaquín about their children’s animals. I was asking how the household had gained its poultry.

Duff: How did Karine [their child] get her female duck?

Tereza: Oh, the female duck was—how do you say it?

Joaquín: It was a present that—

T: It was a present that she received from the man who takes the students to school in the van. He gave it to her, that very duck.

D: Ahh!

T: But the only thing is that here there was no male duck, so we asked Leonardo [a resident of the village] to take it to his house. Now there, she’s laid eggs, they’ve been taken. We’re going to bring her back home.

D: Ahhh!

T: Because she really wanted to have a little

Duff: Como foi que Karine ganhou a pata?

Tereza: Ó, a patinha foi—como é que chama?

Joaquín: Foi um presente que--

T: Foi um presente que ela ganhou do homem que carrega os alunos. Deu a ela, essa patinha mesmo.

D: Ahh!

T: Mas só que aqui não tinha o pato, aí nós pedimos a Leonardo para levar para a casa dele. Aí lá ela botou, já tirou, nós vai trazer ainda para casa.

D: Ahhh!

T: Que ela queria muito ter uma patinha. Gostava demais.

D: É mesmo! Então o—a—como foi que Paulo ganhou os, as galinhas?

duck. She liked it so much.

D: Really! So then ah—um—how was it that Paulo [another child of theirs] got the, the chickens?

T: And Paulo, it was his grandfather who gave him a little chick.

D: Ah!

T: This big. Then we went along raising [a brood], and we went along taking out these chickens, and it kept going until there was just one hen left.

D: Wow!

T: And from that hen, you can see there the outcome [i.e. the current chickens are the hen's offspring.] There's just one that wasn't.

[incomprehensible] It's the gray one.

J: What do you mean, the gray one? She's the daughter of the, the white one. That Dad gave him. Of, of— [...]

D (to Joaquín): And how was it that you obtained your chickens?

J: Ah, me—I don't even remember any more, all of that, how I got them. (Duff and Joaquín laugh a bit.)

T: That red one that you brought, wasn't it Seu Rian who gave it to you? Or did you buy it from him? [Duff yawns] Because you brought the little rooster and the hen, that chubby one that's—

J: I bought it.

T: --that's Rodilan breed.

J: I bought it.

T: Aah, nnnm. [pause] The rooster you bought, too, because it was from, from Dona França.

J: She gave it to me.

T: Ah, it was Dona França who gave it. Mm.

T: E Paulo, foi o avó dele que deu uma pintinha.

D: Ah!

T: Desse tamanho. Aí foi criando, e foi tirando essas galinhas, e foi até ficou só uma franga.

D: Uau!

T: E dessa franga, está aí, o resultado. Só tem uma que não foi. [incomprehensible] Foi a cinzenta.

J: Como que a cinzenta? É filha da, da branca. Que Pai deu a ele. Da, da— [...]

D (to Joaquín): E como foi que você conseguiu as galinhas de você?

J: Ah, eu—nem lembro mais, isso, como consegui. (Duff and Joaquín laugh a bit.)

T: Aquela vermelha que você trouxe, não foi Seu Rian que te deu não? Ou você comprou na mão dele? [Duff yawns] Que você trouxe o franguinho e a franga, aquela cheinha que é—

J: Eu comprei.

T: -- que e' Rodilan.

J: Eu comprei.

T: Aah, nnnm. [pausa] O galo também você comprou, que foi na mão, na mão de Dona França.

J: Ela que me deu.

T: Ah, foi Dona França que deu. Mm.
(from int w t029)

For Tereza and Joaquín, it mattered very much to remember who had given which animal to which child. Joaquín even got into a brief dispute with Tereza – *what do you mean, that gray one?* – when she suggested that their son's gray chicken was not the offspring of a gift from Joaquín's father.

By contrast, when it came to the origins of the animals that he owned, Joaquín, as an adult, radiated indifference. *Ah me, I don't even remember any more, all of that.* Tereza was able to elicit his acknowledgement about the origins of an animal that was a gift from Dona França. But when she speculated that Joaquín's red hen had been a gift from Seu Rian, he cut her off with a phrase – *I bought it* – that seemed to say everything. Joaquín did not specify from whom he had bought it. To have bought an animal was to have freed oneself from the obligation of remembering its origins.

Sertanejos strove to remember the provenance of gift animals in a way that they did not strive to remember the provenance of purchased ones, and this held especially true for children's animals. It was common for sertanejos to trace a child's objects many steps backwards – through generations of animals that had given birth to other animals, items that had been sold and other items bought with the money – until the point in the past where the child had received a gift. This was the point where the storytelling could stop: the gift served as the beginning of everything.

Dona Eva, for example, followed the chain of her son Jeremias's objects, connecting them all as if they had a single underlying substance. All of them had started with \$R200 that she received as a Maternity Wage payment from the government:

I took 200 reais, and I gave it to Andres [her husband] to buy a calf for Jeremias. [...] Still today, there are things from this money [...] It's a cow today. She has already given birth about four times. It's just that we sold the offspring [...] Andres sold them to take care of his [Jeremias's] teeth. It stayed for Jeremias. I gave it to him.	Peguei 200 reais, e dei a Andres para comprar um bezerro para Jeremias [...] Até hoje, tem desse dinheiro [...] É uma vaca hoje. Ela já pariu umas quatro vezes. Só que vendeu [...] Andres vendeu para cuidar dos dentes dele. Ficou para Jeremias. Eu dei para ele. (from Conversa w/ Dona Si about Sal Mat)

Perhaps the best acknowledgement, however, was that which came when the gift's recipient remembered the donor—in other words, when the donor managed to elicit discourse from the recipient. Dona Zaira achieved this honor while talking to her son Aureliano and me:

Duff: How did Aureliano get his cattle? [...]
 Dona Zaira: Would you believe that I've even forgotten about—I think that—[to Aureliano] Was it Xavier [Aureliano's father and Dona Zaira's husband] who gave you the female calf?
 Aureliano: The female calf?
 Z: Mm.
 A: It was with the Maternity Wage money that you bought the—the female goat.
 Z: Mm! I think that that's right. That's right. [...]
 A: The money of the Maternity Wage. [...]
 Z: I got that, that money when he was born.
 D: Aaaaah ha!
 Z: So then, with that money, that calf was bought for him.
 A: That's not right. The goat was bought.
 Z: Ah, that's right! [...]
 A: Then it started misbehaving. So then Daddy sold it—
 Z: He sold it.
 A: --then he bought a pig. Then the pig grew, and he killed the pig and spent the money.
 D: Wow!
 A: He said that he was going to give me a calf. So then he gave me a calf. Then the calf grew, then she gr—she went along—she gave birth to a calf, and then this calf ended up having another calf.

Duff: Como foi que Aureliano ganhou o gado dele? [...]
 Dona Zaira: [incredulous] Você acredita que eu até esqueci de—acho que—[to Aureliano] Foi Xavier que lhe deu a bezerra?
 Aureliano: A bezerra?
 Z: Mm.
 A: Foi com o dinheiro do Salario Maternidade que a Senhora comprou o—a cabra.
 Z: Mm! Acho que foi mesmo. Foi mesmo. [...]
 A: O dinheiro do Salario de Maternidade. [...]
 Z: Eu tirei esse, esse dinheiro quando ele nasceu.
 D: Aaaaah há!
 Z: Aí com esse dinheiro, comprou esse bezerro para ele.
 A: Foi não. Comprou a cabra.
 Z: Ah, foi mesmo! [...]
 A: Aí estava atentando. Aí Painho vendeu—
 Z: Vendeu.
 A: --aí comprou um porco. Aí o porco cresceu, aí ele matou o porco e gastou o dinheiro.
 D: Uau!
 A: Ele falou que ele ia-me dar um bezerro. Aí ele me deu um bezerro. Aí cresceu, aí cr, foi—tirou um cria, aí a filha dela tornou a ter outra cria.
 (fron int w/ t050)

Thus Aureliano himself – and not his mother – remembered that all of his wealth had started with her.

Dirce hoped to receive Maternity Wage for her young son, just as Dona Eva and Dona Zaira had. And when she planned its use, she imagined how she would be remembered. She hoped to buy her son a female calf:

Dirce: Because he's still a child [...] So my plan was for me to buy something to leave in the future. For him to buy what he needs. [...] To leave something, and so that in the future he doesn't – doesn't throw it in my face that I spent frivolously, you know? Or—

Dirce: Porque ele está criança. [...] Então meu plano era de eu comprar alguma coisa para deixar no futuro. Para ele comprar o que ele precisa. [...] Deixar alguma coisa, e para que no futuro, ele não—não jogue na minha cara que gastei à toa, né? Ou--

Duff: [Laugh] I like it!
Di: --that I didn't leave anything for him.

Duff: [laugh] Gostei!
Di: -- eu não deixei nada para ele.

Gift-giving cut the network of remembering (Strathern 1996). A gift marked the starting-point of a durable obligation to remember, an obligation that led sertanejos to tell the story of their ownership by following particular lines and not others. After all, when it came to Paulo's chicken, the ownership story *could* have started with the work in the field that Paulo's grandfather did in order to raise the money to buy the chicken—but it did not. At the beginning of a memory chain stood a gift. Children's animals, always the result of gifts, created the ideal forum for the articulation of these chains. Child ownership, in some senses, was donor ownership, too. The donor would be remembered as well, and, as with the hau (Mauss 1967 [1925]), she remained an owner in part. She could keep by giving away (Weiner 1985, 1992).²⁹

Gift giving was not the only mechanism with which to cut the network of remembering. Home ownership cut the network, too, and in an especially literal way. By owning a home, a sertanejo made herself into the person around whom the family gathered. A sertanejo who owned a home could invite people to stay there, and if she owned two homes could allow others to live in one of them on a semi-permanent basis. She would thus perpetuate the kinship network while also assuring that she would be remembered as the person who stood at a focal point. Both children's animals and owned homes, then, demonstrate the error in the assumption that households or kin groups practice "household communism" (Weber 1968 [1922]: 359). The family is not the space of non-ownership; the opposite is true. Ownership makes it possible to create roles, to build memory—in short, to have a family.

Something more general is also at hand. Ownership, as it turns out, involves remembering. Liberal accounts, including Locke's argument (2003 [1689]), often rely on an

²⁹ Cf Neil Young: "We were right/ We were giving/ That's how we kept what we gave away" ("Comes a Time," 1978).

implicit model in which ownership operates as a claim *against* other people. This model is common in anthropology as well. Radcliffe-Brown referred to “rights over a thing [...] as against the world” (1952 [1935]: 33), while Goody argued, “The definition of property revolves essentially round the problem of exclusion” (1962: 287). On this view, to own is to prevent other people from doing something with the object that one owns. But owning can be fruitfully understood in just the opposite way—as a practice in which one person elicits discourse from others, placing on them the duty of remembering herself through the vehicle of an object. Thus owning, rather than excluding the other from the realm of the self, in fact builds the self by drawing the other in.

Ownership is about memory, and so it is also about forgetting. Ownership means establishing a zero-point for memory, a point beyond which one no longer remembers the relations that previously surrounded an object. In her story about Jeremias’s calf, Dona Eva did not bother to think about who had owned the calf before she gave it to Jeremias. Aureliano said nothing about the origins of the goat. If to own is to make others remember oneself through an object, then to own is also to make others forget the different links that once existed.

Ownership is, indeed, the zero-point at which the forgetting stops and the remembering begins. Mauss has demonstrated, in extraordinary detail, how this zero-point can move; he showed how each ownership regime comes with its own rules for how far back people should trace the trail of ownership (1967 [1925]). In some regimes, this zero-point lies remarkably close to the present, as it does, in the villages, when someone purchases something. To purchase an object with money is, for Joaquín and others like him, means to stop remembering where it came

from and simply say, *I bought it*. In such a regime, where the zero-point is the last transaction, alienation has been achieved.³⁰

Munn has charted out the details of a different system, from a very different context, in which extended chains of memory provide a base for ownership. Her account of the Gawan *leilyu* serves as a salient counterpoint here. Through a *leilyu*, or an account of an object's travels, Gawans recall the thread that leads an object back to the last person who has an authoritative claim on it. This thread is blind to the steps that take place before the zero-point – it neglects, for example, the women who provide food so that men can build a canoe. But it remembers the series of *kula* gifts through which the canoe has been transformed into a shell necklace. These gifts, in Munn's words, constitute the mechanisms through “which Gawans may influence others to remember them over time” (1992 [1986]: 270).

A *leilyu* is a discursive act; it must be *told* by someone—and also listened to and repeated. Hence the importance of the communicative approach to ownership as developed by Rose and Strang and Busse, and hence, too, the importance of amplifying its range. An ownership regime can be understood as a communicative structure, a system of claims and responses. What it works to communicate, however, is not just a single claim to ownership – *this is mine* – but also a historical justification for ownership – *this is mine because it was hers and she gave it to me*. Such justifications have an intrinsically dialogic quality to them. They include inside themselves a range of earlier statements by previous owners, and they are designed to be repeated by other people, propagated so that the ownership claim achieves stability. By offering

³⁰ In the sertão, alienation – in this sense – was prominently demonstrated by the difference between the “old-style” plantation owners, who retained close relations with their *moradores*, and newer absentee landlords (see Ch2.) The forgetfulness of the absentee landlord was beautifully expressed in a story that I was told, several times by several different people, about one of the largest landlords in the state. According to the story, one day this landlord was driving past a piece of land and he found it interesting. *This land is good*, he told his assistant. *Buy it for me*.

Sir, the assistant replied, *you already own it*.

The story conveys, with a parable's incisive indirectness, the neglect practiced by absentee landlords – but it also, more broadly, it skewers the ownership system in which owning has nothing to do with remembering.

a claim, the speaker recognizes that other people once had claims, acknowledges that some other people do still have claims, and anticipates and elicits their replies. These claims and replies together compose the ownership regime.

Earlier, I argued that ownership is a bundle of agencies, and one fundamental such agency is the capacity to make others talk about oneself. A more specific argument can now be made. The particular communicative agency of ownership is not just the ability to elicit discourse, but the ability to elicit discourse that makes oneself remembered over time.

Ownership is a form of memory – the prerogative to public memory. Some people have this prerogative and others do not. The women who make food for Gawan canoe-workers do not, nor do the innumerable people in the sertão through whose hands an animal passes *before* it becomes a gift to a child. Locating the zero-point of ownership, then, is a crucial issue of power: to set the point is to determine whose ownership, at some point in the future, will be said to have counted.

Chapter 8
The Act of Owning II:
Premios, the Prize of Class

After the day's last weed had been pulled, after the last dish had been lathered with cow-fat soap, the sky would grow black and even the donkeys would huddle close to the cluster of houses that made up Maracujá. It was the hour to be home, to open up one's home, or to be at someone else's home. Neighbors chatted over the last drops of coffee; they fell asleep watching TV on each other's couches.

On one such night I ambled through the final twilight outside Dona Pérola's porch, and I overheard a scrap of her conversation with someone:

to stay in our place, tranquil, without it being necessary to leave and go outside for work	ficar no lugar da gente, sossegado, sem ser preciso sair fora para trabalhar (cad12013p81)

There it was, in quiet words on the night air. Dona Pérola had given voice to a ubiquitous dream, the dream of leaving labor. And she described the dream through a particular kind of object: "our place," that is, the house.

Houses mattered very much to Dona Pérola. She earned a steady living from her orange trees and her manioc fields, and as she neared seventy years old, she ruminated on what she wanted her children to have. She decided it was houses. To her four daughters she would leave two houses that she owned in Conquista, each house to be shared by two daughters. One of her sons, wild and free, traveled to foreign countries to work as a heavy machine operator; she had already given him a plot of land on which to build his house. Actually, she specified, the plot of land did not exactly go to him. She put it in the name of his two daughters, because otherwise he would sell it.

Dona Pérola's remaining problem was her calmer son Julinho. She had not yet given him a house. (cad3p17) As she explained to me in an interview:

Dona Pérola: I want to leave—my dream is to	Dona Pérola: Tenho vontade de deixar—meu

leave the plots of land [...] One is still missing. But I have faith in God [...] It's that boy who lives here. Julinho.

Duff: Julinho.

P: But I'm going to give it. You know, he already has a plot for himself. But he was the one who bought it with his own sweat.

D: Ah.

P: And I have an obligation to give him one, right? Because I gave to the others, so then—

D: Ah ha.

P: I'm going to give him one. Tomorrow or the next day.

sonho é deixar as posses [...] Falta um. Mas eu tenho fé em Deus [...] Que é esse varão que mora aqui. O Julinho.

D: O Julinho.

P: Mas eu vou dar. Ah, ele tem a dele. Mas foi ele que comprou com o suor dele.

D: Ah.

P: E eu tenho obrigação de dar uma, né? Que dei aos outros, então—

D: Ah há.

P: Eu vou dar uma para ele. Amanhã ou depois. (interview with c105)

Dona Pérola's felt obligation, as it turned out, was not simply to make sure that Julinho had a plot of land for a house. It was more specific than that. It was to give him a plot for which he would not have to work, one not "bought with his own sweat."

Dona Pérola was hardly the only one worried about dwellings. In the discourse of the villages, the house loomed as a key sign. Adults talked, schemed, and worried about houses constantly. Some people lived in housing borrowed from friends or family or granted by the government, and they crafted plans to get their own. Other people already had a house, and they aimed to improve it and to obtain residences for their children and extended families. (Preferably residences close by, since sertanejos took great care to assemble, over years, contiguous family compounds.) Some sertanejos, not as fortunate as Dona Pérola's children, might need to use their own wages to build their homes. But no matter where it came from, the house was the omnipresent hope. As Celso put it,

Celso: Everyone, everyone dreams about having his or her own house—

Duff: Mm hm.

C:—somewhere out there.

Celso: Todo o mundo, todo o mundo sonha em ter uma casa própria--

Duff: Mm hm.

C: --lá fora. (entrevista com Celso 9m)

Down the dirt street from Dona Pérola, past the jacaranda trees in the school courtyard, Maiara, age one, was learning to toddle. But Maiara was already an owner— not a homeowner,

but an owner of a different kind, just like many of the children in the village. She did not become an owner through work. She owned because of luck and blood.

Maiara's mother Valéria explained this to me.

People say it depends a lot on blood.

O pessoal costuma dizer que depende muito de sangue
(Cad9p13)

Valéria told me about livestock and their ups and downs, the chicken growth spurts and cow plagues that could make a family prosperous or impoverished. All of this did not only depend on the person who took care of the animals. It had much to do with the person who owned them. Some owners just had bad blood, Valéria noted. The animals that they owned would wither and struggle.

A young man next to Valéria jumped into the conversation.

Me, I've got good blood

Eu mesmo tenho sangue bom
(Cad9p13)

he observed. But it wasn't always that simple. Your blood could be good for one animal and not for another. Maiara's grandmother, for example, had much better blood for cows than Maiara's grandfather. Her cows

manage to reproduce and really see a result.

consegue reproduzir e ver resultado realmente.
(Cad9p13)

Valéria knew that in matters relating to chickens, she herself was hopeless. So when she got pregnant with Maiara, she said to herself

"Since I don't have such good blood, I'm going to give this chicken to my daughter." And she wasn't even born yet.

"Como eu não tenho sangue tão bom, vou dar essa galinha para minha filha." E ela nem tinha nascido ainda.
(Cad9p13)

Maiara had started her chicken career from that point, and, in her first year of life, she managed to grow a whole brood. Valéria enumerated the household's chickens for me. She concluded

Most are Maiara's [...] I myself don't have luck.

A maioria é de Maiara [...] Eu mesma não tenho sorte.
(Cad9p13)

And so Maiara had become a prenatal owner – ultimately a quite successful one – because of something that people in the villages would refer to as *blood* or *luck*. Luck provided a rationale for the widespread habit of giving animals to newborn children or grandchildren. This habit, alongside many less prominent gift practices, helped to insure that livestock ownership was rather well dispersed inside families. Even though adult men usually cared for cattle, even though adult women typically cared for chickens, a significant proportion of the animals in the villages were actually owned by children.

But Julinho's land and Maiara's chicken served to exemplify something more than the general principle of ownership. These were owned objects of a special, salient kind. At Maracujá and Rio Branco, children regularly flaunted the animals they owned, and adults held endless discussions about the imagined houses in which, after their many years of work, they hoped to find a home. These objects served as bookends, of a sort, to a person's labor history over the life cycle. Children would own an animal before they ever began working. At the other end, adults poured their treasure into the houses where they and their families could live once formal employment was done.

As bookends, the house and the chicken offered an important sertanejo rebuttal to a certain justification for ownership, the justification according to which people owned things because of work (Locke 2003 [1689]). When children owned animals, their ownership offered tangible evidence of a force – luck or blood – that made people into owners without work. This force could even operate at cross-purposes to work. It could allow the cattle of the careful herder to die of snakebites, while the lazy neighbor's cows grew fat.

The house gave evidence of a different kind—less an explanation for where wealth came from and more an explanation for where it should end up. Through the house, a fund of wealth exited the cycle of labor. Wage labor, of course, often went into creating the house. Frequently an aspiring homeowner would have to draw from her wage earnings to pay for the materials and labor that went into building her home. But once this conversion had occurred, the house was then supposed to leave forever the sphere of monetary circulation and pass into the sphere of kinship exchange. The house was never to be sold or even evaluated in money, never to be deserved through wages again. It provided a visible signpost for leaving labor.

This chapter will use the term *premio* to refer to objects like the chicken and the house. A *premio* is an object owned outside of, and specifically in opposition to, the relations of labor. Premios might be thought of as disalienated commodities: they originate fully inside commodity circuits, where they are first purchased, and yet they come to be owned in such a way that they acquire a particular connection to their owners, a connection that the vicissitudes of labor are not supposed to rupture.¹ A person may not always be able to hold on to her premios, but this should have nothing to do with her work.

This usage of “premio” takes advantage of an ambiguity that arises when translating the Portuguese word *prêmio* (or its Spanish equivalent, *premio*) into English. *Prêmio* means both *reward* and *prize*; it can refer both to remuneration earned over the long term (“a reward for her labors”) and to a short-term jackpot (“a lottery prize.”) This ambiguity seems well-suited to the meaning at hand, since the *premio*, in the sense it is used in this chapter, is an immediately-

¹ To use Appadurai’s terms, this might be considered a change in the object’s commodity candidacy (1986: 13). Thanks go to Julie Chu for this insightful point.

visible object – a jackpot of sorts – that comes to stand in for or take the place of regular remuneration.²

Premios often appear as gifts or inheritances, but not always. Ferguson's oxen could be considered an example of the premio (1985), as could the cattle that the Comaroffs tracked among the Tswana (2005),³ and so could a gold retirement watch from a corporate employer ("You gave us your time; now we are giving you ours.")⁴ A premio, by this definition, has nothing accidental or minor about it. It has publicly fallen out of the cycles of commodity exchange, and this does not simply mean that someone has grown personally attached to it. Rather, it has acquired a new position and receives wide recognition as such. In a social world entangled with labor, premios serve as major orienting signs; they operate as dreams and anchors. Premios are, in a sense, inalienable objects that have appeared inside capital (Weiner 1985). They open the door to the possibility of a non-labor relation between people and things.

This mattered in the sertão, because the labor relation between people and things, for sertanejos, posed some vexing questions. How was it that you could earn so much money in the city, and yet end up as the owner of nothing? The converse was equally puzzling. Why did the countryside, where everyone earned so little money, become the place where people owned things? Money, it seemed, could be the opposite of owning. In the village, a person might own

² Here, I cannot avoid citing a beautiful piece of advice given, a century before Thaler, by the narrator in *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*: "Talvez a economia social pudesse ganhar alguma coisa se eu mostrasse como todo e qualquer prêmio estranho vale pouco ao lado do prêmio subjetivo e imediato"/ "Perhaps social economics could gain something if I were to demonstrate how any and every distant prize (*prêmio*) is worth little when compared to the subjective and immediate prize (*prêmio*)" (Assis 2012 [1880]: 119, chapter 157.)

³ The Comaroffs describe in great detail the moves through which the Southern Tswana of the late 19th century "tried constantly to convert all gains from the sale of labor or produce into bovines" (1997: 208). This approach was greatly frustrating to colonial officials, who saw it as an effort to create autonomy from wage labor.

⁴ The quote comes Laura 2013, who says the gold watch tradition began at Pepsico in the 1940s. Thompson refers to the practice as early as the 19th century in England: "for fifty years of disciplined servitude to work, the enlightened employer gave to his employee an engraved gold watch" (1967: 70).

cattle and manioc, fields and houses. In the city and on the large farms where sertanejos labored as migrants, ownership had a bad habit of slipping through one's fingers.

Why the premio

Lael's father sold the family land long ago, and in the early 1970s, Lael made his way to Sao Paulo, one in the river of millions who flowed into urban life in those years. He was twelve. He did the heavy work for master bricklayers; during dictatorship and inflation, he made the concrete city sprout. Several decades later he came to Maracujá and had only a field of manioc to his name. I asked him if he missed São Paulo.

Lael: Well, I'm going to tell the truth. When it comes to São Paulo, I don't have—For me, you know, São Paulo is an illusion.

Duff: Really!

L: Yes. Eh—

D: What do you mean, an illusion?

Lael: Ô, eu vou falar verdade. De São Paulo eu não tenho—Para mim, eh, São Paulo é ilusão.

Duff: É mesmo!

L: É. Eh--

D: Como assim, ilusão?

Lael's voice filled with a sudden anger.

L: An illusion because—we work, work, work, and—some people? Some people acquire life. And others don't, don't, ah—they gain nothing. Because I—I worked many years in São Paulo. I have nothing.

D: Mm hm. [pause]

L: I don't even want to hear any more about São Paulo.

L: Ilusão porque—a gente trabalha, trabalha, trabalha e—uns? Uns adquirem a vida. E outros não, não, ah—ganham nada. Que eu—trabalhei muitos anos em São Paulo, não tenho nada.

D: Mm hm. [pausa]

L: Eu não quero nem mais saber de São Paulo. (int w c157)

Joaquín, from the neighboring village, had once earned good money as a laborer on a plantation. Then he returned to Rio Branco. Back in the village he worked only sporadic jobs for other people, and he planted his own crops.

Joaquín: Here it's better. You know why? If I were on the plantation, today I wouldn't have beans. I wouldn't have corn [...] But here, hey. There are beans. It's enough to get through the

Joaquín: Aqui é melhor. Você sabe porque? Se eu estivesse na fazenda, hoje eu não tinha feijão. Eu não tinha milho [...] Mas aqui, Ô. Tem feijão. Dá para passar o ano.

year.

Duff: Mm hm.

J: There's corn in the field. It's enough for me to raise my chickens.

Tereza (Joaquín's wife): There are pumpkins. (Laugh)

J: There are pumpkins. [...] You know? And if I were on the plantation, they wouldn't give me that—that freedom.

D: Mm hm.

J: They would pay me the salary. But – I would have to see—ah, look after just what was theirs.

D: Mm hm.

J: They wouldn't, wouldn't let for—me do for myself. And here, no. I work for other people, but I do for myself.

Duff: Mm hm.

J: Tem milho na roça. Dá para mim criar minhas galinhas.

Tereza (Joaquín's wife): Tem abóbora. (risada)

J: Tem abóbora. [...] Né? E se eu estivesse na fazenda, eles não me davam essa—essa liberdade.

D: Mm hm.

J: Eles me pagavam o salário. Mas -- eu tinha que ver—o, olhar só o deles.

D: Mm hm.

J: Não, não deixava para—eu fazer para mim. E aqui não. Eu trabalho para os outros, mas faço para mim.

(from interview w t029)

“*The salary*” versus “*my field*.” Joaquín outlined a distinction between pay and ownership. On a major industrial farm, he got the decent money of a salary. At Rio Branco, where he only worked occasionally for others, he had little money, but complete ownership. He did not have to *look after just what was theirs*.

The interest in property might have struck some people as an expression of greed or covetousness; for others, perhaps, it had the ring of petty-bourgeois ideology. But it was not a question of envy, Dalia argued to me. Something besides envy and false consciousness was motivating her to fight to pay for her brown couch, redeeming it bit by bit each month from the *mascate* (see Chapter 3). In her windswept concrete house at Maracujá, the couch was one of the few things she could say that she owned.

Dalia belonged to one of the poorest families in the village, and when she went to the city, she seemed even poorer. She knew too well how to sleep in the corners of a distant relative's house in the city, taking up as little space as possible, squeezing herself into the edges

of a place where she had nothing to her name. While we talked, she counted up the things that were hers. I asked her why it felt good to own.

Dalia: It's just like this. A person, we see a person there, and the person is like, "This thing here is mine."

Duff: Mm hm.

Da: And we don't have anything so that we can say, "*This thing here* is mine, too." It must be because of that. I think—I don't know—it's not envy, you know?

Du: Mm hm.

Da: But it's something like this. Er—"She can own, like that. Me—why can't I?"

Dalia: Que nem assim, uma pessoa, a gente vê uma pessoa lá, e assim, "Isso aqui é meu."

Duff: Mm hm.

Da: E a gente não tem o que falar assim, "Isso aqui também é meu." E deve ser por isso. Acho que—sei lá-- Não é inveja, sabe?

Du: Mm hm.

Da: Mas é uma coisa assim, ah—"Ela pode ter, assim. Eu-- porque eu não posso?"

(c145 entrevista x—12-3-12)

The city and the industrial farm were places where sertanejos could see an unending parade of things they did not own. In such places sertanejos might end up *looking after just what was someone else's*; they might feel the sense of having nothing. Often, earning a salary did not seem to remedy this sense. If the commodity is, when stripped to its simplest form, the homogenous object, then perhaps it could be said that in the city and the plantation, objects were homogenous in that they were all identically not one's own. Each thing was just like every other thing insofar as it remained out of reach. To disalienate the commodity, then, meant to own it in some strong and special way—as, in the villages, a child might own a chicken, or an adult might own a house.

The premio, as an especially salient sign, helps to provide an answer to the daily problem of unequal distribution. The premio offers not just a stock of wealth, but also a set of assumptions about owning and why one might be considered an owner. These assumptions differ substantially from the logic that governs labor relations. And yet the premio is bound up with labor, through a relation of opposition: the premio exists precisely as the visible inverse of labor, the thing that, in a social world dominated by labor, is not labor.

For this reason, I argue, the premio serves as one core constituent in the construction of a social class. If we understand class to be a group's relationship to labor, then the premio, the signpost for non-labor, has a central role to play in building the concepts, relations, mentalities, and habits that underlie any class. The premio appears prominently in people's narratives of their labor histories. And it is not merely a personal feature. A premio becomes a common aspiration, a shared image of what people can strive for beyond their work. Members of a class learn together the practice of hoping for a premio, and they also learn the technique of using this hope to get through labor. Sometimes they start their work days by quietly reminding each other of the premio; they tell stories about the premio during their time off; they become outraged and rise up when the premio grows more distant or difficult to access. They make labor survivable by limiting labor – and by leaving it – and they define its limits by orienting towards a premio. Thus they articulate their particular relationship to labor.

For the professional-managerial class, perhaps, education is the ultimate premio (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979 [1977]). Here I argue that people at Maracujá and Rio Branco produce themselves as classed people through a pair of premios: animals owned by children and houses owned by adults. By possessing a cow as a child, by planning out a family home, sertanejos become not simply rural agriculturalists, but, more specifically, semi-proletarians (Wallerstein 2003 [1983]: 26), neo-peasants, people who know waged labor very intimately and who leave it behind for the possibilities that the small farm provides. Luck and blood and dwellings are the tools through which they make their class.

Ownership and class in social theory

In the Marxist tradition, ownership has a somewhat ambivalent status. Marxists do not wish to ground our critique on distribution alone, and so we refuse to content ourselves with any analysis of inequality – whether liberal or anarchist – that considers inequality to be primarily a problem of ownership, primarily an issue of different quantities of goods in different people’s hands. Marxist accounts must place distribution inside a narrative that also involves production and consumption; by Marxist lights, a theory’s strength comes from its story about the dynamics of capital.

And yet ownership shows up at key points in the Marxist canon. It appears, first of all, inside the definition of alienation. Already in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx understood alienation as a definitive separation between the worker and the object of her labor. This object no longer *belonged* to her in any sense:

the object which labor produces – labor’s product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer [...]. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation [...] So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the less he can possess and the more he falls under the sway of his product, capital [...] If the product of labor is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong? [...] If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker (1988 [1844]: 71-79, Manuscript 1, “Estranged Labor,” XXV).

Marx inverted the standard economic exposition, which first explained the origins of private property in an imagined past moment and then discussed labor as a relationship in which the people with property employed the people without it. Marx insisted on placing labor first in the explanation.⁵ What made property possible was precisely the fact that some people were working

⁵ Causally first – first in priority of explanation – although the historical details were more complicated. Primitive accumulation often involved outright seizure of objects, for example. But what made the system of property coherent under capital was the ongoing act of labor.

for others. Property existed because labor existed, not the other way around. “Private property,” Marx concluded, “is [...] the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself” (1988 [1844]: 81, Manuscript 1, “Estranged Labor,” XXV).

When Marxists begin to define “social class,” ownership makes a second – controversial – appearance. According to one widespread line of thought, a class is, fundamentally, a group of people who own the same kinds of objects. A person’s class status is determined by his or her ownership (or non-ownership) of the means of production. After Marx’s death, this view was suggested by Engels in his 1888 annotations to the English version of the *Communist Manifesto*:

By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live (2005 [1848/1888]: 39).

Ownership, then, would be a defining criterion of class.⁶ In the opening lines of the final chapter of *Capital*, Marx seemed to agree.⁷

The owners of mere labor-power, the owners of capital, and landlords, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit, and ground-rent—in other words wage-laborers, capitalists, and landowners – form the three great classes of modern society based on the capitalist mode of production (1981 [1894]: 1025).

Such a view, however, runs up against notorious difficulties. By the late nineteenth century, the leading firms in Europe were controlled through stock arrangements; the people running business were not owners in any direct sense, and ownership was increasingly mediated

⁶ For a more contemporary example of this view, see, for example, Morrison: “What we observe historically is that only one class of persons has always owned or monopolized the means of production throughout history. This condition of ownership over the means of production is the single most fundamental fact of the materialist theory of history since it is this that leads to the division of society into economic classes. The key division, Marx reasoned, is between owners and non-owners of the means of production” (2006: 44).

⁷ Note that Weber appears to have believed, similarly, that property lay at the root of class. “‘Property’ and ‘lack of property’ are, therefore, the basic categories of all class situations” (Weber 1968 [1922]: 927, “Class, Status, Party”).

through an extraordinary variety of financial instruments, all of which made it hard to identify “the owners of the means of production.” Hilferding (1981 [1910]) noticed this problem and used it to argue for the emergence of a new form of capitalism, finance capitalism. Later, during the heyday of Fordism, Dahrendorf (1959 [1957]) diagnosed similar confusions inside the vertically-integrated, publicly-traded firm, where managers rather than owners controlled the levers of power. Dahrendorf suggested that it was time to “replace the possession, or nonpossession, of effective private property by the exercise of, or exclusion from, authority as the criterion of class formation” (1959 [1957]: 136).⁸

Thus the economic structures of the 20th century made it hard to identify Engels’ “class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production.” But the “ownership” definition of class also confronted an objection of a more theoretical nature. If classes were defined by ownership, and if ownership amounted to a legal framework, then class would be, at its heart, a juridical matter. Classes would come from law and force, not from the process of labor itself. Class would be something of a second-order phenomenon. Perhaps for this reason, a number of Western Marxists slowly de-emphasized the notion of class, preferring to focus on other dynamics at the heart of capital.

Do Marxists, then, depend on the notion of ownership to ground their understandings of class and alienation? GA Cohen has expressed great concern about this possibility. Although a fervent Marxist, he worries that Marxist critiques have a surreptitious base in the assumption of self-ownership: the libertarian belief that people have a right to own themselves.

⁸ Also note Amin’s criticism of the notion that class is grounded in the ownership of the means of production. Each class-divided mode of production determines a pair of classes that are both opposed and united in this mode: state-class and peasants in the tribute-paying mode, slaveowners and slaves in the slaveowning mode, feudal lords and serfs in the feudal mode, bourgeois and proletarians in the capitalist mode. Each of these classes is defined by the function it fulfills in production. This essential reference to the production process cannot be reduced to ‘ownership’ of the means of production (Amin 1976: 23).

Marxists say that capitalists steal labour time from working people. But you can steal from someone only that which properly belongs to him. The Marxist critique of capitalist injustice therefore implies that the worker is the proper owner of his own labour-time: he, no one else, has the right to decide what will be done with it (Cohen 1995: 146).

But a society of self-owners could never oblige or even ask its members to support each other's selves. Cohen believes self-ownership to be a fundamentally inegalitarian concept, one that "contradicts the idea that there should be an equality of benefits and burdens among people" (1995: 151). He thus argues for the necessity of removing the ground of ownership that underpins Marxist theory.

Cohen fears the disintegration of Marxism into libertarian atomism, but other thinkers have exactly the opposite concern: that the notion of ownership inclines Marxists towards state control. If bourgeois exploitation comes from private ownership of the means of production—if the problem is not the structure of labor per se but rather the ownership system – then, perhaps, state ownership appears as the inevitable solution. With such a solution, ownership relations change; labor relations stay the same. On this reading, the Marxist utopia turns out to be a total government.⁹

Both of these anxieties point towards the question of what ownership *is*. One way to ask this question is through a speculative engagement with the Marx canon. Did Marx really conceive of ownership as a relation between a person and an object? Did he subscribe to the *Notes and Queries* definition? Or did he, like Gluckman, see ownership as a relationship between people, mediated through an object?

⁹ Chattopadhyay (2014: 42-43) rebuts at length the claim that Marx favored state ownership of the means of production as the culmination of the socialist project. In a footnote, Chattopadhyay includes the following fascinating tidbit: "As the last limit of centralization of capital, Marx even envisages in *Capital*'s French version the existence, over the whole economy, of a single capital under a single ownership" (51; Chattopadhyay cites pp. 1 and 139 in Marx, Karl (1875 [1965]), *Le Capital*, in *Oeuvres. Économie*, vol. I. Paris: Gallimard.)

When the definition of ownership is thus opened up, it becomes possible re-evaluate, first of all, the meaning of social class. Is class primarily a relation between people and objects? Does *class* mean the ownership (or non-ownership) of those objects known as “the means of production?”

A close look at Marx’s writing reveals a view of class that is considerably more complex than that.¹⁰ If Marx began the final chapter of *Capital* by referring to “the owners of mere labor-power, the owners of capital, and landlords” as “the three great classes of modern society,” then it must be added that within a page, he had already undermined the notion of ownership that undergirded this definition. “The question to be answered next,” Marx promised,

is ‘What makes a class?’ [...] At first sight, the identity of revenues and revenue sources. For these are the three great social groups whose components, the individuals forming them, live respectively from wages, profit, and ground rent, from the valorization of their labor-power, capital, and landed property. From this point of view, however, doctors and government officials would also form two classes [...] The same would hold true for the infinite fragmentation of interests and positions into which the division of social labor splits not only workers but also capitalists and landowners—the latter, for instance, into vineyard-owners, field-owners, field-owners, forest-owners, mine-owners, fishery-owners, etc (1981 [1894]: 1025-6).

If the relation to the object makes the class, then an unending diversity of objects will generate an unending number of classes. Having raised the problem, Marx did not solve it. The chapter ends with Engels’ note: “At this point the manuscript breaks off.” Here, as elsewhere, Marx remained surprisingly cagey about class, never quite offering a conclusive view, and the unfinished quality of Volume 3 means that the question lacks an answer.¹¹

¹⁰ For a similar criticism of the theory that ownership underpins class status, see Postone 1993: 47-53. Postone characterizes this theory as follows: “the market and private ownership of the means of production are considered to be the essential capitalist relations of production, which are expressed by the categories of value and surplus value. Social domination is treated as a function of class domination, which, in turn, is rooted in ‘private property in land and capital’” (1993: 53; the quotation is from p. 78 in Dobb, Maurice (1937). *Political Economy and Capitalism*. London: Routledge.) Postone rejects the theory by arguing that it grounds value in the sphere of exchange and fails to criticize the categories of production, in particular the category of labor.

¹¹ Thanks to T Morton for this insight

Given this openness, Marx left space for a surprising variety of ownership forms inside a class. As Chattopadhyay has pointed out, Marx in some senses anticipated the historical rise of non-owning managerial capitalists, referring to the capitalist as a “functionary of capital.”

It is important to stress that Marx conceives the individual capitalist not necessarily as a private owner of capital, but as a ‘functionary of capital,’ ‘the real agent of capitalist production’ earning ‘wages of management’ for exploiting laborers (Chattopadhyay 2014: 51).

Marx’s view of class, it seems, includes ownership, but it stretches far beyond the simple equation of owners and objects. In *Capital*’s first volume, he refers to class as the collective embodiment of the production process itself:

In the history of capitalist production, the establishment of a norm for the working day presents itself as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labor, i.e. the working class (Marx 1976 [1867]: 344).

As “collective capital” and “collective labor,” the two great classes, here, are defined not in terms of their ownership status, but rather in terms of their relationship to work. Classes are emblems of a position inside the labor relation.

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx refers to class in even more general terms:

Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself (2008 [1847]: 86).

What makes the workers into a “class against capital?” Here, it is a *common situation* and *common interests* arising from their shared economic state. This state presumably includes ownership relations. But it is not limited to them.

Marx’s account comes to seem more and more like a story about class as a “common” or “collective” relationship to labor in general. What matters, above all, is the *shared* nature of the relation, a relation that one shares with one’s fellows, against some other group. Personal

ownership – the sort of ownership that troubles Cohen, the relation of the individual subject to the object – fades into the background. What counts, for an understanding of class, is ownership as one element in a group’s common economic repertoire. It is ownership as a shared disposition. It is not *what objects* one owns, but *the way* one owns or does not own, alongside whom.

In his defense of the Commune, Marx obliquely points towards this view of ownership:¹²

The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization! Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intends to abolish that class-property which makes the labor of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labor (1933 [1871]: 44).

“Class-property:” the word is revelatory. Under capitalism, property appears as the property of a class, that is, it appears in the guise of an ownership system where, in the final analysis, it is not the person’s but the group’s relationship to the object that is preserved and defended. Thus Marx can argue that capital knows no real individual property. Only communism could make that possible.

The notion of “class-property” acquires particular relevance if one considers Marx’s statements about property and ownership in general. Marx, as it turns out, was particularly committed to the notion that property is a group relation. After laying out the basic foundation of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx, accompanied by Engels, spent the next several years sketching out a historical account that attempted to show how this very foundation was not inevitable at all,¹³ but had rather emerged over time as a

¹² This insight comes from Chattopadhyay 2014: 42 and 51.

¹³ This same wish – to demonstrate how capital might not be the inevitable arrangement of all human affairs – also motivated Gluckman’s efforts to document relations at the border between capitalism and other systems. This point is owed to Jean Comaroff.

collective state of affairs.¹⁴ And as Marx matured, he explored more and more deeply the systemic social whole that arose out of the individual worker's alienation. From this holistic point of view, the word "property" referred less to a particular owned object and more to an overarching social institution. Marx and Engels declared, in *The German Ideology* (1998 [1846]), that "property" was really another way of saying "the division of labor." Property, in other words, served as the visible evidence for a full-scale structure of unequal human production.

Division of labor and private property are [...] identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity (1998 [1846]: 52, "Private Property and Communism").

Thirteen years later, in *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx sharpened his phrasing even further.

At a certain stage of development, the forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before (1904 [1859]: 12, "1859 Preface.")

Here, "division of labor" was replaced with the more expansive "relations of production."

"Property" itself, which had formerly referred to a collection of objects ("the product of the activity"), now denoted a legal framework. For Marx, property was "the existing relations of production." Property had more and more become an index of the relational structure.

¹⁴ By the writing of *The German Ideology* (1998 [1846]), Marx and Engels had settled on their own loose historical framework for the emergence of private property. They argued that the patriarchal household contained the roots of property, since the patriarch exploited the household's women and children for their products ("Private Property and Communism"). Ownership then progressed through different stages: tribal, communal/ state, feudal ("First Premises of the Materialist Method"), and eventually capitalist. All of the forms of property, hence, were ultimately "social relations" corresponding to a definite stage of production" (1998 [1846]: 248) ("Alienation Due to Private Property.") Marx and Engels concluded, "Division of labor and private property are [...] identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity" (1998 [1846]: 52) ("Private Property and Communism").

However, these earlier forms of property, in Marx and Engels' view, remained teleologically incomplete. "Pure private property" was capital itself – "modern capital, determined by big industry and universal competition" (1998 [1846]: 99) ("The Relation of State and Law to Property"). This form of property then generated the law and the state in its image – rather than the state creating property.

And so Gluckman's argument comes from the tradition of Marx. Ownership is not a relationship between a person and an object. Ownership is a relationship between people, mediated by an object.

Such an understanding of ownership, in turn, pushes us towards a particular reading of alienation. Alienation loses its affinity with Locke, who had argued that the laborer intrinsically owns the object with which she mixes her labor.¹⁵ Alienation becomes more Hegelian. In Hegel's master-slave dialectic, alienated labor does not come about because the worker's object is stolen. Quite the contrary. The dialectic begins not with individual work but with a mutual relationship between two consciousnesses. Only once one consciousness dominates the other, becoming master to the other's slave, does the object appear. This object is the chain. Alienated labor is precisely the work that the slave does on the chain:

The thing is independent vis-a-vis the bondsman, whose negating of it, therefore, cannot go the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation; in other words, he only *works* on it [...] the lord, who had interposed the bondsman between it and himself, takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence he leaves to the bondsman, who works on it (Hegel 1998 [1807]: 116, B/ Self-Consciousness, A / 3, para 190).

On this account, then, labor does not pre-exist relationships. Labor arises out of a relation, the relation between master and slave. The things of labor – the chains on which one works – are the fruits of the relation. Alienation is not the theft of an object, but rather a relational state mediated

¹⁵ Locke described it as follows: "Every man has a property in his own person [...] The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and jointed to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property [...] For this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once jointed to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others" (Locke 2003 [1689]: 111, Second Treatise, book 2 ch. 5, para 27).

This logic of self-ownership, as Cohen fears, could lead to a particular reading of alienation: what is wrong with alienation, on Locke's view, is that it separates the worker from what she has made.

through an object. Ownership does not originate in a personal act of original appropriation, but in the interaction between consciousnesses.

Thus Marxism has much to gain from a close (and ethnographic) interrogation of the concept of ownership. Marxists have grown used to asserting that “the ownership of the means of production” is a matter of vital importance. And rightly so. We should take note, however, of Marx’s reminder: “Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself” (2008 [1847]: 87). The working class *itself* is the ultimate “means of production.” To analyze the ownership of the means¹⁶ of production, then, is not simply to chart which individuals own which objects. Rather, it is to map out the fundamental separation that divides workers from their own capacity to produce. It is to understand how ownership becomes a blockade thrown up between people and their own collective capacity.

As we have seen, this interrogation has implications for the definition of two fundamental concepts, alienation and class. “Alienation” ceases to refer to the theft of an object from a subject. Instead, alienation points towards the relations that separate humans from their collective ability to produce.

Along similar lines, “class” can no longer be reduced to the legal ownership of the means of production. Instead, class becomes a collective relationship to labor. This relation, of course, involves objects: in Gluckman’s sense, it is a relationship between persons, mediated by things.

¹⁶ Along similar lines, Moacyr Palmeira argues that when considering the peasantry of Brazil’s Northeast, “*pensarmos em expropriação, não em termos de separação do trabalhador de seus meios de trabalho, como é o caso em outras situações históricas, mas, para usarmos os termos de Marx, em expropriação do trabalhador de suas “condições de produção.” No caso que analisamos, “condições de produção” significam uma forma de dominação específica, sofrida e interiorizada pelos trabalhadores*” (Palmeira 1976: 313-4).

“[We must] think of expropriation not in terms of the separation of the worker from her or his means of work, as is the case in other historical situations, but, to use Marx’s phrase, in terms of the expropriation of the worker’s ‘conditions of production.’ In the case we have analyzed, ‘conditions of production’ means a specific form of domination, suffered and internalized by the workers.”

An understanding of class, then, requires an investigation of way that these things mediate the relation. Here, we look for class by looking for a relation that functions through two special kinds of things – houses and animals.

Luck

“In his name,” Oziel averred. He was speaking about the name of his grandson Venâncio, and about the cow held in that name. “It goes on yielding benefits there in his name.”

Above, in Ch. 7, I contended that *name* does not refer simply to the guardianship power that an adult can claim over a child’s possession. When a cow or a pig is *in a person’s name*, something special unfolds. Special, but not always desirable. Tereza used the same term to describe why she did not own any of her household’s chickens.

I don’t have any, because I don’t like to put them in my name.

Eu não tenho nenhuma, porque eu não gosto de botar em meu nome. (from int w/ t029).

What was this special quality that attaches to name? Name, here, perhaps offered a lighter way of talking about a power that we have already mentioned: *luck*, also known as *blood*.¹⁷

Marisol and Hugo, who had lied to Núbia about her chicken, explained luck as follows.

M: There have been people who put things, like, in the name of someone else from the family, because – because that other person is the kind of owner who has more luck. [...] Sometimes it’s mine, but I don’t have luck. So I put it in the other person’s name.

H: Yes.

M: It ends up as if it were the other person’s.

D: Really! Because you think that he has more luck. [...]

M: Then it yields more. Ah, ah—really quickly,

M: Teve gente que coloca, assim, no nome de outro da família, porque—porque é dono de ter mais sorte. [...] Às vezes é meu, mas eu não tenho sorte. Daí eu boto no nome dele.

H: É.

M: Fica como se fosse dele.

D: É mesmo! Porque você acha que ele tem mais sorte. [...]

M: Aí rende mais. Ah, ah—logo rende. Produz mais. [...]

M: Toma conta como se fosse dela.

¹⁷ For an analysis of the role that blood plays in health and body practices in Brazil’s Northeast, see Sanabria 2009 and Mayblin 2013. These papers focus on medical and healing uses of blood, and they make it clear that blood is understood as a key constituent in forming an individual’s internal state of health, by insuring that the body is neither too dry nor too full of blood.

it yields a benefit. It produces more. [...] The person takes care as if it were hers.

D: Yeah, yeah—that, I didn't know anything about that.

M: Because sometimes there are people who have luck, like, for cattle. But for chickens they don't. It's like that.

H: I, I myself—I don't have luck with [incomp.] But with cattle, pigs, and sheep, I do have some.

M: Yep. Some people have luck with one thing, but they don't have it with another.

D: É, é—lá, eu não sabia nada disso. [pause]

M: Que às vezes tem gente que tem sorte, assim, para gado. Já para galinhas já não tem. É assim.

H: Eu, eu mesmo—não tenho sorte com [incomp.] Já com gado, porco, e carneiro, ainda tem.

M: Pois é. Tem uns que tem sorte com uma coisa, já não tem com a outra. (from int w/ t066)

Luck affected the flourishing of livestock. For this reason, people gave their animals as gifts to people who had luck, and luck hence had an impact on who owned which animal. But luck swayed ownership decisions inside a particular circle: the circle of kinship. As Marisol noted, luck could influence the allocation of goods between *people from the family*. The discourse of luck offered a way of talking about the allocation of ownership inside the kin network, not in other contexts.¹⁸

Luck inhered in a person. Neither learned nor inherited, it came out of a person's individual being, unpredictably. Some people had one kind and others had another kind. Hence

¹⁸ This dynamic can be compared with a fascinating observation made by Schapera in another pastoralist context:

Reference may also be made here to a Kgatla custom now rapidly disappearing under the influence of modern ideas. It was formerly a fairly common practice for a man who had met with continual misfortune in his economic ventures to make a nominal transfer of any newly-acquired property to one or another of his children. If, e.g., he obtained a new heifer, or made a new field, he would say: 'This is so-and-so's,' naming one of his children. This was known as *go bitsa kgomo* (or *tshimo*) *ka ngwana*. The idea underlying it was that the ancestral spirits would bless the property through that particular child, and so put an end to the run of bad luck. If the heifer lived and bred satisfactorily, or the new field yielded abundantly, it was proof that the child after whom it had been 'named' was gifted with luck (*lesegô*). Henceforth other newly-acquired possessions of the same type would be 'named' after him.

At no time in the olden days did the practice of this custom mean that the father had donated the property concerned to the child. He retained full right of control over it, and could do with it as he pleased. On his death it formed part of his general estate, to be handed on according to the customary rules of inheritance, and the child after whom it had been 'named' had no special claim over it. But, nowadays, children have begun to claim such property as theirs by right, maintaining that the 'naming' is equivalent to a donation. In several cases of inheritance, disputes have arisen over the ownership of such property. The old custom of 'naming' is therefore being abandoned. At present the usual practice is that, when cattle or fields are 'named' after a child, that child inherits them on the death of his father. This interpretation of the 'naming' custom is a new development, attributed by the Kgatla themselves to the modern conceptions of ownership arising out of contact with the Europeans (Schapera 1955 [1938]: 241).

luck opened a space for individual particularity against the background of the shared kinship bond. It was precisely this particularity, the fact that a child was a specific person with specific qualities, that allowed the child to make demands on the kin network's store of animal wealth by asking to hold an animal in her own name. Luck here fit inside the broader Bahian framework of *natureza* (Johnson 1997), the specific "nature" that each person was presumed to have from birth – quiet or excitable, obedient or rebellious – and that was presumed immutable. It made the person special.

Luck manifested itself externally—in cattle fertility, for example. Martinho pointed contentedly at his daughter and told me about the young cow that his father-in-law had given to her. "Look how she has luck," he enthused (*Veja só que ela tem sorte.*) Her cow had given birth three times—most recently, to twins.

Luck could also appear in the form of money that someone made from livestock. Lara's teenaged son had managed – with parental approval – to sell his donkey for the handsome sum of \$R40. Lara concluded:

He's got luck for earning, like, these—Yeah, he's the one who earns it himself, too. He's got luck for earning.

Ele tem sorte para ganhar, assim, essas—é, ele mesmo que ganha também. Tem sorte para ganhar.
(c031 entrevista, 10-22-12)

And so luck, in sertanejos' stories, could explain outcomes. People also used *luck* more broadly— to refer not just to a fortuitous force but also to a whole system of ownership, a way that things could be owned. For example, Dirce told me with disappointment that she had failed to obtain Salário Maternidade, a maternity benefit that the government sometimes paid out. If she had gotten it, though, she would have used the money to buy a cow for her infant son.

My plan, if I got the money, was for me to buy at least a little calf and leave it in his luck.

Meus planos, se eu recebesse o dinheiro, era eu comprar pelo menos uma bezerrinha e deixar na sorte dele.

Initially I misheard her comment, thinking that she had said *leave it in his hand*—in other words, leave for him to own.

Du: You said, “Buy at least a calf and leave it in his hand?” Or—	Du: Você falou, “Comprar pelo menos um bezerro e deixar na mão dele?” Ou—
Di: Nah—“leave it in his luck,” leave it with someone, you know, to raise for him.	Di: Nn—“deixar na sorte,” deixar com alguém, né, para criar para ele.
Du: Ah ha.	Du: Ah há.
Di: He’ll grow and—can take care of it.	Di: Ele crescer e – pode tomar conta.

Leaving it in his luck was a particular way for Dirce’s son to own a cow, a mode of ownership, an arrangement in which someone else raised the animal. Oziel, similarly, spoke of luck as a *kind* of ownership. He and his wife Jaqueline were telling me about how the real owner of their flock of chickens was their granddaughter Lucília.

J: It’s Lucília’s, because I bought it for her.	J: É de Lucília, que eu comprei para ela.
D: Mm hm.	D: Mm hm.
O: But here, it’s like this.	O: Mas aqui é o seguinte.
J: It’s in her luck.	J: É na sorte dela.
O: In luck, you know? Because when it’s time to decide to sell or to eat, here there’s none of that business of, of, of—(Jaqueline laughs). No.	O: Na sorte, né? Porque na hora de dar de vender ou comer, aqui não tem negócio de, de, de—(Jaqueline laughs) Não. (from int w/ c188)

In what sense, Oziel asked, did Lucília own the chickens? She owned them *in luck*. Luck was the principle according to which Lucília owned the chickens—a principle that did not enable her to stop them from being sold or eaten, but that nonetheless gave her some kind of title, a title that Oziel and Jaqueline found important enough to be worth emphasizing to me. For Oziel and Jaqueline, *luck* was a full-scale ownership regime. The term functioned not only as a descriptor for personal propitiousness, but also, more broadly, as a native model, a tag for one particular system of owning.¹⁹

¹⁹ Along similar lines, Seu Inácio used the term *nome* (“nome”) to refer to the modality through which his grandson owned a cow. “Now it’s—his, like this. In, in the name it’s already his. Now, for him to do business, do everything, he can’t. Because he’s a minor.” (*Agora é— dele, assim. No, no nome já é dele. Agora, para ele fazer negócio, fazer tudo, não pode. Que ele é de menor. (from int w/ t090)*) In the name was, seemingly, the way that the grandson owned the cow. It was the answer to the tacit question *in what sense did he own it?*

The luck system made it possible for a child to own an animal as a special kind of object—as a premio. The animal had once circulated in a commodity market; perhaps an adult had bought it in order to give it to the child as a gift, or perhaps it had initially been only a commodity in potentia, one more calf in a herd of cows that a farmer knew that she could sell if she wanted. But once it entered the child’s ownership, the animal shed some of its commodity qualities, at least for a time. It became disalienated. It acquired a particular connection to the child. Her ownership over the animal had to do with her luck or blood, that is, her selfhood, prior to any act of labor on her part. Hence the animal could not be so easily separated from her. Luck, perhaps, offered something of a riposte to the justification according to which people deserved to own things because of their own labor.

Even in everyday commodity situations, with no premio involved, the logic of luck still had purchase. Lara highlighted the connection between luck and labor when she described one of the work projects undertaken by her husband Rodrigo. Along with his brother, Rodrigo had toiled to weed and harvest the beans that a large farmer grew in the alleyways separating the coffee trees (discussed in Ch. 1). With the earnings Rodrigo bought a illicit chain saw, thinking it would open the door to high-paid work. But in the village, no-one had the money to pay high. Lara said that Rodrigo now wondered if it would have been better to spend the cash on cattle. On the other hand, cattle, too, came with risks.

L: And what he says is no, that the beast—the thing is that that’s dangerous too, you know? We say, like, “It would have given a better result.” But the beast that’s raised free-range is out there too, you know?

D: Mm hm.

L: It depends on the person’s luck.

L: E diz ele que não, que o bicho—é que também é perigoso, né? A gente fala assim, “Dava mais resultado.” Mas o bicho que está solto está lá também, né?

D: Mm hm.

L: Vai da sorte da pessoa.

For example, Lara noted, cows could get bitten by snakes. She concluded:

L: But we're, like, venturing luck, you know?

D: Mm hm.

L: Trusting in God, and—

L: Mas a gente aventurando a sorte assim, né?

D: Mm hm.

L: Confiando em Deus, e—

(from focus fam int w/ c031. 9/25)

Luck helped to account for why Rodrigo's hard work to buy the chain saw had not turned out exactly as planned; luck also explained why the cattle alternative might not have been better.

And yet, although it relied upon the possible disjuncture between work and reward, the discourse of luck here had nothing resigned about it. Lara was not talking Rodrigo out of working. On the contrary, the logic of luck promoted perseverance, since one's setbacks were not necessarily one's fault, and alternatives might not have been better. The awareness of luck was a hedge against regret. People had to keep *venturing luck*.

The sense that ownership does not come from labor – at least not always – is what underlies the *premio*. The *premio* thus carries out the ideological task of making sense of the rest of the work world. Rodrigo's chain saw was far from a *premio*; it was a regular commodity, and a losing one at that. But it was subject to the same force that enabled children's livestock to prosper, luck. Children did not do any labor to care for their animals, and yet they could influence the animals' growth through luck. In the same way, some force beyond labor would be helping govern the results that Rodrigo faced in his everyday work life. The *premio* provided a visual example of a principle to be remembered: labor did not really determine who owned which things in the world.²⁰

This principle, with the sensibility underlying it, could sometimes provide a potent resource for political critique. The landless leader Genaro invoked it during a land occupation. Genaro, by his early twenties, had become a promising activist in the MST, and when landless

²⁰ Thanks go to Bill Sites for this insightful view.

farmers occupied a plantation, he took part in the negotiations with its owner. The owner objected that he had worked for his land. Genaro gave a terse reply, which he told me about afterwards: *if work were really rewarded, then the slaves would be the owners of everything.*

Here, Genaro activated the critical edge that was present, if sometimes quietly so, inside the discourse of child ownership. Child ownership proved that people owned things because of kinship and not because of labor, because of who had preceded them and not how much they had worked; child ownership, as if it were a reflection of so many of the other, crueler ownerships in the surrounding world, pulled the rug out from under the tale about work and reward. In Genaro's words of challenge, lucklessness became a condition of history.

But political militancy was only one possible use to which the luck discourse could be put. Another alternative came from the busy household of Rúbia, Tadeu, and their children. They were the most prominent evangelical family in Maracujá and the careful owners of a herd of cattle. Evangelicals did not, in my experience, directly talk about luck. Rúbia and Tadeu seemed to have transformed some of its features, however, into a different notion: *influência*. Sertanejos, in general, used the word *influência* to refer to a person's interests or inclinations. In Rúbia's and Tadeu's discourse, the term described a lasting inner state, fundamental to a child's identity, that explained why the child should have access to animals. *Influência* was somewhat like luck, in other words—except that, in a Weberian turn, it had become aligned with vocation.

Duff: How can a child end up, um, um, um, having an animal?

Tadeu: It's because – we're the ones who buy it and give it to them, you know?

D: Ah ha.

Rúbia: And their interests (*influência*), too, right?

C: Their interests.

R: Because mine, ours, are really like that. Very interested (*influyente*.) There's Hernâni, he's

D: Como é que um menino pode chegar a, a, a ter um animal?

T: É porque—é a gente que compra e dá para eles, não é?

D: Ah ha.

Rúbia: E a influência deles, também, né?

T: A influência.

R: Porque os meus, os nossos mesmo são assim.

Muito influente [...] É o Hernâni mesmo, é o mais—gosta muito desses animais. De –criar.

really the most—he really likes those animals. He likes—raising them.

T: It's vocation, you know? They say that we have to – hm—um—observe what our children's vocation is, you know?

D: Mm hm.

T: So that when we really invest, we don't invest wrong.

D: Mm hm!

T: So—I've got a—I've got a—a child there whose vocation is to rear. It's just to rear, just that, him. Cattle, things like that.

D: Mm hm.

T: So we've already observed that he's just—he's focused on that area. So I want to invest in that area so that tomorrow or the next day—you know? Now the others, we look, trying to observe what their vocation is, you know?

Because often, today, we—we parents, if we don't observe what is the vocation of our children, we invest wrong, you know?

D: Mm hm. (pause.) Truly, this question of vocation is, is very important. And truly, we have to invest well in children.

T: Yes. They say that the child is like an arrow, you know? And we the archer.

D: Mm hm.

T: So then we have to—shoot the arrow at the right target.

D: I like that. I'm going to write down that phrase. "The child is like an arrow, and we the archer—"

T: In the hand of the warrior, you know? We are the warrior.

T: É a vocação, né? Diz que a gente tem que—e—oh— observar qual é a vocação dos nossos filhos, né?

D: Mm hm.

T: Para quando a gente investir mesmo, não investir errado.

D: Mm hm!

T: Então—eu tenho um—eu tenho um—um menino aí que a vocação dele é criar. É só criar só, ele. Gado, esses negócios.

D: Mm hm.

T: Então já tem observado que ele só—ele é focalizado nessa área. Então eu quero investir nessa área para amanhã ou depois—né? Agora os outros, a gente olha, tentando observar qual é a vocação deles, né? Que muitas das vezes hoje, nós—nós pais, se nós não observar qual é a vocação de nossos filhos, nós investe errado, né?

D: Mm hm. (pause.) Justamente, essa questão de vocação é, é muito importante. E justamente, a gente tem que investir bem nos filhos.

T: É. Diz que o filho é como flecha, né? E nós o flecheiro.

D: Mm hm.

T: Então nós tem que—lançar flecha no alvo certo.

D: Gostei. Vou escrever essa frase. "O filho é como flecha, e nós o flecheiro"—

T: Na mão do guerreiro, né? Nós somos o guerreiro.

(from int w/ c045)

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Luck, blood, name, *influência*, vocation: some force beyond labor, lodged deep inside a person, had the capacity to shape the future of the objects that the person owned. This was not chance or fortune in a general sense. It made up part of the individual's particular selfhood. As Lara said when discussing Rodrigo's chain saw, *it depends on the person's luck*— not luck writ large, but *the person's luck*. This personal force was described in a discourse that could be put to varied

uses: persistence, rebellion, investment. And the force, with all of its ambiguities, was on display most prominently in the pigs and chickens that sertanejos assigned to the children in their lives.

Getting to a house

Maciele was born in a place that her parents did not own, in the windy plain at the top of Maracujá, in a house where the landowner let them live. Her mother and her father took care of the owner's cows and coffee fields, and eventually she did too; they received the right to reside in that dry place and a salary that was too small. They were *moradores*.

Maciele saw history happen in the place, and she helped to make it happen. She saw the coffee boom, when the crop became so prosperous that dozens of hired hands would come each year for the harvest and sleep in temporary lodgings. She saw the owners spend more and more time in the city, investing their wealth in ventures there. She saw the occupation in the mid-1990s, when the landless movement rushed in through the front gate and set up little shacks everywhere. The occupiers lived in the shacks, through hunger and cold, and they demanded that the land be redistributed. Eventually, Maciele joined the movement in the shacks. When the federal government expropriated the land, she received a piece to work on and a small white house to live in, newly built with government money, all concrete and red roofing tile, identical to the 119 others. Like everyone else at the new Maracujá land settlement, Maciele had a right to use the house and the land, but not a title to it. She could not sell her place. She could be removed from it if the settlement leadership decided to remove her. Some things, then, had not changed since the time of her birth. But other things had: now, as a settler on a movement settlement, she helped to decide how the land was run and to choose who ran it.

In 2012, Maciele told me about a dream that she had:

To make a house for myself, a good one, there on the outside. [...] I don't know if I'm going to make that come true.	Fazer uma casa para mim, boa, lá fora [...] Não sei se vou realizar. Caldint1p138

This dream, indeed, was practically universal in the sertão. At Maracujá, nearly everyone, even the movement leadership, seemed to want a house that he or she could own legally, somewhere outside of the movement area. Seu Miguel explained it this way: he would still live and work on the land settlement, but he would have something in another place, too. Dona Cássia, in her seventies and surrounded by grandchildren, did ultimately achieve the dream, having bit by bit paid for the construction supplies and the people who made a house for her at the edge of the urban zone of Conquista.

Dona Cássia: [I] paid for—that, that house there. I paid for that land. Seu Jorge (her husband): Indeed. Dona Cássia: I bought building supplies and I made a future.	Dona Cássia: [P]aguei—esse, essa casinha lá. Paguei esse terreno. Seu Jorge (her husband): É. DC: Comprei material e fiz futuro. (from interview w c153)

Rio Branco was different from Maracujá. At Rio Branco, every kin group – except one – owned its own land.²¹ But the dream mattered at Rio Branco, too. Younger couples and poorer people often did not own their homes; they lived in rooms or houses lent by relatives, on land owned by relatives. For these people, getting a house was frequently an important goal. And the housing dream did not end with home ownership. Home owners made major efforts to expand their homes. An expanded house – even better, a cluster of them all close by – could enable the extended family to live together, helping to turn the focal couple into a community center of gravity, if perhaps occasionally frustrating the autonomous hopes of the family members in their orbit.

²¹ Or two, depending on definitions. In addition to the family of Dona Dorotea and Seu Inácio, discussed below, there was Murilo. A friendly man, much given to reggae and employed as the government health agent in the region, Murilo had no land of his own in the community – although he did own a house in a different part of the countryside – and he lived in a house that an older resident of Rio Branco allowed him to use for free.

But at Rio Branco, one kin group did not have any land of its own to lend or borrow.

Dona Dorotea and Seu Inácio lived as *moradores*, just as Maciele once had, on a plantation at the edge of the village, as described in Chapter 2. Their house belonged to an owner who spent perhaps one week there each year; for a small salary, they cared for his cattle and his coconut grove. Seu Inácio told me that he hoped for something different:

Seu Inácio: For us to live in our place. [...] I'm thinking this way, for me to have my house, for me to live in, like that.

Duff: Mm hm.

R: (quietly) My thing.

Seu Inácio: Para a gente morar no lugar da gente [...] Eu penso assim, de eu ter minha casa, para eu morar, assim.

Duff: Mm hm.

R: (quietly) O meu.

Whether living on the plantation owner's land or on the government's, in a relative's house or even in one's own, everyone spoke about *my thing*, the house that one could imagine having.

This dream bore the marks of history, since, as we saw in Chapter 2, *moradores* had once figured their houses as key sites of struggle in their relationship with the landowner. Someone who managed to move to his or her own home would, by that very act, cease working for the plantation-owner as a *morador*. In the mid-twentieth century, indeed, this progression was encoded in rural labor law, and when the *morador* left the plantation after a certain number of years, landlords were obligated to pay for the worker's time – *pagar os tempos* – by purchasing a home elsewhere for the worker (see discussion in Ch. 2). The desire for a house thus took shape inside a tradition: to live in the house that the plantation-owner gave was to live insecurely, and to achieve one's own home was to stop toiling for a plantation-owner and exit the cycle of plantation work. It was, in a direct sense, to leave labor.

In this sense, the house was a *prêmio*, an index of labor left. But how did one leave labor?

Dona Cássia said that, when she bought building materials, she *made a future*. How was this future constructed?

It was, quite literally, constructed. Sertanejos never, in my experience, rented houses, and they rarely bought or sold them.²² Instead, they built houses. Once built, houses were to be lived in – or to be lent, not rented, to friends and family. Houses thus remained largely outside the sphere of circulation for cash.

Sertanejos tended to follow a quite consistent path towards home construction.²³ They would accumulate cattle bit by bit. The cattle would reproduce. Earnings from other ventures would be converted into more cattle. Eventually, the cattle could be sold to pay for the building materials, the plot of land, and some skilled masons to do the more complex parts of the work.

As Daniel described it:

For me to buy a house, I've got to invest, right there, something like seventy calves.

Para mim comprar uma casa, tem que investir, aí mesmo, umas setenta novilhas.
int w c151

This trajectory conformed to the Bohannans' famous "spheres of exchange" model (1968). Houses remained in an upper sphere by themselves, not to be traded away for any money, but rather to be circulated among kin. Below houses came the sphere of cattle, animals that sertanejos avoided selling in most circumstances—but which could be used to buy houses.²⁴

²² Selling did occur occasionally in the villages, but in the two circumstances of which I am aware, everyone seemed to conceive of the sale as the sale of a piece of land with a house on it rather than the sale of a house. Land, not housing, was the salient saleable object. It was much more common to lend a house.

²³ Compare with Holston 1991.

²⁴ Sertanejos might also sell cattle for an urgent reason, or to achieve some major purpose—like, for example, the computer Martinho bought for his daughters (Ch. 7). Dona Zaida explained that, for her father, cattle had actually been a form of long-term savings for retirement—very similar to the dynamic observed by Ferguson (1985). “Oh, dude, he had some little livestock. Because for his whole life, he tried hard to have livestock—to have a little pig in the pen—in, in the yard, a cow. When he was having a tough time, he would sell a calf. And he ended up making it to his death that way. He would sell a pig. It was like that. He would make a little corn field. He would raise a little big. And he went living in that way. But everything was in that manner, in suffering.

D: Mm hm.

DZ: Everything in suffering.

(O, moço, ele tinha umas criaçozinhas. Que toda a vida ele esforçava para ter uma criação—ter um porquinho no chi—no, no terreiro, uma vaquinha, quando se via apertado vendia um bezerro, e ele acabou de morrer desse jeito. Vendi um porco. Era assim. Fazia uma rocinha de milho. Criava um porquinho. E foi vivendo, foi assim. Mas tudo, assim, sofrendo.

In the lowest sphere, other sources of income, such as money from crops or from wage-labor, could be beneficially converted into cattle. And just as Guyer has suggested in her revision of the Bohannon model (2003), these “spheres” might even more helpfully be conceptualized as a set of “moves,” of strategic acquisitions that sertanejos make in order to advance through an overarching narrative in which they become more and more prosperous.

Seu Valentim, who in his late seventies lived in one of the mud shacks at Maracujá, used his toils on the land settlement in order to make such moves. He got a better house, not in the village but in the nearby city.²⁵

Seu Valentim: [I] sold the cattle, and I bought a house in Conquista, you know?

D: Mm hm.

SV: But when I sold the last little bit of the cattle, and I saw that the money was going to run out, I made an addition to the house. It was a big kitchen. I – bought—I put some things inside the house [*botei dentro de casa*].

Seu Valentim: [E]u vendi o gado, e comprei a casa em Conquista, né?

Duff: Mm hm.

SV: Mas quando eu vendi o restinho do gado, que eu vi que o dinheiro ia acabar, eu fiz uma reforma na casa. Foi uma cozinha grande. Eu—comprei—botei umas coisinhas dentro de casa. int w c181

Seu Valentim, indeed, made the conversion model explicit. He had been unusually financially successful. Like a number of sertanejos, however, he had also lost money through problems at a bank.²⁶ He told me that he decided henceforth to put his money into “gado e casa” – “cattle and house” – thus literalizing the notion of the “cattle bank.” (See Comaroffs 1997: 208.)²⁷

D: Mm hm

DZ: Tudo sofrendo.)

²⁵ Note that Seu Valentim bought his house in the city. Houses in the villages were rarely bought or sold.

²⁶ The inflation episodes of the 1980s seem to have been especially difficult for sertanejos. People had stories about watching their money lose value, and, in at least one case of which I know, an entrepreneurial young man refused to use the banking system for decades afterwards.

²⁷ It was common to hear sertanejos refer to cattle as a form of saving or a “countryside bank.”

SV: Yeah, so the Banco do Nordeste,-- I put some money there, twenty-three thousand reais. I made a savings passbook there that—I didn't open up a checking account, thinking— [pause] that I wouldn't pay interest.

D: Mm hm.

SV: But the bank took my identity documents. They made another—another deposit—into a commercial account.

D: Mm hm.

SV: When I put in my card, to take out a little cash, they—My money was in the savings account, and they shouldn't have taken it out without my authorization. They sent money from the bank that they lent to me at interest, eating it up behind my back.

D: Oh, wow.

SV: You see? When I—when two years had passed, a phone call for me, a phone call for me, you know? I went there to see. When I got there, I was there with a lawyer right away.

D: Wow.

SV: When I got there, he says, “No, Mr. Valentim, sir. It's because you owe the bank here two thousand and seven hundred bucks.”

D: Wow! (yawn)

SV: “And we can't take out your money, because your money is in a savings account.” I said, “This right here is theft by the bank.”

D: Wow.

SV: “And my money, I'm going to take it out of there now,” and I took it out. And so I put it to use in a house, in cattle, and – and I took it out of there.

SV: Mesmo assim, o Banco do Nordeste—eu botei um dinheiro lá, vinte três mil reais. Fiz uma caderneta de poupança que, que não abri conta corrente, pensando—

[pause] que eu não ia pagar juros.

D: Mm hm.

SV: Mas o banco pegou meus documentos. Fez outra—outro depósito, de—comercial.

D: Mm hm.

SV: Quando eu passava o cartão meu, para tirar um trocado, eles— Meu dinheiro estava na poupança, eles não tirava sem minha ordem. Mandava o dinheiro do banco me emprestar de juros, comendo na minha cacunda.

D: Oh, uau.

SV: Viu? Quando eu—quando chegou com dois anos, telefone para mim, telefone para mim, viu? Eu fui lá ver. Quando eu cheguei, já fui com advogado.

D: Uau.

SV: Quando eu cheguei, diz, “Não, O Seu Valentim. É porque você está devendo o banco aqui dois mil e setecentos contos.”

D: Uau! (yawn)

SV: “E nos não pode tirar de seu dinheiro, que o seu dinheiro está na poupança.” Eu disse, “Isso aí é furto do banco.”

D: Uau.

SV: “E meu dinheiro vou tirar daí agora,” e tirei. E que apliquei em casa, em gado, e—e tirei de lá.

(int w c181)

Thus Seu Valentim opted out of a system in which money was fungible – too unpredictably fungible – and into a system of conversions to cattle and houses. To convert upwards, as he did, was the dream. Downwards conversions also happened, but they provoked shame and regret. Lara remembered how her father, who had gained a house by working for many years as a morador on a plantation, traded it downwards for cattle and agricultural goods.

Lara: [T]oday he doesn't have it any more, although he could have held onto it [*segurado*], you know? [...] I was telling Duff that it ended up being a trade for nothing in exchange. Lourenço [her friend]: Well, yeah. L: Dad took the house, he traded it, back in that time. It was for some old horse, for a cart— It was for the little cows. Today there's nothing from that house.

Lara: [H]oje ele não tem mais, que ele podia ter *segurado*, né? [...] Eu falando para Duff que acabou a troca de mais nada. F: Pois é. L: Pai pegou a casa, trocou naquele tempo. Foi em cavalo velho, foi em carroça—[...] Foi nas vaquinhas. Hoje não tem nada de volta dessa casa. (from c031 interview 10, 8-19-12)

As Lara suggested, an owned house had special significance not just for a person, but for a full contingent of kin.²⁸ Like children's animals, the house created the kin network— but it did so in the opposite direction, so to speak. Children's animals built the kinship network by individuating kin property and hence establishing the different kinship roles in relation to each other. The house, by contrast, aggregated kin property. It assembled contributions from throughout the network in order to generate a single home where everyone, at least in principle, could have a place to stay.²⁹ Russo acknowledged this aggregation when he spoke about the house that he had recently purchased in the city:

²⁸ Hugo, similarly, spoke about the house he had built bit by bit with the help of his family.

Hugo: Yeah, my grandfather, when he got sick, ah, ah, ahm, after he was sick he gave me a female calf. Duff: Mm hm. H: And now, just recently, my uncle gave me a female calf as well. That one that I have. D: Mmmm! H: The one that my grandfather gave me, I got to the point of having twelve [head of cattle]. D: Wow! H: All, almost all, the offspring of, of just one cow. D: Really! What was it that happened to so much cattle? H: [...] I went selling it, and then a male calf died. Then, when I went to make the house here, I—I sold the other cows. D: And why did you sell? Marisol (his wife): The financial situation, you know? H: Yeah, because I had to—I needed to pay the masons and I didn't have any other, other money.

Hugo: Oh, meu avô, quando adoeceu, eh, eh, ahm, depois que ele estava doente ele me deu uma bezerra. Duff: Mm hm. H: E agora, tem pouco tempo, meu tio me deu uma bezerra também. Essa que eu tenho. D: Mmmm! H: A que meu avô me deu, eu cheguei a ter até doze. D: Uau! H: Tudo, quase tudo, filhos de, de uma só. D: É mesmo! O que é que aconteceu com tanto gado? H: [...] Eu fui vendendo, depois morreu um bezerro. Aí, quando eu fui fazer a casa aqui, eu—eu vendi as outras. D: E porque é que vendeu? Marisol (his wife): As condição, né? H: É, porque eu tive que—eu tinha que pagar os pedreiros e eu não tinha outro, outro dinheiro. (from interview w/ t066)

²⁹ Individuation and aggregation, here, occur at different moments in the life-cycle of the owner. Youthful owners tend to individuate their wealth—as, for example, happens when young people claim family resources and convert

I sold [the cattle] to get together a sum to buy the house. [...] At that time, all of the girls had cows. So I sold everyone's in order to buy [the house.] Mine, the girls', and Fábía's [his wife's].

Eu vendi para enterar para comprar a casa [...] Então as meninas tudo tinha vaca. Aí, vendi a de todo o mundo para comprar. Minha, delas, a de Fábía
(from int w c193)

Dona Cássia was even clearer:

Dona Cássia: As far as me buying this land and house, I'm not the one who is buying it. It's my children. Who live in São Paulo.

Duff: Mm hm.

DC: And are helping me to buy it. Because, um—with money from here, and from me myself, it's not possible.

Dona Cássia: Que eu estou comprando esse sitio, não é eu que estou comprando. É meus filhos. Que moram em São Paulo.

Duff: Mm hm.

DC: E estão me ajudando a comprar. Que, eh—de dinheiro daqui, e de eu mesma, não dá.
(from interview w c153)

Dona Cássia's house wove a web of connections between São Paulo and the village. As it made connections like these, a house became a *premio* par excellence. Houses were *premios*, in the first instance, because they were disalienated: although built from commodified labor and commodified materials, houses had been lifted out of the sphere where cash and labor normally flowed. Houses circulated in another sphere, lent and borrowed between relatives, shared and preserved, and in this way they generated kinship ties and came to belong to the kin group in a special sense.

Houses were *premios*, in the second instance, because they served as signposts for labor left. Half a century ago, to have a house meant to stop working as a *morador* – as it still means that for remaining *moradores* like Dona Dorotea and Seu Inácio. But today, an owned house tends to mean something else: it grants a measure of autonomy from labor in the city or in migratory plantation jobs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 208). A home owner knows that she

these resources into objects like clothes and bus fare that will allow them to work in the city or on a mechanized plantation. Older *sertanejos* can claim to be aggregating their family's wealth as they draw down on various resource streams in order to assemble a herd or build a home where everyone belongs. Since a kin network ideally includes both young and old, the overlapping dynamics mean that some kinspeople will be individuating at the same time as others are aggregating. Thanks go to Julie Chu for this enormously helpful point.

can live cheaply and relatively securely in the countryside, even without employment. She has fewer reasons to travel outside the village to labor.

The house as *premio*, then, helps to construct the semiproletarian class identity available in the *sertão*. Through the house, people articulate a particular relation to labor—a relation of distance from it. The possibilities of the house are, in an important sense, the limits that *sertanejos* manage to place on labor.

Those limits can change. Maciele was born into a building that belonged to the plantation owner; she spent years living in a cramped protest shanty; she moved into a white house built by the government. These three lodgings, all on the same land, marked out the different spaces in which she could plan and hope, labor and leave labor. The story of her moves through these spaces could be told as a tale about class transformation. Or it could be told as she told it, as the unfinished narrative of a person and a family finding something to be theirs. Nalta also told it that way, and she said it best:

The house of us people, it can be lousy,
whatever way it is. But it's our house.

A casa da gente, pode ser ruim, do jeito que for.
Mas é a casa da gente. 3lagint2p16

Conclusion

Maiara owned her chicken in her special sense, the same special sense that Julinho would own his house, and that specialness helped Maiara and Julinho to know who they were and what they could do. In creating *premios*, people build a form of ownership for themselves; they make available an agency. A *premio* system is a particular way of owning objects. Children in the *sertão* own animals because of luck and acquire them by speaking. Adults, by contrast, own houses in order to leave labor and acquire them by converting upwards from cattle. In both cases, the *premio* instantiates a set of assumptions that help to form a class. *Sertanejos*, through their

premios, remind each other that orality has strength, that the kinship realm enjoys autonomy from labor, and that work is not always what determines who gets which objects. These are the lessons that help turn a person into a semi-proletarian.

Perhaps most of all, sertanejos use premios to respond to homogeneity. In the city, sertanejos find themselves faced with a constant stream of homogenous objects, commodities all fungible one for the other. Often enough, for sertanejos this homogeneity becomes manifested through homogenous deprivation: all commodities are alike in that sertanejos cannot have them. Through the premio, people disalienate the homogenous object, correcting for its homogeneity through a series of practices that convert it into a kind of inalienable wealth. In effect, the premio is a way for people to move the zero-point backwards. In a commodity system, everyone forgets the ownership of an item with each new exchange cycle; here, by contrast, the object has been made to enter a realm where its moves are traced and recalled over time.

And yet it would be a mistake to understand the premio as a zone separate from labor relations. At a second degree, premios help to structure the broader economic system inside of which they exist. Adults strive to build houses and to give their children cattle, and this story – *let me try to get enough money to buy it* – can provide the motivation and arc that leads an adult to enter the labor market for a spell of paid work. The arc that leads the adult to enter *and* to exit: once one had gained the cow or the house, it became easier to drop out. The premio, as a dream of something to be acquired, promotes labor, but it promotes it only by promising the possibility of an end to labor. The condition of possibility for labor is the existence, even if illusory, of something beyond labor.

All ownership regimes, under capital, find themselves afflicted by a fundamental strangeness. People work in order to own, and yet ownership never really comes. Objects remain

perpetually transient. The most expensive mansion is subject to property taxes that make it unaffordable to penurious heirs; the most secure bonds can be bought in an instant; the greatest fortunes decay in the face of competition. Capitalism's apologists – and some of its detractors – describe it as a system of private ownership, but the truth is otherwise. Capital circulates objects and labor beyond any private control.³⁰ Every class constitutes itself by establishing some sort of bulwark against this flux, something permanent onto which a person could hold. When this bulwark is threatened, ownership, which so often functions as the motive behind accumulation, can instead turn into an obstacle to capital's reproduction and a focus of resistance to it. Class identity itself, even elite class identity, can emerge in these moments as a site of opposition to capital. So it comes to pass that elites defend education or traditional skill or historic estates – all of them premises of one or another kind – against the assaults of profit. Class, which marks a human as a particular kind of person, ultimately renders that human not fully fungible, not fully adaptable to new dictates, and in her very specificity a possible stumbling-block to accumulation.

Sertanejos, far more frequently than other people, become stumbling-blocks. Their historical experience, along with their contemporary status as members of the industrial reserve army, inclines them to create a premio system that gives them an unusual degree of distance from the accumulative norm. This distance sits in an uneasy balance with the extraordinary proximity to the global market that sertanejos acquire when they go to work at enormous iron mines or industrial coffee plantations. Faced with this unease, many sertanejos, especially younger ones, choreograph a class transition into full-time proletarian status.

Alexandra thought long and hard about such a transition. She had traveled to Belo Horizonte to help her sister (Introduction), and she gained a precious chance—the chance to stay

³⁰ Note the similar position taken by Maurer and Schwab 2006.

there. As she described her options to me, Alexandra brought into view a new and different premio logic: the logic of *opportunity*. I had asked her what it meant to grow in life.

Alexandra: To grow in life (*crescer na vida*) is for you to have an opportunity and know how to hold on (*segurar*) to it. You know? For example, there was a, an opportunity for studying. Then you've got to know how to hold on to that studying. Because that thing right there is a future of yours. It's a thing that is yours. You die with that. Your knowledge is yours alone.

Duff: Mm hm.

A: Opportunity, it doesn't knock twice on your door. It only comes once. So for you to grow in life, you have to—everything that comes to you, whether it be—for example, you're only going to know if it's bad if you—
[long pause] do it. And if you don't try, you are never going to know if it was bad or if it was good for you.

Alexandra: Crescer na vida é você ter oportunidade e saber segurar ela. Né? Você—eh. Por exemplo, tinha um, uma oportunidade de um estudo. Aí você tem que saber segurar aquele estudo. Porque aquilo ali é um futuro seu. É uma coisa que é seu. Você morre com aquilo. O seu saber é só seu.

Duff: Mm hm.

A: A oportunidade, ela não bate duas vezes em sua porta. Ela só vem uma vez. Então para você crescer na vida, você precisa—tudo que vem até você, seja ela—por exemplo, você só vai saber se ela é ruim se você [long pause] fazer. E se você não tentar, você nunca vai saber se ela foi ruim ou se ela foi boa para você.

(Entrevista com Alexandra sobre trabalho fora)

Alexandra used the language of absolutes – *always, never, die with it, yours alone* – to mark the appearance of the premio, something big, something that, like the child's chicken or the family house, could belong to you in a special way. She spoke of study, the definitional premio of the professional-managerial class. But she understood study through the prism of a particular rationality, one foreign to professionals but familiar to proletarians in more than one part of the world: the singular opportunity (Muder 2007).

Opportunity was a master concept that young sertanejos seized upon to discuss their transitions to full-time proletarian status. For the youth who left the villages behind for good, opportunity became a defining reason. Celso described the thought process as follows:

Celso: I think that in the countryside there's not much opportunity for growth, no way.

Duff: Mm hm.

C: To have a better life. To have—a, a house, to have a car. To buy.

Celso: Eu acho na roça não tem muita oportunidade de crescimento não.

Duff: Mm hm

C: Ter uma vida melhor. Ter —um, uma casinha, ter um carro. Comprar.

(Entrevista com Celso sobre trabalho fora)

If luck explained why a rural child owned animals, opportunity provided the same sort of explanation— albeit along radically different lines. Maiara had a brood of chickens because she was lucky; a sertanejo with a factory job had a car because he had gotten the opportunity. Opportunity, like luck, was a deeply personal matter, and it accounted for the outcomes that a person faced. But unlike luck, which originated inside the person, opportunity was *given*. It came from a company or a boss, and thus it established a human relation, an exchange, between the worker and the dominant forces in the labor process. Orestes used these terms to refer to his job at a Wal-Mart subsidiary:

You've got to have—this commitment to the company. Because the company, like, it's a company that – let's put it this way, gives a lot of opportunity. You know? [...] If you want that – that you – that your work be recognized inside the company, you have to have this responsibility. You know? And that makes you have more opportunity inside the company— makes your knowledge, makes it so that you grow, you know? Inside the company. Because inside that place, right there, it can open doors for you.

Você tem que ter—esse compromisso com a empresa. Porque a empresa, assim, ela é uma empresa que, digamos assim, dá muita oportunidade. Não é? [...] Se você quer que – que você—que seu trabalho seja reconhecido dentro da empresa, você tem que ter essa responsabilidade. Né? É isso que faça com que tenha mais oportunidade dentro da empresa, que – faça com seus conhecimentos, que você cresça, né? Dentro da empresa. Que lá dentro, mesmo, possa abrir portas para você.
(Entrevista com Orestes sobre trabalho fora)

Once the doors opened, they enabled access to the marks of urban ascension.

Opportunity, like a gift given, explained how a person acquired those premios that were characterized above all by the quality of mobility: cars, education, and, in the broadest sense, growth itself. These objects had a special connection to their owner, just as the chicken had a special connection to Maiara. They allowed the person to become singular within the environment of labor.

Opportunity, moreover, was frighteningly unique and temporary. When she felt frustrated at the clothing factory, Ana recalled, some of her co-workers urged her not to quit, because

the labor market wouldn't give me another opportunity.

o mercado de trabalho não ia me dar outra oportunidade. (entrevista com Ana sobre trabalho fora)

As Alexandra had put it, opportunity *only comes once*. Different from the enduring state of luck, an opportunity shimmered with temporary time—but, whether taken or left, it would always have been yours, yours in a deep sense. Alexandra had taken the opportunity and she knew.

Alexandra did ultimately return to Maracujá and to her family, although she still held her opportunity close, talking about it with me often, especially glad for the words that her boss at the grocery store had told her when she left: *you can come back any time, to any store in the chain, and have your position again*. Alexandra had her opportunity, but now, once again, she lived close to a very different kind of premio—as close as she was to Seu Juvenal, age 78, whose house in the village stood only a few doors down from hers. When I asked Seu Juvenal what his dream in life was, he said, to my surprise,

My dream is to work. Today, tomorrow—I'm already at this age, but—[...] At this age, work. So that tomorrow or the next day, perhaps, God bless me, I and my family—when I—come to be missing, God takes me, then—there might be a—might be a son, might be the wife, might be a grandchild who says, “This thing here, it was my father who left it.”

Meu sonho é trabalhar. Hoje, amanhã—já estou dessa idade, mas—[...] Nessa idade, trabalho. Para amanhã ou depois, talvez, Deus me abençoe, eu e minha família—quando eu—chegar a faltar, Deus me levar, aí—ter um—ter um filho, ter a mulher, ter um neto falar, “Isso aqui foi meu pai que deixou.”

This was far from the logic of the opportunity. Seu Juvenal aimed for the prize of something permanent and visible, perhaps a cow or a house, something that could trace out the line of descent into the future. Seu Juvenal concluded with words that reminded me of the discourse of luck. He spoke in the familiar tone of deliberate humility and unstinted determination. He would work, he explained, but he would not deserve his prize through work. He would get it another way.

For my family. I can't do it, no way. I have

Para minha família. Não posso não, não tenho

nothing. But there are the graces of God. But—
that's what my dream is.

nada, mas tem as graças de Deus, mas—é isso
que é meu sonho. (from interview w 164)

Conclusion

For many years, Fábía and her husband Russo ran a bar and general store out of their house in Maracujá, the house where you could get cash loans in the back room (Ch. 4). They had patience when their neighbors rapped on the window to buy late-night tomatoes. They calmed the rages of the intoxicated fighters who paced their front porch after a brawl. Finally, as a reward for good business, Fábía and their four daughters managed to move to the city.

When Fábía returned to Maracujá for a visit, however, she seemed ambivalent. I stood quietly by her side while she talked to Filipe, one of the oldest cattle herders in the village. She told him about her reflections: *I am a simple person. All I need is a plate of food and a house to live in. I don't have that wish to grow in life. Some people want to get drivers licenses. I've never wanted to. For what? Why drive a car or motorcycle?*

To grow. It was a verb that shivered with tensions. Sometimes, people in the villages spoke contemptuously about those who wanted *to grow in life* (*crescer na vida*.) But other people, other times, used the same words as a sign of praise. Then, growth counted as a virtue.

While sertanejos debated what to make of growth, they were also figuring out how they would participate in an economy that, over ten years' time, had doubled the wages they could make.¹ Should they go earn money in the formal labor market, more money than had ever before been possible? Or should they leave labor behind? And why?

When I asked Celso why he had gone back to school in his 20s, he had a simple answer. "Dream of growth, you know?" (*Sonho de crescimento, né?*) Indeed, most other young people at Maracujá said they wanted the same. Their goal, Celso explained, was

To go to the city. Try the luck of growth of that place, of the outside. [...] To have a better life.

Ir para a cidade. Te, tentar a sorte de crescimento de lá, de lá fora. [...] Ter uma vida melhor. (int w/ Celso)

¹ See Introduction for figures on Brazil's economic growth.

The city, however, offered no guarantee. It might bring money, but not growth. Ana remembered what had felt so frustrating about her job at the clothing factory: not just that she stapled her own finger, not just that she felt the boss hovering over her minutes, but that it had not allowed her any growth. “I wanted a job that helped me grow,” she mused, mixing bitterness with nostalgia. “[A job] that taught me. [...] I wanted to have a good future, even.” (*Eu queria um emprego que me ajudasse a crescer [...] que me ensinasse [...] Eu queria até ter um futuro bom (c8p84.)*)

If Celso and Ana spoke highly of growth, Analis, on the other hand, agreed with Fábila. Analis was the poorest person in Rio Branco. She lived in a single cement room that she had built for herself on her bumpy field, a room that her brother refused to visit.

Analis’s brother had moved to São Paulo, where he found a job and earned well. In those same years, Analis’s husband left her with their two sons, ages five and seven. But, Analis said, her brother did not reach out a hand to help. “And when he comes here to Bahia,” she fumed to me, “he’s with his friends drinking beer. He spends, like, three, four thousand reais.” (*E quando chega aqui na Bahia, é mais os amigos dele tomando cerveja. Gasta, é três, quatro mil reais.*)

Through the grapevine, Analis heard that her brother had a reason for not visiting her little house.

Analis: So he told an aunt of mine that he hasn’t come here to see me yet because even I don’t fit in this place. Imagine him. [...] He doesn’t help me, he doesn’t have consideration (*consideração*), he doesn’t even come here to chat with me.

D: Wow.

A: Sometimes, before, I would go after him, running, thinking that he didn’t want to come in case I wasn’t here.

D: Mm hm.

A: But no. [...] Those people, you know?

Who—

D: That’s horrible.

Analis: Aí falou com uma tia minha que ele não ainda veio aqui porque aqui não cabe nem eu. Imagina ele.

[...] Não me ajuda, não tem consideração, não vem nem aqui prosar mais eu.

D: Uau.

A: Às vezes antes eu saía atrás dele aí, correndo, pensando que ele não queria vir por medo de eu não estar aqui.

D: Mm hm.

A: Mas não. [...] Que essas pessoas, né?

Que—

D: Isso é horrível.

A: Que quer ser cresc—quer crescer na, na—

A: Who want to be grown—want to grow in, #(t081 int 10/4/12)
in—

As Analis pronounced the word *grow*, a frown squeezed her lips, and she slapped her hands against each other. I waited for her to finish the phrase *to grow in life*, but she had a different idea.

A: In falseness.

A: Na falsidade.

Between Analis and Celso, Laura took the middle position. In São Paulo she had seen the upside of growth and its downside, too. She worked as a servant and a chef. She bought good clothes and went to parties. In the city, she remembered, it seemed as if she were “flying, to earn more” (*voando, para ganhar mais.*)

And then she moved to a little white house at Maracujá, with a view of the dry plain, and she made cheese from the milk of her own cows. “If we go beyond what we are,” she reflected, “beyond what we aren’t, we wind up flopping” (*Se a gente vai além do que é – além do que não é – acaba quebrando a cara.*) She had a metaphor to describe this cycle. “You start sprouting wings,” she said. “But then you have to return to what you were, humble” (*Você acaba criando asas [...] mas depois você tem que voltar ao que você era, humilde*) (cad5p84).

In the backlands of Brazil, the circuit of growth and return that Laura described is a deeply etched path. Mintz spotted this circuit in the Caribbean, and his words could apply to Brazil’s Northeast as well.

Rather than “primitives” whose homelands were conquered from afar, or “peasants” within archaic imperial states invaded or crushed by European newcomers, Caribbean peoples were always migrants, or the recent descendants of migrants, compelled to design new patterns of life in an alien environment, and usually under rigidly coercive conditions. A peasant-like adaptation outside the plantation system for such people usually involved either a total escape from the system itself—by self-imposed isolation, as in the case of runaway slave communities (Price, 1973) — or else a permanently unbalanced oscillation between plantation or other outside labor and subsistence-

producing cultivation, as in the case of many or most non-plantation rural settlements (Mintz 1973: 100).

This dissertation has traced the oscillation. In particular, I have followed one leg of the path: the motion that points away from labor.

The oscillation itself is a structured inequality. Its contours, like grooves, give direction to human movement and give lasting shape to the differences between people. It accommodates growth without changing its own structure. During moments of youth and economic expansion, workers flow towards the formal labor market; when obstacles arise, those same workers return to farmhouses and stocks of cattle.

The circular motion allows for a new engagement with the question of what labor is and how to understand its shape. In this dissertation, that engagement unfolds in response to the broader challenge of reading the contemporary moment, a moment in which the steady wage no longer serves as the dominant scalar frame undergirding the ideology of work. Labor, I have argued, can be seen not only as an employment relation, but also, in a different sense, as a particular process for scaling time and objects. That process comes to the fore when sertanejos count the shirts they iron per day in a factory; it shines through when they sum up the monetary value of the work they do for themselves on their own fields. Understood in these terms, labor belongs to a social world that gets its direction from the great axis of homogeneity: labor is the use of homogeneous time to create homogeneous objects.

This argument has important roots in the claims made by Thompson, his antecedents, and his successors (Thompson 1967, Le Goff 1980 [1963], Whorf 1956 [1939], Anderson 2003 [1983], Chakrabarty 2000). But in contrast to Thompson's vision, it is not a modernization narrative, an account of the progressive conquest of social life by the standard hour. Instead, sertanejos move in circles that head both towards labor and away from it.

And, as it turns out, there are circles inside of circles. Once one has arrived in the countryside, one can draw closer to labor by toiling for pay on someone else's fields. Or one can move farther from it by building up one's own farm. On one's own farm, one will sometimes account in the restrictive terms of the day-wage, while at other times moving to the expansive language of the year or the dreamy future beyond it. Leaving labor, in other words, is not just the act of moving out of an urban job. It happens on the field, in the kitchen, in the front porch that has been converted into a bar. Leaving labor is a fractal process, never fully complete, that makes work imaginable by positing something beyond work. It is a process through which people under capital articulate their ambivalent and orbital relationship to the forms of value that dominate their world.

This process, I have argued, is not new. In symptomatically different guises, it manifested itself a century ago on plantations and a half-century ago in wage-laborers' towns, manifestations that remain present today. And in the past, as now, homogeneity was not a question of a single hegemonic mode of timekeeping that unrolled like a flattening carpet. Instead, at every conjuncture people faced several different kinds of time: some accounted in tiny units, some accounted as broadly as possible. Minute accounting served as a sign of subordination. To leave labor meant to move, as far as possible, from tracking the smaller to tracking the larger cycles.

I have claimed that these examples of homogeneity can allow for a close view onto the creation of the category *value*. When sertanejos arrange their economic exchanges, they sometimes speak in terms of a standard that exists outside of the interaction between the people present. To invoke this standard they use distinctive linguistic techniques, including an insistent present tense, shortened sentences, and the omission of personal pronouns. I refer to these techniques as "nomic calibration," and I argue that they characterize a particular kind of

exchange, one in which the exchanged object comes from a location understood to be so socially distant that the only possible relationship between the people at the origin and the people at the destination is the object itself, as scaled by the standard. This is the situation that makes value conceivable. Thus value carries inside itself a sense of externality, and, as Celso put it, to participate in value's increase meant to try *the luck of growth of the outside*.

In the Introduction I raised the question of economic immobility: why Brazilians have tended to occupy the same relative ranks even as income inequality has dropped. I proposed social class as an analytic tool for answering this question, and throughout the dissertation I have striven to show how sertanejos build a distinctive class position, using time systems and types of ownership, methods for measuring a field and ways to weigh a cow. I have argued that this position insulates rural Brazilians by opening the possibility of a space beyond labor. In the space beyond labor, sertanejos account along incommensurable scales; they aspire to hold objects permanently. They create their own sense for what is important or worthwhile. They retire, they have children, and they do all of this, as Murilo said, outside of the salary.

But I have also claimed that the class position fits into a structure of durable inequality. Maracujá and Rio Branco are one-class settings, with no superordinate class present. And yet the superordinating other, the power of value, is made present through the practices of sign use that surround the commodity. Lukacs' suspicion is thus confirmed (1999 [1923]): when the person relates to the specter of the commodity, class relations already come into being.

This process has a quite practical manifestation. People make lives in the villages by using commodities, and to obtain these commodities they count on sertanejos who have gone to the city, but who maintain their relationships and will someday come back. Employers and policymakers, for their part, also count on sertanejos' eventual return to the rural zone, designing

wage rates and social policies insufficient to support families in the city. Because the countryside exists as an alternative destination, everyone can act as if urban employment were transitory, and it becomes so. The return to the countryside then returns sertanejos to the same relative position they have long occupied, wealthier than before, but ranked the same. The presence of an alternative to labor helps the current arrangements of labor to continue.

Fortified with this alternative, the labor hierarchy proves to be hardy indeed, fixing people into relative positions that remain stable in crisis and prosperity alike. Rank persists, that is to say, because circular migration is a system that accommodates both growth and stasis. The system converts forward motion into circular motion. It gives workers a place to go in times of economic expansion and a destination to return to in moments of stagnation. It offers both a set of aspirations associated with labor *and* a set of counter-aspirations set apart from labor.

Sertanejos can alternate between the two, just as Alexandra did, in the Introduction, when she said that she changed her objectives: first accompanying her family, then making money for her family, then accompanying her family again. No wonder Laura concluded that *you have to return to what you were*.

Yet this is not only a story about rural Brazil, since labor, to become abstract, always depends on the existence of something outside of labor. People know that they are laboring because they can imagine a part of themselves that has nothing to do with labor, and they know that their labor is an alienable and homogeneous thing, a thing ultimately fungible with every other unit of labor, because they constantly draw the line that separates labor from that other part of themselves. They draw the line with time clocks, with work uniforms, with the impersonal, subjectless verb *dá*, with a bus that heads past thornbushes and into the drylands. Beyond that line lies the zone outside of labor. It can make labor tolerable, in a personal and biographical

sense; it promises a weekend to see one's spouse, a retirement, or a party. But the zone means more than just a rest. It also signifies a shred of human dignity. And it is this incommensurable shred, ironically, that renders labor coherent as a category, since labor, in its abstract mode, is the force that the potential to take over everything else.²

In the sertão, the zone outside labor took on a visibly geographic shape, appearing as the village. Celso and Alexandra went there in order to exit their jobs. Although they knew that they might end up toiling as village day-laborers, at least for a time, the village made it possible to believe that they could eventually *work for no-one*, just plant a field. That particular vision – owning a field in order to *work for no-one* – would also mark them in their rank, labeling them as peasants; it would keep them in the same hierarchical position as before. This hierarchy was no mere question of money. Seu Xavier had achieved great success as a farmer, with a beautiful house, and he felt acutely the difference between his cash as a “poor man” and the “rich man”'s cash (Chapter 6.) The specific mode of leaving labor – in Seu Xavier's case, the decision to locate the house in the village rather than on a plantation – became an index of a sertanejo's peasant status.

Class is defined by the way that one labors and also by the way that one leaves labor. The premio, as I argued in Chapter 8, serves as an especially potent marker of class because it delimits the edges of labor. By defining what labor is *not*, for some group of people, the premio also suggests what labor *is* for them. As has often been observed, perhaps the most powerful indicators of class are those social forms that flourish outside of the labor relation, like leisure and taste (Bourdieu 1984, Veblen 1965 [1899].) Because these indicators do not directly depend on the work process, they last well beyond any particular job. They are durable and portable over

² Thanks to Jean Comaroff for this insight.

a life course. More to the point, these indicators designate that which labor is not supposed to be able to touch, the irreducible element that labor should never change, and thus they can track people into relatively enduring and immobile roles inside the current division of labor. They create an underlying armature of stability on which to rest the vicissitudes and uncertainties that characterize the labor system in a time of growth.

The zone outside of labor is crucial to the construction of labor itself. In a parallel sense, as I argued in Chapter 8, growth depends on the existence of a zone of permanence, the terrain of the *premio*. And yet this zone constantly gets cast as archaic, quaint, sentimental, or backwards – in other words, non-modern. For a plantation owner like Paco (Chapter 2), the archaic element was beloved Scotch. For *sertanejos*, it was the village. The village reproduced labor in a direct sense, because it provided for the growth of children, and it also reproduced labor more indirectly, by defining the status of the people who lived there and thereby determining their insertion into the urban labor market. But the village, which helped sustain the workforce for Brazil's enormous commodities boom, had been made into as a non-modern space: devoid of labor laws, irregularly electrified, and beyond the reach of asphalt, basic health care, and running water. Deprived, thus, of the fundamental protections that the state guaranteed for its other citizens.

Faced with the dangers of this deprivation, *sertanejos* often aim for permanence. Dalia took her Bolsa Família money and put it into a dream of durability: the brown couch that she said she had imagined since her childhood, now bought on credit. Bolsa Família proved fickle. Dalia had waited more than a year to obtain the benefit, but she lost it three months later when her husband began earning US \$7.50 per month over the income limit (Chapter 3). It looked like the *mascate* might repossess her couch.

But Dalia found ways to bargain and pay, and when she welcomed me into her home in 2013, I sat on the results. “The sofa,” she said, “is mine now. For certain.” (*Agora o sofá é meu. Com certeza.* #*(Cad22013p14 (9/9/13))*)

Certainty often appears as the end-point of the circuit of growth. In some senses, certainty works as the opposite of what Celso called *trying the luck of growth*. Certainty is actually quite a dramatic aspiration: the aspiration to make a life that could finally end the circuit of movements towards and away from a center. Even when unachievable as a general goal, this hope can orient a biography. Seu Valentim, who decided to live in a sprawling shack that he built in his pasture at Caldeirao, thought of his residence in the terms of certainty. “In this place,” he told me, “it’s to spend the rest of my life” (*aqui dentro, e’ para passar o resto da vida* #*(caldint5p61)*)

His neighbor Seu Valentim sounded a similar note. He explained to me how permanence had guided the whole landless drama of occupation and resistance. Through the MST, he himself had turned Maracujá into a place as slow as it was lasting:

We live in this place today. And I think that we’re going to stay for the rest of our lives. [...] So they told me about the lands. I came, I registered in this land – for agrarian reform – and I’m here living nice and slowly up until today. And I think that it will be forever.

Moramos aqui hoje. E acho que vamos ficar o resto da vida. [...] Aí me falaram das terras. Vim, cadastrei nessa terra—da reforma agrária—e estou aqui vivendo devagarinho até hoje. E acho que será para sempre.

Before she was born, she wanted. Catarina Aparecida wanted to be born in the village.

Her mother Dalia did not know – how, after all, could Catarina Aparecida communicate?

So right before the due date, Dalia traveled to the city. She was familiar with the precariousness

of the health system, and she felt determined to get into the hospital quickly when her time came. So she took her belongings and went to stay in a corner of an in-law's house in Conquista.

The city, on that visit, did not treat Dalia well. The banks were on strike, and her husband Natan could not withdraw his money. Then Natan started to feel a wrenching pain in his guts.

Natan's family was worried. His sister Selma, who worked as a domestic servant in the house of a doctor, asked the doctor for help, and the doctor pulled the necessary strings to get Natan an immediate appointment. The appointment cost money, which the relatives scrambled to raise. During those days, I would see them clustered around Maracujá's pay phone every evening. They were waiting for any possible call.

Weeks passed— one, then two, then three. Natan's guts improved. But the baby was approaching a month overdue, and Dalia got tired, as Daniel put it, of squatting in *other people's house* (casa dos outros.) One weekend, a political candidate chartered a bus to take his supporters from Maracujá to a rally in the city, and Dalia saw her solution. Once the rally finished, she slipped onto the bus and caught a free ride back to the countryside.

She would not get to rest there for even a single day. That night, Catarina Aparecida, who wanted to be born in the village, started trying to come out. While I slept across the street, blissfully unaware, people bunched around Dalia's house and decided to call an ambulance. But since ambulances could never be relied on to show up at Maracujá, someone also went to find Cristovam, in the neighboring village, who had a truck and a kind heart. Cristovam secured Dalia in the truck and raced off along the dirt roads, eventually meeting up with the ambulance, which, much to everyone's surprise, had come after all. Still in labor, Dalia was transferred to the ambulance. And so Catarina Aparecida was born.

Some days later, Dalia's younger sister Clara came running up to tell me that Dalia was headed back from the hospital to Maracujá. She was coming not on the bus, Clara said, but in a private car. Sertanejos took very seriously the practice of *resguardo* – a special period of rest and confinement for forty days after childbirth – and I knew better than to just walk up to Dalia. But after she had settled in, I, along with the whole village, was invited to pay my respects.

That day, men crowded the street near Dalia's house, sitting on blocks of cement and cracking jokes about sex. And when it was my turn to be ushered inside, I found a living room commanded by women. There was Alexandra, the baby's aunt, who had sold Brazil nuts and baked panettone at the luxury grocery store in Belo Horizonte. There was Dona Lúcia, Alexandra's mother, who had pleaded with Alexandra over the phone to come back from Belo Horizonte. Dalia's sisters were lined up, too, serious and knowing. With a bit of joy, I noticed that people were sitting on the brown couch that Dalia had striven so hard to buy.

A woman invited me to go into the bedroom. On an enormous bed, Dalia was propping her back against the wall, looking exhausted. She held a miniscule person, all red, tiny gloves on the hands, thick black hair framing her head. My words failed. I managed to ask about the gloves. Dalia answered that it was warm in the womb, but cold outside, so the baby needed to be protected.

Clara slid into the bedroom – I had not noticed – and told me to pick up the baby. The request scared me, but I complied, sticking out a tiny part of my hand to support the neck, and after a few seconds Catarina Aparecida started crying and waving tiny fists. I handed her back.

I headed out quickly. In the main room, Dona Lúcia was happy in a way that I had never before seen her happy. Someone new had joined her family. The village had grown. *I love babies*, Dona Lúcia told me.

How many have you helped raise? I asked. She laughed. She couldn't count them.

Three different claims

This is a statement given by Oziel, who has helped lead the landless movement since the day he occupied the plantation at Maracujá.

Oziel (age 53): Look. When you get to your country, you say: the solution for ending hunger in Brazil—

Duff (age 34): Mm.

Jaqueline (age 47): For ending destitution.

O: --for ending destitution, hunger, poverty—it's agrarian reform.

D: Mm hm.

O: Agrarian reform is what ends hunger, poverty—

J: It's the solution.

O: It's the solution. It's what takes the — the poor person out of the periphery [i.e. poor urban neighborhoods]. It takes—it takes the child out of marginalization, out of drugs. What does all of this is coming to the fields, to the land.

And for this reason, we have to occupy land for the government to buy it — and give it over for us to work. For that, we have to occupy land. The solution, in our country, to end hunger and destitution—is agrarian reform. [...] You hear? So then you can say that to the big people there. [...] You can see that to your country there, to big people—the authorities. [...] And you can say that we really stand up and struggle, we go after things, we go after our goals. Right? And we struggle for real. We don't sit around with our arms crossed, no way. We go all out against the government. And we achieve our objectives. [...] You can say that it was a landless person who sent this message to—to—to a big person there whom you're going to make a presentation for. OK? Give land to the poor person to work and give loans. Because—for him or her to survive.

Oziel: Olha. Quando chegar no seu país, você diz: eh, a solução para acabar com a fome no Brasil—

Duff: Mm

J: Com a miséria.

O: -- com a miséria, com a fome, com a pobreza—é reforma agrária.

D: Mm hm.

O: Reforma agrária é que acaba com a fome, com pobreza—

J: É a solução.

O: É a solução. É que tira o, o, o pobre da periferia. Tira, tira a criança da marginalização, das drogas. É vindo para a roça, para a terra.

E para isso, eh, nós tem que ocupar terra para o governo comprar e dar para nós trabalhar. Para ele tem que ocupar terra. É a solução, nosso país, para acabar com a fome e a miséria—é reforma agrária. [...] Viu? Aí você pode dizer para as pessoas grandes lá. [...] Você pode dizer isso a seu país lá, pessoas grandes, da-- as autoridades. [...] E você pode dizer que nós vamos à luta mesmo, nós corre atrás, a gente corre atrás dos nossos objetivos, né? E a gente luta mesmo. Nós não fica de braços cruzados não. Nós quebra o pau com o governo. E nós consegue nossos objetivos. [...] Pode falar que foi um sem-terra que mandou essa mensagem para—para—para o—para uma pessoa grande lá que você vai apresentar. Viu? Dar a terra ao pobre para trabalhar e dar o credito. Que—para ele sobreviver. Que aí que acaba com a fome.

Because that's what ends hunger.

This is a snippet of audio from a video produced by Caetana and Benta, who are growing up on the land settlement village that Oziel and the movement founded after the plantation at Maracujá was expropriated.

Caetana (age 13): We are here talking about a dream. For the person who dreams, the person who wants to make her dream come true. [...] To have a family, get married, have my house, live calm, with resources. To live in a place that only I imagine.

Benta (age 14): My greatest dream is to study, to be someone in life, go away from this place, and – work.

C: So, people. As you can see, there are a lot of people here working. But that doesn't compensate them for what they are doing. The money does not compensate them for what they're doing. So the real compensation is for you to dream and for the dream to come unto you. So, people, let's—let's see what a dream come true looks like [here at Maracujá]. It's not even come true.

Caetana: Estamos aqui falando de um sonho. Para quem sonha, quem quer realizar o seu sonho. [...] Ter uma família, casar, ter minha casa, morar sossegado, com condição. Morar em um lugar que só eu imagino.

Benta: Meu maior sonho é estudar, ser alguém na vida, ir embora desse lugar e – trabalhar.

Caetana: Então, gente. Como você pode ver, tem muitas pessoas aqui trabalhando. Mas isso não recompensa o que eles fazem. O dinheiro não recompensa o que eles fazem. Então a recompensa mesmo é você sonhar e o sonho vir entre você. Então, gente, vamos—vamos ver como é um sonho realizado. Nem realizado é.

This is what Caetana said when she spotted a political education sign, hand-lettered, that MST teachers had posted in the school. She began to question its message.

C: “Educate. School. A just country is an—“

B: “Egalitarian”

C: “—egalitarian country.” So, people, this here is half of a dream. It is not a complete dream.

Caetana (reading sign): “Educar. Escola. Um país justo é um país—“

Benta: “Igualitário.”

Caetana: “—igualitário.” Então, gente, isso aqui é a metade de um sonho. Não é um sonho completo.

This is a piece of an interview with Tereza, whose family has lived at Rio Branco for generations.

Tereza (age 38): Now harvesting coffee, every

Tereza: Agora panhar café, todo ano nós panha

year we harvest coffee [on the large plantations.] That's our work.

Joaquín (age 45): Yep. [...]

Duff (age 34): You've never left to go live on a plantation—

A: Yes. To live on a plantation, I've done that. [...] I always came back to my own thing. To Rio Branco. (laugh)

D: Why?

A: Because we like this place so much. My life is to live here forever.

café. Esse é o nosso trabalho.

Joaquín: É. [...]

Duff: Você nunca saiu fora para morar em fazenda—

A: Já. Para morar em fazenda já. [...] Sempre voltava para o meu. Para Rio Branco. (laugh)

Duff: Porque?

A: Porque a gente gosta desse lugar aqui demais. A minha vida é morar aqui para sempre.

(from int w t029)

Appendix 1

Survey Results

This research project has an ethnographic core. I strove to carry out the ethnography, however, as part of a dialogue with researchers who use other approaches. Early on I abandoned the notion of running statistical tests—what, after all, was the universe that the sample could represent, in a statistical sense? But at the same time, in the tradition that I learned from Enrique Mayer (2002), I found that it was possible to ask my interlocutors in the village questions about numbers – like the number of cows they owned or the amount of money they made by selling their manioc. When successful, these inquiries would lead to what I came to think of as an ethnographic number: a quantity emerging out of the machination of some remembered encounter, a cipher that bore witness to, rather than deleting, the complexities of its own creation.

My approach to ethnographic numbers – to the descriptive and small-N use of figures – was influenced by *Portfolios of the Poor* (Collins et al. 2009), and especially by the accounts in its appendix. Like the authors of that book, however, I felt myself torn between two options: structuring my conversations so as to obtain quantities that I understood better, or leaving the dialogue open so that I could learn about how my interlocutors used numbers. Instead of a solution, this problem has a praxis. In my own praxis, I started by imposing a significant burden of structure during the beginning of field work, while gradually removing my blinders as my knowledge increased.

During the field work period from fall 2011 to fall 2012, I carried out two major quantitative projects. First, I conducted a census of every household in Maracujá and Rio Branco. The census aimed to calculate income and assets for the 2011 calendar year and, probably more importantly, to introduce me to the people around the region. Once the census was complete, I moved to a more detailed approach: I selected five households in Maracujá and four households in Rio Branco, and I began carrying out weekly “focus family” interviews with them. The focus family interviews tracked income and spending every week, over a period of time that in some cases stretched to six months, and, in comparison to the census, they turned into much more sensitive and idiosyncratic conversations about the measurement of economic mundanity.

In addition to the census interviews and the focus family interviews, I carried out several less-formal surveys. Eventually I became very interested in Salário Maternidade Rural, a federal program that gives each pregnant small farmer the right, in principle, to a payment worth four months of the national minimum wage. I spoke about the program with (to my knowledge) every woman at Maracujá and Rio Branco who seemed to have ever fit the criteria for Salário Maternidade. Also, I did a similar set of structured conversations with women who seemed eligible for Bolsa Família, the conditional cash transfer discussed in Chapter 3. For all of these interviews – census, focus family, and others – I did all of the interviewing myself, and, when permitted, I recorded the interviews with a voice-recorder. No payment was offered for participation in any of the interviews, although I did give household items and photographs as gifts at the end of my stay in the villages. Before interviews began, each interviewee went through a consent process approved by the University of Chicago Institutional Review Board.

This appendix reports some results from the census interviews and the focus family interviews. It also outlines the methods – some more successful than others – that underlay the creation of these small and complicated numbers.

One note: prices have all been given in reais (\$R). At the time of the interviews, one US dollar was exchangeable for about two reais, so a rough sense for dollar amounts can be obtained by dividing \$R quantities in half.

Methods for the census interviews

Each census interview was, without a doubt, an extraordinarily mixed speech event. With these interviews I aimed to carry out many tasks at once: to obtain comparable numbers on household income and assets, to introduce myself to new people and solidify relations with people I already knew, to spark a conversation about personal work histories, and to inspire reflection on Bolsa Família. The interviews undoubtedly lacked the epistemological hygiene achieved by a well-run statistical service. On the other hand, they garnered a hodgepodge of interesting answers.

The survey process came out of a series of conversations with Alicia Menendez, Harold Pollack, Marcos Rangel, and other scholars who generously donated their time and thoughts. The errors, of course, were all mine.

The survey instrument

At the end of the appendix is attached a copy of the survey instrument that I devised. The instrument's economic questions deliberately mirrored the 2006 Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD), the representative household survey carried out by Brazil's statistical service. However, the conditions of this survey differed greatly from the PNAD. In some cases, as discussed below, I diverged from the PNAD's definitions, but in an effort to accommodate the details of rural economic life and devise numbers that meant approximately the same thing as the PNAD's overall numbers.

The survey instrument, as I have already noted, covered an extraordinary number of topics. It was roughly divided into the following sections, in this order:

- A. Bolsa Família: the respondent's general opinions and experiences
- B. Basic household demographics and physical condition of the house and land
- C. Opinions on children and gender relations
- D. Personal work history
- E. Household asset tally: agricultural assets and home assets
- F. Details on Bolsa Família and other social programs
- G. Work, income, and agricultural production
- H. Ideas about investment, savings, and the future

Selecting interviewees, defining households, and conducting interviews

The interview process began with a map. In each village, I asked one of my most trusted early interlocutors to take me on a walk around the village and explain who lived in which house. (At Rio Branco, this job was carried out, with great excitement and a spirit of welcome, by three young teenagers; they provided me with extraordinary stories.) The boundaries of each village were accepted by general consensus among the people living there. These boundaries have their roots in government power: Maracujá is a federal land settlement with specific borders, and Rio Branco is defined (although much more loosely) by the coverage area of the municipality's community health educator.

With map drawn, I numbered households and used a random number table to place them in random order. The random ordering was designed to insure that I spoke, relatively quickly, to at least some people from the different social groups into which the community is divided – Protestants and Catholics, single men and large families, newcomers and veterans – rather than conducting the census in exclusive alliance with one or another group. But since it often took a period of time to locate a household and find a time when its members were available for interview, the order was not rigidly followed: often I would interview households farther down the list while I was still trying to make contact with one of the households that came earlier. Nonetheless, the random ordering did succeed in mixing up the pool of people that I interviewed early on, and I was relatively quickly introduced to households that otherwise I might have met only after a long period of field work. I started working on the census in October 2011 and it was largely complete by April 2012.

The goal of the census was to carry out an interview in every household. The person who responded at one Rio Branco household politely declined the interview, but otherwise, every household at Rio Branco and Maracujá participated. In several households, however, the interviewees requested that I not record the interview with the voice recorder, and I complied.

At each household, I used a randomization process to decide who would carry out the interview. When first speaking with people in the household about the interview, I asked whoever was present to tell me the names of every person 18 or older who lived with them, and then, out of all the adults living in the house, I used the random number table to select the person who would be interviewed. Often the person selected was not present, and I had to return later to find him or her. I did not insist on privacy during the interview, and some interviews ended up as joint interactions, with several different people offering answers, but I strove to direct questions towards the person who had been randomly selected.

In some cases, "household" proved to be a difficult term. I defined a household as a group of people who lived together, whether in a single structure or in nearby structures, and who generally shared their meals. Of course, in a migratory context, this definition can leave important ambiguities: how should one treat a family member who is working this month but will return next month? Or who comes to the village on weekends?

To resolve these questions, I selected an “index week:” October 2 to 8, 2011. Each household was defined as the group of people who, during that week, were, on a normal basis, sleeping in the house and sharing food at least four nights per week.

After arriving at a household and selecting the person to be interviewed, I went through a verbal consent process, as approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Chicago. The consent process was generally rapid, but the interviews themselves took time: they ranged from approximately 30 minutes to several hours. My questioning style did not hew exactly to the phrasing as written on the survey instrument, although I was guided by it. When interlocutors wanted to add details about other subjects, I often encouraged the digression. Generally, I followed the order of questions in the survey instrument, but I would sometimes deviate in an effort to accommodate the interviewee’s discomfort, fatigue, or wish to avoid a line of inquiry. If a respondent did not know the answer to a particular question but thought that a different member of the household might know, then I asked the other member of the household, even if that required returning at a later time.

Definitions for work and assets

The questions about work and assets also raised a number of definitional and process problems. When I reached the work section of the survey instrument, I first asked about all jobs worked by members of the household during the week of October 2 to 8, 2011. Then I asked about all jobs worked by members of the household during all of 2011. I also asked detailed questions about money sent through remittances and money earned from social programs.

The first problem – discussed in Chapter 5 – occurred when my interlocutors said that they could not remember how much money they had earned at a particular job. I encouraged them to provide estimates or even guesses. Particularly with day-labor, however, respondents often said that they simply had no idea. I managed this problem by asking how much they usually earned in a day and how many days they worked in an average month or in an average week. Generally, respondents had very clear memories of the day-labor rate, and, although memories for the average number of work days were often more vague, I managed to use this process to construct estimates for employment earnings.

An even more difficult problem arose in recording farm earnings. Most people who live at Maracujá and Rio Branco engage in some form of subsistence farming. The PNAD questions do not seem well-suited to this context, since they simply ask about normal monthly pay. In a small-farming context it is not at all clear how to define “pay.” For this reason, I asked an extended series of queries about the crops harvested during 2011, the milk and eggs sold, and the animals sold. I also asked about the cost side of farming: the animals purchased in 2011 and the farm expenditures that the farmer made in 2011. The expenditure question proved to be difficult for respondents. Often, although sometimes inconsistently, I would prompt respondents to think about the cost of fertilizer, cattle vaccines, seeds, pay for tractor services, and pay for hired labor.

For accounting purposes, I treated the farm as a very simple business: I started with the total money earned through the sale of farm products, I subtracted the farm’s costs, and I defined

the resulting number as the “pay” earned through farming for the year. I considered only the value of the farm products that were sold for money. I did not account for the value of food eaten or given away – although the majority of farm products in the region seem to be disposed of through non-monetary means.

Also, I did not consider depreciation or attempt to spread costs over several years. In some cases, the depreciation problem led to distortions, as, for example, in the case of families who had recently purchased or sold a large number of cattle, and who therefore seemed to have unusually large negative or positive incomes.

Another problem was posed by the fact that I began interviews in October 2011, before the year was complete. Since I wanted to obtain figures for total income in 2011, I asked respondents to estimate the amount of money that they would earn through the end of the year. I similarly asked them to estimate the amount of money they would gain from selling crops or animals through the end of 2011—and the amount they would spend on farm expenditures. I continued recruiting new interviewees through the first half of 2012. For respondents whom I interviewed after the beginning of 2012, I simply asked about the figures for 2011; obviously, these respondents did not have to estimate any future values.

I also asked about the household’s assets, agricultural and otherwise. To plan out these asset questions, I talked to several people I knew well at Maracujá and devised a checklist of the items that they said were common in the villages. I included major pieces of furniture, appliances, motorcycles, major agricultural implements, and animals. I did not include clothing, small tools, or small kitchen items. I also asked respondents to report other “objects of value.”

Housing is difficult to evaluate at Maracujá and Rio Branco, in part because rent is almost never charged and houses are rarely, if ever, sold. For this reason I did not consider the value of housing. I also did not consider the value of land, although I did record the area of land owned. Also, I did not consider the value of crops in the ground, unless the respondent planned to harvest them in 2011.

To assign a monetary value to each asset, I spoke with vendors in the nearby city who sold used items that were similar. For the most part, vendors were able to provide a general valuation for each class of item. Butchers provided values for the animals. In the case of a few unusual or hard-to-find items, I asked the respondent him or herself to estimate the monetary value.

A further difficulty arose because some households had members who entered or left the household at some point during 2011. Given the migratory patterns that prevailed in the villages, people typically earned much higher incomes when living outside, but they also faced much higher expenses. It therefore seemed misleading, when accounting for a household’s income, to include the full-year income of part-year residents. With part-year residents, I only considered the income that the person earned during the period when she or he was living in the household in the village. I also asked about the amount of money that part-year residents brought with them when they came to the village after a spell elsewhere. I included this amount of money – the money that was brought into the community – as a part of the household’s annual income. I did

not, however, consider any earnings from part-year residents who were not living in the household at the time when the interview was conducted. This omission might have resulted in the unwarranted exclusion of money from the household income, but since I had little or no opportunity to ask questions of the part-year residents who were absent during the interview period, I kept them out of the data. If they sent remittances, however, the remittances were included in the household's income.

When I was calculating per-capita annual household income, I defined "per capita" by taking the total annual household income and dividing by the number of people living in the household at the time of the interview. Part-year residents were included only if they were in the household during the interview period.

In one case, the per-capita calculation led to a major outlier because a single man was supporting a large family that did not, by the definition I adopted, technically reside in his household. For this particular household, I exercised judicious discretion and considered the other family members to be residents in the household.

A similar problem arose when people maintained several separate households – for example, when a person spent weekends living in the village but weekdays working in the city. In these cases, I asked the person how much money she or he normally brought back to the village home, either in the form of cash or in the form of goods purchased in the city and used in the village. I considered this "money brought back" to be part of the household income, but I did not consider the rest of the person's income to be a part of the household income.

There are some indications that the survey's respondents tended to underreport income from farm activities. Other students and landless activists noted to me that this under-reporting is common in the surveys that many different groups conduct in the region. Respondents may be afraid of being found ineligible for social program benefits, and, more broadly, speaking about one's possessions is widely considered impolite if it makes one seem wealthier than one's neighbors. This problem was vividly illustrated for me one day when one person told a story about a person from a neighboring village who had struck up a conversation with a stranger. The stranger asked how many cows he had, and the cow-owner responded truthfully. The person who was telling me the story then expressed disapproval: people should not openly say how many cows they have.

Census interview results

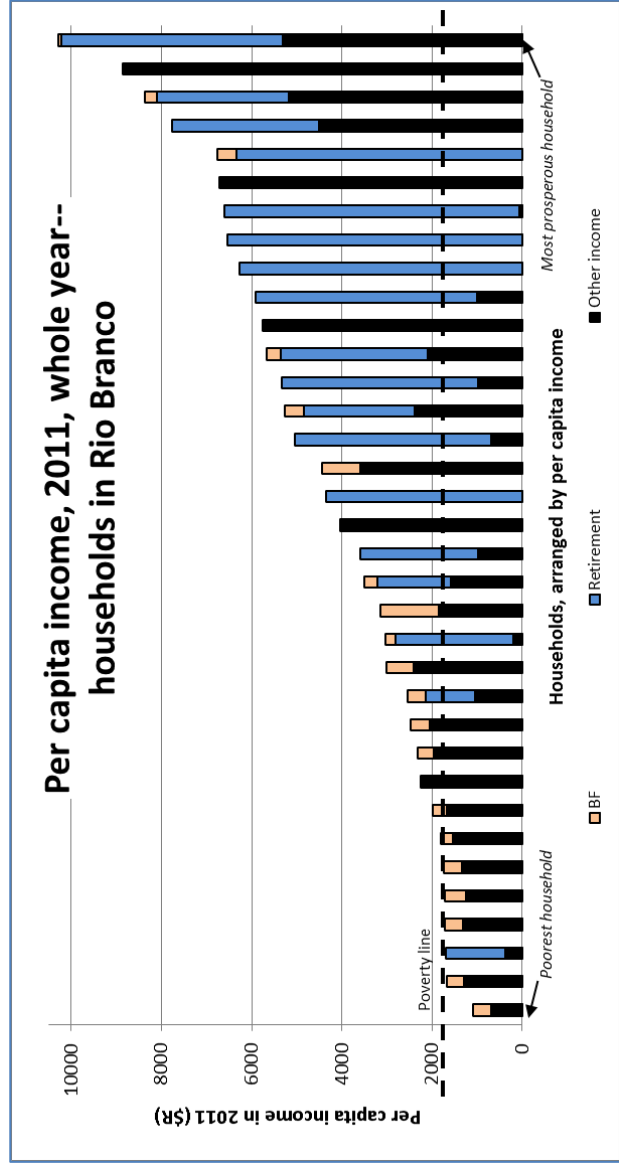
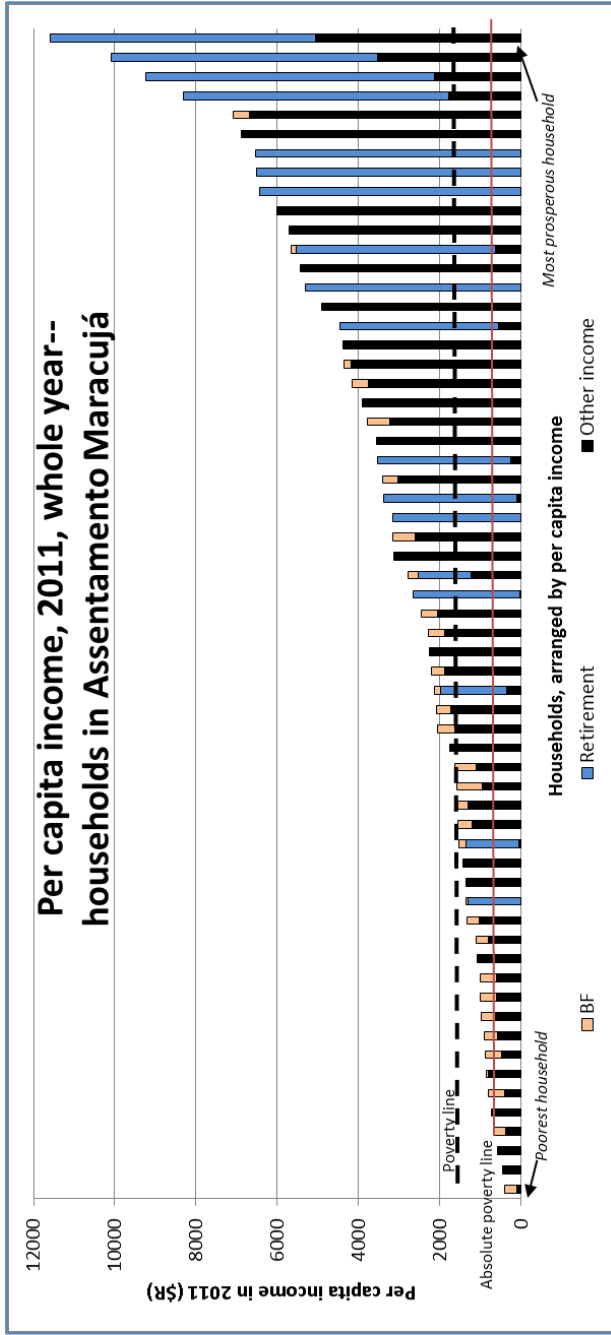
Table 2: Demographic overview of Maracujá and Rio Branco, 2011

	Maracujá	Rio Branco
Total number of households and residents	62 households, 205 people (mean of 3.3 people per household)	35 households, 103 people (mean of 2.9 people per household)
Number of households that include children	40 households (64% of total)	18 households (51% of total)

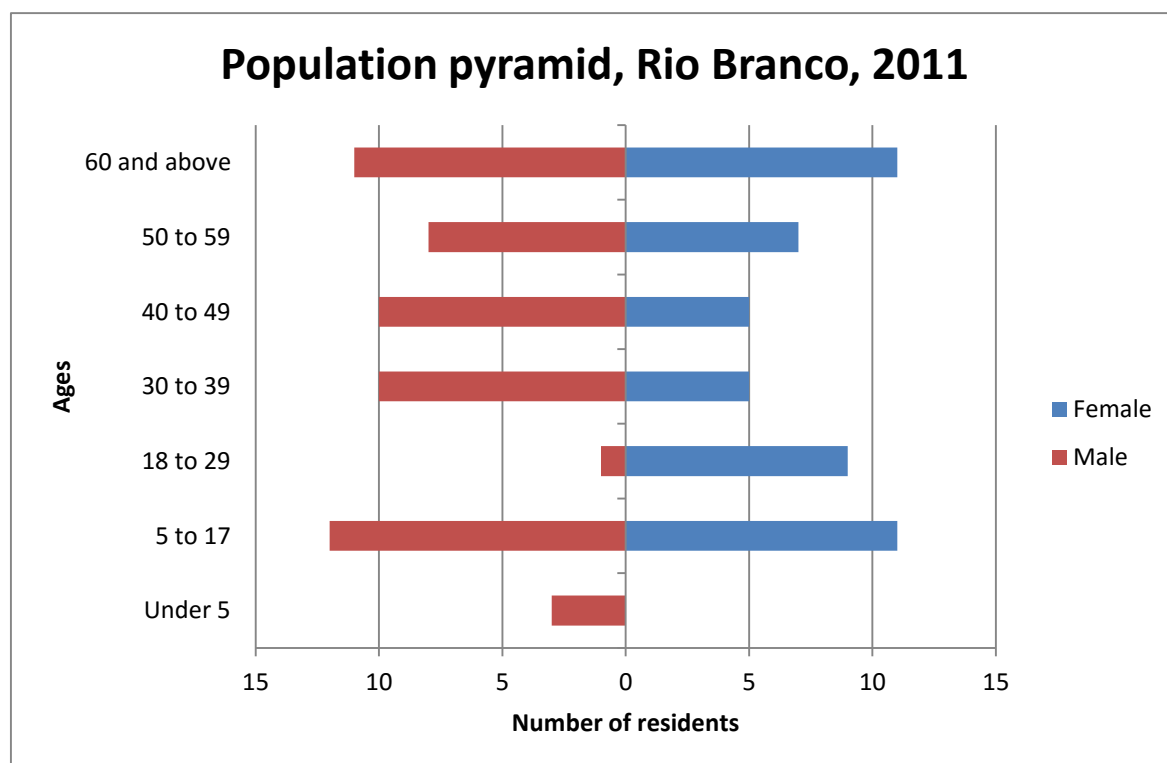
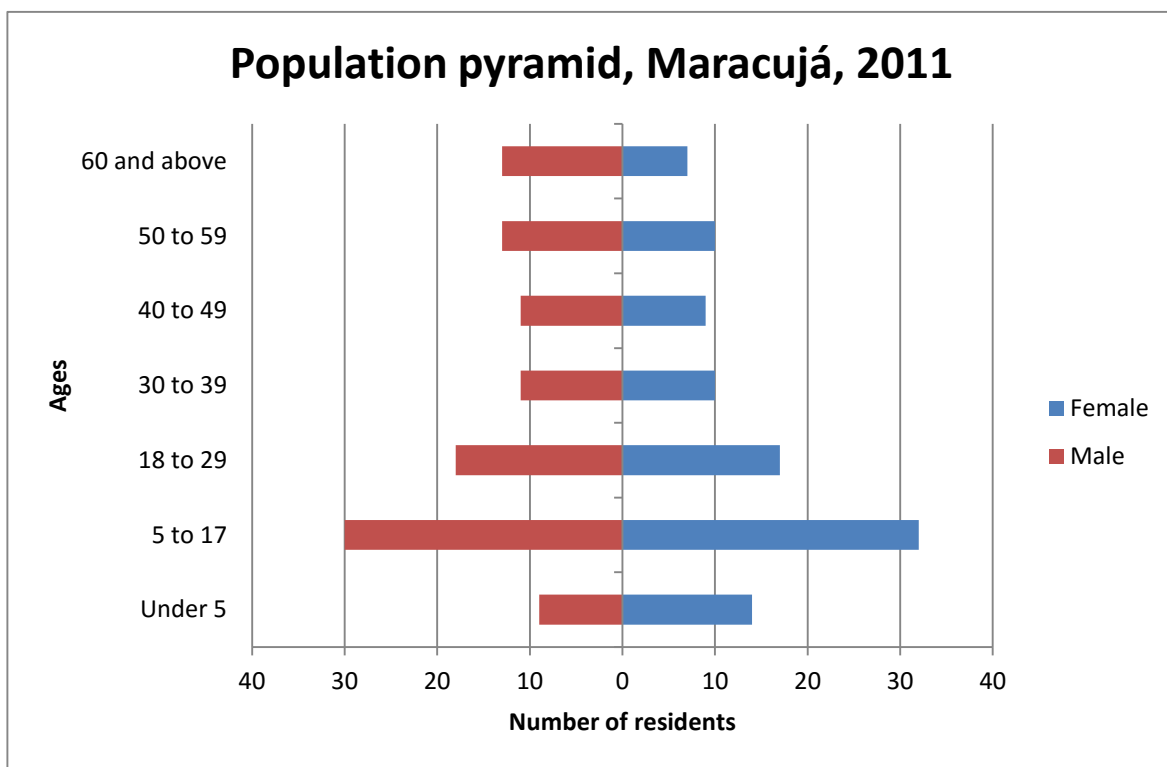
Graphs 1 and 2: Per capita income by household in Maracujá and Rio Branco (repeated from pp. 158-9)

The “poverty line” is set at \$R140 (approximately \$70 US) per person per month and the “absolute poverty line” is set at \$R70 (approximately \$35 US) per person per month. These figures correspond to administrative cutoff lines used by the Brazilian federal government at the time of the study. They are roughly equivalent to two poverty lines frequently used by the World Bank: \$2 US per person per day and \$1.25 per person per day.

One household is omitted from the Maracujá graph; that household had a large negative income because of the purchase of a significant



Graphs 3 and 4: Population pyramids for Maracujá and Rio Branco, 2011

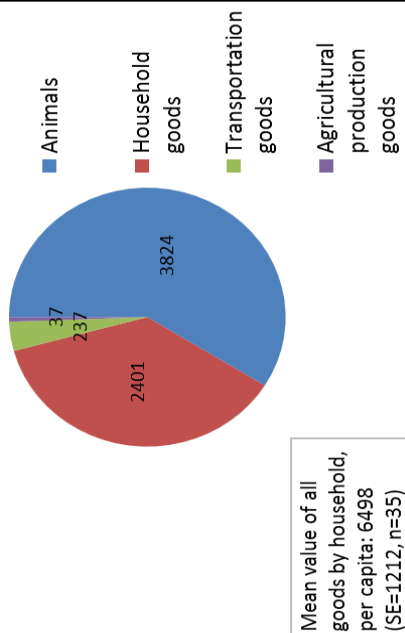


Graphs 5-8: Assets by household in Maracujá and Rio Branco

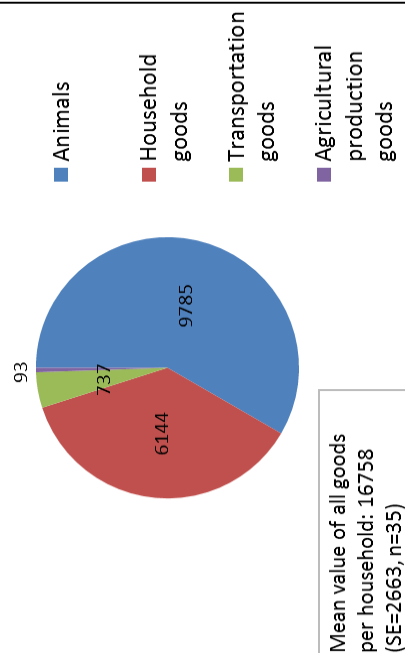
Results from a survey inquiring about the ownership of a wide variety of goods. "Animals" are livestock like cattle, chickens, and pigs. "Household goods" are assets like beds, televisions, and tables. "Transportation goods" are modes of transportation like bicycles, motorcycles, and cars. "Agricultural production goods" are tools for farm production like water tanks and farm machines.

Clothes, silverware, plates, pots, pans, small tools, cats, and dogs not included. Value of housing and land also not included. "Per capita" means that the total value of all goods in the household was divided by the number of people in the household.

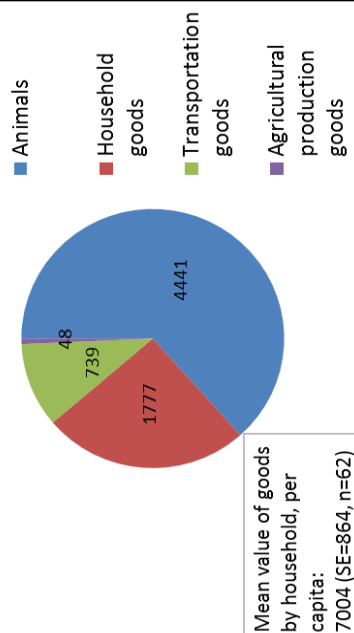
Mean value of goods by household, per capita, Rio Branco, 2011, in \$R



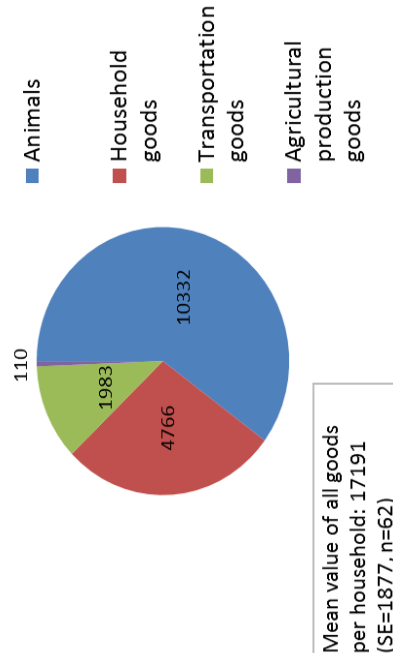
Mean value of goods per household, Rio Branco, 2011, in \$R



Mean value of goods by household, per capita, Maracujá, 2011, in \$R



Mean value of goods per household, Maracujá, 2011, in \$R

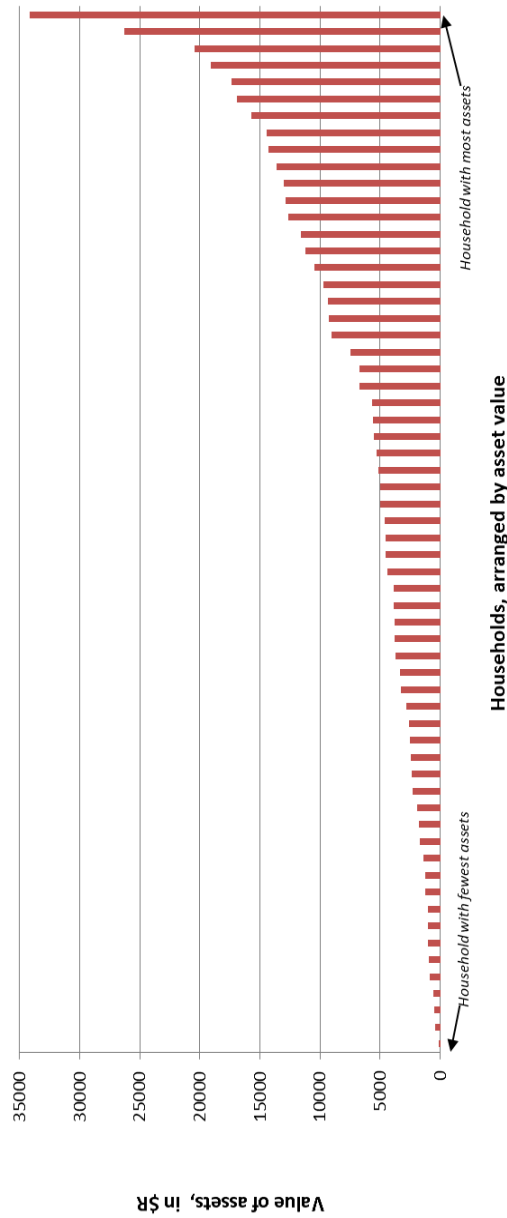


Graphs 9a and b:
Distribution of
assets in
Maracujá and
Rio Branco

Results from a
survey inquiring
about the ownership
of a wide variety of
goods. Clothes,
silverware, plates,
pots, pans, small
tools, cats, and dogs
not included. Value
of housing and land
also not included.

“Per capita” means
that the total value
of all goods in the
household was
divided by the
number of people in
the household.

**Inequality in the value of goods by household,
per capita, Maracujá, 2011**



**Inequality in the value of goods by household,
per capita, Rio Branco, 2011**

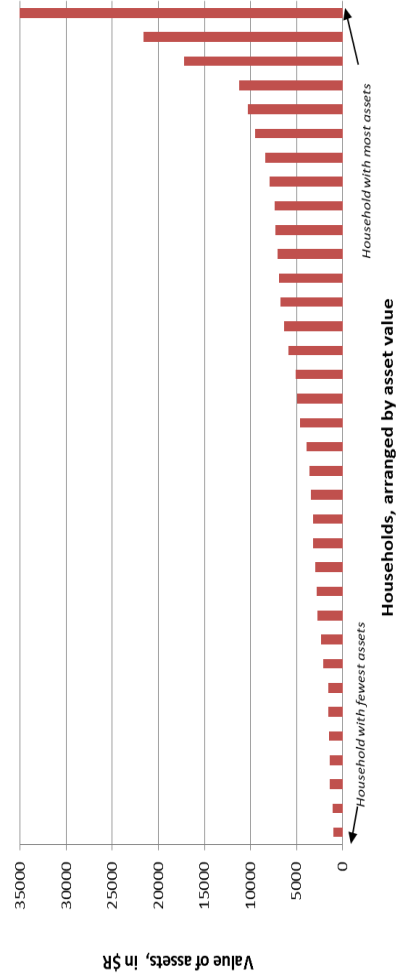
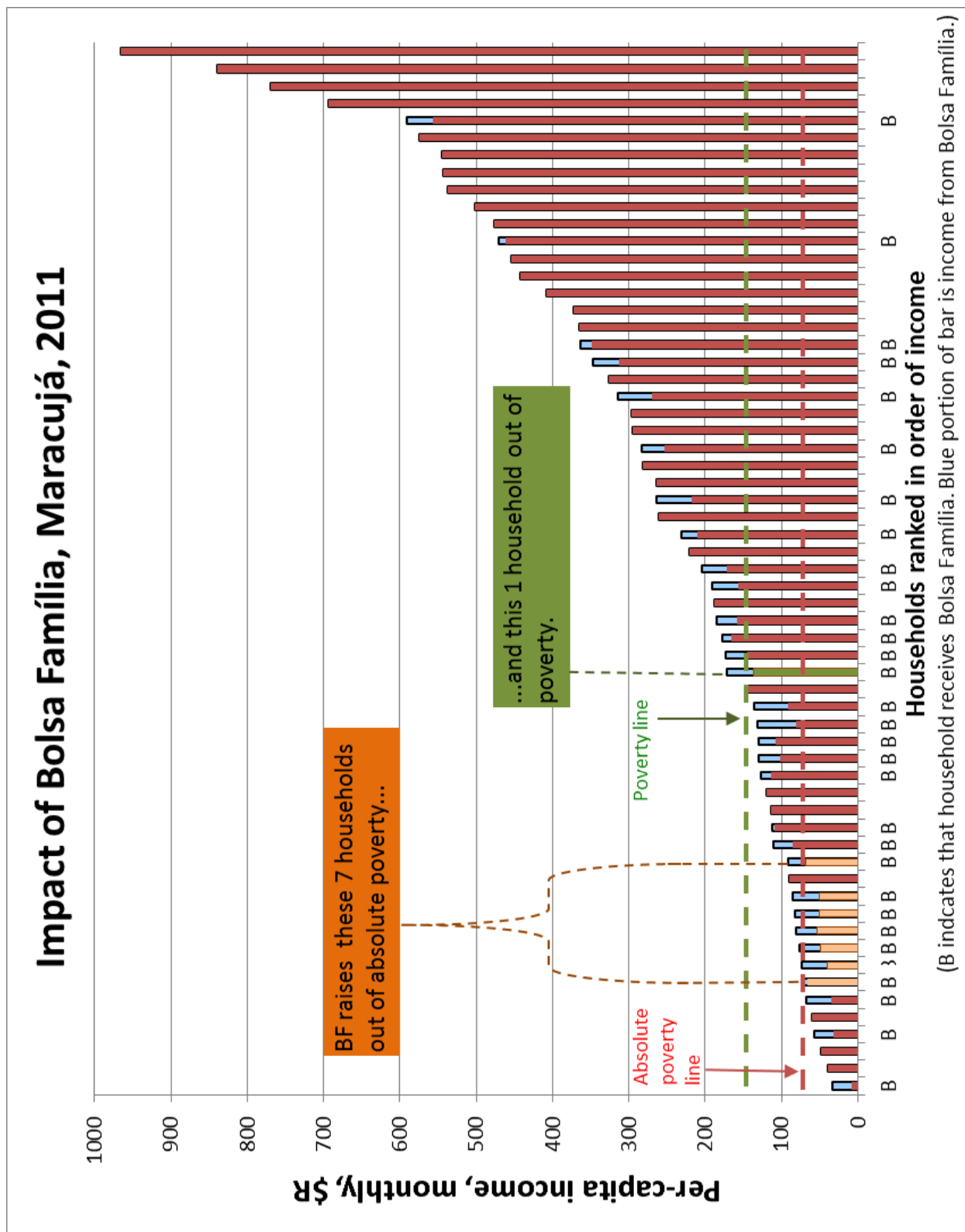


Table 3: Access to selected social programs in Maracujá and Rio Branco, 2011-12

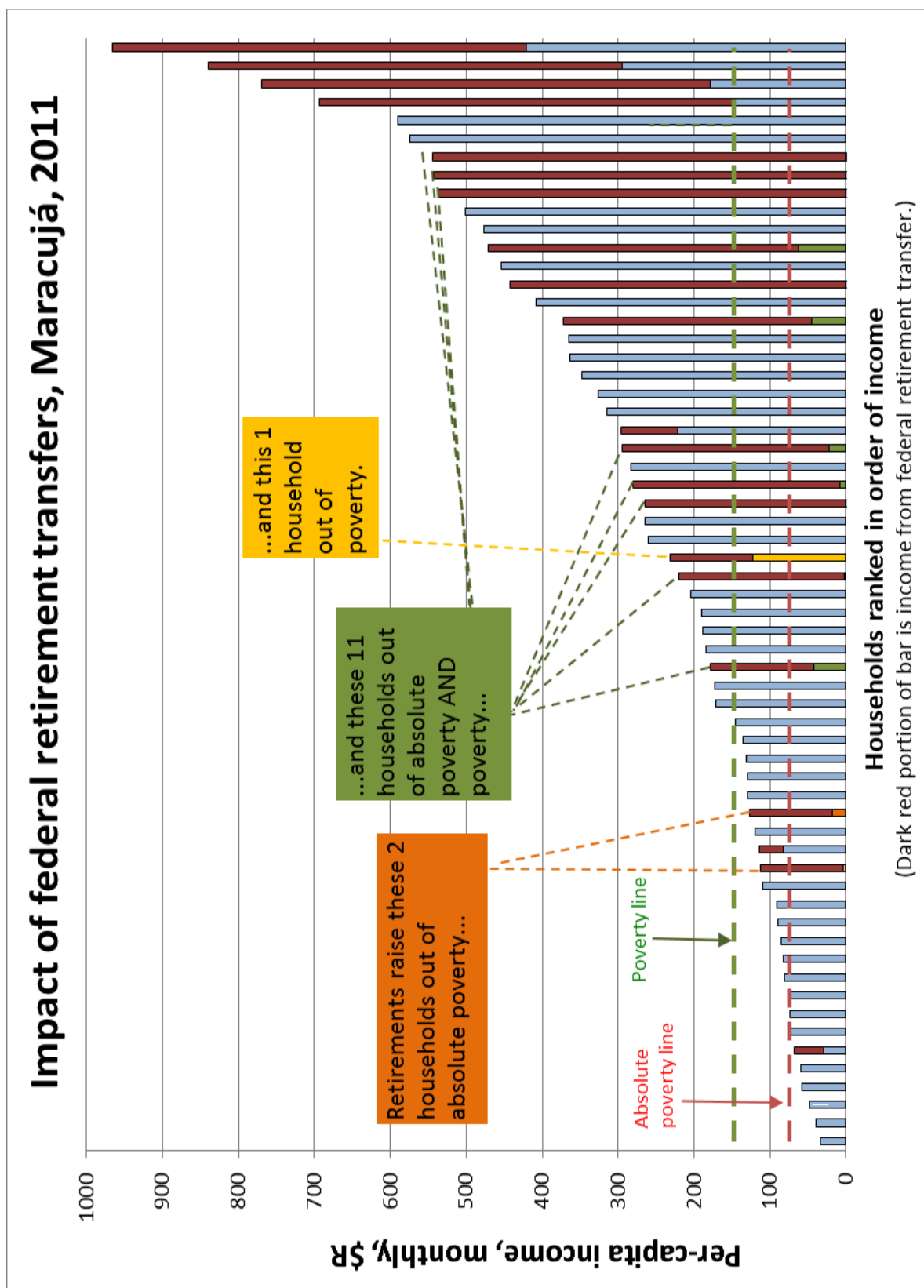
Results from census and follow-up questionnaire that asked about receipt of Bolsa Família (“BF,” a conditional cash transfer for families in poverty) and the rural Maternity Wage (a federal payment to rural women who have been pregnant.) “Likely eligibility” was determined by examining income figures from household census, inquiring about family structure, and comparing these factors to government requirements and standard practices for awarding BF and Maternity Wage. “Percent with access” means the percentage of likely-eligible households that receive the benefit (in other words, number of households that receive the benefit divided by (number of households that receive the benefit + number of households not receiving but likely eligible.)) Households that actually receive a benefit were assumed to be eligible for it.

Number of households...	Assentamento Maracujá 62 households, 205 people	Rio Branco 35 households, 103 people	Total for both villages
Receiving BF	31	20	51
Not receiving, but likely eligible	8	2	10
Percent with access to BF	79.5%	90.9%	83.6%
Have received Maternity Wage	8	6	14
Did not receive, but likely eligible	24	13	37
Percent with access to Maternity Wage	25%	31.6%	27.5%
Data from census conducted by author in two villages, 2011-2012			

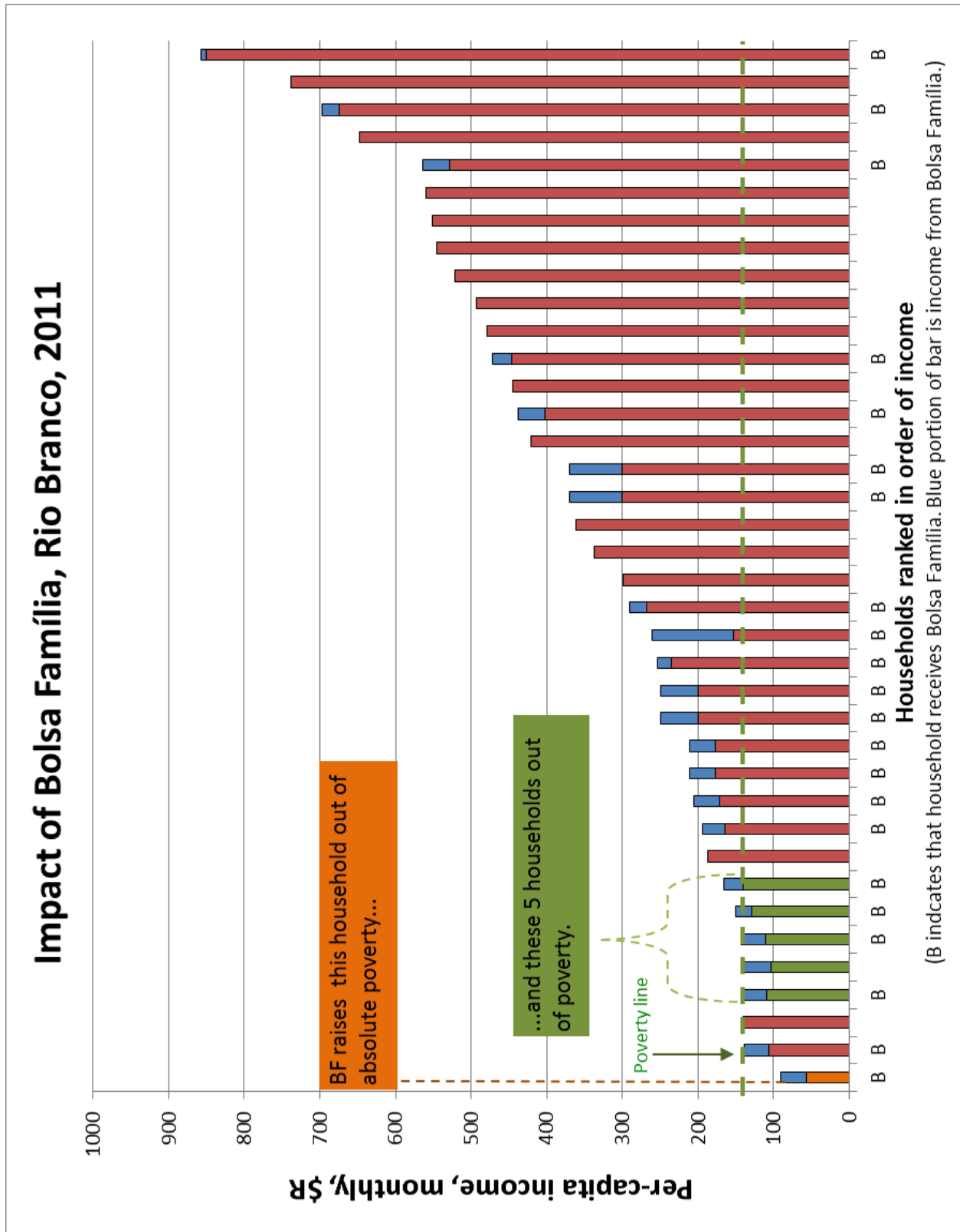
Graph 10: Impact of Bolsa Família in Maracujá



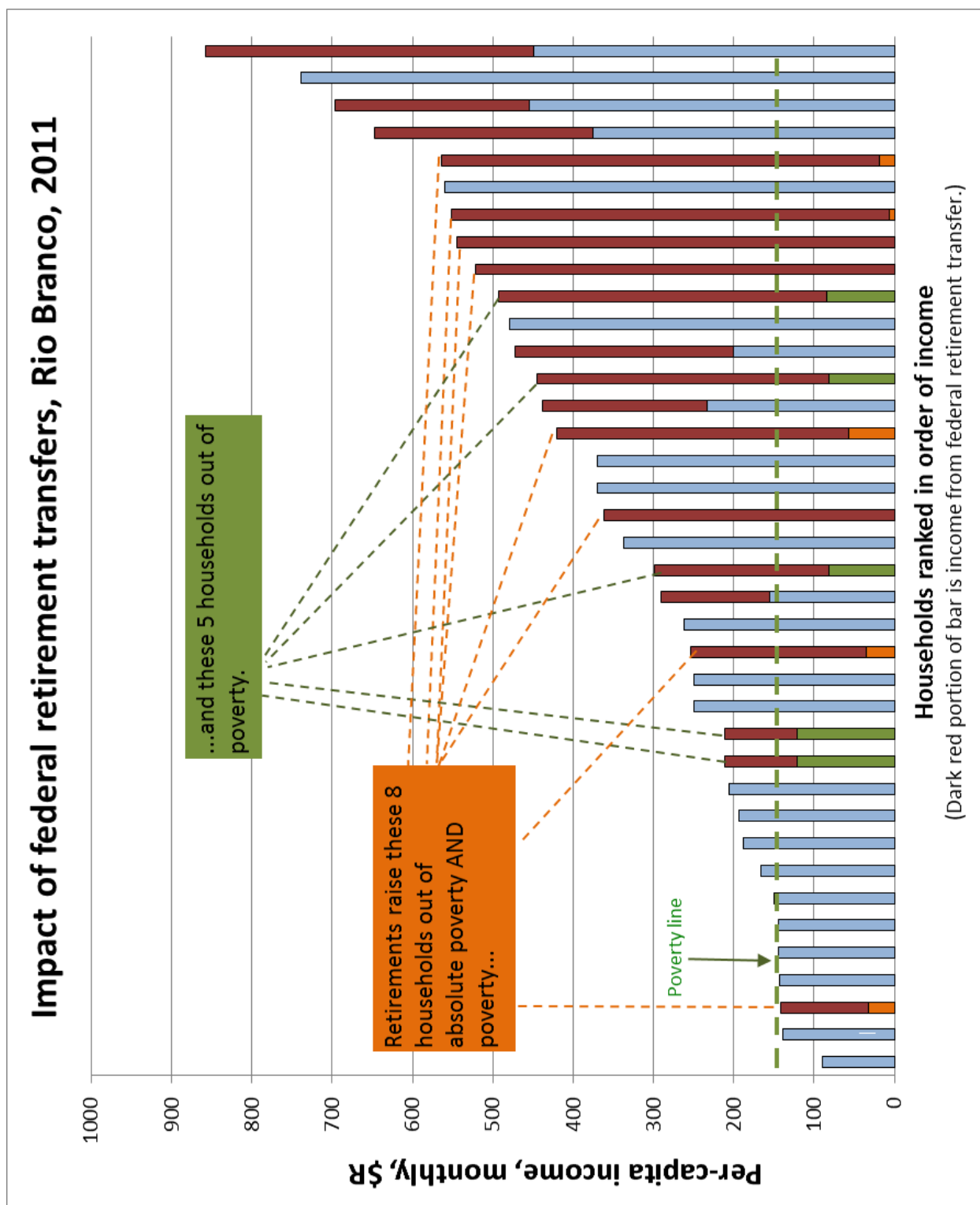
Graph 11: Impact of federal retirement benefits in Maracujá



Graph 12: Impact of Bolsa Família in Rio Branco



Graph 13: Impact of federal retirement benefits in Rio Branco



Methods for the focus family interviews

As the census interviews were coming to a close, I began to plan a closer look at income flows in a small group of households. I identified several households for this process, ultimately selecting five at Maracujá and four at Rio Branco.

The households were chosen to represent, in as broad a possible manner, the many different groups in the villages. I chose households that were comparatively prosperous and households that were comparatively impoverished, households with children and households without, households with Catholics and households with Protestants, households with mostly agricultural income and households with mostly non-agricultural income, and households with one, two, and three generations.

Because I had a strong interest in Bolsa Família, I made a special effort to include two households that were not receiving the benefit but that seemed likely to get it. Fortunately, both of these households did begin getting Bolsa Família during the research period. One of the two was quickly cut off from Bolsa Família, leading to difficulties for the family members. These difficulties became clearer to me because of the weekly interviews.

Also, it should be mentioned that I considered the respondents' own level of interest when I decided whom to include in the interview group. Each household would have to complete an interview each week, including detailed questions about money earned and money spent. Respondents would be successful and happy in this process, I believed, only if they enjoyed interviewing. Therefore I strove to select households that had seemed enthusiastic to participate in the census interview, and, in particular, I aimed for households that included people who were good storytellers and precise reporters of the past. In households that agreed to participate, I allowed the people in the household to decide each week who would do the interview with me. Most frequently, it would be a woman, although men sometimes participated as well.

The originally-selected group included eight households. One household dropped out after nearly two months; I then introduced a different household at the same village to make up for the gap. Most households provided quite detailed information. In one household, the respondent seemed to have difficulty remembering even major purchases. This respondent also expressed great enthusiasm about the more narrative aspects of the weekly interview, however, and so I continued to conduct the interview every week, although the quantitative results from that household are not reported here.

The interview process was considerably more fluid than with the census interviews. I tended to try my weekly interviews during the evening hours when visiting is welcomed. I learned to bring cookies with me, an idea suggested in *Portfolios of the Poor* (Collins et al. 2009) as a stratagem for reducing the burden of welcoming me with food each week. Almost invariably, I would be offered coffee, and over coffee and cookies we would review the week's budget.

During the interview I asked about how much everyone in the household had spent during the week. Then I would ask about how much everyone in the household had earned that week. My aim, generally, was to leave space for respondents to define these categories. With each household I eventually learned the standard weekly items, and I developed a somewhat informal checklist by household. I would ask questions from this checklist to make sure that nothing was being forgotten.

The most important and interesting part of an interview, invariably, was the conversation that it created. I recorded the interviews. They generally lasted between fifteen minutes and an hour.

Since my interlocutors often reported that they had bought an item on credit, I had to decide how to record credit expenditures. Generally, I noted down the credit arrangement in my notebook as soon as the object changed hands. However, I did not include the object's price as an expenditure until the week when the household actually paid for it. For items purchased on credit over an extended period, I included each installment payment as an expenditure on the week that it was actually paid.

Similarly, I strove to note down income in the week when the money actually entered the hands of the worker.

One household did the weekly interviews for only a two-month period before dropping out; on the opposite extreme, one household did the interviews for nearly seven months. Most households participated in the interviewing for five or six months. In two households, there was an extended gap of time with no interviewing because an important family member was missing from the household. Also, on several occasions, I missed an interview with a household during a single week. When only one week was missed, I would ask the respondent to report that week's income and expenditures during the next interview.

To gain a sense for the accuracy of the data, I summed up total expenses and total income for each household over the full interview period. Respondents often told me that they did not have any monetary savings at all,¹ so I expected expenses and income to balance out. For some households, reported income and reported expenditures did indeed come close to balancing, but for others, they did not. In one household they were vastly different due to loans taken out by the mother. Leaving that household aside, I divided reported income by reported expenditures to obtain a percentage for each household. In the different households, reported income ranged from 10% less than reported expenditures to 21% more than reported expenditures.

These discrepancies could occur because household members were saving small amounts or making use of credit. The discrepancies might also be due to refusal to report some facts to me. It seems most likely, however, that the discrepancies come from errors of memory and related difficulties. It was sometimes hard for my interlocutors to remember every item purchased in a week, particularly if the purchase was made by another resident of the house. Hence the discrepancies, though important, seem understandable.

Here, I report on particular households of interest. In the interests of confidentiality, certain small details have been changed and the name of each household's village is not identified; also, different pseudonyms are used from those in the main text. The aim, here, is to provide a sense for the flows and the fixities of mundane economic life.

¹ Many people in the villages did, however, save by devoting resources to agriculture – for example, by purchasing cattle or improving a field.

Results from the focus family interviews

Family A: Nasir and Lina, middle-aged farming couple with three children

Income per person per month: **\$R 110**

(below poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Família: **\$R 69**

(below poverty and absolute poverty)

Interview period: **6 months**

Interview accuracy: Over full period of 6 months, reported total income was **15% higher** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 1.15 times total expenses.)

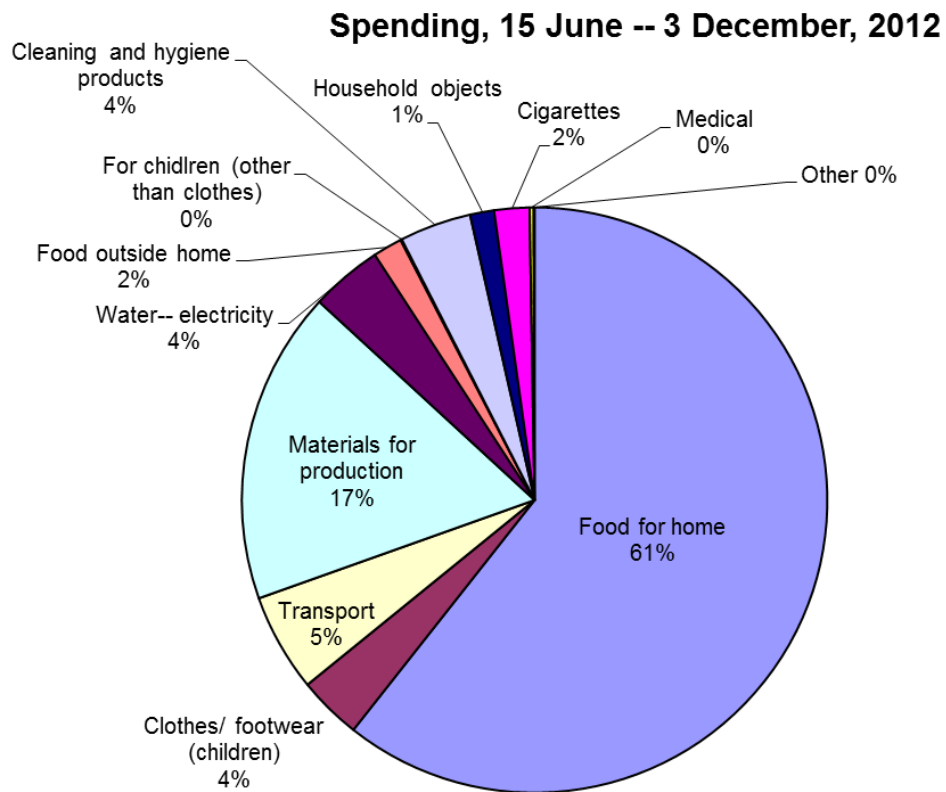
Late at night, often after a long day in the fields, this couple would joke with their children and pour me coffee while they recalled their expenditures and incomes for me. Nasir, Lina, and the children tended to spend their evenings together. Nasir had recently returned from many months of migrant labor outside of the village. He brought back enough money to purchase some household items – a television, a new mattress – that made the evenings more pleasant. Also, he used a part of the money to invest in the family's own field.

Both Nasir and Lina told me about their common goal: living successfully from their production on their field. For now, however, the goal was out of reach. To make ends meet, Nasir often did day-labor on the fields of his wealthier neighbors. Lina earned free household items, but not cash, by serving as a re-sale agent for a *mascate* (traveling merchant) who periodically passed through the village. She also received Bolsa Família, which was fundamental to the family's subsistence.

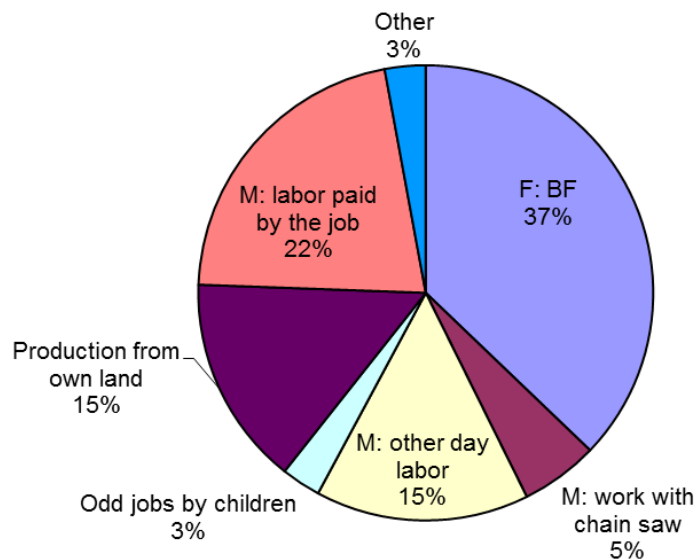
Even with Bolsa Família, the family had one of the poorer households in the village, although certainly not the poorest. Nasir explained to me that he could make much more than the Bolsa Família money if he sent his children to labor. But, he believed, school was important, so he kept them out of work, except for light help around the farm and occasional opportunities to earn pocket-change by helping out their neighbors. And, as Nasir also observed, over the last five or ten years, local plantations had stopped accepting child labor. Government inspections were having an effect. Indeed, a sea change had occurred in the region more generally: adults had almost universally come to believe that children should study rather than work.

Since Lina and Nasir's household was relatively poor, it is unsurprising that more than 60% of their expenditures went to food. Somewhat more surprising is the observation that 17% of expenditures were for production equipment. This reflects the family's commitment to improving their own fields.

Bolsa Família, despite its important role in the family's survival, made up only 37% of the total income stream. (This was common in poorer families; Bolsa Família was never, for any family in the village, the only source of income.) Along with Bolsa Família, the family received money from Nasir's day-labor and other small jobs. It is notable that this family, like many of the poorest families in the region, counted on a very diversified income stream. Bolsa Família only covered about a third of their expenses.

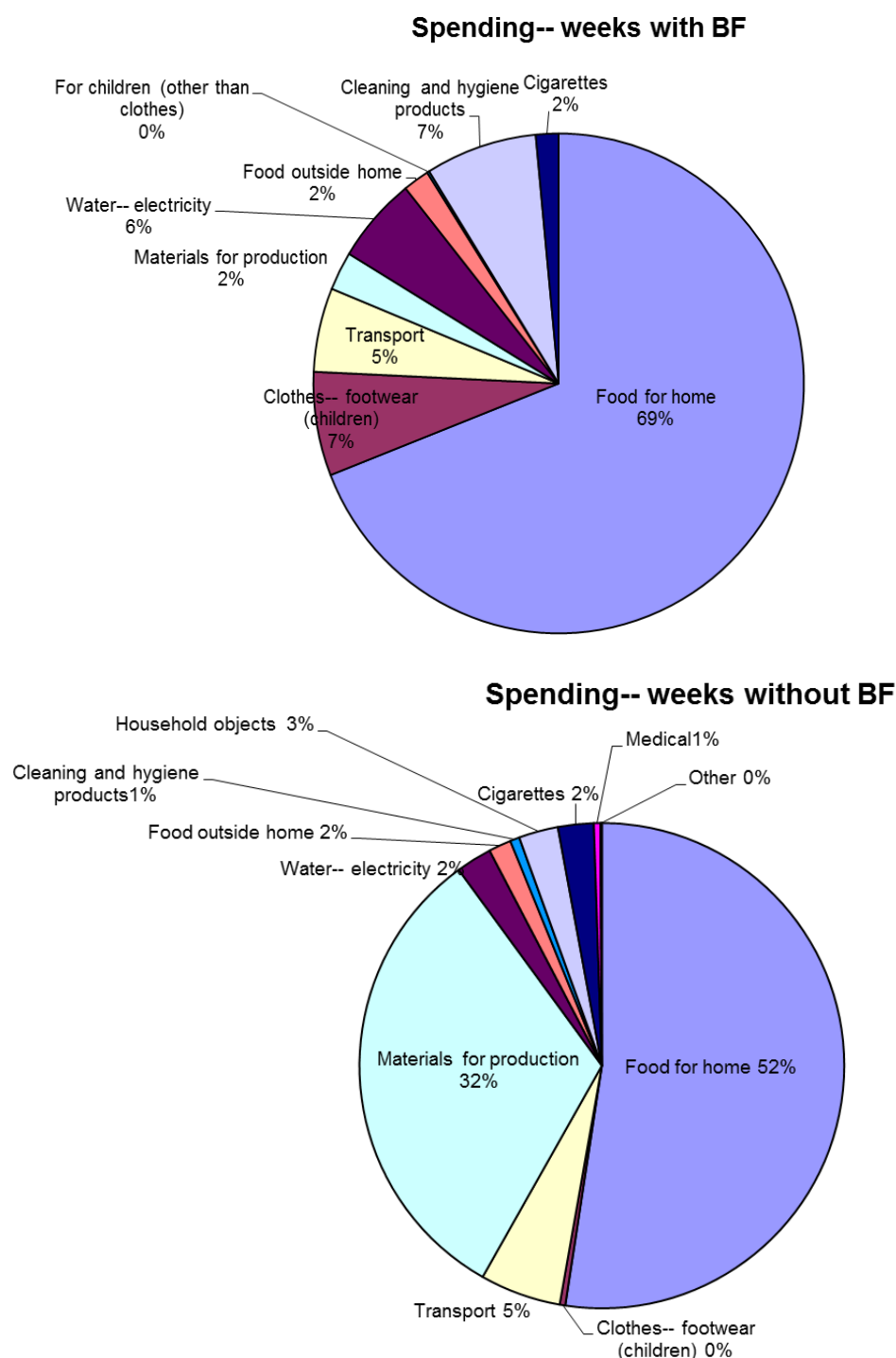


Income, 15 June - 3 December, 2012

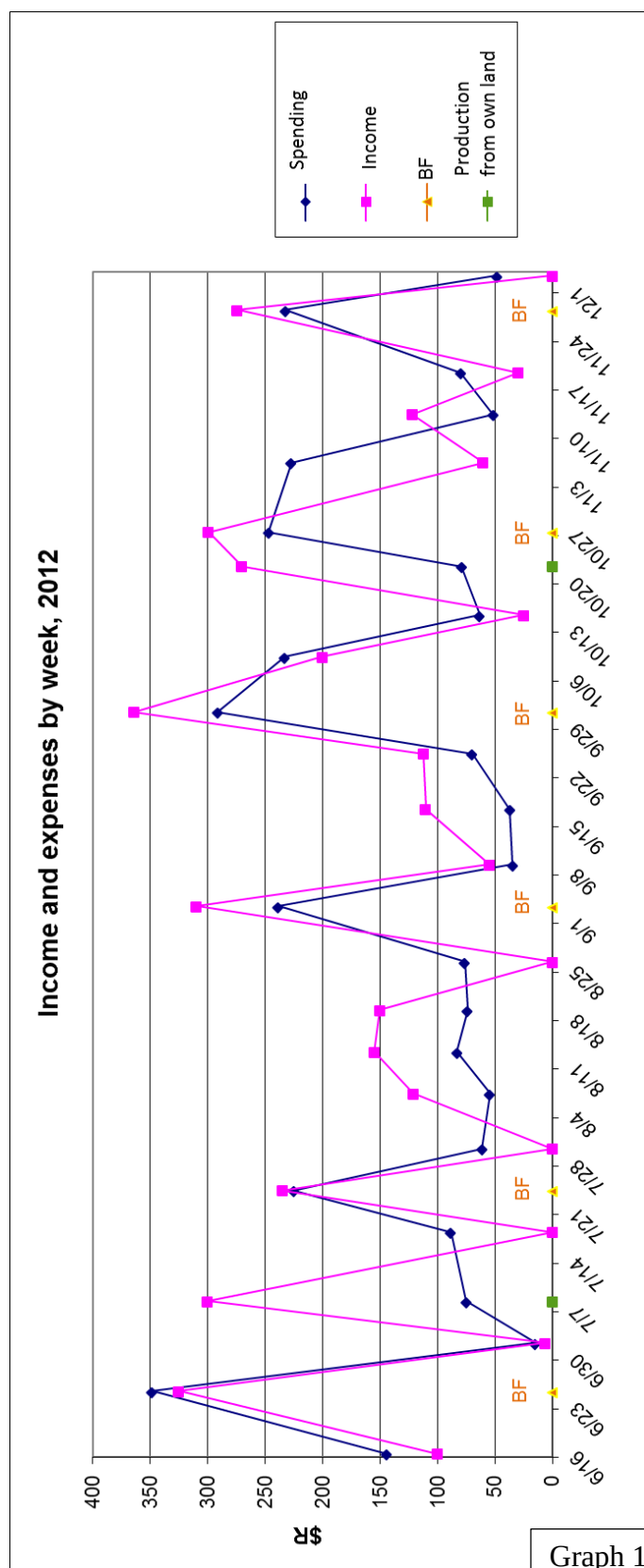


Graphs 14 and 15: Family A spending and income

By comparing the household's expenditures in the weeks when Bolsa Família arrived to their expenditures in other weeks, we can gain some insight into how the family used Bolsa Família money.



Graphs 16 and 17: Spending with and without BF, Family A



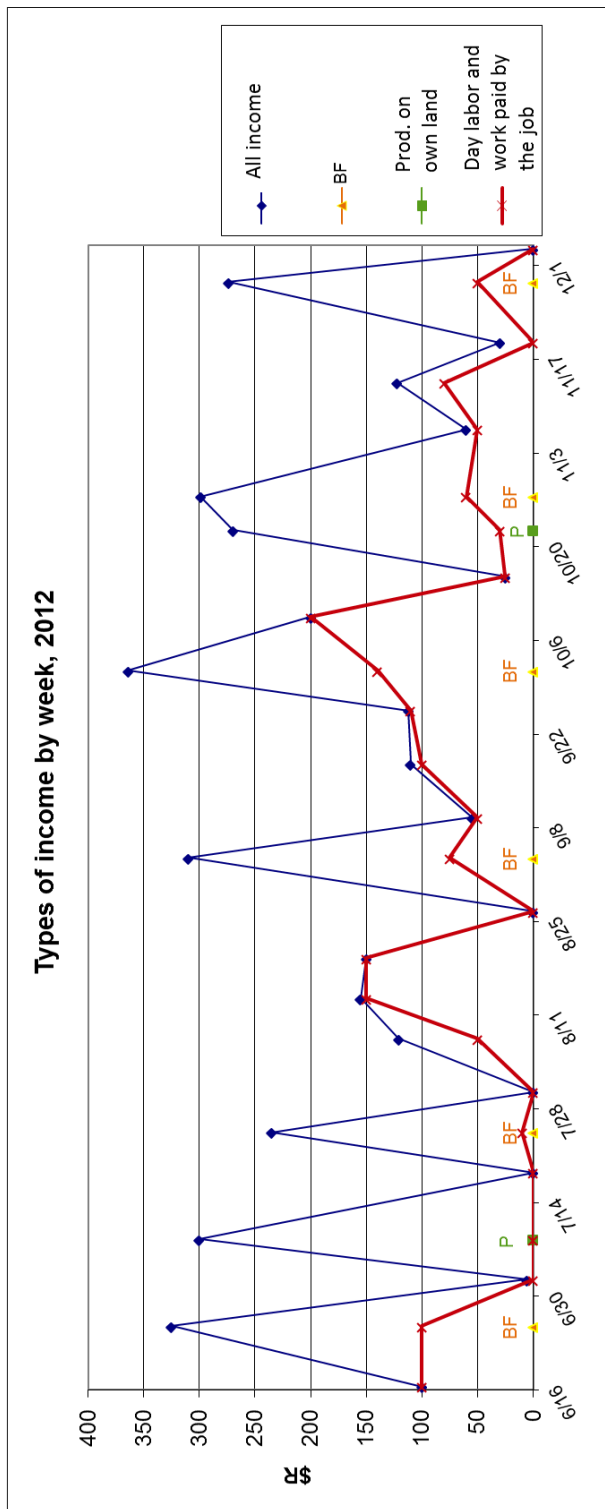
Graph 18: Income and expenditures by week, family A

Weeks with Bolsa Família saw a considerably greater proportion of the budget devoted to food, hygiene products, and children’s clothing. During weeks without Bolsa Família, by contrast, the family prioritized purchasing supplies to help them produce in the field—including, for example, gas for a chainsaw, a new chicken, and materials for planting trees.

Thus the distinction between the two pie charts, above, tells a familiar story. On weeks when the household received Bolsa Família, adults made their major monthly shopping trip, purchasing food and cleaning supplies and devoting some of the cash to children’s clothing. During the other weeks, expenditures were oriented towards the shared project of agricultural production. The distinction corresponds to a process of earmarking (see Chapter 5), with Bolsa Família money earmarked for food and clothing.

As the above line graph demonstrates, the family tended to spend money as soon as it arrived. Expenditures and income tracked each other closely, with little income smoothing. Since the majority of the family’s money needed to be devoted to food, it was difficult to save cash. When the family did save, that savings often took on an agricultural form. The purchase of agricultural supplies for production was, in effect, a savings that would hopefully bear fruit in the long run.

The graph below offers a view onto the flow of different kinds of income. The household’s overall income (blue line) is characteristically uneven, with a range of



Graph 19: Types of income by week, family A

peaks and valleys. As the graph demonstrates, the main source of this unevenness was the monthly Bolsa Família payment, which caused a sudden surge in income each month. On two occasions, the household received money by selling agricultural products grown on the family's own land (the two green dots.) These sales also led to peaks.

A glance back at the first line graph reveals an interesting contrast: Bolsa Família peaks were usually accompanied by spending peaks, meaning that the family used the money to make purchases immediately. On the two occasions when the family made money by selling agricultural products, however, spending did not rise dramatically. This seems to indicate a second form of earmarking: if Bolsa Família money was directed towards food, then, by contrast, the family earmarked the money from their own field for expenditures that were made more slowly and selectively. Ethnographic evidence corroborates this supposition (see Chapter 5). It appears these slower and more selective expenditures were, specifically, purchases of animals and supplies for agricultural production.

Bolsa Família and production money thus arrived in peaks; day-labor and by-the-job earnings were somewhat more continuous, although, as the second line graph shows, they tended to come in small amounts. Sometimes, as in July, there was no work to be had at all.

In conclusion, this family faced the challenge of living near the poverty line, a situation in which a large portion of the family income had to be spent immediately on food. Nonetheless, they managed to save money as well, by devoting productive resources to their own field. Earmarking, in particular, helped them to carry out this saving.

Family B: Naira and Nilton, young couple, short-term construction labor, Bolsa Família problems, two small children

Income per person per month: **\$R 194**

(above poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Familia: **\$R 145**

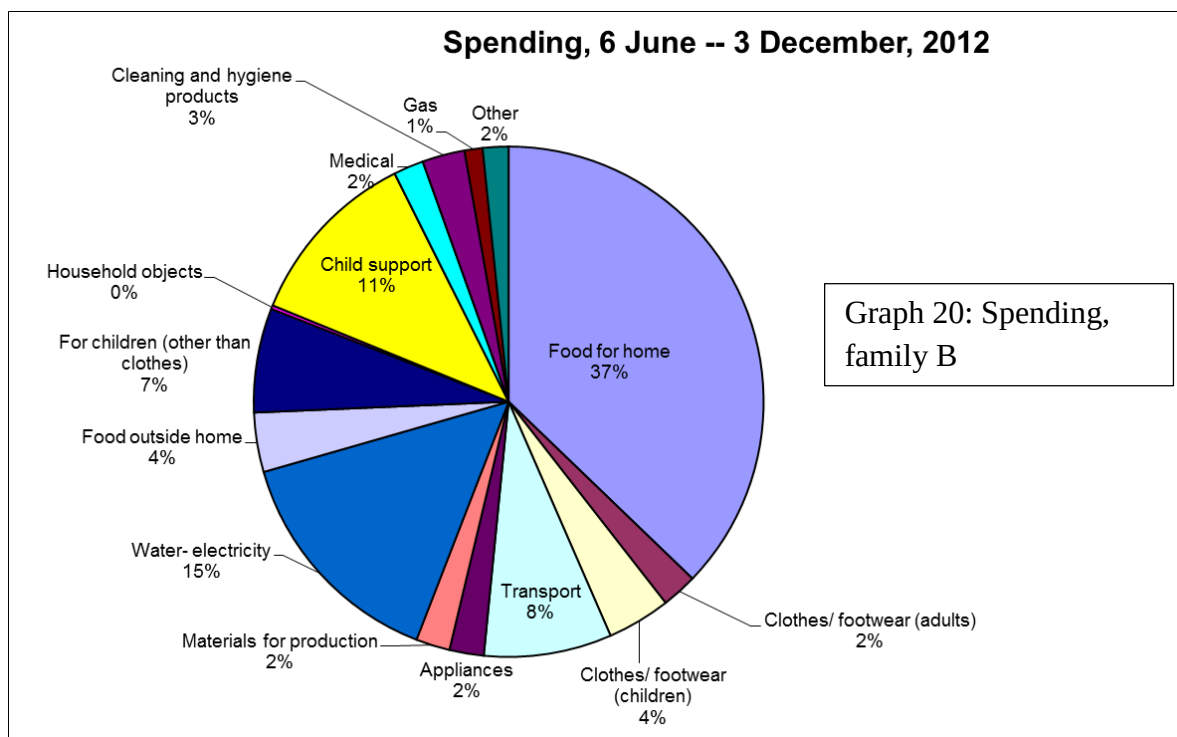
(above but close to poverty; above absolute poverty)

Interview period: **6 months** (with almost two months missing in the middle)

Interview accuracy: Over full period of 5 months, reported total income was **9% lower** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 0.91 times total expenses.)

Naira and Nilton had recently set up a home together, in a colorful house located between Naira's parents and Nilton's. She was in her late teens and he in his early 20s, and they both assumed a quiet and serious style when talking to me; they were trying hard to raise their young son. They were pregnant with their second son during the first interviews. Eventually they traveled to the city to have the baby – creating the nearly two-month gap in interview data here presented.

During the time of my field work, Naira and Nilton had to endure frequent periods apart. Nilton sometimes worked in a major city. Shortly before the interviews began, he returned from one of these labor spells. In those days he was only rarely finding day-labor. Naira, for her part, had inexplicably spent more than a year on the waiting list for Bolsa Família. This dire situation led to food insecurity.

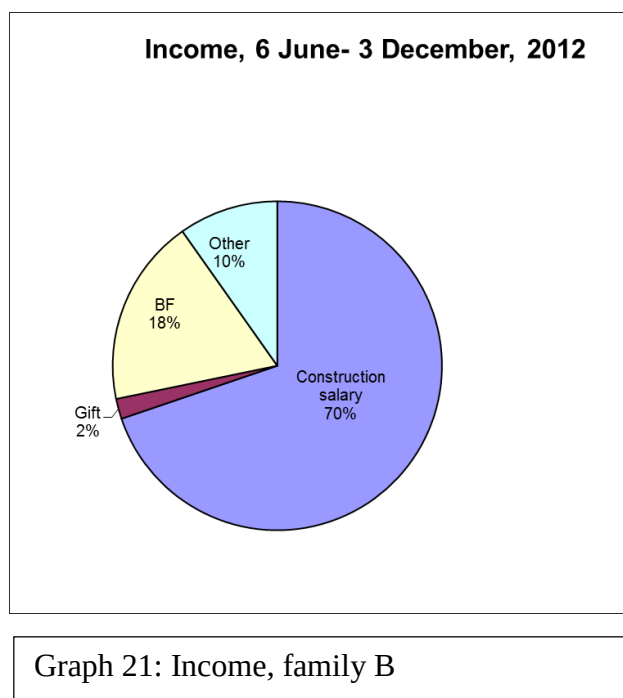


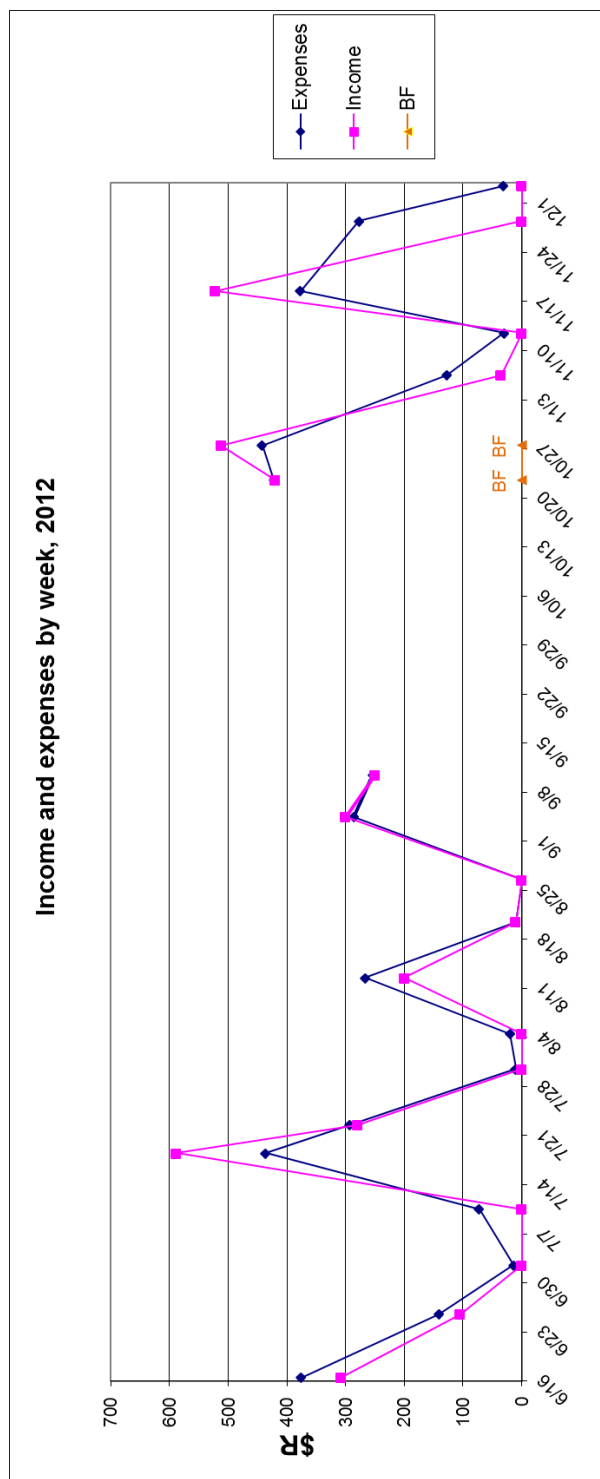
At the very beginning of the interview period, Nilton found an unusual construction labor job that allowed him to continue living in the countryside. This job would only last for a limited period, but it considerably increased the family's income. Some months after he began work, Naira finally received Bolsa Família. Hence their income during the interview period was considerably higher than normal for them.

Probably due to this increase in income, Naira and Nilton spent a smaller share of their income on food than the poorest families normally did. They were able to devote an unusual proportion of their income to children's items and to the purchase of an appliance: an inexpensive DVD player, which drew members of the extended family into their living room to watch movies. However, possibly in keeping with their newfound income source, they also incurred extra expenses related to kinship obligations. They had to make child support payments to Nilton's son from a previous relationship. They had an extremely high electric bill because they used their line to provide electricity to some of their relatives.

The construction job had, for the time being, crowded out most other income sources. Bolsa Família supplied less than 20% of their household income, and Naira, who spent most of her time caring for the household and for infant children, had few opportunities for employment.

As the line graph demonstrates, the family still spent most of its money immediately, with expenses closely tracking income each week. Although their income had recently increased, the family still needed to cover baby expenses and support extended family, so they had little room to save as of yet.





Graph 22: Income and expenses by week, family B

Family C: Glória, mother with young child, self-employment

Income per person per month: **\$R 92**

(below poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Familia: **\$R 41**

(below poverty, below absolute poverty)

Interview period: **3 months**

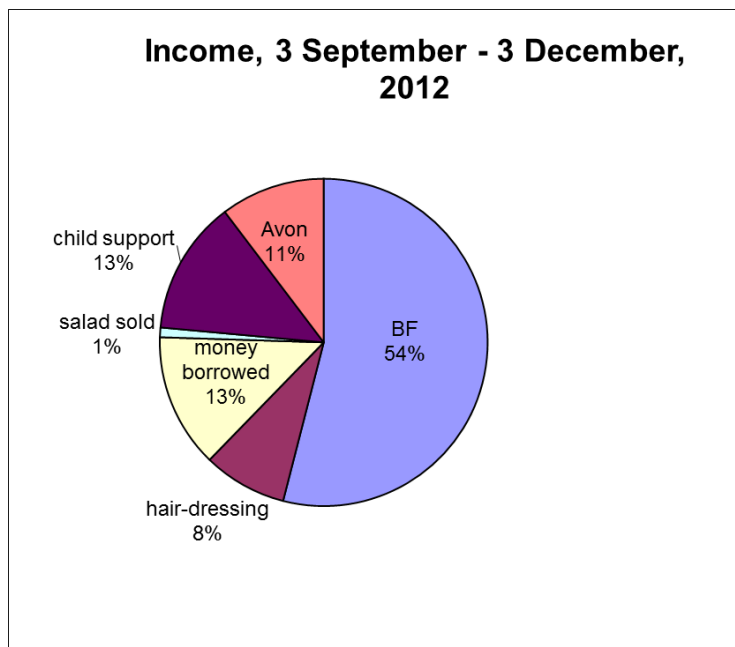
Interview accuracy: Over full period of 3 months, reported total income was **67% lower** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 0.67 times total expenses.) Note, however, that this excess is due to the large amount of money that the mother borrowed, as explained below. It probably does not reflect inaccurate reporting on her part.

In a spartan house, Glória, a mother in her twenties, lived with her early-elementary-aged daughter Maia, a child who had become famous throughout the village for her sunny disposition and her habit of smiling at everyone she saw. They were one of the poorest families in the village. Often, they had difficulty finding enough to eat and getting to the doctor in times of sickness.

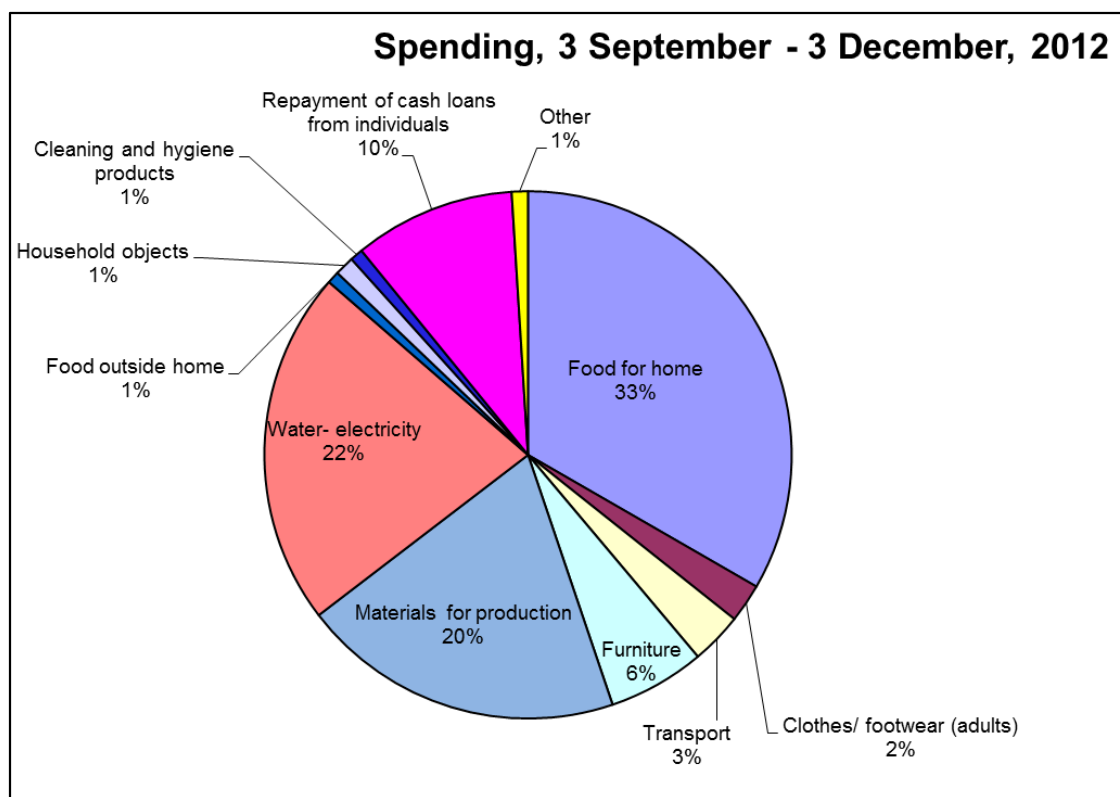
Glória had invented several forms of small employment for herself. She peddled Avon products from a catalogue to other people in the village. She grew lettuce and sold it for a very low price. She cut and dressed her neighbors' hair.

As the income pie chart demonstrates, Glória's most important source of income was Bolsa Família. But even in this extremely poor household, Bolsa Família accounted for only about half of the family income. It was supplemented with child support from the Maia's father. However, the child support payment came irregularly.

Glória's earnings from Avon, lettuce, and hairdressing made an important contribution towards the family's income. Glória also relied on her ability to borrow money from friends and family. Since these loans— some of which may have been intended as gifts – played such an important role in the family budget, I have included them as "income." (Note that the "money borrowed" category only includes personal cash loans from individuals, not credit extended by storekeepers for purchases, which was also very important to the family. Credit will be discussed below.)



Graph 23: Income, family C



Graph 24: Spending, family C

Because the household was unusually poor, the expenditures had some out-of-the-ordinary characteristics. The poorest households tended to devote the majority of their spending to food. In this case, however, Glória and Maia reduced their food expenses to an extremely low level, and hence food occupied a comparatively small percentage of the household budget. This was necessary because the basic cost for running electric lights, which for most households was a tiny proportion of the budget, took up nearly a third of their limited funds.

On weeks without Bolsa Família,² Glória devoted all of her expenditures to food. These non-Bolsa Família food expenditures were extremely low, totaling \$R55 over the three-month period. Interestingly, on those same weeks she earned \$R87.50 from lettuce, Avon, and hairdressing. She also received \$R80 in personal loans during those weeks. In other words, she saved money during her non-Bolsa Família weeks so that she could spend it during her Bolsa Família weeks, when she made the majority of her purchases.

Glória devoted an additional 10% of her spending to repaying loans that she received from individuals. This fact points towards one of Glória's important characteristics. She was fastidious about repayment, recording each one of her debts in writing, expressing anxiety until she could pay them all back.

Indeed, the family's economic activity was characterized by extraordinary financial complexity. Glória borrowed money, but the financial arrangements went both ways: she also sold her wares on credit and did work for others in exchange for the promise that she would get paid later. She was simultaneously a debtor and a creditor, in a web that linked a large number of

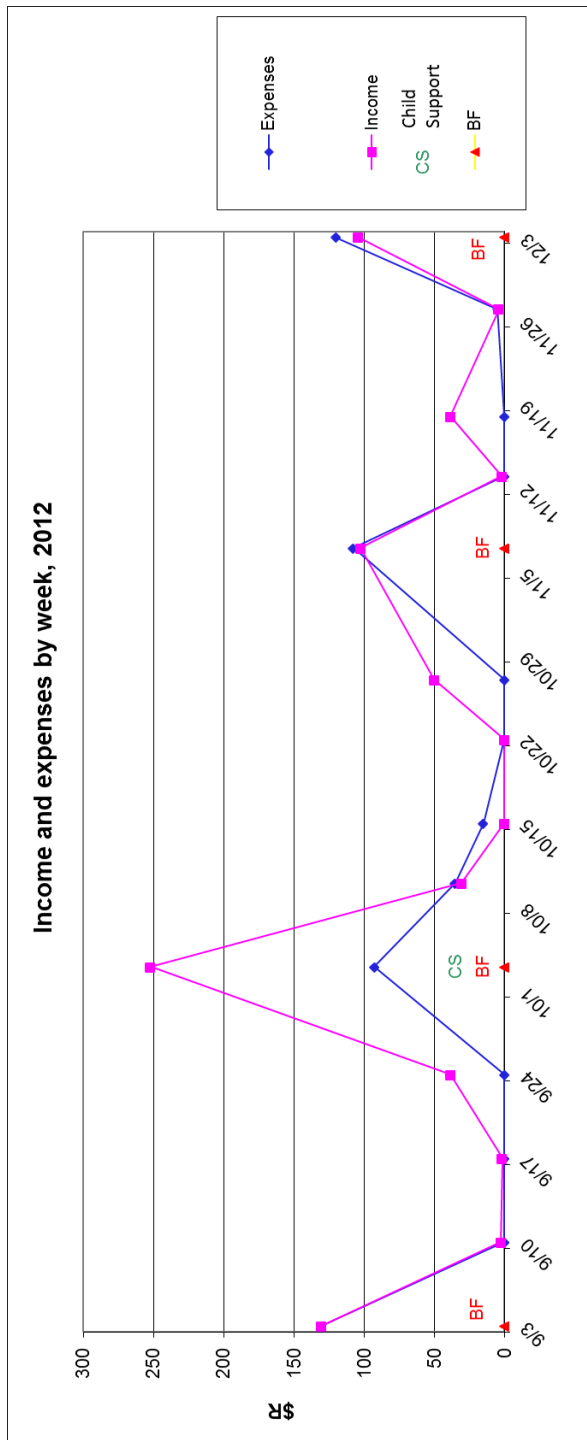
² Separate pie charts for weeks with BF and weeks without BF are not shown here.

people. Her financial operations were probably the most complicated in the village, with the possible exception of those carried out by the village's informal banker.

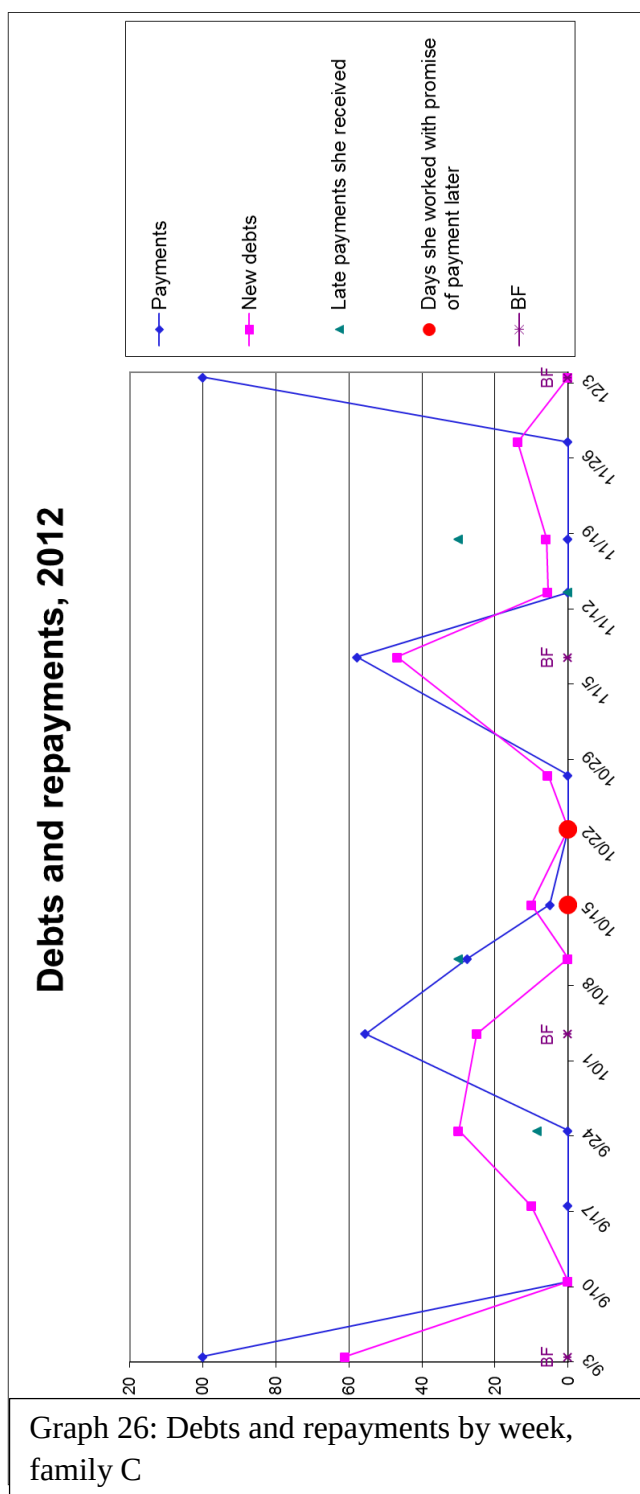
Glória told me that she hated being in debt. What pushed her into financial relations, it seemed, was her poverty and her determination to earn an income to support her daughter. She was constantly seeking opportunities to make money, and this required that she sell to people who could not immediately pay; other, more established village businesspeople could afford to wait and be choosier when selecting their customers.

Moreover, because Glória could rarely afford to travel to the city, she had to do almost all of her sales in the village, where her customers were poorer than in the city, prices were significantly lower, and purchasers expected credit to be extended. This same expectation also benefited her. Because of it, she was often able to purchase food from storekeepers on credit. In order to maintain these lines of credit, she prioritized paying the storekeepers back quickly.

Because of these financial entanglements, the line graph of income and expenses is comparatively uninformative here; it shows that Glória tended to earn more in income than she expended, but the earnings amount includes loans, and so it is difficult to interpret. More relevant is a graph of her financial flow.



Graph 25: Income by week, family C



The financial line graph shows that Glória tended to repay debts to the village storekeeper and then make new debts with the same storekeeper on the same day. It was by acquitting herself of at least part of a previous obligation, she told me, that she felt capable of taking on new obligations. As seen on the graph, when she received Bolsa Família every month, she immediately paid off old debts; on September 3rd, October 3rd, and November 7th, she then made significant new debts, purchasing a stock of food supplies.

In addition to these major debts, Glória needed to make smaller debts on a regular basis, throughout the month, especially when she ran out of food. She made these smaller debts – for bread or similar items – with a variety of local food vendors, and, perhaps because of the small amounts involved, she undertook these debts without paying back any previous amounts owed.

The line graph displays not only her indebtedness, but also her status as a creditor. On September 24th and October 10th, she received payments from customers who owed her money from hairdressing that she had done previously. On November 19th, she got more late hairdressing money and a late payment from an Avon customer. At the same time, she was extending new credit: on October 15th and 22nd, she did hairdressing work in exchange for her customers' promise that they would pay her later.

Thus Glória became involved in credit and debt relations not because she had extra money to invest, but for just the opposite reason: because she lacked the funds necessary to aspire to an autarkic existence,

as Family A did. Credit was risky and unpalatable, yet vital for her.

Its risks were vividly exposed by the story behind the “materials for production” category in the Spending pie chart, which occupied a full 20% of the family expenditures over the three-month interview period. This category, here, included just one expenditure, the result of a difficult situation. One of Glória’s Avon customers ordered an item from her, but when the item arrived, the customer declined to pay for it. Since the item could not be returned, Glória had to

cover the entire expense out of pocket in order to remain in good standing with Avon. Incidents like this one showed the dark side of credit. To be exposed to such risks was, often, a problem that the poorest villagers faced; to achieve a measure of distance from both credit and debt was a goal to which one could aspire once prosperity was in sight.

Family D: Pedro and Jenilda, middle-aged couple, political work, five children

Income per person per month: **\$R 166**

(above poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

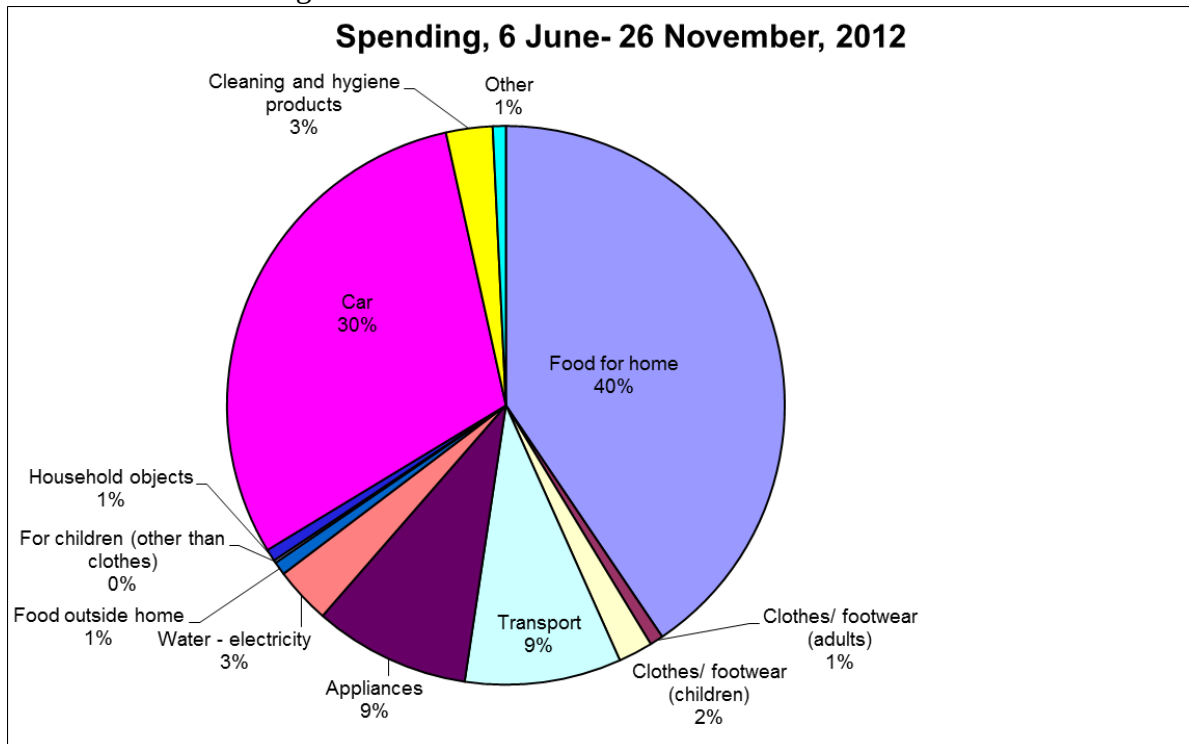
Income per person per month without Bolsa Família: **\$R 111**

(below poverty; above absolute poverty)

Interview period: **5 ½ months** (with two weeks missing in the middle)

Interview accuracy: Over full period of 5 months, reported total income was **21% higher** than reported total expenses. (Total expenses = 1.21 times total income.) This discrepancy occurred, in part, because expenditures were not recorded during the two missing weeks.

In a noisy but well-kempt house, Pedro and Jenilda watched over their five children and planned for the future. The family's income had recently increased significantly, since Pedro had begun working as the local representative for a politician. Pedro and Jenilda continued to maintain a herd of cattle, but political work was now taking up more of his time, and this work allowed them to consider savings for the future.

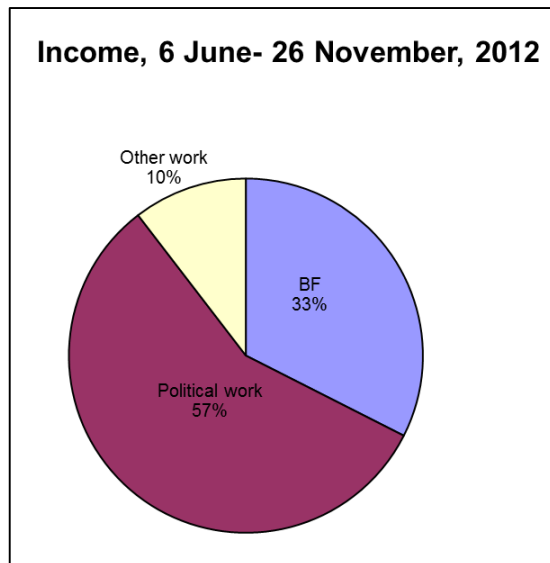


Graph 27: Spending, family D

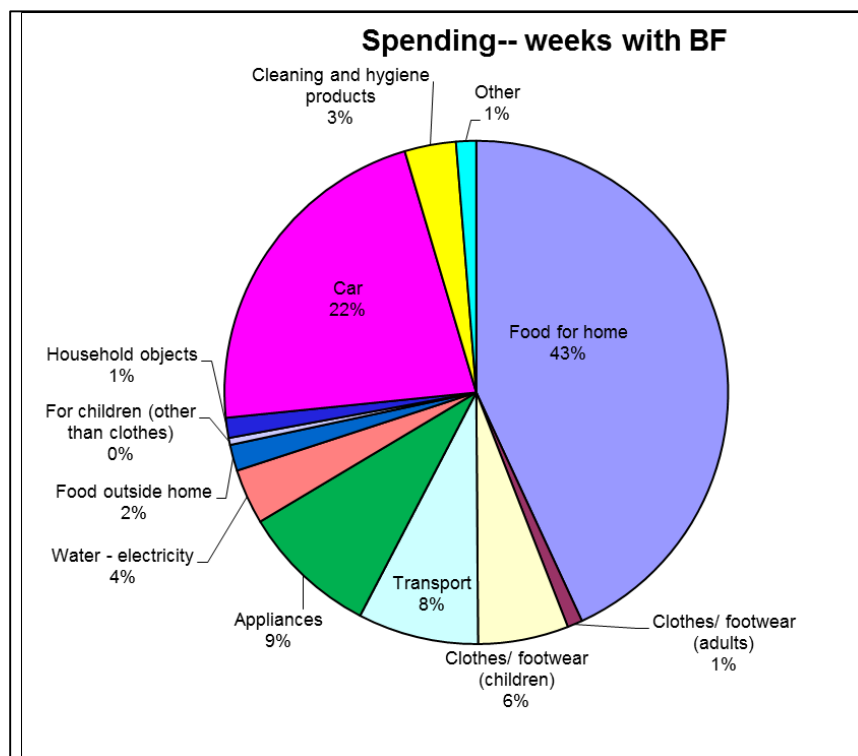
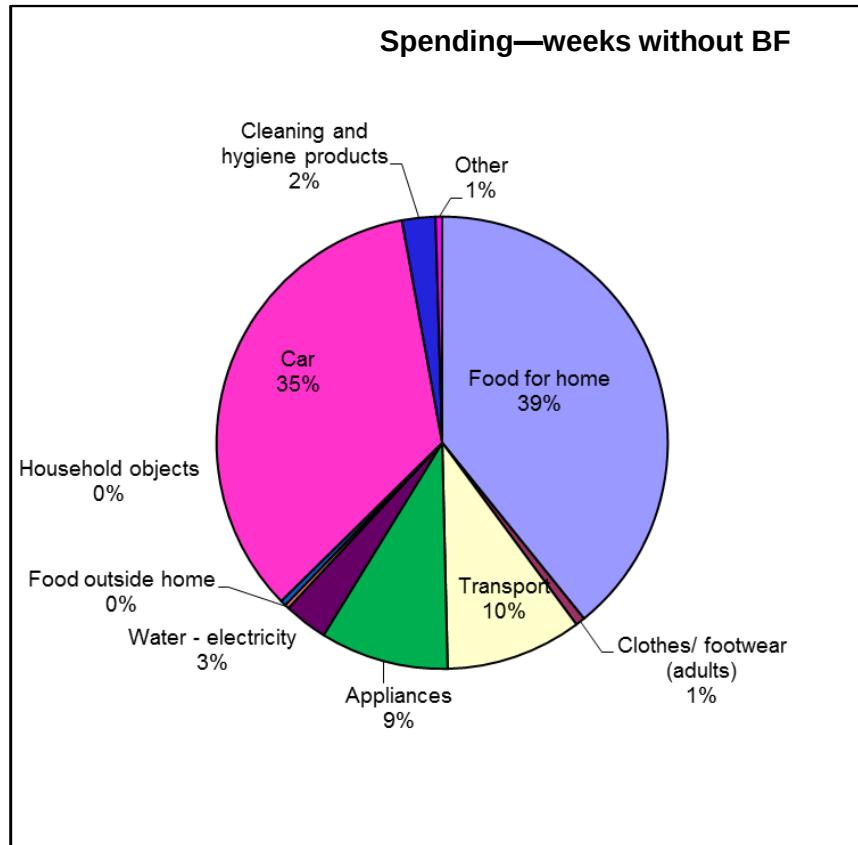
Political work accounted for more than half of the family's earnings, although Bolsa Família still played an important role in raising the family out of poverty. In keeping with the family's increasing prosperity, less than half of total expenditures were devoted to food. A large share of spending was directed towards the car, a comparatively rare asset in the village and one that was vital both to current political work and future plans for this work.

The family had similar patterns of expenditure during weeks with and without Bolsa Família, but not entirely similar. Food spending took up a somewhat greater proportion of the budget during weeks with Bolsa Família. Correspondingly, the car, which was associated with Pedro's work, took up a greater proportion of the budget during weeks without Bolsa Família; he frequently had to make car payments or repairs, and he seems to have covered these expenses out of employment earnings rather than Bolsa Família. Along similar lines, children's clothes were only purchased during weeks with Bolsa Família.

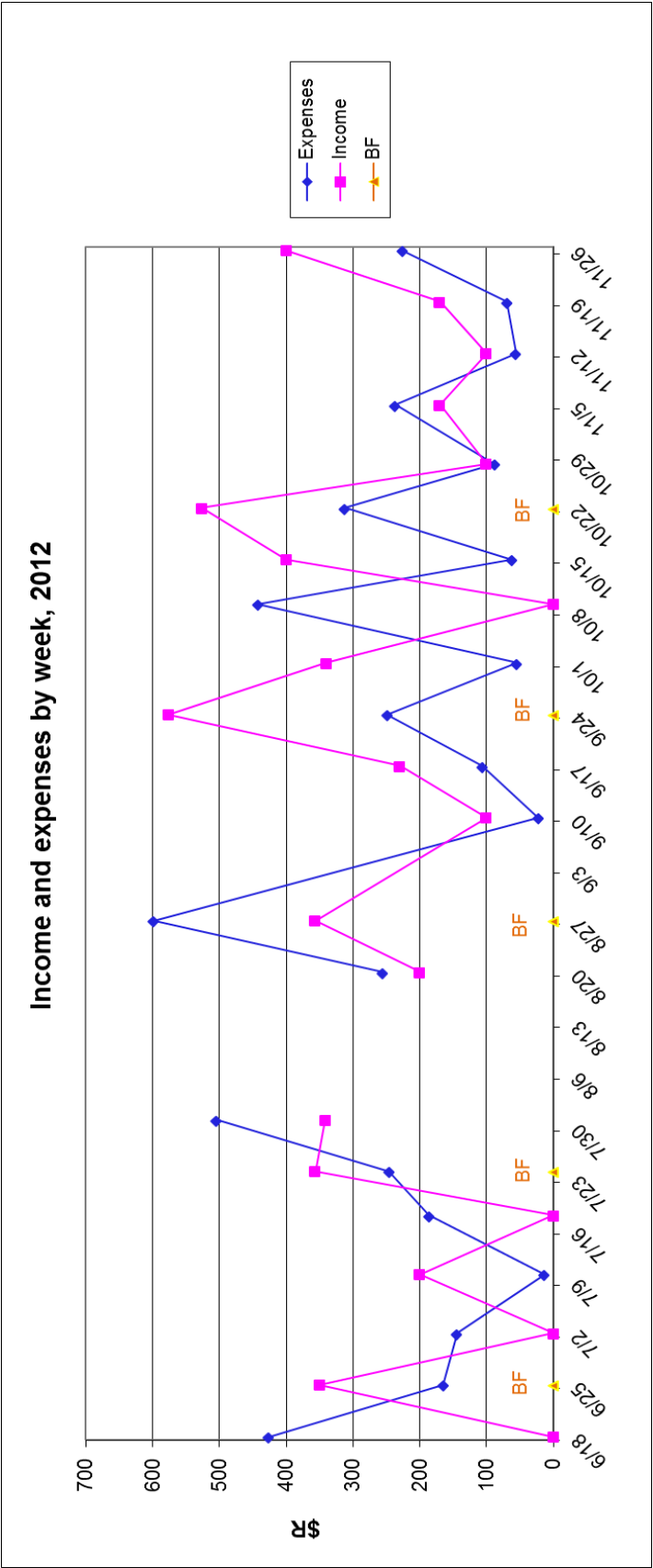
If expenditures were mostly similar during weeks with and without Bolsa Família, this may have been because Jenilda and Pedro managed to hold on to enough money so that they could spend money during the weeks when they did not earn anything. As the line graph shows, their expenditures and their income both came with peaks. The expenditure peaks corresponded to days when they made a major shopping trip, and the income peaks corresponded to days when they earned a major payment. However, the expenditure peaks did not necessarily overlap with income peaks. In other words, Jenilda and Pedro seem to have saved some of their earnings and carried these savings over into later weeks, when they would spend the money. This capacity to save, along with their future-focused expenditure on the car, pointed towards the relative prosperity they had attained in comparison to their earlier situation.



Graph 28: Income, family D



Graphs 29 and 30: Spending with and without BF, family D



Graph 31:
Income and
expenses by
week, family D

Family E: Bryan and Nara, middle-aged farming couple, three adolescent children

Income per person per month: **\$R 160**

(above poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Família: **\$R 127**

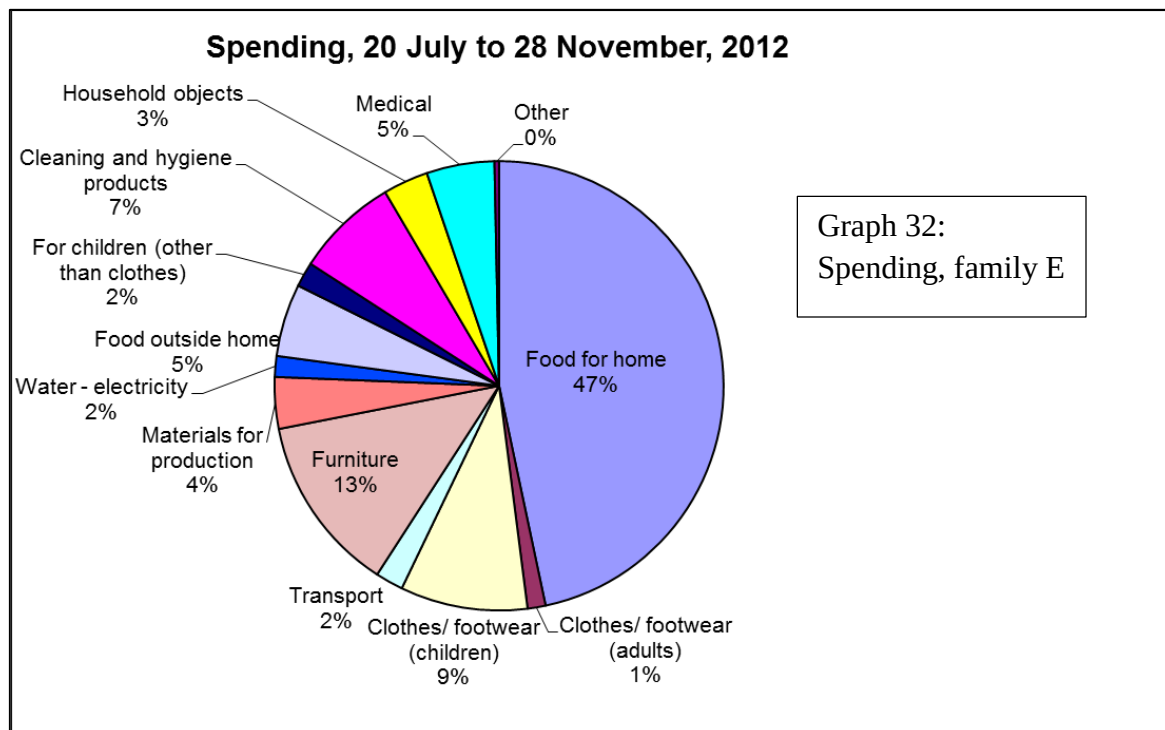
(below poverty; above absolute poverty)

Interview period: **4 months**

Interview accuracy: Over full period of 4 months, reported total income was **19% higher** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 1.19 times total expenses.)

Far off the village's more well-traveled paths, Bryan and Nara's small white house was surrounded by fields and pastures. But the family was not distant from the global workforce. Bryan made frequent trips to work in cities. By the time of the interviews, he said he was determined to stop these voyages, settle down, and devote himself to agricultural work in the villages. The couple's three teenaged children were not so sure about staying in the village environment. All three were academically ambitious, and they seemed likely to go to the city, at least for a time.

Bryan and Nara supported their family at a comparatively moderate income level, thanks to a wide range of income sources. Bryan had a reputation as one of the most reliable workers in the village, and so he was able to obtain not only day-labor, but also more remunerative and dignified pay-by-the-job employment in agriculture and small-time construction around the village (see Chapter 5 on pay-by-the job.) Nara, for her part, washed clothes for money. She also sometimes worked day-labor in the fields, although, as was standard in the villages, she earned a wage-rate far below the normal rate for men. Finally, Bolsa Família played an important role in keeping the family out of poverty.

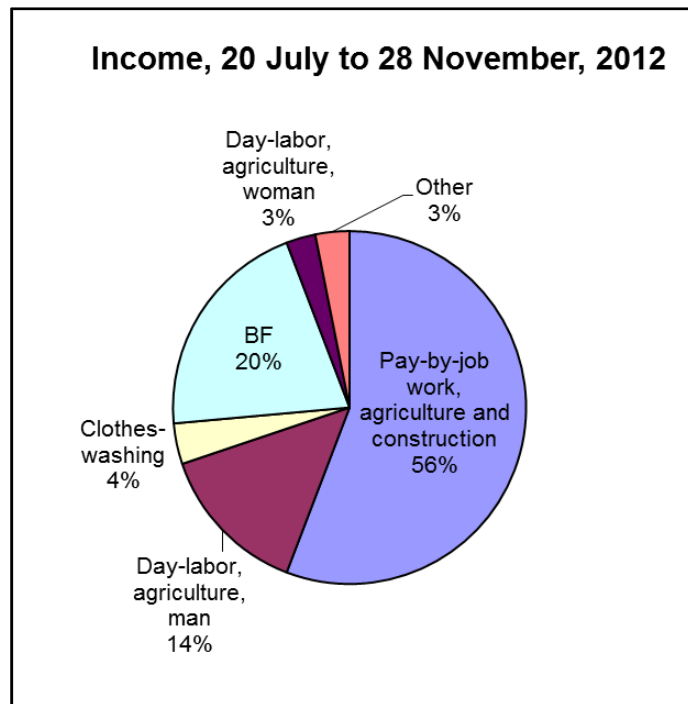


The family spent just under half of their expenditures on food, less than was habitual for the poorest families but more than the more prosperous families. They managed to devote a meaningful portion of their spending to furniture: specifically, a mattress and a wardrobe closet, the latter purchased bit by bit from a neighbor. Nara was paying for the wardrobe closet in labor by washing the neighbor's clothes each month.

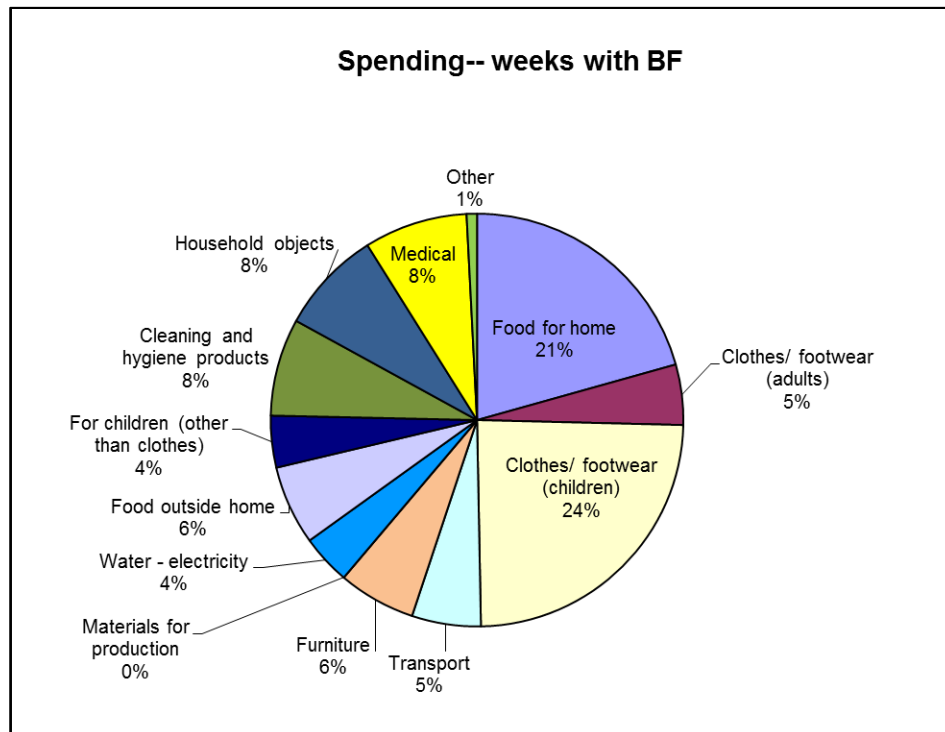
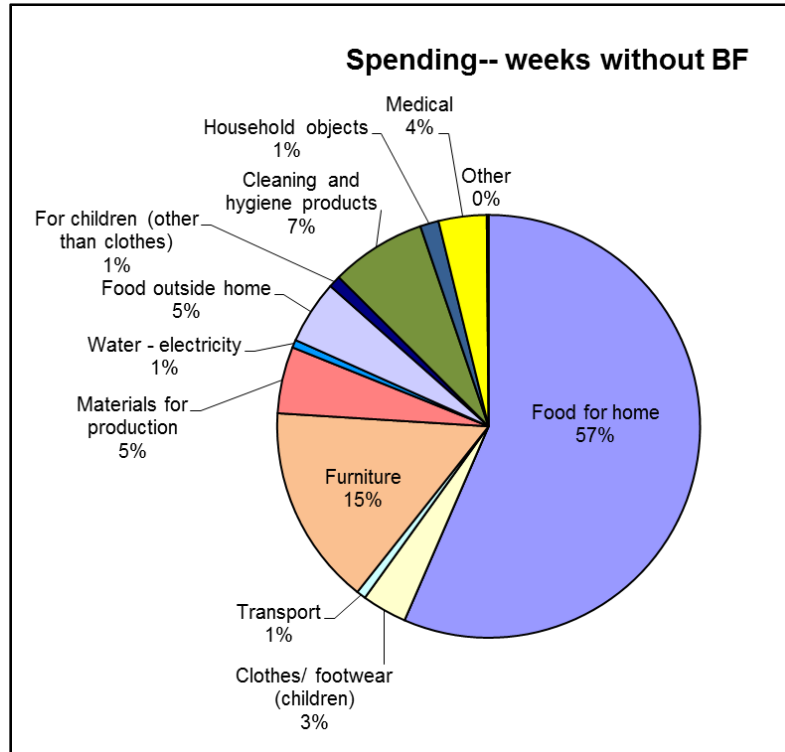
The comparison between Bolsa Família and non-Bolsa Família weeks is a surprising one. Nara and Bryan spent a considerably greater proportion of their income on food in the weeks when they did not receive Bolsa Família. This seems to have occurred because they coordinated their major monthly food purchase with a neighbor, who went to the city and brought the food back for them. The major difference between the two kinds of weeks was hence not food but children's clothing. During the interview period, the family was paying off a debt for a pair of shoes for one of the daughters, and they would tend to make the payment on the day when they received Bolsa Família.

Thanks in part to the neighbor's assistance with food purchases, Nara and Bryan achieved an unusually high level of income smoothing. As the line graph demonstrates, their expenditures were largely decoupled from their income, indicating that they managed to hold money over several weeks until the time when they spent it. Moreover, because of Bryan's excellent reputation and the relative abundance of work available in his part of the village, he earned money fairly consistently.

Despite living close to the poverty line, Nara and Bryan's family achieved several benchmarks associated with more prosperous families: they devoted less than half of their expenditures to food and they smoothed their incomes over time. These achievements seemed to reflect their good relationships inside the village, which opened doors for credit and employment; it also reflected their long-term sense of financial stability.

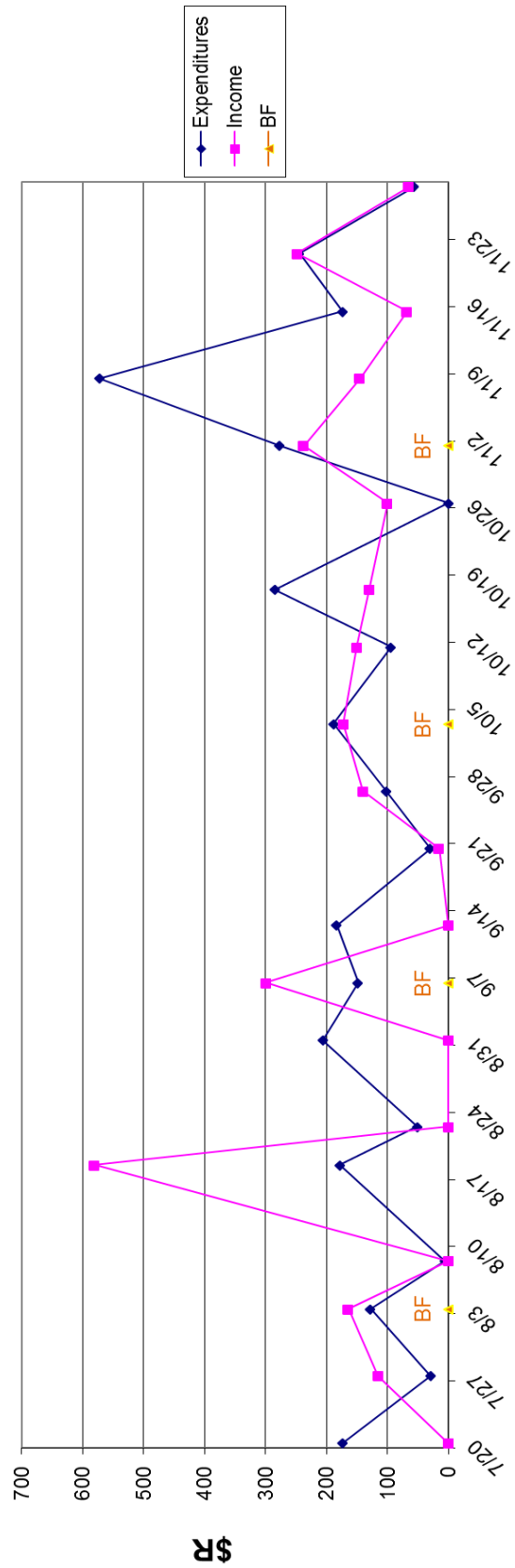


Graph 33: Income, family E



Graphs 34 and 35: Spending with and without BF, family E

Expenditures and income, 2012



Graph 36:
Spending and
income by week,
family E

Family F: Dona Alberta, Nelson, and Cobita, retired mother and couple, one child

Income per person per month: **\$R 612**

(above poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Família: **\$R 592**

(above poverty; above absolute poverty)

Interview period: **5 months**

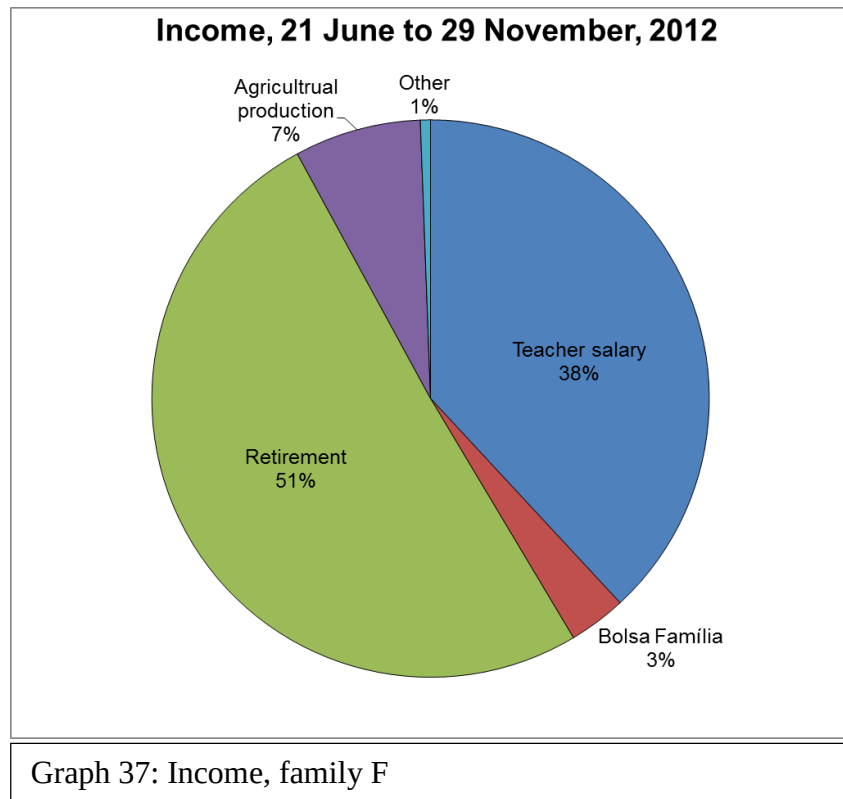
Interview accuracy: Over full period of 5 months, reported total income was **3% higher** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 1.03 times total expenses.)

Nelson and Cobita spent years building a solid adobe home on the edge of the inhabited area of the village, a home where they had raised their son and were now raising their daughter. Nelson had also spent years studying to become a teacher, and he now had steady employment with the local school. Along with his pedagogical duties, Nelson made a special effort to cultivate and improve his land, garnering a small but steady stream of agricultural income.

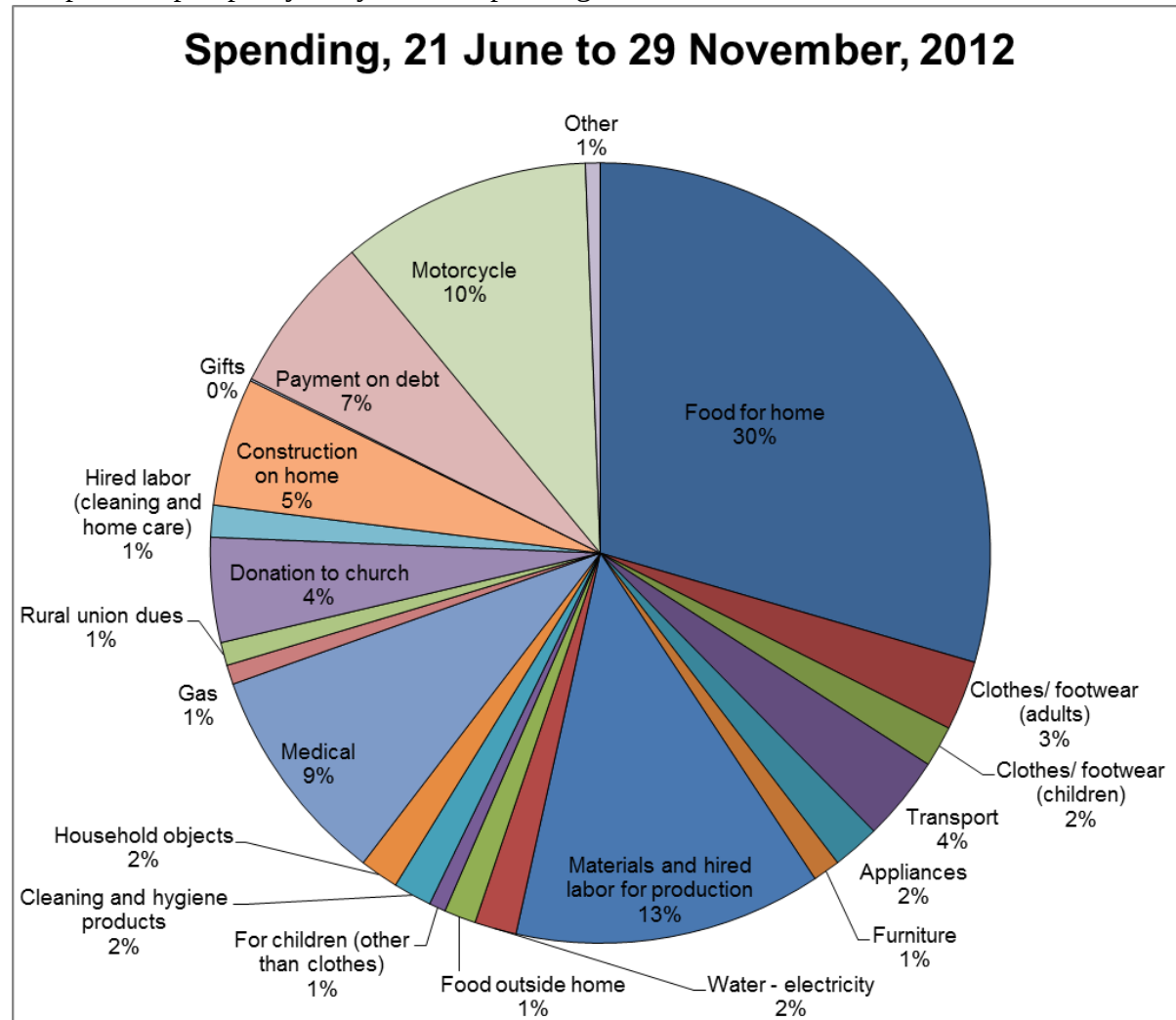
Before the interviews had begun, however, Nelson and Cobita's lives became more complex. Nelson's mother Dona Alberta fell ill and they needed to care for her on an almost constant basis. Fortunately, Nelson's mother had obtained a pension that, for the rural area, was sizeable, which helped with her care.

Initially the family maintained two households, with one set aside for Dona Alberta. This separate accounting helps to explain why the family still received Bolsa Família despite their comparatively high income: they were legally counted as two different households. Since they spent most of their time together and were increasingly merging the two households into one, I have reported them here as a single household.

Thanks to the pension and Nelson's teacher pay, the family had more money than almost all of their neighbors in the village. Their income was spent for a very wide variety of purposes, including large medical expenses for Dona Alberta and others (9%), a motorcycle that enabled Nelson to visit his students at home (10%), a significant investment in agricultural production (13%), repayment on a

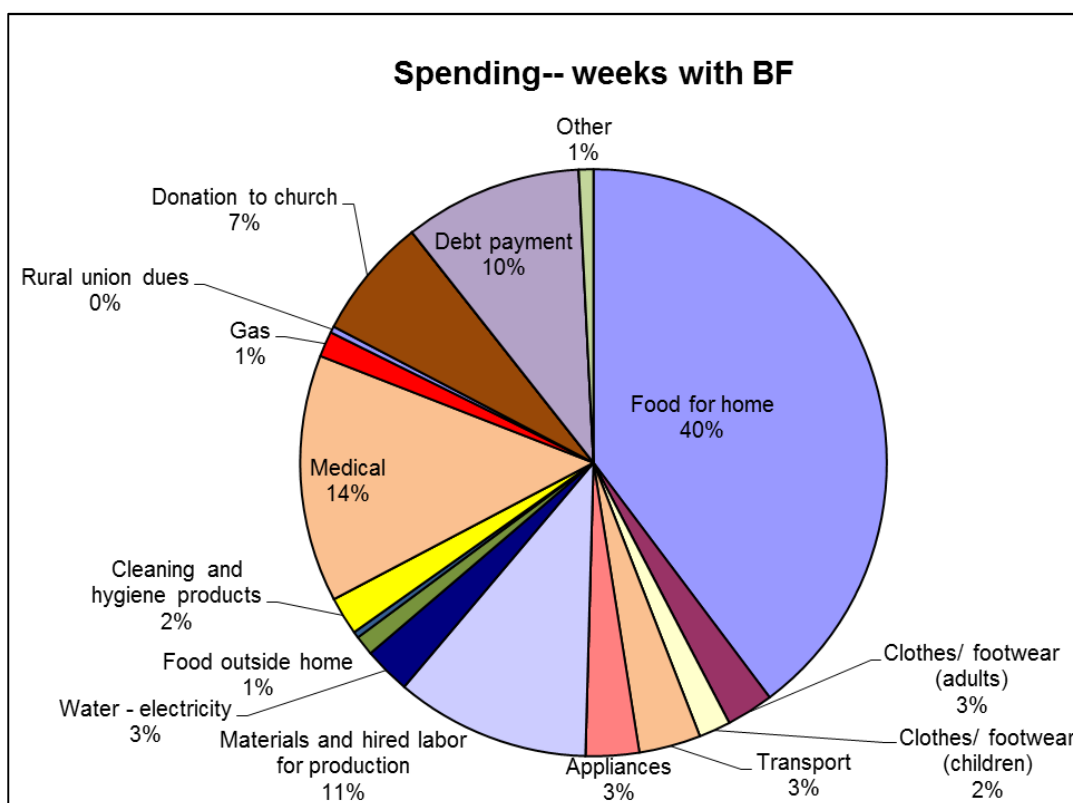
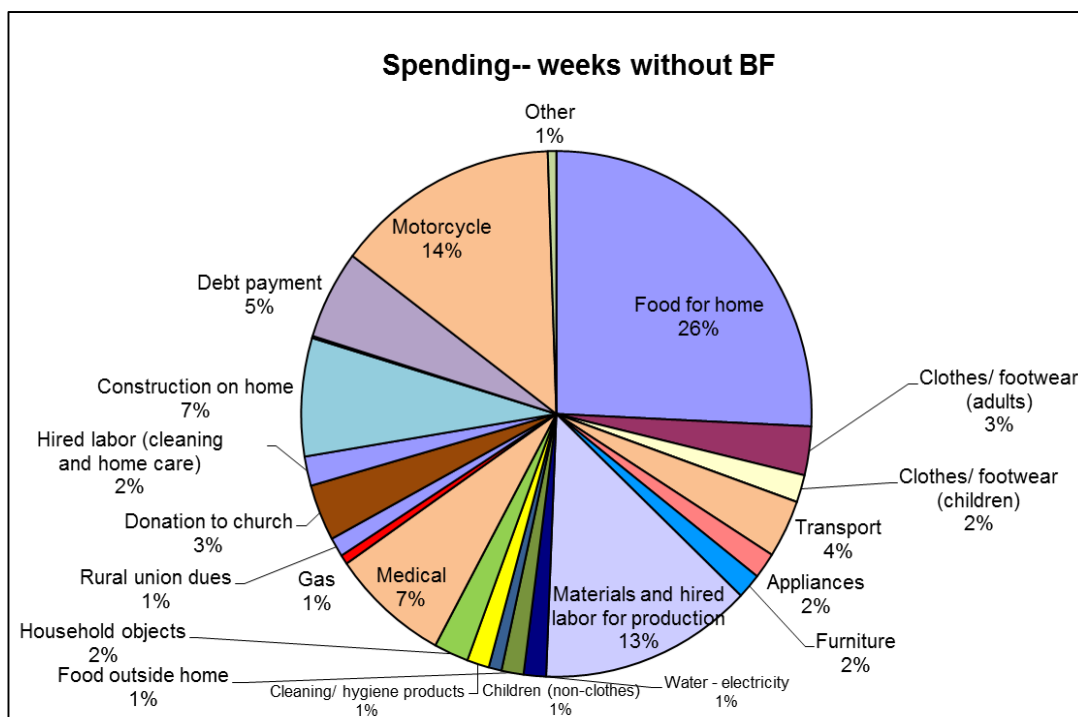


debt incurred prior to the interviews (7%), and church donations. In a telling sign of the family's comparative prosperity, only 30% of spending went to food.

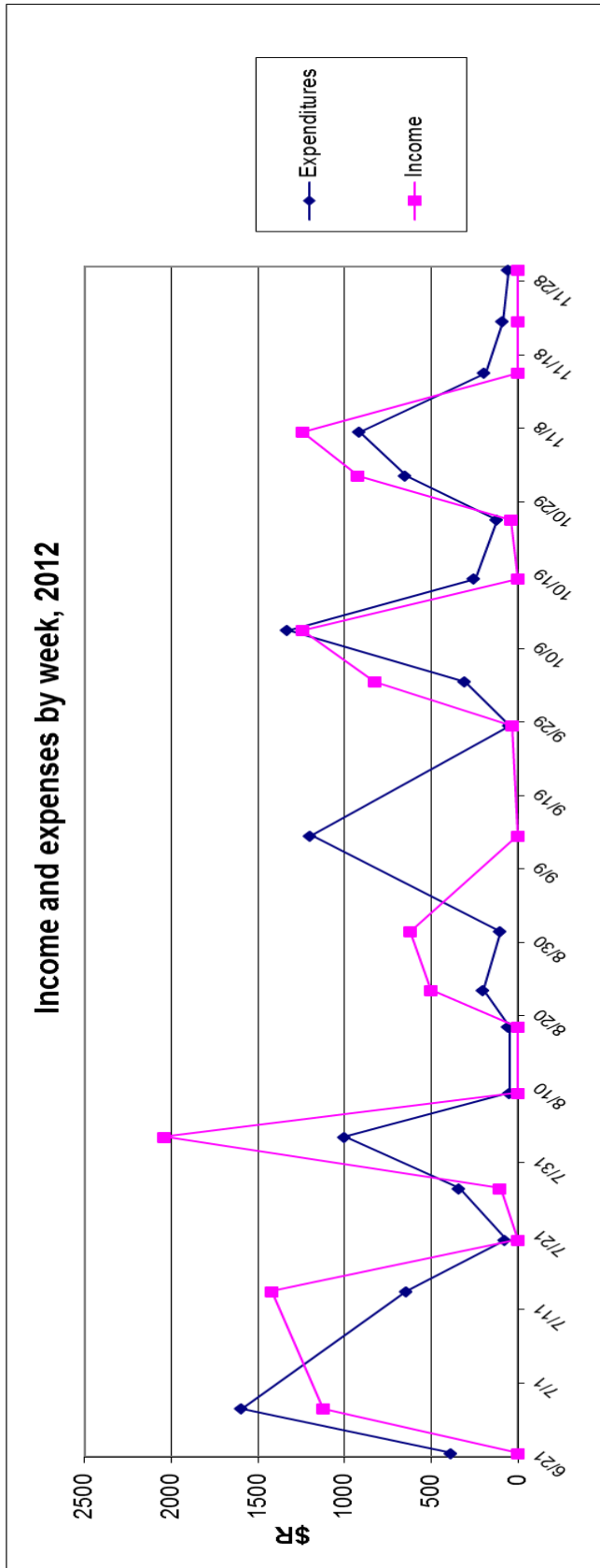


Graph 38: Spending, family F

Despite the fact that Bolsa Família accounted for less than 5% of the family budget, expenditures were quite different on weeks with and without Bolsa Família. When the family received Bolsa Família, they tended to devote a much more significant share of their income to food and medical expenses; weeks without the benefit saw greater expenditures on the motorcycle and home construction. While it is tempting to attribute this difference to gendered distinctions in expenditure patterns, a more likely explanation involves the calendar. Family members would often take a single monthly trip to the city to pick up the Bolsa Família money, purchasing the majority of the month's food at the same time and also handling medical appointments. Thus the scheduling of city trips, rather than gendered spending, probably accounts for the difference between the kinds of weeks.



Graphs 39 and 40: Spending with and without BF, family F



This same calendar probably accounts for the surprisingly unsmooth nature of the family's expenditure and income flows, as shown in the line graph. Family members tended to spend money on the same day it arrived, creating the overlapping peaks and valleys in the expenditure-income graph. Thus the unsmoothness probably reflected the difficulty of getting to the city and the imperative of purchasing when one had the opportunity to travel.

On these shopping trips, Cobita took extremely careful notes. She was an extraordinary participant in the weekly survey, carefully remembering her purchases, asking store owners for receipts so that she could read them back to me. Her hard work was much appreciated. Because of it, the family's reported expenditures came within 3% of their reported income for the interview period.

Nelson, Cobita, and Dona Alberta had built a stable economic foundation and were able to spend on agricultural production and reap income from it, as Nasir and Lina (Family A) hoped to do. They also faced significant medical expenses. Nonetheless, they were able to make long-term expenditures on home improvement, appliances, furniture, and transportation, increasing their durable assets with an eye to the future.

Graph 41: Income and expenditures by week, family F

Family G: Zelia and Bartolomiu, young couple, one child, agricultural work

Income per person per month: **\$R 242**

(above poverty level of \$R140; above absolute poverty level of \$R70)

Income per person per month without Bolsa Família: **\$R 197**

(above poverty; above absolute poverty)

Interview period: **6 months**

Interview accuracy: Over full period of 6 months, reported total income was **10% lower** than reported total expenses. (Total income = 0.9 times total expenses.)

Shortly before the beginning of interviews, Zelia and Bartolomiu built their first house together. The house was often full of people: partly because it was small and hence easy to fill, partly because they frequently invited guests. Although they had few long-term assets, they could count a number of strong relationships.

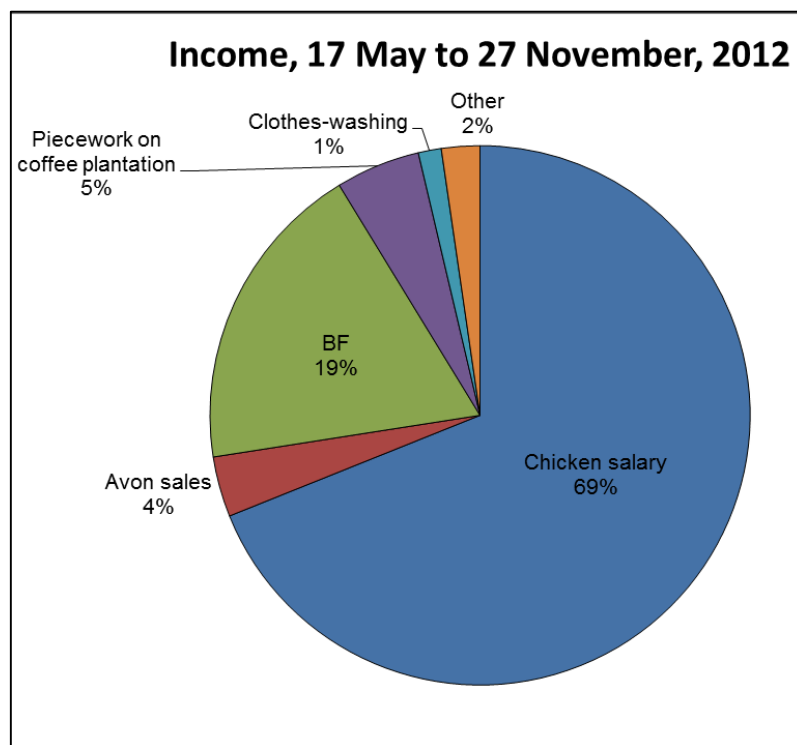
These relationships proved especially important as Zelia and Bartolomiu raised their energetic young daughter. They often needed help minding her. Bartolomiu had steady employment taking care of a commercial chicken coop, and Zelia worked a number of irregular jobs. She sold Avon from a catalogue, she washed clothes for pay, and during the coffee harvest she worked on nearby plantations, earning a fixed amount for each bag she harvested. With these demands on their time, Zelia's and Bartolomiu's social connections proved to be an important form of support.

Thanks to their varied sources of income, Zelia and Bartolomiu had a relatively prosperous income when compared to their neighbors, although it fluctuated with the seasonality of Zelia's work.

Zelia had requested Bolsa Família in the past, and halfway through the interviews, she actually received it. This allowed for a close view onto the changes that occurred in the family's budget when Bolsa Família was introduced.

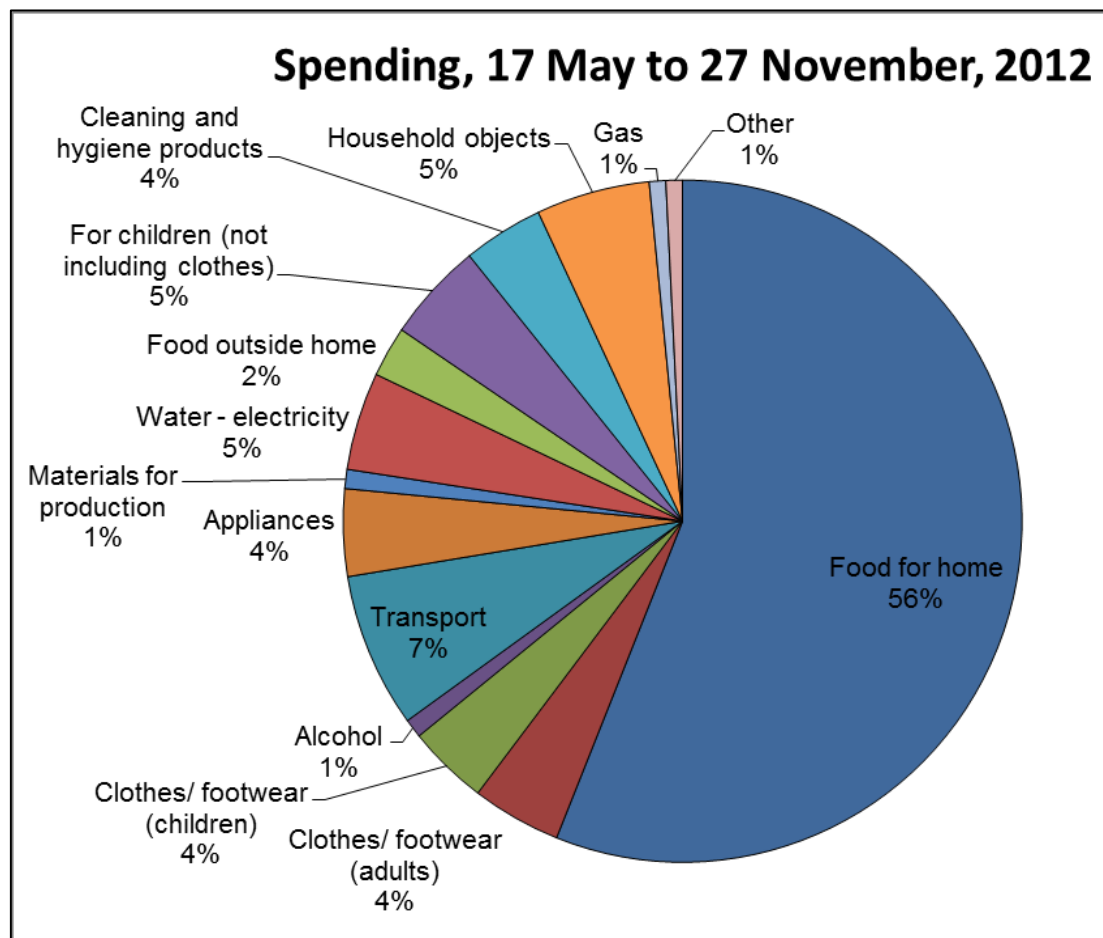
Despite their comparatively prosperous income, Zelia and Bartolomiu devoted more than half of their expenditures to food.

They also needed to spend a considerable amount on the transportation that allowed Bartolomiu to reach his job. They also set



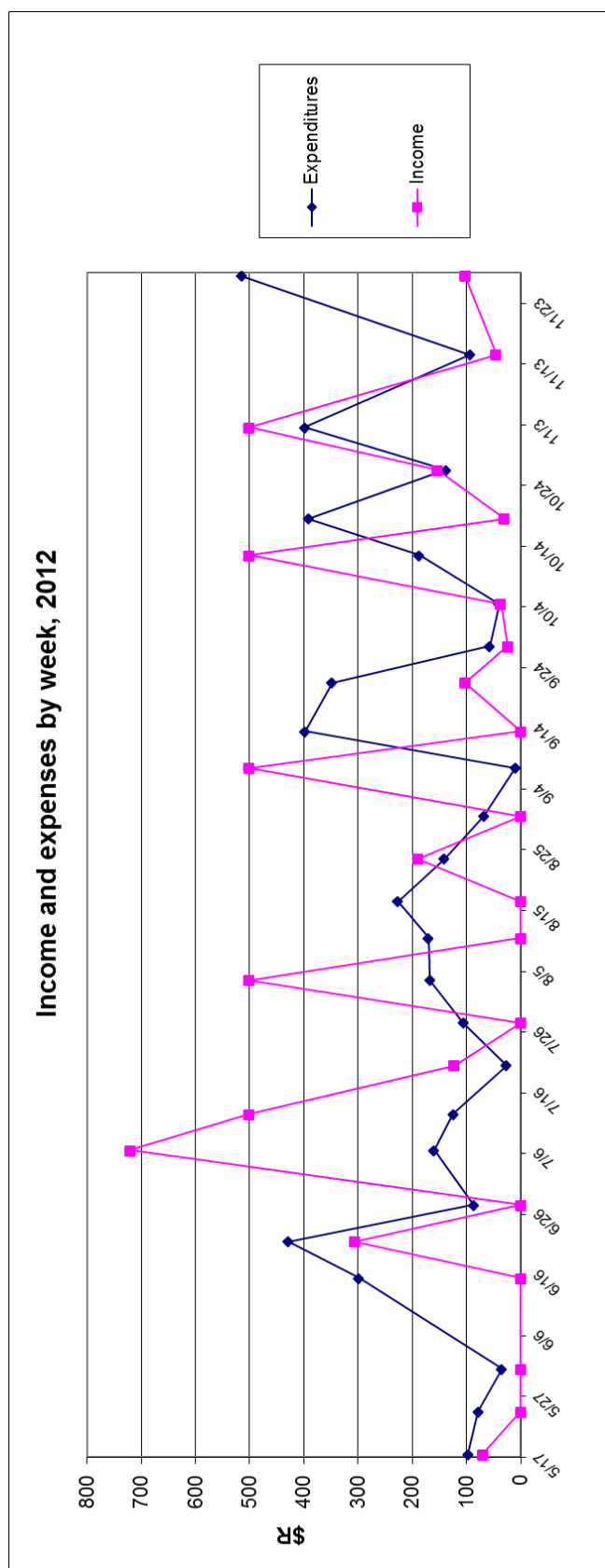
Graph 42: Income, family G

aside 9% for household objects and appliances combined, both expenditures destined to improve their new house.



Graph 43: Spending, family G

Bartolomiu and Zelia had managed to separate the rhythm of their expenditures and their income. As the line graph demonstrates, they maintained a baseline level of expenditure even in weeks when they had no income, and their expenditure peaks did not necessarily correspond to their income peaks. They had enough money to be able to hold on to money from one week to the next.

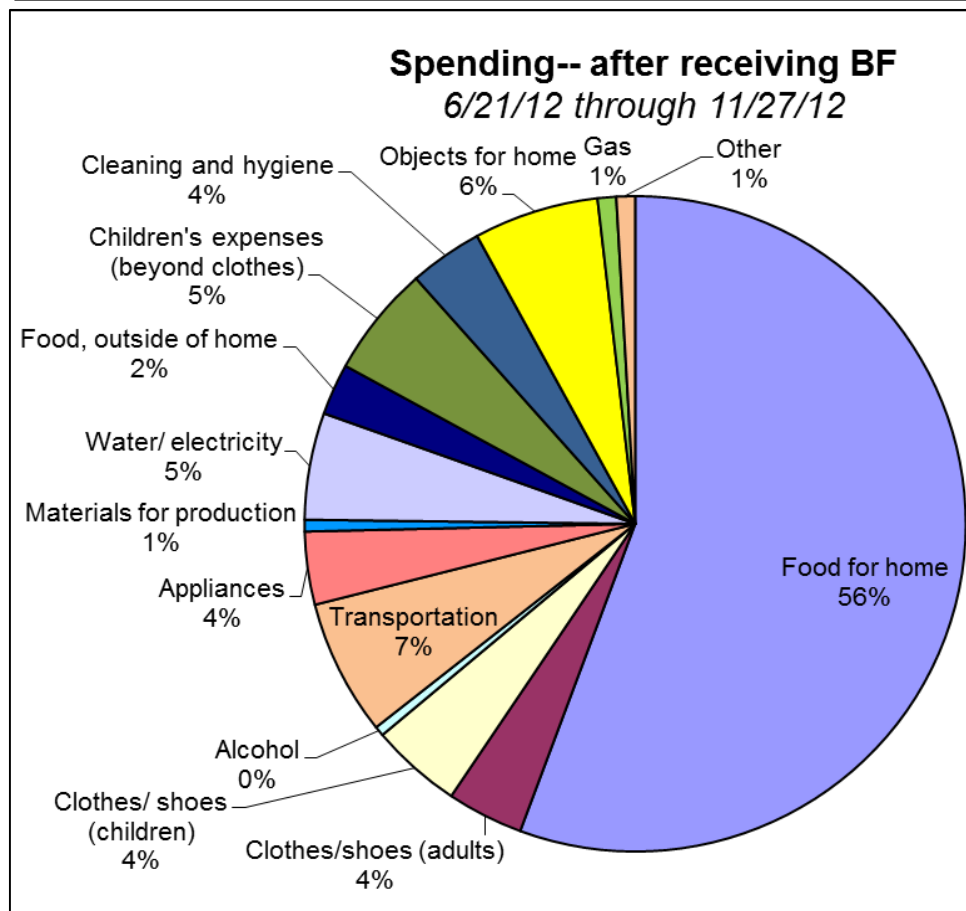
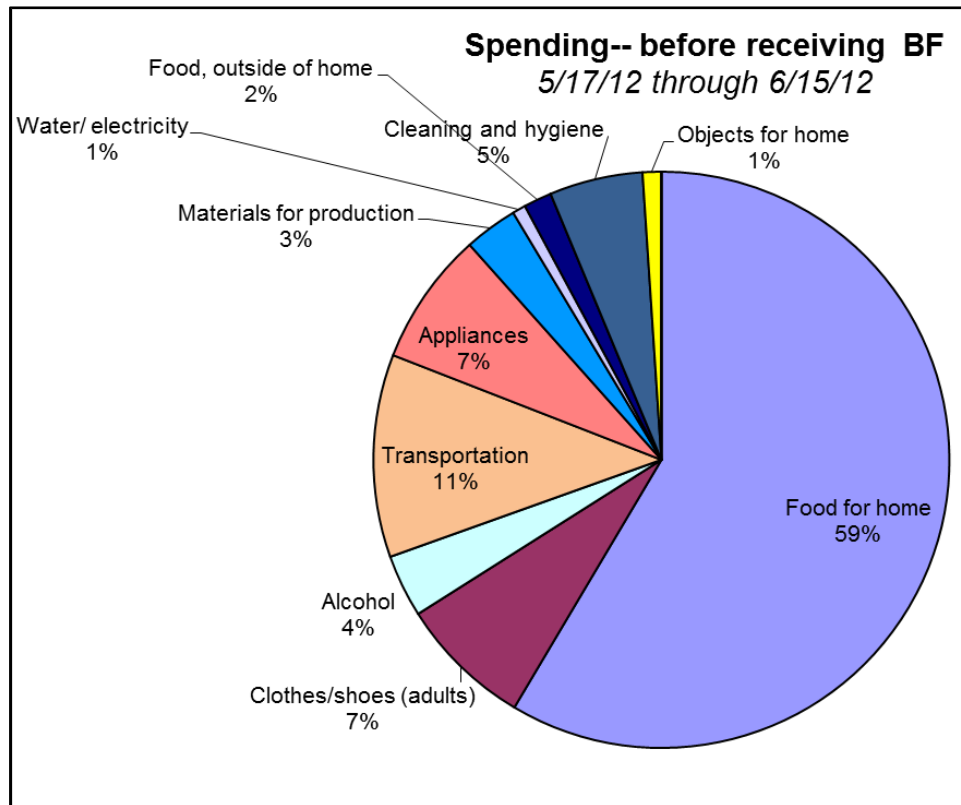


Long before the interviews began, Zelia had requested Bolsa Família. She finally received it during the interview period, which created an opportunity to watch the changes when the new money arrived. Bolsa Família introduced several new categories into the family budget.

Conclusions about Bolsa Família should be tempered by the note that only one month was observed before Bolsa Família began, and during that month, I did not manage to record Bartolomiu's pay. Nonetheless, some differences do appear in the pie charts below. After Bartolomiu and Zelia received Bolsa Família, they began spending on children's clothes and other children's expenses, which in this case included a bicycle for their daughter. They also increased their spending on objects for the home—expenditures that Zelia said that she sought. Bolsa Família was indeed associated with opening up new areas for consumption that corresponded to the woman and the child in the household.

Bartolomiu and Zelia were beginning to establish a household, using a varied range of income sources to buy the supplies that they needed in order to set up their home. Bolsa Família helped them in doing this, and it enabled them at the same time to obtain goods that they could give to their daughter.

Graph 44: Income and expenditures by week, family G



Graphs 45 and 46: Spending before and after receiving BF, family G

Interview instrument for census interview

Formulário para Levantamento Básico

Pesquisa sobre orçamentos domésticos

e Bolsa Família

Região Sudoeste—BA

2011

Comunidade: _____

Nome-código da pessoa entrevistada: _____

Entrevistador: _____

Data: _____

Com qualquer pergunta, entre em contato com duffmorton@uchicago.edu

1. **Primeiro, eu queria saber—me fale um pouco sobre o Bolsa Família.**
2. **Antes do BF, como foi essa questão de sustentar a família? Antes do BF, o que é que vocês faziam para sobreviver? *(ou—no começo da sua família, como foi a vida de vocês?)***
3. **Como foi que vocês começaram a receber BF? Me conte um pouco da história.**

Como foi que vocês ficaram sabendo da existência do programa?

3ª. Quais são as coisas que vocês puderam comprar com o dinheiro do BF?

Folha de Perguntas Inicias

Essa folha deve separar-se dos outros questionnaires, e guardar-se em lugar seguro. Os nomes-codigo escritos aqui devem utilizar-se em todos os demais questionários. Essa folha e qualquer gravação será o únicos registros com os nomes verdadeiros das pessoas na família.

Local exata da moradia: _____

** (pergunte sobre as casa vizinhas, se for necessário)

Quem mora na casa com a Senhora/ o Senhor?

(Obs: consideramos que uma pessoa “mora na casa” se essa pessoa **atualmente** dorme na estrutura da casa ou numa estrutura vizinha, e come a maioria das refeições junto com os outros na casa, pelo menos **quatro dias por semana**.)

Adultos (mais de 18 anos)

Nome	Genero	Idade	Relacao com a pessoa #1 (filho, esposo, etc. – anote também relações com outros na família)	Nome- codigo	Escolhido para entrevista?
1.			MESMA PESSOA		
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Menores (menos de 18 anos)

Nome	Quem sao os pais?	Genero	Idade	Relacao com a pessoa entrevistada (filho, esposo, etc.)	Nome- codigo
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

Por favor, lembre-se de separar essa folha!

(folha em branco—pode escrever dados adicionais sobre a família aqui)

Obs: Durante a entrevista, se a pessoa não sabe responder a uma pergunta sobre uma quantidade de dinheiro (por ex, a quantidade do Bolsa Família, ou o salário que uma pessoa ganhou), anote a pergunta com uma estrela. Depois, tente voltar para se informar com a pessoa diretamente.

I. Primeiro, eu queria fazer algumas **perguntas básicas** sobre você e as pessoas que moram aqui na casa com você.

4. Qual o seu estado civil?

Solteira/o Casada/o Amasiada/o Divorciada/o Separada/o Viuva/o

5. Faz quantos anos que você mora aqui? Como foi que você veio morar aqui?

6. Qual o seu nível de escolaridade?

0 Alfabetização 1 incompleto 1 completo 2 incompleto 2 completo Mais

Estudou até que série (com aprovação)?

7. A gente já falou sobre as pessoas que estão morando aqui agora. Tem alguém que normalmente mora aqui com você, mas que está morando fora agora?

O que é que essa pessoa está fazendo fora de casa?

8. Entre as pessoas que moram aqui, tem alguém que também tem uma outra casa em outro lugar?

Quem? Onde fica a outra casa?

A pessoa também fica na outra casa às vezes? Quando foi a última vez?

Na outra casa, quem paga as despesas regulares da casa? (por exemplo, energia, gás, e comida.)

A pessoa é dono da outra casa? Paga aluguel? Mora lá de graça?

A pessoa recebe aluguel da outra casa?

Sobre essa casa aqui, quem é dono da casa?

Telhado de que? Paredes de que?

Tem terra também? Quanta terra?

Quantos comodos? Quantos dormitórios? Quantos banheiros?

A casa é... próprio ainda pagando alugado cedido por alguém

O terreno é...

Vocês fizeram trabalho para melhorar a casa e a terra? Que tipo de trabalho?

Vocês pagam aluguel? Quanto?

(Se não pagar—) Se vendesse a casa e a terra, qual seria o valor? *(um estimado)*

Tem... água encanada? água de onde? energia? banheiro?

Escoadouro do banheiro é como? Lixo funciona como?

-
9. *(Se tiver crianças—)* Eu queria saber um pouco mais sobre suas crianças. Como é que eles são diferentes? Quais são os talentos que eles têm?

Como é que seus filhos se encaixam na família? O que é que eles fazem na família?

Pensando em cada criança, quais são seus sonhos para esse filho?

Gênero—

10. Pensando nessa questão de sustento, como é que você ve os talentos do homem na família?
-- OU-- Nessa questão de sustentar a família, me explica um pouco sobre as diferenças entre a mulher e o homem. --OU— entre o pai e a mãe?

E a mulher. Como é que você ve os talentos da mulher na família?

Trabalho—

11. Você começou a trabalhar com quantos anos?
12. Me fale um pouco sobre os outros trabalhos que você já fez depois desse primeiro trabalho. Como foi cada um para você?

13. Pensando num dia normal para você, hoje, me explica um pouco como é. O que é que você faz num dia normal?

14. Qual foi o trabalho dos seus pais? O que foi que você aprendeu deles?

Você acha que o trabalho que você faz hoje é mais ou menos a mesma coisa do que o trabalho dos seus pais? Ou mudou muita coisa?

15. Se for comparar o trabalho aqui nessa comunidade com o trabalho fora, em outros lugares, como é que você compara? Com o trabalho na cidade?

16. E quando você não está trabalhando—o que é que você faz?

II. *Agora eu gostaria de fazer algumas perguntas sobre **as coisas que pertencem** à vocês que moram aqui.*

17. Quais são os animais que pertencem às pessoas da casa? *(Não contamos cão e gato)*

Quantos....

Galinhas e galos? *(não conte pintos)*

Cocás?

Porcos?

Caixas de abelhas?

Gado?

Cavalos/ jegues/ mulas/ burros?

Ovelhas?

Patos?

Cabras?

Pirius?

Outros animais? (anote)

Os animais pertencem a quem?

18. Se você permitir, eu gostaria de fazer um pouco a visita da sua casa, para conhecer o que é que é mais importante aqui para você.

O domicílio tem... *(Circule os objetos que a família tem na casa. Pergunte quantos)*

mesa? cadeira? fogão?
fogão elétrico ou a gás? *(quantas bocas?)* computador?
geladeira? *(1 porta ou 2 portas?)* carro? carroça?
panelas? bicicleta? moto?
quantas camas? para quantas pessoas? dessas pessoas,
quantas são casais? *
quantas são camas de vara? Quantas são camas de colchão?
televisão? *(cores ou p-b?)* rádio? toca-discos CD? *coloque aqui o
aparelho DVD? telefone? carro? carroça? número de pessoas que
pelo menos um prato por pessoa? que dormem em casal romântico

Se tiver telefone: o telefone é fixo, celular, ou tem os dois?
Tem antena para celular rural?

O domicílio tem... *(De novo, circule os objetos que a família tem)*
algum tipo de filtro d'água? caixa d'água? *(que tipo?)*
antena parabólica? freezer? máquina de lavar roupa? sofá? armário?
estante? guarda-roupa? rack? cômoda? ventilador?
máquina de costura? chuveiro elétrico? ferro de passar? tapete?
aparelho de videogames (video game)? máquina fotográfica?
bomba de água? violão? outros objetos de valor?

19. Entre as pessoas que moram aqui na casa, tem alguém que recebe algum tipo de ajuda do governo? (em outubro de 2011)

-Cesta Básica -PETI -Bolsa Família -Outro (anote)

****Quando foi que começou a receber o benefício? Teve mudanças no valor durante o ano 2011?

O benefício é para quem? (ou seja, quais são as crianças cadastradas para receber o benefício?)
Quanto é?

20. A família tem alguma outra fonte de renda fora da comunidade?

-Aposentadoria por invalidez

-Aposentadoria por idade

Pessoa	Começou a receber com quantos anos?	Tipo de aposentadoria (BPC-LOAS? Aposentadoria rural? Outro tipo?)

-Pessoa que trabalha fora

-Pessoa que manda dinheiro de fora (por exemplo, pensão para crianças)

-Recebe aluguel

-Outro (anote)

Quem recebe esse dinheiro?
Quanto é?

Recebeu em outubro de 2011?

III. Agora tem algumas perguntas específicas sobre *Bolsa Família* e outros benefícios.

21. **Vocês tem o cartão aqui? Posso ver?**

Eu sei que com BF tem sempre a questão da segurança. Como é que vocês fazem para guardar o cartão?

E a senha. Quem é que sabe a senha do cartão?

22. **No meu país, a gente não tem Bolsa Família. Então eu quero entender o programa um pouco melhor. E quero saber seu ponto de vista. Na tua visão, por que é que o programa existe?**

23. **O dinheiro do programa vem de onde?
(de onde é que o governo consegue o dinheiro?)**

24. *(Para casas que recebem benefício:)* **Qual é o dia quando recebem o dinheiro do Bolsa Família (ou outro recurso)? Como fazem para buscar o dinheiro?**

Pagam alguém para buscar o dinheiro? Quanto é que pagam essa pessoa?

25. **Tem alguém na casa que poderia receber Bolsa Família, mas que não está recebendo? Quem? Por que não recebe?**

E aposentadoria? E outros benefícios? Tem alguém que poderia receber mas que não está recebendo?

26. *(Se houver na casa uma criança com menos de 18 anos, ou mulher com mais de 50 anos, ou homem com mais de 55 anos, ou uma pessoa em extrema pobreza, e se essa pessoa não receber benefício, e se a situação não for explicado antes:)* **Por que essa pessoa não recebe benefício?**

27. Na sua visão, o Bolsa Família mudou a situação aqui?

28. Eu sei que a maioria das pessoas que recebem o dinheiro do Bolsa Família são mulheres. Por que é isso?

Na ideia de algumas pessoas, a BF deveria mudar a situação da mulher. Ou seja, a mulher vai passar a ser mais respeitada na família porque agora ela tem esse dinheiro. Você acha que isso está acontecendo de verdade?

*IV. Agora quero fazer algumas perguntas sobre o **trabalho**.*

29. Das pessoas que moram na casa com você, quem trabalha?

30. Dentro de casa, quais são os afazeres?

Quem faz?

31. Você já pagou alguém para fazer os afazeres? Alguém da casa já pagou?

Quem? Quanto é que você (ou a outra pessoa) paga normalmente?

32. Agora eu gostaria de voltar para falar mais sobre as fontes de renda aqui.

****A coisa mais importante é que eu não vou dizer isso para ninguém, então não vai afetar nem a BF nem nada.***

Das pessoas que moram aqui com você, alguém trabalhou na semana de 2 de 8 de Outubro de 2011? (Se tiver alguém que normalmente tem algum trabalho reumunerado mas que está temporariamente afastado, anote aqui.)

Pessoa	Trabalho	Empregado? Conta própria? Temp? Não reumnerado? Empregador? Carteira assinada?	Quantas horas e dias trabalhou no mês?	Quando foi que iniciou o trabalho? O trabalho vai durar até quando?	Quanto recebe? (anote também remuneração não monetária, e valor estimado)

Agora, deixando de lado aqueles trabalhos que você já explicou, tem alguém na casa que trabalhou esse ano? (Por exemplo, pode ser um trabalho que a pessoa já terminou.)

Tem alguém que vai trabalhar esse ano, mas que ainda não começou o trabalho?

Vamos pensar aqui só no ano 2011.

<i>Pessoa</i>	<i>Trabalho</i>	<i>Empregado? Conta própria? Temp? Não reumnerado? Empregador? Carteira assinada?</i>	<i>Quantas horas e dias trabalhou no mês?</i>	<i>Quando foi que iniciou o trabalho? O trabalho vai durar até quando?</i>	<i>Quanto recebe? (anote também remuneração não monetária, e valor estimado)</i>

33. Esse ano, das pessoas que moram aqui com você, tem alguém que já colheu algum plantio que pertencia a vocês? Ou que vendeu ou consumiu alguma criação? ***VENDEU ALGUM ANIMAL?

<i>Plantio ou criação</i>	<i>Pessoas que trabalharam</i>	<i>Quanto foi colhido ou vendido?</i>	<i>Consumiram uma parte em casa?</i>	<i>Venderam uma parte? Quanto receberam?</i>

Das pessoas que moram aqui com você, tem alguém que vai colher um plantio que pertence a vocês antes do final de 2011? Ou que vai vender ou consumir uma criação?

<i>Plantio ou criação</i>	<i>Pessoas que trabalharão</i>	<i>Quanto será colhido ou vendido? (estimado)</i>	<i>Vão consumir uma parte em casa?</i>	<i>Vão vender uma parte? Quanto receberão? (estimado)</i>

34. E os gastos na roça. Vocês tiveram algum gasto na roça esse ano?

Vocês compraram alguma criação em 2011?

*****COMPRARAM ALGUM ANIMAL?

**Quais são os gastos que vão ter até o final de 2011? Animais que vão comprar?

<i>Tipo de gasto</i>	<i>Quantidade que gastaram</i>	<i>Quando foi gasto?</i>

35. Esse ano, das pessoas que moram aqui com você, tem alguém que fez um trabalho de construção na casa ou na sua terra? (Por exemplo, aumentar uma cozinha ou instalar uma nova cerca.) Ou tem alguém que vai fazer um trabalho de construção antes do final de 2011?

<i>Trabalho</i>	<i>Pessoas que trabalharam ou trabalharão</i>

36. Nós já falamos sobre o dinheiro dos trabalhos, dos programas sociais, e da roça. Tem algum outro dinheiro que entrou na casa esse ano? Ou que vai entrar na casa esse ano? Como foi que vocês conseguiram o dinheiro? (por exemplo, salário maternidade, décimo-terceiro, uma venda, a venda de uma terra, ou um pequeno negócio.) Se for necessário, volte aqui à pergunta sobre trabalho—no caso, por exemplo, de um pequeno negócio.

V. Agora gostaria de fazer umas perguntas sobre investimentos, poupanças, e empréstimos.

37. Para você, na sua visão, o que significa “investir?” O que é um investimento?

Você acha que alguém já chegou a investir em você?

E você. Você já chegou a investir em alguém?

28. Também tem muitas formas de poupar. Você está poupanando? Alguém na casa?

29. Você, ou alguém da casa, tem algum dinheiro que pediu emprestado? Está devendo dinheiro a alguém? Pode ser com uma loja ou uma venda, inclusive parcelação.

Você, ou alguém da casa, tem cartão de crédito?

30. Tem alguém que deve dinheiro a você? A alguém da casa?

31. Para terminar, eu queria perguntar sobre os sonhos. Se for sonhar, você sonha com o que?

Entrevistador deve anotar: Quem estava presente durante a entrevista?

E como é que você vê o futuro?

Anote qualquer outro detalhe sobre o processo da entrevista:

32. Você tem alguma pergunta para nós?

Appendix 2

Documents related to Fábio dos Santos Silva

Fábio dos Santos Silva played many roles: he was a teacher, a Catholic activist, a leader in the MST landless movement, a prisoner after a famous protest, a village leader, and a father. But he received media attention mostly when he became a martyr.

Fábio did not need the media to become famous in his own way. Among landless farmers in Bahia, he was already quite well-known during the time of my field work. His oratory sparkled with brilliance and humor. He had a facility for tracing familiar rural problems back into the deep history of Brazil – the history of capital itself – along a line that faithfully followed the traditions of liberation theology. But he was friendly rather than pedantic. Farmers knew him because he spent so much time living in the villages.

Fábio worked in a region near Vitória da Conquista, but not mostly in Maracujá or Rio Branco. I only got to know him in passing. I do have a vivid memory of a speech that he gave to the farmers I knew; it roused all of us.

When he was arrested during a land occupation and imprisoned for several months, in May 2010, Fábio became something of a local cause célèbre. He also began receiving death threats. Fábio continued with his work and even ran for alderman – unsuccessfully – under the Workers Party banner. Well aware of the threats' nature, he persisted in organizing inside villages after his electoral defeat.

On April 2, 2013, Fábio was driving in the countryside outside the city of Iguaí, around noon. His car was followed by a motorcycle. From the motorcycle, Fábio was fired upon and, after his car stopped, the gunmen came closer and fired again. 15 shots were fired in total. Fábio's wife and daughter were in the car with him, but they were not fired upon. Fábio died on the scene. He was 37 years old.

Fábio's assassination provoked shock and revulsion. After the deaths of Maria Zilda, Manoel Bomfim, and a landlord's brother in 1994, Southwestern Bahia had begun to earn a reputation for its comparative freedom from violence during land reform conflicts. (See Introduction.) MST leaders expressed certainty that, as the threats against Fábio indicated, he had been killed by landlords or related groups who were opposed to land reform in the region.

The time after Fábio's death has been extraordinarily difficult for his family and fellow activists. The MST launched a series of marches to demand an investigation. Although Bahia's state government was in the hands of a Workers Party governor who declared himself an ally of the movement, the investigation proceeded slowly. The movement stepped up its protests. On September 10th, 2013, a large but peaceful group of MST protestors entered first floor of the Secretariat of Public Security headquarters in Salvador, the state capital. From the second floor, they could see Ari Pereira, the state's sub-secretary of security. Pereira drew a pistol. Then he fired three shots into the crowd.

No-one was wounded in the incident. But the international news picked up the photo of a middle-aged official with a gold watch and a loaded gun – representing an allegedly-friendly government, his yellow tie hanging over the balcony as he leaned down to shoot the weapon near the 300 protestors below.

Unfortunately, Pereira's gesture did not resolve the case. To date there had been no conviction in Fábio's assassination.

The incidents related to Fábio's death were widely discussed in the local media, especially in blogs. Because of the importance of the case, I am attaching this appendix with copies of the photos, postings, articles, and comments that were spread on the internet. (Two videos are attached as supplemental files. One shows Fábio leading an MST march and delivering a speech. The second shows the MST protest at which Ari Pereira fired near the

crowd.) All of this material is being printed with permission from the owners of the websites where it first appeared. Hopefully, it can serve as a stable archive about the incident. And, more importantly, it can offer some inspiration to those of us who can learn the lessons that Fábio taught.

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<http://www.iguaimix.com/v2/2013/04/02/fabio-do-sem-terra-foi-assassinado-em-iguai/>

Fábio do Sem Terra foi assassinado em Iguai

2/abr/2013 . 13:47

(see video attached as a supplemental file, which shows Fábio delivering a speech and talking to the local mayor).

digg [60 comentários](#)

Fábio dos Santos Silva, conhecido como Fábio do Sem Terra ou Fábio do PT, foi assassinado com 15 tiros, por pistoleiros, por volta do meio-dia, em uma estrada vicinal, que dá acesso ao distrito de Palmeirinha, próximo ao Ribeirão das Flores, a poucos quilômetros de Iguai.



Figure 1: Fábio assassination.
SOURCE:
Iguai Mix

Fábio Sem Terra foi assassinado em estrada
que dá acesso a Palmeirinha (Foto: Iguai Mix)

Segundo informações de amigos, ele estava na cidade com sua família e se dirigia para a sua casa no distrito, quando foi seguido por uma moto e começaram os disparos. De acordo com declarações da esposa de Fábio, eles atiraram e, assim que o carro parou, se aproximaram para disparar mais tiros, levando-o ao óbito ali mesmo no veículo que dirigia, um fiat Uno.

Fábio dos Santos Silva estava acompanhado da mulher e da filha, que não sofreram nenhum ferimento. A polícia aguarda a perícia técnica no local para as averiguações.



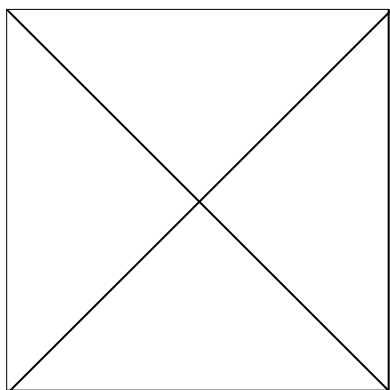
Figure 2: Fábio at meeting.
SOURCE:
Iguaí Mix

Fábio dos Santos (em destaque) durante reunião com o prefeito de Iguaí no ano passado (Foto: Iguaí Mix)

Não há confirmação do motivo do crime, mas familiares, que estavam no local, disseram que Fábio vinha recebendo ameaças constantemente. Essa informação também foi divulgada, poucos momentos após a sua morte, no site do MST, pelo Deputado Valmir Assunção (PT-Bahia). Ele era pedagogo, especialista em Educação do Campo, e líder do Movimento dos Sem Terra em Iguaí. Também foi candidato a vereador nas eleições municipais, em Iguaí, no ano passado.

[Confira nota no site do MST](#)

Veja mais fotos:



Assista a vídeo com Fábio dos Santos:

Da Redação

60 comentários

[#1](#)Locutora2 de abril de 2013, 13:53

Triste ,que Deus conforte a família .

[#2](#)Gregório2 de abril de 2013, 13:58

O Estado Brasileiro tem que ser implacável com quem tira a vida de um dos seus co-cidadão dessa forma!!!! Tem que mudar!!!! Até quando, ou não tem quando?

[#3](#)sales2 de abril de 2013, 14:11

que deus fabio te põe em um bom lugar meu amigo que deus possa conforta sua mulher e seus filho vai em paz...

[#4](#)Raquel Maia2 de abril de 2013, 14:41

que Deus conforte a sua família...
até quando o Brasil não terá leis pra essas pessoas que matam sem dó nem piedade



[#5](#)Luan Soares2 de abril de 2013, 14:52

Fica Nosso Luto Por Mais Um Assassinato Em Nossa Cidade .

[#6](#)LEILA2 de abril de 2013, 14:56

É MUITO TRISTE VE UMA SITUAÇÃO DESSA QUE A JUSTIÇA VENHA SER FEITA. EU ESTOU SENTINDO MUITO IMAGINE OS FAMILIARES MAIS PROXIMOS. DEUS TENHA MISERICORDIA. CHEGA DE TANTAS MORTE. SÓ EXISTE UM QUE TEM O PODER DE TIRAR VIDAS É AQUELE QUE A DÁ. BASTA! VC VAI FAZER MUITA FALTA FABIO!

#7TATY2 de abril de 2013, 15:12

NOSSOS ENCONTROS DE FORMAÇÃO PEDAGOGICOS NÃO SERÃO MAIS OS MESMOS. VOCÊ SERÁ SEMPRE SERÁ LEMBRADO COMPANHEIRO... QUE JUSTIÇA SEJA FEITA.

#8rafa2 de abril de 2013, 15:14

que deus conforte todos seus familiares, e tire toda a essa cena da cabeça da filha e da mulher dele.LUTO.

#9Santos2 de abril de 2013, 15:23

Iguai esta de luto

#10mari2 de abril de 2013, 16:28

que deus abençoa a familia que que ele foi o meu grande amigo no momento que eu mas presizei por isso quero que deus fiçar bem pertinho da familia póis eli era muinto querido para muinto deus fiçar com vc familia que a luz divina abençoa eli e muinto tresti

#11zikaa2 de abril de 2013, 16:44

deus esta com a familia a todo todo o momento

#12neide2 de abril de 2013, 16:53

perdemos um granjjde amigo que justisa seja feita.

#13neide2 de abril de 2013, 17:11

prenda esses vagabundos assassinos .que matam inocentes

#14neide2 de abril de 2013, 17:12

luto

#15loira2 de abril de 2013, 17:27

Até quando o ser humano vai ser tratado dessa forma , onde esta a justiça que muitos dizem que tem. O ser humano não esta tendo mais valor, pra que tanto pagamento de imposto se não temos segurança. Que Deus possa dando conforto todos os familiares.

#16Lidiane2 de abril de 2013, 17:29

Aqui fica a revolta da família de Fabio Santos Silva,daqui de São Paulo,sentimentos de dor,e justiça.

#17Lidiane(prima)2 de abril de 2013, 17:38

Aqui estamos em São Paulo,toda a família do mesmo reunida,em oração,com imensa dor,e inconformidade,pedimos a justiça brasileira e de Iguai(BA),que por favor,não se omitam,perante a vida de alguém que tanto fez por esse povo,alguém que a inteligência foi de extrema,em uso de uma população,e que nesta data foi interrompida!

Fabio um homem guerreiro e lutador,que fez muito pelas pessoas,e que hoje deixa saudades a todos,familiares,amigos,admiradores e seus companheiros e companheiras de luta,que o levaram no coração!

#18Bia2 de abril de 2013, 17:53

Que horror... só lamento...

Fábio foi meu colega no curso de Magistério; sempre muito dedicado nas coisas que fazia.

#19Eliana2 de abril de 2013, 18:11

Que Deus conforte a familia. Saudades

#20Jucão2 de abril de 2013, 18:34

A cidade de iguai perde um grande homem, líder, comunicador etc.

Grande amigo vá em paz que o senhor posa confortar toda a tua família.

Espero que a justiça seja feita e os bandidos que executaram uma pessoa de bem que sem lutou pelas minorias vão pra cadeia.

#21nick2 de abril de 2013, 19:26

Espero que não fique em punhe esse omicidio. pois é mais uma vida que vai em iguai, sem que as autoridades descubra os autores destes omicidios, pois ja passam de 25. so em iguai.

#22dinho2 de abril de 2013, 19:31

ATÉ QUANDO VAMOS CONTINUAR VENDENDO NOSSOS GUERREIROS E
COMPANHEIROS DE LUTA SENDO ASSASSINADO BRUTALMENTE POR UMA
SOCIEDADE MAIS DIGNA E SOCIALISTA , DESCANSE EM PAZ MEU AMIGO ESTOU
MUITO TRISTE POR ESTA VIDA QUE ACABOU DE PARTE NOSSA LUTAS NUNCA
MAIS SERÁ A MESMA SEM VC MEU COMPANHEIRO NOS ENCONTROS NÃO SERÁ
OS MESMOS

#23edvaldo2 de abril de 2013, 19:33

foi se o Fabio, mas ficou a historia de um homem lutador, que ajudava o povo,a ponto de colocar sua vida em risco. mas Deus retribuirá a cada um segundo as suas obras seja boa ou seja más Deus conforte a família !!!!

#24nick2 de abril de 2013, 19:34

Iguai, não pode virar, campo de batalha, a cidade esta jogada as traças se tratando de segurança, neste final de semana houve uma festa na Associal Cultural de Iguai, mas na madrugada só restou vandalos quebraram tudo que encontraram pela frente, CADE POLICIA cade os guardas municipais, acorda autoridades. Vereadores a sociedade precisa de resposta poder LEGISLATIVO EXECUTIVO aumentaram as cadeiras da câmara e acabou as responsabilidades? bom a sociedade precisa de uma resposta rápida de vocês, poque quando meche em Vocês a coisa muda.

#25nick2 de abril de 2013, 19:39

Sabemos que a policia não tem bola de cristal, para saber a hora mas é preciso fazer uma politica de segurança, policiais fazendo rondas com apoio de guardas municipais, autoridades façam alguma coisa, Srº Comandante coloque seus homens na rua. com um trabalho de preenvenção.

#26lai2 de abril de 2013, 19:43

deus te poe em bom lugar e dar força a sua familia

#27bei2 de abril de 2013, 19:50

vai com deus fabio fiquei muito sentido

#28bei2 de abril de 2013, 19:59

pena fabio voce tao inteligente deu chance pro azar morreu novo vai com deus

#29SP2 de abril de 2013, 20:18

Na maioria das vezes existe necessidades e impludências,mas nem sempre tirando a vida das pessoas se resolve as coisas. Ainda jovem porém talvez ninguém saiba o motivo do crime.Eu sou a favor da pena de morte para esses q tiram vidas..eles não são os donos da verdade para ta

tirando a vida dos outros...Mais no pais q vivemos,é um pais sem lei,tudo q acontece eles aceitam,ate onde isso irar chegar.

#30mara2 de abril de 2013, 20:29

Descanse em Paz Fabio e que Deus possa dar o consolo necessário ao familiares... Sinto muito...

#31IGUAI2 de abril de 2013, 21:42

SIM ESTAMOS DE LUTO POR UMA PESSAO QUE TEMOS A CERTEZA QUE ERA UM BOM CIDADÃO.

TRISTEZA É SABER QUE NÃO HÁ JUSTIÇA , CONTRA ASSASINOS E MANDANTE, ESPERAMOS A JUSTIÇA PROVIDENÇIAL DE DEUS QUE O SENHOR COM A SUA EMENSA MISERICORDIA NOS GUARDE DO MAL, E SARE ESSA FAMILIA DESSA EMENSA DOR

#32Mateus Leonardo2 de abril de 2013, 23:16

Temos de federalizar crimes contras líderes de comunidade sociais...se não vai ficar difícil, mas não abandonar a causa...nossos sentimentos socialistas.

#33Iza2 de abril de 2013, 23:20

Estou muito triste por saber que a maldade das pessoas não tem limites.Com mais tristeza ainda pela morte do meu inesquecível colega e amigo Fábio,grande pessoa,só tenho boas recordações,não só dos nossos tempos de estudantes,mas de todas as vezes que eu o encontrava,pois sua educação,atenção e carisma continuaram.

Neste momento em que minhas lágrimas nada podem fazer,apenas peço a Deus que conceda muita força e paz a todos os seus familiares,continuo com a esperança de paz mundial!!!!!!Fábio,grande lutador!

#34Sales2 de abril de 2013, 23:34

EstouNão tem palavras q conforta esta familia só Deus vai em paz amigo

#35Juliana2 de abril de 2013, 23:55

Que Deus possa confortar essa Família! Ate quando vai durar a impunidade em nosso país? Ate quando?

#36Sales3 de abril de 2013, 0:11

Não tem palavras que conforta esta familia só Deus vai em paz amigo

#37Euclemes sales de oliveira3 de abril de 2013, 0:21

Oi esposa e filhos Deus está com vçs ele vai confortar seus corações!!!!

#38Euclemes sales de oliveira3 de abril de 2013, 0:27

Cenas que ã pode ser esquecida por vç + Deus vai tí ajudar

#39dantas.3 de abril de 2013, 9:01

calhordas, inefastos, corruptos, mercenários e inescrupulosos. ávidos, sem sentimento e respeito familiar, social e corações de terras áridas e esturricadas, sem amor pelo próximo. isto é o que esses assassinos e mandantes são. JUSTIÇA SEJA FEITA E CONCRETIZADA. PUNIÇÃO PARA TODOS É O QUE ESPERAMOS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

#40eli3 de abril de 2013, 10:12

e muito triste q Deus confote a família
foi uma covardia meus pessma a família

#41Murilo Veiga queiroz3 de abril de 2013, 10:17

Esperamos que a CAERC que se diz a toda poderosa, não deixe mais esse assassinato passar despercebido. vamos sim cobrar das autoridades uma resposta para essa violência. Ou será que a polícia de Iguai juntamente com a CAERC só sabe prender ladrão de galinha????????????????????????????????

#42darci ruas3 de abril de 2013, 11:10

Que DEUS conforte a família enlutada.Justiça.

#43mitally ryann3 de abril de 2013, 11:21

eh uma grande pessoa ki se foi.

#44rona3 de abril de 2013, 12:25

meu deus como e triste uma coisa dessa so deus para conformar os familiares justiça brasil nos nao temos uma justiça fel parece q todos sao iguais nao pode acontecer uma coisa dessa pois precisa de ser punido esse pistoleiros

#45Moreira de Ibicuí3 de abril de 2013, 12:59

NÃO O CONHECI MAIS SINTO QUE AS FAMÍLIAS DE IGUAÍ ESTÃO CHORANDO PELA BRUTALIDADE . MEU DEUS MAIS FILHOS QUE VÃO FICAR ÓRFÃOS DE UM PAI. DEUS MEU PAI TENHA MISERICÓRDIA DESTA FAMÍLIA.

#46Moreira de Ibicuí3 de abril de 2013, 13:02

NO DIA QUE O SER HUMANO DEIXAR DEUS DOMINAR OS CORAÇÕES, NESTE DIA
NÃO MAIS HAVERÁ VIOLÊNCIA.
DESCANSE EM PAZ SR. FÁBIO.
CONFORTE ESTA FAMÍLIA DEUS MISERICORDIOSO

#47karol3 de abril de 2013, 13:47

que deus
da muito conforto pra sua familia pq e tambem perdeu um vo

#48Andre PT de Ibicuí3 de abril de 2013, 14:15

Que Deus dê um bom lugar a Fábio, e que Jesus conforte a esposa e sua filha.

#49Professor Rodrigo3 de abril de 2013, 19:11

Funeral de um Lavrador
Chico Buarque

Esta cova em que estás com palmos medida
É a conta menor que tiraste em vida
É a conta menor que tiraste em vida

É de bom tamanho nem largo nem fundo
É a parte que te cabe deste latifúndio
É a parte que te cabe deste latifúndio

Não é cova grande, é cova medida
É a terra que querias ver dividida
É a terra que querias ver dividida

É uma cova grande pra teu pouco defunto
Mas estarás mais ancho que estavas no mundo
estarás mais ancho que estavas no mundo

É uma cova grande pra teu defunto parco
Porém mais que no mundo te sentirás largo
Porém mais que no mundo te sentirás largo

É uma cova grande pra tua carne pouca
Mas a terra dada, não se abre a boca
É a conta menor que tiraste em vida
É a parte que te cabe deste latifúndio
É a terra que querias ver dividida

Estarás mais ancho que estavas no mundo
Mas a terra dada, não se abre a boca.

#50Pe. Estevam3 de abril de 2013, 22:53

Conheci o Fábio quando eu era ainda Pároco de Iguai em 1995 e ele já engajado em uma comunidade. Que Deus o receba na glória eterna!
Que a justiça dos Homens não falhe em encontrar os assassinos e mandantes, pois, a justiça Divina certamente também não faltará!
Deus console seus familiares e amigos, rezemos pela Paz!
Pe. Estevam dos Santos Silva Filho

#51Lane4 de abril de 2013, 13:14

É lamentável tamanha barbaridade, que fizeres a uma pessoa integra e de caracter como Fábio. Até quando pessoas como o Fábio tem que morrer para que os governantes venham agir e o próximo tenha amor, consideração, respeito para com os semelhante??
Esperamos justiça!!!

#52VERDADE4 de abril de 2013, 13:59

BRASIL... O CARA SEM TERRA AI REGIAO DE RICAS FAZENDAS, DERREPENTE BUUUUMMMM O CARA E ASSASSINADO, TA CHEIO DESSES CASOS NO BRASIL QUE TERMINA EM NADA, CADE O ESTADO OS POLITICOS QUE PRECISAM DOS SEM TERRA CADE DILMA LUTADORA E LULA LUTADOR DOS POBRES SEM TETO E SEM CHAO, TUDO BLA BLA BLA TUDO FARÇA E O CARA MORTO A FAMILIA SEM A SUA BASE E ASSIM JA SE FAZEM 2013 ANOS DEPOIS DE CRISTO.

#53João Henrique4 de abril de 2013, 14:36

Até quando Iguai vai permanecer na idade das trevas? Fábio importante cidadão Iguaiense foi ceifado de formar violeta por querer uma sociedade diferente. Força a todos nós, que neste momento sende a dor por ter sofrido tamanha perda.
Temos Fabão mais um motivo para continuar lutando por mudança em nome de tua memória.

#54jezi6 de abril de 2013, 18:04

que tristeza nao reconheco mais a cidade que nasci.tornou se violenta tenho muita vontade de visita la mais o medo e maior.politicos que so prometem enada fazem,policia truculenta,trafico...pior que as grandes capitais.me sinto muito envergonhado.

#55junior7 de abril de 2013, 21:08

O brasil pede justiça por uma pessoa q lutou e pela desigualdade soçial e q sempre quiz o bm de todos e q sempre defendeu sua opinião sobre

os latifundiario ele se foi mais sempre vai ficar no coração de cada um da quele q ele ajundou q DEUS o abençõe e q coloque em um bm lugar mais o brasil pede justiça .

#56jessica15 de abril de 2013, 19:15

fabio vc era uma pessoa muito emportante pro povo do riachão de canberiba vc vai fazer muita falta pra eles vai em paz e que o senhos te da um bom luga e confota tua familia...

#57sena15 de abril de 2013, 20:57

Q Deus ti poem em um bom, apesar das poucas vezes q vi ese rapaz mas era uma boa pessoa. meus pesos pra familia. triste!!!!!!!

#58sena15 de abril de 2013, 20:59

que a justiça seja feita e que os cupados pague pelos seus crimres.

#59carmo17 de abril de 2013, 16:41

que deus ilumine essa familia q estao sofrendo tanto e q deus o poe em bom lugar ele era muito querido e quem fez isto pague.

#60Minga17 de abril de 2013, 21:44

conheci o Fábio quando era criança e já era uma pessoa maravilhosa, Tenho na minha mente a primeira vez que o vir, Ele só tinha 9 anos assim como eu. então me apaixonei, e aos 11 ele me roubou um beijo, meu coração quase parou. Nunca esqueci um aniversário dele apesar de ter mais de 18 anos que nos virmos. nos beijamos aos 17 anos Vou ama-lo para sempre, e sempre vou lembrar de cada ano que faria.

<http://www.iguaimix.com/v2/2013/04/03/autoridades-dao-depoimentos-sobre-o-assassinato-do-lider-do-mst/>

Autoridades dão depoimentos sobre o assassinato do líder do MST

3/abr/2013 . 22:33

digg [9 comentários](#)

Autoridades presentes no velório de Fábio dos Santos Silva, líder do MST, assassinado terça-feira (02), em Iguai, falam sobre o episódio e as providências a serem tomadas a partir de hoje (03).



Figure 3: MST members and PT mayor mourn Fábio.
SOURCE: Iguai Mix

Júlio Honorato, Vera Lúcia Barbosa e Guilherme Menezes
(da direita para a esquerda) (Foto: Iguai Mix)

Confira abaixo os depoimentos dados com exclusividade para o site Iguai Mix:

Vera Lúcia Barbosa – Secretária de Política das Mulheres. Esteve no local representando o Governador Jaques Wagner – *Os assassinatos no campo precisam terminar. A gente não está mais nessa época da disputa pelo fuzil, pela bala, pela espingarda. Então essas práticas*

arcaicas precisam ter um fim na Bahia. Esse assassinato aqui é uma simbologia disso e nós não podemos permitir. Por isso, o governador me pediu que eu viesse aqui acompanhar o velório, porque nós, governo do estado, a partir de amanhã (04), nós vamos sentar, eu estou levando daqui diversos subsídios dos acontecimentos. Vou ver se ainda dá tempo para falar com o delegado, para ver a versão dele para, a partir de amanhã, na Secretaria de Segurança Pública, a gente ver como é que nós vamos incidir juntos, enquanto governo do estado, para ver o que nós podemos fazer para que em Iguai não ocorra mais mortes como a de Fábio. Fábio deixou dois filhos, Fábio deixou uma comunidade, Fábio era uma liderança expressiva do MST. A luta vai continuar, mas a gente perdeu uma pessoa importantíssima na fileira da luta pela reforma agrária. Então esses assassinatos, a gente precisa botar um ponto final. O governador está com ordem expressa para que a gente descubra o assassino, ou os assassinos, para que de fato eles não voltem a cometer outros assassinatos aqui no campo e na região.

Guilherme Menezes – Prefeito de Vitória da Conquista (PT) – É muito feio para a nossa cidade que não tem a marca da violência. É claro que toda cidade, hoje, está convivendo com essa epidemia das drogas, como o crack, por exemplo, mas elas são uma epidemia bastante generalizada. Mas um crime desses, que tem a marca da frieza, da premeditação, como se fosse um crime de mando, e tudo indica, não é uma coisa que possui um histórico em Iguai e isso agride a todos nós. Esperamos que seja elucidado, que as autoridades já estejam levantando dados para chegar às pessoas que praticaram essa barbaridade com tamanho ódio, com tamanha frieza, na presença da esposa, de uma criancinha de dois meses, e chegar aos mandantes, se por acaso houve mandantes. É isso que todos nós esperamos.

Júlio Honorato – Vereador de Vitória da Conquista (PT) – A gente lamenta, porque em pleno século XXI fatos como esses ainda acontecem no campo brasileiro e a gente chega a perguntar e ficar questionando até quando isso vai continuar acontecendo, exatamente por conta de que as pessoas que lutam por justiça, que lutam pela democratização da terra, no caso a reforma agrária, infelizmente ainda são alvos como esses, arbitrários, de pistolagem. Nós sabemos que aqui em Iguai essa prática não é a primeira vez que acontece, não é um fato isolado. Pessoas são assassinadas aqui constantemente. É claro que a morte de Fábio, ela repercute muito mais por ele pertencer a um movimento social e por ele ser uma pessoa muito querida aqui na cidade, mas esses fatos já vêm acontecendo aqui em Iguai. O que nós queremos é que se faça justiça. Da nossa parte nós vamos fazer. A nossa justiça é a cada tiro que ele recebeu, mais um assentamento aqui na região por parte do Movimento dos Sem Terra. Agora, a parte do poder judiciário, nós vamos pressionar os órgãos competentes, no sentido que faça averiguação e que possa elucidar o crime, no sentido de fazer justiça e de colocar na cadeia as pessoas que cometeram essas atrocidades.

Da Redação

[Veja mais...](#)

9 comentários

[#1](#)Gregório4 de abril de 2013, 12:39

A lô governador e Secretário de Segurança Pública!!!! Mais Polícia Nas Ruas e os culpados deste crime, na cadeia!!!!

[#2](#)nilzete4 de abril de 2013, 13:25

É muita tristeza que fica em minha alma de ter perdido um primo de uma forma tão covarde e brutal. Perdemos um amigo, um irmão, um primo, um pai, um batalhador. É isso que o Fábio era. Espero que as autoridades da Bahia tomam providência, que esse caso não fiquem arquivado somente no papel, mas que esses assassinos sejam presos. E eu pensei que só aqui em São Paulo agente via tanta covardia. Que Deus conforte toda nossa família pela perda desse grande homem.

Nilzete, São Paulo

[#3](#)val4 de abril de 2013, 20:12

eu estou indignada com tudo isto, e pesso a colaboracao de todos que saiba dos assassinos denusia vcs so tem a ganhar, e que deus conforta a nossa familia MST,

[#4](#)lunnah4 de abril de 2013, 20:41

uma bruta covardia, espero que não fique apenas em velhos arquivos, a morte de meu primo, que seja feita justiça

[#5](#)galego6 de abril de 2013, 8:09

A vida é ceifada por motivos fúteis, tem pessoas que acham que é dona da própria existência das outras pessoas, Iguaí se tornou um lugar sem lei.... quero ver se essa perda também vai passar em branco como muitas outras.....

[#6](#)fabi6 de abril de 2013, 19:43

eu gostaria muito de ter conhecido Fábio, pois sou prima irmã dele ele lutou muito pela reforma agrária sei que em Iguaí só tem fazendeiro esperto pois sei também que eles ficavam com terras inadequadas pois minha mãe Lucineide grimas dos Santos tinha uma fazenda enorme e foi roubada por fazendeiro esperto sou prima irmã de Fábio e vou lutar pelos direitos de todos que a fazenda de Lucineide grimas dos Santos que pertence a mim ou outros herdeiros....

[#7](#)Almeida7 de abril de 2013, 8:34

O Magnífico economista Celso Furtado disse um dia: A melhor empresa do Brasil é o MST, porque quando emprega, emprega 200 300 famílias inclusive crianças. Logo violências com o pessoal do MST é inconstitucional e é preciso julgamento exemplar.

#8nadinho8 de abril de 2013, 9:25

quem fazer aqui so paga aqui?

#9carmo17 de abril de 2013, 16:24

quem fez isso tem q pagar quero justiça

Pictures of Fabio from <http://www.iguaimix.com/v2/2013/04/02/fabio-do-sem-terra-foi-assassinado-em-iguai/>, accessed 9/8/2015



Figure 4: Fábio
assassination.
SOURCE:
Iguaí Mix

Figure 5: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguaí Mix



Figure 6: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguaí Mix



Figure 7: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguaí Mix



Figure 8: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 9: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 10: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 11: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 12: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 13: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 14: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 15: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 16: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 17: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguai Mix



Figure 18: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguaí Mix



Figure 19: Fábio assassination. SOURCE: Iguaí Mix



Dirigente do MST é executado por pistoleiros com 15 tiros na Bahia

2 de abril de 2013

Da Página do MST

Na manhã desta terça (02/4), Fábio dos Santos Silva, dirigente do MST na Bahia, foi brutalmente executado por pistoleiros com 15 tiros, na frente de sua mulher e de uma criança. O dirigente já vinha sendo ameaçado de morte na região de Iguaí. As informações são do deputado Valmir Assunção (PT-BA):

"É com revolta e ainda bastante abalado que denuncio o assassinato do dirigente do MST da Bahia, Fábio dos Santos Silva. Fábio foi executado no fim desta manhã com 15 tiros na frente da sua companheira e uma criança, que seguiam de carro para Palmerinha, distrito próximo a Iguaí, no Sudoeste baiano.

Segundo relato da própria companheira de Fábio, uma moto interceptou o carro em que estavam e executaram Fábio. Ele, que já era ameaçado de morte na região de Iguaí, onde o latifúndio não aceita a democratização da terra, nem a presença dos três assentamentos e do acampamento existente no local, teve sua vida ceifada.

Pergunto-me, quantas vezes os nossos camponeses e trabalhadores serão assassinados? É esse tipo de ação, com o uso da pistolagem, covarde e cruel, que estamos convivendo no campo brasileiro. Esse assassinato, com claros sinais de execução, não pode ficar impune.

Fábio, que inclusive foi candidato a vereador pelo PT da região, foi um grande lutador, companheiro e militante das causas sociais. Como todo militante do MST, queria ver a Reforma Agrária ser concretizada.

Companheiro Fábio, aqui continuaremos tua luta. Solidarizo-me à família.

Fábio, presente, presente, presente!

O MST está de luto".

DIRIGENTE DO MST É ASSASSINADO EM IGUAÍ

📅 2/abr/2013 . 17:01 | 🧑 Autor: [Editor](#)



Figure 20:
Fábio.
SOURCE:
Iguaí Mix

Fábio Silva.

O dirigente do Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (MST) na Bahia, Fábio dos Santos Silva, foi brutalmente assassinado na manhã dessa terça-feira, 02, em Iguaí.

Fábio Silva foi atingido por 15 tiros, na frente de sua esposa e de uma criança. O crime tem características de execução.

Segundo relato da esposa de Fábio, o carro em que ele viajava foi interceptado por uma moto. Daí em diante, os assassinos cometeram o crime.

Fábio já vinha sendo ameaçado de morte na região de Iguaí desde 2010, por conta de conflitos pela terra. Foi também candidato a vereador pelo Partido dos Trabalhadores nas últimas eleições. Os familiares aguardam a liberação do corpo pelo Instituto Médico Legal para definir o local e hora do sepultamento.

CORPO DE DIRIGENTE DO MST SERÁ VELADO NA CÂMARA DE VEREADORES DE IGUAÍ

📅 3/abr/2013 . 10:20



Figure 21:
Fábio.
SOURCE:
Iguaí Mix

Fábio Santos

O corpo de Fábio dos Santos Silva, dirigente do MST na Bahia morto por disparos de arma de fogo na manhã de ontem (terça,02), será velado na Câmara de Vereadores de Iguaí.

Fábio foi atingido por 15 tiros, na frente de sua esposa e de uma criança. O crime tem características de execução. Imagens do site Iguaí Mix.



Figure 22:
Fábio
assassination
SOURCE:
Iguaí Mix

PRESIDENTE DA CÂMARA DE IGUAÍ DECRETA LUTO OFICIAL

Redação | IguaiBAHIA.com.br 03/04/2013 [DESTAQUE DE GIRO](#), [DESTAQUE PRINCIPAL](#), [LETREIRO](#), [NOTÍCIAS](#) 1 Comentário 116 Views

Figure 23: Iguai city hall. SOURCE: IguaiBahia.com.br



Câmara de Vereadores de Iguai durante o velório de Fábio do PT, assassinado em Iguai

O Presidente da Câmara de Vereadores de Iguai, Osmário Rocha dos Santos, decretou na manhã desta quarta-feira (03), luto oficial do Poder Legislativo por três dias em razão da morte do Líder do MST, Fábio dos Santos Silva.



Figure 24:
Fábio.
SOURCE:
Valmir
Assunção
website

Foto: Reprodução do site Valmir Assunção

O presidente, em nota, afirmou lamentar o grau de violência deste falecimento, prematuro e inesperado deste Líder que “deixou Iguaí profundamente abalada” e o Poder Legislativo “que repercute intensamente as aspirações, demandas e sentimentos do povo”, se une à comunidade neste momento de dor.

A redação do site [IguaíBAHIA](#) acessou o site oficial da Prefeitura Municipal de Iguaí, mas até o momento da postagem, 11:52 h, não havia nenhuma nota referente ao falecimento do Líder do MST.

No prédio onde fica a sede da Secretaria Municipal de Educação e Secretaria Municipal de Saúde, foi estendida uma faixa de luto nesta quarta-feira (3).

<http://www.mstbrazil.org/news/landless-demand-justice-during-funeral-mst-leader-bahia>

Landless demand justice during the funeral for MST leader in Bahia

Landless demand justice during the funeral for MST leader in Bahia

Friday, April 5, 2013

[Oppression of MST and Social Movements](#) [MST Occupations and Demonstrations](#)

Figure 25: March for Fábio. SOURCE: MST



MST leader **Fábio Santos da Silva**, assassinated on April 2 by 15 shots fired by gunmen in Iguai, in the Southwest of Bahia, was buried on April 3.

The vigil for the body began in the Rural Community of Ribeirão das Flores and afterwards the body was taken to the City Hall of Iguai, where the city can follow and share this moment of mourning and show solidarity with the grief of the family, friends, and men and women comrades in mourning.

On leaving the City Hall, families, friends, and MST activists held a march to the end of the city to accompany the coffin. On the way, a lot of music and chanting showed the people's anger.

"This march has the goal of establishing a dialog with society in the sense of denouncing what happened and demanding that justice be done and the killers do not remain unpunished", said the Federal Deputy Valmir Assunção (PT-BA).

The MST leadership states that the activists in the region are suffering continuous threats aimed

at weakening the Movement's struggle, trying to prevent new occupations and mobilizations. After the march, the body was taken back to the Rural Community, where Fábio was buried alongside other family members.

"How many times are our peasants and workers assassinated? It's this type of action, killing by gunmen, which is so cowardly and cruel, that we are facing in the Brazilian countryside. This killing, with clear signs that it was an execution, cannot go unpunished. Fábio, who was also a candidate for assemblyman for the Workers Party in the region, was a great fighter, comrade, and activist in social causes. Like every MST activist, he wanted to see Agrarian Reform put into effect", added Valmir Assunção.



Figure 26:
Mourning
for Fábio.
SOURCE:
MST

"Companheiro Fábio, here we are continuing your struggle. I am in solidarity with your family. Fábio, presente, presente, presente! The MST is in mourning", he concluded in his homage to the landless leader.

History

Since 2010, starting with occupations carried out by families from the Mother Earth Encampment in Iguai, the MST activists of the region began to receive threats from the owners of the big estates.

Faced with the threats, the Movement called a meeting with the Agrarian Auditor. In this way the activists placed the offensive of the estate owners against the struggle for expropriation of land for the purpose of agrarian reform, and nothing was done.

Because of this indifference, Fábio Santos was killed. This is why the Landless are demanding justice from the court.

Violence in the Countryside

The Pastoral Land Commission registered 29 killings of rural workers in conflicts in the countryside in 2011. A smaller number than 2010, when 34 workers were killed.

However there was an increase of 178% in the number of workers who received death threats.

The data shows that in the countryside in the first four months of 2010, 12 workers were killed in conflicts in the countryside. In the same period in 2011, eight were killed.

This shows that violence continues and the impunity for the killers and those who make threats persist.

MST REALIZA 'MARCHA ESTADUAL FÁBIO SANTOS SILVA'

[Redação | IguaiBAHIA.com.br](#) 10/04/2013 [DESTAQUE 1](#), [DESTAQUE DE GIRO](#), [DESTAQUE PRINCIPAL](#), [LETREIRO](#), [NOTÍCIAS 1](#) [Comentário](#)

Nesta terça-feira (9), os trabalhadores saíram em marcha com destino a Salvador. Os Sem Terra pretendem chegar na capital baiana na próxima quinta-feira (11). A marcha leva o nome de “Marcha Estadual Fábio Santos Silva”, homenageando o dirigente do MST assassinado com 15 tiros por pistoleiros no último dia 2, em Iguai, região sudoeste da Bahia.



Figure 27: March for Fábio. SOURCE: MST

Marcha Estadual de luta pela Reforma Agrária leva o nome Fábio dos Santos Silva

Foto: Página do MST

Ao longo do percurso, os trabalhadores rurais fazem três paradas: em Cascalheira, Lauro de Freitas, e no Centro Administrativo de Salvador, onde ficam acampados até o dia 17 para pressionar o governo estadual e órgãos competentes sobre as reivindicações

Ocupação

70 integrantes do MST ocupam desde sábado (6) uma área da Empresa Baiana de Desenvolvimento Agrícola (EBDA) em Barra do Choça, no sul da Bahia. O Movimento exige

uma reunião com o governo federal e a EBDA para que o uso da área ocupada para fins de Reforma Agrária.

As ações, além de lembrarem o massacre de Eldorado dos Carajás, cobram justiça aos crimes mais recentes ligados à luta pelo campo, como o assassinato brutal de Fábio dos Santos Silva, dirigente do MST na Bahia, executado na semana passada com 15 tiros.

A Marcha

Iniciou na segunda-feira (8), a Marcha Estadual de luta pela Reforma Agrária. A marcha, que conta com cerca de cinco mil Sem Terra de 9 regiões do estado. Começou no município de Camaçari, e segue em direção a Salvador.



Figure 28: Fábio Santos Silva State March. SOURCE: MST

Marcha Estadual Fábio Santos Silva

Foto: Página do MST

A marcha leva o nome de “Marcha Estadual Fábio Santos Silva”, homenageando o dirigente do MST assassinado com 15 tiros por pistoleiros no último dia 2, em Iguai, região sudoeste da Bahia.

Na saída de Camaçari, os trabalhadores rurais marcharam à praça central da cidade e dialogaram com sociedade questões referentes à criminalização da luta dos movimentos sociais – enfatizando o massacre de Eldorado dos Carajás e a execução recente de Fábio Santos -, denunciaram a seca no semi-árido baiano e a paralisação da Reforma Agrária.

“Precisamos sair em marcha para denunciarmos o descaso da justiça perante os assassinatos de trabalhadores rurais em todo o país. Também queremos denunciar a existência de várias áreas improdutivas e devolutas na Bahia, sendo que nada é feito para que sejam destinadas à Reforma Agrária. Enquanto isso, temos 25 mil famílias debaixo da lona, nas beiras das estradas por todo o estado”, disse Márcio Matos, da direção estadual do MST.

A mobilização faz parte da Jornada de lutas do MST, realizada todos os anos no mês de abril, quando são lembrados os 21 trabalhadores rurais mortos no Massacre de Eldorado dos Carajás, ocorrido no estado do Pará, no dia 17 de abril de 1996.

O ato também contou com a participação do prefeito da cidade, Ademar Delgado (PT), do deputado federal Valmir Assunção (PT), deputada estadual Luíza Maia (PT), a Secretária de Política para Mulheres, Verá Lucia Barbosa, e representantes públicos municipais, estaduais e nacionais.

Por Wesley Lima | Página do MST

<http://www.iguai bahia.com.br/padre-andre-costa-paroco-de-iguai-contabiliza-mais-de-70-assassinatos-em-dois-anos/>

Padre André Costa, Pároco de Iguai, contabiliza mais de 70 assassinatos em dois anos

Redação | [Iguai BAHIA.com.br](http://www.iguai bahia.com.br) 21/04/2013 [DESTAQUE DE GIRO](#), [DESTAQUE PRINCIPAL](#), [LETREIRO](#), [NOTÍCIAS](#) [1 Comentário](#) 392 Views

A pequena Iguai, cidade natal do prefeito Guilherme Menezes, está com alto índice de homicídios e a grande maioria deles sem nenhuma investigação. Foi preciso a [morte](#) do histórico militante petista e líder do Movimento Sem Terra, Fábio Santos Silva, para receber uma atenção especial do Governo Baiano, [que promete apurar a rigor e punir os mandantes e os assassinos](#).



Figure 29:
Father
André
Costa
SOURCE:
Blog do
Anderson

Padre André Costa, Pároco de Iguai

Foto: Blog do Anderson

Com dois anos frente Paróquia Nossa Senhora do Perpétuo Socorro, o padre André Costa confessa assustado com tanta violência. “*Nós fomos todos surpreendidos com a notícia da morte de Fábio, desse assassinato, e o município todo continua perplexo e espera que a Polícia Civil solucione mais um homicídio trágico em nosso município. Infelizmente, eu já estou lá há dois anos, e assim a gente pode somar mais de 70 homicídios no município. Iguai é uma cidade*

pequena que aparentemente deveria ser calma, mas a violência infelizmente tem ceifado muitas vidas”, comentou o líder católico ao Blog do Anderson nesse sábado (20).

De acordo com o religioso, o uso e o tráfico de drogas são os principais provocadores da criminalidade. Ainda segundo o pároco, tanto a Polícia Civil como a Militar possui os equipamentos para a proteção da população aliados com a Guarda Municipal. *“A cidade está bem protegida, mas a Zona Rural ainda fica descoberta ainda”,* complementou lembrando que a maioria das ocorrências são registradas na Zona Urbana.

Com informações do Blog do Anderson

<http://www.vozdomovimento.org/2013/09/em-protesto-contraviolencia-mst-e.html>

Em protesto contra violência, MST é recebido a balas por subsecretário

Marcadores:

[Debates Estudo Luta Social Notícias](#)

Por José Coutinho Júnior

Da [Página do MST](#)



Figure 30:
Pereira
pointing at
MST
SOURCE:
MST

Subsecretário da Secretaria de Segurança Pública (SSP)

Um, dois, três. Foi o número de tiros disparados contra militantes do MST nesta terça-feira (10/9) pelo subsecretário de segurança Ary Pereira. Cerca de 300 Sem Terra estavam na porta da Secretaria de Segurança Pública da Bahia (SSP-BA) para cobrar a investigação e esclarecimento do assassinato do dirigente Fábio dos Santos Silva. "Fomos recebidos a bala pelo subsecretário Ary Pereira. Ele já estava com a arma em riste quando nós chegamos", disse Márcio Matos, da coordenação

do MST.

"O nosso protesto era de forma pacífica. Ao chegar na porta, o subsecretário de Segurança Pública da Bahia deflagrou três tiros contra os manifestantes. Não houve ocupação. Nós chegamos até a porta do prédio", conta Valber Rubens Santos, dirigente do MST.

A ação do subsecretário foi defendida pelo secretário de segurança, Maurício Barbosa. "Não podemos aceitar nenhum tipo de tomada do prédio que representa e simboliza a segurança pública do nosso estado, sob qualquer pretexto. Nós tivemos que apelar para o uso de arma de fogo em detrimento a inúmeras pessoas que entraram aqui de facão e de foice na mão deliberados a tomar o prédio. Temos que salvaguardar a integridade física dos nossos servidores", afirmou.

No protesto, os Sem Terra pediram o fim da violência no campo e cobraram a investigação do assassinato com 15 tiros de Fábio. A Justiça baiana não investiga o caso.

O subsecretário que efetuou os disparos até o momento não foi punido e sua postura foi defendida. O governo da Bahia afirmou em nota que o "disparo de advertência" "fez os manifestantes recuarem e garantiu a integridade dos servidores que já tinham chegado ao trabalho e das instalações do prédio.

A Secretaria da Segurança Pública afirma estar aberta ao diálogo com o MST, mas repudia qualquer manifestação violenta, que ameace a integridade dos funcionários e as instalações físicas de suas dependências".

Assassinato

Os mandantes e executores de Fábio ainda não vieram à tona, mas a sua execução ocorreu por um motivo: incomodar os latifúndios de Iguaí. O dirigente já vinha sendo ameaçado de morte, e os grandes proprietários da região se opõem fortemente à presença dos três assentamentos e do acampamento existentes.



Figure 31: March for Fábio SOURCE: MST

Em uma manhã de abril desse ano, um carro que seguia de Iguai para Palmerinha (BA) foi interceptado por uma moto. Um dos homens desceu da moto, sacou uma pistola e disparou 15 tiros em Fábio dos Santos Silva, dirigente do MST na Bahia. A brutal execução foi testemunhada pela companheira de Fábio e por uma criança. Até hoje, não se sabe quem foram os assassinos de Fábio.

“Quantas vezes os nossos camponeses e trabalhadores serão assassinados? É esse tipo de ação, com o uso da pistolagem, covarde e cruel, que estamos convivendo no campo brasileiro. Esse assassinato, com claros sinais de execução, não pode ficar impune”, disse o deputado Valmir Assunção (PT-BA).

<http://www.bahianoticias.com.br/noticia/143449-integrantes-do-mst-deixam-area-externa-da-ssp-apos-reuniao-com-mauricio-barbosa.html>

(See, in attached files, a video of this occupation.)

Terça, 10 de Setembro de 2013 - 17:20

Integrantes do MST deixam área externa da SSP após reunião com Maurício Barbosa

Integrantes do Movimento dos Sem-Terra (MST) deixaram na tarde desta terça-feira (10) a área externa da Secretaria da Segurança Pública, no Centro Administrativo da Bahia (CAB), em Salvador, após reunião com o titular da pasta, Maurício Barbosa, na Governadoria. Pela manhã, um grupo munido de facões, paus e foices invadiu o prédio da SSP e **foi contido por um disparo** feito pelo subsecretário de Segurança Pública, Ary Pereira. A invasão foi considerada “intolerável” por Barbosa. “Sempre me reúno com líderes sindicais e de diversos movimentos sociais, para juntos solucionarmos problemas ligados a nossa pasta”, disse o secretário. O chefe da Segurança Pública informou que a instituição não foi procurada em nenhum momento pelo MST, que reivindicava informações sobre o homicídio de Fábio Santos, integrante do movimento morto em abril deste ano no município baiano de Iguaí. Sobre o caso, Barbosa disse que as investigações, coordenadas por uma equipe especial integrada pela SSP e Ministério Público Estadual, estão em andamento.

<http://www.bahianoticias.com.br/noticia/143427-subsecretario-de-seguranca-publica-atira-para-conter-sem-terra-que-invadiram-ssp.html>

Terça, 10 de Setembro de 2013 - 10:16

Subsecretário de Segurança Pública atira para conter sem-terra que invadiram SSP

por Rodrigo Aguiar



Figure 32:
Press
appearance
after
protest
SOURCE:
Adenilson
Nunes/
Secom

Foto: Adenilson Nunes / Secom

O subsecretário de Segurança Pública da Bahia, Ary Pereira, foi o autor do **disparo ouvido na manhã desta terça-feira (10)**, na sede da pasta, no Centro Administrativo da Bahia (CAB), em Salvador, durante tentativa de invasão de integrantes do Movimento Sem-Terra ao prédio. De acordo com a assessoria da SSP, um “disparo de advertência” foi feito para conter o grupo, que já estava dentro do prédio e acessava a escada para o primeiro andar. Não houve feridos, ainda de acordo com a assessoria. Com facões e foices, os sem-terra estão do lado de fora da secretaria.

<http://www.bahianoticias.com.br/noticia/143460-decisao-de-atirar-para-reprimir-mst-039-foi-acertada-039-diz-secretario-de-seguranca-publica.html>

Quarta, 11 de Setembro de 2013 - 00:00

Decisão de atirar para reprimir MST 'foi acertada', diz secretário de Segurança Pública

por Evilásio Júnior



Figure 33:
Press
appearance
after
protest
SOURCE:
Tiago
Melo/
Bahia
Notícias,
Salvio
Oliveira/
MST

Fotos: Tiago Melo/ Bahia Notícias | Salvio Oliveira/MST

O secretário de Segurança Pública do Estado, Maurício Barbosa, endossou a atitude do número 2 da pasta, Ary Pereira, de disparar três tiros para dispersar a invasão de integrantes do Movimento dos Sem-Terra à sede do órgão, nesta terça-feira (10). Em entrevista ao Bahia Notícias, o titular da pasta defendeu o seu auxiliar e criticou a ação dos manifestantes que cobravam celeridade nas investigações sobre a morte de Fábio dos Santos Silva, integrante do MST assassinado em abril deste ano em Iguaí, no sudoeste baiano. "O próprio vídeo mostra a forma como o movimento chegou. Mais de 300 pessoas invadiram o prédio com foice e facão. Não foi dada ciência prévia nem houve solicitação de audiência. A decisão [de atirar] foi acertada. Primeiro porque tínhamos servidores, policiais, armamento, documentos, sistemas informatizados... Não pode um prédio desse ser tomado. É um desrespeito ao órgão e a quem sempre tratou os movimentos muito bem. Se tinham alguma

dúvida, que solicitassem audiência e nós íamos atender de pronto. Até porque temos um grupo formado para investigar crimes no campo", argumentou Barbosa, ao complementar que os sem-terra "agiram de forma desproporcional". "Esse foi o meio que evitou a ameaça à integridade física das pessoas. Sabe-se lá qual é a animosidade deles? Presumir que esse tipo de situação é normal, não é", opinou o chefe da SSP.



Figure 34: Pereira pointing at protesters SOURCE: MST

Ele não cogita a demissão do subsecretário, como [sugeriu a deputada estadual Luiza Maia \(PT\)](#), aliada do governo. "A avaliação dela eu respeito, mas a demissão ou não compete ao governador. Nós fizemos o que manda a lei. Se abirmos mão da nossa atribuição, estaremos prevaricando. Estamos aqui para fazer cumprir a lei", avisou. De acordo com o secretário, Ary Pereira é agente do setor de inteligência da Polícia Federal, tem pistola registrada e porte de arma federal.

<http://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,governador-da-bahia-defende-secretario-que-atirou-contramst,1073692>

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Governador da Bahia defende secretário que atirou contra MST

TIAGO DÉCIMO - O ESTADO DE S. PAULO
11 Setembro 2013 | 16h 57

SALVADOR - Apesar da pressão da oposição — e até de alguns aliados na Assembleia Legislativa — pela exoneração do subsecretário de Segurança Pública da Bahia, Ary Pereira de Oliveira, que nessa terça-feira, 10, atirou contra integrantes do MST que protestavam na frente da sede da secretaria, o governador baiano, Jaques Wagner (PT), defendeu o subordinado e acusou o MST de ter cometido "um exagero".

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cometido "um exagero".

Segundo Wagner, "as pessoas não podem confundir democracia com baderna" e "não é razoável que a sede da Segurança Pública ou de qualquer outra secretaria seja invadida por uma porção de gente com foice, facão, enxada".



RELACIONADAS

[_ Subsecretário de segurança da Bahia atira contra MST](#)

"Pode ter sido um ato limite do subsecretário, mas foi um ato para impedir que algo muito pior acontecesse, que seria a ocupação da

Secretaria de Segurança por completo", justificou o governador, em entrevista para uma rádio local. "(O tiro) foi para intimidar e não se (deixar) concluir o processo de ocupação e invasão no prédio da Secretaria de Segurança Pública. Daqui a pouco, um integrante do movimento ia estar sentado na cadeira do secretário. Só me faltava essa."

A confusão ocorreu por volta das 8 horas dessa terça-feira, 10. Um grupo de cerca de mil integrantes do MST, que acampava na área externa da sede do Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (Incra) na Bahia desde a segunda-feira, decidiu ir até o prédio da SSP, que fica nas proximidades, para protestar contra a demora na investigação sobre o assassinato de Fábio Santos — um dos

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Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (Incra) na Bahia desde a segunda-feira, decidiu ir até o prédio da SSP, que fica nas proximidades, para protestar contra a demora na investigação sobre o assassinato de Fábio Santos — um dos líderes do movimento no Estado, morto a tiros em abril, no município de Iguaí, 497 quilômetros ao sul de Salvador.

Segundo as lideranças do MST, assim que a manifestação chegou à sede da secretaria, Pereira teria começado a atirar, dando três disparos. De acordo com a assessoria da SSP, apenas um tiro foi dado, depois de integrantes do movimento invadirem o saguão do prédio, armados com foices e facões. Ninguém ficou ferido, mas uma das portas do prédio ficou danificada.

Após a confusão, o grupo montou acampamento na frente da secretaria, que só foi desfeito no início da noite, após uma reunião entre as lideranças do MST com o secretário de Segurança, Maurício Barbosa. Os integrantes do movimento foram, então, para a frente da sede da Secretaria da Agricultura, Pecuária, Irrigação, Reforma Agrária, Pesca e Aquicultura (Seagri), onde seguem acampados, pressionando por regularização fundiária para os assentados no Estado.

TAGS: MST, BAHIA, TIROS

<http://www.mst.org.br/2014/04/04/na-bahia-sem-terra-realizam-acoes-contrainpunidade-no-campo.html>

Na Bahia, Sem Terra realizam ações contra impunidade no campo

Completado um ano de impunidade, cerca de mil trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra das nove regiões do estado da Bahia relembaram e denunciaram o assassinato do Militante Fábio Santos.

4 de abril de 2014 13h22



*Do Coletivo Estadual de Comunicação do MST/BA
Da Página do MST*

Completado um ano de impunidade, cerca de mil trabalhadores rurais Sem Terra das nove regiões do estado da Bahia relembaram e denunciaram o assassinato do Militante Fábio Santos, nesta quarta-feira (02).

Uma missa no local do assassinato - na estrada entre o município de Iguaí e o distrito de Palmeirinha - iniciou os dias de mobilizações, contando com a participação de familiares, amigos e parceiros.

Em marcha, os trabalhadores saíram em direção a sede municipal para dialogar com a população iguaiese sobre o processo histórico de violência no campo.

Com o objetivo de cobrar do poder público a punição dos mandantes e assassinos de Fábio Santos, os trabalhadores também fizeram uma ação em frente ao Fórum Municipal.

Evanildo Costa, da direção estadual do MST, afirmou que o estado não cumpre o seu papel democrático ao deixar impune os mandantes e assassinos de Fábio.

Já na Praça Manoel Novaes, no centro da cidade, os camponeses realizaram um Ato Público com diversas representações a nível federal, estadual e municipal, que contou com a participação de organizações parceiras do MST.

Em apoio a marcha, Vera Lúcia Barbosa, Secretária de Políticas Públicas para as Mulheres da Bahia, disse ser muito importante se mobilizar e cobrar do estado respostas sobre o processo de violência sofrida pelos trabalhadores do campo.

Para ela, a atividade se legitima a partir do momento que consegue o apoio da população.

A violência no Campo em Iguai

Iguai possui um histórico de violência que reprime os trabalhadores e a luta do povo pela terra.

Segundo os Sem Terra, de 2011 à 2014, 62 camponeses já foram assassinados no município e as investigações estão paradas.

Este município é apenas um reflexo de um panorama geral. Segundo dados da Comissão pastoral da Terra (CPT) foram registrados 29 assassinatos de trabalhadores rurais em conflitos no campo em 2011. Um número menor que no ano de 2010, quando foram assassinados 34 trabalhadores. Entretanto, houve um aumento de quase 178% no número de trabalhadores e trabalhadoras ameaçadas de morte.

Acampamento

Diante da conjuntura de impunidades históricas no município, os trabalhadores montaram um acampamento na Praça Manoel Novaes exigindo imediatos esclarecimentos da Justiça referente a morte de Fábio Santos.

Os Sem Terra aguardaram um posicionamento da Secretaria de Segurança Pública (SSP-BA), já que nenhuma resposta foi dada até o momento.

Mediante a luta e as demandas de esclarecimentos reivindicados pelos trabalhadores, a SSP – BA marcou uma audiência com representantes do MST para discutir as investigações em torno do caso.

Com audiência marcada, os trabalhadores desocuparam a Praça, mas prometem voltar caso nada seja resolvido.

<http://www.iguai bahia.com.br/iguai-governo-vai-apresentar-relatorio-sobre-a-morte-de-lider-do-mst-no-dia-10-de-junho/>

Iguaí: Governo vai apresentar relatório sobre a morte de Líder do MST no dia 10 de junho

Redação | IguaíBAHIA.com.br 17/05/2014 [DESTAQUE DE GIRO](#), [DESTAQUE PRINCIPAL](#), [IGUAÍ](#), [LETREIRO](#) 1 Comentário

Fábio dos Santos Silva (35), foi morto por disparos de arma de fogo, na manhã de terça-feira do dia 02 de abril de 2013, por volta do meio-dia, a 5 km de Iguaí, numa estrada que liga a sede ao distrito de Palmeirinha.



Figure 35: Assassination of Fábio SOURCE: iguaibahia.com

Veículo conduzido pelo ex-coordenador do MST, morto em Iguaí

Um relatório sobre o assassinato de Fábio Santos, militante do MST, morto com nove tiros em abril de 2013, na cidade de Iguaí, no sudoeste do estado. Será entregue pelo governo do estado no dia 10 de junho. O caso foi motivo de uma manifestação com 3 mil integrantes do Movimento Sem-Terra na semana passada.

“As conquistas são animadoras. Espero que isso sirva de inspiração para o Governo Federal, diante do quadro nacional”, afirma o deputado federal Valmir Assunção (PT), um dos líderes do movimento. Emissão e imissão de posses de terras, negociações de áreas dos perímetros irrigados, construção de escolas, quadras poliesportivas, aquisição de maquinário agrícola, ampliação de unidades de ensino já construídas e de alojamento de professores, são algumas das demandas que o governo da Bahia se comprometeu em atender.

Em pronunciamento, o chefe do Executivo baiano além de confirmar a lista de ações para o MST revelou que vai mesmo apresentar o relatório sobre o assassinato do líder sem-terra Fábio Santos no mês de junho. “Eu sei que um dos motivos que não é comum, mas que é muito importante nesta marcha de 2014 é a solução do crime contra Fábio, companheiro que foi assassinado e com certeza foi assassinado porque lutava em defesa dos trabalhadores e o compromisso meu e do meu secretário de Segurança Pública [Maurício Barbosa] com a direção do MST é apresentar o relatório final e os suspeitos da morte de Fábio. É claro que a gente não quer acusar ninguém levianamente, mas o secretário Maurício tem um compromisso de que até o dia 10 de junho a gente vai concluir e apresentar a investigação”, declara Wagner.

Leia também:

- ***Iguaí: MST realizará Ato Público nesta quarta-feira (2) em memória a Fábio dos Santos***
- ***[SITE DO MST PUBLICA MATÉRIA SOBRE A MORTE DE DIRIGENTE DO MOVIMENTO MORTO EM IGUAÍ](#)***
- ***[EX-COORDENADOR DO MST É MORTO EM IGUAÍ](#)***
- ***[PRESIDENTE DA CÂMARA DE IGUAÍ DECRETA LUTO OFICIAL](#)***
- ***[DEPUTADO PETISTA MANIFESTA PESAR PELO ASSASSINATO DE DIRIGENTE DO MST EM IGUAÍ](#)***
- ***[ZÉ RAIMUNDO, DEPUTADO PETISTA, PEDE APURAÇÃO DO ASSASSINATO DE MILITANTE DO MST](#)***
- ***[GOVERNADOR RECEBE REPRESENTANTES DO MOVIMENTO DOS SEM TERRA](#)***
- ***[Padre André Costa, Pároco de Iguaí, contabiliza mais de 70 assassinatos em dois anos](#)***
- ***[MST REALIZA ‘MARCHA ESTADUAL FÁBIO SANTOS SILVA’](#)***
- ***[FAMILIARES E AMIGOS PARTICIPAM DA MISSA DE SÉTIMO DIA DE FÁBIO DOS SANTOS SILVA](#)***
- ***[CORPO DE FÁBIO DO PT, DIRIGENTE DO MST, SERÁ VELADO NA CÂMARA DE VEREADORES DE IGUAÍ](#)***

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