

**RE-VISIONING THE NORTHEAST:  
ECONOMIC DIFFERENCE AND ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE  
BRAZILIAN SEMIARID**

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## ABSTRACT

ANA M. ARAUJO: Re-Visioning the Northeast: Economic Difference and Alternative Visions of Development in the Brazilian Semiarid  
(Under the direction of Arturo Escobar)

This dissertation documents the creation, maintenance and existence of *practices of economic difference*, or non-capitalist practices, among residents of the town of Sobradinho in Northeast Brazil. This project traces residents' place-based responses to the construction of the Sobradinho hydroelectric dam in the 1970s and the role of state discourse and intervention in shaping both a sense of regional identity and in creating a "regional economy" for the national economic integration of this "underdeveloped" region. The São Francisco Valley, where the town is located, has witnessed the rapid proliferation of export-oriented agroindustrial firms since the late 1980s as part of Brazil's economic restructuring. As state development strategies have had differing impacts on men and women (i.e. men were targeted as a mobile labor force, while, more recently, women have been recruited as temporary waged labor in the agro-industry), there has been a consequent shift away from former subsistence agricultural livelihoods to those premised on wage labor. Accordingly, this project examines changing gender relations and the generational aspects of the formation of regional economic subjectivities. Despite the seeming entrenchment of market-oriented economic models, this research indicates that residents continue to support older forms of labor practice and

also create new labor models that are not premised upon capitalist labor regimes. In keeping with this, women in the community are also involved in what could be termed the care economy or the community economy. Following feminist geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham's work in "reading for difference," this study highlights how residents, rather than becoming market-oriented neoliberal subjects, have engaged in a *micropolitics of resubjection* whereby they nurture and sustain forms of economic practice that are not market-oriented. These projects of reworking economic models are linked with a broader re-visioning of representations of the *sertão* (backlands) towards one centered on the Brazilian semiarid, focusing on culturally and ecologically appropriate production models. In documenting these projects, this dissertation maps possibilities for alternative forms of development, potentialities for a postdevelopment future, and the creation of alternative economic practices under the processes of neoliberal globalization.

To my family -  
Terezinha de Melo Araujo, Manuel Costa Araujo, Theresa Mapagay,  
Vicki Araujo, and Tom Zito.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASJ	<i>Associação dos Agricultores da Vila São Joaquim</i> Agricultural Association of Vila São Joaquim
ASA	<i>Articulação do Semi-Árido</i> Articulation of the Semiarid
BNB	<i>Banco do Nordeste</i> Bank of the Northeast
CAR	<i>Coordenação de Ação Regional</i> Coordination of Regional Action
CEB	<i>Comunidades Eclesias de Base</i> Christian Base Communities
CEPAL	<i>Comissão Econômica para América Latina</i> Latin American Economic Commission
CHESF	<i>Companhia Hidro Eléctrica do São Francisco</i> Hydroelectric Company of the São Francisco
CODEVASF	<i>Companhia do Desenvolvimento dos Vales do São Francisco e do Parnaíba</i> Development Company of the São Francisco and Parnaíba River Valleys
CPT	<i>Comissão Pastoral da Terra</i> Pastoral Land Commission
CVRD	<i>Companhia do Vale do Rio Doce</i> Company of the Sweet River Valley
CVSF	<i>Comissão do Vale do São Francisco</i> São Francisco Valley Commission
FETAG-BA	<i>Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura no Estado da Bahia</i> Federation of Agricultural Workers in the State of Bahia
GTDN	<i>Grupo de Trabalho de para o Desenvolvimento do Nordeste</i> Working Group for the Development of the Northeast
IBGE	<i>Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística</i>

	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
IFOCS	<i>Inspeçtoria Federal de Obras Contra as Secas</i> Federal Inspectorate of Anti-Drought Works
INCRA	<i>Instituto Nacional de Colonizaço e Reforma Agrria</i> National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform
IRPAA	<i>Instituto Regional da Pequena Agropecuria Apropriada</i> Regional Institute of Appropriate Small Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
MMTR	<i>Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais</i> Rural Women Workers' Movement
MST	<i>Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra,</i> Landless Rural Workers' Movement
PDRI	<i>Programa para Desenvolvimento Regional Integrado</i> Program for Integrated Regional Development
PDRS	<i>Programa para o Desenvolvimento para o Reservatrio do Sobradinho</i> Program for the Development of the Sobradinho Reservoir
PJMP	<i>Pastoral de Juventude do Meio Popular</i> Pastoral of Youth of the Popular Classes
RESAB	<i>Rede de Educaço do Semi-rido</i> Network for Education in the Semi-Arid
SEPLAN	<i>Secretaria do Planejamento</i> Bahian Secretariat of Planning
STR	<i>Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais</i> Rural Workers' Union
SUDENE	<i>Superintendncia do Desenvolvimento do Nordeste</i> Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION - CREATING THE NORTHEAST AND BECOMING THE SEMIARID

*O homem chega já desfaz a natureza  
Tira gente põe represa, diz que tudo vai mudar  
O São Francisco lá pra cima da Bahia  
Diz que dia menos dia, vai subir bem devagar  
E passo a passo, vai cumprindo a profecia  
Do beato que dizia que o sertão ia alagar  
O sertão vai virar mar  
Dói no coração  
O medo que algum dia  
O mar também vire sertão!  
O sertão vai virar mar  
Adeus Remanso, Casanova, Sento Sé  
Adeus Pilão Arcado veio o rio te engolir!*

Man arrives and undoes nature  
Removes the people and puts in a dam,  
Saying that everything was going to change  
The San Francisco up there at the top of Bahia  
They say that day by day, it's slowly going to be  
submerged  
And step by step, it will fulfill the prophecy  
Of the saint who said that the *sertão* would be  
inundated  
The *sertão* is going to turn into the sea!  
My heart aches at the fear that one day  
The sea might also turn into the *sertão*  
Goodbye Remanso, Casanova, Sento Sé  
Goodbye Pilão Arcado, I will see the river  
swallow you!

So starts a Brazilian pop song by Sa and Guarabyra from the 1970s that describes the creation of the lake of Sobradinho by the Sobradinho dam, which engulfed four cities whole (Pilão Arcado, Remanso, Casanova, Sento Sé), portions of the rural areas of the municipalities of Xique Xique and Juazeiro, and dozens of small communities, ultimately displacing approximately 70,000 residents. I first heard this song sung at the 2005 Sobradinho *Semana Social* (a regional social forum), a gathering of communities that surround the lake. In attendance were residents of the relocated communities mentioned in the song, as well as several others which surround the Sobradinho lake. Attendees sang the song with the musical accompaniment of youth from the town of Sobradinho and the crowd participated by singing and waving good-bye to the submersed communities—the reconstructed versions of which many at the forum now lived. It was obvious, by the

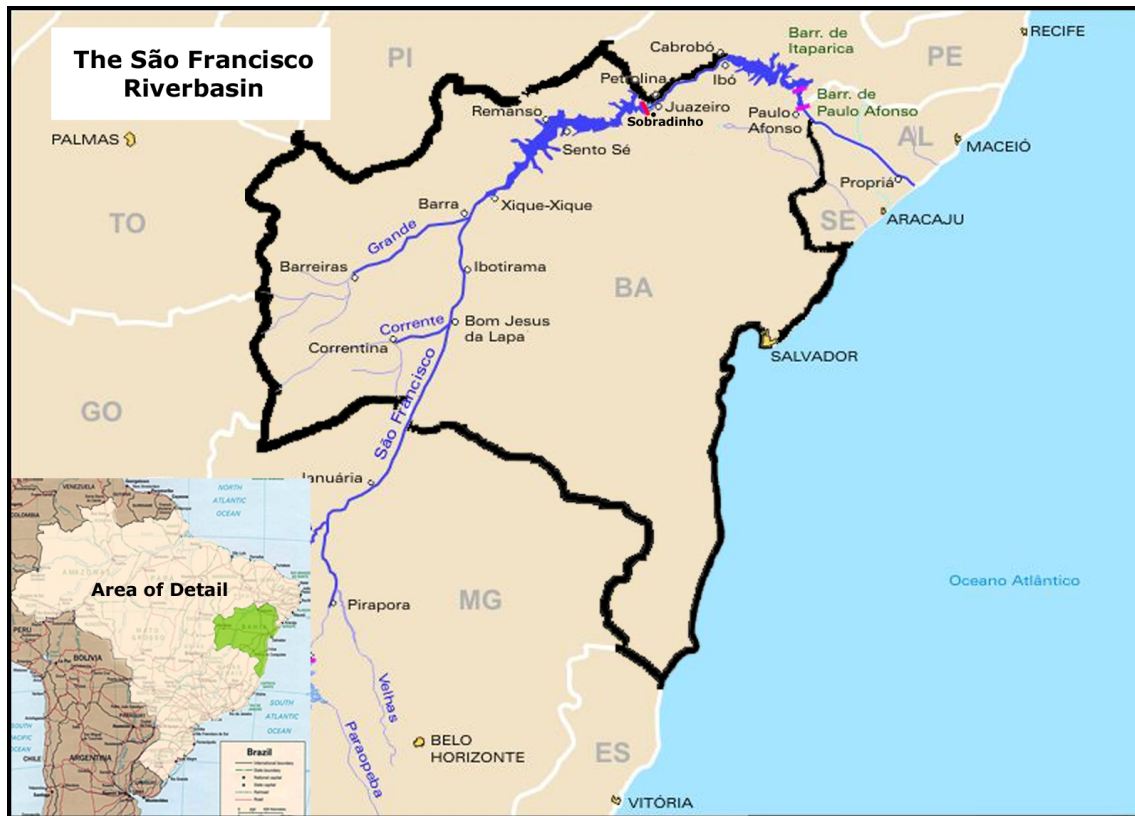
enthusiasm, that most in attendance were familiar with the song. This song, which was popular nationwide when it was released, inserted the dam into the national imaginary. It made light of the inundation, but also recognized the destructiveness of the dam with its allusion to residents' sense that the world was turning upside down with the *sertão* turning into the sea.<sup>1</sup> For many in Brazil this song may have been their only perception of the Sobradinho dam at the time of the dam's construction. But for those who lived and now live in the town of Sobradinho, the dam was and is, in many ways, central their community's existence. This song makes a direct connection between events of the 1890s at the site of Canudos and construction of the dam. The "saint" (*beato*) that the lyrics refer to is Antônio Conselheiro, who was the religious leader of Canudos, the site of a millenarian religious community in the *sertão* of the state of Bahia. This religious community caught the attention of the newly founded Republican government of Brazil because of a belief that it was part of a monarchist plot to overthrow that government. The events at Canudos are still significant to many who live in the *sertão* because they are seen to be central to the region's entrance into the national imaginary and are often seen as a form of *sertanejo*<sup>2</sup> resistance to those in power. By connecting the events at Canudos with the creation of the dam this song participates in a broader discourse about the Northeast that helps to form a sense of regional coherence and indeed helps to create the Northeast itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *sertão* refers to the semiarid brushlands of the interior of the Northeast of Brazil. The term literally means "the backlands."

<sup>2</sup> Residents of the *sertão*.





**Figure 1: Map of the São Francisco River Basin**

The *sertão*, the term popularly used to describe the semiarid region which covers more than 895,000 square kilometers of the interior of the states of Bahia, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Alagoas, Sergipe, Pernambuco, Ceará, and Maranhão, has often been considered synonymous with the *Nordeste* (the Northeast).<sup>3</sup> However, climactically speaking, the Northeast is comprised of three zones: the *zona da mata* (the forest zone, now largely deforested) which covers the coastal areas and which receives 1,500-2,000 mm of rainfall per year; the *agreste*, which serves as an intermediate zone between the humid coast and the semiarid interior and which receives 1,000-1,400 mm of

<sup>3</sup> The Brazilian semiarid region also includes the northern part of the state of Minas Gerais, which is classified as part of the Southeast region of the country. The Southeast includes the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo. The semiarid region is also known as the “drought polygon.”

rain per year; and the *semi-árido* (the semiarid), which receives 400-800 mm of rain fall annually.<sup>4</sup>

In this study I will alternately use the terms semiarid and *sertão* to describe the areas of the states of Bahia, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Alagoas, Sergipe, Pernambuco, Ceará, Maranhão, and Minas Gerais that possess semiarid ecological conditions, in order to avoid repetition. While the term *sertão* is more common in popular parlance, I will often opt for the term “the semiarid,” which is the preferred term of a number of research and activist groups in the region who are trying to rework popular (and often pejorative) representations of the area. Semiarid is preferred both because it does not conjure a host of negative imagery (as the *sertão* does) and also because it more accurately describes the specificity of the climactic and ecological conditions of the region.

When I refer to the São Francisco Valley in this study, I am referring to the area also called the lower-middle São Francisco, which spans the river course from the Sobradinho dam until the town of Belo Monte, Alagoas. It includes Sobradinho and areas further downstream, including, Juazeiro and Petrolina. The term São Francisco Valley is frequently used synonymously with the areas surrounding Juazeiro and Petrolina, where agroindustry has sprung up over the past three decades. When I use the term, “the Sobradinho Lake region,” I am referring to the area that spans both the middle and lower-middle São Francisco, referring specifically to the municipalities that surround the

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<sup>4</sup> To get a comparable sense of the area’s climate and environment, the two climactic regions with similar climates and ecologies are the southern African bush country of the Karoo and Kalahari and the Australian Outback. Semiarid climates are generally considered to be those with an average rainfall of 250-500 mm/year. The Brazilian *caatinga* (brushlands), is the densest in vegetation of these three semiarid areas and in some parts of the *caatinga* the average rainfall is slightly higher on average than other semiarid areas.

Sobradinho Lake: Sobradinho, Sento Sé, Casa Nova, Pilão Arcado, and Xique Xique, and sometimes Juazeiro and Petrolina (even though they do not sit on the lake's edge).

The São Francisco River cuts across the semiarid, flowing 3,200 miles to the sea. Known as the “river of national unity” because it transects the north and south of the country, it plays a role as an imaginary bridge between the south and northeast, especially since the nation-building efforts of the 1950s. The São Francisco River now has six hydroelectric dams along its course, which are key sites for energy generation for the North and Northeast of Brazil. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century the area was populated by landed cattle ranchers whose herds provided meat, leather, and work animals for the sugarcane producing coastal areas of the country.<sup>5</sup> These herds were cared for by tenant share-cropping farmers and *vaqueiros* (cowboys) of the region. Cattle ranching and flood-plain agriculture remained the central economic activities in the region until the 1970s.

The town of Sobradinho is located in the northwest corner of the state of Bahia, approximately 12 hours by bus from the state capital of Salvador. Situated on the São Francisco River it makes up part of the São Francisco River Valley or, more specifically, the lower-middle São Francisco. Approximately 48 kilometers away from Sobradinho lie the two cities of Juazeiro and Petrolina, which sit on opposite banks of the São Francisco River in the states of Bahia and Pernambuco, respectively. Since the 1970s, and especially since the completion of the dam in 1979, these two municipalities have witnessed a swift change from the once dominant cattle-raising economy of the area's landed elite to the rapid spread of irrigated agriculture on agro-industrial plantations. In addition to cattle raising, agricultural production has always existed in the area, both

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<sup>5</sup> These large estates were called *latifúndia*.

conducted by tenant farmers on the lands of large property owners (largely cotton grown for the market, in addition to subsistence food production), and on *terra devoluta* (unclaimed land). Most people living on the river's edge (often referred to as *beiradeiros* or *ribeirinhos*) survived on a combination of fishing, flood-based agriculture on small islands along the river's edge (*agricultura da vazante*), dry-land rain fed agriculture, and tending livestock.

This dissertation is about the residents of the town of Sobradinho, created as a settlement for the workers who would build the Sobradinho dam from 1973 to 1979. The neighboring municipalities of Juazeiro and Petrolina have seen a rapid rise in traditional economic indicators since the 1980s, and thus, representations the lower-middle São Francisco Valley have focused on the economic boom that has seemingly occurred in the entire region. However, I focus instead on understandings and practices of the economy in Sobradinho, or more particularly, the *diverse economy* of the town, because the regional “economic boom” has not been experienced in this town in quite the same way as it has in neighboring municipalities. Accordingly, this dissertation is an ethnography of the existence and creation of *practices of economic difference* in the town of Sobradinho, Bahia. By practices of economic difference, I am referring to forms of economic practice which could be called non-capitalist, meaning that they neither conform to a pure market-based logic, although they may or may not be articulated with market-based practices. Geographers Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) have argued that most critical political-economic discourses portray capitalism as having such hegemonic force and dominance that all other forms of economy are consequentially seen as either subordinate to

capitalism or about to eventually become capitalism. Gibson-Graham argue that such discourses foreclose the possibility that many economic practices might serve as forms of non-capitalisms or forms of economic difference in their own right. Some examples of forms of economic difference could be subsistence economies, cooperative ventures, or feudal situations.

In examining these projects and residents' understandings of them, this ethnography charts the politics of economic possibility in a particular place, a place which has been dramatically impacted by changing development and economic models. I will examine some of the ways in which residents engage in various forms of economic practice which constitute forms of non-capitalisms or which cannot be reduced to a market-based logic. This dissertation is also about the political potential of these projects, which have broader ramifications for understanding localized responses to shifting market and labor models under what is often termed neoliberal globalization. By documenting these responses, I hope to provide a vision of hope amidst the often bleak landscape of the impacts of neoliberal restructuring. As the dam led to the introduction of a canal-based irrigation system and the consequent proliferation of large agro-industrial firms, the residents of Sobradinho found themselves feeling largely "excluded" from these rapid developments. This has happened at the same time that capitalist production relations have become further entrenched in many areas of the São Francisco River Valley. This dissertation will address how residents of Sobradinho both struggle with and engage with market-based models of the economy and, also, how their struggles represent

different models and understandings of the economy. These might offer possibilities for non-market-oriented economic transformations.

As a project about Sobradinho, this dissertation discusses the processes that gave rise to a sense of “exclusion” from traditional economic growth. It is also an interrogation of dominant economic representations and understandings of Sobradinho and more broadly the *sertão* and the Northeast. Since it is located in the Northeast and the *sertão*, the history of the town needs to be understood in the context of the history of state intervention in the semiarid, and in the context of historical forms of marginalization of residents of the Northeast. The Brazilian Northeast is commonly characterized in mainstream development literature as a place of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and drought—all of which help to classify it as a “problem” region. In the colonial era, the region was largely governed by the will of patriarchal landowners, called *coroneis*<sup>6</sup>, who ran their large cattle-raising *latifúndia*<sup>7</sup> and agricultural plantations on slave labor and later on semi-feudal relations that were upheld by a system of patronage-based politics, or when that was not effective, by the use of violence on the part of their personal “police” forces. This history, and the images and tropes that are used to describe it, serve to distill an understanding of the region as one which “clearly” needs state or international intervention.

However, relatively early on in the rise of developmentalist thinking, Josué de Castro, former Council Chairman at the Food and Agriculture Organization intervened

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<sup>6</sup> *Coroneis*, plural of *coronel*, meaning colonel. *Coroneis* are Northeastern patriarchal landowners who are the heads of large extended households, who once held a monopoly on local political power, and who still maintain a large degree of political clout and influence in local political affairs.

<sup>7</sup> *Latifúndia*: a large landed estate.

with the landmark book, *The Geography of Hunger* (1952). In this book he refuted developmental economic theories and made the bold assertion that hunger was not caused by insufficient food supply, but by the national and international political order. He overtly countered neo-Malthusian arguments and instead argued that hunger was due to the misuse of human and natural resources. Particular to the Brazilian Northeast, de Castro highlights that social and political factors are to blame for the inadequate food intake, not natural factors (1952: 97). In particular, de Castro blames what he sees as the two “evils” of monocrop agriculture and the *latifúndia* (large estates) for the situation (1952: 98).

Despite de Castro’s early intervention, the tropes used to represent the Northeast would shift to a discourse around “underdevelopment” in the 1950s, facilitating a particularly economistic view of the Northeast. Sobradinho, as a community that emerged out of the construction of a hydroelectric dam, represents one of the outcomes of a long history of interventions in the region. Despite that the dam construction was posed as one of the “solutions” for the region’s problems, today Sobradinho could still be (problematically) described using the same tropes as those used to describe the Northeast. Indeed, as we will see in this dissertation, many of these negative understandings of place are held by residents. However, this work seeks to participate in a reconstructive project of understanding the economy of Sobradinho in particular, and the Northeast in general. The aim is to open a discursive space that allows us to see the region’s existing and potential economy through a different lens, one that is not dominated by visions of lack or “backwardness.” This dissertation connects with a broader project of residents,

scholars, and activists of the semi-arid who seek to re-vision the potentialities of the region, thereby countering hegemonic representations of it. This project will be discussed at further length in this chapter, and throughout the dissertation.

Images of the “neediness” of residents have centered on those who are seen to be *flagelados* (victims of the drought) or *retirantes* (migrants), people who have been forced to flee due to lack of water. These images have been used to rationalize the implementation of a series of water-based development interventions in the area since the late 1870s. These projects are often referred to by critics as forming the “drought industry,” a term referring to the ways in which state and local elite benefit from state interventions that are supposed to “solve” the drought problem. Once it was determined by state planning authorities in the late 1950s that the problems of drought would be solved by removing subsistence farmers from the believed precarity of subsistence farming, state policy shifted away from solving the “drought problem” to creating forms of waged employment for the Northeastern population.<sup>8</sup> In 1964 Brazil witnessed a military coup, bringing to power a regime intent on national economic growth, which in the Northeast would manifest as twin strategies for the expansion of the generation of electricity and the expansion of export-oriented agricultural development. The Sobradinho dam was approved in the early 1970s and was first part of the Brazilian military regime’s strategy to generate hydroelectric power along the São Francisco River for the industrialization of the Northeast. This strategy shifted in the mid-1970s to focus on developing the infrastructure for the expansion of agro-industry to turn the São

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<sup>8</sup> This plan is introduced with the report entitled “A Policy for the Economic Development of the Northeast” produced by the Working Group for Development of the Northeast (GTDN) in 1959. It will be discussed further detail later in this introduction.



Francisco River Valley (particularly around the cities of Juazeiro and Petrolina) into a development pole. But before I examine these processes, I will first address how it was that an area called the “Northeast” came to exist.

### **“Two Brazils” and the Creation of the Northeast**

Central to understanding the existence of the “Northeast” is an elite discourse about the existence of “Two Brazils.” In this dualistic vision, Brazil is seen as culturally and economically divided between the rural areas and the urban centers. Tied to this division is a series of connotations, with urban Brazil standing in as cosmopolitan, modern, and civilized, and with rural Brazil representing the provincial, “backward,” and primitive. These divisions take on a regional aspect as the rural and backward is often read as the Northeast and the urban and modern is read as the Center-South of the country. As we will see below, this discourse emerges in the early 1900s when the official discourse came to incorporate this notion of “two Brazils,” one urban and one rural, with a huge gap which separating them (Löwy 1997: 125). Of course, this discourse echoes in many ways the paternalistic First World-Third World dialectic, in which one is seen to be cosmopolitan, modern, and civilized, and the other provincial, backward, and primitive. This “division” was to serve as a rationale for development interventions through the second half of the twentieth century. In Brazil, the contrast between the “two Brazils,” one rural and backward and one urban and modern, would provide ideological rationalization for the relationship between the South of Brazil and the North, which would manifest as strategies towards nation-building and towards creating “national unity” in the period following World War II.

A sense of this “divide” first emerges when the drought of 1877-79 drew the Imperial government’s attention to the North (only later did it become known as the Northeast) for the first time. This drought posed a problem for the Imperial Brazilian government, less because of the drought itself and the suffering of the *sertão*’s inhabitants, but rather because it coincided with an economic downturn in the area that affected the large ranchers and which sent thousands of *sertanejos* (inhabitants of the backlands) into the urban centers. As a consequence of the drought, the government established the Imperial Commission of Inquiry in 1877 to, as it claimed, address the problem of drought in the area. The commission recommended “technical changes” (in absence of the recognition of their “social” effects) such as improvements to harbors, railroad networks, and the construction of twenty dams (World Bank 1983: 27). Although the great tragedy of the drought was the starvation and flight of thousands of *sertanejos*, governmental opinion was that technological improvements and constructions, rather than addressing the vast social inequalities in the region, would somehow solve the problems of the Northeast. In current popular imaginings of the Northeast, both from *Nordestinos* (Northeasterners) and those living in the Center-South, drought figures prominently as one of the “causes” of the “backwardness” of the region.

#### *The War and Massacre at Canudos*

In 1891, sixteen years after the drought of 1877 and four years after the founding of the Republic of Brazil, the Northeast, still known as “the North,” again drew the attention of government officials when a popular, messianic movement led by the charismatic Antônio Conselheiro drew thousands of *sertanejos* to create a city at Canudos

in the interior of the state of Bahia. Conselheiro's popularity was such that within two years Canudos was the second largest city in Bahia, after the capital city of Salvador. Conselheiro's message was clear: his followers were to deny the sovereignty of the Brazilian state and create their own community, which shunned property, paying of taxes, and other institutional forms (Chilcote 1990: 242). The large property owners in the region demanded government action to control this "uprising" of what they considered to be their labor force. The leaders of the four-year-old Republic, perceiving a potential threat to the tenuous unity of the young nation-state, laid siege to the settlement from 1893 to 1897, eventually massacring most of the community. The Brazilian military, fearing a public outcry against the attack, represented the battle to the public as a Monarchist plot that threatened the new republic. In 1902, Euclides Da Cunha published the novel *Os Sertões*, which related the actual story of the massacre, which introduced the misery of the inhabitants of the backlands to the elites of urban and coastal Brazil, in particular those living in the South of the country.

Mario Vargas Llosa's account of Canudos in *The War of the End of the World* represents the community's denunciation of property, money, taxes, marriage, and other institutional constructs as representative of an ultimate denial of the imagined unity of the modern nation-state. By critiquing these forms, the elite believed that the inhabitants were also refusing what were considered to be the markers of modernity and civilization, and thereby were denying "progress" in favor of atavism and religious fanaticism. Canudos made visible the lack of unity within the young republic, though ironically, the later release of *Os Sertões* produced the very sense of national community that the

military rulers were striving to create, despite the military's attempt to represent Canudos as a Monarchist plot. In consequence, the problems of the *sertanejos* (poverty, illiteracy, lack of technology) came to be envisioned as national problems.

Despite Da Cunha's sympathy for the plight of the residents of Canudos, notions of atavism and social Darwinian ideas of purity underpinned his representation as he claimed that the events at Canudos were the result of geography, climate and race (Levine 1992: 17). In the 1870s Brazilian intellectuals had already expressed concern over the mixed race population of the backlands, who were seen as illiterate, ignorant, and superstitious *matutos*<sup>9</sup>. Important to understanding elite configurations of the Northeast at this time are racist fears of the Northeast as a backward, poverty-ridden place. Although these notions of difference were reinforced by the writings of da Cunha and the construction of supposed racial difference between the regions, they had their roots in the history of colonialism, slavery and later the founding of the Brazilian Republic. The perceptions of racial difference are significant to the historical forms of marginalization of the region and its residents and will be discussed further in this chapter.<sup>10</sup> First we should examine how the "Northeast" became consolidated as a national region.

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<sup>9</sup> *Matutos* was a term used for persons from the *sertão* of European, African and Indigenous descent which no longer in common use.

<sup>10</sup> Actual numbers of the racial composition of the Northeast are complicated by the census's use of the term *pardo* (brown) to describe anyone of mixed ancestry, a term which is not used in popular parlance or as a self-descriptor by those forced to select it in census takings. Afro-Brazilians frequently use the ambiguous term *moreno/a* or, increasingly, the racially affirmative *negro/a*.

### *Consolidation of the Northeast*

At the time of the events at Canudos, and even through the release of *Os Sertões* in 1902, the Northeast was known simply as the “North” of Brazil. Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. argues that the term “*o Nordeste*” (the Northeast) first emerged in a 1919 document of the Federal Inspectorate of Anti-Drought Works (*Inspeccoria Federal de Obras Contra as Secas*, IFOCS) to designate the area in which the federal agency would conduct its work (1996: 68).<sup>11</sup> In this institutional IFOCS discourse, the Northeast was seen as a subregion of the North; a subregion which was subject to periodic drought and was thus deserving of special resources from the federal government.<sup>12</sup> This is to start a pattern of dispersal of state funds to the region which would later be termed the “drought industry.”<sup>13</sup> De Albuquerque clearly sees the IFOCS policy of setting up “earmarks” for the region as placing the region in a position of a permanent rentier and as a victim in “need of help.” According to de Albuquerque, the linking of the “Northeast” with anti-drought works in this 1919 document indicates that, “The Northeast, in large measure, is the child of drought: an imaginary-discursive product of a series of images and texts,

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<sup>11</sup> IFOCS was the new designation for the previously established agency, the Superintendency of Studies and Works against the Effects of Drought, established in 1909. This agency was to cement the connection between the region and the drought industry, referring to its use by local elite to obtain resources to fund projects for the victims of the drought. In 1934, Article 177 of the Federal Constitution allocated 4% of annual federal tax revenues to address the problem of drought in the Northeast; this concession would later be omitted in the 1937 New State of Getúlio Vargas (Chilcote 1990: 12). In the 1940s the name of this agency would shift to *Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra Sêcas*, (DNOCS, the National Department of Anti-Drought Works).

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly (but not surprisingly) enough, local politicians cast their districts as part of this “problem region.” They petitioned to have their municipalities included in what would become known as the “drought polygon” so that they would have access to federal funds that were earmarked for drought-prone areas.

<sup>13</sup> The term would only gain currency in 1958 when charges of graft and corruption were made towards officials involved in the federally funded DNOCS (National Department of Anti-Drought Works, *Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra Sêcas*) when information about the dispersal of relief monies came to public light.

produced in respect to this phenomenon, since the major drought of 1877 placed it as the most important problem of this area (1996: 68).” It continued to be the key descriptive trope for the region along with representations of banditry (*cangaço*) and religious messianic movements, such as that of Canudos.<sup>14</sup> Although not addressed by de Albuquerque, I would add that representations of *coronelismo* and patronage politics are also strong descriptive tropes for the Northeast, as they recur in planning documents from the mid-twentieth century onwards— often cited as one of the reasons that the population had to be saved from “backward” social practices. These representations demonstrate the processes whereby Northeast was designated a “problem region.” This designation had already emerged, in part, with earlier discourses about “Two Brazils,” but it was further consolidated with the region’s close association with the drought problem.

The term “*o Nordeste*” gets cemented in the 1920s and 1930s through a discourse produced by both academics and elite in Recife, Pernambuco.<sup>15</sup> De Albuquerque argues that the Northeast got cemented as a region in the imaginary landscape of Brazil in the 1920s as a response to strategies of nationalization, as well as to the early globalization of economic and social relations (1999: 77). This discourse characterizes the Northeast in romantic terms as a place of tradition and folklore, thereby glossing over class conflict

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<sup>14</sup> One of the most famous depictions of *cangaço* and religious messianism is the film *Deus e Diabo no Terra do Sol* (1964, known in English as *Black God, White Devil*), directed by Glauber Rocha. The film depicts the life of a landless worker, Manuel, who due to lack of pay and disrespect by his employers converts to a life of banditry (*cangaço*). He rebels against and terrorizes the wealthy, landed elite of the Northeast while fleetingly involved with a messianic religious movement. This film is considered to be expressive of Glauber’s critique of and frustration with the Catholic Church, the Brazilian government, and the corrupt landed elite in Brazil.

<sup>15</sup> Most notably, anthropologist Gilberto Freyre was largely responsible for these representations, as his work on both the culture of the Northeast and on Brazil represented the Northeast as a place where there was little racial animosity. He is considered partially responsible for founding the myth of a “racial democracy” that persists among many Brazilians of European descent, which is premised on an erroneous belief that racism does not exist in Brazil.

and racial tensions that existed in the region. Similar to Raymond Williams' (1973) analysis of the city-rural divide in English literature, these representations of the Northeast are really a "myth functioning as memory." The condensation of the Northeast as a region happened at a time of modernizing state relations, with the concentration of bureaucratic state power in the Centre-South and nationalization of bureaucratic relations. This would be further exemplified by the introduction of the Northeast as a national regional category by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in 1940 (Vainer e Araújo 1992: 22).

Therefore we can see how modernizing state relations helped produce a sense that the region was imbued with "tradition"; it only became possible to think of the "traditional" (or backward) Northeast at a moment when the state was focusing on modernist visions (de Albuquerque 1999: 77). De Albuquerque argues that because of this, the Northeast should be understood as a child of modernity, not outside of modernity as the notion of "two Brazils" would suggest.<sup>16</sup>

### *A Racialized Geography*

We cannot understand the dichotomous distinction of "two Brazils" without an examination of how this notion also produces a racialized geography. This racialized geography repeats some of the earlier binaries of "two Brazils." We should recall that

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<sup>16</sup> Although de Albuquerque's work (to my knowledge) was not written in dialogue with the writers of the modernity/coloniality working group (Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo), his argument is in keeping with Quijano's (1995) assertion that coloniality is the underside of modernity. By coloniality he means that colonial relations of oppression and domination were central to the processes of Latin American nation-building. Essentially "'coloniality' refers to [the existence of] colonial situations after the demise of colonial administration" (cited in Medeiros 2005: 18). Further he and other modernity/coloniality theorists argue that foundational to the dynamic of modernity is a dynamic of inclusion-exclusion; more and more peoples were included in the expansion of Europe, but at the same time the mechanism of their exclusion constructed them as the "Other" or the non-modern (Medeiros 2005: 18).

when the region entered into the national imaginary with da Cunha's work and national understandings of the inhabitants of the region were influenced by da Cunha's racialized depictions. Although attempting to be sympathetic, his notions were influenced by Social Darwinism of the era which saw the region as one in which climate, geography and race came together. Such understandings of the racial "difference" and the assumed inferiority of the *sertanejos* have their roots in the history of colonialism in Brazil. Quijano argues that race as a category of difference and distinction is central to the colonial domination of the Americas: the codification of differences and hierarchy between the conquerors and conquered was established through the idea of "race" (2000: 533). The idea of race was fundamental to the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power and in the Americas race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing (Quijano 2000: 535-36). Tied to these categories and the process of colonization was the domination and subjugation of other forms of knowledge and the expropriation of the cultural discoveries of the colonized, models of production of meaning, constructed symbolic universes, modes of expression, and objectification of subjectivities (Quijano 2000: 541). The colonized were forced to learn the ways of the dominant culture as their cognitive perspectives and their modes of producing and giving meaning were colonized (Quijano 2000: 541). This is what Quijano calls "the colonality of power."

Therefore, in the notion of "Two Brazils" we can identify what Quijano asserts was the creation of a new temporal perspective of history by Europeans, which relocated the colonized population, along with their histories and cultures, to the past, and with a



historical trajectory that would culminate in Europe (2000: 541). Modernity and rationality were seen to be exclusively European products and experiences—codified in a play of new categories: East/West, primitive/civilized, magic-mythic/scientific, irrational/rational, traditional/modern—Europe and not Europe (2000: 542). Quijano explains how colonial difference established a system based on race and temporal displacement. His analysis can be applied to representations of *sertanejos*, as their difference was read both as racial difference and as cultural “backwardness”; equally, this differentiation was applied to the entire Northeast. It also accounts for the racialization of the region, whereby those of mixed descent were seen to be racially inferior to those of European origin, but were also thought to be morally and intellectually backward. As we will see, one culmination of this racist ideology is the rationalization of their use in economic planning as a “cheap” labor force that would contribute to the ultimate goal of “developing” this “backward” region for the progress of the nation.

### **Droughts, Underdevelopment, and Development Poles: the Regional Economy of Sobradinho and the São Francisco Valley**

During the post World War II years the São Francisco River Valley, particularly the area surrounding Juazeiro and Petrolina (the lower-middle San Francisco), became a focus of federal policy in the Northeast. The years from 1910 to 1950 marked the “modernization” of the sugar industry in the *zona da mata* of the Northeast as it switched from a tenant-based agricultural system to one based on wage labor, yet these changes did not affect the *sertão* as dramatically. In the area surrounding the Juazeiro and Petrolina, the cattle industry, run by the landed elite, remained the dominant form of market-based economic activity in the region. At this time, small-holders’ and tenant

farmers' livelihoods were largely based on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and animal husbandry, with the additional sale of surplus to large landowners or at weekly markets in the area. Accordingly, the region surrounding the São Francisco Valley drew little notice by the federal government until the years following World War II.

The post-war years marked the crystallization of the development discourse in international geo-politics and also the second phase of nation building Latin America. Escobar (1995) has noted that the development discourse crystallized during the decade following World War II. The organizing premise of the discourse was a belief that modernization was the only force capable of destroying archaic superstitions and social relations. Under the development discourse, industrialization and urbanization were seen to be both inevitable and necessary, leading to “progress” and modernization. Material advancement, in effect participation in the market economy, was seen as the only way in which social, cultural, and political progress could be achieved (Escobar 1995: 39). State projects oriented towards industrialization were common throughout Brazil in this period and reflected such modernizing aims. In the São Francisco Valley this resulted in State plans for the generation of hydroelectric energy along the river's course which would later culminate in the Paulo Afonso dam (1955) and the Sobradinho dam (1974). The effects of hydroelectric production on residents of the São Francisco Valley were seen as peripheral to the primary goal of energy production. The chart below provides the reader with a summary of major events and development interventions in the region from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the late 1970s.

Year / Era	Event
1877	First National Commission of Inquiry on Drought established. First large dam (Quixadá) started
1893-1897	War and Massacre of Canudos
1902	Release of Euclides da Cunha's <i>Os Sertões</i>
1910-1950	Period of "modernization of the sugar industry in the <i>zona da mata</i>
1919	IFOCS (Federal Inspectorate of Anti-Drought Works) policy document first uses the term " <i>Nordeste</i> " to describe the region eligible for receipt of emergency drought earmarks
1940	First use of the regional term " <i>Nordeste</i> " by the Brazilian Institute of Statistics and Geography (IBGE)
1946	Plan for the Valorization of the São Francisco initiated
1948	Establishment of the São Francisco Valley Commission (CVSF) and the São Francisco Hydroelectric company (CHESF)
1952	Establishment of the Bank of the Northeast (BNB)
1955	Construction initiated on the Paulo Afonso Dam along the São Francisco River
1957	Construction initiated on the Três Marias dam along the upper São Francisco
1959	Creation of SUDENE (the Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast); Report by the Working Group for the Development of the Northeast (the GTDN, under the supervision of SUDENE) released
1968-1973	Period of the Brazilian "Economic Miracle"
1972	Announcement of the Sobradinho Dam Project
1973	Construction begins on the Sobradinho dam
1978	Inauguration of the Sobradinho Dam (construction continued until 1979)

**Table 1: Select list of events marking the creation of the Northeast to the establishment of the São Francisco Valley and Sobradinho regions.**

The initial result of these nation-building policies for the Northeast was the establishment of the São Francisco Valley Commission (*Comissão do Vale do São Francisco*, CVSF) and the São Francisco Hydroelectric Company (*Companhia Hidroelétrica do São Francisco*, CHESF) in 1948.<sup>17</sup> The CVSF was modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the United States, a regional planning model that was exported internationally reflecting the geopolitics of development of the era. CHESF was created with the goal of creating electricity for the Northeast, fueling its industrialization and development, while the CVSF was to take on the "drought problem" through a focus on small dam construction and other small projects—a task that was

<sup>17</sup> CHESF is also the same hydroelectric company that would later be responsible for the construction of the Sobradinho dam.

starting to appear passé by the mid-1950s (Hirschman 1968: 58).<sup>18</sup> This period marked a shift in the State's former focus on solving the "drought problem" (although drought would still be used to characterize the region both in state and popular discourse) to a focus on "development" and economic growth (industrialization), which were as the goals of federal policy and action in the region.

Vainer and Araújo assert that this is the same era in which the "regional question" emerges—a question which aligns with the "Northeast question" (1992: 19). They assert that these "questions" should really be termed "State questions" because ultimately the Northeast is only a topic of concern in relation to the consolidation of the state and nation-building. Planning documents from the era cite the "recuperation" and the "valorization" of the São Francisco Valley as part of an effort to "strengthen national unity" and to "affirm the unity of the country."<sup>19</sup> The 1946 Plan for the Valorization of the São Francisco stated that the area would serve as a "transition zone" between the perceived social-cultural differences of Northeast and the Centre-South, as it was an area whose "civilization . . . will be a synthesis, a transition between the civilizations that developed in the northeast, in the centre, and the south."<sup>20</sup> Here again we can see the echoes of "two Brazils" and the civilizing mission that development of the São Francisco Valley was to accomplish. This plan marked the first attempt at regional planning in the

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<sup>18</sup> At this time CHESF largely focused its energies on the construction of the Paulo Afonso dam on the São Francisco River in 1955.

<sup>19</sup> From a 1957 CVSF document and a 1955 Ministry of Transport document, cited in Sigaud (1988: 90).

<sup>20</sup> From a 1946 document, printed in 1957 by the São Francisco Valley Commission, entitled "*A Valorização do Vale do São Francisco*," cited in Sigaud (1988: 91).

country as it was designed to take advantage of all the “economic possibilities of the São Francisco River and its effluents (in Sigaud 1988: 91).”

These attempts at regional economic planning were later furthered with the creation of the Bank of the Northeast (*Banco do Nordeste*) in 1951. The bank was supposed to herald a shift from the previous “narrow engineering” approach to the problems of the region to one that would encompass a “broad economic” approach (Hirschman 1968: 55). To emphasize a shift in regional focus, the bank was established in the Northeastern city of Fortaleza, whereas CHESF, the CVSF, and DNOCs had all been headquartered in the South, in Rio de Janeiro. The shift towards a “broad economic” approach fit with the nation-building spirit of the era in which the region’s economy was to be boosted to fit into the needs of “growing the national economy.” This same period (1951-52) marked a shift towards an emphasis on economic figures that were read to indicate the large disparity between the economy of the Northeast and the economy of Center-South Brazil. This served to create and mark the empirical “reality” of the Northeast as economically “different” from the Center-South (Hirschman 1968: 66-67). Northeastern difference in this case, read though a civilizational discourse, was seen as the economic and social “backwardness” of the area compared to the Center-South. Most major economic studies of the Northeast from 1951-52 onward focused on this economic gap (Hirschman 1968: 67). Proposed solutions to the problems of the region had shifted away from the “drought problem” towards narrowing the economic gap between the regions. Again this reflected the continuity of the discourse of two Brazils as one was “backwards” and “rural” and the Center-South was “modern,” “urban,” and “developed.”

However, in this case, difference was marked not through the lens of race, culture, or geography, but rather “the Economy” became the marker of difference. Consequently, intervention into the Economy became the route to “fixing” the problems of the Northeast. More importantly, these problems were seen as not just regional, but national problems.

Gibson-Graham in their analysis of regional subjection in the Latrobe Valley in Australia highlight how “the numbers” (referring to economic calculation) come to be seen as representative of the objective reality of the valley (2006: 27). They cite the work of Theodore Porter (1995) who argues that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards numbers have grown in importance to projects of governmentality, as they imply objectivity, impersonality, and “the subordination of personal interests and prejudices to public standards (1995:74).” Similarly, the economic gap cited in the economic reports about the Center-South and the North marked the unquestionable difference between the regions. Policy from this era onward was oriented towards growing the numbers, particularly through a focus on industrialization and what industrialization required: electric energy. Vainer and Araújo (1992) have noted how national development policy shifted from a focus on “regional planning” (with its initial focus on the Northeast) in the 1950s to a focus on large-scale development projects in the late 1960s and 1970s, most of which were centered on energy production.<sup>21</sup> As I discuss later, residents of Sobradinho, in particular, experience these figures and those like them as constituting the economic reality of their town. Their understanding of the “poor economy” of their town has

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<sup>21</sup> Vainer and Araújo term these projects “*grandes projetos de investimento*” (GPI), or large investment projects (1992: 40).

concomitant effects on their experience and understanding of themselves as regional subjects.

Hydroelectric production in the São Francisco Valley became central to state plans for intervention in the region in the 1950s under the administration of Juscelino Kubitschek. At that time, Lucas Lopes, Minister of Transportation<sup>22</sup>, asserted that rather than a plan that consisted of “a grand policy of small projects,” that the plan for the region should be a “policy of grand projects.”<sup>23</sup> A policy of large-scale projects is, of course, a common phenomenon in the modern nation-state building processes and a way in which the state extends its governing power, and as such, this model would fit with those objectives. This resulted in the construction of the Paulo Afonso dam in 1955 and the Três Marias dam from 1957-1961 in the Upper São Francisco, which provided electric energy for the North and Northeast and the Center-South state of Minas Gerais respectively.

In 1958 under the administration of president Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), Celso Furtado became director of the newly founded Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast (SUDENE) and also director of the Bank of the Northeast.<sup>24</sup> Furtado, a native of the Northeast and an economist with CEPAL (*Comissão Econômica para América Latina*, the Latin American Economic

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<sup>22</sup> The plan was made under the Ministry of Transportation because energy was seen to be part of the infrastructure needed for industrialization (Sigaud 1988: 92).

<sup>23</sup> As we will see, there continues to be a large rift between those who believe in small-scale solutions to the problems of the region and those who support large projects, as evidenced by the debates surrounding the 2005 announcement of a federal project to redirect the flow of the São Francisco River which will be discussed further on in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> At this time Celso Furtado was the President of the National Bank for Economic Development and was to assist the GTDN in finding new solutions for the problem of the Northeast.

Commission), was known for his work on dependency theory and he applied a dependency theory analysis to the Northeast.<sup>25</sup> In 1959 the Working Group for the Development of the Northeast (*Grupo de Trabalho de para o Desenvolvimento do Nordeste*, GTDN) issued a report entitled “A Policy for the Economic Development of the Northeast.” This report used statistics to convey its indignation with the economic “reality” of the region: “The disparity in income levels is without doubt the most serious problem to be faced in the present stage of our national economic development. This disparity is greater than that between Brazil’s Center-South and the industrial countries of Western Europe (quoted in Hirschman 1968: 74).” This document cemented the shift away from understanding the problems of the region as being the result of drought toward privileging a lens which saw the region in terms of development/underdevelopment (Gomes 1998: 69). The characterization as “underdeveloped” indeed served to create the region, mapping it in strictly developmentalist terms.

While dependency theory emerged from a leftist perspective that intended to counter both internal colonization and also international imperialism, the marking of the region as “underdeveloped” served to reinforce the developmentalist vision and thereby

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<sup>25</sup> Dependency theory was developed by a group of intellectuals from various disciplines who shared a common sensibility (Rist 1997: 109). In Latin America it was elaborated at CEPAL (the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) by Raúl Prebisch, Osvaldo Sunkel, Orlando Fals Borda, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Fernando Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, and Celso Furtado. A classic contribution to dependency theory was introduced by Celso Furtado with his book *Economic Development in Latin America: a survey from colonial times to the Cuban revolution* (1970). Another key contribution was Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s and Enzo Faletto’s *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (1979). Dependency theory was premised on the idea that free trade was favorable to industrial economies because of the differences between their structure and that of dominated or peripheral economies, leading to unequal exchange (Rist 1997: 115). Relations between these economies were defined as center and periphery, with declining terms of trade keeping peripheral economies in a “dependent” position. This would be rectified by import substitution strategies. These theorists also recognized internal forms of class and economic domination that operated on a similar center-periphery model, as was identified in the economic relationship between the Center-South and Northeast of Brazil.



of the necessity of intervention, even if unwittingly. It also served to reinforce the idea that the problems of the region could be solved by intervention into the market economy, particularly through the construction of a national economy. As such, dependency theory reflected a different developmentalist vision, even as it questioned the terms under which much development had been conducted in Brazil to date. State policy from this period forward would seek to address the region's underdevelopment in order to insert it into the national and international economy by spurring industrial production in the region.

Applying Furtado's dependency theory analysis, the GTDN report pointed out that the declining terms of trade were to blame for the situation: the Northeast was a net importer from the Center-South and a net exporter to foreign markets. The region was also represented as "underdeveloped" by the following markers: its dependence on foreign markets and financial interests, inadequate communication and transportation, low productivity, low level of technology, high chances of climactic stress, including low natural fertility and shallow soils (Chilcote 1990: 15). In this description we can see how drought has now become one factor among many that were seen to contribute to the region's "backwardness." According to dependency theory these conditions and the declining terms of trade made the region "dependent" on external markets as it was producing neither food goods nor industrial goods internally. The working group's proposed solution was to fix this situation by creating centers for growth and investment in the Northeast—this would lead to a focus on the São Francisco Valley as the site for creating a "development pole."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The "development pole" concept comes from the work of economist F. Perroux in *L'économie du XXème siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964). In relation to Brazil and the Northeast, Manoel Correia de Andrade elaborated the concept in *Espaço, Polarização e Desenvolvimento: a teoria dos polos de desenvolvimento e a realidade nordestina* (Recife: Centro Regional Administração Municipal, 1967). It

Creating a development pole was to be conducted by utilizing, according to the report, the region's principal comparative advantage: "cheap and abundant labor." Here we see how the human subject gets reduced to a labor cost, which follows from the numerical representation of the "reality" of the region and who will become useful to eliminate the situation of "underdevelopment." In addition, this report characterizes the region's subsistence practices as "extremely rudimentary work techniques and forms of organization" which led to their non-integration with the market and, consequentially, to their precarity during periods of drought (Gomes 1998: 71, citing the 1959 GTDN document). The small farmers' situation of (perceived) precarity therefore marked them as a potential labor force for agro-industry and their work as a wage labor force was to remove them from this situation of precarity. Waged labor, then, gets represented as a way to "protect" those in the region. But, as we will see, insertion into the wage labor market served to put many in a more precarious economic and social situation. Although conducted with "goodwill," this project displays the paternalistic benevolence of these projects and the assumption of the unquestionable "good" of linking with the market. In accordance with developmentalist vision, plans were made for the "surplus population" of the region to emigrate to colonies in Maranhão and areas in Bahia, whereas a "more rational" use of land in the sugar zones was introduced in order to produce cheap food for the industrial labor force (Kutcher and Scandizzo 1981: 14).

After the 1964 military coup, the national economy was restructured to enlarge the internal market for Brazilian-made manufactured goods. The agricultural sector,

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is premised on the idea of focusing investment in a limited number of locations in order to encourage economic activity, in a belief that this would raise levels of well-being in that region.

particularly in the Northeast, was reoriented to become a market for agrochemicals and machinery produced by the industrial sector (largely in the Center-South of the country). The agricultural sector was to help to reduce the deficit balance of payments directly by producing export crops, such as wheat, and indirectly by supplying the export-oriented agro-industrial enterprises with raw materials (Spindel 1987: 53). The coming together of “surplus labor” and the expansion of food production for the internal market marked the area of the São Francisco Valley as a potential development pole in the late 1960s. The area surrounding Juazeiro in particular was labeled as one where “geography and human and physical resources offered some prospect of economic growth and change (Chilcote 1990: 15).” The Northeast now came to be envisioned as a region of untapped wealth, with the *sertanejos* (“cheap and abundant labor”) providing food for the industrial areas of Brazil and for export agriculture that would serve to lower the balance on debt repayments. We will see later in this work how such forms of economic subjection and identification with employment on a farm have impacted residents in the region, in many ways making other alternatives appear inviable.

The processes I have just described (the identification of the “drought problem,” the crystallization of the Northeast, the targeting of the region for development) all gave rise to the creation of a “regional economy” in the Valley, which required development. State programs and projects served to stabilize and naturalize the region and also to help bring about the formation of economic subjects who would identify with these dominant representations of the region, as a place in need of development and economic growth. A sense of regional coherence congealed around certain characterizations of the region: that

its residents were available to serve as “cheap labor,” indeed that they *were* labor; that the region could be utilized for the ends of national economic growth; and, also that the region and its residents were “victims” in need of “emergency funds,” new projects, or insertion into the waged labor market. As the region’s “backward” clientelistic practices were supposed to have held people in bondage, the shift to wage labor was figured as a route towards the region’s “advancement” and “progress.” The existence of these seeming economic realities has given rise to some residents’ belief that the semiarid region is a place of limited possibility. This sense of place (one of limited possibility) took particular form in the São Francisco River Valley and what would later be called the “Sobradinho lake region” as we will discuss in the following section.

#### *Hydroelectric Power as National Development Strategy and the Sobradinho dam*

Since the 1950s generation of hydroelectric power has been a priority of the Brazilian state with Brazil taking what many would argue as the ignominious position of being one of the “leading” dam-building nations in the world in terms of numbers of dams constructed.<sup>27</sup> Approximately 80% of the electric energy used in Brazil comes from hydroelectric power produced at large dams. Therefore, dams must be understood in the context of post-war efforts at Brazilian nation-building with their emphasis on modernization and industrialization by the Brazilian state. Since the administration of President Kubitschek (1956-1961), through the rule of the military regime of the 1960s to mid-1980s, and even until today, hydroelectric dams have remained a central part of Brazil’s industrialization and economic strategy. However, hydroelectric dams did not

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<sup>27</sup> For example, the Movement of Dam-Affected People (MAB) in Brazil estimates that 1,000,000 people have been affected by dam construction Brazil since the 1970s and that 70% of these have not received compensation for their losses.

play a major role until the mid-1970s when the international petroleum crisis hit. At this point, dams were seen as one way to contribute to Brazil's energy independence—a strategic and symbolic position they still hold—along with continued emphasis on ethanol and a growing focus on biodiesel production.

Vainer and Araújo (1992) assert that post-war attempts by the Brazilian state at “regional planning” (which manifested in the establishment of large regional development agencies such as SUDENE in the Northeast in the late 1950s) shifted towards a new form of development planning focused on large-scale development projects (*grande projetos de investimento*, GPI) in the 1970s, signaling the death of “regional planning” as a state development strategy.<sup>28</sup> This new strategy, focused on large-scale development projects, would result in a series of what they term regional “microlocalizations,” which were to be centered on the creation of a growth or development pole. These poles which were established through large-scale projects that required huge amounts of capital investment came to create and define new regions. This focus would reflect the growing influence of the Bretton Woods institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, in encouraging, sponsoring, and funding such projects. The Petrolina-Juazeiro development pole and the creation of the “Sobradinho lake region” demonstrate just one example of the creation of such a region, whose sponsorship came directly from World Bank funding, with equipment such as the turbines originating in the former U.S.S.R.

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<sup>28</sup> As Vainer and Araújo note, this did not result in the immediate destruction of agencies created for regional development, as the various regional development agencies such as SUDENE and SUDAM still exist. However, they have become relatively politically vacuous in effect. It also does not mean that the use of the term “development pole” has been entirely abandoned as development documents up through the early 2000s refer to the Petrolina-Juazeiro development pole when to agro-industrial development in the area.

Therefore, Sobradinho, as a community constructed around and for the construction of a hydro-electric dam should be seen within the broader context of dam building and water-based development projects in Brazil and state strategies oriented towards creating new micro-regions centered around “growth poles” as a path to development. In keeping with the development discourse, the development model at Sobradinho followed the rationale of using the traditional rural sector to fuel the modern sector. In the Northeast, the São Francisco River has played a particularly important role within the broader plan for energy generation in order to industrialize the Northeast. There are currently six large dams along the course of the Rio São Francisco.<sup>29</sup> These dams produce 10,300 megawatts of energy, which is principally consumed by the urban areas of the North and Northeast.<sup>30</sup>

The project for the dam at Sobradinho was announced in 1972 having been put together by the Ministry of Mines and Energy, under the administration of General Emílio Médici, considered one of the most authoritarian governments in Brazilian history (Sigaud 1988: 88). At the early stages the dam was planned to simply regulate the flow of the river in order to guarantee a steady flow for the Paulo Afonso hydroelectric dam, downstream from Sobradinho. Subsidiary objectives were to better the navigability of the river and to create a font of water to irrigate the Project Massangano (a colonization scheme planned by CODEVASF). In 1974, in the midst of the world petroleum crisis and after the dam had been under construction for approximately a year, the project was

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<sup>29</sup> These dams are the Três Marias, Sobradinho, Itaparica, Moxotó, Paulo Afonso, and Xingó.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that only 10% of the energy produced goes to the irrigated areas of the Rio São Francisco. Most of the population living along the river’s edge either is not on the electrical grid or cannot afford the use of electric energy.

amended to include hydroelectric generation. Like other large-scale development projects, Sobradinho was heralded as bringing “progress” to the region—although as we will see in this dissertation and as noted by Vainer and Araújo (1992), these projects rarely bring the promises of modernity to anyone beyond those in the settlements created for the engineers and technicians of these projects. As we will also see below, two local elite families were able to benefit from the rise of agro-industry and consolidate their power in the years following the military coup of 1964, and have remained an important political and economic force in the region (Chilcote 1990). The majority of the capital in the region is national in origin, although not all local, while approximately one-third of the investment in the region is foreign or joint venture (Collins 1993). Much of the actual production is exported internationally to Japanese, European or North American markets or is sold to domestic supermarket chains. New forms of international capitalist investment in this industry were to benefit from the changes introduced by the dam. While some domestic firms and middle-sized farmers have benefited from the irrigation schemes, it could be argued that this was at the expense of small-producers in the region who were uprooted by the lake’s waters.

If the state priority for the São Francisco valley region in the 1950s was to generate hydroelectric power, in the 1970s this plan was consolidated with the Sobradinho dam. Following Vainer and Araújo (1992), Sigaud argues that Sobradinho marked a definitive shift towards conceiving the São Francisco Valley as a regional (economic) unit, with consequent objectives for its economic “valorization.” The first and primary aspect of its valorization was the shift in focus towards the generation of

hydroelectric power. Secondary objectives were to fix the population in place to end migration, the containment of floods, and the establishment of irrigated projects oriented towards the development of agriculture in the region (Sigaud 1988: 92).<sup>31</sup> The creation of the dam and the resulting agro-industry, were part of the regime's attempts to create alternatives to the use of petroleum during the international petroleum crisis of the 1970s—the region would later become one of the largest producers of sugar-cane alcohol used to fuel automobiles, which economists hoped would prevent a crisis in the internal automobile industry centered in the Center-South of the country (Spindel 1987: 65).

The dam was one-third inundated by 1976, with completion on December 1977, and official inauguration in March 1978. Once completed the lake covered a total area of 4,214 square kilometers making it one the largest man-made lakes in the world and resulting in the displacement of approximately 70,000 people. It is beyond the scope of this project to go over all of the details of the relocation of those who were uprooted by the lake's waters. A number of researchers (de Ataíde 1984; Barros 1984; Duqué 1980, 1984; Lima 2004; Martins-Costa 1989; Sandroni 1979; Sigaud 1986, 1988; Siqueira 1992) have conducted studies of the impacts of the Sobradinho dam on the relocated population and also resistance to the compulsory relocation. These studies point to the coercive and contradictory actions of CHESF, the proletarianization of the small producers through the destruction of their livelihood strategies, and the resistance of the population to their removal.

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<sup>31</sup> As we will see, and as Sigaud notes in her work (1988), the stated official conception of the project and its effects were quite different.



However, there are several aspects of the dam planning, population relocation, and dam construction process that are particularly relevant to the questions pursued in this project and I would like to discuss here. These issues are: the representation of the economic activities of the dispossessed population by both CHESF and the associated state planning agencies; the ways in which the rural population was compensated and relocated (showing preferential treatment for the urban population); the authoritarian nature of the removal process (which will be echoed in stories of the founding of Sobradinho); and the popular and Church-based resistance that grew towards the dam, the legacy of which is still present in the lake region until this day.

State planning documents for the dam construction give the impression that the local rural population had little connection to the market and that this population consisted largely of subsistence producers (which, in large part, they were), and also that this population was disconnected from “the market” (which they were not). A 1975 planning document produced by Hidroservice, one of the contractors of CHESF that would handle the relocation, made a link between residents’ supposed “lack of connection” and a “closed” mentality, stating,

The relative isolation that the population lives in, their precarious life and work conditions, does not permit openings in their mental world, nor also the acquisition of social techniques that would conveniently equip them to adapt to new environments.<sup>32</sup>

It is not necessary to comment on the civilizational discourse implied in the representation of the population’s supposed inability to “permit openings in their mental world.” However, I do want to discuss further how the representation of the population as living in relative isolation was exaggerated.

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<sup>32</sup> From the document *Projeto Sobradinho: Plano de Reassentimento para a População atingida pelo Reservatório de Sobradinho. 1975. CHESF/Hidroservice, subsidiary of Eletrobrás.*

Many of the displaced population practiced flood-based farming on the riverbanks or on small river islands or rainwater farming in the dry areas of the *sequeiro*.<sup>33</sup> This same document is contradictory in its representation of the livelihood strategies of the local population. It both asserts that farmers relied on subsistence production (agriculture and fishing), but then goes on to describe the sale of surplus by boat along the São Francisco, at the weekly markets in neighboring towns, to wholesalers in Remanso, or to retailers in the small settlements in the region (1975: 69). Therefore the documents contradictorily imply both the residents' "isolation" and their participation in market-based economic activity. Duque (1980) has also demonstrated in her work that up to 60% of the vendors at the market in Casa Nova prior to the dam construction were small-scale producers. However, these producers were represented as "subsistence producers" in planning documents. As Sigaud (1988) has remarked, this seems to indicate that the relocated population was not living in social or economic "isolation" nor were they *isolated from* the market economy. They simply were *not dependent on* the market economy; they were never *disconnected from* the market—a critical distinction that gets erased in these documents. Ferguson (1994) argues a similar point in his seminal critique of development practice. Ferguson notes how third world populations, such as Lesotho's (where his ethnography is centered), are frequently depicted as "rural," implying they are "disconnected" or isolated from global markets. However, Lesotho's "rural" economy was clearly connected with transnational flows and rural residents were frequently worked as wage laborers in South Africa. Similarly, since the 1950s many residents of

<sup>33</sup> *Sequeiro* is a term used to refer to those dry areas away from either a creek, stream or riverbed in the semiarid region. Necessarily most of the farming activities here consist of either animal husbandry or rainwater based farming (*agricultura da chuva*). In contrast, those who practiced farming on the river's edge or on the small river islands farmed according to the river's flood cycle, called *agricultura da vazante*.

the Brazilian semiarid had integrated migratory labor into their livelihood strategies in the Center-South and elsewhere in Brazil.

This representation of disconnect was part of a broader representation of the backwardness of the population in the planning documents, which Sigaud asserts represented them as:

“... poor, underdeveloped, without professional qualification, conditioned by the river, isolated, self-sufficient, illiterate, without contact with forms of mass communication, limited contact with their neighbors or markets, without the mentality to evolve, in summary, a primitive, without buying power, without aspirations, conforming and dominated by fear of the unknown, being culturally and economically disconnected from the rest of the country (Sigaud 1988: 99).”<sup>34</sup>

With representations such as these it is no wonder that the project took on a “civilizing mission” in order to remedy the situation of the river-dwelling population’s “barbarity” (Sigaud 1988: 99). Michael Kearney (1996) provides an insightful critique of the characterization of the “peasantry” that is applicable here. Kearney asserts that since the concept of the “primitive” was done away with in anthropology, the peasantry has served as one of anthropology’s principal “others.” The “othering” of the peasantry has been conducted by describing the peasant as one whose economic life is composed mainly of acts based on the principal of reciprocity, whereas “moderns” conduct exchange based upon a market logic. The modernist discourse of rational choice and economic man, serves to position those acts which do not conform to this model as somehow “lacking” or primitive. These representations of the *ribeirinhos* (river dwellers) and *caatingueiros* (dwellers of the dry areas) mirror such representations of the peasantry.

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<sup>34</sup> From a 1974 planning document, reprinted in 1983: *Congresso Nacional/Câmara dos Deputados. 1983. CPI das Cheias do São Francisco: considerações sobre o Projeto de Resolução # 331/82.*

In addition to the inaccurate and condescending representations of the residents, the relocation process was to (not surprisingly) show preferential treatment for those who dwelled in the urban centers of the cities that were to be rebuilt (Pilão Arcado, Remanso, Casa Nova, and Sento Sé). In the beginning the rural population was offered the solution of resettlement on a colonization project called Serra do Ramalho<sup>35</sup>, sponsored by INCRA. However many were resistant to this option and in the end CHESF offered three solutions: to move to the lake's edge with minimal help from CHESF (69.8%), to move to the colonization project called Serra do Ramalho (8.6%), or to migrate from the region (called "*solução própria*" or "own solution") (19.2%) (Duque 1984: 34). Note that the two most popular solutions (the lake's edge and *solução própria*) only emerged *after* significant resistance of the population to their removal to the colonization project at Serra do Ramalho. Unequal treatment of the rural population is evidenced by the fact that the rural population that selected to move to the lake's edge or to migrate were compensated for only up to 70% of the cost to rebuild their homes, whereas the urban population was to have their homes rebuilt in planned cities at full cost paid by CHESF.<sup>36</sup> Many of the rural population recounted never having received payment from CHESF for their lost land or for home reconstruction; compensation was further complicated by the

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<sup>35</sup> Serra do Ramalho was an irrigated colonization project designed by CHESF and associated agencies for the relocation of the rural population that would be displaced by the Sobradinho dam, located approximately 700 kilometers from where most of the population resided. It was referred to as the "*Projeto Especial de Colonização de Sobradinho*" (Special Project for the Colonization of Sobradinho, or PECSR). There was resistance by many of the dispossessed to move so far away from where they had spent their entire lives; others feared that living in the colonization project would mean that they would be living like "captives" (*cativos*), referring to those who lived as tenants on the property of large landowners in the region who were essentially trapped on the plantation or ranch (Duque 1984; Sigaud 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Most of the population lived in houses made of *taipa* (a wattle and daub type construction), so that when assessed at market rates these were not assessed at high values. The situation was exacerbated by the escalation in the cost of building materials due to high demand during the period of the inundation.

fact that some did not possess title to their land or were renting public land on which to farm from the local prefecture.<sup>37</sup>

This differential treatment of the rural population was also echoed in the authoritarian nature of the removal process. As Sigaud notes, we should not suppose there was any ill intent on the part of employees of CHESF or the supporting agencies, however the way that the process was handled demonstrated that no matter what the negative effects of the dam were, these were always considered subordinate to the primary and unquestionable goal of energy production. CHESF planning documents predicted the disastrous effects on the lives of the rural population (Sigaud 1986: 20). So, not surprisingly, in the end most rural residents perceived the removal to be conducted in an authoritarian manner. Descriptions of the removal process, as Sigaud documents, indicate that the relocation was conducted “more like a military operation to evacuate a territory than the resettlement of a population (1988: 105).” The removal included stories reminiscent of a chaotic and unplanned move: herds of animals drowning, *povoados* fleeing as the waters rose, suicides as water reached properties’ edges, and so on (Sigaud 1988). The situation was exacerbated for some who had chosen to relocate on their own (*solução própria*) and who had to move twice because their first move was within the interior of municipalities which were to be flooded. We will see in the next chapter that

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<sup>37</sup> Ghislaine Duque (1984: 32) provides a thorough description of the four types of land possession of the relocated population. They were: 1) Lands on the margins of the river and islands which by the Federal Constitution were public; 2) Private properties which were usually in the best areas of the *sequeiro* (dryland areas); 3) *Fazendas* (plantations) which were cut up and owned by different owners which had their roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century land grants; and 4) Lands which were defined as *terras devolutas* – or unowned land-- which also had their root in the land grants of the colonial Brazil. De Ataíde (1984) also provides a classification system for describing the types of property owning situation of the dispossessed population.

the founding of the workers' settlement at Sobradinho also resembled an authoritarian, military situation, which significantly influenced social relations within the settlement.

All of the situations described above led to popular resistance to the dam, supported by the liberation theology-influenced Catholic Church (including the Pastoral Land Commission) and local rural labor unions. Bishop Dom José Rodrigues de Souza of Juazeiro was to take an active and vocal public role in condemning the project and how the rural population was treated, both in his monthly church newsletter *Caminhar Juntos* (To Walk Together) and on the rural radio station. However, this support did not emerge until 1975 when Bishop Dom José replaced the previous bishop, meaning that dam plans were already well underway before the Church offered its support. Both Bishop Dom José and Padre Mansueto de Lavor, a priest in Petrolina, who later ran for a seat in the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Pernambuco, were vocal critics of CHESF and state policy. They asserted that the dam benefited the interests of capital (including the IMF) and the state not rural residents. Most importantly Dom José Rodrigues de Souza organized a group of activist leaders to work with local church base communities (CEBs) and the rural labor unions in order to support the rural communities. As we will see later in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, the legacy of this organizing tradition has been an important force in nurturing and encouraging alternatives to the state-sponsored, market-oriented development model in the region.

Although the organizing impetus of the Church was crucial, this is not to say that the rural population did not act. Prior to the Church involvement, residents of the small *povoados* (villages) met to discuss which option offered by CHESF would be best and

many decided as a group whether or not they would accept relocation or choose their own resettlement plan. As noted already, the option of moving to the lake's edge and "*solução própria*" were concessions by CHESF after large numbers of those to be relocated rejected the long move to Serra do Ramalho.<sup>38</sup> However, organized resistance is often seen as having emerged under the direction of Dom José Rodrigues and the organizing work he conducted long with others in the rural communities.

Given the events just related it is probably not surprising to hear that the relocation process was considered to have been poorly handled. This led to a re-evaluation of how future resettlement processes would be conducted for future dams funded by the World Bank. However, even the next dam constructed along the São Francisco River, the Itaparica dam, was critiqued by the dispossessed population and activists for poor handling. However, from the start there was a more organized form of resistance to the dam, as residents felt they had learned from Sobradinho and therefore refused to cooperate with surveyors (Horgan 1999: 25).<sup>39</sup> Thus the Sobradinho dam project can be seen as part of a long line of state intervention in the region that proved to line the pockets of both elites in the region and those of international capital, rather than

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<sup>38</sup> Ruben Alfredo de Siqueira (1992) argues that the refusal to move to Serra do Ramalho constituted a social movement that should be read as a form of resistance, along the lines of James Scott's work on peasant forms of resistance in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Siqueira, a sociologist and long-time activist with the Pastoral Land Commission, offers this in response to some researchers who had portrayed the population as passive in the face of the proposal for the dam.

<sup>39</sup> The experience at Sobradinho and especially the experience of the Itaipu dam in the state of Paraná in the south of the country in the late 1970s are considered to have given rise to the creation of a national movement of dam-affected people in Brazil, called the *Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens* (MAB, the Movement of Dam-Affected People). MAB estimates that one million Brazilians have been impacted by dam construction, and that 70% of these people have not received compensation for their losses. MAB has grown into a national movement, and is one of the strongest organizations of dam-affected people in the world. Guiomar Germani (2003) argues that the experience at Itaipu gave rise to the *Movimento Justiça e Terra* (Land and Justice Movement) which led to both the creation of the national Pastoral Land Commission and later the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST, Landless Worker's Movement).

“helping” small producers. As Vainer and Araújo (1992: 36) have pointed out, these projects have made rural livelihoods further insecure rather than providing the economic security they are often claimed to do. Vainer and Araújo argue that, in fact, these projects tend to recreate colonial enclaves and multiply social problems, while the fruits of these projects (in this case, electricity and later, non-traditional export crops) are consumed elsewhere in the country or abroad.<sup>40</sup> The first chapter of this dissertation will explore the creation of a colonial-style enclave in Sobradinho, as well as residents’ responses to the situation.

### *The Dominant View of the Economy of the São Francisco Valley Today*

Despite the situation of proletarianization that those who were relocated found themselves in, if one reads current traditional economic indicators for the region, the economy of the São Francisco Valley appears to be flourishing. The Juazeiro-Petrolina region is seen a success of the “development pole” model in the Northeast and is described in government documents as “being responsible for improvements in the regional population’s quality of life over the past years.”<sup>41</sup> The region continues to be portrayed in a positive light, as an area where the development pole model has flourished.

For example, a development planning document (1997) released by the Bank of the Northeast pointed to the following indicators as the “comparative advantages” of the

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<sup>40</sup> Vainer and Araújo (1992: 37) also point out that large development projects, because of their tendency towards capital concentration, result in a number of social problems, such as the creation of *favelas* (shanty towns), marginalization of residents, pauperization, prostitution, criminality – demonstrating the perverse effects of the diffusion of “modernity” on peripheral countries and areas. More specifically, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (1994) argues that large-scale dams are exemplary of a distillation of the effects and dynamics of the international capitalist system—that broader systemic inequalities can be read in the ways in which large scale development projects are planned and executed.

<sup>41</sup> Quote taken from: The Executive Summary of the final report on “Determination of Land Use in the Middle-Lower São Francisco River Basin.” *Companhia do Desenvolvimento do Rio São Francisco* (CODEVASF). 2000: 3.



area: availability of land and water of good quality and in sufficient quantity; abundant labor power; favorable climactic conditions; exploitable infrastructure; possibility of placing fruits in the Northern Hemisphere during winter; proximity to European and North American markets (with only 6 days of maritime transport); and a quick productive cycle (*Banco do Nordeste* 1997: 10-11). This document, demonstrates how the expansion of export agriculture (or “non-traditional export crops”) has become a major state development strategy for the region, shifting away from the early 1960s’ focus on producing foodstuffs for residents of the Northeast. To get a sense of the rapid growth the two municipalities have witnessed in the agricultural sector, the year 2006 marked the entrance of Juazeiro and Petrolina onto “the list of ten Brazilian municipalities with highest values of agricultural production.”<sup>42</sup> Juazeiro rose to fourth position with a value of R\$ 519.5 million in value of production and Petrolina rose to 6<sup>th</sup> position nationwide with R\$ 430.9 million in value of production. With its focus on export-oriented agriculture, the region has been seen to contribute to growing the national economy and as a “success” of the neoliberal focus on export-oriented agriculture as an economic development strategy.

Although the municipality of Sobradinho is one of those considered to be part of the broader Petrolina-Juazeiro development pole, residents of Sobradinho believe that their town’s economy has only deteriorated since the dam’s construction. There is sense of exclusion from the processes of regional growth even as the dam that many of its

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<sup>42</sup> From the IBGE (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*) website: [http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/presidencia/noticias/noticia\\_visualiza.php?id\\_noticia=998&id\\_pagina=1](http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/presidencia/noticias/noticia_visualiza.php?id_noticia=998&id_pagina=1). Accessed June 15, 2008. Due to fruit crops, directed mainly towards exports, the municipalities had increases of 56.3 % and 18.6% in the value of production, in comparison with 2005. The irrigated areas of the São Francisco Valley were the most responsible for the growth of the value of production in Brazil’s fruit crops in 2006 with 22.6% growth in relation to the previous year.

residents worked on was central to that growth. This is evidenced, in part in the municipality's population loss from 1991-1996 in liquid terms, mainly due to migration to nearby Juazeiro. Residents often cite the lack of employment opportunities in their town as evidence of the exclusion from such growth, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Residents sense of place and senses of self are imbricated in historical representations of the region and their subjection by the creation of a "regional economy."

### **Towards A New Territoriality: 'Living with/in the Brazilian Semi-arid'**

As documented throughout this introduction, the area around Sobradinho is deeply impacted by the historical forms of marginalization of the region's residents, including the creation of a racialized geography, and the region's subjection to the "greater" national priority of energy production and later to the priorities of export-oriented neoliberal economic policy. Representations of the region and its residents all highlight the "strengths and staying powers of a hegemonic formation (Gibson-Graham 2006: 23)," in this case hegemonic understandings of the "Northeast" that must be destabilized in order to create a new understanding of the region. In their work examining the creation of a regional economy in the Latrobe Valley of Australia, Gibson-Graham (2006:23) suggest a useful analysis that can be applied to the Northeast. They argue that the notion of a regional economy and the forms of regional subjection that residents experienced had to be destabilized and denaturalized in order to create the space for the creation of different sorts of economic subjectivities. For example, Gibson-Graham show how residents' only forms of economic identification were those which were linked with

the state-owned energy firm, as everyone in the Latrobe Valley was either employed by or had a family member employed by the plant. This form of subjection disallowed other forms of economic identification. Similarly, Gibson-Graham demonstrate how the use of numbers (statistics, charts, graphs, etc.) served to reinforce a certain form of economic “reality” of the Valley. Similarly in Sobradinho traditional economic indicators and the town’s former reliance on jobs with the state hydroelectric firm, CHESF, made other economic imaginings unlikely for many residents.

In the case of Sobradinho, I assert that a similar sort of dis-association is being made by some residents of both Sobradinho and the broader São Francisco Valley region. This disassociation with the dominant modes of representing the economy and the region (as underdeveloped, backward, drought-stricken, etc.) allows residents to dis-identify with broader state schemes for modernization and capitalist development. It also allows them to imagine economic possibilities in the region that are not reliant on agroindustry, one of the only seeming “viable” economic options for the São Francisco Valley. Residents, by not simply accepting dominant models of the economy, participate in a process of cultivating economic subjectivities that are not entirely capitalist or market-oriented. This allows them to create a sense of place in Sobradinho that is not premised on the purpose of growing the national economy or for producing energy for the nation. Instead some residents, whether by a conscious process of resubjection or through a more visceral resistance to forms of subjection, are reworking identifications which posit residents as in “need” of wage labor or as regional victims.<sup>43</sup> In addition, this attempt to

<sup>43</sup> What I am referring to here by a “visceral sense” is what Connolly (1999: 46) refers to as “fugitive energies” and emotions that exceed those of institutionally founded subjectivities. These fugitive energies and emotions provide the possibility for new forms of subjection. But, without an active politics of becoming (i.e. an active project of resubjection), Connolly argues, these can become reintegrated into

rework dominant representations of the region is part of a broader project of seeing the semiarid as a place of possibility, not a place of lack. Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that residents of the Latrobe Valley had to be able to undo hegemonic visions of their valley in order to imagine and secure alternative subjectivities and expressions of regional identity. As we will see in this dissertation, this is exactly what some residents of Sobradinho are doing. With this project, I will document the cultivation of non-market-oriented subjectivities and forms of resistance to capitalist models.

De Albuquerque (1998) similarly concludes his book on the invention of the Northeast by arguing that the Northeast, as it is known, must be “undone.” He argues that this project is necessary in order to create other possibilities and other ways of being that will allow the region to move beyond its sense of “victimhood.” He asks:

“Why perpetuate this Northeast that signifies drought, misery, social injustice, violence, fanaticism, folklore, and social and cultural backwardness? It is necessary to escape from this discourse of supplication or denunciation of misery: what is necessary are new voices and new visions that complicate this region, that demonstrate its segmentations, the social complicities of the winners of the situation that is present in this space (de Albuquerque 1998: 315).”

Both de Albuquerque’s framework and analysis and that of Gibson-Graham are relevant as I discuss attempts to reframe dominant understandings of the region by activists, scholars and Catholic Church members in this dissertation. Gibson-Graham ask in their study of regional subjection, “How might the potentiality for becoming arise out of the experience of subjection (2006: 23)?”<sup>44</sup> This question is particularly relevant as I examine old discourses and old forms of argument (Connolly 1999: 146).

<sup>44</sup> What I am referring to is that if we are to understand subjects as both made and making themselves in and through practices of governmentality (Foucault 1990), we can also see governmental power as both productive and enabling. When power is assumed by the subject it becomes the instrument of the subject’s becoming. Becoming here refers to the process by which subjects shift and create new identities for themselves despite the power of hegemonic discourses (here specifically economic discourse) and governmental practices. This is a summary of an argument put forth by Gibson-Graham (2006: 23-24). They base their model on the works of Foucault (1990) and Butler (1997). “Becoming” here refers to an

both the creation of regional subjects and their resistance to, and reworking of, capitalist economic models. As will be examined throughout this dissertation, residents' experiences of subjection and marginalization have also been productive of other forms of regional pride and resistance to hegemonic representations of the Northeast. In this way residents are engaging in a process of *resubjectivation*, by cultivating economic and regional subjectivities that do not conform to the dominant economic models.

Even while those in state institutions and international development agencies have sought to intervene in the Northeast in order to solve its numerous "problems," those who live in the region-- scholars, activists, Church members, and local NGO workers-- have sought to rework hegemonic representations of the region. There are several organizations involved in this project. These include activists with the Catholic Church's *Comissão Pastoral da Terra* (the Pastoral Land Commission, CPT), non-governmental organizations and their representatives working with the Articulation for the Semiarid (*Articulação do Semi-Árido*, ASA), the Network for Education in the Semi-Arid (*Rede de Educação do Semi-Árido*, RESAB), among other movements and organizations in the region. These groups and their projects have attempted to rework dominant understandings of the region which have led to projects for "combating drought" or which have focused on the priority of energy production. Instead they focus on what I would call "a politics of the small" in urging for what is called a *Convivência do Semi-Árido*, a project of "Living with the Semiarid" as opposed to large-scale technological interventions. In doing so, these projects focus largely on providing access to water (both for human and animal consumption), to reworking negative representations of the

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emerging political imaginary and Gibson-Graham particularly identify place as a site of becoming.

semiarid, towards creating regionally appropriate and grounded forms of education, and strengthening production practices which will allow small producers to remain on their land and to avoid becoming proletarianized (Berengues 1984: 67). Some of these projects are particularly focused on small-holders, and while aimed at helping small holders participate in the market, their goal is not “economic integration” in order to “grow the (national or regional) economy.” Instead these projects are focused on strengthening small producer livelihoods and lessening their susceptibility to the vagaries of both the market economy and the climate of the semiarid. These projects work on both the level of representation as well as the level of practice in order to realize these goals, recognizing how both each is constitutive of the other.

Amidst these projects for a *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* is a sense that the region’s potential has never truly been appreciated because the “solutions” sought were always in the interest of local elite. Grand projects were imagined instead of working with the existing and potentially novel livelihood strategies in the region that are focused on small-scale agriculture and not for “growing the Economy” of the region. The project of creating a *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* aims to reframe representations of lack with those of positivity and potentiality. It is important to note that for some NGO representatives, Sobradinho is not seen as the best example of the implementation of these strategies because of the perceived social divisions in the town that emerged in the post-construction era, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. Yet, as I will discuss, there are moments of interruption in the experience of regional economic subjection

present in residents' everyday practice and in their narratives about their lives, which may indicate that residents are reworking dominant economic models.

At the time that I began my longer-term field research stay in January 2005, the federal government had announced plans for another massive development project for the São Francisco River: the transposition of the São Francisco River's flow to states further north in the Northeast (Ceará, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and inland areas of Pernambuco). Church activists, academics, and residents opposed this project as yet another "pharaonic project" in the Northeast, referring to the grand nature of these projects. While I was in Sobradinho there were a series of small demonstrations against this project in Juazeiro, including one in which activists blocked the well-trafficked bridge connecting Juazeiro and Petrolina. The Bishop of Barra in the city of Cabrobó, Dom Luiz Cappio, went on a hunger strike in October 2005, to protest the proposal because he claimed that dam-building along the Rio São Francisco had already negatively affected the peoples living on the river's edge. Two years later in October 2007, he went on a hunger strike again to protest the transposition. This time he traveled to the city of Sobradinho to conduct the hunger strike, as the city was seen as representative of the injustices committed by state-sponsored development projects in the region and the negative impacts these projects have had on the livelihoods and lifeways of people of the São Francisco Valley.

The main argument of Bishop Cappio's protest, along with that of numerous activists and groups in the Northeast, is that the water of the transposed river will end up benefiting agro-industry, particularly the flower industry in Ceará, rather than small

producers of the *sertão*. Activists cite the effects of the Sobradinho dam to demonstrate that these waters will not end up helping small producers at all, as many small producers still (more than 25 years after the dam's completion) do not have access to one of the largest man-made lake's in the world. Rather than spending the R\$3.6 billion to supply water to the municipalities of the region (of the total R\$6.6 billion allocated to the project), Bishop Cappio urged support for small scale solutions such as small cisterns, which are also part of the solution proposed by ASA and the CPT with their One Million Cisterns Project.<sup>45</sup> This form of protest and solidarity with the riverine communities and small producers was in line with the resistance to the dam led by Bishop Dom José Rodrigues in the late 1970s against the building of the Sobradinho dam.

I bring this up to show how large-scale development projects (whether energy related or not) and water-related development projects are still central to the federal government's development plans for the region. The continued efforts of the state to intervene in the region mean that for residents, water issues and large-scale development construction are not seen as issues of the past, but as on-going struggles. The potential effects of the proposed transposition on the São Francisco River are experienced intimately, as many have already seen the river they once knew (with its seasonal

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<sup>45</sup> The project is more extensive than just building one million cisterns, which is the CPT and ASA's preliminary goal. Part of a longer term project is *Programa Segunda Água* (Second Water Program), which plans to provide each family in the semiarid with an additional source of water for food production purposes (for agriculture and for watering livestock). This program forms part of a much broader project which also attempts to address land issues, so that each family has enough land for food production. This broader project is called the "Program of One Land and Two Waters" (*Programa 1 + 2*, referred to as P1 + 2). The goal of the P1 + 2 project is to provide families with enough land to produce basic foodstuffs for themselves, plus a cistern for water for human consumption, plus the construction of an underground well system that can store water for animals and agriculture. The CPT based this program off of a similar one launched in the Guangzhou province in China in which 300,000 of these subterranean dams were constructed.



fluctuations) change significantly, and have been forced to live far from their homes on the river's edge with the Sobradinho dam.

The proposal of the transposition, then, is seen as one more project in a series of state intervention in the region. Throughout this introduction I have hoped to demonstrate how a sense of regional coherence (as the Northeast and the São Francisco Valley) was formed. Not just that but regional coherence was premised on a very limited set of images and hegemonic discourse about the region that designated it as space in need of intervention. The purpose of this dissertation is both to explore how these practices of governmentality have both serve to create a sense of place in Sobradinho, but how these same practices have led residents resist and rework this sense of place and to take on an active project of cultivating different sorts of economic subjectivities.

## **Methodology**

Research for this project was conducted over fifteen consecutive months of field work in Sobradinho starting in January 2004. On my first visit to Brazil in 2001, I arrived interested in conducting fieldwork in the São Francisco Valley because prior to my arrival I had heard of the large numbers of women who were being drawn in as employees in agroindustry in the region. Admittedly, I did not know where to begin in terms of making contacts in the São Francisco Valley. One day I was walking through Salvador, and by chance stumbled upon a protest starting in Campo Grande, the central square in downtown Salvador. The protest was organized in response to the potential privatization of the waters of the Rio São Francisco. At this protest, a busload of Rural Labor Union members arrived from the São Francisco Valley (an 8-10 hour drive from

Salvador), waving banners of the state federation of rural labor unions, FETAG-BA (*Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura no Estado da Bahia*). Learning of FETAG-BA, I later contacted the state-wide branch of the labor union and was introduced to Josefa Rita da Silva, a labor union leader from Sobradinho (who later became vice-president of FETAG-BA). After hearing her story, which represented the situation in Sobradinho in particularly gendered terms, I became interested in doing research in the town. When I indicated that I was interested in visiting Sobradinho, Josefa Rita da Silva made sure that when I arrived there that the Rural Labor Union members knew of my visit and would introduce me to other residents of the town.

Prior to my extended field stay in 2005-2006, I made three previous visits to Sobradinho (in 2001, 2002, and 2003), including that first visit, in order to conduct preliminary fieldwork and see if residents were open to my conducting research in their community. Residents were used to foreigners' interest in the town given that the town had once been the site of a hydroelectric dam project, and later in the 1980s was witness to a number of "participatory development" projects. A number of foreign groups (particularly a number of German church groups of varying denominations) have funded a number of projects in the town since the 1980s, so my visit (read in a similar light) was not seen as out of the ordinary. For many, my interest was likely initially read in the context of a long history of foreign and "expert" interest in the town, demonstrating the town's dubious experience with various forms of "development," whether that be through large scale projects or through the supposedly inclusive participatory projects of the post-

construction period.<sup>46</sup> I made it clear that I was not there to set up a project, but instead wanted to learn about residents' participation in existing projects and community initiatives.

During my first visit, residents showed me a number of community projects (a community-run daycare, a center for adolescent girls, and a cooperative cookie-making venture (that had ended by the time of my field stay) that they thought I would be interested in. Indeed I did find these interesting. What struck me was that participants seemed to feel invested in and excited about these projects. I was intrigued by these everyday projects, especially as I learned that many of those involved were not receiving a formal salary for their work.

During that visit, I contacted the Catholic nuns in town, the Sisters of the Daughters of Jesus (*Filhas de Jesus*), to see if they could provide me with lodging on my next visit because several residents suggested they would likely host my stay. The Sisters were more than accommodating and welcomed me to stay with them. I soon found out that the Catholic Church was involved in a number, if not all, of the same activities introduced to me by residents. I left from that visit much more interested in these “everyday economic projects” than the gendered dynamics of the agroindustry in the region which I had initially wanted to examine, even though that certainly was part of the broader context of town (economic) life.

I spent the first five months of my extended field stay living with Sisters of the Daughters of Jesus in their home in Sobradinho, eating meals with them and participating

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<sup>46</sup> For example, residents vividly recalled the number of Russian engineers and technicians that lived in the town during the construction. They were there to help with the installation of the hydroelectric turbines which had been manufactured in the former U.S.S.R.

in many of their daily routines. This greatly assisted my fieldwork as the sisters were well-known in the town and linked to a number of programs. I should add that it likely facilitated my acceptance in Sobradinho as people came to learn that I was living with the nuns. I was later told by several residents, who thought it was funny, that many referred to me as “*a menina das freiras*”—the nuns’ girl. Some residents, I also found out, had assumed I was a novice nun until they got to know me (some also thought this was funny and teased me about it). While this may have facilitated my entrance and acceptance by many in the community, it is also likely that those who did not have an affiliation with the Church, along with those who had a disagreement with it, may have been less inclined to engage with me.<sup>47</sup> I made a point, however, of getting to know residents who were not Catholic Church congregants and also of interviewing residents who were not part of the Church. My experience living with the Sisters gave me greater insight into the complexity of opinions of both clergy and lay congregants of the Catholic Church than I think I would otherwise have acquired. It also made me more sympathetic to the programs and projects of the Church, which likely influenced my interpretation of events.

This project entailed four methods of data collection and analysis. The first consisted of participant observation at community projects and public events. Second, I conducted open-ended interviews with residents about their livelihood strategies, as well as interviews with representatives of local activist organizations and non-governmental organizations in the region. Third, I collected detailed oral histories and arrival stories from residents, mainly from residents in the workers *vilas* of the Vila São Joaquim and

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<sup>47</sup> I say this not because anything in specific happened but because Sobradinho had a history of factionalism that was the result of the participatory development projects in the 1980s.

the Vila São Francisco. Last, I conducted research in and analyzed documents of several development agency archives both in the São Francisco Valley and in the state capital of Salvador.<sup>48</sup> This archival research focused on planning documents of several development agencies active in Sobradinho both before the dam construction and afterwards, in the 1980s. The projects at which I focused my participant observation included, among others: the *Creche Comunitária Gente Valente* (a daycare center), *Casa de Custodia Antonita Bandres* (a program for preteen girls), *Projeto Sobradinho* (a project supporting community gardens, brick production for housing, computer training, and more), several community gardens, several Church pastorals (for children, youth, and elderly), community health agent programs, association meetings, and events of the rural labor union, among others. In addition to participating in the daily functioning of projects and programs, I also attended rallies, protests, and regional gatherings sponsored by the Catholic Church and other organizations and movements in the region. Some of these events were attended only by residents from Sobradinho, others involved residents from the entire Sobradinho Lake region. At these gatherings I was able to learn how residents of the lake region identified and addressed common problems and interests. In this way I was also able to get a better sense of how residents of Sobradinho articulated their struggle with broader regional struggles, both in the São Francisco Valley and in the semiarid region more broadly. I also attended municipal gatherings and gatherings sponsored and organized by Bahian state development agencies which also gave me insight into what sorts of state projects interventions are currently being planned, and

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<sup>48</sup> Archival research expanded from the Hydroelectric Company of the San Francisco (CHESF) to an additional three sites: EMBRAPA (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*) archive in Petrolina, Pernambuco; the CAR (*Companhia de Desenvolvimento e Ação Regional*) archive in Salvador, Bahia; and the archive of the Catholic Diocese of Juazeiro, Bahia.

residents' responses to them.

Participants in the study were selected based on their involvement in community activities (such as the rural labor union or Church Pastorals) or because of their representation of a non-governmental organization or institution involved in the region. I waited until I had been in the town a few months before approaching residents for interviews—both so that I could identify who was involved in which projects but also so that residents would get to know me better before the interview. Residents would suggest others who they thought would have interesting perspectives or insights about the history of Sobradinho. I collected a total of 65 interviews from community residents and from representatives of non-governmental organizations and governmental programs active in the region.

Even though I write this as an ethnography of Sobradinho, much of the activity I documented went on in the manual workers' settlements of the Vila São Joaquim (a former squatter settlement) and the Vila São Francisco. This is because many of the forms of community-oriented practice that I was interested in (volunteering, Church pastorals, alternative economic projects, etc.) were most present in these settlements. So my methodology was to document sites where a sense of community (meaning a sense of interconnectedness and mutual responsibility constructed through everyday sociality) and community economy were being constructed in the town. This led to an emphasis on the former workers' vilas, rather than the middle-class settlement of Vila Santana, where

community (although present) was less visible in everyday forms on the street or in everyday gatherings.<sup>49</sup>

In my daily participation in projects I was particularly attentive to idioms used to describe both what could be considered part of the “market realm” of the economy but also how residents described and understood their participation in projects that were seemingly not connected with the market economy, such as the Church Pastorals or the community daycare. I interviewed residents about their routine work practices in the years before, during, and after the construction of the dam, devoting particular attention to the gendered and generational aspects of livelihood making. Through participant observation at community projects I documented how these organizations were sustained, including forms of financial, moral, or participatory support, *as well as* attending to the tensions and difficulties involved in their operation. Through this work, I hoped to determine to what extent these projects operate either partially outside of, or in articulation with, the formal market realm of the economy.

In some ways this project was conducted in the style of traditional “village ethnography” in that most of my time was spent living in the Vila São Joaquim (the former worker and squatter settlement) in Sobradinho. Also, most of the social relations I examine occur in the town. However, it incorporates Marcus’ (1995) notion of a multi-sited study in that my analysis includes discursive analysis of how development plans for the region fit within broader state discourse, as developed in federal and state planning agencies. In addition, I examine the interconnections between the social construction of

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<sup>49</sup> The reasons for this will become more clear in the next chapter, when I discuss how the town was founded and the forms of community that are present in Sobradinho.

the region and broader state development planning, as well as the connections with national and global neoliberal economic restructuring. This research situates Sobradinho as a site that was produced both by state intervention, but also by residents' own practices of place-making. Sobradinho, the São Francisco Valley, and the "Sobradinho lake region" are sites that are inextricably connected to nation-building and the industrialization of South-Central Brazil. In addition, this project seeks to examine how the creation of the region is embroiled in universalist conception of the economy, as economic growth is figured as a universal good (central to nation-building). But, I also explore how residents have their own understandings and forms of value expressed in everyday economic practice.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation addresses anthropological literature on development and economic anthropology. It also contributes to understandings of the impacts of global restructuring and the implementation of the neoliberal economic model on residents of the semiarid of the Northeast. In addressing these issues, this dissertation focuses on residents' engagement with place and the community economy as a response to the broader processes of state-sponsored development and economic restructuring. In what follows I will further explore the contribution of this project to these sets of literature.

### *Globalization and Global Restructuring*

Although only alluded to so far, this dissertation is largely about the effects global restructuring on residents of the São Francisco Valley. I will examine how the programs and projects oriented towards the "economic development" of the São Francisco Valley



with their concomitant set of market-based economic forms also rub up against preexisting economic practice in the region. I further explore how novel economic practices emerge from this coming together of seemingly divergent economic models. This means that the adoption of market-oriented logic is not a seamless process and that, in fact, there are moments of disruption in the formation of regional (economic) subjects. In examining economic practice, I attempt to move the discussion beyond what were useful understandings of processes of globalization within anthropology and other disciplines, which often discuss the experience of time-space compression; the global “flows” of images, texts, ideas; and the rise of global cities (Appadurai 1996; Ferguson and Gupta 1992; Hannerz 1989; Harvey 1990; Sassen 1998). These now form part of the anthropological “common-sense” of globalization. These processes are understood to contribute to the decreased relevance of place and the decreased salience of “local” practices and subjectivities, as the local is increasingly seen to be mutually imbricated with the “global.” These theorists highlight the homogenizing effects of global flows and the decreased analytical relevance of the local as transnational institutions are seen to increasingly produce the “local” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 2001). Jameson (2002), in a similar vein points to the universalizing quality of capitalism.

In contrast, some theorists highlight counter-tendencies to globalization, discussing how cultures are continually coproduced through what Anna Tsing terms “friction”: “the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across difference (2005: 4).” Global capital never enters into a cultural void, seamlessly subjecting people to productive demands; instead capital encounters local cultural and

economic forms. This means that there is unevenness in the cultural production of capital and some theorists have asserted the need to look for cultural specificity in its production (Yanagasako 2002; Mitchell 2002).

In a similar vein, other scholars argue that theories that emphasize global connections may underplay the continued significance that a sense of place has in people's lives. I write from this stance in order to counter those who claim that revalorizing the local has served to romanticize the local as resistance (Guthman 2006). I follow those researchers who argue that place still matters, even in an era of globalization. This project will follow in the footsteps of those theorists who see economic difference and processes of place-making as central to organizing against capitalist globalization (Aretxaga 1997; Dirlik 2001; Escobar 2001; Gudeman and Rivera-Gutierrez 2002; Chase 2002; Harcourt and Escobar 2005; Massey 1994). Attentive to the insights of critiques of place and locality (Appadurai 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 2002), in this study I explore Dirlik's (2001) assertion that ethnographies focused on the processes of place-making are essential to a critique of development, to the extent that the local poses challenges to the alleged universalism of the global and global developmentalism. This dissertation seeks to bring together this attention to the processes of place-making in Sobradinho along with an examination of the cultural specificity of the encounter between market-based economic models and non-market-oriented model which have a longer history in the semiarid of Northeast Brazil. As we will see in the chapters that follow, place-making was and is central to the politics of residents of Sobradinho.

In particular, I will highlight both a politics of place enacted by residents in general as well as women's place-based activism in Sobradinho (Gibson 2002; Harcourt and Escobar 2002, 2005). These theorists call attention to women's engagement in place-based struggles which are focused around various types of "place": around the body, the home, the environment, the community, and public space. This project focuses on women's place-based politics as an attempt to highlight forms of politics that may not be recognized as forms of political engagement. These place-based struggles, rather than being subsumed by global logics, are rooted in the specificity of their social, cultural and economic location (Harcourt and Escobar 2002: 13). Residents of Sobradinho were actively involved in a politics of place: first during the post-dam-construction years of the 1980s when the economic situation was dire for many residents in the town. This politics manifested in organizing efforts for the "political emancipation" of the town and by petitioning to the state for recognition of the community as a municipality, so that residents could elect their own officials and determine how state funds would be spent. Place-based politics in Sobradinho has continued until today, largely being practiced by women in the community through their volunteer care work in the community, as will be discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation. An exploration of these forms of place-based politics and forms of economic activism complexifies and adds to existing studies of women workers in the region, as a number of researchers have documented the ways in which women have been drawn in as "ideal workers" on agroindustrial firms in the São Francisco Valley (Branco 2000; Collins 1993, 1996; Deere 2001; Fischer 2000; Fischer

and de Melo 1996; Spindel 1987; Thayer 2000).<sup>50</sup> Many of these same researchers highlight the consequent effects on gender relations in the region as women have become increasingly involved in wage labor and labor unions.

Similar to place-based theorists, geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (under the collective name of J.K. Gibson-Graham) have noted the tendency in many scholarly accounts of globalization to script local communities as inherently vulnerable to capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996). Pointing to the *phallogocentrism* of many social theories on globalization they urge researchers to attempt to read for difference rather than dominance in interpreting the processes of globalization, in order to document the diversity of economic practice (even within capitalism) that exists (Gibson-Graham 1996). What follows from this attempt to de-ontologize capitalism is a project of de-linking globalization from capitalism, by documenting the situated and contextual forms of economic practice that exist on the ground. With this dissertation, I seek to contribute to this project of de-linking globalization and capitalism by documenting the forms of economic difference that exist even in a region that is seen to be exemplary of the entrenchment of the neoliberal economic model.

Gibson-Graham have followed up on their earlier work on deconstructing capitalism with a broader project that seeks to map out what they term, following Connolly (1995, 1999), a “micropolitics of resistance” or practices of *resubjection* (Foucault 1990). These forms of micropolitical resistance manifest, in many ways, as

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<sup>50</sup> What I mean by “ideal workers” in this context is that management uses an ideology about women’s natural ability for the detail-oriented work (such as grape trimming) to justify their hire; in addition, gender ideologies support women being hired under temporary and seasonal systems of employment (“flexible” systems). Under prevailing gender ideology, these women are assumed to be bringing in secondary, rather than primary, income into the home. See Collins (1993) for a discussion of this gender ideology as it is put to use by agroindustrial employers in the region.

economic difference. Both Connolly and Gibson-Graham (2003) assert that macropolitical settlements are only made possible through the micro-political processes of *resubjectivation* and active self-transformation. They refer to Foucault's notion of *ethical self-transformation* (1997) and Connolly's micropolitics of (re)subjectivation as examples of how new selves are constituted through everyday practice. My work traces similar processes of social/economic *resubjectivation* that are occurring in Sobradinho and in the broader São Francisco Valley, despite the seeming entrenchment of capitalist models introduced by agroindustry in the region. I examine several projects which highlight how such practices of the self are being enacted in this area. Through attention to this sort of particularity, focused on places and subjects, my work attempts to trace a "politics of becoming in place (JKGG 2006: xxiv)."

#### *Economic Globalization and Production of the Neoliberal Subject*

Geographer David Harvey has described neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (2005: 2)." The neoliberal project is often characterized as one which requires the privatization of public resource and spaces, minimization of labor costs, reductions of public spending, the elimination of regulations that limit business and the displacement of governance responsibilities away from nation states (Guthman 2006: 1172). With the increasing prevalence of these economic shifts around the globe, some researchers of neoliberal policy and ideology assert that neoliberalism leaves little room for alternative

practices or discourses on the economy (Schild 1998; Goodman and Watts 1994). A number of scholars have explored what they see as a particular set of embodiments that are necessary for the advancement of the neoliberal economic project; whereas others have argued that there is a need to distinguish between neoliberalism as an ideal type and “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Castree 2005; Jessop 2002; Peck 2004).

Central to these concerns are what scholars have termed “neoliberal governmentality.” Governmentality is understood as the process by which the state produces citizens whose subjectivities are best suited to fulfill governmental policy or the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault 1990). This refers to the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which residents (as subjects) are governed; thus governmentality (or political rationality) constitutes how one thinks about and acts upon others and one’s self (Barry, et al. 1996: 7). Neoliberal governmentality, in particular, entails the formation of economic subjects who embody the autonomous, individualized, entrepreneurial, self-actualizing, and market-oriented agent of the advanced neoliberal model (Bondi 2005: 499). Theorists have asserted that neoliberal economic restructuring has led to subjects who identify as “citizen consumers” (Clarke 2004), “consumer citizens” (Schild 1998), or as those who see themselves as “entrepreneurs of themselves.” John Clarke argues that these representations are the result of a thin conception of the social (2004: 5). What he means by this is that identities are often taken-for-granted as being the incarnation of the neo-classical economic subject, whereas people often do not behave in the ways economic theory suggests. As we will see in this dissertation, I

largely argue that a neoliberal subjectivity has not been assimilated by many in Sobradinho and that there is, in fact, an active project of working counter to the formation of such subjectivities.

Some argue that current forms of “development” are operationalized through what has been termed “transnational governmentality” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Transnational governmentality, instead of being actualized principally through state-run projects, is operationalized through networks of international institutions and transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The targeting of “women” as the preferred population of development interventions and the desired clientele of “micro-credit” schemes are representative of just these changes in governmentality. These market-oriented programs are also representative of wider socio-economic changes associated with global restructuring, such as the reorganization of the nation-state (Appadurai 1986, 1988, 1996; Clarke 2004); the increased governmental and regulatory role of multi-lateral institutions and NGOs (Gupta and Ferguson 2002; Mindry 2001); the rise of forms of transnational capital and the spread of processes of accumulation to more locations around the globe (Clarke 2004); and changing notions of civic participation in which there is an intensified valorization of the private realm with an individualized, voluntaristic notion of social responsibility (Clarke 2004; Dagnino 2007; Godelier 1999; Schild 1998). This neoliberal version of development is seen by some as a revision of the statist and nationalist modernization and developmentalist projects of the 1940s through 1960s, which focused on national programs, policies and projects in order to boost national economies (Goodman and Watts 1997).

Regardless of whether or not national economies have ever consisted of the bounded, discrete economic systems the earlier nationalist projects were designed to achieve, the programs that have been implemented over the past three decades *do* represent a shift in the organization in forms of state power and the increased role of multilateral institutions (WTO, World Bank) and transnational corporations. These shifts, as identified in these works, have caused scholars to probe the changing understandings and practices of governance, citizenship, and the responsibilities of the state amidst globalization – which brings us full circle to questions of the construction of neoliberal subjectivity. In particular, I will examine the coming together of the neoliberal project with different ways in which “citizenship” and citizen participation is currently being configured in Brazil. In doing so, I will explore Dagnino’s assertion (2007) that there has been a “perverse confluence” of the citizenship projects of Brazilian social movements oriented towards social inclusion in the 1980s with the current implementation of the neoliberal model in Brazil.

### *Interrogating the Economy*

In keeping with an exploration of the actual forms in which neoliberalism occurs “on the ground,” this project will also interrogate dominant notions of the realm of the economic. This dissertation participates in a broader de-ontologization of dominant representations and readings of the “Economy,” which like capitalism is often represented as a monolithic unity. Mitchell (1998) argues that an understanding of the Economy as an entity that can be measured and which can be grown only became fixed after the Second World War. At this time, the Economy came to refer to the assumed



totality of the relations of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services within a given country or region. But before this, “economy” referred to the arts of frugality or the prudent use of resources. As Mitchell highlights, the notion of “growing the economy” was internationally central to developmentalist projects in the post-World War II era. Thus an interrogation of the realm of the economic is central to calling into question the developmentalist project in general, but also the assumptions about the seeming inevitability of the creation of neoliberal or market-oriented subjectivities.

Mitchell’s work in some ways follows the very important work of Karl Polanyi (1944) who argued that it was the process of creation the commodity fictions of land, labor, and money that served to disembed the economy from social life. Dumont (1977) similarly highlights how the realm of the economy came to be separated from politics, society, and morality. Both Mitchell and Polanyi highlight the ways in which the Economy was created as it own separate sphere and the ways in which its connections to daily life are made invisible. As already detailed in this introduction, the national strategy for the “economic integration” of the Northeast coincided with concerns about growing the national economy, which also resulted in a plan for creating a regional economy in the São Francisco Valley region. The import substitution strategies of the post-World War II era framed the economic growth of the region as important to broader national economic growth, later shifting towards an export-oriented economic strategy in the 1980s.

Examining the “economic’ has a long history in anthropological thought. Since the discipline’s inception the realm of the economic has been identified as central to

social relations. Early anthropologists (Malinowski 1921, 1922; Boas 1897) identified reciprocity and exchange as sites of social/cultural reproduction. These works and the later work of Mauss' (1990) on gift economies provide an important foundation for understanding the realm of the material as critical to forging social relationships and meaning-making. However, Malinowski's ethnographic work in the Trobriand Islands served to universalize the notion of the economy and later scholars have taken up this universalized understanding of the economy in their anthropological studies. These early anthropological works attempted to describe a "different" ethic than that of the "rational man" or *homo oeconomicus* proposed by classical economic theory, yet they served to reinforce universals that were not grounded in localized conceptions of value and exchange. Contemporary anthropologists have taken up the project started by these earlier works in further examining the gift economy and provide important critiques of their premises (Godelier 1999; Gudeman 2001; Mitchell 1998, 2002; Sahlins 1972; Strathern 1988; Weiner 1992). In this dissertation I seek to contribute to these studies examining the role of social relations and localized conceptions of value in understanding conceptions of the economy in Sobradinho.

With the exceptions of explorations of the gift, anthropology has interrogated virtually every social category (race, gender, etc.) but has left a singular notion of the economy relatively intact (for exceptions, see Gudeman 2001; Mitchell 2002; Polanyi 1944). A series of researchers have begun the task of exploring alternative conceptions and practices of the economy which extend beyond anthropology's traditional focus on the gift economy. Unorthodox economists (Perroux 1963; Kolm 1984), anthropologists

(Godelier 1999; Gudeman 2001; Polanyi 1944) and other theorists (Cameron and Gibson-Graham 2003; Godbout 1998) have asserted that contrary to the singular conception of conventional economic theory, that societies contain *multiple* economic domains. Using Gudeman's (2001) insights which call for a recognition of both the market realm and the communal realm of the economy, allows for a reading of economic difference. It also allows for a reading of the economy that does not endow one realm of the economy, particularly the market, as of greater import than the other. Gibson-Graham also argue for the construction of a language of economic diversity, by focusing on the various types of economic transaction and what they call the diverse economy, which includes various types of transactions that occur (market or non-market), forms of labor (waged, alternative paid, and unpaid), and enterprise (capitalist, alternative capitalist, or noncapitalist) (2006: 71).

In particular, Godelier (1999) has focused on the salience of the gift in neoliberal times as he highlights the centrality of the "unreturned gift" in neoliberal programs. For example, Godelier highlights situations in which civil society is asked to give money or donations, but not to fundamentally alter their relationship with others. Alternately, Godbout (1998) asserts that the gift economy often operates through community-based practice. He argues that the gift economy is central to economic life and asserts that modern nation-states and societies could not function without the gift economy. His work suggests that contemporary thinkers have actually underplayed the gift economy's significance in holding modern societies together. In this study, I will bring the proposals of both Godelier and Godbout together with the work of theorists who are examining the

interplay of the economic and forms of government in the neoliberal context. Burchell (1996: 29) argues that an “enterprise culture” has emerged with the “enterprise form” in the neoliberal context. This enterprise culture emerged from the conduct of organizations, government and the individual in areas that were formerly considered non-economic. Related to this is what Burchell terms a “responsibilization of the governed,” in which citizens are urged to take active responsibility for tasks that had hitherto been the domain of governmental agencies. This critique is echoed in the works of feminist theorists who have highlighted the role that women have played in taking up the burden of care for their communities amidst cutbacks to state programs (Barrig 1996; Brodie 1994; Lind 2005; Olea 1995). Some further the argument by asserting that the organizations that these women are involved with end up being positioned as clients, recipients, or consumers vis-à-vis the state, creating new consumer-based political identities (see Lind 2000 for a review of this argument). This shift towards the responsibilization of the governed is addressed in this dissertation as residents, particularly, women have taken up the role of the provision of basic social services and care work within Sobradinho. However, I hope to highlight a perhaps more positive outcome of this process: women’s involvement in the community economy and place-based economic activism as posing an alternative to capitalist-based local economic transformation (Gibson 2002). Rather than reading women’s participation in these projects as exemplary of their exploitation (although, in part, this occurs), I will highlight their active project of cultivating a community economy and becoming collective economic subjects. Following the work of Cameron and Gibson-Graham (2003), I will highlight not just the domestic spheres of the economy, which have

long been construed in gendered terms, but also how care work and non-capitalist, non-market spheres of the economy have also been gendered. In doing so, I hope to participate in undoing the binary between capitalist waged work and unpaid work.

### *The Anthropology of Development*

As already suggested, this project is part of a broader critique of developementalism. Scholars critiquing state-sponsored development projects have demonstrated the destructive effects of such programs and policies upon local lifeways and livelihood practices and the role of states in shaping local communities through forms of governmentality (Foucault 1990). These critiques demonstrate the processes by which these programs create target populations and geographies as objects of development and the lack of correspondence between planners' framing of a region with the experiences and understandings of local residents (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Gupta 1998, Mitchell 1988). In contrast, Mosse (2005) emphasizes the negotiations, misunderstandings, and misrepresentations that occur between representatives of development agencies and the "target population" of participatory development projects.

From the post-world war II years until the 1970s, development was associated with nationalist state-building ambitions that were often oriented towards inward focused economic policies, such as import-substitution strategies; however, now some argued that the developmentalist project has shifted its modes of operation to an emphasis on free trade, deregulation, and cut-backs to state services. Sobradinho and the broader São Francisco Valley are embroiled in this as the construction of the Sobradinho dam was part of broader strategies for national integration of the region and later the region was

dramatically impacted by the relatively rapid rise of export-oriented agro-industry, promoted by policy shifts directed by free-market principles. In this dissertation I will examine how these macro-economic shifts have impacted residents of Sobradinho and their negotiations with these changes.

Some argue that such conditions mean that the conditions which under-girded the developmentalist project have weakened, as the once-assumed coherence of the nation-state has dissolved. This set of literature on development is significant to my work as it offers insight into the complex and shifting relations between the state, capital, development agencies, and local communities. These works also situate the challenges and difficulties that capitalist globalization poses to the possibilities of local autonomy, alternative economic and social practices, and localized senses of place. Yet, this project will build on the premises of these works by documenting the agency and forms of resistance of local actors in challenging the models and values introduced under the neoliberal and developmentalist projects. In some ways this dissertation explores what some have termed “counterwork” and “counter-tendencies” to development (Arce and Long 2000; Bebbington 2000). In particular, I will explore these processes through the lens of the economic, by documenting women, youth, and other residents’ involvement in the creation and enactment of a politics of economic difference

This dissertation also addresses the anthropological literature on the study of the social impacts of dams and the resettlement of affected populations. These works have tended to approach dams from two different angles. The first set of literature is written from the perspective of development anthropology (Cernea 1993, 1996; Cernea and

Guggenheim 1993; Scudder 1985). These are oriented towards the evaluation, planning, and implementation of relocation and resettlement of dispossessed groups.

Correspondingly, these studies focus upon strategies to address the reduction of what they identify as the risks posed for dispossessed populations by a dam project. These studies tend to see dam projects as a necessary evil that will ultimately provide the greater good for larger numbers of people and, therefore, seek to lessen the effects on displaced populations.

The second approach (Ferradás 1998; Ribeiro 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1996) to the study of dams follows the perspective of the anthropology of development, in which the researchers conduct ethnography of development planning and implementation during and after the construction of a large dam project. The works of Ferradás and Ribeiro represent the actions taken by those involved in project planning and include attention to the various groups associated with such a project-- technicians, engineers, laborers, and the dispossessed.

Similarly the works of a number of Brazilian scholars have highlighted how the implementation of large scale development projects in Brazil are intricately tied to Brazilian nation-building strategies (Araújo, Neto, e Lima 2000; Germani 2003; Seva 1990; Sigaud 1986; Vainer e Araújo 1992). These authors highlight the role of dam projects in participating in a transnational capitalist system and also the impacts of the projects on both workers' communities and local residents (Lopes 1996; Ribeiro 1994, 1996). This includes attention to the numbers of people displaced by these projects and social movement responses to dam construction (Araújo 1990; Germani 2003; Vainer

1990). These works expand on and complexify the foundational works of Thayer Scudder (1982, 1985, 2005), written from the perspective of applied development anthropology, which elaborates planning strategies for the resettlement of displaced populations. Others have examined the impacts on those who had been compulsorily removed from their lands (Bartolomé 1996; de Almeida 1996; Sigaud 1996). Because dam-building in Brazil was a central development strategy of the military regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these scholars have highlighted the interconnections between dam-building and broader macroeconomic policy and the symbolism of large scale development projects in light of national modernizing ambitions. A number of these studies have examined the impacts of dams along the course of the São Francisco River (Barros 1996; Araújo 1990; Araújo, Neto, e Lima 2000).

### **Dissertation Outline**

In what follows I will explore the previously discussed theoretical perspectives and how they apply to the case of Sobradinho. Chapter two examines residents' narratives about the founding of Sobradinho in order to examine their engagement with a politics of place in the former workers' settlement. I examine the period in which the settlement was founded, the impacts of state-sponsored 'participatory' development projects in the settlement in the 1980s, and residents' organizing for the legal recognition of the settlement as a municipality, resulting in forms of place-based politics.

Chapter three examines the construction of regional economic subjectivities in Sobradinho. I trace how several historical processes (colonization, state-sponsored industry, and later private-public investments in agro-industry in the São Francisco



Valley) gave rise to particular understandings and experiences of the economy in Sobradinho. These understandings reflect of hegemonic market-based representations of the Sobradinho lake region and the broader São Francisco Valley, which have in turn influenced residents' senses of self and others in their community. I pay particular attention to how residents negotiate market-based economic identities, as they witness economic change in their community.

The fourth chapter examines how despite the stabilization of the “regional economy” and the seeming dominance of market models, residents engage in a variety of everyday economic practice that cannot be reduced to market logic. It further explores how some residents, both of the older and younger generations, are involved in reworking of capitalist scripts, thereby revealing that non-market oriented subject positions still exist and are being cultivated in the Sobradinho lake region.

The fifth chapter examines women's engagement in a politics of place through their participation in the care and community economies. By examining women volunteers' understandings of their community-oriented work, this chapter explores how they negotiate the tensions between group-oriented values and more, individualized, market-oriented values introduced with state-led development. I pay particular attention to how these women are involved in reworking of market-oriented notions of value by integrating the realms of work and care.

The happenings featured in this dissertation reveal that a politics of becoming is present in Sobradinho, the greater Sobradinho lake region, São Francisco River Valley, and the semiarid in general. Residents' hopes and desires point towards new

understanding of the semiarid that are being created right now. In discussing emergent discourses and practices I hope to reveal that, while incipient, there are forms of economic difference currently being practiced and cultivated in Sobradinho—who knows what may become of these?

## CHAPTER 2: CONSTRUCTING PLACE, POLITICS, AND COMMUNITY IN SOBRADINHO

I made a promise to *Bom Jesus de Lapa*, that He help to illuminate a place where we could live, all of the family. I threw some coins in the river for *Bom Jesus da Lapa*. So, then, I dreamt that night . . . and when I woke up, I remembered where. In that dream I knew where. When I woke up in the morning I called to my father, “Father, I know where we can go!” “To where?” “To Sobradinho!”  
- Maria Bezerra, resident of the Vila São Joaquim in Sobradinho

I know that there were many *peão* [laborers], many *peão* in that period. You would have found people from every place and of every type here. It was wonderful! Too bad that I couldn’t have taken advantage of it. Right? It was a *maravilha* [wonderful]. Understand, a lot of money flowed here (*enrola muito dinheiro*). Those people who understood how to live and start things got rich. There were many people who did this and left.  
- Marta de Santana, resident of the Vila São Francisco in Sobradinho

As discussed in the previous chapter, the semiarid (often referred to as the *sertão*) of the interior of Northeast Brazil has long held a central place in the Brazilian popular imaginary. For residents of the area, this manifests as identifying as being *Nordestino* (Northeastern) or *Sertanejo* (someone from the *sertão*). Albuquerque’s (1999) work examining the “invention” of the Northeast notes how regional *nordestino* identity is the product of official discourses about the region and also of residents’ adoption and manipulation of these discourses. Particularly, in Sobradinho, a sense of place and a place-based identity is expressed in claims of not just being *Nordestino* or *Sertanejo* but also being *Sobradinhense*—someone from Sobradinho. These identities help establish a sense of place in Sobradinho, even as residents have moved there from all over Brazil and the Northeast. Residents’ sense of place reflects their experience of living in a town that was created by and for the construction of a large-scale development project, the

Sobradinho dam.<sup>51</sup> Similar to Albuquerque's assertion that regional identity has been produced both by "outsider" discourses, as well as by their appropriation and reworking by residents of the Northeast, Sobradinho itself is a place produced by the State and the State's developmentalist vision. But, it is also a place produced by residents' struggles over place. Sobradinho is in many ways a place produced by residents' responses to state-based forms of development.

This history has significantly impacted everyday life and social relations in the town, and even while the dam is not visible from the town center, the dam "looms large" in the memory and experience of residents and how they see themselves and where they live. The fact that the town emerged as a planned community that was slated to be demolished after the dam construction, adds a unique, if not strange element to residents sense to their town's history. One young resident noted, "Sobradinho has a history that is different from normal cities. This city was planned to be destroyed." As I will argue in this chapter, the town was not destroyed largely due to residents' participation in a politics of place, which manifested in forms of social organizing around residents' well-being, their occupation of land for a return to farming, and their mobilization to have the settlement recognized as its own municipality.

This chapter examines how residents engaged in a form of place-based politics in response to the dam construction process. A sense of community was forged through the process of dam construction and the subsequent creation of a town and municipality

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<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that there was a *povoado* (small village) at the foot of the original falls of Sobradinho which was destroyed by the dam; many of the original residents now live in the town of Sobradinho. However, the majority of the current population in Sobradinho came to the settlement because of the dam and the employment opportunities that its construction once provided.

around the dam.<sup>52</sup> This chapter explores the following questions: What were the links between place-making and the development of a sense of community among some residents (even with internal divisions) through the elaboration of a common structure of feeling (Williams 1977)? How did the separation of residents into three distinct *vilas* result in specific experiences of exclusion by residents in the unofficial squatter settlement? How did this impact the sort of politics residents engaged in around place? How did the dam construction period (1973-1979) and residents' memories of the founding of the town result in an understanding by residents that it was a place of their own making? What were the interconnections between unemployment in the early 1980s and everyday forms of violence in Sobradinho?<sup>53</sup> How was the social movement for a return to agricultural livelihoods absorbed by state "participatory development" projects? How did residents engage in a politics of place by petitioning for municipal status? In examining these processes, I highlight how residents' stories about the founding of Sobradinho indicate their sense of having constructed the town and a sense of place.

By using the term "politics of place" I am referring to residents' resistant and creative responses to both abstract global forces (transnational capital) and more readily

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<sup>52</sup> I am aware of the critiques of the term "community" and how the term often glosses over difference. Under the current neoliberal political model, the word *community* has increasingly become popular among politicians across the political spectrum (Gibson-Graham 2006: 84-85). Some argue that the use of the term "community" has served to camouflage governmental withdrawal from society as it shifts responsibilities onto citizens (Morton 2000). This corresponds with a similar warning recently made by Brazilian social scientist Evelina Dagnino who has asserted that there has been a "perverse confluence" between the neoliberal project and the democratizing project of Latin American popular social movements, which focused on citizen rights and the creation of active citizens (Dagnino 2007). Wary of these trends, I attempt to demonstrate how the common experience of living through the town's founding period resulted in a politics of place for many residents, and that, for many, common experience (i.e. community) was central to this process, especially amidst the inequality and difference that existed in the settlement.

<sup>53</sup> The construction period was followed by a particularly difficult period of mass unemployment starting in the early 1980s.

identifiable forms of State intervention that were inserting themselves into the locality. A number of researchers and activists have urged for attention to such place-based practices in order to challenge the supposed inevitability of capitalist globalization (see Harcourt and Escobar 2005). They argue that women are increasingly involved in a series of struggles around bodies, environment and economies. This chapter does not specifically address women's struggles, instead it documents how residents of the workers' settlement were involved in struggles around land, community, livelihood, and political determination of their own community.<sup>54</sup> While residents engaged in a transformative politics of place, they were also caught up in the state's attempts to draw residents into state-sponsored development and assuring their entry into the market, ignoring residents' desire for certain forms "peasant" based production. Residents engaged in a movement to occupy land in order to return to family-farming based livelihoods, which many saw as central to forms of familial security and community dignity. We can read the struggles of residents of Sobradinho as an attempt to defend and democratize livelihood (Harcourt and Escobar 1995: 10). As the writers of the politics of place perspective assert, "for many poor rural communities, the loss of connection to place implies the loss of meaning, subsistence, and security (Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 10)." We will see in this chapter that residents attempted to regain some of these forms of security through their place-based struggles.

When I refer to a construction of community in this chapter, I am referring to a sense of common cause (created amidst differing political stances) and also forms of social solidarity that emerged in the settlement, particularly among those living in the

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<sup>54</sup> However, I will return to a women's politics of place centered on the local economy in Chapter 5.

former squatter settlement of Vila São Joaquim. A sense of common cause emerged out of the group experience of social exclusion and state neglect, but also through the processes of working together to establish livelihood alternatives and through the process of organizing for the recognition of their settlement as a municipality. I realize that the term “community” is slippery and often politically suspect, in the way it glosses over difference. However, I hope to convey that a common history was created through the process of living through a similar set of hardships and through collective efforts to redress these—even as residents may occupy differing political positions today.

Because Sobradinho is a town that came into being within the span of the living memory of most residents, they (especially those in the former squatter *vila*, the *Vila São Joaquim*) convey “a sense of living in a self-constructed place” (Auyero 2000), despite the fact that much of the town was planned by state development agencies.<sup>55</sup> As Raffles notes in his study of place and nature-making in the Brazilian Amazon, much of the work of place-making is conducted through discursive practice: “the stories people tell over and over again that reinforce their personal connections to [a] particular local (2002: 54).” This chapter only hints at the processes of place-making, but stories indeed contribute to residents’ engagement in a politics around place. In discussing their lived experiences and the town’s history, residents draw from a similar and fairly limited

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<sup>55</sup> Drawing a distinct separation between the state and residents creates a division that may not be true to everyone’s lived experience in the town. Some residents were employed by state agencies and state-paid contractors, therefore they have clear memories of themselves being the ones who “cleared the brush” in order to construct the *vilas*. Older men who worked in Sobradinho in the early 1970s would recount, with pride, how it was they who worked the heavy equipment and how it was “all brush” (*tudo mato*) when they first arrived. Despite social tensions between Vila São Joaquim and Vila São Francisco, it is this shared sense of having cleared the area and having provided the labor for the town’s construction that creates a common structure of feeling at least amidst residents of these two *vilas*—i.e. there is a sense that they *made* the town.

repertoire of images, characters, and stories about the past. These stories convey residents' sense of ownership over the history of a place and of the town itself.

Poorer residents of the town often define themselves and the town through hardships and common trials that they or their townsfolk endured both during the construction of the dam and in its aftermath. Some residents recalled the excitement of the early years when the place was bustling with people and activity, and when "money was flowing" (*enrola muito dinheiro*). Some described the situation in distinctly gendered dimensions, noting that the town was full of *peão*.<sup>56</sup> Other residents said that "there were so many men here" or that there were a large number of women heads of household during the post-construction period. Residents were quick to relate to me, with *saudades*<sup>57</sup>, pleasure, and some pain, their memories of the early days of the town before it was an officially recognized municipality.

### **The Cultural Geography of Sobradinho**

Sobradinho consists of three *vilas*, each being distinct from and geographically separate from the other two (see figure 2).<sup>58</sup> Two of these *vilas*, the *Vila São Francisco* and the *Vila Santana*, were planned and funded by state development agencies in order to house employees working on the dam. The third *vila*, later named the *Vila São*

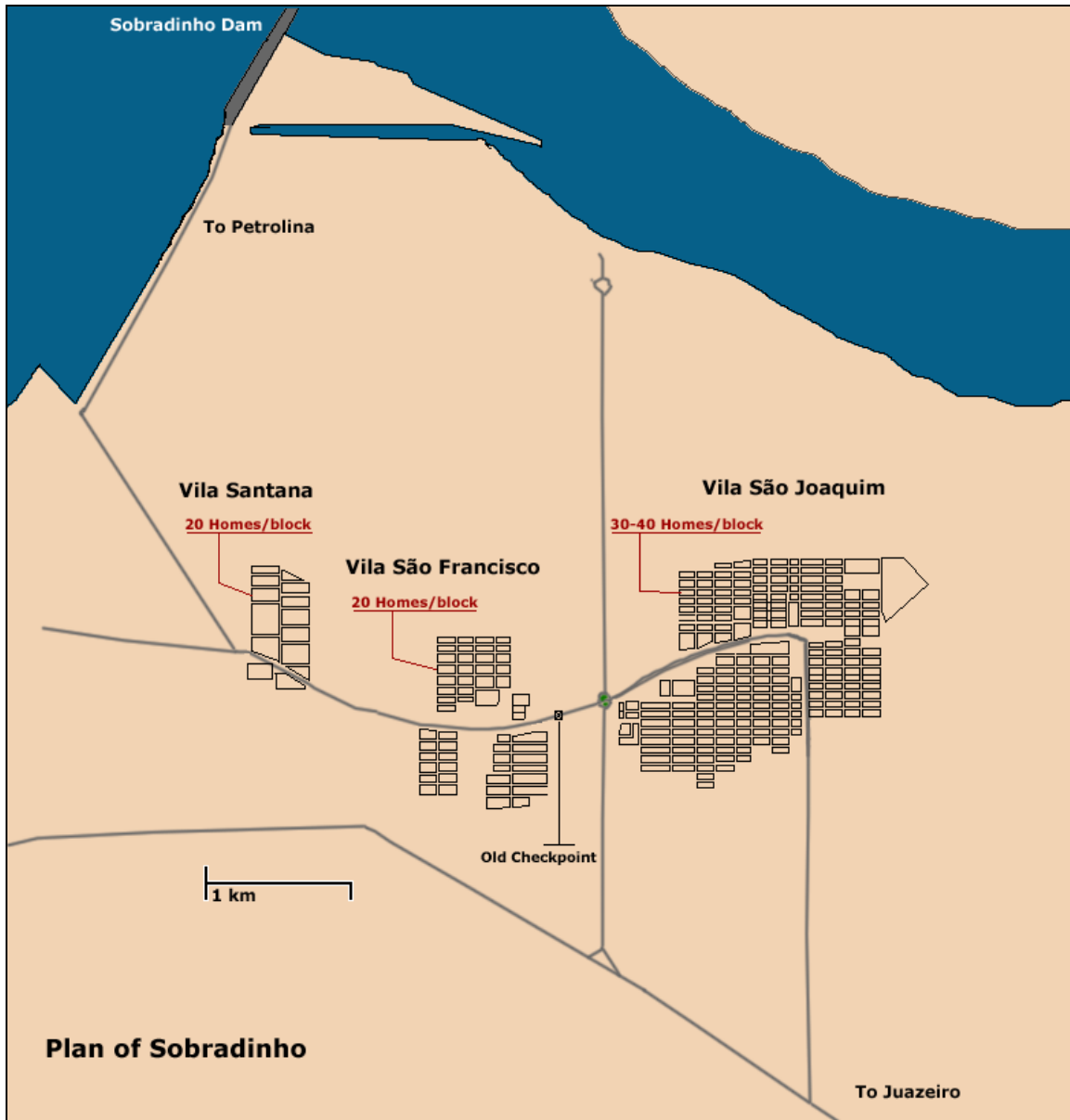
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<sup>56</sup> *Peão* is a term used to describe a physical laborer; it has both class and gendered connotations in referring to a male laborer.

<sup>57</sup> *Saudades* is best translated as nostalgic longing.

<sup>58</sup> The term *vila* (vila) is not usually used in the vernacular of the Northeast, even though it can be found in Portuguese Brazilian dictionaries. In common parlance, small towns or villages in the Northeast are referred to as *povoados*. As best I can tell the use of the term *vila* is an imposition of the development planning industry as residential areas for employees of other large scale development projects are also referred to as *vilas* or *villas* (Holston 1989; Ribeiro 1994).





**Figure 2: Map of Sobradinho.**

*Joaquim*, emerged early on in the construction process when residents squatted on the periphery of the national security fence that surrounded the two planned *vilas*.<sup>59</sup>

Connecting the three *vilas* is the *Avenida Geraldo Silva*, the only paved (but severely pot-

<sup>59</sup> The national security fence was a fence set up by the military regime of the era to protect the construction site after the land had been expropriated and deemed property of the state. This fence resulted in creating a formal separation between the planned settlement and the unplanned squatter settlement set up outside the fence.

holed) road in *Vila São Joaquim* (the former squatter settlement).<sup>60</sup> This avenue runs straight through town and through the *Vila São Francisco* (the former workers' *vila*), and then through the *Vila Santana* (the Vila of the technical and professional staff). Each of the *vilas* is separated from the other by an expanse of dry and dusty *caatinga* (brushland). This distance between the *vilas* was not accidental and served to reinforce forms of social segregation and class divisions between residents. As Zenobia de Oliveira, a resident of the *Vila Santana* who used to live in the *Vila São Francisco*, put it:

The truth is that it wasn't [just] a social division; it was a social injustice that CHESF itself committed. Because it wanted to, in a certain form, protect those who were constructing [the dam] and the people who came, the people who did the heavy labor and deforested, at the beginning of the construction. The people in the Vila São Francisco and the Vila Santana were distributed between these two *vilas* and were fenced in. They were separated with fences and guards. You would only have access if they called someone to confirm that you were going to see them. They would then let you enter into the camp. So, twenty years later they thought that people would not stay in Sobradinho, and what happened was that people in Vila São Joaquim continued living there and the workers who constructed the Vilas São Francisco and Santana stayed.

Zenobia went on to further describe all of the work that the Catholic Church has done in Sobradinho to rectify these injustices, but at the end added, "[B]ut despite all of this we still feel the discrimination in our skin."

The segregation of living quarters of the different classes of workers is not unique to this site, and in fact is a common pattern among large-scale development project settlements. As Ribeiro has noted large scale development projects' internal labor stratification is usually translated into the spatial realities of the settlement (1994: 103). There was a gendered dimension to this segregation as many of the male workers were expected to live in barrack style all-male worker's housing. Some of those skilled laborers who had families were housed in the 2-3 bedroom row houses set up in the *Vila*

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<sup>60</sup> This main avenue is named after the first elected mayor of Sobradinho, Geraldo Silva. He died within three months of being elected in 1989 and his vice-mayor, Ivan Borba, took office.

*São Francisco*. Due to the limited number of family housing units, many workers with families built homes on the periphery of the formal camp. These divisions mirror what Burawoy (1976) has indicated are defining features of what he terms “migratory labor systems,” in which the social reproduction of “unskilled” workers’ families is supposed to take place away from the place of work; planners only account for the lodging of the laborers themselves, not their families.

However, many families moved with the “unskilled” workers and built homes of *taipa*<sup>61</sup> (or any other material they could access), setting up a squatter community. Now most residents (except those who are considered to be living in dire poverty) are housed in homes made of cinder blocks. Today, *Vila São Joaquim* with its cinder block houses, some of which are plastered over, still stands in contrast to the two government-planned *vilas* with their grid layouts and paved streets. At the same time, the engineers’ and professionals’ *vila* stands apart from the previous two workers’ *vilas* because of its large multi-room, free-standing, middle-class homes. I will discuss the symbolism of these houses and the meaning of the attempts to create a gridded street plan in the next section as I describe the Vila São Joaquim.

*Vila São Joaquim: the Unplanned Vila, formerly a squatter community*

During my fieldwork, I lived in and spent most of my time in the *Vila São Joaquim*.<sup>62</sup> As mentioned above, in many ways, more so than the other two *vilas*, *Vila*

*São Joaquim* is understood to be a self-constructed place, as it was residents themselves

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<sup>61</sup> *Taipa* is a traditional wattle and daub construction method employed in the region, but currently seen as undesirable or lacking in dignity by many in the region. The consideration that homes of *taipa* lack dignity is certainly due to the effects of the development discourse in the region; public health concerns influence this as *taipa* often houses the insect which carries *chagas* disease. In one of the *povoados* I visited whose residents were relocated by the hydroelectric company for dam, inhabitants were indignant that they were still living in homes made of *taipa*; they interpreted this as further sign of neglect by those in power.

who cleared the brush and built their first homes here. This area and its homes were *not* planned by the development planners. A few years after residents started settling here in the late 1970s, the settlement came to be considered a “problem” to be dealt with by CHESF<sup>63</sup> authorities, who attempted to impose some sort of “order” on the settlement by setting up grid system of numbered blocks and (unpaved) streets. They also divided the area into a number of lots which residents could apply for and on which they could build homes. Yet despite these efforts, residents are quick to note that most of the streets are still not paved and there is no functioning gutter system. Maria Alice, who moved to Sobradinho in 1980 commented on this saying, “When I first got here, I thought Sobradinho was very strange.” When I asked her why, she said,

Because before that block was all brush. Now it is wonderful, but when I arrived here that block, N-20, was all brush. Over where the sports quad is, that was all brush. It was horrible. All of these blocks were unoccupied.

This was a common comment by residents of *Vila São Joaquim*, that when they go to Sobradinho it was *tudo mato*—all brush, and not like a town at all.

Once the dam planners realized that so many people were moving into the periphery of the national security area, there was an attempt to organize or structure the *vila*. It was divided into a North and South end (split by the *Avenida Geraldo Silva*, the one paved road). Each side was divided into blocks (*quadras*) which were numbered and labeled as North or South. So, for example, a street on the 18<sup>th</sup> block on the North side is

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<sup>62</sup> I was aware that where I chose to live was going to be seen as a political decision, and sure enough when I told friends that I wanted to find a place to rent in *Vila São Joaquim*, some responded, “You want to be with the *povo* (the People)!” in affirmation that I made the “right” choice. My decision was based on this knowledge and desire, as well as my wish to be in the *vila* which is today the center of social life and activity in the town.

<sup>63</sup> CHESF is an acronym for the *Companhia Hidroelétrica do São Francisco*, the Hydroelectric Company of the São Francisco.

called N-18. The setting up of a gridded city was an important element in establishing colonial control in cities in Latin America. Political order was to be established by creating ordered cities, helping with the colonizers civilizing mission (see Stern 1982, mentioned in Goldstein 2004: 6). Goldstein (2004) further notes how the physical orderliness of towns was supposed to translate into the social orderliness of residents themselves. The attempt to impose order by setting a grid pattern and organizing the settlement was an attempt to by the development planners to transform the messy and chaotic settlement into something that would embody some semblance of the vision of progress, modernity, and development that the military was attempting to install with the dam project. The grid system served to map residents in location, instituting a form of social control.

Similarly, Pigg (1992) notes how residents, in the era of developmentalism, appropriate and internalize these sorts of colonial visions, so that cinder block homes, the organization of the *vilas*, and so on are read as representing one's contact with modernity. In Sobradinho, the symbolic value of having a home made of cinder blocks (whether plastered or not) become important markers of whether one has made some inroads in to accessing certain forms of development, even while cinder block homes are seen as "less modern" than the homes in the other two *vilas*. A home made of *taipa* (wattle and daub) symbolizes poverty and living in a home which lacks dignity. The upper middle-class residents in the Vila Santana were already in possession of markers of modernity with their large North-American styled homes. It is likely not coincidental that the engineers'

*vila* is located closer to the dam, the ultimate symbol of modernity, progress, and development.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the contrasts between the *vilas*, the symbolic associations of each *vila* has changed somewhat over the years as the *Vila São Joaquim* is now the commercial, administrative, and social center of the town. The center of *Vila São Joaquim* has many small businesses and one can usually find groups of men sitting in front of bars and storefronts in this area. A prominent feature in the *vila* is the large covered market (built in 2002) which houses produce vendors, dry goods vendors and butcher shops; it is the “modernized” (cleaned-up) version of the open air market that residents’ established in the 1970s. The largest portion of Sobradinho’s residents live in *Vila São Joaquim*, approximately two-thirds of the residents of the total 22,000 residents of the municipality.<sup>65</sup> *Vila São Joaquim*’s liveliness is something that residents often contrast to the *parada* (stopped) life in the other two *vilas*.

However, even as *Vila São Joaquim* might be the liveliest of the *vilas*, we need only to hear the names that residents use for *Vila São Joaquim* to understand how they understand its place in the social hierarchy of Sobradinho. Some names I heard the *vila* called were the *vila dos pobres* (the *vila* of the poor), *vila dos trabalhadores* (the

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<sup>64</sup> Stacy Leigh Pigg examines how the concept of development as it is taken up in Nepal produced an evolutionary understanding of society, in which there is one evolutionary line of social differentiation (1992: 501). Similarly one could read the differences between the villages as symbolizing an evolutionary understanding of those who have access to and are indeed “more developed” than those who live in the *Vila São Joaquim*. Here “modernity” is conflated with socio-economic status. Even “less modern” is the understanding of *povoados* (villages) in the interior of the municipality. Residents who live in the interior are often understood to live in homes made of *taipa* (wattle and daub) construction, are less educated, and in general of mixed African and Indigenous descent.

<sup>65</sup> Approximately 20,000 residents live in the semi-urban center of Sobradinho and the other 2,000 live in the rural areas of the municipality. The population has dropped significantly in the town from its peak of 38,000 during the dam construction period in the 1970s.

workers' *vila*, a name also used for the planned *Vila São Francisco*), the *vila* of those without professionalization, or, in the mid to late-1980s, *Cai Duro*, meaning literally "fallen stiff." As it was explained to me, the term *Cai Duro* refers to the large number of shootings that occurred in the *vila* at the time and the fact that by the time the bodies were found in the morning, they were already cold or "stiff."<sup>66</sup> In addition, residents often referred to the other *vilas* (São Francisco and Santana) as "*the Vila*" (fusing the two), asserting the division between the planned *vilas* and the former squatter community. When I first got to Sobradinho I thought I could use this term (as in, "I'm going to the *vila*.") to describe *Vila São Joaquim* when I was in one of the planned *vilas*; however, the quizzical looks I received when I said this indicated that "*the Vila*" referred exclusively to the areas that were once built by the hydroelectric company. Closely related to this, expressing the former marginality of the squatter settlement, is another term for the *vila*: "the *vila* that wasn't supposed to exist."

*Vila São Francisco: the Planned Vila of the Skilled and Unskilled Labor*

About a half a kilometer separates the *Vila São Joaquim* from the *Vila São Francisco*, the *vila* intended to house the dam construction. Those who were granted permission to live here were employed by either CHESF (the Hydroelectric Company of the São Francisco) or one of the four building contractors working on the dam construction.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to the *Vila São Joaquim*, the streets here are paved, but pot-

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<sup>66</sup> Use of the name *Cai Duro* in reference to Vila São Joaquim is widely documented in the literature produced by development agencies working in Sobradinho in the 1980s and by Catholic Church documents discussing the social movement activity of the period.

<sup>67</sup> This is not to say that those living in the *Vila São Joaquim* were not employed in the dam construction, but they were more likely to have been hired as temporary employees or by the four contracting companies, rather than as permanent (and assumedly "more skilled") CHESF employees.

holed and not well-maintained. These homes are built in a standardized row-house style which serves as a reminder of the temporary (but perhaps more comfortable) barracks that they were supposed to be for those workers who had families. Being row-houses, the homes are of similar design and structure; although additions and changes have been made to them over the years so that today they are more differentiated than they were in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In the past there were tensions between residents of the *Vila São Francisco* and the *Vila São Joaquim*, because of the perceived class differences between them. Those from the *Vila São Francisco* were seen as lower middle class or working class and those in the *Vila São Joaquim* were seen as poor and/or perhaps “more rural” in origin. These perceived differences emerged through the construction process: it mattered *who* was hired by CHESF and who was not. I say this because my discussions with residents of the *Vilas São Joaquim* and *São Francisco* indicated that most residents of both *vilas* came from very similar rural or small town *Nordestino* backgrounds. However, the perception that some were favored through the benefits associated with state employment created status differences between them. For example, while residents of *Vila São Francisco* received free electricity and had running water all day long during the construction years (1973 to 1980), the residents of *Vila São Joaquim* had to pay for electricity and did not have running water. These perks also included the presence of a supermarket, a hospital, the administrative offices of CHESF with their manicured lawns and modernist architecture, and also a Catholic Church constructed by CHESF for workers. Differences



in access to perks such as these were a point of contention and will be discussed further in this and the following chapter.

Because of these amenities, residents of Vila São Francisco related to me that in the past the Vila São Francisco, not the Vila São Joaquim, had once been the center of social life and activity in the town. Those now in their 30s and 40s described to me how in their youth, they used to hang out along the central avenue and how there was always activity on the street. Today the *vila* is rather quiet and there is very little commerce here. When youth or adults want to go out at night for some food or a drink, they go to the *Vila São Joaquim*. However, older residents of *Vila São Francisco* expressed how they felt close to their neighbors and that many felt like family since they had been in Sobradinho for so long together. In the evenings, as the air cooled, and during weekend afternoons, you can find residents sitting in front of their houses, chatting with friends and neighbors; you can also find a similar sort of sociality among neighbors in the *Vila São Joaquim*.

#### *Vila Santana: the Planned Vila of the Engineers and Dam Professionals*

This visible neighborly sociality was harder to find in the much more individualized nuclear family style housing found in the *Vila Santana*. The *Vila Santana* is noticeably different in house structure and layout than the other two *vilas*. Homes there are large by *Sobradinhense* standards, and quite similar to the North American “ideal” of a suburban middle class (ranch-style) home. The houses are free-standing, spacious (most have at least three bedrooms with a living and dining room), and have a fenced-off front yard and backyard (many of which are taken up by a lawn or a rock garden). What was striking was how out-of-place these homes look in this semiarid region. The presence of

lawns seemed absurd since lawns are completely impractical and not part of the local traditions of the semiarid.

If these differences were not enough to demarcate it, the *Vila Santana* is separated from the *Vila São Francisco* by a vacant kilometer long stretch of the *Avenida Geraldo Silva*.<sup>68</sup> The streets of *Vila Santana* are paved and there are several public squares in the *vila* with fountains and lawn areas, yet these remained unoccupied. Although *Vila Santana* stood out as unique among the three *vilas*, it was quite similar to other large-scale development project professional communities found throughout the world (Ribeiro 1989). Built for the engineers and other professionals employed by CHESF, its middle class homes were intended to appeal to a different class aesthetic than the other two *vilas*. Even more so than *Vila São Francisco*, the streets are quite empty and devoid of human activity and residents do not sit outside their houses, as they do in the other two *vilas*. The streets were wider and the houses were further apart than in the other two *vilas*, which likely contributed the lack of visible social life. Apparently, residents of the other *vilas* have their own explanation for the lack of social life in the *Vila Santana*, as a friend told me that many people say that the *Vila Santana* was built on an indigenous grave-yard and this is why life never took off there. We can see in this story, the subtle linking of the violence of colonization with the violence of the development project. Ribeiro has noted that the absence of social interaction in the public spaces of large-scale development project settlements is common: he argues that is the result of the organization of production on the project whereby all spheres of social life are subordinated to the logic

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<sup>68</sup> Note that the distance between the *Vila São Francisco* and the *Vila Santana* is close to double the distance between San Francisco and São Joaquim.

of production, ultimately meaning that social interactions can never be free of the project (1989: 106). As he notes, in his study of the Yacretá dam, “social control is potentially, and sometimes virtually, intertwined with labor control (1989: 106).”

This has also meant that there is no commerce in the *vila*, except for the *Clube Santana* (the Santana Club)—a social club established by CHESF for the engineers’ families which houses a pool, sports facilities, and a small restaurant. Despite its amenities, there has been significant out-flight from *Vila Santana* to Juazeiro and Petrolina. Sobradinho cannot offer the same attractions as the urban areas of Juazeiro and Petrolina, which feature a new shopping mall and cinema (built in 2000), restaurants and bars on the riverfront, high rise upper middle class apartment complexes, and many shops and boutiques.<sup>69</sup> Those who remain in Vila Santana say they prefer Sobradinho to the cities because it is *tranquilo* (tranquil) and they do not have to worry about the violence that troubles many residents of urban Brazil. However, as discussed in the next section, Sobradinho has not always been considered a tranquil place for most residents.

### **The Dam-Building Era and Early Memories of Place: 1973-1979**

Sobradinho residents’ earliest memories convey the atmosphere of festivity and activity that characterized the town in the 1970s. At the same time, the national security fence which divided the population of the *Vila São Joaquim* from the formal encampment (*Vilas São Francisco* and *Santana*) led to tensions between residents, and, generalized violence. The violence of dislocating the residents surrounding the lake, the violence of

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<sup>69</sup> From my first visit to the area in 2001 to my last in 2006, I noticed a dramatic increase in high-end retail shops and fashion boutiques and the shutting down of the “mom and pop” low-end storefronts in downtown Juazeiro, reflecting the area’s emerging middle class that has arisen with the proliferation of agroindustry in the area.

the construction process (many workers died during its construction), and the symbolic violence of the social segregation implemented by the National Security fence and the lack of facilities provided for those living on outside of the government-planned zone, all manifested in forms of everyday violence among residents.<sup>70</sup> The violence became exaggerated during the period of mass lay-offs after the dam was completed in the early 1980s, as will be discussed below.

Stories of Sobradinho in the 1970s (dating from 1973 to 1979) are often colorful and funny: various characters emerge in tales about the people who contributed to Sobradinho's early history. This was the era when residents said the settlement was hopping and money was flowing. These descriptions are often reminiscent of those of a boom town or a frontier town. Many from the Northeast and other parts of Brazil moved to Sobradinho because they had heard of the employment opportunities available and this diversity contributed to the air of festivity.<sup>71</sup> Each had their own specific reason for moving here, but for many *nordestinos*, lack of employment opportunity where they were living or difficult living conditions (such as distant access to water) were cited as reasons for the move. Maria Bezerra, who joked about her innocence<sup>72</sup> before coming to Sobradinho at the age of 15, arrived in 1973. She had left the island of Pituraçá near Cabrobó with her family, fleeing a flood that was covering the island and which put an

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<sup>70</sup> The creation of a perimeter fence around the planned development *vilas* and the squatter settlements is a common phenomenon with large-scale development projects. Ribeiro (1994: 98) documents such a fence at the Yacretá dam in Argentina; and through a visit to the Paulo Afonso dam along the São Francisco River, I also learned that there was a perimeter fence there. Both residents in Ribeiro's work and residents of Paulo Afonso made reference to this fence as a "Berlin Wall."

<sup>71</sup> There was an active process of recruitment, particularly in the Northeast, in which CHESF and their contractors dispersed news of employment opportunities on the dam site.

<sup>72</sup> The word she used in addition to *innocente* was *lesa*, a slang term in the Northeast that indicates someone who is passive and/or without energy.

end to her family's work as day-laborers there. Having made an offering to *Bom Jesus de Lapa*<sup>73</sup> by throwing several coins into the São Francisco River because she had heard that this "saint" was *muito milagroso* (a miracle worker), she asked *Bom Jesus de Lapa* what her family should do:

I made a promise to *Bom Jesus de Lapa*, that He help to illuminate a place where we could live, all of the family. I threw some coins in the river for *Bom Jesus da Lapa*. So, then, I dreamt that night . . . and when I woke up, I remembered where. In that dream I knew where. When I woke up in the morning I called to my father, "Father, I know where we can go!" "To where?" "To Sobradinho!"

She then sold the family's pig, chickens, and her transistor radio, saying "at that time very few people had a radio." She then helped her family pack for Sobradinho, traveling on top of a truck with other migrants. She explained that when she arrived, "Sobradinho . . . was just beginning. It had only started a year before, and it was just stands. There were tents of wood, some made of rods, sticks, mud, and of cardboard —*many* stands of cardboard, and of canvas."

She, like others, commented on the festive spirit of the era. In particular, she talked about the entertainment that came in to town for the workers. One of these was a canvas tent that showed movies:

The *Cine Esperança* [the Cinema of Hope] was made of canvas, it belonged to the gypsies<sup>74</sup>. . . There was a cinema every weekend, with films, with singers, there was Pai José, there was Campo Rei, there was Fernando Mendes, Zé Augusto—there were many more, all of these singers from that time came here. It was really full on Saturdays—full

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<sup>73</sup> *Bom Jesus de Lapa* (Good Jesus of Lapa) is a shrine set-up in a limestone cave in Lapa, a town in Western Bahia along the São Francisco River. Pilgrims come here to make offerings and requests to Jesus. Maria Bezerra laughed to me, that at age 15 when she made this request, she had no idea that *Bom Jesus de Lapa* was Jesus; she had thought the shrine was for a saint.

<sup>74</sup> Dona Zélia and her husband are known as "the gypsies" in Sobradinho and Zélia is a well-known fortune-teller and *candomblé* (an Afro-Brazilian religion of Brazil) practitioner in the area. I first met her on September 26, 2005, when I attended a ceremony for *Cosme e Damião*, a *candomblé* ceremony that offers protection for children in honor of the saints of Cosme and Damião. Dona Zélia proudly told me that she was part Roma, proudly pointing to the pictures on her wall of her Gypsy parents when they were young and still living in Romania.

of people! — to attend the show. At that time, there were many *peão*, lots of people. And this brought in a lot of money too.

Maria's stories conveyed many of the common themes that came up in my interviews and discussions with other residents about that period: that there was a lot of activity in the town, that there were many men, especially *peão*, and that there was a lot of money.<sup>75</sup>

Marta de Santana, a resident of the *Vila São Francisco*, similarly commented,

I know that there were many *peão*, many *peão* in that period. You would have found people from every place and of every type here. It was wonderful! Too bad that I couldn't have taken advantage of it. Right? It was wonderful! You know, a lot of money flowed here [*enrola muito dinheiro*]. Those people who understood how to live and start things got rich. There were many people who did this and left.

Marta joked after she said this that she was just too young at the time to take advantage of the situation. Marta's recollections reflected many others that I heard of the construction period being a time of plenty and fun by residents. Also, we can see how the cash economy created a boomtown situation that was unprecedented for many. However, it is very important to note that expressions of the fun and excitement of the early years were not recalled by those who were forced to move to Sobradinho because they were displaced by the dam. For those who were displaced, their move to Sobradinho marked a period of a profound sense of loss of their former life: their neighbors, their home, their agricultural plots and lush fruit trees, and a sense of tranquility.

It is not surprising, then, that many residents, along with their colorful and hopeful tales, recalled the 1970s to mid-1980s as violent. One aspect of this violence was the institutional violence of the perimeter fence. At the entrance to the Vila São Francisco from the Vila São Joaquim stands a small structure (perhaps 10 feet by 10 feet square, at

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<sup>75</sup> As she recounted this, I could not help but think of Carlos Diegues's classic film, *Bye Bye Brasil*, that humorously chronicles the disappearance of these traveling performance tents in rural Brazil in the 1970s, as television sets and transistor radios start to become forms of entertainment in the Brazilian interior.

most) on a cement island in the middle of the road. To an outsider, it looks innocuous enough, but residents remember it as the guard post where a military officer manned a road block. Before entering the Vila São Francisco and the Vila Santana, residents were required to show their government-issued identification cards and indicate who they were visiting and/or indicate what sort of business they had to conduct there. During the time of the national security zone (1973 to 1980) this guard post symbolized a violent reinforcement of the separation between the planned settlements and the unplanned. Although the days of the security area ended in the early 1980s; the guard shack still stands (now selling crafts made by youth in Sobradinho) as a reminder of those days. But, apparently residents did not accept the humiliating separation without resisting and mocking the militarized masculinity of the guards at the time. Dona Elsa, who used to sell produce by cart in the *Vila São Francisco* in the 1970s, joked to me how when she got to the guard post she would call out to the guard teasingly, “Hey you, raise the stick to let us pass!”, using the play on words “*levante o pau*” which is slang for an erection. This story illustrates some of the subtle ways (or not so subtle) in which residents dealt with and resisted the authoritarian situation under which they were living.

After the elimination of the fence and the removal of the guard post, relations between the Vilas became more fluid and less tense. For example, residents who lived in Vila São Joaquim purchased homes in Vila São Francisco, and now, many residents’ familial and social relations span the *vilas*. But, despite that residents now attend social events, such as church functions, in other *vilas*, they still live with the memory of former social divisions. The old tensions, although not as sharp, still emerge now and again. One

woman once explained to me that she and her husband were participating in a Christian couple's group that was hosted on a rotating basis by the couples involved; but she and her husband stopped attending because all of the meetings were held at homes of couples "in the *Vila*" (referring to the Vila São Francisco). She was ashamed to have people over when it was their turn because then participants would see how the walls of her home were not perfectly white-washed. One youth told me, that young men from the Vila Santana still come into the Vila São Joaquim and beat up the working class youth of that *vila* because they "had nothing better to do." He claimed that the police in the town would do nothing about it because these youth were from the privileged class in Sobradinho.

Returning to the violence of the construction era, Zenobia de Oliveira, a resident of the *Vila Santana* who formerly lived in *Vila São Francisco* described the period to me like this:

In that time period, the violence was huge, there was so much violence that it was one of the biggest concerns that caused them to fence in the encampment. They called it [*Vila São Joaquim*] *Cai Duro* because everyday, in the morning there would be 3, 4, 5 or sometimes an absurd number of people killed. Because there was a lot of violence. There were no women. So, during that time period there was a restaurant called Bandeirão. It was there during the period of the workers-- you had to leave by 9:00 PM [because it was] only men. Because people with families would not go out because of the violence.

Her reflections evoke a number of themes from others' tales about the 1970s and early 1980s in Sobradinho: that it was violent, that there was a predominance of men in the town, and that families would not want to live in or go to certain areas of the town due to violence and the prevalence of prostitution. Zenobia, although active in the Worker's Party and in the Children's Pastoral<sup>76</sup>, implied that the perimeter fence was set up after

<sup>76</sup> The Children's Pastoral is a nationally recognized and funded set of Catholic Church groups whose volunteers works to combat infant and childhood malnutrition. Its existence in Sobradinho is perceived by many to have emerged from the already existing groups that worked towards bettering living conditions for



the violence began. However, other residents attributed the greatest period of violence to the period *following* the mass lay-offs of workers with the completion of the dam, not during construction.

While the security fence served as a form of social exclusion, there were other indignities and forms of violence perpetrated by CHESF that made residents indignant. Rosa Oliveira, secretary of the Rural Laborers Union, moved to Sobradinho in 1973. Her husband worked as a laborer on the dam and she asserted that in the initial stages of the dam construction, bodies were buried secretly at night:

During this time period [in 1973], at the beginning, lots of people died in the dam [construction]. We lived close to the cemetery and at night, there were 10 yellow cars carrying the corpses to the cemetery—they would take them there at night.

AA: People who died in the dam [construction]?

Yes, and they would bring them at night so they would not have to compensate [the families] for the corpses of those people. When their families came to look for them they would say that that person had left, had asked to leave the firm. This created a controversy. People demanded that the firm keep the bodies out until someone could identify them-- a friend or an acquaintance. You would arrive there and there would be a number of open coffins, until the families came. We saw it because we lived close, but no one would go there. It was the military police that brought them there in the beginning, and later they left the corpses out and they would be buried the next day. I *peguei uma crise*<sup>77</sup> [had a breakdown] and cried day and night, to leave, because I was afraid.

AA: Because you were afraid that . . .

That my husband would be caught also!

Workers on the dam site related tales of men falling asleep on the job within the iron framing of the concrete forms for the dam and how those caught below were buried alive within the concrete. Others fell from the scaffolding and died. Since the construction “had to go on” their bodies often were not retrieved and, consequently, were buried in the

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Sobradinho’s population, even prior to official recognition by the Catholic Church.

<sup>77</sup> Literally “had a crisis”; a term for having a breakdown.

concrete of the dam. One elderly gentleman, a former CHESF employee, recalled sadly how a friend of his fell from the scaffolding while constructing one of the water towers in the Vila São Francisco and died. We were just across the street from the tower, and he said that every time he passed it he remembered. Several times I heard *Sobradinhenses* make comments to the effect that the dam was “made of the blood and bones of many workers” or that “many workers are buried inside that dam.” These tales conveyed a sense that production “needs” took priority to human life, as construction was not to be stopped for retrieval of workers’ bodies.

### **Unemployment and Forms of Everyday Violence: 1980-1990**

While the formal institutions of CHESF and the state perpetrated a certain level of violence, those moving into the area often remember violence among and between residents.<sup>78</sup> Most of these tales are about the period after 1980 when 10,000 workers were laid off. However, concerns about the prevalence of prostitution and general carousing were raised by many who moved into *Vila São Joaquim* with their families. Betinha Alves, who lives in the *Vila São Joaquim*, described how good the early years of Sobradinho were. But she also recounted when the violence began to affect her:

The stand [I worked in] closed and I stayed working in a bar. I worked a lot in “Open Doors” – a bar that would stay open late at night and people would drink there. *Mulheres da vida* [prostitutes] would be there drinking. And afterwards I left there because it was very dangerous. One day there was a payday and it was a *pagamento fraco* [a weak payment] and there were a bunch of men drinking there. And when it was about five in the morning, a man grabbed another to fight with him. So, he left . . . and the other stayed

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<sup>78</sup> In their study of the social effects of the trans-Amazonian highway, a project perhaps most illustrative of the Brazilian military regime’s grand developmentalist ideology, Schmink and Wood (1992) note the contradictory effects of planned communities: they often lead to unplanned settlement and military “protection” of the site often leads to generalized violence. Schmink and Wood discuss the social conflicts and that emerge at frontier locations stating that: “[A] ‘frontier can refer to the physical edge of a settled area and to the battle lines that marked the confrontation between competing claims. It can also refer, metaphorically, to the uneasy boundary between alternative definitions of what resources are to be appropriated how and by whom (1992: 19).”

there drinking. I stayed there cleaning up the bar, and the guy came from there and he shot at the other. And the bullet went like this above me. [She motioned with her hand above her head.] . . . And the girls there told me that the bullet had passed just above my head. So, I left because I was scared.

Betinha, who arrived early on in the construction process, recounted that when she first arrived, “*Era bom demais aqui*”— it was so good here. But, the lay-offs marked a shift in her life in Sobradinho. She remembered the lay-off period as a difficult time:

When the work ended it was just suffering, that’s what it was. Everyone was leaving the firm. There were so many people’s houses that were totally closed. People would ask others to live in their houses so that they would not collapse. I lived over there in an abandoned house that had no one in it, it was closed. Many people left, so there were few people here. And we suffered.

This theme of the change from “how good things were” when everyone was steadily employed to the suffering which followed was repeated many times in interviews and discussions with residents.

Residents recounted memories about the layoff period of stores being sacked, random acts of violence, and frequent childhood death. Aparecida da Rosa Silveira told me that her family moved to Salvador for a period of time because, “1983-1985 was very difficult. We left in 1986 because in 1980 CHESF had terminated service. Many people left at that time; if you sold things you could not sell them, and people started to sack the stores.” This was the same period in which *Vila São Joaquim* acquired the name *Cai Duro*, in reference to the killings that occurred. Part of the recovery of a sense of pride in the *vila*, when Sobradinho became its own municipality in 1989, was an assertion by the first mayor Geraldo Silva, that the name of the Vila was not *Cai Duro*, but *Vila São Joaquim*.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Residents still occasionally use the term *Cai Duro* to refer to the *Vila São Joaquim*.

One example of the interplay between the institutional violence of CHESF and everyday violence was what many residents of *Vila São Joaquim* recall as the *época do chafariz*: “the era of the water spigot” and its associated violence. Once CHESF had realized that residents were going to stay in the *Vila São Joaquim* in the 1970s, it set up minimal infrastructure for residents. One of these services was a water spigot for every block in the *vila*. Clara da Silva, director of the community-run daycare remembered this time period, stating:

We accompanied the era of the water spigot. There were big fights over water, including many deaths that occurred because of water . . . People arrived with their cans and placed them in the line [at the spigot]. The water was not [available] all day long. So, at 11 or 12 o’ clock [at night] there would be no more water. Whoever arrived early at the line would be able to get some water, whoever arrived late would not be able to get any. So, many people started to bring many containers and place them in the line . . . But, this would create a commotion—when [the spigot] started to run out of water with a very long line. Sometimes we spent an entire day in line to get a can of water. We placed a can there in the morning and left in the afternoon with a can of water. So, many people started these scrambles and “discussions”<sup>80</sup>-- fights, punches, and even deaths occurred because of water, the fights at the water spigot. We were here at this time! We kids went to the line . . . This was a very difficult time. And in general, we would just get water for the consumption of the house: for cleaning, to cook, to wash clothes.

Up through the early 1990s water was only available to residents of the two planned *vilas* during the day and at night water would be turned on for the informal settlement of *Vila São Joaquim*.<sup>81</sup> Residents would set up pails in line next to the few public water spigots throughout the encampment in order to reserve their space in line. Water access within the encampment was particularly important because the *vila* was located a little over two kilometers from the river’s edge. Also, in the era of the national security fence, one would have had to pass through the guard post in order to get onto the road that led to the

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<sup>80</sup> The term Clara used was *discussões*, translated literally “discussions,” but used as a euphemism for an altercation.

<sup>81</sup> Clara recalled the water as being turned on after 10 PM. The hour varies in residents’ accounts, but all agreed that the water did not go on until at least 9 PM at night.

river. This meant that residents who needed to go to the river to wash clothes and to bathe had to gain permission to enter into the national security area. Few residents had cars, so most would have walked or gone by bicycle under the hot sun. It was not until a year or two after the municipalization of the town that most homes had piped water.

To add insult to injury, according to Sister Elena Maria Martins, who arrived in Sobradinho in 1987, the water would be turned on in the Vila São Joaquim only *after* CHESF's gardens were watered in the other two Vilas:

The water was treated in the Vila São Francisco and went to the Vila Santana. It didn't come here. The water just arrived in the water spigot, always after 11 PM at night, because the water would go there [to the planned Vilas] during the day to water the gardens. At that time it all belonged to CHESF. After watering the gardens there the water would come here.

AA: The gardens?

Yes, the gardens there—that's how it was. But, it was untreated water—it came straight out of the river to water the gardens and we used this same water.

These stories demonstrate the ways in which the water spigots contributed to residents' sense that CHESF was perpetrating a series of indignities upon those in the *Vila São Joaquim*: one was that the water went first to water the gardens of the hydroelectric company; another was that there were not enough spigots for the number of residents of the *vila*; and last, that the residents in *Vila São Joaquim* did not receive treated water, as did the residents of the other two planned *vilas*. For most residents this last indignity was less pressing as many had not had treated water in the small villages where they had once lived; drinking water from the river was the norm. It was the contrast between what those in the other two *vilas* received and what those in *Vila São Joaquim* did not that created bad feelings about the issue.

However, some residents were resourceful, using the water shortage to earn some income. Dona Elsa and her husband Jorge, laughingly told me of *o Colombiano* (the Colombian, as they called him) who set-up a shower system and sold showers in the encampment for R \$1.00 and how residents would complain that they got cheated out of the amount of water in their shower.<sup>82</sup> According to them, this same man kept a tiger as a pet that he would charge residents to see. Another woman told me that her children would take turns bringing pails of water to other residents for which they would get paid, adding much-needed family income during this difficult financial period.

Despite this creativity, according to Sister Elena, the untreated water, combined with the generalized poverty caused a number of childhood deaths:

*Nossa senhora!*<sup>83</sup> Many children [died]—the first month I arrived here—I went to the cemetery and I saw all these small coffins for children. At the end of the month, we went there and there were 38 children who had been buried that month. So, there was more than one baby dying each day. Yes, many people, many people died-- and many children. Too many died to count.

Despite the prevalence of childhood death, physical violence between residents in Sobradinho had declined somewhat by 1987. Residents, both with the assistance of the Church and through their own volition, organized a series of projects to address the situation of high infant death in the town and the poor living conditions as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Despite the fact that conditions have generally improved since the mid-1980s, for those of the older generation, who had lived in the smaller villages that were inundated by the dam, there was a marked sense that they no longer have the tranquil life they once

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<sup>82</sup> The Brazilian *real* was not the form of currency at the time, but I noticed that many residents slipped into using the comparable number of *reais* to refer to the *cruzeiros*, the form of currency at the time.

<sup>83</sup> *Nossa Senhora* means “Our Lady!” conveying the meaning of “My word!”

had. Aparecida da Rosa Silveira, who lives in the *Vila São Joaquim* and whose village of Bossaroca was inundated by the waters of the lake, commented:

I do miss it [her village] because it was tranquil. We had more freedom. We could send a child any distance to do something and there was no danger from anything. And today, I can't even send my grandson to study in the *Vila Santana*, and he is little. At that time, we didn't have this danger.

Those who were in their 50s or older, who had memories of life prior to the dam, recalled the peace they once had in contrast with the sense of insecurity they now feel.<sup>84</sup> This was a common refrain among older residents: the contrast between a former life of *paz* (peace) and tranquility versus a current sense of insecurity and fear related to a rise in violence. This sense of insecurity is also related to the loss of their former close-knit community, in which one was surrounded by extended kin relations and neighbors with which they had been acquainted for life.

Dona Fátima, in her sixties and who had lived on the river's edge in the municipality of Sento Sé, commented, "We left all of our community there—where you knew everyone. But once you moved, you didn't know anyone." Dona Fátima further related a change in lifestyle and daily habits that were difficult for her to get accustomed to:

A lot of our habits changed. Because there we worked in a certain manner—when it rained the river would flood and it would wash the land and so we would plant there on those lands. People who live here now but who used to live there, now work differently. Now people live far from the river. It was a change in our habits. There we worked in one way and after the dam we worked in another manner.

AA: Do you feel *saudades* [longing/nostalgia] for there?

Until today I feel them. Until today. To work in the street [*trabalhar na rua*] is a huge difference. Because working in the fields is different from working in the house of a

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<sup>84</sup> Apparently not just a sense of tranquility changed, even Aparecida's experience of time changed. When I asked her if her daily workload was heavier or lighter at her *povoado*, she said, "I think it is equal." But then added, "Here [in Sobradinho] there is more work because there is little time. Back then we did harder work, but we had more time for it. Today we are a slave to life (*escravo da vida*). We have to work."

family [as a domestic worker]. We get used to it, but the difference is big . . . it was a big change for us to get accustomed to new habits.

“Working in the street” meant a shift away from the self-organized farm work that was part of their daily experience—now residents were held to schedules and other forms of labor regimentation. As we will see later in this chapter, some residents will pursue agrarian occupations in order to reconstruct their former autonomously organized, but family-oriented, work styles when they relied on subsistence-based livelihoods.

Similarly Dona Terezinha, also in her sixties and who lived in a different *povoado* in the municipality of Sento Sé, lamented the loss of her livestock. She then went on to discuss the insecurity she feels in Sobradinho:

When I arrived here, I didn’t like the place, but afterwards I got used to it. But, there in my land where I lived it was more tranquil because we weren’t scared of thieves or things like this—we weren’t scared of anything. But here you can’t even sleep because of the fear of thieves, of everything.

She went on to explain how concerns about marijuana use and physical assaults were simply not an issue in the past. Dona Terezinha reiterated that she had a hard time sleeping at night because she fears a potential assault.<sup>85</sup>

Throughout my field stay, I observed how these memories of everyday violence shaped people’s responses today. One evening I was in attending a town hall meeting with my friend Claudia when the lights suddenly went off. She urged me to duck and cover, saying that she would explain afterwards. After several of minutes of ducking in our seats in the dark, everyone realized it was a regular power outage. We rose to see that

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<sup>85</sup> Both of these women commented that CHESF compensated them only for their homes made of *taipa* which were appraised at very low rates. The words they used, respectively to describe the compensation were *péssimo* (awful) and “nothing,” meaning that the payment amounted to nothing of value because it was so small. Dona Fátima commented that the payment was not even enough to pay for the boat-trip her family needed to move them from their *povoado* to their new living location. When they were first relocated, they slept under tents they made out of branches they gathered from the brush to avoid the rain until they were able to build a new house.



the town council members had also ducked and were huddled in the corner. Claudia started laughing at them. As we were leaving the now-cancelled town council meeting, she explained to me that in the early 1990s when Sobradinho had just become a municipality one of the *pistoleiros* (thuggish gunmen who controlled the town) had cut the electricity to a town meeting. A gunman had then entered the town hall to gun down the town council members. So, on this evening many years later, both the town council members and Claudia were afraid that the same thing was happening.<sup>86</sup> When we got outside, we ran into Arlinda, another friend who works at the Community Center; she laughed and pointed to the large rock in her hand. She explained that she had grabbed it in order to protect herself “just in case” someone tried to mess with her. We laughed at all of the events of the evening. But, despite our laughter, memories of violence influenced Claudia’s initial reaction of telling me to duck and compelled Arlinda to pick up a rock.

In a similar incident, I once asked my landlord why I did not have a doorbell to my second floor apartment (located above his storefront) although there had clearly been one installed in the past. He explained that when he lived in the apartment, children would ring the doorbell in the middle of the night. He removed the doorbell because he was worried that when he went to the side of the building to see who was downstairs that it would not be a doorbell-ditcher but someone waiting there to shoot him.<sup>87</sup> Although

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<sup>86</sup> The prefecture of Sobradinho was experiencing a financial crisis at this time and was unable to pay many of its employees. So, it was perfectly conceivable that someone may have tried to gun down the town council members, who were perceived by some as being apathetic to the plight of many of Sobradinho’s residents during the financial crisis.

<sup>87</sup> My landlord, Maurico Caçola, is well known in Sobradinho as a sort of “self-made” man who managed to acquire a lot of money and property even though he arrived in Sobradinho at 15 years old “without anything.” It was related to me, with respect, that, “And he did this without robbing!” His fears of being shot were likely due to his knowledge that many resented him for his wealth. His nickname *caçola* is slang for “pants,” a name he earned either from being a ladies’ man or from the long baggy shorts that he often wore (the tamer explanation coming from the nuns).

residents generally agreed that Sobradinho was not as violent as it once was, I decided to go without a doorbell, both because I did not want to be awoken in the middle of the night, but also because I did not find his story comforting.<sup>88</sup> These events and the various stories I heard of past violence reminded me of how everyday violence still shapes residents' everyday experience of place.

### **Struggles over Place**

As already discussed, the late 1980s witnessed a drop in violence, but livelihoods and living conditions were precarious for many in the town. The situation of violence and generalized economic insecurity led residents to organize for better living conditions for themselves and others in their community. They worked along with the Catholic Church, the rural labor union, non-governmental organizations, and state agencies with varying degrees of collaboration. This work was a continuation of a much larger process of organizing initiated by the Catholic Church and Bishop Dom Luis Rodrigues, which together spear-headed resistance to the dam project in the 1970s by those who would be displaced by the lake waters.<sup>89</sup> During the 1980s, community organizing work was

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<sup>88</sup> Anxiety about safety, which I was not preoccupied about *before* I arrived in Sobradinho or during my first few months there, I will admit, became more exaggerated over time on my part due to the responses that I received from many residents when I told them I had rented a place on my own. "Aren't you scared to sleep alone?! I would be scared that someone would come in and rob and kill me at night." Or the more comforting, "But if someone breaks in and you scream out no one will hear you because you are on the far end of the vila!" The first few times I heard this, I attributed the responses to the fact that it was not common for young women to live on their own and also cultural valorization of family living. I knew many older women, in their 50s and 60s who lived on their own, but they insisted that they had someone come over at night to sleep at their house, saying, "No, I would never sleep alone!" The *repeated* and *relatively unvaried* responses ultimately had the effect of making me scared to sleep alone! Friends had conveyed several stories of older women who lived alone who had been killed during robberies although these seemed to be a rarity, but one did happen a year before my arrival. I suspect some of these fears are related to perceptions by many that violence has increased in the region since the construction of the dam and are also related to the fact that being by one's self was relatively rare for many.

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed history of Catholic Church involvement in resistance to the Sobradinho dam see Rosa Maria Viana Pereira's thesis, *O Papel da Igreja na Resistência de Sobradinho. Mestrado em Ciências Sociais, Universidade da Bahia*. Salvador, BA, 1988.

conducted by several priests in succession and other members of the Liberation Theology influenced Church in Sobradinho, as well as by everyday residents. Residents' stories of this era highlight the community figures and projects that were seen as crucial to the formation of the town. In the 1980s it became increasingly clear to CHESF and other state development authorities that what they had planned to be a temporary settlement that would be demolished was now perceived by residents to be permanent. Residents wanted a say in the future of the settlement and its administration and this resulted in their social mobilization for status as a legally recognized municipality.

The 1980s witnessed a fairly rapid flight of residents from the settlement and a rapid decrease in population from 38,000 to a population in the lower 20,000s by the early 1990s. This was largely a male out-migration as many men left their wives and children behind in Sobradinho to search for work.<sup>90</sup> Some went in search of construction jobs at other locations, some moved on to other dam projects, and some went to the urban centers of South-Central Brazil in search of any sort of employment they could find. As a consequence, the gendered dimension of the settlement shifted from having been principally made up of men in the early 1970s to a high number of female heads-of-household during the mid-1980s.<sup>91</sup> This gave rise to a new category of woman in Sobradinho: the *viúvas de maridos vivos* (widows of living husbands). The presence of a

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<sup>90</sup> In a discussion with economist Henrique Barros at the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation in Recife, Barros asserted that the reason that the *barrageiros* (dam workers) did not have any place to move on to was that the construction of the next dam to be built along the São Francisco River, the Itaparica dam, was delayed until the mid-1980s. Ideally, CHESF planners would have had workers move on to this construction site.

<sup>91</sup> This is a common migration pattern among small-scale agriculturalists in the semi-arid Northeast. During periods of drought men often travel to the urban centers of Brazil in search of employment, leaving their wives and children behind to take care of the family farm. These women are often in local terms referred to as *viúvas da seca* (widows of the drought).

large number of *viúvas de maridos vivos* was a common theme in people's descriptions of Sobradinho in the 1980s.

For some women Sobradinho became a place where one could stay in the company of neighbors while one's partner was away earning money. For example, Rosa Oliveira of the Rural Labor Union stated:

Today I am married, lady [*dona*] of the house, I lost my husband 11 years ago and I continue here because it is where I *ranchei o meu rancho*,<sup>92</sup> [where I established my home] my roofed rooms.

The house that Rosa Oliveira was living in was purchased by her in the 1980s with money her husband had sent to her to buy groceries for the children when he left in search of work. He became upset when he called her and heard she had spent all the money on a house! How would they eat? Rosa Oliveira told him not to worry, that she would start washing and ironing clothes to make money. But, she commented, it this was considered very ugly (*feio*) at the time for a woman to work. She laughed—but it got us this house! She was very proud of herself, as her husband later was also. When her husband died in 1995 due to cancer while working in construction the next state of Espírito Santo, he wanted to return to Sobradinho so much that she brought his body back to Sobradinho for burial. Rosa Oliveira was someone who described how much she loved Sobradinho and how much her husband did too. Rosa Oliveira's tale demonstrates how residents had become increasingly attached to the settlement.

For those who did not leave and who had moved several times in search of work before arriving in Sobradinho, the town became a haven of sorts where they could

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<sup>92</sup> Literally "Where I ranched my ranch." In the Dictionary of the Northeast *rancho* can refer to a place where one finds lodging. In the Michaelis Brazilian Portuguese dictionary *rancho* is a term for a "house of the poor." I heard others from the Northeast use the term *rancho* to refer to their home in Sobradinho.

establish a permanent residence. Many of those I interviewed described several moves before settling in Sobradinho. In a region where people have had to regularly migrate in search of work, finding somewhere where you and your family could settle permanently was a relief which led to a sense of home and place, even if the initial decision was made due to expediency. The significant social connections and social ties that were formed among residents in Sobradinho through an experience-in-common during the construction and post-construction periods, along with the material reality of having a home in region where many have been forced to frequently move in search of work, made the idea of moving untenable for many.<sup>93</sup>

What may have contributed to the decision to stay, despite the lack of employment opportunities, was the deeding of land to residents by CHESF. In 1979 due to the squatting that was occurring on the periphery of the national security area in what became the *Vila São Joaquim*, CHESF had began to allot parcels of land to residents and set up a gridded street system.<sup>94</sup> The deeding of land led to a sense of fixedness and some residents, for the first time, owned land and had enough money to construct their own house. Squatting on government-owned land in order to obtain legal rights is a common route by which residents obtain legal access to land, as seen across Brazil and other areas

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<sup>93</sup> In the early to mid-1980s CHESF divvied up the land in what was to become the *Vila São Joaquim* and deeded this land to residents at very low cost. The ownership of land and the construction of homes on this land no doubt helped fuel residents desire to stay in the settlement. Even as residents left they sold these land parcels at low cost to other residents. Many residents feel that they have been able to own homes in Sobradinho that would have been an impossibility for them to obtain elsewhere in Brazil due to lack of affordability.

<sup>94</sup> Residents were given permission to live on this land which had already been expropriated by the State. Some residents at the time of my fieldwork had legal title to their plot of land; many others were still going through the process of passing the title into their name. Residents were not given titles immediately because, as Duqué (1984: 35) noted, the land was expropriated for public use (“*utilidade pública*”), complicating its transfer into private property.

of Latin America (Holston 1989). Once land is claimed, residents can make claims to a whole host of services from the government. In Sobradinho this process ultimately led to the movement within the town for municipalization.

However, the 1980s was experienced as a time of difficulty for most in the *Vila Joaquim*, and even for many in the *Vila São Francisco*. Early concerns that emerged in the settlement, particularly in the *Vila São Joaquim*, were problems of childhood death due to malnourishment in the early to mid-1980s and the generalized poverty of the residents. As recounted earlier, Sister Elena Maria Martins commented that in 1987 close to 40 children a month were dying. At first, some residents attempted to use state programs to address the urgent situation. Ghislaine Ferreira, who now works for the municipality, recalled one figure, Josué, who she saw as particularly crucial in addressing this issue:

At that time Sobradinho was not a city like it is today. We did this work with [Josué]. He said, “Oh, Ghislaine, there are so many children malnourished, what will we do?” He said, “I will go to Salvador” and he went to Salvador to the LBA [Brazilian Legion of Assistance]. . . and there he was able to convey the situation of Sobradinho and the reality here and we were able to start a milk program. So, a truckload of milk arrived – liquid milk. And when he achieved this he said, “Let’s take to the streets and sign these families up.” There were no community health agents at the time. He was able to get the resources to do this . . . How this program reduced infant mortality! It was a beautiful project. When this truck arrived with this milk, it was us, the employees of the accounting office along with the associations that passed out this milk. We gave two liters of milk to each child.

Ghislaine in her account implied that Josué’s work was one of the precursors to the establishment of the community health agent program in Sobradinho. Ghislaine’s story could be seen as exemplary of *assistencialismo* (assistance-based, paternalist politics), however that interpretation would not capture the sense that she and many residents have of this act. They instead interpret this as an example of how they themselves took action

to better others' life situations. This is seen as something that was not done for political reasons or personal gain. Since it seemed to residents that their lives did not matter to authorities, this struggle over valuing and saving children's lives was as an assertion that the lives of residents were not secondary to production needs. Projects such as these helped to congeal a sense of common cause and collectivity.

### **Post-Dam Construction Development Projects**

Residents' discontent with their situation led to a movement to occupy land in Sobradinho so that it could be converted to farmland for the unemployed residents of the settlement. For many residents a return to farming represented a return to the sort of work they grew up with and with which they were comfortable. This movement was led by José Balbino, a former farmer who was displaced by the lake waters. Active as a social organizer in the early 1980s, residents' recall with admiration how this "illiterate farmer" was able to organize a large number of people and openly challenge state authorities at a time when many were living in desperate circumstances in the settlement.<sup>95</sup>

Before going into the particulars of the movement, I want to highlight the varied histories of residents in the settlement at that time. Residents had different relationships to the land prior to their arrival in Sobradinho, however, all had been victim to the Northeast's artificial land scarcity (Beaney 1993: 269). Their livelihood strategies involved household production that coexisted and overlapped with wage labor, extractive, and 'informal' sector activities (Beaney 1993: 268). Many residents had histories of

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<sup>95</sup> José Balbino also ran for mayor during the first election held in Sobradinho once it became an officially recognized municipality in 1989. Unfortunately, he died the day of the election in a car crash on the road connecting Sobradinho and Juazeiro. His son, Gilberto Balbino became mayor of Sobradinho in January 2005, just as I started my fieldwork.

migration to work in construction in Brasília and other dam sites since the 1950s, but would trade “proletarian” status for “peasant” status when the opportunity arose (Beaney 1993: 269). However, most residents recalled having spent a childhood “*na roça*” (in the fields), whether working on land owned by family or in a tenant-based production situation.

Given this history residents were enthusiastic to return to agriculture and Balbino and another social organizer, Josefa Rita da Silva, spurred residents to protest their conditions and occupy land. José Balbino and Josefa Rita da Silva are figures who frequently appear in residents’ memories of the era, but also are recurring figures in documentation produced by the Bahian state development agencies of the period.

Aparecida da Rosa Silveira had this to say about José Balbino and the years of 1984-1985, when the land was incorporated into a state sponsored development project:

It was serious. People were passing through difficulty. And emergency [assistance] arrived too late. There was a drought in Ceará and Pernambuco so the emergency [assistance] arrived afterwards. And the father of this Gilberto Balbino [i.e. the current mayor] was a poor man, illiterate, but he raised up the people and he got money so that people wouldn’t be in the street. He got money and he started deforesting that area where the Project Tataúí is located. So, when it was all clear, he went after some resources to be able to fence it. When he was clearing that brush, there was a large group of people working there. Everyone was there to earn some money. It was this money that sustained Sobradinho.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> During the time of my fieldwork, Balbino’s legacy lived on as his son, Gilberto Balbino (mentioned above by Aparecida da Rosa Silveira), was and still is the mayor of the town. Unfortunately Gilberto Balbino’s term was marked by severe financial mismanagement of municipal funds and a strong sense of disillusionment by many. Various allegations were made that city funds were used to pay off loan sharks (*agiotas*) that he borrowed money from in order to finance his campaign. In January 2006 Balbino and his family were even rumored to have gone into hiding for a few days in order to avoid potential violence when the loan sharks showed up at the town offices looking to collect. During his tenure as mayor municipal employees were laid off on a mass scale because there were no funds to pay their salaries. In a phone call made to Sobradinho during the writing of this chapter (April 2008) the Catholic town priest lamented that in his over 10 years in Sobradinho he had never seen Sobradinho in such bad financial shape, which he attributed to the mismanagement of Gilberto Balbino’s administration.



In the early 1980s the State development authorities started to introduce development projects that acknowledged the agricultural movement of Sobradinho. In Sobradinho and other communities around the lake, the State set up a series of participatory development programs initiated through the Bahian Secretariat of Planning (SEPLAN) and the Coordination of Regional Action (CAR) called the Special Program for Development in the Region of the Sobradinho Lake.<sup>97</sup> This program was part of a larger federal plan for regional development, undertaken under the Program for Integrated Regional Development (PDRI). National and international attention led to the Program for the Development of the Sobradinho reservoir (PDRS and the PDRI) in 1978, sponsored and funded in large part by the World Bank (Siqueira 1992: 72). In 1982 this became the “participatory planning” program led by CAR and SEPLAN (Siqueira 1992: 79). The PDRI projects were designed to integrate existing forms of association (such as the movement led by Balbino) with the belief that incorporating existing groups would facilitate the taking up of the PDRI projects. This period and the associated projects have been written about extensively by both academics and development planners active in the area during this period, so I will not go over these programs at length.<sup>98</sup> But, I will highlight some key issues as they relate to a politics of place and the economic ways in which the project was rendered, as these are, respectively, themes of both this chapter and

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<sup>97</sup> This project, as are many run by CAR and SEPLAN, was funded by the World Bank. The CAR-SEPLAN offices in the state capitol of Salvador explicitly cite their financial support and work with the World Bank.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Beaney (1993) provides an excellent analysis of the implementation and failure of the PDRI projects in Sobradinho. These projects have also been documented in detail in the book *Poder e Participação Política no Campo* by Eduardo Pães Machado, et al., although with less of a critical analysis about the project’s assumptions and implications.

the dissertation.<sup>99</sup>

With its incorporation into the participatory development planning process the movement became registered with the state as the Agricultural Association of Vila São Joaquim (AASJ, now defunct), which received considerable financial and technical support from state agencies during the 1980s.<sup>100</sup> This association led to the establishment of the Project Tataúi (*Projeto Tatauí*) in Sobradinho in the mid-1980s. The aims of the participatory planning process, sponsored by the state development agencies of CAR and SEPLAN, were to create a series of associations. This “participatory development” process focused on the establishment of agricultural and fishers’ associations as a means by which small producers could access resources (such as loans, technical assistance, applications for land titles, etc.) in order to return to agricultural production and fishing, albeit under different (now market-oriented) conditions. The programs already defined in CAR-SEPLAN documents from 1982 focused on “developing” artisanal fishing in the region with the express idea of creating fishers’ associations and large fish processing

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<sup>99</sup> José Balbino and Josefa Rita da Silva were certainly not the only figures that residents recall as having been important to early social organizing in Sobradinho. There were several other figures-- employees of CHESF as well as Catholic Church social advocates-- who also recur in tales as “heroes” of the era. Balbino stands out because of his prominent role in starting the very large Project Tataúi and because he also ran for mayor in 1989. José Balbino’s incorporation into the Special Program for Development in the Region of the Sobradinho Lake reflects what others have noted about participatory planning projects: that they often seek to work with those individuals who *already have* the skills and knowledge that the project seeks to create (Mosse 2005). Similarly, Beaney notes, in an analysis of the implementation of integrated rural development projects in Brazil (particularly the Sobradinho project), that the productivist orientation of these programs meant that they were inclined to work with a group of producers that already had the technical and institutional knowledge to implement the development package, which meant they were most successful where they were least likely to help small producers who needed the help most (1993: 252).

<sup>100</sup> There were several associations started in Sobradinho at this time. This association, however, was the largest. The development planning documents of this era cite conflict between different groups of organizers, particularly differences between José Balbino and Josefa Rita da Silva—the two most active organizers in the town at the time indicating that there may have been conflicts about resources provided by State agencies.

terminals in the communities around the lake.<sup>101</sup> A focus on agriculture and the creation of agricultural associations emerges the following year in 1983 development planning documents.<sup>102</sup> The AASJ and the Project Tatauí were to become the prototype for associations and development projects throughout the region. They were both strategically and symbolically central to the broader PDRI project's "success" by planners.

The planning documents from this era explicitly state that the goal of these projects was to integrate small producers into the market economy (one even asserts the global economy). A 1983 planning document states:

The activities already developed in the area of Sobradinho, principally in the area of fishing, are already tied with the market economy, and so agriculture, from the start of the formulation of the project, should be developed, in order to help propitiate conditions for the small producer which will make his insertion into the market viable (SEPLAN-CAR: 9).<sup>103</sup>

Beaney (1993) documents the disjunction between the state's vision of incorporation of the population into the market and residents' desire to return to subsistence-based production strategies. Beaney notes that residents' desires for a return to family-based production was secondary and peripheral to the State's focus on market integration.<sup>104</sup> As

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<sup>101</sup> *Programa Especial de Desenvolvimento na Região do Lago de Sobradinho: II Plano de Ação. Governo do Estado de Bahia.* SEPLAN-CAR. May-August 1982.

<sup>102</sup> CAR and SEPLAN identified two areas for these projects the first was *agropecuária* (agriculture and animal husbandry) and the second was fishing (Siqueira 1992: 79).

<sup>103</sup> In the document entitled, *Bases Para Uma Nova Proposta de Intervenção na Região do Lago de Sobradinho. Governo do Estado da Bahia.* SEPLAN-CAR. Salvador, May 1983.

<sup>104</sup> The shift away from family-based production strategies meant that there was a focus on "cooperative" techniques. While the Project Tatauí was set-up under a formal cooperativist model, it ended up creating segmentation and differentiation among those involved with the project. A small number of participants became small landowners while a much larger (and largely female) segment worked as waged day-laborers (paid by the hour) on the project. In essence, the cooperative project set up a small enterprise system of production—quite contrary to the family-based, non-time-management-oriented techniques that the residents were accustomed to working with.

Escobar (1995) has noted, integrated rural planning relied on a series of particularly enconomistic representations of the peasantry. Accordingly, although the process was set up to be “participatory” there was a prescriptive notion of what would result from the planning process: a series of associations of small producers and fisher people.<sup>105,106</sup>

Since the Project Tatauí was a pilot project for the broader program that was to be instituted around the Sobradinho lake region, it was imperative that the project pursue the state’s goal of market integration of small producers rather than other aims.

However, most residents had positive recollections of the project. The Project Tatauí was set up with the active members of the AASJ. The vision for the Project Tatauí was for farmers to jointly farm a large area of land close to the *Vila São Joaquim*.<sup>107</sup> Each would have his<sup>108</sup> own plot but would be instructed on what to grow based upon advice from agricultural technicians and would sell the produce in bulk with all the others project members. Residents’ memories of the first year of planting at this site were positive and many referred to the abundance of produce that resulted. For example, Aparecida da Rosa Silveira commented, “In the first year it produced a lot. It produced a

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<sup>105</sup> This is similar to the assessment made by Mosse (2005) in his analysis of the implementation of participatory development planning in rural India, in which projects were initiated with a prescriptive notion of both what form “participation” would take and the ultimate end of the project.

<sup>106</sup> A 1983 SEPLAN-CAR document, referred to above, asserts that one of the results of the project was to be “the formation and consolidation of organizations of small producers [who are] participants and beneficiaries of the actions of the Project, that drive them towards the qualification to fully exercise self-sustaining activities (1983: 35).”

<sup>107</sup> A rift developed in the community between those who supported Balbino and his attempts to work with state planners and those who did not. The leader of the opposition group was Josefa Rita da Silva, current vice-President of FETAG (a national agricultural syndicate). Josefa is also the same person who initially told me about Sobradinho and introduced me to the Rural Labor Union there. Josefa is staunchly opposed to state development projects and she and her supporters continue to petition against any sort of project introduced by the state, including one that was just in the planning stages during my fieldwork.

<sup>108</sup> I use the term “his” here consciously, as Beaney (1993) documented that most of the active associates ended up being men.

lot of onion and manioc. The people planted and there was abundance and people sold it. And many people here constructed nice houses from that money, others bought cars.”

What Aparecida’s statement hints at is the social segmentation that the project itself ended up creating. The project created its own forms of social hierarchy and differentiation. Some involved in the project became producers (owners of the land) while many others were hired as day laborers on the project. Beaney (1993) notes that those who were paid as day-laborers were frequently women. Many women I spoke with recalled working as wage laborers picking tomatoes and other produce on the Project Tatauí. Interestingly, the women’s farm and association emerged during this period, led by Josefa Rita da Silva, on which many women received there own plots of land to plant and tend, rather than being waged laborers on the project.<sup>109</sup> A number of feminist critiques of the implementation of agricultural development projects cite similar processes whereby men become the “preferred” beneficiaries of the projects, as technicians arrive with their own set of gendered assumptions about who will work on the project.

However after the fourth year of production, residents recall that a pesticide was applied to the land that was given to them by someone (who my informants did not want to name) which was apparently inappropriate for the semiarid climate. Aparecida da Rosa Silveira recalled,

But, at that time, there was a donation of a pesticide that was from another country. This pesticide, if you placed it on the lands of the Northeast, would kill the lands of the

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<sup>109</sup> CAR-SEPLAN documents from the era describe the political schism and open antagonism between José Balbino and Josefa Rita da Silva. However, during my field stay people were hesitant to bring up these differences. The group that Josefa Rita da Silva led to start their own “women’s farm” also split a few years later, with one association led by Josefa Rita da Silva and another led by another woman. This other group formed an association that was supported by the Catholic Church.

Northeast. Because the Northeast has a semiarid climate and it was a pesticide only for cold places. So, someone donated the pesticide and fertilizer to the father of [Gilberto] Balbino, to someone who doesn't know how to read and doesn't have knowledge of it. It was a donation so everyone was happy. Everyone used it a lot the second year, and by the third year they started to use less. By the fourth year they weren't using it anymore and all of the people closed the project and stopped planting, it produced nothing, nothing. It just lasted 5 years.

When I attempted to ask a technician at the state agency EMBRAPA who was involved in this project in his former SEPLAN-CAR days, I was told that one of the reasons the project fell apart was because small producers were wiped out by the larger producers that emerged with state-supported irrigated agriculture in the broader Juazeiro-Petrolina region. In effect, the former technician argued that the small producers could not compete with infinitely larger government and private support for agro-industry; the scale on which agro-industry operated resulted in pushing small farmers out of the market. He was markedly resistant to discussing the actual particulars of the “failure” of the project. I ended up giving up on meeting to discuss the details of what had happened.<sup>110</sup>

In Sobradinho, the planning process resulted in a large number of agricultural associations, the construction of a fishing terminal, and establishment of a fishers' association. Thus the legacy of the project is still present in some forms of associativism in Sobradinho. Residents often comment that Sobradinho has the highest number of associations per capita than any other city in Brazil, so that “on paper” Sobradinho looks highly politically organized. But, they lament that in reality many of these associations are only in existence in name and hardly function as such.

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<sup>110</sup> As Mosse notes in his analysis of development project implementation, “success” and “failure” are policy-oriented judgments that obscure project effects (Mosse 2005: 19). In the Sobradinho case, the association failed to become a consistently producing farmers' association (although residents still individually grow on the land) that would result in market-oriented livelihoods. But it has had lasting effects on residents' sense of themselves and their community in that it represents, for many, a period in which they made something happen and in which they had the attention of the State. The area of land, after having laid fallow for many years, is still tilled, but not as an associative venture.

Escobar (1995) in his analysis of the emergence of integrated rural development projects in the 1980s argues that the emergence of these sorts of development projects needs to be understood as part of a mapping of visibilities by the development industry. Small farmers become visible when migrants start to swell the cities, creating new demands on the cities, and when concerns arise that the countryside could no longer produce enough food (1995: 157). Accordingly, representations of the peasantry shifted from those which hardly portrayed them as an amorphous mass to their later inclusion in development as “beneficiaries” of integrated rural development projects, just as their voices and faces start to regularly been seen and heard. We can see in the Sobradinho lake region, that as movements like the one in Sobradinho arose, the State was forced to find a way to deal with the situation. The integrated rural development process, with its democratic pretensions, filled the gap. Sobradinho had already been a sort of public relations disaster for the State and the World Bank as academics and activists spread word about the impacts on the 70,000 relocated inhabitants of the river’s edge. The relocation was perceived as a disaster and led to the World Bank’s re-evaluation of its resettlement policies for dams thereafter. Therefore, the State represented the “participatory planning” program as an attempt to “rectify” the top-down Brazilian development model of the 1970s.

Surprisingly enough, or at least I was surprised to encounter this, many residents did not distinguish between their initial movement to occupy land and the establishment of the development project of Tatauí. Despite an analysis that could assert that the residents’ project was coopted by the state, the residents I spoke with did not recall events

in those terms. Residents do not understand themselves to have played a passive role in the project's implementation. This is not to say that residents' own interpretations are not influenced by official interpretations of events. For example, Aparecida da Rosa Silveira further went on to say, "The desire of CHESF was that when this dam ended, they would abandon it [Sobradinho], like they abandoned Vila São Joaquim. What raised us up at that time was the Project Tataúi." Residents interpret the Project Tataúi to have emerged "just in time."<sup>111</sup> Certainly this could reflect an adoption of hegemonic development rhetoric. But, seen in a different light, residents' reading of these events as a "victory" reflects a refusal to position themselves as mere victims of the State. Despite the numerous problems with the project, the implementation of this participatory development program and the stories told about it helped give rise to a sense of place and a sense of common history. Residents express a great deal of pride that they (not the State) made these events happen. Having been disregarded by authorities, state recognition and the insistence with which Balbino and other organizers worked towards forcing some recognition was indeed considered to be a victory.

However, since the work on participatory development in the region, *Sobradinhenses* feel that the town has been forgotten and neglected by State authorities, and by their own municipal politicians. As I was conducting my fieldwork, a new development project was in the planning stages that was to settle 40-50 families on plots of land in the municipality, once again in an associative model. This project, called

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<sup>111</sup> This was the same era (around 1984) that witnessed store sackings and general unrest in Sobradinho. This period was remembered as one of the worst periods in Sobradinho's history.



*Cédula da Terra* (Land Certificate),<sup>112</sup> is World Bank sponsored and widely contested by groups such as the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST) and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). The *Cédula da Terra* project was introduced on the national level under the administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Groups such as the MST and the CPT assert it subverts true land reform, by shifting land reform towards market-oriented mechanisms; some analysts have referred to it as “market oriented land reform” (Muritiba and de Alencar 2007).

The project was organized through CAR (*Companhia de Ação Regional*) and SEPLAN (the Bahian Secretariat of Planning) and supported by the current mayor (son of José Balbino) and his administration. Although I did not survey this group, the participants I spoke with sounded wary. Those I spoke with had yet to see anything concrete come out of the project. They, like others I spoke with who had been involved in state projects before, expressed a cautious pessimism about such projects. During a municipal meeting, the Rural Labor Union took a formal stance against the project. However, some members supported it and the town seemed divided between support for and against the project. Some felt the project was going to be a repeat of the Project Tatauí, while others maintained a sense of optimism that it would bring positive change for the families who would be part of the project. Some residents, including the Catholic parish priest, were concerned that many families were going to be left in debt because of the program, as were many who were once involved with the Project Tatauí. Like Tatauí

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<sup>112</sup> Apparently, the name of this project has changed from the name it was being sponsored under while I was conducting fieldwork; the new name is *Crédito Fundiário* (Agrarian Credit). It is intended to settle families in association with others on parcels of land, not just provide credit.

the project is oriented towards market-based production, rather than subsistence-based production.

As Beaney (1993) notes, the concept of “participation” in the PDRI-sponsored projects was limited to the narrow confines of the project space. There was little attempt to extend “participation” to broader spheres of political participation. This, it would seem, fit with the State’s goal of integrating small farmer into the market, their “inclusion” being premised upon establishing their dependence on the market. Significantly, the PDRI projects occurred alongside of broader forms of social mobilization in Sobradinho and in the context of several years of organizing work by the Catholic Church in the lake region. As we will see in the next section, the same impetus that gave rise to the movement to occupy land shifts towards a popular movement for the political “emancipation” of Sobradinho from the municipality of Juazeiro. So, that despite the PDRI projects narrow vision of “participation,” residents themselves pursued a broader vision in keeping with the democratization era in Brazil.

### **The Movement for Political Emancipation and Municipalization**

The late 1980s (1987-1989) witnessed a movement led by residents for the political emancipation<sup>113</sup> of Sobradinho and for its formal municipalization. Residents who were youth at the time, but are now in their late 30s and early 40s recall this period with fondness, as a period of much excitement and promise. Those active in the movement for emancipation cited several reasons as to why they felt emancipation was necessary: one was that Sobradinho had little political representation as a district of

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<sup>113</sup> I use the term political emancipation because this was the term that was most often used by residents when referring to this process.

Juazeiro, having only one representative on the town council. Another reason was that CHESF made payments to the municipality in which energy was generated: prior to emancipation these funds went to Juazeiro and little returned to Sobradinho. Finally, and tied to the previous two concerns, was a belief that Sobradinho needed to determine its own future and be run by those who were invested in the settlement, not by distant politicians.

Ghislaine Ferreira was active as a youth in the movement to emancipate Sobradinho. She had this to say about the era:

It was incredible the process of emancipation of Sobradinho . . . We did theatre work before the emancipation of Sobradinho. GRUTAS<sup>114</sup> functioned in the Agricultural Association [of São Joaquim], and at that time Balbino was someone who was marvelous. At that time he fought for us, Zefinha in the union also. We went to Juazeiro knowing we had to fight for our emancipation. And it was incredible, how those people were tireless. There weren't computers so we made mimeographs and made information pamphlets for the community. We would spend the night cutting them up and putting the paper together. And we did this work— Josué, Balbino, and others . . . Padre Eduardo and other people in the community would say, "Let's take to the streets!". . . It was a slow work, a project of consciousness-raising, and thanks to God and thanks to the will of the people of that era there was no political objective but there was the objective of seeing Sobradinho grow.

Here Ghislaine recalls the popular consciousness-raising theater conducted along the lines of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed<sup>115</sup> and the activity of various members of the community. Ghislaine conveyed the sense of excitement and possibility that they had about establishing themselves as their own town with their own elected officials.<sup>116</sup> To

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<sup>114</sup> GRUTAS was a popular theatre group that was active in Sobradinho in the mid-1980s to early 1990s.

<sup>115</sup> Popular theatre as a tool of consciousness-raising was employed by many activist-oriented and Liberation Theology-oriented groups of the era. This work was inspired by the work of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed who was inspired by Paulo Freire's work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* of the 1960s.

<sup>116</sup> The increasing "municipalization" of small communities in the rural Northeast has been interpreted by some as the outcome of neoliberal policy in the region in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In an interview with Luzineide Dourado Carvalho and Edmerson dos Santos Reis of RESAB (educators with the Network of Educators in the Brazilian Semi-Arid), they discussed this issue and how such policies have in many cases served to erode the provision of basic infrastructure and social services because many low-income

many, emancipation was seen as an act of dignity for Sobradinho and towards establishing the self-determination for the town. However, also implicit in Ghislaine's comment is that she now sees politics as having gotten involved in residents' work, whereas before there was "one objective" of working to better Sobradinho. She implied that the process of municipalization somehow made some residents more self-interested or more interested in political gain, than the good of the community. Now that the town has been officially recognized for close to two decades, the sense of collective has weakened. For example, another resident commented to me, in reference to a former political activist of the 1980s, that this person "fought really hard—not like today. Today I don't know if [this person] fights for the struggle of the people or for [their] own power. At the time [they] fought hard for the power of the people."<sup>117</sup> These more cynical sentiments contrast with the sense of possibility and hope that was present at the time of emancipation on February 16, 1989.

This cynicism is linked to a series of contradictions that emerged with emancipation. As mentioned earlier, emancipation is seen as having been a step towards self-determination and having a say in the planning of the city's future, particularly the city's finances. For example, when I asked one former activist involved on organizing for municipalization if he saw emancipation as having bettered conditions in the town, he responded, "In some ways, yes. With emancipation we achieved the ability to administer

municipalities cannot fund many basic services and forms of infrastructure. They saw this as an issue that particularly affects small communities in the semiarid region. They did not apply this assessment to the case of Sobradinho which is larger than many other small municipalities and which receives funds from CHESF for the production of energy, but it provides the political-economic backdrop under which many small towns were granted municipal status in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

<sup>117</sup> I am keeping the identity of the person neutral in this statement in order to protect those who have criticisms made of them. I have included this statement not to demonstrate its veracity, but to exemplify the sort of cynicism that occurs in the community now that there is less of a sense of a collective struggle.

our own revenue, because before we had to depend on Juazeiro and also what CHESF took responsibility for.” However, those who work for CHESF and live in the middle-class *Vila Santana* often see the administration and maintenance of town facilities as having deteriorated since emancipation. Middle-class notions of administrative competence and smooth bureaucratic functioning come into play in these assessments. The more “modern” views of many of the CHESF staff contrast with those from the interior of the Northeast with agrarian backgrounds. So, even while residents of Vila São Joaquim might decry what they see as the lack of certain amenities such as a gutter system or paved streets, they still feel that emancipation overall has been good for the town and are less likely to assert that there has been a deterioration of town facilities.<sup>118</sup> This is likely because some amenities, such as piped water, sewage systems (not centralized), and garbage collection, have been put into place in the *Vila São Joaquim* since municipalization. These amenities and more had already been provided by CHESF for those living in the planned *vilas*. As the next chapter will explore, residents in the other two *vilas* who had formerly been employed by CHESF feel like they have been abandoned by CHESF since municipalization.

There is a deep contradiction in residents’ perception of there being a cycle of attention and neglect by outside authorities and their own politicians. For example, while residents see it as a “good” that they have political autonomy, there is still a sense by many that CHESF owes the community a social debt (*dívida social*). There is tension around conceptions of “responsibility” here. A CHESF representative and resident of

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<sup>118</sup> This does not mean the residents of *Vila São Joaquim* do not decry what they see as government mismanagement, they do. But they do not express a sense of things having gotten worse in the settlement since 1989, as do some people in the other two *vilas*.

Sobradinho that I spoke with implied that CHESF had held its end of the bargain by providing minimal infrastructure and amenities during the 1970s and early 1980s to those who moved there and who “could not find employment on the dam.” CHESF had held up its end of the bargain, so to speak, by providing for its employees. As he expressed it, since there was never any intention of there being a permanent settlement in the *Vila São Joaquim*, CHESF did not have any further responsibility for the settlement now that the town infrastructure has passed into municipal ownership with emancipation. This official’s sense that CHESF’s obligations have been met contrasts with that of residents who felt it was a moral obligation and responsibility of CHESF to provide certain amenities, given the history of mistreatment of the region’s residents by the same firm. At the same time residents want their autonomous control of the area.

To a certain extent, residents are not willing to compromise a certain desire for aspects of development (de Vries 2007), such as certain forms of infrastructure that they would like to see put in place in town. Yet many are also not willing to “submit” to outside decision-making and management of the town and want to determine the terms by which outside authorities can intervene, especially given the history of abuses they perceive CHESF and other state agencies to have perpetrated against the local population. They assert their right to autonomous political decision-making which is often compromised by State-sponsored projects, yet at the same time they believe the state responsible for provision of certain development ends, such as good roads between municipalities, paved streets, functioning gutter systems, and other amenities. There are rifts and divisions in the community have their roots in the era of the participatory

projects. These rifts have led some to take a more anti-state stance, while others welcome state-sponsored projects like the proposed *Cédula da Terra*.

## Conclusion

While negative treatment by state planners and the state's designation of the settlement as both temporary and to be demolished once the construction was over did indeed help *shape* residents' sense of place, it did not *determine* their experience of place. Today's residents of Sobradinho perceive their struggle as one to make a home and a living in Sobradinho, forming a politics of place. Despite the violence of the earlier eras, there is a sense that they have taken back the city for their own self-determination. The establishment of the settlement was premised on a model common to large-scale development projects both in Brazil and worldwide. First, there is the relocation of the local population and their subsequent proletarianization. Second, there was the creation of a hierarchically differentiated settlement pattern that separated unskilled labor from skilled labor and even further, upper middle class engineers from the skilled labor (Ribeiro 1989: 103). Related to the separation of classes of workers was a concern to provide recreational facilities and spaces for middle-class social reproduction, as will be expanded on in the following chapter.<sup>119</sup> Last, the project incorporated a labor model premised upon the temporary employment of unskilled labor. Skilled laborers were,

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<sup>119</sup> One of the odder (at least to me) of these recreational features was a botanical garden and zoo that was put in place for the leisure of CHESF families. It was hard for me to imagine lions, tigers, and other animals in the space now occupied by a restaurant. As we will see in the next chapter, provision of forms of family entertainment was one of the "perks" intended to keep the middle and upper-middle class workers in Sobradinho during the course of the construction and helped to create company loyalty. This zoo was one of the facilities I heard one resident decry as an example of how the town's administration has not maintained facilities ceded to them by CHESF. One resident who lived in the Vila Santana questioned why the town government allowed the zoo to be disbanded when it could have served as a tourist attraction for the larger region, and thus bring revenue into the town.

however, expected to maintain a migratory labor pattern by moving from one construction site to another. In addition, this model relied upon the separation of the unskilled labor force from the sites of social reproduction: in effect, families of the laborers were not expected to accompany the male labor force, although they did.

In his analysis of the responses of those who were displaced by the rising lake waters, Ruben Siqueira (1992) argues against those analyses that suggest that the *ribeirinhos* (river basin dwellers) failed to respond or to act against the threat to their lifeways. He asserts that these analyses fail to see that the residents engaged in a form of resistance by refusing to move when notified that the waters would reach their homesteads. Siqueira (1992: 266) asserts that most of these analyses look for “organized action” that would be intelligible as a social movement or some other sort of formal political action, but instead he asserts that Scott’s (1985) concept of everyday forms of resistance is more helpful here in recognizing that their “lack of response” was a form of resistance. Another interpretation of the *ribeirinhos*’ actions is offered by Martins Costa (1989) who asserts that residents did not move, not as an act of defiance as Siqueira implies, but because, based upon their intimate knowledge of the river built up over generations, such a dramatic rise in the river’s waters seemed impossible. The *ribeirinhos* did not move until the last minute because they were basing their actions upon previous dramatic floods in which they easily moved to set locations on higher ground. Afterwards, they would move back to their riverside settlements, once the waters had receded. Martins Costa asserts that there was a conflict in interpretation between CHESF representatives and local residents.



While only a portion of Sobradinho was composed of the relocated *ribeirinho* population, I argue that a similar conflict in interpretation was expressed in the different stances taken by residents of Sobradinho and CHESF representatives. If one takes the frame of Siqueira's analysis under consideration (everyday resistance), residents' refusal of mobility was also a refusal of being incorporated into the capitalist development model being inserted into the region. Residents may have participated in agriculture and fishing associations because they offered hope (if not lasting) of the possibility of staying fixed in place.<sup>120</sup> Also, in keeping with Martins-Costa's reading of a difference in interpretation between CHESF and local residents, one could argue that CHESF representatives failed to understand the meaning and significance attributed to the new settlement by the new residents. What was expendable and disposable to planners had become home, based upon residents' varied social experiences and the formation of bonds of friendship and community there. If being a *retirante* (migrant) has been symbolic of the difficult and insecure lives of landless residents of the Northeast, those who stayed on were either attempting to break with this pattern or refusing to be incorporated into it, if they had been relocated by the dam and were not accustomed to migratory work patterns. For some, Sobradinho provided a place and opportunity to end this cycle of migration. For those who had been forced to move to Sobradinho due to dislocation by the rising lake waters, this was a refusal to move again.

As the stories discussed in this chapter suggest, residents, particularly those of the *Vila São Joaquim*, have memories of a number of practices intended to "put them in their

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<sup>120</sup> Sigaud (1986) notes that many of those who were forced to re-locate opted to stay at the river's edge because living far from the river was unthinkable for many. Some of those who had chosen the option of planning their own relocation, called "*solução própria*" in the development documents of the era, chose to settle in towns that were closer to the river, such as Barra, Xique-Xique, or Juazeiro/Sobradinho.

place” through a series of institutionalized forms of violence, which resulted in forms of everyday violence. In her ethnography of West Belfast, Begoña Aretxaga (1997) notes how people are routinely “put in their place” by assigning them to specific locations in the urban landscape. Similarly, the military setting under which the town emerged assured that early residents “knew their place” by setting up separate *vilas* and a security fence. Particular to the Brazilian context, Kia Caldwell (2007) discusses the significance of “knowing one’s place” in maintaining racial and class divisions in Brazilian culture. She cites the work of George Reid Andrews (1991) who has argued that the close association of manual labor with slavery in Brazil has caused manual labor to be considered both degrading and humiliating. Because manual labor is particularly demeaned and devalued those who do manual labor get put in their social place through various mechanisms of social exclusion. This analysis can be extended, both in its racial terms and its class-based terms, to the attempts to “fence out” the working class population. These forms of social exclusion certainly did not emerge with the construction of the dam as they have a long history in the region, yet the state development planning and authoritarian manner in which the construction was conducted served to institutionalize these social divisions. One could read in this a recreation of the perceived national “divide” between South-Central Brazil and the Northeast, with its racialized, class-based, and modern/backward distinctions, recreated within the settlement areas. Ribeiro (1994) has noted how ethnic segmentation of the labor force is a common pattern in settlements of large-scale development projects. We can also see, how this differentiation, in the context of Brazil regional dynamics serves to further

marginalize those from the region (the unskilled labor force) while privileging those middle-class professionals who come from the Center-South of Brazil or abroad.

In her research among Bolivian Andean highlanders, Carmen Medeiros (2005) discusses how residents argue that they want and need the tools of development in order to know how to respond to the conditions which development and the long history of colonization has wrought. Medeiros asserts that residents want development in order to be able to define what direction they will take as a people. Crucial to her reading of residents' claims is that they do not see development as being the teleological end-goal towards which they want to direct themselves, rather the tools of development are the starting point from which to pursue a project of self-direction as a people. She urges for a reading that sees their "desire" for development as an expression of historical awareness that they have been systematically excluded from power positions, but not the effects of state power. "Development" for the subaltern can indicate the ability to impact a situation in which they have been historically excluded-- from decision-making and the authority to self-determine their direction in the broader dynamics national political-economy. Similarly we could read residents' movement to occupy land and their later participation in the participatory development projects as an attempt to direct and take control of a situation after generations of experience as pawns to those in power, as was made quite clear by the relocation process. Unfortunately, the participatory development projects were designed with State interests in mind (incorporation into the market) rather than residents' goals of self-production and therefore the project reproduced the power dynamics the movement was attempting to rework.

However, residents still refused to see themselves as victims. Residents refused to be “put in their place” by asserting that they would seek municipalization. In their refusal to move and in their assertion that they had a right to stay and even to form their own municipality, residents were asserting what Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino (1998) has called a struggle for the “rights to have rights.” Dagnino has argued that during the years of redemocratization in Brazil and other Latin American nations the right to make rights claims was an important strategy of popular movements. Rather than being treated as peripheral or marginal to the needs to the State or the firm (CHESF), residents asserted their *right* to both seek out livelihoods in Sobradinho and their right to maintain the community they had formed. Stories about the organizing process are central to *Sobradinhenses* pride in their town and themselves, therefore a reading of events which reduces the situation to one of cooptation fails to acknowledge the very different reading that residents have of the events. In essence their rights claims emerge both as a refusal to be incorporated in a utilitarian manner into the capitalist model and a refusal to be treated as expendable labor or second-class citizens. In the next chapter, I will explore the relationship between regional migratory labor patterns and residents’ understandings of the economy. I also explore the ways in which some residents harbor attachments to the era of full employment by the State hydroelectric firm, CHESF.

Residents have found “emancipation” (municipalization) to have resulted in a number of “gains” (*ganhos*), but also a series of disappointments as evidenced in the final section. Many reflect that they had expected to see more positive change come from emancipation. These disappointments give rise to a sense that Sobradinho has been

forgotten or that Sobradinho is in some way disconnected from the economic development that is happening in Juazeiro and Petrolina. Many residents have not entirely rejected hegemonic constructions of the economy that value economic growth. This is represented by some residents' perceptions that neighboring municipalities have benefited from the dam and the subsequent creation of a system of canals for irrigated agribusiness, but that Sobradinho has not seen these benefits. The following chapter will explore these sentiments as I discuss everyday understandings of the economy in Sobradinho.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### EVERYDAY DISCOURSES OF THE ECONOMY: ECONOMIC SUBJECTIVITY IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

So, our lives are like this: you need to leave a city and relocate for 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 years to hunt for a place where you will live better. Because it is not like if you are born in Sobradinho that you will have a good existence [*sobrevivência*]*—doing what? You have to run after something else. Isn't it like this?*

*- Rosa Oliveira, 56 years old, wife of former dam worker*

Until today they use the term *peão de trecho* [laborer of the stretch]*—people who move from project to project. So, they are called peão de trecho. Trecho refers to the estrada [road] that they have to follow.*

*- Luis Almeida, 26 years old, son of former CHESF employee*

I first visited Sobradinho from the nearest city of Juazeiro, situated 48 kilometers away along the São Francisco River in early July 2001. When I took the bus from Juazeiro into Sobradinho, I was struck by the expanse of dry and sparsely populated *caatinga*, and also the density of the scrubby vegetation.<sup>121</sup> For years the bus ride to and from Juazeiro took at least an hour due to the pot-hole filled roads until it was repaved in July 2005.<sup>122</sup> The bus driver was forced to drive at less than 15 kilometers per hour, at times on the side of the road (not on it) in order to avoid them. When the road was

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<sup>121</sup> I also passed several *povoados* (small villages) and the Juazeiro trash dump, the plastic bags of which are caught in trees for kilometers on end.

<sup>122</sup> A few weeks prior to its repavement in 2005, I had seen news footage of a protest on one of the roads in the Sobradinho Lake region. At this protest residents of neighboring municipalities demonstrated against the condition of the road connecting communities around the Sobradinho Lake by setting up a roadblock for several hours. When I later asked residents of Sobradinho (who were not involved in this protest) if they thought the demonstration led to the eventual repaving, they said that no, that it was likely that the money was already slated for the maintenance of the road by the State of Bahia. Later, however, I heard someone else refer to this protest, indicating that they thought this was why the roads were repaved. In either case, a number of Bahian state-sponsored television commercials lauded the infrastructural works that the state government was sponsoring that year, one included attention to roads connecting municipalities in the interior of the state.

repaved, residents of Sobradinho were thrilled, despite that they felt it was long overdue. During 2005 and 2006, the time of this research, the trip cost R\$4.60 each way or close to R\$10.00 total for a round trip.<sup>123</sup> This was an exorbitant sum for many of those living on the limited incomes of Sobradinho. The cost of this trip was often cited by youth or their parents as one of the reasons that they did not pursue higher education in the neighboring cities of Juazeiro or Petrolina. Residents also had to go to Juazeiro to conduct errands, such as to attend a medical appointment, conduct business at the social security office or other government agencies, and so on. This meant that this pricey trip was a necessity for most residents at some point or another. The difficulty of access to Juazeiro-Petrolina due to the cost of the trip, stands in contrast to the frequency in which middle-school and high school age children of many CHESF employees rode the bus to attend private schools in Juazeiro or Petrolina. Residents sense of disconnect from the seeming prosperity of neighboring municipalities is related to feelings of abandonment by authorities which are experienced by many residents of the Northeast in general (Rebhun 1999: 38), but are particularly strong in Sobradinho given the experience of being a community that was created for the construction of a large-scale dam project.

### **Disconnect and Development**

This chapter explores the processes by which residents have come to feel economically marginalized. Because many residents of Sobradinho experience themselves and their town as being cut off from the seeming prosperity of Juazeiro and

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<sup>123</sup> At the time of my research this would have converted to approximately \$2.00 U.S. dollars each way. Buses within most cities in Brazil cost approximately R\$1.20, converting to approximately 50 U.S. cents. However, in terms of understanding how expensive this trip was for residents, it would be best to think about the trip as costing approximately \$10.00 U.S. dollars or more round-trip.

Petrolina, I believe that many of the residents of Sobradinho experience themselves, and even their town, as in a state of *abjection* (Kristeva 1982). I take the use of this concept from the work of James Ferguson (1999) who used the term to refer to the sense of disconnect from development and the global economy that residents in the Zambian copperbelt region experienced after the copper industry in their country collapsed. In this work Ferguson defines *abjection* as “a process of being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded. But its literal meaning also implies not just being thrown out but also being thrown *down* – thus expulsion, but also debasement and also humiliation (1999: 140).” As Ferguson asserts in his study, essential to this description is a sense of having once been globally connected, but now being in a state of disconnect in which things are going “down.”<sup>124</sup> While never part of the burgeoning economy in Juazeiro-Petrolina, residents of Sobradinho have memories of the boomtown years of the construction era when waged work was a possibility. This sense of disconnect is reflective of the ways in which residents have come to desire some of the goods of development and its promises, but simultaneously feel that the promises of access to certain development “goods” have rescinded.

My assertion that many in the town experience a state of abjection is due to the everyday discourses about the economy that residents engaged in during my field stay. However, this feeling of exclusion is multi-layered, as it is also related to the marginalization of the region and its residents since colonization and other social processes in the region. In this chapter I explore how discourses about the town’s

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<sup>124</sup> In his work, Ferguson (1999) argues that if modernity implies progress and a teleological sense that things are “moving forward”; disconnect leads to stagnation or, worse, fallen further “behind.”



economy are related to: 1) a longer historical trajectory of marginalization of the region's residents; 2) the more recent impacts of "regional economic development" and the construction of the Sobradinho dam on residents understanding of work; and 3) the subsequent effects of economic restructuring on residents' sense of selves and of others in their community. This chapter explores the following questions: What are the legacies of colonialism and nation building on the construction of economic subjectivities in the Northeastern *sertão*? How has Sobradinho's history as a former company town impacted residents' understandings of their economic and life possibilities? How has the rise of export-oriented agroindustry in the São Francisco Valley led to shifts in residents' life and work expectations? What are the generational shifts that have occurred in terms of livelihood expectations in the town? Why do these changes manifest in judgment of some townspeople as "lazy"? In exploring this last question, I will examine the discourse around "laziness" and its connections to the emerging labor models in the region and changing gender relations.

In this chapter I discuss residents' attachments to the subject position of "employee." This chapter illustrates, in part, how this subject positioning serves to make other economic and livelihood possibilities invisible or unthinkable for some residents. Much of the energy of this chapter is in the "negative" in the sense that it reflects residents' sense of despair, frustration, and worry about their "economic" situation which manifests in representations of Sobradinho as a place of lack. These descriptions may seem bleak at times and, indeed, many residents, understandably, had a bleak outlook about their economic possibilities. As a researcher, I want to acknowledge my own

hesitance in engaging with these sentiments (although I sympathized with them), as they ran counter to my research project of attempting to document forms of economic difference or with documenting the presence of noncapitalist economic forms. However, these sentiments were widely present and are very revealing about the impacts of the development process on residents' sense of selves and their sense of place. In the next chapter, I resolve this tension (meaning, my own tension as a researcher) by highlighting openings and possibilities for *resubjectivation* and for economic becomings in place by examining existing livelihood practices and economic projects.<sup>125</sup> Not everyone in Sobradinho is in economic despair. But that is getting ahead of the current topic. Before that discussion, I first examine how the institutionalization, stabilization and naturalization of a regional economy has led to certain forms of economic subjection in Sobradinho that are sources of both positive attachment and pain.

*O Banco dos Aposentados, o Banco dos Desempregados, e o Banco dos Trabalhadores: the Bench of the Unemployed, the Bench of the Retired, and the Bench of the Workers*

Before entering into the main themes of this chapter, I would like to provide the reader with a description of three benches located in the *Vila São Joaquim*. These benches and their names encapsulate many of the concerns that regional economic development has introduced for residents and they exemplify the idioms through which their (economic) discontent is expressed. These sentiments are linked to longer historical relationships of the region within the political economy of Brazil.

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<sup>125</sup> I am using the term *resubjectivation* in the manner outlined by theorists Gibson-Graham (2006). They take this term (resubjectivation) from the work of Foucault (1997) on *ethical self-transformation* or what Connolly (1995, 1999) has termed a “micropolitics of (re)subjectivation.” These processes refer to the cultivation of different forms of subjectivities that enable macropolitical settlements- what they term a politics of the subject.

One day, walking to the house of a friend, I noticed a home-made bench placed against a cement wall. Spray-painted behind the bench was written, *Banco dos Aposentados* (Bench of the Retired). I laughed and walked on. I soon came to another bench of similar design, labeled in spray paint, *Banco dos Desempregados* (Bench of the Unemployed), and finally arriving at my friend's street corner I saw a series of logs set up in a circle of benches and a wooden placard attached to the post of streetlight above these benches, labeling them, *Banco dos Trabalhadores* (Bench of the Workers). One night, when walking by the Bench of the Workers where a number of people were seated, a friend laughed and said, "It is called the 'Bench of the Workers' but that sign should say 'The Bench of the Lazy' [*preguiçosos*] because all of them there are lazy!"<sup>126</sup> Indeed the conflict between those at the bench labeling themselves as "workers" and their being called "lazy" by others reflect the tensions that exist for those who identify as being hard workers, but who live in a situation that has denied them the opportunity to work—whether it be by means of waged or salaried labor or by having the means of production as family farmers at their disposal. Certainly referring to themselves as "workers" is a rejection of negative stereotypes of *nordestinos* as "lazy," whereas the reference to towns-people as "lazy" inversely demonstrates the adoption of hegemonic discourses

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<sup>126</sup> This bench usually had the most residents sitting at it, as opposed to the others that were almost always vacant. Since a placard was put up to label it, I (perhaps erroneously) assumed that it was put up by those who hung out there. They were a funny, raucous group, composed mainly of men. I only sat with this group once, when a fisherwoman friend and her mother joined in on their conversation. As a foreigner and as a woman, it normally would have been awkward for me to gain entry into this usually very male group. On this evening the group was mixed they were having a very lively discussion theorizing about what was causing the current plague affecting the *surubim*—a fish native to the river which was mysteriously dying off at the time. Studies by IBAMA (the Brazilian Environmental Protective Agency) were inconclusive as to what caused the deaths although theories by residents included the effects of pesticides from the agro-industry in the region. Other theories included attacks on the *surubim* by the more aggressive and non-native fish, the *tucunaré*, that the *surubim* was eating some poisoned or sick (introduced) tilapia, or that they were dying from some as yet unidentified virus or bacteria.

within the town.<sup>127</sup> But, the adoption of the “worker” identity itself reflects how residents themselves take up and respond to subject positions which reflect dominant discourses of the economy, how they take these up as a point of pride in asserting that they *are* workers. In what follows, I want to interrogate how the terms and categorizations both referred to and implied by these benches are related to residents’ experiences with development and formal employment in their town.

The categories used to label the benches and their implied contrasts (the retired/the working; the unemployed/the employed; workers/non-workers or the “lazy”) made up central categories in how *Sobradinhenses* understood their community and its economic situation. These benches bring up issues related to modernization and its myths about the values of productivity, industriousness, and, as we will see, about the seeming necessity of waged “employment” and the creation of desires for full employment.<sup>128</sup> As already mentioned, the judgments of “laziness” reflect both old stereotypes of the region’s residents but are also reflective of the impacts of the neoliberal paradigm on residents. These benches and the social categories they evoke are expressive of residents’ anxieties and concerns about the ways in which they have both been rendered visible and invisible within hegemonic representations of the regional and national economies, and the ways in which they have been denied of the opportunity to produce for themselves, whether it be through lack of land to begin with, through lack of forms of support for

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<sup>127</sup> Brazilian sociologist Alfredo Macedo Gomes (1998) in his study on the social imaginary of drought in the Northeastern *sertão* found that many of the *sertanejos* that he interviewed represented themselves as being *trabalhadores* (workers), followed by identification as being someone who struggles (*lutadores*, implying a resistant survivor), and as sufferers (*sofredores*).

<sup>128</sup> By “employment,” I am referring to a specific use of the term to refer to wage labor or salaried employment, not subsistence production, self-production for the market, or other forms of economic activity.

production, or through the loss of land and herds with the flooding of the Sobradinho Lake.

The Bench of the Workers may reflect deeper anxieties about development, work, and productivity, but it is particularly tied to the ways in which residents in the town have become subjected as regional economic subjects. It is linked to a history of migrant labor in the *sertão*, which has been premised upon residents' use as a "cheap labor pool" for both agricultural production in the Northeast and for industrial production in other urban centers of the country. The Bench of the Retired and the Bench of the Unemployed encapsulate a major concern of many: that the town is increasingly made up of the elderly, as its younger residents leave in search of work and what they believe will be the offerings urban life. Also connected to the reference to the "retired" is a concern that without elderly residents' retirement pensions, many extended families would not be able to stay economically afloat because there are so few opportunities for youth in town. In what follows I will explore what these categories and related discourses reveal about residents' historical experience of work and livelihood in the *sertão* and also processes by which residents have been subjected as regional (economic) subjects.

### **Legacies of Colonialism, Nation-Building and the Construction of Subjectivity in the Northeastern Sertão**

Residents' sense of exclusion must be contextualized within a long historical dynamic of inclusion-exclusion of residents of the *sertão* and the Northeast. Since colonial times and through the projects of nation-building both in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries *Nordestinos* and especially *sertanejos* have long felt that they were neglected by state authorities, although their region was certainly the target a series of state

interventions, as illustrated in the introduction to this dissertation. Their “inclusion” in the national project was often limited to that of a source of “labor” or the use of their natural environment for the extraction of “resources” for the growth of other areas of their the empire or nation. This denigration of the region’s residents occurred at the same time that they, particularly men, were included in the national project of industrializing and nation-building as migrant laborers who have traveled to urban areas and to the South of Brazil in order to seek out wage labor.

In addition to the utilitarian purposes for which the region has served, there is the long history of devaluation of *sertanejo* cultural practices and beliefs. As already noted, residents of the region have often held a place within the national imaginary as religious “fanatics,” “backward,” and uneducated. Therefore the terms and categories which residents have used to describe themselves and their townspeople (workers/the lazy, the retired/the working, employed/unemployed) have to be seen within this longer trajectory of negative representations that, in part, have become internalized. Although, I certainly do not think residents have entirely come under the sway of these negative representations as will be outlined in the next chapter.

Landlessness is a long-standing historical issue in the region which has its origins in the colonial land system, the 16<sup>th</sup> Century *sesmarias* land grants, in which the land of the Northeast was divided by the Portuguese crown and given to noble’s families. By the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century most of these lands in the Northeast ended up being divided between two families, the Garcia da Avilas and the Guedes Britos (Sabourin and Caron 2003: 37). These large land grants, later were reduced in size and led to the establishment

of a larger number of landed elite families. This resulted in a pattern of migration from plantation to plantation for many *sertanejos*, as *vaqueiros* (cowboys) tending to the cattle of the plantation owner (*fazendeiro*). This system gave rise to *coronelismo* (the colonel system). *Coroneis* (plural of *coronel*) were Northeastern patriarchal landowners who were the heads of large extended households, who once held a monopoly on local political power, some even running their own “police” forces. Today some *coroneis* continue to maintain a large degree of political clout and influence in local political affairs. It was this system of patron-client relations that many in the dam industry claimed they were disrupting by bringing development to the region with the Sobradinho dam.<sup>129</sup> However, as others (Chilcote 1990) have noted—these practices were merely reconfigured by elite families in Petrolina and Juazeiro who managed to negotiate themselves into strategic positions in private-public institutional arrangements that were central to state development institutions in the São Francisco Valley. These oligarchic families ultimately benefited from the rise of agro-industrial production in the region.

The presence of large landowning families and, also, small property owners was largely due to the *Lei da Terra* of 1850, which decreed that land must be purchased and not just occupied. This law led to small property owners and small communities in the region (Sabourin and Caron 2003: 38). The *Lei da Terra* had the effect of limiting free access to the land as it reinforced property owners’ power and created mechanisms that

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<sup>129</sup> Ronald Chilcote’s book, *Power and the Ruling Classes in Northeast Brazil*, examines the reorganization of power that occurred among the ruling families in Juazeiro-Petrolina after the construction of the Sobradinho dam. The most powerful families in the lower-middle São Francisco did not oppose new forms of investment and technical changes in the region because they benefited from the subsidized credit and government incentive programs that emerged in the 1980s (Collins and Krippner 1999: 518). Chilcote refers to these families as new *coroneis* (new colonels) because they have combined merchant capital with state and industrial capital, thereby strengthening their influence in the region (1990: 273).

made access to the land more difficult (de Ataíde 1984: 42). However, much of the riverside-dwelling population (called *ribeirinhos*, *lameiros*, or *beiradeiros*) who were displaced by the dam's waters had lived for generations in the same village on the river's edge, but did not have title to the land.<sup>130</sup> These settlements existed alongside the system of vast tracts used for cattle-grazing and owned by absentee owners. These cattle were cared for by migrant *vaqueiros* (cowboys) and their families. It was this system of landless *vaqueiros*, along with their families tenant farming on these lands, that gave rise to frequent migration in the region, as one's access to the land was dependent on the will of the *fazendeiro*. Migrations in the semiarid for were either seasonal (for the collection of coffee, tobacco, or sugar cane) or temporary, conducted with the intention returning to one's family who stayed behind on the farmstead (Sabourin and Caron 2003: 36). In addition, the exodus out of the *sertão* during periods of drought contributed to these migrational trends. Definitive out-migration is a relatively recent phenomenon, beginning within the second half of the twentieth century, particularly since the 1970s (Silva 1999: 370). As we will see later in this chapter, youth and their elder family members express a number of anxieties and concerns about the phenomenon of permanent out-migration.

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<sup>130</sup> De Ataíde (1984) created a classificatory system to describe the three types of dislocated population in the Sobradinho lake region. The first group was composed of those with large tracts of land (i.e. the landed elite) with workers living on the land, who traded their labor for land use privileges-- both to live on and on which to grow their subsistence crops. The second group consisted of rural inhabitants of the Fazenda Urucé in the municipality of Sento Sé who believed testimony to their right to the land was given to them through their residence and *cultivo* (cultivation) of the land, believing that they did not need a land title. The third group was composed of residents on fazendas of the *sesmarial* type that did not have successors, so these residents were living on land in the public domain (23 *fazendas* around the lake consisted of this type). The residents (*posseiros*) did not have documentation and were considered "occupiers of public land." As de Ataíde asserted, this group's worldview was neither urban nor capitalist, what they valorized was to live on and cultivate the land. This meant that land titles and documentation was never important to them (de Ataíde 1984: 108). This group dealt with neighboring colonels by lending them service (work) and part of their final agricultural product in exchange for use of the colonel's *engheno* (sugar mill) and *casa de farinha* (flour mill).



While analysts may identify shifts in labor migration patterns, Rosa Oliveira, in her late fifties and secretary of the Rural Labor Union, discussed the pattern of labor migration as part of the continuation of an older trend:

So, our lives are like this: you need to leave a city and relocate for 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 years to hunt for a place where you will live better. Because it is not like if you are born in Sobradinho that you will have a good existence [*sobrevivência*]*—*doing what? You have to run after something else. Isn't it like this? [AA: Yes. . .] And so, the life of the *peão* is like this . . . in the Northeast it is like this: to hunt for the better. When the field won't give, go to the firm; when the firm ends, return to the field; when the farm (*roça*) doesn't give, go back to the firm; and like this successively.

AA: And you think that folks still live like this here?

Yes, they are still living like this. The families stay here and the husbands leave running after bread [*atrás do pão*]. There are still many [families] living like this in our region. Going away in search of bread. Leaving the family and going into the world. Those who can return alive, that is good; for others, they return dead; and others don't return at all. The families just receive word.

Rosa Oliveira's husband had died while working on a job in a neighboring state in 1995, which no doubt is one reason why she sees this as a continuing pattern. We can also read in Rosa Oliveira's statement a sense that residents' lives are expendable to those in power positions. Residents have been forced to accept a situation in which they do not know if they will hear from their family if they leave. Rosa Oliveira's reflections on migration were made in the same interview in which she recounted that many people had been buried alive inside the dam and that CHESF had tried to initially cover up the deaths of workers by burying bodies in secret at night, discussed in the previous chapter, which certainly influences her sense that residents are expendable.

Rosa Oliveira also uses a common idiom to refer to making a living: to run after bread (*atrás do pão*), which highlights the connection between one's work and basic sustenance.<sup>131</sup> Her comments also reveal that while official documents pronounce the

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<sup>131</sup> Similarly, another woman I spoke with, who had raised three daughters on her own, used the term "we never lacked bread" (*nunca faltava pão*) to refer to the fact that they had always managed to have enough

better “quality of life” brought about by agroindustry in the region, many residents perceive their situation to be no different from the past: precarious and one in which they feel that they must keep migrating in search of “bread.” These historical patterns have led to a lack of rootedness, a sense that one cannot count on what one will have tomorrow, as at any moment one could be cast away from where they were currently living and working.<sup>132</sup> The efforts to stay in Sobradinho, discussed in the previous chapter were an attempt to put an end to a history of migration.

For example, Dona Márcia Brito commented that her husband had suggested they leave Sobradinho a few months after they had arrived in the early 1970s. Conditions were not good: they had been living in one room with several young children. But, Dona Márcia had grown up on a farmstead in the *sertão* of Pernambuco and she, her husband and their children had already moved several times before coming to Sobradinho (even having lived in São Paulo for several years). So, she refused:

Once he received his first payment things got better. I said, “I am not going to stay in this house, I am going to go look for a better house.” He said, “Let’s leave this place.” I said “No, I was not raised moving. I was raised where I was born until I got married. I am not going to move. I am going to work.”

Dona Márcia’s comments reflect a similar sentiment expressed by other residents—that they were unwilling to keep on moving for work and wanted to settle and make a home. Interestingly enough, both the stories of Dona Márcia and Rosa Oliveira centered on how they managed to stay in Sobradinho by defying social convention of the time that said that women should not work outside the home.

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to get by.

<sup>132</sup> I would like to acknowledge José Moacir dos Santos, director of IRPAA and doctoral student of anthropology at the Catholic University of Ecuador, for pointing this dynamic out to me.

Migration is not a new phenomenon for many rural *Nordestinos* of the semiarid, accordingly many popular depictions (films, paintings, books, photographs, etc.) of *sertanejos* represent *os retirantes* (the migrants): families of landless migrants moving from plantation to plantation in the *sertão* in search of work and a place to live.<sup>133</sup> For many decades men, in particular, have seasonally migrated in order to acquire income to send home to their wives and families who stay behind to take care of the farmstead. It was this pattern of migration that gave rise to the term *viúvas de seca* (widows of the drought) to refer to the women who stayed behind while men migrated for work. *Sobradinhenses* created their own term for a similar phenomenon that occurred in the post-dam-construction period: women who raised their kids in the absence of their partner were termed *viúvas de maridos vivos* (widows of living husbands).<sup>134</sup>

As cattle-raising fell out of favor in the 1970s former migrant families also established themselves on the land, many turning to both subsistence agriculture and goat and sheep husbandry. Keeping in mind the history of these relations, many of those who are under 40 in Sobradinho face different life expectations than those of their parents and grandparents—both those who have roots in a migratory labor pattern or who come from

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<sup>133</sup> Perhaps one of the most famous of these depictions is the film *Vidas Secas* (Barren Lives) made by Nelson Pereira dos Santos in 1963, based on the book by Graciliano Ramos of the same name. The film portrays the difficult lives of a family of landless migrants, the father and husband being a *vaqueiro* (cowboy) who tends the cattle of ranchers in the *sertão*. One of the stars of the film, Maria Ribeiro, who plays the wife in the film, lives in Sobradinho—having migrated to Minas Gerais with her aunt and uncle in the 1950s and later moving to Rio de Janeiro as a young woman. Working as a film processor in a film studio in Rio de Janeiro, Pereira dos Santos offered her the role when he decided to make the film. After several decades in the film industry, she moved to Sobradinho for retirement because her brother and sister live there, having been dislocated from their village on the river's edge by the Sobradinho dam.

<sup>134</sup> Brazilian sociologist Claudia Maia (2004a, 2004b) documents a similar trend that has emerged in the *sertão* of Minas Gerais since the 1970s, where women have increasingly come to take care of the homestead while men migrate in search of work, leading to changes in the regional gendered division of labor in the town of Jequitinhonha.

*ribeirinho* (river-dwelling) or *caatingeiro* (dry area dwelling) subsistence backgrounds. One major difference is that they are now schooled, and many have grown up in hopes of employment in an activity other than agriculture, while their parents may have either grown up in subsistence agriculture, fishing or working as migrant labor with minimal, if any, formal schooling. One reason for these hopes is the general devalorization of agricultural livelihoods that is present in the schooling system in the region, as will be discussed further in this chapter. This, along with the meager employment options, has led to a new pattern of definitive emigration that is now being conducted by the youth of Sobradinho.

Definitive out-migration is tied to the general denigration of rural lifestyles and forms of livelihood, as youth's education often valorizes city life over that in the semiarid. A term I frequently heard in reference to Sobradinho was *o fim do mundo* (the end of the earth). Residents frequently asked me, incredulously, "What made you come here? To this End of the Earth?" The term is not just used to describe Sobradinho, but also to describe other small towns in the semi-arid region. I once asked a friend what she meant by the term, and she said that it meant that Sobradinho was *parada* (at a standstill; stopped) and *sem desenvolvimento* (without development), unlike Juazeiro. It is only by contrast to the "developed" urban areas that a place like Sobradinho can be seen as the "end of the earth," even though it provides a significant portion of the energy generated along the São Francisco River which provides the majority of the electric energy used by the Northeast.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, Sobradinho's history as a former company town of the

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<sup>135</sup> Of course the contrast between being at "the end of the earth" or being part of the center are relative as Juazeiro is seen to be peripheral to Salvador, which is peripheral to São Paulo. Certainly the small *povoados* in the *sertão* would be seen to be the most "peripheral" of places in the Northeast.

hydroelectric company is central to many residents' experience of place and understandings of the economy.

### **The Contradictions and Expectations of Living in a Former “Company Town”**

The region was considered relatively unimportant to national economic planning until the late 1940s with the establishment of the Company of the São Francisco Valley (CVSF). Despite the creation of the CVSF, it was not until the 1980s that agro-industrial development was pursued with any intensity, with a shift away from the former dominant regional economy focused on cattle-raising. However, within this broader regional history Sobradinho occupies the relatively unique position of having been established as a “company town” by CHESF (the Hydroelectric Company of the São Francisco).<sup>136</sup> In that respect, its residents' experiences are in some ways similar to those of other former industrial towns that have seen the withdrawal of state investment and industry over the last several decades of global economic restructuring, both within Brazil and without. But it also is different from other former company towns in that Sobradinho was intended to be torn down after the dam construction era, with the exception of the upper-middle-class homes in the Vila Santana. Relations in the town are shaped by the fact that the population is made up of a large number of former CHESF employees whose past employment was predicated on either their acceptance of

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<sup>136</sup> What I mean by company town, is that it is town that was constructed for a state-owned and operated company (CHESF); consequently, its economy and its town “culture” developed in relation to that company. Chase (2001) argues that one characteristic of life in company towns is that the firm ends up intervening in domestic life in a number of ways since the labor force is often constructed from the ground up. Other researchers have documented similar trends (Gill 1990; Gibson 1991; Gibson-Graham 1996; Klubock 1998).

temporary work or the willingness to migrate to another dam construction site once construction ended.

The withdrawal of CHESF from the management of and investment in the town has resulted in different responses from residents, depending on their relationship with CHESF. Those who were relocated because of the rising lake-waters relate differently to CHESF than do those who had once lived in the relatively privileged and sheltered position of sponsorship as company employees. Other residents have felt both marginal to, but also connected with, CHESF, as they had once been employed temporarily by one of CHESF's subcontractors during the 1970s construction era. Others, while not employed by CHESF, felt they benefited from the firm's existence as income from its employees created a "boom town" situation in Sobradinho as their wages were spent on entertainment, food, and other goods and services supplied by those small "entrepreneurs" who moved into the area for this reason, as discussed in the previous chapter.

At the same time that residents had different sorts of relationships with CHESF, there are trends that can be discerned. Jacquelyn Chase's 2001 study of the company town of Itabira in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, which was established by the *Companhia do Vale do Rio Doce* (CVRD, Company of the Sweet River Valley), revealed that residents shifted in representing the state-owned steel enterprise in the gendered terms of a "sweet mother" during the 1940s to 1980s to a characterization of the company in the 1980s onwards as an "evil stepmother." This portrayal of the company as an "evil stepmother" occurred after the company started making cutbacks and layoffs (Chase

2001). Her work highlights how workers' domestic lives were manipulated to create both labor stability and worker commitment. Representations of the company in its pre-downsizing years incorporated feminine metaphors that highlight its role of "caring" for workers. Similarly, J.K. Gibson-Graham highlight how former employees of the state-owned energy firm in the Latrobe Valley of Australia also participated in a paternalistic set of social relations with the state firm as it housed, schooled, employed, entertained, policed and watched workers (2006: 38). As workers were both protected and "cared for," they argue that they were also infantilized and controlled, to a certain extent, leading to a situation of dependence and compliance with state authority. A similar situation in Sobradinho later leads to feelings of abandonment, but also a desire for a return to certain forms of employment. Labor relations such as these produce a certain type of economic subject, as will be outlined below.

Similar to both Chase's and Gibson-Graham's studies, some residents in Sobradinho accepted paternalistic relations (or perhaps maternalistic?, as we will see) on the part of CHESF. Indeed, Zenobia de Oliveira used a feminine care-giving metaphor to describe CHESF, just as the women in Chase's study did. Although, interestingly, while in Chase's study the feminine metaphors for the company shifted from that of the "sweet mother" to the (evil) "stepmother," CHESF was figured as a "widow" in Zenobia's recounting of events. She asserted that CHESF was a "feminine" institution, saying:

CHESF is feminine. The *peãozada* [laborers] wanted a lot of material goods. Everyone felt like CHESF was a mother, a widow that gave much material and houses and furniture to them. So, the *peãozada* saw CHESF as an abandoning widow [*abandosa*]. When the recession started under Fernando Henrique, the changes started in the functional areas [of CHESF] and funds were not liberated as freely. So, people would say that "*a viúva*

*estava falida*” [the widow has become bankrupt] and is no longer helping. Really, she wasn’t [helping] anymore.<sup>137</sup>

Zenobia highlights how residents had come to expect CHESF to provide goods and services, and when this was withdrawn, it was as if a motherly care had been withdrawn.<sup>138</sup> Chase (2001), citing Barnes (1996, 1997), argues that the use of a femininely gendered metaphor serves to bring the discussion of the economy back to the intimate life, thereby making the connection between the domestic world and the wider systems in which the economy is involved. Women in Sobradinho were not necessarily confined to the domestic sphere as appeared to be the case in Chase’s study, especially not those women whose husbands were employed as heavy equipment operators, drivers, or in other forms of manual labor. Several different women recounted that their husband’s pay from CHESF was not enough to support the entire family, so they turned to doing laundry, cleaning homes, making charcoal, caring for a small farm plot (if they could obtain one) or other sorts of activities to sustain the family.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Unfortunately I lost the statement that she made right before saying “CHESF is feminine.” She said this just as I switched sides of a tape during our interview. The previous side ended with her speaking of the “good works” of the wife of a former CHESF employee and then the following side started with her statement that “CHESF is feminine.”

<sup>138</sup> I also heard CHESF referred to as a mother, in another more critical and less than flattering context, during a Christmas food drive. The military police force in the town had sponsored the drive along with the Children’s Pastoral. While handing out food baskets, a police officer asserted that the residents needed to stop thinking that they were living under the care of CHESF as their mother-- that those days were over. He made this comment because some residents had complained that they had not made it onto the list of those who were to receive a basket. The community health agents in town had been assigned the task of picking only the “most needy” (*mais carente*) of the families on their block to receive baskets. The officer’s critique of residents expecting a “mother” to take care of them, reflects the ways in which some of those in authority attempt to blame the general population for their “failure” to take responsibility—a critique that is bound up in the neoliberal model which posits individualized notions of responsibility and self-actualization which are increasingly taken up by some residents of the region. The discourse of responsibility often was used to criticize residents of the town.

<sup>139</sup> Retirees of CHESF still pass through financial straits; during my visits to the association of CHESF retirees, former employees would drop in asking for forms of assistance (food stamps to purchase groceries, etc.) from the retirees’ association. Lest it seem that I am entirely demonizing anyone associated with CHESF, I want to relate that the two women who ran the association and who were married to CHESF



Residents in Sobradinho who were full-time employees benefited from the perks of state-provisioned domiciles, free electricity, free water, company-sponsored private schools, churches constructed by the firm, entertainment facilities (a zoo, social clubs, etc.), and a subsidized grocery, among other perks of employment. Residents who lived in one of the CHESF-constructed *vilas* often commented on how nice and well cared for the *vilas* used to be under CHESF care. This has led to contradictory sentiments by some residents about the town's "political emancipation"—some who live in the Vila São Francisco or the Vila Santana still harbor attachments to the way the town used to be when it was managed by CHESF. They contrast those days with their current sense that the municipal governments over the years have both failed to maintain facilities or to bring major "improvements" to the town. Certainly, the municipal government has less resources at its disposal and less of a "need" to maintain the area in keeping with CHESF's promise of "bringing modernity and development" to the region. If the dam was supposed to be a harbinger of "progress" to the region, the (planned) city in which it was built was to present the promise of that progress: paved and well-lit streets, manicured lawns, and so on—but for a limited few. What residents' nostalgia for these former days of CHESF sponsorship reveal, as Gibson-Graham note in their study of the Latrobe Valley, is that the experience of regional economic subjection under such circumstances can both be affirming, valuable, and desired, but also dominating, oppressive, and resisted (2006: 33). *Sobradinhenses* were active participants in upholding

CHESF and the state's dreams of progress at times; for example, in coming to desire employees were wonderful, caring people who were genuinely distressed about the life conditions of the former employees. They were perhaps continuing this "maternal" tradition described above. They had petitioned for the reactivation of the CHESF retiree center which had been closed down for several years and had close friendships with the former employees.

these symbols of modernity and being impressed by their installation in the town and region.

For the many residents who had migrated into Sobradinho as landless migrant laborers or as rural laborers (landed or not), being hired by the firm and the consumption patterns it enabled were unimagined luxuries. Not to be discounted, is the possibility that inclusion for some meant the arrival of “rights” for those who migrated from rural areas of the Northeast.<sup>140</sup> The guaranteed schooling of one’s children and hopes that male children would be hired by CHESF once they reached adulthood were central to feelings of being “cared for” by the firm just as Chase related in her study of the company town of Itabira. Families experienced relatively high consumption patterns, especially compared to childhoods of never having access to such goods, having moved from relatively small rural towns in the *sertão* to Sobradinho. Residents from that era who lived in the lower-middle-class Vila São Francisco, had fond memories of raising their children in these homes with the support of neighbors and friends.<sup>141</sup> For many, these homes and the lifestyles the families led were the fulfillment of a dream.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Chase (2001) suggests this was the case with men employed by the firm in her study in Itabira, Brazil. These men saw the arrival of the company as the arrival of rights which most of them had been deprived of, especially in the rural areas from which 70% of the workers came. For these men the company represented a form of salvation, as it instituted a change from their past rural experience with social and racial injustice. For those who were illiterate, full employment was indeed very valued.

<sup>141</sup> This contrasts with Chase’s (2001) finding that many women experienced a sense of social isolation in raising their children away from extended family in the CVRD company town of Itabira. Women in Sobradinho more frequently commented that their neighbors were like family and that they relied on each other for help and support, especially in the blue collar Vila São Francisco.

<sup>142</sup> As Chase highlights in her work, there was certainly a gendered dynamic to this construction of family life as men labored in the firm (CHESF) while women were responsible for domestic care and social reproduction. However, some women did paid work, especially those who were the wives of the blue collar workers. Their husbands’ salaries were often not sufficient to cover their costs of living, despite the seeming privileges that CHESF employment was supposed to afford.

However, different in some ways from the experience of the CVRD in Itabira, Brazil and the Latrobe Valley in Australia is that Sobradinho was built upon a series of internal inequalities and injustices: not everyone felt themselves to be under CHESF's maternal "care." For example, many settlers and contract employees were excluded outside the military fence. Many other residents had been displaced by the lake's waters. Both of these situations did not lead to feelings of having a maternal relationship with CHESF, in fact quite the opposite. Therefore, employees' complicity with the perks and benefits of CHESF occurred alongside an acceptance (whether one liked it or not) of the inequalities produced by that same firm. Thus many of the dispossessed blamed their impoverished living conditions on CHESF and resentments brewed in the Vila São Joaquim against those who seemed to be reaping the benefits of CHESF's care while they were living on the margins of this seeming prosperity. These sentiments were particularly common among the generation who were children during the time of the construction, who saw their peers as privileged in relation to themselves. Those who were active in movements for social justice in Sobradinho would refer to what they called a *dívida social* (social debt) that CHESF owed residents of Sobradinho and the broader lake region. The resentments caused by a sense of social exclusion contrast with positive and often fond memories of company sponsorship and the ways it supported domestic and family life with its provision of homes for residents. In addition, CHESF produced its own internal exclusions and hierarchies among its employees as those who were employed by contractors were forced to live in the squatter village of Vila São Joaquim and the white collar staff was settled in a different and more luxurious vila than that of

the staff that did manual labor.

The complicities with CHESF's "maternalism" parallel older regional models which have served to subjugate the population under the care of the "good boss" (*patron* or *fazendeiro*) under the patronage-based plantation or cattle ranching system. So while the company produced its own sorts of economic subjectivity based upon creating a docile labor force, this model came together fairly neatly for some under the older clientelistic practices. Many working class residents would speak fondly and glowingly of former bosses or wives of CHESF employees who were "so good, so good," who "helped people so much," or who "did a lot of social work." I bring this up not as a form of critique of residents or to imply they are in some sense to blame for today's situation; instead, like Gibson-Graham, I highlight these dynamics between industry, employees, and town residents to indicate the ways in which forms of paternalistic care by CHESF were experienced as both desirable, but also constricting. For example, Ribeiro (1980, 1987, 1989) has noted that the social life in the housing areas of large-scale development projects fit Goffman's (1962) notion of a "total institution" in that the central administration of the project regulates worker's lives. Because housing is standardized and even furniture is provided, there is a uniform appearance in private areas as well as public. What this means, according to Ribeiro (1989) is that residents often feel as if they have never left work.

The former's days when things were "so good" in the town are often contrasted to today, demonstrating how that era shaped many residents' expectations, and that many feel former hopes of upward mobility have been dashed. In Chase's research in Itabira,

she documents how some residents felt they “owed everything” to the company (CVRD) (2001). Similarly, when CHESF started to make cuts in the 1980s, this former “contract” between CHESF and residents was severed. Residents came to see that the education that they or their children received meant little if they could not access higher education in Juazeiro-Petrolina, or if it required their children to migrate to obtain work.<sup>143</sup>

Many in Sobradinho had a sense of receiving a lot since moving to Sobradinho. However, this was not phrased in terms of CHESF having given them what they have, but as if Sobradinho, *the town* not the company, had given them what they have. For example, Marta de Santana often announced her love of Sobradinho. During her interview she asserted, “I have been here in Sobradinho for more than 30 years. I love Sobradinho, understand?” But, she went on to discuss how difficult it was when her family first arrived there:

I know that when we first arrived here we suffered a lot. Because CHESF did not pay very well in that period, they paid their workers very little and there were five kids [in our family]. To sustain five kids on a very small salary-- it was very difficult. So, my mother started to do housecleaning. Me, Cristina and my mother did this there in the other *vila*. Me and Cristina went with my mother to help her out. Understand? My childhood was like this—already working and having responsibility.

But she then went on to relate,

So, today I give thanks. This is why I love Sobradinho. Right? Because it was here that we encountered bread to eat everyday, beans, and were able to be clothed with shoes on. This is why I don’t have anything to complain about Sobradinho. I don’t have any complaints.

Marta was very clear that Sobradinho, not CHESF, was the “giver” of what she has now, stating: “Who do I thank? I thank Sobradinho because it was Sobradinho that gave me this opportunity to survive. Isn’t that right?” Her statement seems to indicate that CHESF

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<sup>143</sup> Chase (2001) documents a similar disillusionment with the possibilities that education was to provide versus the reality of children’s life possibilities, especially as opportunities within the firm became fewer and fewer.

had ceased to be envisioned as a “provider” for residents, even for those whose parents had once been employed by CHESF as Marta’s once had. Of course it is also clear from her statement, that not everyone employed by CHESF experienced themselves as being “cared for,” as her father’s pay as a truck driver was not enough to provide for all of their needs. But, significantly, her experience of community, connection with other residents, and a sense of place have all contributed to her sense of gratitude towards and love for Sobradinho.

Indeed when I asked her why then, if she loves Sobradinho and felt thankful to it, did other residents speak poorly of the town. She responded:

I think that people today speak poorly of Sobradinho because Sobradinho doesn’t have employment, doesn’t have courses, doesn’t have a college. I myself did not study at college because I don’t have conditions. If I went to Juazeiro to study I would have to pay for a [bus] pass, which is an absurd cost. So, for those who live on a minimum salary, to study—I would like to but I don’t have conditions. I never had the conditions to do this. So, I think that the youth that speak poorly of Sobradinho, I think it is because of this—this opportunity that they don’t have here in Sobradinho.

This may be because now that most former employees are either unemployed or receiving marginal retirement benefits from CHESF, most residents are in the same boat of feeling “excluded” from company perks.<sup>144</sup> The case of Sobradinho contrasts with both Chase’s and Gibson-Graham’s studies of company towns because in both cases these firms sought to create a fixed (and content) labor force through the provision of services, homes, and so on. However, unlike the mining town cases in which the companies attempted to fix a potentially mobile labor force in place, CHESF relied on the migratory pattern present in the region and among dam workers in general to establish its operations. The dam-worker labor model was premised upon the willingness of

<sup>144</sup> While those who are still employed by CHESF do have access to more benefits, these benefits have been significantly reduced as a result of company streamlining in the 1990s and the emancipation of the municipality in the 1980s. For example, all residents now pay for water and electricity.

employees to move from one dam construction site to the next and/or on the temporariness of the labor sourced by its sub-contracting companies. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro (1994) found that workers at the site in which he did research (the Yacretá dam on the Argentinean-Brazilian border) referred to themselves as “dam creatures” (*bichos da obra*), highlighting their dependence on the project and migration from one project to the next. In this case, we can see that the company may provide perks to keep workers loyal in the same way that other industrial firms do, but these perks are provided to support a migrational labor pattern, rather than with the intent of fixing the labor in one location permanently. So that while capital (i.e. CHESF) certainly did attempt to foster a committed and docile labor force, the dynamics of the dam industry, as Ribeiro notes, is dependent upon flows of labor and capital. Because of this the relationship between workers and the firm take on a different form than in those towns where industry attempts to create a permanently fixed labor force.

Luis Almeida indicated that some youth have continued the migratory labor pattern of their parents:

Yes, many people still do this. Many people hear that there is work in another place where they are paying people and so people leave. And some companies send people to places like Juazeiro or Sobradinho to get employees to come to their project-- until today, they do this still. People know that the project ended here so they send people here. Many times the father did it and so the son does it. In many families it becomes a sort of tradition. Passing from the father who worked the *trecho* and then the son does too.

Just before saying this Luis Almeida had explained what *trecho* refers to:

Until today they use the term *peão de trecho* (laborer of the stretch)—people who move from project to project. So, they are called *peão de trecho*. *Trecho* refers to the *estrada* [road] that they have to follow. So, my father was working in São Paulo and my grandfather came here, the father of my mother. . . so they moved here and stayed here.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> *Trecho* can be translated as a passage or a stretch of road. The main point is that this laborers identify the road and movement as part of their labor and life experience.

The term *correr o trecho* (to run the stretch) recurs in the documentation by CAR from the participatory planning period of the mid-1980s. Those who entered into the movement to occupy landing Sobradinho and those who attempted to stay settled there were attempting to escape this pattern of periodic labor migration.

But, for youth who have broken with this pattern of labor migration and who have been educated in Sobradinho there is a sense for some that a supposed promise of development (access to a life of higher consumption patterns, security, and higher income) has been broken, and even more basic needs that are not caught up in higher consumption patterns are hard to maintain. While most in Sobradinho had never had access to all of the promises of the Fordist employment model, some had seen their parents benefit from employment by a state firm (CHESF) and they now perceive that there is little to no opportunity of finding themselves employed under such conditions.

Feelings of abandonment by CHESF have led to a number of negative characterizations of the town. One time, as I waited to get onto the bus in Juazeiro to head back to Sobradinho, one young man commented to his friend, laughing, “Ahh, going back to the *terra da barragem*! Well, one day things will get better there.” The term *terra da barragem* (land of the dam) is used in municipal documents to describe Sobradinho, its intent being to sing Sobradinho’s praises. Yet, this young man clearly was mocking the term’s empty and meaningless glorification of being “the land of the dam,” thereby turning the language of development into something derogatory. We can identify in this sarcastic reference what Geraldine Pratt has termed “counterdiscourses” that expose the internal inconsistencies of a more dominant discourse (1999: 215). So while



CHESF and other state agencies attempt to sing the praises of the “land of the dam,” we can see how the sarcastic use of such a term reveals the inconsistencies of CHESF’s claims that the dam has brought “progress” to the region.

### **The Rise of Export-Oriented Agroindustry in the Region: Economic Restructuring and Shifting Economic Expectations**

The experiences described in the previous section help explain why, without fail, when I asked residents what they perceived to be the biggest problem in Sobradinho, they responded with “unemployment” (*desemprego*) or “lack of employment” (*falta de emprego*). These concerns are related to a feeling that many *Sobradinhenses* have of being “cut off from” or disconnected from the neighboring and more urban municipalities of Juazeiro and Petrolina, which are seen as sites of development (*desenvolvimento*), prosperity, and growth. This sense of exclusion is compounded by many residents’ perceptions that the agro-industry that emerged with the dam has not created employment or economic opportunities within the municipality of Sobradinho, even though the rise of this industry was contingent upon the dam that many *Sobradinhenses* or their relatives helped construct. Many *Sobradinhenses* expressed sentiments of feeling “forgotten” or “left behind” now that the dam has been constructed and there is little formal employment in the municipality.<sup>146</sup>

Because Sobradinho is, and from its inception has been, “connected” and in fact was pivotal to the development of Juazeiro-Petrolina, there is a sense among many

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<sup>146</sup> Certainly, a sense of being forgotten or not mattering to those in authority is not unique to Sobradinho as many *Nordestinos* of the popular classes comments about their invisibility to those in political power (Rebhun 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1992). However, these sentiments might be exaggerated in Sobradinho in the context of the national and international praise of the São Francisco Valley’s astronomical economic growth, a process from which *Sobradinhenses* feel excluded. In addition, their feelings of abandonment emerge from a sense that the town had once appreciated the sponsorship of state investment but no longer matters to those in power.

residents that Sobradinho “should” be doing better financially and have better infrastructure. There is a firm belief by many that the creation of the ever-elusive “employment” (particularly through the establishment of agroindustrial firms or plantations) is the route to bettering Sobradinho and there is a great deal of discontent about the perceived failure of the past few municipal administrations to woo any firms to the area. One of the questions that I would like to probe in the rest of this chapter is why “employment” and the voicing of their problems around “unemployment” is virtually the only language many residents have to describe their frustration and their hopes for the future. Because of the widespread recognition of the environmental problems that these firms cause (due to pesticide use) and also the recognition that these jobs were not ideal, I often wondered if residents truly wanted agroindustrial firms to set up shop in Sobradinho or if this was merely the only imaginable solution to their plight. Why was it that employment on an agrofirma seemed to be the only imaginable economic alternative?

It is important to see read this desire for wage labor as the outcome of a long history of economic subjection of the semiarid, in particular, and the Northeast in general. A cry for employment may seem common-sense according to hegemonic economic understandings: following conventional developmentalist logic, regions that are experiencing economic downturns, according to dominant indicators, should seek to create jobs, usually in the form of waged labor.<sup>147</sup> However, it is only within the past few decades that many residents and their families may have shifted away from subsistence-based family agriculture to relying principally wage-based employment. Certainly wage

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<sup>147</sup> Feminist economist Barbara Brandt refers to this phenomenon as part of what she terms the “addictive economy.” She states, “It seems to me that society’s eagerness to accept any kind of destructive project, as long as the magic words ‘jobs’ or ‘economic development’ are invoked constitutes a form of addiction (Brandt 1995: 4).”

labor helped maintain farms for some in the region for several decades. However, in the past migrational waged work was a strategic end to maintain a farmstead in the *sertão* – it was not the principal form of livelihood. This means that it is important not to see the calls for *emprego* (employment) as the only natural and normal response to their situation. Instead I want to explore how the creation of employment has come to be both the biggest problem and, also, the only solution.

To understand this situation one needs to understand the changes that the municipalities of Juazeiro and Petrolina have experienced since the 1980s.<sup>148</sup> The 1970s witnessed state investment in irrigated agriculture in the region surrounding Juazeiro-Petrolina, often referred to as the middle-São Francisco region. These projects were state-led under the support of CODEVASF<sup>149</sup> (Company for the Development of the São Francisco and Parnaíba Valleys), which was responsible for the establishment of infrastructure for irrigated agriculture in the region. The state, in attempts at “social inclusion,” created a number of state-developed irrigated farmer settlements, called *colonos*, in which small producers were settled in the mid-1980s.

However, with state divestment from CODEVASF in the 1980s the focus of irrigated agricultural development in the São Francisco Valley shifted towards export-oriented industrial agriculture through a combination of public and private investment in irrigation. In this context, the earlier *colono* model of settling small farmers became a

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<sup>148</sup> To provide one with a sense of the expansion that has occurred in the region over the years the combined population of the two municipalities has grown from 40,000 in 1940, to 124,000 in 1970, 222,000 in 1980, 332,000 in 1989, and to 500,000 in 2005.

<sup>149</sup> CODEVASF stands for *Companhia do Desenvolvimento dos Vales do São Francisco e do Parnaíba*. When the Company was established in the 1974 it only referred to the São Francisco Valley, not the Parnaíba Valley. Parnaíba was added as part of its jurisdiction within the past decade. CODEVASF is a branch of the Ministry of National Integration, underlining how the state organ exists in order to achieve “national economic integration.”

miniscule part of much broader state development plan oriented towards export agriculture. Agricultural firms emerged as major economic powers in the region during this period, resulting in the projects in the São Francisco Valley becoming the largest irrigated agricultural development in Latin America (Marsden 1997: 174). The majority of state investment shifted towards supports for large enterprise in the region with a regional focus on what the trade literature refers to as “non-traditional export crops.” These had the ultimate effect of pushing out many small producers from participating in this export sector. This is due to the power that private enterprises can exert on family producers in enforcing quality control for the export market, essentially excluding small producers from the export market (Marsden 1997). This indicates that forms of regulation that occur even as the state divested responsibility in CODEVASF (the government agency that oversaw the irrigated projects).<sup>150</sup> Pedro Gama (2001) argues that private interests were able to insert themselves into strategic political and business arenas in the São Francisco Valley, allowing for their virtual monopoly of the coordination of fruit crops against the proclaimed official public purpose of these projects. These changes emerged with the liberalization of the Brazilian economy in the early 1990s.

To get a sense of the rapid growth that the two municipalities have witnessed in the agricultural sector, the year 2006 marked the entrance of Juazeiro and Petrolina onto “the list of ten Brazilian municipalities with highest values of agricultural production.”<sup>151</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Marsden (1997) argues that the changing power relations in the region reflect not so much the impacts of “deregulation” as they reveal the implantation of spatially specific set of power relations. Privatized forms are able to exert heavy pressure on small producers to adhere to strict quality control criteria, effectively leading to their exclusion from the export market.

<sup>151</sup> From the IBGE (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*) website: [http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/presidencia/noticias/noticia\\_visualiza.php?id\\_noticia=998&id\\_pagina=1](http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/presidencia/noticias/noticia_visualiza.php?id_noticia=998&id_pagina=1). Accessed June 15, 2008. Due to fruit crops directed mainly towards export, these municipalities had increases of 56.3 % and 18.6% in the value of production, in comparison with 2005. The irrigated areas of

Juazeiro rose to fourth position with a value of R\$ 519.5 million in value of production and Petrolina rose to 6<sup>th</sup> position nationwide with R\$ 430.9 million in value of production. The Juazeiro-Petrolina region is seen as exemplary of the “development pole” development model in the Northeast and described in government documents as “being responsible for improvements in the regional population’s quality of life in the past years.”<sup>152</sup> But, as the work of a number of researchers in the region have noted, many of the jobs introduced by the agro-industry in the São Francisco Valley are insecure, seasonal, and temporary (Collins 1993), while a smaller proportion are permanent or semi-permanent (Collins and Krippner 1999). Women tend to be hired in the less secure jobs in the valley, based upon a gender ideology which rationalizes hiring women for part-time work as they are not considered “primary wage-earners” (Branco 2000; Collins 1993; Fischer 2000; Fischer and de Melo 1996).

As already witnessed, amidst the seeming flourishing economy of the region, Sobradinho’s residents are very much concerned about unemployment in their municipality.<sup>153</sup> They cite not just Juazeiro-Petrolina as sites of economic growth but also

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the São Francisco Valley were the most responsible for the growth of the value of production in Brazil’s fruit crops in 2006 with 22.6% growth in relation to the previous year.

<sup>152</sup> Quote taken from: The Executive Summary of the final report on “Determination of Land Use in the Middle-Lower São Francisco River Basin” (CODEVASF 2000: 3).

<sup>153</sup> The 2001 national census data indicated that of the 16,898 of the population of Sobradinho over 10 years old that 9,022 were “without income”; or 53% of the adult population was “without income.” This figure is more dramatic when one considers that 23% of those who “have income” bring in less than a minimum salary. See: <http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat/default.php>. Accessed June 17, 2008. I want to note that I do not think these figures tell the full economic story of Sobradinho and I recognize that these figures imply a wholeness to the economy that can, in reality, never be accounted for; I merely relate them here so that the reader can have a sense of the general situation in regards to official statistics on formal employment. In addition, it is important to note that many in Sobradinho feel that these official figures are distorted by the high wages of the few residents in the Vila Santana who are employed by CHESF, thus making it appear that the situation of poverty in Sobradinho is not as bad as it is, due to the inflated averages caused by these high CHESF incomes.

smaller municipalities in the lake region such as Santana de Sobrado, which, to paraphrase a resident of Sobradinho, “is a smaller town but much nicer because there are about 5 mango or grape growing firms there.” Younger residents of the Vila São Francisco or the Vila São Joaquim often compare their municipality with others in the Sobradinho lake region stating that, “There [in that municipality] people have money because there are agro-firms there. We don’t have any firms here.” Some *Sobradinhenses* are indeed employed in the agroindustry in neighboring municipalities, being picked up in the mornings and dropped off in the evenings by these firms. Others work seasonally on a contract basis, living on site, for example, during the mango collection season.

But, Sobradinho itself has not experienced what are often seen as the “glamorous” and “modern” changes that have occurred in these neighboring municipalities. Juazeiro now has seen a number of flourishing bars and restaurants on its riverfront and a number of fashionable boutiques open upon its main street, which a few years back only contained small family-owned shops, stores, and lunch places. However, in comparison to Petrolina, Juazeiro is seen as “more backward” and “less developed” as Petrolina has a number of high-rise apartment buildings, well maintained roads, and a large shopping center and cinema complex.<sup>154</sup> The region is often described in industry documents as the *Nova California* (New California) or as the *Celeiro do Mundo* (Granary of the World).

The desired association with California is echoed in the name of a new gated high-rise

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<sup>154</sup> One friend described Juazeiro as *mais quente*, “hotter,” than Petrolina. In this context she meant that it was more “of the people” and “down-home” than the “more modern,” cold Petrolina—which she happened to like better. In 2001 a popular *forró* song by Targino Gondim, a *forró* singer from the region, went, “I like Juazeiro, but I love Petrolina!” This song egged on the rivalry between the two towns. While Petrolina is seen as “more developed,” there is a noticeable lack of nightlife on its waterfront compared to the packed bars and cafes on the Juazeiro waterfront.

complex that was being built in Petrolina in 2006 called *Sol da California* (California Sun).<sup>155</sup>

Residents see the changes in Juazeiro-Petrolina in contrast to Sobradinho that has not had its roads repaved since the early 1990s, and especially in contrast to those streets in the *Vila São Joaquim* that have never been paved at all.<sup>156</sup> In comparison to the night life that exists in the neighboring cities, young *Sobradinhenses* will complain that there is nothing to do there but drink or hang out in the *praça* (square). Mothers will complain that restaurants never last in Sobradinho or that there are no family friendly places, such as an ice cream shop because no one has any money to go to one—instead there are just bars. There is a general sense that things are falling apart or deteriorating in Sobradinho. This might be summed up in residents' statements that Sobradinho is *acabando*, meaning “finishing.”<sup>157</sup> Certainly a sense of state neglect is not new for residents of the semiarid, or even the Northeast in general, however, the contrast with the “modernization” of Juazeiro-Petrolina brings the perception of Sobradinho's neglect into sharp relief.

As Medeiros (2005) notes, the division between centers and peripheries is relative—as even Juazeiro-Petrolina is seen as peripheral to Salvador or Recife, which are further peripheral to the Center South cities. For example, within the São Francisco Valley,

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<sup>155</sup> Above and beyond agriculture in general, the emerging wine industry in the region is likely another reason for which connections to California are made.

<sup>156</sup> My field notes include an incident that occurred during February 2005 when Sobradinho was celebrating its 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary in which the white lines on the main street of Sobradinho had just been repainted by the municipal government. A woman I knew pointed to them and laughed, “Ha! They painted the streets, but they still left all the big holes in the road!” She was trying to point out how only superficial changes had been made, but no real repairs had been made to the roads.

<sup>157</sup> These sentiments were pronounced during my field stay (2005-2006) because the municipal government was experiencing a financial crisis and had laid off a large number of municipal employees and had also not paid a number of employees for a 2-3 month period.

Sobradinho certainly represents what some consider a more peripheral place in relation to the seeming modernity of Petrolina and even Juazeiro. Someone from a small *povoado* in the region might experience themselves as even further on the periphery than those in Sobradinho do. Forms of social marginalization certainly echo how one is positioned within centers and peripheries in the region.

These senses of disconnect are encapsulated in some of the ways in which residents refer to the town and in everyday incidents, as the following stories will demonstrate. I heard youth describe Sobradinho as *pessimo* (awful) or *ruim* (bad; defective). One time I was taking the bus from Sobradinho to Juazeiro and a woman got on who obviously had an eye infection or injury because she had a towel over her head to cover it; several residents offered their seats to her. She declined their offers and responded, “I am used to suffering. It is good to suffer. Sobradinho is like this—a *favela* (slum). I am used to living in a *favela*.” Instead of reading her statements as some form of self-abnegation we can read her statements as recognition of the long history of neglect, in which she has come to expect nothing more from authorities based on the fact that they have continually failed to deliver on promises to Sobradinho’s residents.<sup>158</sup>

The contrast between Sobradinho and the seeming prosperity of Juazeiro-Petrolina is highlighted by those who study the dynamics of the implantation of the

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<sup>158</sup> Another time I was at an event with the Sobradinho’s Catholic youth group, the Pastoral of Youth from the Popular Classes (*Pastoral de Juventude do Meio Popular*). We were attending a march of youth from the larger Sobradinho lake region (several municipalities) and were marching through neighborhoods in Juazeiro following Sobradinho’s Catholic samba band, *Fé e Axé* (Faith and Good Vibrations). One of the young women in the march who was from Sobradinho noticed how the streets were not paved and did not have a gutter system (because of the mucky water we had to walk through) and commented, “Oh, we’re passing through the poor areas of Juazeiro!” Her friend, teasingly responded, “What are you talking about? It’s no different from Sobradinho!” I bring this up to highlight that she seemed surprised that Juazeiro had neighborhoods that were similar to those in Sobradinho.



neoliberal model. David Harvey (2000) has noted how the market both encounters spatial discontinuities and creates new ones as it changes social relations and ecologies in places (cited in Chase 2002: 4). Crucial to the case of Sobradinho in the broader São Francisco Valley is Jacquelyn Chase's assertion that the seemingly dynamic regions produced by neoliberal economic policy have created internal inequalities (2002: 7). She highlights how new export crops have redefined the distinction between underdeveloped and developed regions and how agroindustrial poles have created the potential for new forms of exclusion. Most commonly, the rise of export agriculture had led to the loss of family lands and a shift towards wage labor. In particular, we can see how the dynamic of the large-scale development project planning by CHESF created a "redundant" space as investment was withdrawn from Sobradinho during the post dam-construction era—not to mention the numbers of families up-rooted from their lands. In what follows I will discuss how this situation has impacted the youth of Sobradinho.

### **Generational Change and the Creation of New "Needs" and Worries**

Because of the lack of formal employment opportunities in Sobradinho, the younger generation (those who were about 40 years old or younger) expressed concerns about the number of their generation that have moved away in search of work. Similar to comments about other *povoados* in the region, I heard young people say that Sobradinho would one day be made up only of "old people." Sometimes this was phrased as Sobradinho *vai acabar* (is going to be finished) or Sobradinho *não cabe mais*—(Sobradinho can't hold anymore). At the same time, the elderly expressed concerns about the possibilities for youth, their children and grandchildren, within the town. Indeed, an

issue that spans generations is concern that migration is the result of the lack of employment opportunities in Sobradinho. Less and less was this discussed in terms of lack of access to the land and other means of production needed to maintain a family farm. Increasingly the wage model has become the hegemonic and only thinkable possibility for the younger generation, although some are questioning that model as we will see in the next chapter. The lack of employment or livelihood options in Sobradinho leads to a lack of rootedness, which is one of the things that residents tried to resist by refusing to leave Sobradinho after the dam construction. While the elder generation has managed to stay, their children's options have not improved significantly.

This section discusses the issue of out-migration, in particular its generational aspects. In this section, I will examine the relationship of migration to many parents' sense that both they and their children face new concerns and life expectations—some of which they feel cannot be met, such as access to higher education, steady employment, and certain consumer goods. All of these expectations are related to the wants that were introduced during the construction process, but are also due to the increasing flow of images and representations of urban life and middle-class lifestyles into the region with the increasing presence of different forms of mass media. At the end of this section I consider how some youth are evaluated as “lazy” by other residents and the meaning of such evaluations. Over all, this section will examine the impacts of the development and market-based economic models on residents' understanding of their fellow towns-people and of their own life expectations and senses of self.

Labor migration is perceived to be something that particularly impacts youth more than the older generation since youth cannot find formal employment in Sobradinho, even though their parents have managed to settle there. The situation of unemployment in the town is distressing for many parents. As Marcos Abreu Correia, the President of a goat-herders association conveyed to me:

In the past when my family was small that was one thing, but today my family is big. That is another thing. The sadness augments. At that time none of the members worried about getting enough food. Today we worry about food, clothing, shoes -- because they don't have any place to earn money so now they have to stay with their parents. We have to help them. The other side is schooling [*estudo*]. The schooling is. . . [never finishes statement], so today the sadness has augmented.

Another parent, a mother of several adult children, commented to me:

Since the children have grown, today the worries are about their living conditions. When they were young I just worried about getting them to study and feeding them. Today it is different. I don't worry about the food part, but I worry about whether they have work and what will happen. With [my daughter] for example, I worry about what will happen to her in regards to work.

Both parents here express concern, whether in the past or in the present about providing “necessities” such as food, clothing and shoes. However, both express a sense that now there are new concerns such as access to higher education and employment that cause them both distress and sadness. We heard a similar concern echoed by Marta de Santana earlier in this chapter when she mentioned that the bus cost to attend college in Juazeiro was absurdly expensive.

It was relatively rare to find youth who wanted to continue working in agriculture or in fishing, former occupations of many of their parents, although some certainly did and took great pride in that work. However, the general devaluation of agricultural work along with the lack of institutional supports for small farmers and little access to land have led most youth to abandon hopes of working in agriculture, except as waged

workers. Working as an agriculturalist (whether as a small market-oriented farmer or for subsistence production) was unthinkable for many youth. In the absence of other options, the desire for waged employment has become the only choice imaginable.

Many of the older generations have a sense that access to opportunities have changed—and not necessarily for the better. One father in his 60s commented that it was easier when he was young because he felt there was more opportunity and that today youth actually have fewer options.<sup>159</sup> He went on, “Now there are schools and people can get more education—but what good is this education if there are no options [meaning jobs] for them here?” Similarly, the grandfather of two young women, one of whom who had just moved to São Paulo in search of work, commented that there was no opportunity for youth in Sobradinho. He asserted that it is better for someone who has a high school education, like his granddaughter, to go to São Paulo to find work. He asserted that it may not be good work, but it was work. He lamented that this is why the young men sit and drink *cachaça* (sugar-cane alcohol) in the town—because there is nothing else for them to do. This has meant that moving to São Paulo, even if temporarily, was often seen as both a necessity, but also as something exciting and adventurous by many youth.<sup>160</sup>

But, there are also those youth who do not want to leave Sobradinho because they appreciate the fairly tranquil life that it allows in comparison the perceived violence and frenetic pace of the big city. For example, one young woman in her twenties commented,

<sup>159</sup> His sense that there are “fewer options” is likely also related to youth’s higher expectations about social mobility. This father grew up in a fairly isolated *povoado* on the riverside and has mainly worked in manual labor. Most of his children are involved in different occupations: one is a school teacher, another works an NGO, another is an agricultural extension agent, and so on.

<sup>160</sup> When the granddaughter of this same gentleman returned to Sobradinho after several months of working in São Paulo, she recounted the excitement of going to the city-- going out, finding a job, finding a boyfriend. Her sister and mother were excited to hear her tales because these were adventures that would be difficult to encounter in Sobradinho.

Here in Sobradinho, Ana, a person can feel very trapped. There are only two high schools. Here this isn't option for anything . . . Here I feel a bit suffocated in regards to the question of education. But, I like this place. I like Sobradinho. It's tranquil. It's a place where I don't feel much pressure.

This appreciation of what they have in Sobradinho, as exemplified in the above quote is also tempered by a feeling that there are very few options for them. Many youth involved in church activities, in particular, felt positively about the city, but also felt that the lack of employment was a major issue. For example, Claudia Nunes, in her twenties, had this to say about the town:

If you go to the Diocese of Juazeiro, Sobradinho is involved in everything. Sobradinho has the [musical] band that goes everywhere. Sobradinho has the Children's Pastoral which is one of the strongest [in the diocese]. Sobradinho has people in the Church who are very courageous who have *garra* [spunk]—there is a lot of this.<sup>161</sup> There is a desire to see things happen. But, Sobradinho also lacks—the youth, these schools—the youth are lost, alienated. There is no where to go, there is nothing to look for. We need something to rescue these youth, I don't know what. It still lacks this. Sobradinho, like much of Brazil, lacks employment.

Though there are more educational opportunities now, as already mentioned, access to higher education is limited by the high cost of busfare to Juazeiro-Petrolina, where the colleges and universities are located. Many, even if they receive state funding for school, cannot afford the bus ride. In the 1990s youth established a Students' Association which until today has largely focused on the issue of the cost of the bus ride from Sobradinho to Juazeiro-Petrolina.<sup>162</sup> While this association has succeeded in obtaining a students' bus with a discounted fare, bus fare remains a limiting factor in many youth's access to higher education. This situation contributes to this sense of disconnect and lack for those

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<sup>161</sup> The term *garra* is frequently used to characterize *sertanejos*. It refers to strength and fortitude in the face of adversity, a self-representation in which residents of the semiarid take pride. It could be translated as having "guts" or being "gutsy."

<sup>162</sup> This is one of the lasting associations that emerged out of the period of "associativism" initiated by the participatory planning projects of the 1980s, as mentioned in Chapter 2.

residents without access to middle-class salaries and lifestyles that are seen to be on the rise in neighboring Juazeiro-Petrolina.

Indeed, this situation represents how development creates needs and a sense of lack, even as it promises more. The perception of the lack of opportunity in Sobradinho contributes to a sense that the promise of development has been broken: more education has not led to better jobs.<sup>163</sup> Parents are often happy that many of their children have high school educations, something to which they never had access.<sup>164</sup> However, their children often do not have access to higher education. This becomes an issue when they realize that high school education does not assure employment, certainly not in Sobradinho.

As de Vries (2007) has noted, development is a “desiring machine” that creates the desire for development by making promises that are never fulfilled. Residents’ desires for development should be read as an attempt to hold the state accountable to the unfulfilled promises it had made, “for the roads that were never built, the schools that never arrived, the jobs that never opened up; in other words, for the material and economic progress that was promised but only arrives in their dreams (de Vries 2007).” De Vries highlights that development is about more than just infrastructure; it also involves a moral relationship with authorities. Development involved both the creation of desire (for development) but also requires its banalization. Read in this light, although we

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<sup>163</sup> What I mean by a “promise of development” is that social change (in this case, development) is often conflated with social mobility: i.e. more development is supposed to lead to increased social mobility. Stacy Leigh Pigg makes a similar point in her discussion of development ideology in Nepal. She notes, “The representation of social change as social mobility is perhaps the most deceptive feature of development ideology in Nepal. In its imagery the promotion of *bikas* [development] promises to all a life modeled on that of the most affluent Nepalis, yet in its implementation the increased access to resources that would foster true economic mobility is seldom made possible (Pigg 1992: 501).”

<sup>164</sup> Again Pigg, makes the connection, “Education is both a symbol of *bikasi* [development] status and the route through which people can hope to move from farming in the village to an office job in a *bikasi* [developed] place (1992: 502).”

can deconstruct the creation of a sense of lack around the twin concepts of “employment/unemployment” we can also understand that residents are not “duped” by this call for what seems to be destructive economic development (agroindustry in their municipality). They realize that certain promises have been rescinded. When residents call for some of the seeming symbols of development such as paved roads, access to higher education, and other such social “goods,” this is not just about desire for development as a symbol or marker of “modernity.” It is about having a place, a home where they can stay and raise their families alongside others in community, without having to leave for work or to worry about their livelihood from day to day. These desires for home and community (social-economic security) are related to the older generation’s sense of the lives of peace and tranquility that they experienced in their former *povoados*. Indeed, new anxieties about unemployment likely contribute to the unease that many in the town feel. While there is a shared sense of having created something together in Sobradinho, many feel that without the ability to sustain themselves economically, the community and home that they have made will certainly “finish” (*acabar*). Thus, the calls for development should not be read as residents being somehow duped by the dominant development model, but about a broader vision of rootedness and community. However, these claims might be couched in the terms of traditional development indicators.

In fact the issue of education is something that some educators and activists in the region are attempting to address. RESAB (the Network of Educators in the Brazilian Semiarid) argues that education in the region has not been contextualized in regards to

regional realities and serves, instead, to train youth to become employees in order to leave the semi-arid to find jobs in the urban centers of Brazil.<sup>165</sup> Part of their mission of “decolonizing” education in the region, which they argue has served hegemonic interests, is to create regionally contextualized education that cultivates a desire in youth to stay in the region instead of a desire to leave to become a mere employee. A long history of devaluing the region and its residents has made it seem that any opportunity in the city is a better than staying in Sobradinho.

Those working on rethinking education in the region argue that migration to urban areas is made desirable because scholastic didactic material presents those lifestyles as a normative point of reference. This is a particular concern for members of the Catholic Church in the region, who worry that youth are wooed away from the region (and from religion) by the promise of access to consumer goods and the lifestyle possibilities of the urban centers. Media forms, particularly *telenovelas*, are often the center of these Church critiques because of their tendency to glorify urban life and consumerism. For example, in a sermon in the spring of 2006, the town priest commented that today’s idolatry was “*o Mercado*” (the market) and the economy. He urged residents not to teach their children that money and material goods were the most important things in their lives because the exploitation of others operates through a focus on these values. He asserted that those who work counter to the market are those who are doing the work of Jesus.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> A series of articles on RESAB’s framework can be found in the collection entitled, *Educação para a Convivência com o Semi-Árido: Reflexões Teórico-Práticas*. Juazeiro, Brasil: RESAB. 2004.

<sup>166</sup> These concerns also manifested around the number of young women from Sobradinho and in the region who were working in the sex trade in Juazeiro and Petrolina. When these young women were asked about why they had turned to this work by members of the Pastoral of Marginalized Women in Juazeiro, some of them recounted to the pastoral volunteers that they did this in order to cover the cost of college tuition. However, there was concern by members of the Church that many of these young women were turning to this work because of lures of material goods, as one of the nuns working with this project noted that many



In another sermon to a gathering of youth, the town pastor railed against individualism, which he linked to the neoliberal export-oriented economic model that was being implanted in the region. In his view there was a direct link between agro-industrial production and individualism. He argued that growing and selling mangoes, onions, and so on just for external markets and without attention to the consequences was an individualist activity. For the Church, the neoliberal model was an ethical-moral concern, related to issues of faith and community.

Many older residents who had moved to Sobradinho in the 1970s grew up without electricity—so the daily watching of *telenovelas* and other TV programs (an activity that virtually everyone engages in) certainly has impacted residents' expectations and knowledge of lifestyles of Brazilian and international elite. The interconnections of schooling, the media, and a sense of lack were expressed by one man who, stated that when he was young, he and others his age did not know that they were “supposed” to be in school and have certain material goods. He elaborated that now children like his school-age nephew see a certain lifestyle represented on television and feel like they are “missing” something. The Catholic Church's Youth Pastoral of the Popular Classes (PJMP) works to combat these desires and to, alternately, cultivate different desires such as a sense of investment in the region, as we will see in the next chapter. However, next I will discuss how, despite the widely recognized lack of employment options, youth are believed to be at fault by some residents.

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of them purchase the latest and most expensive brands of designer jeans.

## Interpreting the Category of the “Young and Lazy”

Many residents judge some youth as lazy or as unwilling to work, despite the widespread complaints that there are few employment opportunities in the municipality. These residents claimed that some youth just want to “sit around all day” and/or “drink in the square every night.” This tended to be a gendered characterization as those who were seen as “lazy” most often were young men.<sup>167</sup>

The *Praça da Biblia* (the Square of the Bible), was a site that was seen as emblematic of youth “laziness” or at least, lack of participation in anything “worthwhile.”<sup>168</sup> This square, located on the main drag in *Vila São Joaquim*, was filled every night of the week with youth-- some drinking, some not-- music blaring from a bar in the square. The *Praça da Biblia* was an object of much discussion by youth in Sobradinho: of those who hang out there as “not having anything better to do,” of it being “not my style” (implying tacky), or with excitement as somewhere one wanted to go to, especially on a weekend night.<sup>169</sup> But, three sisters in their twenties once complained to me, “The young men here aren’t worth anything, they are just lazy. They just want to sit

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<sup>167</sup> Young women were certainly judged as well, but the judgment of them often took on moral tones, hinting at these women’s assumed sexual promiscuity, rather than their “laziness.” I frequently heard reference to young women who participated in such activities as being “prostitutes.” This designation did not seem to have to do with literal payment for sex, or even perhaps sexual activity at all, instead it seemed to be a term used to judge women who breached social convention by hanging out in the square and socializing, and perhaps drinking alcohol. Frequently it was implied that these women exchanged sexual favors for material goods, rather than cash payment. For many residents, it was “all the same—prostitution.” These judgments were certainly reflective of anxieties about changing gender relations and social mores in the region.

<sup>168</sup> I always found the name of the square ironic: called the Square of the Bible because of a cement statue of the Bible that stood in the square, it was actually home to what some residents would moralistically see as an area of vice and laziness. It was also located directly in front of one of the more conservative Evangelical churches in the town; worshipers were quick to enter into the church in order to not seem to be hanging out in the *praça*.

<sup>169</sup> There was also a gendered, moralistic dimension to this as many young women did not want to be seen drinking in public. Some young women thought it was fine to socialize there but were careful not to drink in order to avoid gossip and to maintain their respectability in the eyes of their neighbors.

at the *Praça da Biblia* and watch the world go by.” One of them laughed, “Those guys say they want to work, but if you were to tell one of them that you have a job for them, they would respond, ‘Now? You mean you want me to start working now?’” She laughed, “As if they have something better to do!”<sup>170</sup> Rather than reading these men’s behavior as “laziness,” I would like to offer an alternative interpretation provided by Jacquelyn Chase’s (1997) work examining the new labor practices implemented by new industrial and export-oriented farmers in order to induce labor commitment among their workforce in central Brazil. Chase notes:

We can see on closer observation that what appears to be a preference for ‘leisure’ which neoclassical economists (and local landowners in southwest Goiás interviewed for this research) claim to exist among agricultural workers is, in fact, a resistance to certain forms of work by some men, based on a critical and realistic appraisal of the job market available to these individuals and to their children (Bardhan 1989; Berry 1993; Chase 1997; Hart 1992) (1997: 598).

Men in one of the communities she studied saw seasonal day labor as a disguised form of unemployment. We should recall that seasonal day labor is the new model in the São Francisco Valley region as well, in addition to a preference for female labor on many of the farms. The men in Chase’s study rejected the agricultural day-labor market but did not make parallel efforts to seek permanent jobs either in or out of agriculture. She asserts that the reasons seemed to be low expectations by men of accessing full-time wage jobs of any kind, in the city or countryside (Chase 1997: 598).

Likewise, many young men in Sobradinho have no reason to expect anything more than these men in Goiás did, as others have noted that employers expect relations of subjection with their employees (Collins and Krippner 1999). Men’s seeming “laziness”

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<sup>170</sup> These same young women said that pay for a day’s work on plantations was R\$10.00-\$12.00, or about U.S. \$5.00 a day; you could earn up to R\$15.00 if you were willing to work with applying *venenos* (pesticides). Some firms paid based on *produção* (how much you produced and it was possible to earn more on these farms per day).

is a response to the lack of desirable employment opportunities available to them.

However, as Chase also noted in her work, households often cope with men's hope of better work situations through the economic contributions of women and children (1997: 599). Given this reading we can understand both perspectives: why young men may seemingly "choose" not to work, but also why some women in the community may interpret such behavior as "laziness."

I want to recognize that residents do see the situation as complicated even as they feel frustrated with their fellow residents. One woman in her forties who had been active in the mobilization for Sobradinho's political emancipation said that,

Today when you go out in Sobradinho on Friday, what do you see? There on the avenue you see all these youth—they are there *parada* [stopped; inactive]. There is nothing [for them to do]. There are no parties, nothing. They are there *solto* [loose] and without objective.

She attributed this lack of opportunity as leading to youth's lack of participation in town politics. She used a word to describe these youth that was frequently applied to the local population: *acomodada* (meaning comfortable, implying passivity). While she was clearly critiquing the youth for their inactivity, she also saw it as a broader societal failure to offer anything to these young people other than the chance to hang out in the square. Her comments echo those we heard earlier in this chapter by Claudia Nunes who commented that many youth were lost and she did not know what could be done for them.

The seeming hesitance to work may reflect youth's ambivalence about working under the neoliberal model as a "flexible" worker and also of working under older regional models that required subjection to an employer. As Chase (1997) has noted,

flexibility is certainly not new to landless day laborers (known as *bóias-frias* or *diaristas*) in Brazil, on agricultural *fazendas* or plantations, even prior to the implementation of the neoliberal model. For decades agriculture in the Northeast has relied upon a temporary and insecure labor force. Certainly, this is also the case in other industries as well, such as construction, as we heard Luis Almeida refer to the phenomenon of the *peão de trecho* and it being a multi-generational family phenomenon. Therefore, many have, well before the full implantation of the neoliberal model, relied upon flexible methods and creativity in securing a livelihood.

These descriptions of youth resonate with the value put on industriousness that was introduced with development and market-based economic models in the region. The categories of those who are “workers” (i.e. the industrious) and the “lazy” do not emerge on their own from residents of Sobradinho, nor do the moral valences put on them. Stereotypes of the “lazy native” are a widespread colonial trope (Redfield 2000: 217) and the moral evaluations of one’s laziness or industriousness are certainly tied to the encroachment of the development discourse and market-based evaluations of daily life.<sup>171</sup> In addition they echo negative, racialized representations of Northeasterners as slow and lazy, which contrasts with *sertanejo* self-identification as workers, strugglers, and sufferers (Gomes 1998).

Whether it’s a new phenomenon or not, we can see in youth’s lack of desire to “work right now,” a resistance to being put in a situation of subjection to the will of an

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<sup>171</sup> As Redfield asserts, the act of the colonization of the tropics involved the importation of new tools and systems designed elsewhere and left a space in between them and their new locale. The gap in between this standardized structure and a particular milieu creates a gap or area open to negotiation. “The arts of laziness, then, can be understood as an alternative to the arts of control, as well as another reaction to displacement (Redfield 2000: 223).”

employer who has little mutual obligation to them as employees. Rather than “laziness” (a hegemonic reading of these youth’s actions), their behavior could be read as a refusal to work under exploitative labor relations. Indeed Collins and Krippner (1999), citing Shaffner (1993), argue that threat of dismissal is used in the region to maintain subjection of the workforce. As the former regional tradition of binding employment on *fazendas* or estates has broken down (as employees used to live on-site on the *fazenda*), workers have either been forced into work as day laborers (*bóias-frias*). They have also turned to a variety of forms of employment returning temporary situations, stable but discontinuous labor contracts, and, in some situations, multi-year permanent contracts (Collins and Krippner 1999: 515). The first few models do not guarantee worker benefits and the last model (multi-year contracts) often entails a situation of subjection to employer needs. Keeping this in mind, sitting in the *praça* (although read as laziness), certainly is more enjoyable, and perhaps allows youth to maintain a certain degree of dignity as they do not have to subject themselves to working as an insecure (and potentially mistreated) employee.<sup>172</sup> In essence, these youth are refusing to become the “flexible” employee that so many have argued is central to the neoliberal labor model, nor do they seem to desire a return to the former labor practices that entailed subjection to an employer’s wishes.

Graham (2002) discusses how capitalist economic models have often attributed men with the “positive” capitalist economic identity of “wage earner.” In contrast, women may be more open to re-inventing themselves and may also be more creative in

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<sup>172</sup> For example, I recall one of the nuns of Sobradinho recounting how a young man had spent a week working for a *fazendeiro*; after the week ended he went to him for his pay. He was told, simply, “I don’t have it.” The young man had no recourse and was never paid for that week’s work. This certainly is not a new or rare occurrence, as a classic scene in the book *Vidas Secas*, by Graciliano Ramos, depicts the husband shamefacedly ask for his rightful payment from a *fazendeiro* who practically ignored him and only grudgingly gave him his weekly pay.

seeking and developing alternative economic practices and models due to the fact that they are not obliged to identify with the “wage earner” role.<sup>173</sup> The reason I raise this analysis here is that I believe the inverse also applies: that the few available alternative (gendered) subject positions in Sobradinho lead to judgments of young men as “lazy” and at the same time precludes many of them from seeking alternatives. These young men by “hanging out in the square” are perhaps rejecting the worth and desirability of dominant economic roles, which they see as virtually impossible to access. Or, alternately, which require them to subject themselves to exploitative labor relations. However, combined with a sense that the elderly support the youth with their retirement pensions and that women economically sustain a household, this leads to moral approbation of those young men who hang out in the square.<sup>174</sup>

Certainly the urge for young men to be “productive” and young women positioning themselves as the productive ones in contradistinction to these men, is due to the shifts that have occurred in hiring practices and gender relations over the past several decades in the region. As already mentioned women have been increasingly drawn in as temporary labor on firms in the region, which has led to women’s increasing economic independence, but also their being subject to (gendered) labor relations (Collins 1993).

Now that women have been incorporated into the labor market, some young men have

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<sup>173</sup> Graham muses that perhaps women are more open to new economic identities because their economic identities are often “unfixed, multiple, flexible, or floating” or because they are devalued in both their gender and economic roles (2002: 20). This idea will be explored further in Chapter 5: Women, Care, and the Community Economy.

<sup>174</sup> There is broad recognition in Sobradinho that many families are held afloat financially by the retirement pensions of the elderly. This may contribute to the moral approbation of some youth, when they are interpreted as just living off the pensions of the elderly. Conversely, parental (and grandparental) concern is one reason why pensions are used to support the broader household, especially in the wide recognition of the meager formal employment opportunities in Sobradinho.

come to experience themselves as economically marginalized. This is coupled with the earlier dynamic of men's sense that they are supposed to be the one's earning for the family, not women. Women have more options open to them because they have not felt hemmed in by the capitalist model of being the "wage earner."

Most significantly, the evaluation of these youth as "lazy" also falls in line with the individualized subject of the neoliberal economic model, who is individually culpable for his or her economic situation (Bondi 2005: 499). According to this logic, if one does not "succeed" it is because one has failed to demonstrate the enterprising and flexible behavior expected of the neoliberal workforce. So the values of industriousness associated with development and modernization now come together in the situation of largely temporary and seasonal work available in the agro-industry of neighboring municipalities, so that those who choose not to pursue such options are seen to be lazy, a moral failing.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I outlined some of the processes which gave rise to specific forms of economic subjection in Sobradinho. I first outlined the longer historical processes of landlessness and migration among residents of the semiarid. I then examined the particular dynamics that CHESF, as a state-run firm, introduced into the town and what sorts of paternalistic labor relations that being a former "company town" gave rise to for residents. I then examined how the rise of agro-industry with the concomitant rise in dominant economic indicators in Juazeiro-Petrolina has led to feelings of abjection for many residents in Sobradinho. I concluded with an examination of the generational shifts



that have occurred in terms of employment expectations and what sorts of livelihoods are seen as viable. I highlighted the role of the neoliberal development model in leading to an evaluation of many residents as “lazy” for “failing” to pursue employment in neighboring agroindustry. What I have tried to trace, is how a certain way of understanding the economy became stabilized over the past several decades in the Northeast in general and in Sobradinho, in particular. There has been a shift from subsistence-based production, towards a partial reliance on wage labor, to wage labor becoming one of the only possibilities imaginable for many residents. In other words, if the aims of state-led “development” were to integrate individuals into the market economy, the subject positions discussed in this chapter seem to indicate the entrenchment of the market economy.

Residents have been encouraged to want certain goods that were offered as the promises of development—such as access to higher education, stable income, and so on. This is a similar argument the one that de Vries (2007) makes about development being a desiring machine that also requires the banalization of these desires. Unfortunately, what has happened in the process of creating these desires is that there has been a simultaneous call for what many might see as destructive forms of development, such as a call for agroindustrial firms in the municipality. However, this is only a partial description of what is happening in Sobradinho and in the São Francisco Valley as we will discover in the next chapter. While the state clings to a version of incorporation which is modeled on market integration, the popular Catholic Church has been one of the few institutions in the rural Northeast that supports small producers’ desires to not become dependent on the

market. As the next chapter explores, not everyone is calling for “employment”—some residents’ visions are much ampler. Small producers and youth engaged with the popular Catholic Church have attempted to rethink the necessity and seeming inevitability of wage work as the only form of employment in the town.

This chapter opened with a number of negative visions of Sobradinho as we learned about residents sense of disconnect and the ways in which residents see themselves and other residents through categories introduced by market-base economic models in the region; such as the workers/the lazy, the employed/the unemployed, or the retired/the working. In the next chapter, the tone will shift towards a more hopeful view of what sorts of becoming are possible in Sobradinho, despite the prevalence of a number of economic identities premised upon experiencing oneself and one’s community as in a state of abjection. In the following chapter, I explore projects and views of residents that indicate that not all residents are assuming the economic subject positions introduced by economic restructuring in Brazil. Indeed, some are cultivating more group-oriented and non-wage-based livelihood possibilities in the town. In what follows, I examine existing economic practice in the town in order to make space for a vision that is not dominated by hegemonic understandings of the economy.

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **EVERYDAY ECONOMIC PRACTICE: REWORKING CAPITALIST SCRIPTS**

Let me tell you something, the life of an employee is not so good. Because in the life of an employee—you only have money when you are working.

- *Marcos Abreu, Resident of Sobradinho and President of the Association of Canaan*

“Why has Economy become an everyday term that denotes a force to be reckoned with existing outside of politics and society—a force that constitutes the ultimate arbiter of possibility? How is it that waged labor, the commodity market, and capitalist enterprise have come to be seen as the only ‘normal’ forms of work, exchange, and business organization?”

- *J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006: 53)*

Much of the energy of the previous chapter might be interpreted as being in the “negative,” as it was about forms of regional subjection and identification with the subject position of “employee” that make other forms of the economic identification unthinkable. These visions often, but not always, accompanied an understanding of Sobradinho as a place of lack, particularly as a place which “lacks employment.” In this chapter, the focus shifts towards existing livelihood practices and projects that residents engage in, despite a common understanding that the town is in need of employment. With this chapter I hope to contribute to the work of other researchers in redefining the unitary notion of the “the economy” as cultural practice, thereby creating an opening for a discussion of the “economic” as composed of multiple practices and discourses of the economy (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006; Gudeman 1981, 2001; Mitchell 1998). This piece will portray the economy of Sobradinho in terms that are not defined by market-based models or by capitalism. Instead it highlights the various forms of economic practice in

which residents are engaged. Many of these represent forms of non-capitalist practice or are practices which only partially engage with the market, meaning that they are not entirely governed by a market logic.

In doing so, I build off of the work of Marxist feminist geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) who have urged researchers to be wary of a certain “capitalocentrism” in our theories and descriptions of economic globalization. They warn that representations of economic globalization tend to reinforce a sort of “globalization script,” whereby communities are discursively construed as inherently vulnerable to and victims of global capital. Gibson-Graham assert that such representations bolster the seeming inevitability of capitalist dominance, by positing all other forms of economic practice as either lesser forms of capitalism or forms that will soon be replaced by capitalism. Instead they urge economic theorists to focus on economic difference rather than dominance. They attempt to redefine capitalism, shifting away from a definition focused on ownership of the means of production to a focus on the communal appropriation and redistribution of surplus as markers of non-capitalisms (1996).

Their project aligns with the work of economic anthropologist Stephen Gudeman (2001) who argues that the economy consists of two realms, that of the market realm and that of the communal realm. Central to his conception of the communal realm is the idea that the base (a community’s shared interests) and social relationships are the most salient part of this realm. He contrasts this with the market realm of the economy, in which short-term material relationships and transactions are undertaken in order to secure a good or achieve a project (2001: 10). By identifying these two realms, Gudeman opens a

discursive space for seeing the economic practice not as a singular type, which is always market-oriented, but instead he highlights the ways in which different value concerns can, and often do, come into play in economic practice. Significantly, his understanding of the economy does not identify the market realm as necessarily prior to or dominant over the community realm. In fact, community realm-based concerns may often take precedence to the market realm, although these realms can clearly overlap.

His attention to the community realm builds on the work of Karl Polanyi (1957) who describes the process by which the “market” came to be disembedded from social life. Particularly, he asserts that land, labor, and money represent the three “commodity fictions” of the market economy, as these are not commodities (i.e. they are not produced), but instead should be seen as nature, human life, and a form of exchange. Polanyi argues that although the market economy has become the dominant way of organizing economic life over the past two centuries, it is just one way of doing so, not the only way. Instead of seeing the economy as something that “exists” out there, a number of theorists urge for attention to how the “economy” has been historically produced as a distinct category (Dumont 1977; Foucault 1973; Mitchell 1998). These theorists’ works are useful to this chapter (and to the following chapter), as I examine how residents’ experiences in the realms of the economic are intricately tied to visions of community and their sense of place in Sobradinho.

This chapter will explore the following question: What livelihood practices and strategies do residents engage in despite the fact that many believe that their town’s biggest problem is unemployment? In exploring this question, I describe what might be

called the *diverse economy* (Gibson-Graham 2006) of Sobradinho and highlight how a vision of the diverse economy opens up space for imagining Sobradinho and the lake region not as a place of lack or as a place which is dependent on CHESF or agroindustry. By the diverse economy I am referring to all of those practices that are marginalized or excluded by a monolithic vision of the economy as capitalist or inherently about the market economy. Following Gibson-Graham, I will highlight economic practice in terms of different kinds of transaction, types of labor, and forms of enterprise that exist in Sobradinho (Gibson-Graham 2006: 60). For Gibson-Graham the descriptive project of highlighting the diverse economy helps to create a frame for new economic “becomings” in place. By “becomings” I mean emerging forms of identification and ways of being in the world. Recognizing the diverse economy provides a framework in which such practices can be cultivated and nurtured.

The second section of this chapter examines two case studies which illuminate how some residents negotiate the messages they receive about work and employment, expressing views that are different from the capitalist scripts that are common among many who live in the region. This section first examines the practices of the elder generation and then of youth. In this section I elaborate how former subsistence-based production models serve as counter-weights to the pull of capitalist models for many older residents who are unwilling to fully submit themselves to the conditions of waged employment. For older residents, non-market oriented subjectivities might be more sedimented (Butler 1997), meaning that older practices and ways of being are retained (embodied) from the past (Walkderine 2006). These sedimented ways of being conflict

with those required of waged workers. The continuance of these older practices is significant. Escobar, referencing the work Comaroff and Comaroff (1991), asserts that, “There is a space between the colonization of consciousness by the apparatuses of capital and modernity and the consciousness of colonization where the process is actively contested and significantly reshaped by those undergoing it (Escobar 2008: 82).” The two case studies in this section will document this process of contestation by both the elder generation and some of the younger generation.

Youth are undertaking an active process of resubjectivation, whereby they participate in practices and projects with others that actively cultivate themselves as non-market oriented subjects. By resubjectivation I refer to a term that Gibson-Graham (2006) have incorporated from the work of Connolly (1995, 1999) which describes the processes of a “micropolitics of (re)subjectivation.” Connolly bases this notion on Foucault’s (1997) work on *ethical self-transformation*, which articulates the microlevel behavioral changes that are involved in (re)shaping subjectivities. For youth who have grown up surrounded by both wage-based and salaried labor, who have been taught that these labor models are not just the only option available to them, but also the only desirable options, they must engage in an active process of reorienting their desires to envision other livelihood possibilities. Not only are youth involved in a process of re-visioning what sorts of livelihoods they can imagine and want to participate in, but they are also engaged in creating different frames for understanding the possibilities of their region based upon its ecological conditions. This entails, as alluded to in the previous chapter, a project of reorienting their desires and what they see as the “good” away from the material and

consumption-oriented patterns that are associated with urban living by many in Sobradinho.

These two case studies should demonstrate that residents are already involved in enacting, creating, and recreating forms of economic practice in place which are not market-oriented, or at least certainly cannot be reduced to capitalism. Both case studies highlight the connections of these economic projects to the work of the progressive Catholic Church, NGOs and social movements in the region that work with residents in an attempt to create a positive imaginative frame, as well as forms of legal and bureaucratic support for such projects. As will become clear, these projects are not about disengagement from the market, but instead are about creating livelihoods that do not necessitate dependency on the market economy or wage labor. These projects grant residents some leverage in regards to the market. In doing so, these projects create spaces for both practices and forms of subjectivity that are not entirely colonized by capital.

### **Everyday Forms of Economy**

Despite a sense of lack expressed about Sobradinho and its negative economic identity, there is a wide variety of economic activity present in the town. The existence of this variety of economic practice demonstrates that the negative portrayals of Sobradinho do not accurately represent the existing economic activity, but instead demonstrate broader anxieties introduced by the development discourse and a market-based economic model, both of which encourage residents to see being an “employee” as the only viable economic identity. I argue that livelihoods in Sobradinho are maintained by a plethora of economic activities that do not conform to the wage labor model, commodity production



for the market, or capitalist enterprise (Gibson-Graham 2006: 58). However, because wage labor and salaried work are the only forms of economic activity validated by the hegemonic economic model, these other activities are seen as “non-economic” by residents.

Gibson-Graham in their work on dominant understandings of the economy urge researchers to shift their analytic focus onto what they call the *diverse economy* or, more broadly, *the community economy* (2006: 68). Their view of the economy highlights the diversity of economic practice that exists outside of or articulated with, the supposed sole dimensions of the economy: market transactions, wage labor, and capitalist enterprise. They do this in order to make visible the vast sea of economic relations that do not conform solely to market logic; i.e. what they call the *community economy*. They urge theorists to recognize that capitalist economic activities are only a small part – the tip of the economic iceberg—of the many economic activities that exist in many (if not all) communities. This project of the diverse economy attempts to re-situate non-capitalist practices from empty negativity to active forms of non-capitalist practice. In fact, Gibson-Graham note, it is this variety of non-market transaction that sustains us all.

On the following page is a chart (Table 2) taken from Gibson-Graham’s book *A Post-Capitalist Politics* (2006: 71), which provides a framework for the diverse economy. Using the framework provided by the chart below, I have documented some of the economic activities that the residents of Sobradinho engage in that fall within the framework of the diverse economy (see Table 3). The chart is not exhaustive, nor did I intend it to be. It instead represents just some of the economic activities (paid and unpaid;

“employment” or not) that *Sobradinhenses* engage in. Most of these do not conform to the category of “capitalist,” highlighting that much of what happens within the realm of the economic in Sobradinho is not governed by market models.

TRANSACTIONS	LABOR	ENTERPRISE
<b>MARKET</b> <b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> <i>Sale of public goods</i> <i>Ethical “fair trade” markets</i> <i>Local trading systems</i> <i>Alternative currencies</i> <i>Underground market</i> <i>Co-op exchange</i> <i>Barter</i> <i>Informal market</i>	<b>WAGE</b> <b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> <i>Self-employed</i> <i>Cooperative</i> <i>Indentured</i> <i>Reciprocal labor</i> <i>In-kind</i> <i>Work for welfare</i>	<b>CAPITALIST</b> <b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> <i>State enterprise</i> <i>Green capitalist</i> <i>Socially responsible firm</i> <i>Nonprofit</i>
<b>NONMARKET</b> <i>Household flows</i> <i>Gift giving</i> <i>Indigenous exchange</i> <i>State allocations</i> <i>State appropriations</i> <i>Gleaning</i> <i>Hunting, fishing, gathering</i> <i>Theft, poaching</i>	<b>UNPAID</b> <i>Housework</i> <i>Family care</i> <i>Neighborhood work</i> <i>Volunteer</i> <i>Self-provisioning</i> <i>Slave labor</i>	<b>NONCAPITALIST</b> <i>Communal</i> <i>Independent</i> <i>Feudal</i> <i>Slave</i>

**Table 2: Framework for the Diverse Economy**

In their work in the Pioneer and Latrobe Valleys in the U.S. and Australia, respectively, Gibson-Graham found a number of half-hearted and defensive ‘economic’ identities that went largely acknowledged as social identities among residents, such as those of houseworker, giver of gifts, volunteer, cooperator, and so on (2006: 77). In Sobradinho, these same economic identities are blurred or hidden from view by the focus on formal employment as a route to positive economic identity.<sup>175</sup> I believe that this is a

<sup>175</sup> As will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, this obsession with “employment” and becoming an employee is seen by some activists and researchers in the region as being due to the education in the region which merely teaches the young to become employees. This often has the effect of urging them to migrate to the urban areas of Brazil and away from the Brazilian semiarid. Both RESAB (the Network of Educators in the Brazilian Semi-Arid) and IRPAA (Regional Institute of Appropriate Agriculture and Animal Husbandry), and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) take such a stance.

significant cause of the negative representations of the town and the accusations that some residents are “lazy.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> This is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the following chapter will address a number of economic identities, particularly those taken on by women in Sobradinho, which get blurred by the focus on formal employment.

<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>LABOR</b>	<b>ENTERPRISE</b>
<b>MARKET</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Purchase of goods at grocery stores, shops, and market stalls</li> <li>– Selling cosmetics or clothing through catalogues (Avon, Botânica, etc.) to existing social networks</li> </ul>	<b>WAGE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Domestic Servant</li> <li>– Washing Clothes for pay</li> <li>– Work in agroindustry</li> <li>– Working as a moto-taxista (motorcycle taxi-driver)</li> <li>– Shop clerk in Sobradinho</li> <li>– Work in offices and stores in Juazeiro-Petrolina</li> </ul>	<b>CAPITALIST</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Chain store</li> <li>– Chain gas station</li> </ul>
<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sale of self-produced agricultural produce</li> <li>– Artisanal fish</li> <li>– Sale of livestock</li> <li>– Buying clothing or other goods in Caruaru (a market town) and re-selling them in Sobradinho</li> <li>– Holding a bingo, raffle, or a feijoada<sup>177</sup> to raise money for an operation or a special expense</li> <li>– Ownership of small commercial enterprise (such as small bars, stores, mechanic shops, video rental shop, vegetable stands, etc.) and employment of family members within it</li> </ul>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Volunteer” at Community Daycare</li> <li>– Self-employment in service industry: hair care services, manicuring, bike repair, etc.</li> <li>– Making cinder blocks for sale</li> <li>– Sleeping in the home of an elderly individual for a small fee (for safety and companionship)</li> <li>– Work for the Rural Labor Union</li> <li>– Crocheting, knitting, or sewing items for sale</li> <li>– Small scale craft or food production for sale within Sobradinho</li> <li>– Home-based piece-paid contracts sewing clothing or other items</li> <li>– Prostitution</li> <li>– Decorating for children’s birthday parties or weddings (for payment or in exchange for a favor)</li> </ul>	<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Work for CHESF (State energy company)</li> <li>– Work for municipal government</li> <li>– Work as a Community Health Agent or the federally funded position</li> <li>– Work for local NGOs</li> </ul>
<b>NONMARKET</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Subsistence Fishing</li> <li>– Receipt of Retirement Salary from federal government</li> <li>– Gift giving- baking a cake as thanks, etc.</li> <li>– Exchange of favors (braiding hair, manicuring, adding embellishments to clothing, etc.) with friends</li> </ul>	<b>UNPAID</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Housework</li> <li>– Family Care</li> <li>– Work on family farm plot or community garden plot</li> <li>– Volunteer for Church Pastorals or elsewhere in the community</li> <li>– Catechist</li> <li>– Work in family-owned shop</li> </ul>	<b>NONCAPITALIST</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Community-Run Daycare</li> <li>– Cooperative Non-profit School</li> <li>– Community Garden</li> </ul>

**Table 3: The Diverse Economy of Sobradinho**

<sup>177</sup> *Feijoada* is considered by many to be Brazil’s national dish. It is made from either black or brown beans cooked with cuts of pork, including bacon. Served over rice, it tends to be made only on Sundays or on special occasions. Holding a *feijoada* would entail making large quantities of this dish and selling tickets to the event in advance to raise money; the Church Children’s Pastoral held one as a fundraiser during my time in Sobradinho.

Not all residents have adopted this vision which sees the only possible economic identity as that of a full-time employee. *Sobradinhenses* recognize that both their neighbors and they themselves must be creative by cobbling together a living through a number of odd jobs or projects, a practice which accords with the expansive literature on household survival strategies in Latin America. Residents capture this sense of cobbling together a living in the expression *trabalhando ao bico* (working by the beak; working a number of casual jobs). Many of their activities are tenuous in terms of providing monetary security, but the list above demonstrates that residents are not inactive (*parada*), non-industrious, nor unemployed as implied by some in the town. They just do not receive a formal wage for much of their economic activity. However, wage labor is the hegemonic yardstick by which their social/economic contributions are judged.

Accordingly, many theorists portray economic activities that exist outside the market model as stop gaps or band-aids to the precarities induced by the neoliberal economic model because they do not appear to produce any sort of systemic change. However, Gibson-Graham (2006) urge an approach based on what they call “weak theory”—an approach that is descriptive rather than totalizing. This sort of reading asserts that every economic relation offers both aspects of economic freedom, as well as possibilities for exploitation or oppression. Each type of work situation also offers the potential for one or more economic identities or subject positions (Gibson-Graham 2006: 72). This means that other forms of economic practice are not necessarily unviable or insignificant. Considering that youth are urged by media and their schooling to establish

their life and work elsewhere, the very fact that residents attempt to stay and make a living in Sobradinho is significant. Certainly the dominant economic model encourages residents to leave, but instead many have chosen to stay in Sobradinho. There are other dimensions to their lives and livelihoods that are not dominated by market-based models and which could be critical to their decision to make a life in Sobradinho.

In expanding the discussion of the diverse economy, I would like to highlight a few examples of the sorts of economic and livelihoods options available to residents, in order to expand the notion that there is no employment in Sobradinho. In addition to the economic activities described above, there are waged and salaried jobs either with CHESF or the municipal government. To get many of these positions, one has to be *concursada*: meaning that one has to pass a federal exam and go through a recruitment process to be placed in the position. Positions accessed through the *concursada* are permanent and they range in level of professionalization and pay, from minimum-salary jobs such as that of *merendeira* (snack-maker for a school or daycare) to slightly higher paid clerical office positions. These positions are highly desired by residents because they are funded by the federal government, secure, and assure access to social security benefits. As municipal administrations change in Sobradinho, it is not infrequent for there to be a turn-over in town staffing due to political favoritism, which is why the permanent *concursada* positions are sought by many.<sup>178</sup> Yet, some argued, that even these positions at CHESF were subject to favoritism, despite the formal selection process. Some residents argued that they had come in first place in a *concursada*, yet the position went

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<sup>178</sup> Anyone working in a position achieved through the *concursada* can be shifted into a less prestigious or less influential position when a new administration enters office, as happened to some municipal employees during the course of my stay in Sobradinho. However, when this happens their salary cannot be reduced.

to others. While this discussion of the *concurso* seems to diverge from my discussion of livelihoods in Sobradinho, I mention it because these positions have a strong hold on the economic imaginary and desires of residents: they are seen as both the most desirable and also the most difficult to obtain. Many residents keep participating in the *concurso* year after year, in hope of obtaining one of these positions.

As discussed in the previous chapter, because CHESF had previously employed many, residents felt a sense of loss and nostalgia for the permanent jobs that are now gone. For example, one young man in his twenties, João Fernandes, stated:

There isn't a lot of work in the municipality today, and there is very little commerce. . . . Because today the prefecture is at the center of things—it dominates most of the employment in the city. Today the prefecture employs about 1,500 people but it is difficult to access [the jobs] for youth. So, the biggest problem today in our municipality is the labor market. There is no work— you either need to leave or work on the plantations that are in other [neighboring] cities, such as Petrolina.

His comments highlight how positions associated with the *concurso* are perceived as central to the economy of Sobradinho. He also notes that the only option for many youth is to migrate in search of work on plantations in neighboring municipalities. However, this young man was not despairing and was determined to make a life in Sobradinho as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. The hold such forms of employment have on residents' imaginaries and desires is one reason why Gibson-Graham's political project of reworking negative and capitalocentric economic identities around a new nodal point, the *community economy*, could be a critical tool in reworking the local economy. As we will see, some residents are already discovering new economic identities for themselves and at the same time creating forms of community economy- a form of economy premised on economic interdependence which will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

For those who are not employed by CHESF or the municipality, the predominant forms of occupation are employment by firms in neighboring municipalities, farm work, fishing, running a small business, and a number of other strategies described in the chart earlier in this chapter. Many are involved in varied, overlapping strategies in order to make a living wage. For example, many women might work as community health agent, sell cosmetics and clothing through catalogues, and also create craft items to sell within Sobradinho. Other residents maintained a garden plot on which they produced for their own consumption, as well as for sale within Sobradinho. These residents were simultaneously involved in other projects that brought in small amounts of cash income. Many women were involved in various forms of craft production that they sold to others (making pastries, party favors, baby bedding and clothing, popsicles, and so on). A central strategy for many families was to pool the resources of several family members across generations, which is a common strategy of low-income households across Latin America and around the world. The retirement pensions of the elderly were essential to maintaining extended family households. In what follows, I will provide the reader with a snapshot of how one family managed to create a living in Sobradinho.

*Cobbling Together a Livelihood: The Maceio Family*

The parents of the Maceio family were dislocated by the dam's waters in the late 1970s. They moved to Sobradinho the late 1970s. When lots were being partitioned by CHESF in the 1980s, they managed to acquire three lots that were next to each other. Mr. Maceio's brother, his sister and her husband acquired the other two lots. Today the Maceios and their five adult children live in this "compound." They have recreated as



best as possible the rich garden of their former lives on the river bank. It is lush, full of fruit trees, and has a large central courtyard. The family lived together, and everyone, including the adult children (all, at that time, unmarried), pooled their resources. The Maceios' parents owned a small plot of land on the outskirts of Sobradinho. Michele, one of the three daughters, helped her father tend that plot where they grow *mandioca* (manioc). They sold the produce in Sobradinho and in neighboring Juazeiro-Petrolina. The family also has a plot in the NGO-run community garden which Michele and her mother tend, and another plot in a community garden, run by the Evangelical congregation that the family belongs to.

In their former lives in a *povoado* on the river's edge in the municipality of Sento Sé, the parents grew *mamona* (a native, vining ground vegetable that produces cooking oil)<sup>179</sup> and *esteira* (a type of straw that can be woven into baskets, hats, etc) that they would sell in either the central market of Sento Sé or travel by boat to Juazeiro. They also grew foods for their own consumption: sweet potato, pumpkin, and manioc. They made their own farinha, a coarse flour made from manioc, that is considered a staple food usually sprinkled on top of beans. While living in their *povoado*, the Maceios got most of their other needs by *troca* (exchange), trading with other residents who also produced goods.

Michele, the middle daughter, in her early twenties now helps with community garden plots and her father's farm plot. At the time of the completion of my fieldwork, she had enrolled in a program for rural youth. This program was sponsored by the Rural

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<sup>179</sup> *Mamona* is now being touted as a possible source for biofuel; however, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) had taken a stance against this because it was being produced on monocrop plantations and required more water to produce than what the Commission saw as sustainable in the semiarid climate of the Northeast.

Labor Union and was set up to create a cooperative goat-herding association for youth. Its goal is to help rural youth stay in the municipality and continue to work in agrarian occupations, as their parents did. Of the three sisters, Michele openly expressed her love of gardening and agrarian work and was excited to participate in the program.<sup>180</sup> In addition to her farm work, she also contributed to the family's income by sleeping in the home of an elderly woman so that she would not have to sleep alone. This was a fairly common way to earn extra cash for young women.

Her younger sister, Adriane, in her early twenties, made tote-bags, backpacks, and clothing, for which she was paid by the piece by a contractor. She sewed these in her own home on her own machine and was compensated for the use of electricity and wear on her machine, in addition to the amount she received for each piece. She also made party favors out of a craft that was popular in Sobradinho called *biscuit*.<sup>181</sup> She would contract with other residents of Sobradinho to make biscuit favors for weddings, birth announcements, or other commemorative events. Many women in Sobradinho were involved in *biscuit* favor-making as a form of cash generation.

Another sister was a school-teacher at a municipal school, earning a minimum wage. Both of the brothers in the family, who I did not know very well, worked as day

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<sup>180</sup> This is significant because I heard other youth and their parents say that they were not inclined to participate in the program because they did not want to pursue agrarian occupations (part of the devaluation of the rural livelihoods). Michele was relatively unique of her excitement and love of agrarian work, especially as a young woman.

<sup>181</sup> *Biscuit* (pronounced bis-kwee) was a very popular craft among women in Sobradinho, amounting to a small cottage industry in the town. It involved making dough which could be dyed, molded, and then baked, forming quite intricate figures and characters. Biscuit figures were very popular as favors at weddings, the birth of a baby, graduations, and so on. Some women kept collections of these from every event that they had attended. Women who made *biscuit* favors relied on word of mouth and their own social networks to contract with customers to make favors for upcoming events. Obviously those who were known to be more skilled at creating attractive figures and characters were sought after for their services.

laborers (*diaristas*) on plantations in neighboring municipalities. Together the family was able to earn a sufficient living, but, even with all these sources of income they were not even middle-class by any means. However, their work allowed them a certain degree of autonomy.

When I asked the parents about the differences between their life now and prior to the relocation, the mother, like many who were relocated by the dam, was clear that she felt that the children's access to education was one of the "better" outcomes of the move, but they still held a lot of *saudades* (longing) for their former *povoado* and life by the river's edge when they produced almost everything that they needed. The three daughters recounted to me, when their parents were not around, that their parents frequently said that their life in the *povoado* was more peaceful, and that they now felt like people did not trust each other as much as when they did when they lived in the *povoado*.

The example of the Maceios is significant because it demonstrates the ways in which residents attempt to recreate the economic forms of their previous *ribeirinho* (riverside) lifestyle while living in the center of town. It also shows the ways in which families pool resources and draw on multiple strategies to earn a livelihood. Despite the fact that their income is quite limited, their lives are far from "poor." However, their current semi-urban living situation means they have many more economic demands in their life, such as payment of electric and water bills, which necessitates pooling their resources and engagement in multiple livelihood strategies.

In the next section I will highlight that despite the anxieties and precariousness of many forms of livelihood in Sobradinho, the situation is not one of despair for everyone.

Some residents are finding other ways of working together in the community to establish livelihoods for themselves—and meaningful ones at that. As we will see, by doing so residents are cultivating values that are different from the standards used to assess “success” of market-based economic models, such as increased *poder aquisitivo* (buying power) or the promise of a waged job.

### **Reworking Capitalist Scripts: Sedimented Forms of Being and the Cultivation of New Ways of Being**

The previous chapter with its focus on “unemployment” may have given the reader a gloomy view of Sobradinho. Indeed, for some there is a sense of despair and general uneasiness about the economic state of the town. However, the first half of this chapter provided the reader with an alternate reading of the economic state of Sobradinho and a broader vision of economic activity that exists within the town than the anxieties about “unemployment” indicate. This first part of the chapter included a broader view of the realms of the economic, which revealed a whole host of non-market and market-based economic activity. In what follows, I will discuss two case studies that demonstrate the ways in which some residents have responded to dominant economic models and how they rework dominant views of the economy and their associated economic identities. Some residents have either rejected or attempted to rework the capitalist scripts (such as the desirability of being a waged worker) and market-based economic models that have been introduced by state-led development in the region since the 1970s. The first case study focuses on the establishment of a goat-herding association and how this association’s production methods allow those who participate to engage in work that is very different from being an “employee.” The second case study examines some youths’

attempts to rework confining employment options for them by creating economic projects that they hope will allow them to stay in Sobradinho rather than migrate in search of work, as many of their contemporaries have done. These projects and individuals may not represent the predominant view of the economy in Sobradinho, but they are worth examining because they demonstrate residents' attempts to negotiate the push towards wage-based (often insecure) employment in or outside the São Francisco Valley. Not all residents accept dominant economic models or identities wholesale. Some residents draw on previous skills and experience, while others create new ones, to try to establish viable livelihoods in the town.

This section, in part, examines what has been termed *practices of resubjection* by theorists J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006).<sup>182</sup> If subjects are made in and through practices of governmentality and governmental power, we can also recognize, as Foucault pointed out, that this governmental power is both productive and enabling in addition to being oppressive and limiting (Gibson-Graham 2006: 23). For Gibson-Graham, the experiences of retrenchment and privatization serve as moments of interruption of the practices of regional economic subjection (2006: 25). As discussed previously, many residents who had been employed by CHESF experienced state employment as comforting and expressive of a form of “care” by the firm. However, the state made cutbacks to its investment in CHESF and the town of Sobradinho almost two decades ago. This, for many residents, was perceived as the withdrawal of state “care.”<sup>183</sup> Rather than

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<sup>182</sup> For a complete outline of what this political project entails, what Gibson-Graham term a “politics of the subject” see “Chapter 6: Cultivating Subjects for a Community Economy,” in *A Postcapitalist Politics*.

<sup>183</sup> Linda Rebhun noted that residents of Caruaru, Pernambuco frequently noted that there was a “lack of love” in the public arena which led to the problems of persistent poverty, health problems, poor public education, and the lack of paved roads, sewers and other facilities (Rebhun 1999: 51). She quotes one

experiencing a sense of abandonment or neglect, the residents who participate in the projects examined in this section both help nurture already-existing modes of economic being and also attempt to cultivate new ones. Through a process of working with others or “being-in-common” (*convivência*) with others, residents have been able to strengthen desires to become economic subjects that dis-identify with the current neoliberal economic model implanted in the region.<sup>184</sup>

Before discussing the case studies, I first want to examine a comment made to me by one older resident because it highlights some of the contradictory stances of residents in regards to employment—especially those of the older generation. This resident, Paulo Silveira, is in his 60s and moved to Sobradinho in the late 1970s at the age of 32 when the lake waters were soon to cover his *povoado*. In his lifetime he has worked alternately as a fisherman, a middleman moving goods back and forth between Sobradinho and Salvador (Bahia’s capital), and most recently, farming a large plot of *mandioca* (manioc) on his wife’s farm plot at the Women’s Association Farm (*a Roça das Mulheres*, as it is called), which he sells in Juazeiro. He is also a very active member of Sobradinho’s Fishers’ Association. He and his wife have raised 8 children, arriving in Sobradinho in 1976 with 5 young children. Knowing all of this about him, I was curious when one day he said,

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woman who stated, “If the mayor loved us, he would take care of us. But Brazil does not love the poor (Rebhun 1999: 51).” She further noted that for those who are used to legal protections and contractual relations, paternalistic personalism seems oppressive, but for those who are used to personalism, the impersonality of contractual relations is seen as cold rather than protective (Rebhun 1991: 51). This would also explain why the “care” that CHESF seemed to display for its workers and the town was experienced by residents as a good and desired thing rather than as some sort of manipulation of worker loyalties.

<sup>184</sup> The concept of resubjection will be discussed in further depth in the following chapter on women’s involvement in the community economy.

The problem with Brazilians is that they don't want to work for themselves [*si mesmo*]. They always want *emprego* [employment] and someone to be their boss. If people were willing to work for themselves and produce, such as in the field [*roça*], they would not be dependent on a company for employment.

The statements above might appear quite critical of residents and since hearing him say them I have tried to understand what he meant. Knowing of his background and active community involvement, I did not believe he was claiming that “Brazilians (in this case *Sobradinhenses*) are lazy” (a moral discourse linked to modernization and development). I suspect he was making a claim that the obsession with “employment” itself was the problem, not that people were unwilling to work. Having grown up in a *povoado* where one did not worry about employment since residents relied on subsistence agriculture, I suspect the new concern for formal employment was striking to him.<sup>185</sup> I also want to make it clear that he was not making a claim based upon notions of the modern “self-made” individual (the liberal subject), although a decontextualized reading of his statement might take that to be his intention.

José Moacir dos Santos, director of IRPAA (Regional Institute of Appropriate Agriculture and Animal Husbandry)<sup>186</sup> and a doctoral student in anthropology, commented that residents in the region do not want to be *empresarios* (businesspeople; entrepreneurs) because being an *empresario* has a very negative connotation among

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<sup>185</sup> As José de Souza Martins notes, “the fundamentals of conduct and the conscience of the farmer in the country (and the worker) are completely different. A farmer [*camponês*] does not have the minimum condition to think and act as a worker [*operário*], because he is socially another person, this is, pertaining to another social class, whose social relations are of another type, whose horizons and limits are others. . . (1980: 14, cited in de Ataíde 1984: 113).”

<sup>186</sup> The name of the institute in Portuguese is: *Instituto Regional da Pequena Agropecuária Apropriada*. The translation above is my best attempt at an English equivalent. IRPAA emerged out of the liberation theology-influenced Catholic Church work that was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. The organization was founded because church activists felt there was a need to provide small agriculturalists with basic skills and the knowledge to deal with the market-based economic relations that were encroaching on the region with the land speculation that occurred after the dam's construction and the rise of agro-industry in the 1980s.

residents native to the semiarid.<sup>187, 188</sup> However, part of IRPAA's mission is to provide small agriculturalists with some of the basic skills to deal with the market economy of the region, which emerged out of the post-dam construction land speculation in the 1970s and, then, agro-industry in the 1980s. To IRPAA, teaching these skills is a step towards facilitating small farmers to remain on their land, while, at the same time, keeping elements of their cultural traditions intact. Thinking in market-based terms, according to dos Santos, is not part of the cultural legacy for many who live in the region, so IRPAA also feels that it is necessary to provide family farmers with the minimum of market skills. Otherwise, the people who work for IRPAA fear that former subsistence farmers will be pushed off their land, as they would not know how to deal with some basics of the market economy (a simple example would be the possession of title for their land).

Residents who had several generations of family history living on the river's edge, on what they called *terra devoluta* (land owned by the government), have a different relationship to land and forms of labor than do landless families in the region who have regularly migrated in search of employment. Many of these former subsistence or semi-subsistence farmers may be resistant to working as an employee. This seems to be supported by this statement by Aparecida da Rosa Silveira, the wife of Paulo Silveira who commented that many Brazilians want "employment":

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<sup>187</sup> José Moacir dos Santos is from the region, having grown up in Juazeiro and having participated as an activist in the Youth Pastoral in Juazeiro as a youth. He now directs IRPAA, an NGO started by the progressive Catholic Church and which derives its technicians and trainers from the progressive Catholic Church movement (or as he put it, from the popular movement—*movimento popular*), and is working on his doctorate in social anthropology through the Catholic University of Ecuador.

<sup>188</sup> I suspect the unattractiveness of being on *empresario* is that the word seems to imply one who exploits others for financial gain—not a desirable trait among those who value honesty and hard-work (in a different sense than the capitalist model) as do residents of the semiarid.



There [in my *povoado*] it was a rich life—you could take a bath in the water and get your fish. It was a normal life. We don't have that normal life that we had. It's a small difference—bathing in the river, fishing, taking a bath and returning -- you had your things, your trees, your cattle, your little animals [*criaçãozinho*] . . . and when they covered everything many people lost this.

I think it is worth noting that Aparecida da Rosa Silveira calls this life both “rich” and “normal,” in contrast to what might be seen as the impoverished (and perhaps “abnormal”) conditions they now live in (even though they are now live in a cinder block house with running water and have electricity). She also commented that they produced everything that they needed and did not need to buy anything, even calling their produce a *fartura* (abundance). It is common for residents of the *povoados* inundated by the flooding of the lake to comment on the abundance of their former lives and how, through fishing and agriculture, they were able to supply all of their needs.

What I am venturing to say (however, tentatively) is that I suspect that the different experiences in the *sertão* might get glossed over by views of the region which discuss the region as composed of a landless migrant population and an elite land-owning class whose relationships are governed by clientelism. This view excludes both a population (mainly men) that seasonally migrated for employment but whose family remained on the farmstead and another who was fixed on the land practicing subsistence agriculture, such as the *ribeirinho* population. I am not arguing that clientelistic relations do not exist, but this view reduces the experience of many farmers to one of clientelism, when in fact many may have experienced more “liberty” in their former lifestyles—both

those on the river's edge (*ribeirinhos*) and those in the *caatinga* (*caatingueiros*).<sup>189, 190</sup>

Recall, that in chapter 2, Aparecida da Rosa Silveira described her life in her *povoado* as one of more “liberty” (*liberdade*) and tranquility, which seems to contradict the view that there was always a sense of reliance on *fazendeiros* or a *patron* (boss). I am not attempting to justify the patronage system, but question those who argue that the dam brought “progress” to the supposed backward ways of the region.

Aparecida's husband expressed concern that even though youth now had access to basic education, they actually had less opportunity than when he was young. He asked, “What good does education do [the youth] if there are no options for them here?” He then went on to state that one of the negative things about the move to Sobradinho was that now they were dependent on electricity and could be held liable (*julgado*) for not paying an electric bill; before this was not an issue because they did not depend on electricity; before they did not need money because they produced what they needed. He related this back to the problem that despite the fact that some things had “evolved” (*evoluida*), such as access to schooling, education does little good if there were no jobs in Sobradinho.<sup>191</sup>

In asking this I believe he was pointing out that the youth were not at fault, but that a

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<sup>189</sup> *Caatingueiros* is a term to refer to the farmers who relied on rain-water based farming who lived and still live in the *caatinga* (brushland); another term for areas of *caatinga* located far away from the river or a water-source is the *sequeiro*.

<sup>190</sup> Sigaud notes that although there were many small producers who lived in a relationship of subordination to large property owners who controlled both access to land and local prefectures, there were also many small producers whose production situation indicated that they were not dependent on local political chiefs (1986: 110). She further notes that even when a producer may have depended on a local political chief to rent the areas on the river's edge where they planted, they may have also enjoyed a good deal of autonomy when practicing rain-based agriculture on unclaimed lands (*terras devolutas*) or on those that they appropriated (Sigaud 1986: 112).

<sup>191</sup> Despite these concerns, there was widespread agreement among many parents who had been dislocated by the dam's waters that one of the few positive outcomes of the relocation was that their children had access to schooling.

promise of development had been broken: that the supposed route towards upward mobility and hopes for secure employment are in fact not possible for many youth in Sobradinho.

In summary, I am not arguing that Paulo Silveira was implying that *Sobradinhenses* need to “pick themselves up by their bootstraps.” He may have been using the language of “working for oneself” as an argument against the capitalization of subjectivity and perhaps based upon older, more sedimented (Butler 1993, 1997), models of working for one’s kin on their own *roça*.<sup>192</sup> So, it may be possible that the discourse of entrepreneurship (or rather, “of working for one’s self”-- *si mesmo*) could be a tool against the capitalization of subjectivity (Escobar 2008).

As Escobar (2008) noted in his work among residents of the Pacific lowlands of Colombia, many black workers currently working on the oil palm plantations in the area still had hopes of returning to farming some day, to fulfill their desire to live out the rest of their lives in the rivers. He argues that residents’ consciousness has far been transformed by contact with capitalist models, even if older residents recognize that youth are less interested in their “traditions” and rural life (2008: 81).<sup>193</sup> In Sobradinho, the older generation’s desire to return to family-farm-based agriculture is happening despite a situation in which every formal economic indicator indicates that capitalism has triumphed in the region, but apparently has not won everyone’s hearts and minds. Elder

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<sup>192</sup> By sedimented I am referring to the constellation of feelings and ways of being that are embodied, but which can be reworked. For a discussion of this in relation to labor transformations associated with neoliberal restructuring, see Walkerdine (2006).

<sup>193</sup> This is what makes the projects of youth that I discuss at the end of this chapter so interesting: youth in the lake region were actively involved in a process of revalorizing *sertanejo* traditions (such as forms of dance, musical styles, etc.) and were also attempting to revalorize agrarian occupations and the ecology of their region.

residents continued to value agrarian livelihoods and the tranquility of living in Sobradinho or smaller towns in the *sertão*.

In what follows, I am going to discuss two case studies that illustrate how some residents are involved in projects that cultivate subjectivities different than that of the market-oriented subject position of “employee”- both based upon older livelihood practices, but also upon attempts to create new livelihood models. Through their work with others in their community these residents create alternatives to work in agroindustry or migrational labor. In the process, they actively nurture the types of economic subjectivities that they want to embody and what economic identities are available to them.

#### *The Association of Canaan and Fundos de Pasto (Pasturage Funds)*

I am now going to move on to discuss an individual, later a group, who reworked their relationship to employment, perhaps without the explicit intention of doing so. Marcos Abreu Correia, is 61 years old and the President of the Association of Canaan, an association of 18 goat-herders’ families that are joined together under what is called the *fundo de pasto* (pasturage fund) associative model in a rural area of the municipality of Sobradinho. I will elaborate on the specifics of the *fundo de pasto* model below, but first I want to examine Seu Marcos’ trajectory. He arrived in Sobradinho in 1977, leaving his family in his hometown of Uricuri, Pernambuco where they had experienced two years of drought. After obtaining employment on the dam construction, he sent for his family to join him in Sobradinho. He worked on the dam until 1980 and then worked several construction jobs in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador.

However, he had this to say about these jobs:

In '83, I was in Salvador [working]. Let me tell you something, the life of an employee is not so good. Because in the life of an employee—you only have money when you are working. I stopped working and I stopped my service [in 1983]. So, when I got back here I decided, “I am not going to work as an employee anymore, no way. I am going to work in the fields [*roça*] again.” So, I returned to the *roça* and started to farm a plot in the Agricultural Association [of São Joaquim] and said I was going to do that.

AA: And it has been more than 20 years now?

MC: Yes, more than 20 years. We have lived here like this.

AA: And you are happier now than in your life as an employee?

MC: *Oxente!*<sup>194</sup> [Ain't that the truth!] [But] there have been difficult times, we have passed through difficult times.

Although Seu Marcos asserts that there have been difficult times, what is most significant about his story is that he explicitly did not want to be an employee and wanted to return to what he knew: agriculture.<sup>195</sup> Not just that, but he strongly felt that life was better working in agriculture than as an employee. In some ways, Marcos was following a model common in the region of migrating seasonally for work, and gathering enough money to invest in land or a herd. Rather than simply accepting a migratory labor pattern as a permanent part of life, as is common for many in the region, he sought a way to stay in Sobradinho with his family.

Marcos did not stop at returning to agriculture with the Agricultural Association of Vila São Joaquim.<sup>196</sup> One day he saw another piece of land adjacent to the

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<sup>194</sup> *Oxente* is a common expression in the Northeast. It likely comes from the term, “*Ô, gente!*”, literally “Hey, people!” It conveys sentiments of surprise. See Navarro (2004: 255) for further explanation.

<sup>195</sup> The difficult times to which Marcos Correia is referring, are discussed in the previous chapter when he discusses the sadness of not being able to provide for his children's higher education.

<sup>196</sup> This is the same association discussed in depth in Chapter 2 which resulted from the organizing of José Balbino and which was sponsored as a participatory development project by state agencies.

association's land which was better than the land they were farming on. He decided he was going to claim it:

MC: I would go around the area and look at it, it was very good land. It was different from the land that we worked. It was nice looking—*caatinga fechada* [thick brushlands]. I said, "This land here must be good!" So, one day in June 1983 I went there by myself really early, with my scythe, and cleared the brush.

AA: By yourself?

MC: Myself—and God.<sup>197</sup>

That same day he started to discretely mark off the area to claim it as his, waiting a year to pass, keeping an eye on it, before he returned to enclose the area with a fence. Soon, his neighbors started to ask him to also "arrange for piece of land" for them there too. He told them that it wasn't his to give, but if they entered just like him by claiming some land, "If you lose it, it's the same as if you didn't have it." Soon 40 families had marked off areas in order to claim the land. The owner caught wind of it and threatened the families with the police. Many families stayed, despite the threats, and today are in the process of receiving their formal titles for the land. They now have 18 families there, with an area of 1,580 hectares set up as a *fundo de pasto* (pasturage fund). Each family,

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<sup>197</sup> When I asked Marcos Correia if he cleared the land by himself, what I meant was, "Wow! That's impressive that you did this on your own." I had taken it for granted that he had undertaken this act of his own volition. He, as can be noted, did not want to take credit for having done this on his own: it was he and God that cleared the land. Throughout our interview, he repeatedly invoked the presence of God in all that he did, never taking credit that he alone did something or that something was possible through his own volition. I would even venture that this perspective reflects a vision of the world as one that "gives": God was with him and helped him to get this land. The name of his association, the Association of Canaan, is not accidental. Residents often use the verb *dar* to say the land gives. Fisher people might say that the São Francisco River gave them whatever it was that they purchased with the funds from selling that catch. This was most poignantly expressed to me not in Sobradinho but hundreds of miles downstream from Sobradinho in the town of Pinedo, located near the mouth of the São Francisco River. An elderly gentleman I was speaking with on the river front pointed to his house near the waterfront and stated that it was the São Francisco River that gave him that house. He had caught a big catch of fish from the river back in the 1960s and he sold the catch, and the Rio São Francisco gave him that house (by giving him the money to buy it). Even though he used money to buy the house there was still a sense the house really did come from the river. This demonstrates that the cash economy has not entirely changed the way residents understand their relationship with nature. This was a sentiment I also heard expressed in Sobradinho.

according to the rules established by their association, has 8 hectares for their house and subsistence farming, their remaining 80 hectares forms part of the collective pasture, the pasturage fund.

This pattern of land allotment is typical of a *fundo de pasto*. *Fundos de pasto* (collective pastures or pasturage funds) were first legally recognized in 1989 with the new Bahian state constitution. A *fundo de pasto* is a collective pasture set up so that each household is allotted approximately 10 hectares to live on and on which to grow food and another 70 hectares that forms part of a collective pasture. To establish a *fundo de pasto* communities must form legally recognized residents' associations under the legal requirements that designate a *fundo de pasto*. Based upon models of communal pasturage of animals that emerged after the withdrawal of cattle raising in the region, the *fundo de pasto* model was encouraged by the work of progressive academics and Catholic Church activists to protect the lands and livelihoods of rural communities that are dependent on animal husbandry as their livelihood in Bahia.<sup>198</sup> The establishment of *fundos de pastos* in the Sobradinho lake region is a project of several organizations and groups in the region such as the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Articulation of the Semiarid (ASA), and IRPAA, among others.

Salete Pereira, an activist who has worked with the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) for the Catholic Diocese of Juazeiro since the late 1970s, explained that the CPT's broad goal was to assure the ability of small agriculturalists to stay in the countryside.

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<sup>198</sup> Geographer Guiomar Germani's research group, *GeografAR* (Geography of Rural Settlements), at the Federal University of Bahia in Salvador is currently active in both documenting and mapping *fundos de pasto* and working with *quilombolas* (Afro-Brazilian communities formed by escaped slaves) along the Rio São Francisco and in Bahia to establish legal recognition as a *fundo de pasto*. However, the *fundo de pasto* model is not just particular to *quilombola* communities, as those established in Sobradinho are not *quilombola* communities.

She, like many other Catholic Church activists came to the region to help with the Church's mobilization to protect those relocated by the dam. One fundamental aspect of this work is assuring *regularização fundiária* – assuring that residents obtain legal title to the lands on which they live and farm. She continued,

In this modality of work we have something innovative here in Bahia called the *fundo de pasto*. These are collective areas that family farmers can use to raise goats and sheep. These collective areas need to be extensive because the vegetation of the *caatinga* is not very “durable.” So it must be an extensive area in order to have a collective area for raising goats. The Bahian Constitution, which was a conquest of the workers in '89, made it possible to legalize these collective areas in the name of residents' associations of that locale. So, we work with these associations of the *fundos de pasto* type to legalize a collective area and an individual area for each of the agriculturalists that is part of that association.

The assurance of these larger and collectively owned tracts of land are part of what some activists working in the region see as a regionally appropriate community development strategy. They are also seen as a more viable livelihood strategy for small producers than other agricultural methods because goat and sheep raising does not require the capital input and investment of either small scale agriculture or cattle raising. Water, in particular, is a key issue because goats can survive on significantly less water than cattle. This allows small farmers a sort of “cash reserve” of goats throughout the dry season, as opposed to other forms of agriculture that require higher quantities of water. This is, understandably, a key issue in a semiarid environment and in a situation in which settlements and homesteads are scattered and not linked to a centralized water system.

José Moacir dos Santos, director of IRPAA, commented,

So, the *fundo de pasto* is one of the traditions that is being created with the permanence of the people. It did not exist before. Ten, twenty, thirty years ago the cattle of the *fazendeiro* were removed and so there was some freedom [to do this]—before all the land had an owner in Salvador . . . So, the small producers started to raise [goats] . . . So, this practice of *fundo de pasto* has been very positive. They never put up fences because if you put up a fence it looked like you were claiming it, so they left it as it was so the owner wouldn't appear. They also said that [they didn't put up fences] because of the



scattered rainfall—it rains in one place and not another. For the animals a fence was worse because the animals needed to go where there was rain so that they would have larger area from which to graze.

The demise of cattle raising in the region in the 1970s and the consequent decline in power of the elite cattle-raising families in the region was precipitated by the construction of the Sobradinho dam and the rise of agroindustry in the São Francisco Valley. In what might seem to be an unexpected twist in fate, it was only then that goat-herding became a viable option for many small farming families in the region. As the practice of establishing common pastures developed due to residents' own volition, activists in the region came to see it as a viable strategy to maintain sustainable, ecologically appropriate livelihoods in the semiarid in the late 1980s.<sup>199, 200</sup>

But, as Marcos Abreu Correia explained, there are challenges. Being part of a *fundo de pasto* means that each member cannot do whatever they would like with the land:

We can't deforest it. It is only for the feeding of the animals. We raise goats and sheep there, we live off of that [land], so we need to preserve that area. We can't ruin it or take wood from it. We could cut some wood to make a fence, but to sell it or to make charcoal: no, we don't accept that. Otherwise the area is going to be finished [*vai acabar*].

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<sup>199</sup> Despite the establishment of *fundos de pasto*, dos Santos expressed concern, as do those involved with the Pastoral Land Commission, that the farmers tend to claim only 20-30 hectares when getting titles to their land, and do not claim the 80-100 that they actually use for animal pasturage. This is because they have never considered it their land and it would be difficult for them to pay the taxes on that large of a piece of property. This leaves them at the mercy of land speculators and the state which could claim the land for public use. This is why creating *fundos de pasto* are a crucial strategy in enabling the permanence of small farmers on the land in the semiarid areas.

<sup>200</sup> The challenge made by the CPT, ASA, and groups like IRPAA to agrarian reform as it is practiced in Brazil is significant. They argue that Brazilian agrarian reform as it is currently applied (30 hectares per family) is not adequate for the needs of small farmers in the semiarid who often rely on goat and sheep husbandry as their principal source of income and capital. They urge for a regionally specific agrarian reform to account for the 80-100 hectares needed per family to have a viable life in the semiarid, especially for those living in the areas called the *sequeiro* (dry brushland areas, located away from rivers or streams).

So, becoming part of a *fundo de pasto* requires a certain level of recognition that the land is not “one’s own” and that participants have greater responsibilities to others in the community.<sup>201</sup> Some younger residents explicitly frame the positive benefits of the *fundo de pasto* model in ecological and environmentalist terms—as the *caatinga* is increasingly being deforested and even desertified, this land-use system assures that there is collective accountability and maintenance of large tracts of *caatinga*.<sup>202</sup> But, there needs to be a way in which residents can hold others accountable, yet maintain good relations, if someone attempts to use the land in ways that run contrary to group specifications:

MC: When we discipline someone, we do it like this: we call them and we give them advice that it is not permitted. It is not a decision of one person, it is a decision of the assembly. [And] it is a law. . . . So, if they didn’t obey, we tell them and we denounce them to IBAMA.<sup>203</sup> IBAMA will go there and visit the area that was deforested and [the resident is] forced to pay a fine. But, since we are an association and we do not profit, we spoke with IBAMA so that the first time the person does this they do not have to pay, but next time he would have to.

AA: Do you do this to maintain good relations?

MC: Yes. When we say something its not because we see ourselves as a property owner, we want to see the good and the benefits for everyone. That is our preoccupation. I don’t just look after myself while someone else turns around and does something else. We are in charge of the administration for everyone. We look after the needs of one and for all in the association.

There are a few things that I find significant about Marcos Silveira’s story. In terms of the *fundo de pasto* model, this model creates a certain being-in-common and a way of

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<sup>201</sup> I use the term community and not association because members of a *fundo de pasto* tend to live in close contact and form a community of their own; referring to this type of settlement as an association does not capture this much more day-to-day investment and sociality that a *fundo de pasto* requires of its members.

<sup>202</sup> *Fundos de pasto* are envisioned by some activists and NGO workers in the region as an attempt to decolonize land use in the region. For example, José Moacir dos Santos of the organization IRPAA argued that during the era of the colonization of the *sertão* the large-landowners had established cattle-raising as a livelihood activity in the region—however, cattle, due to their high water consumption needs and the amount of vegetation they consume, are not considered “appropriate” for the environment of the semiarid (especially due to the fact that they need large stretches of land).

<sup>203</sup> IBAMA - *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis*; The Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources.

adapting one's needs to the group because they require that no one overgraze or deforest the land. We could look at this form of decision making as an ethic of "being-in-common," or of coexistence with the other, instead of the disembodied, impersonal decision-making of the market realm (Gibson-Graham 2006: 83). The *fundo de pasto* model recognizes the interdependence of its members and makes their economic interdependence visible (Gibson-Graham 2006: 84). These pastures are set up in such a way that the "tragedy of the commons" never happens. There can be little individualized sense of ownership of the land when everyone in the association, to a certain degree, is responsible for care for the land and decisions are made as a group.

The *fundos de pasto* represent what theorists Arce and Long (2000) have termed "counterwork" to development. Counterwork refers to "the interplay of 'hegemonic' and 'non-hegemonic' discourses and values – irrespective of whether they emanate from global or local scenarios (Arce and Long 2000: 8)." The *fundos de pasto* are exemplary of counterwork as the associative form they are built on is a model introduced by state participatory development projects in the 1980s, while the practice of creating communal pastures emerged in the 1970s as cattle ranchers left the *sertão* and small goat-herders established a pasturage system. Thus the *fundo de pasto* is a "modern" form, but one that represents a non-hegemonic model of modernity. The model is representative of local actors' struggles over the meaning and practicality of a form of livelihood. Following Arce and Long (2000), the pasturage funds could be read as "counter-tendency" to development.

Nor can the pasturage fund model be reduced to capitalist terms. Certainly, the goats are sold on the market for profit. But, just as Escobar (2008) has noted in his examination of cooperative shrimp farming enterprises established in the Pacific lowlands of Colombia, residents have become “economy makers,” rather than having the economy done *to* them. Seu Marcos and other participants in the *fundo de pasto* are active in the creation and maintenance of their economy and even in caring for the broader *caatinga*. Referring to the work of philosophers Spinoza, Flores and Dreyfus (1997), Escobar (2008: 99) asserts that such practices are exemplary of the “retrieval of history making skills,” which are rooted in the phenomenological process of human practice and engagement, rather than a the detached Cartesian view of human relations. Being involved in the pasturage fund involves new ways of being and a rootedness in a particular place, which allows for articulation of communal concerns—a process called “skillful disclosing” by Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997). A host of social obligations and the processes of working together are central to the functioning and maintenance of a *fundo de pasto*. The association is not based upon a hierarchical or top-down structure (although there are offices held by various members) and the joint agreement of members is critical for their continued functioning. The project is not obligated to meet the demands of outside investors. Surplus is frequently used to invest in projects that benefit the entire membership of the association (such as creating small dams to collect rainwater for watering the goats). The *fundo de pasto* model serves to reproduce the “base,” what economic anthropologist Stephen Gudeman (2001) argues is the shared interests or values of a community. These make up part of the commons. This productive model, in

its attention to the specificities of the ecological conditions of the *caatinga*, is a model rooted in place. Production and ecological sustainability are interlinked with the pasturage fund; a form of “sustainability” that is rooted in local cultural identities and ecological conditions (Escobar 2008: 103). At a meeting with state development officials, I heard younger members of pasturage funds make impassioned claims about the benefits of these practices for preserving the *caatinga*. Residents often assert that there is a direct connection between the deforestation of the *caatinga* and the dam construction and the subsequent decrease in rainfall, decrease in native bee populations, and the loss of native fish species. Many of those aged 20-50 were acutely aware of the impacts of these processes on the ecology of the region.<sup>204</sup> There is a conjuncture between the projects of older residents of the region (the value of autonomous agrarian livelihoods) and the younger generation’s concerns about the ecological future of the region.

The Association of Canaan is not the only *fundo de pasto* in Sobradinho; there are several of these pasturage funds both within the municipality and in the broader São Francisco Valley. It is representative of a much broader strategy that make up part of regional activist project, called *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* (Living with/in the Semiarid). This project is premised on developing strategies to live with/in the semiarid in contrast to former and current state interventions that propose to “combat drought.” In addition, Marcos Silveira’s story demonstrates how someone discontented with the

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<sup>204</sup> The environmental impacts of the Sobradinho Lake and destructive forms of development are used as evidence by activists to oppose the transposition of the São Francisco River. They argue that before a transposition project is considered, the government must focus on ameliorating the negative impacts on the environment of the São Francisco River basin which have occurred over the past several decades. Activists focused on what was termed the “revitalization” of the São Francisco River basin instead. While the transposition project, as proposed by the federal government, did include funds for some of this revitalization work, many activists argued that the funding was insufficient to undertake a true revitalization.

migratory employment model in the region sought a way, with the support of local institutions, to return to agriculture and establish a fixed life in Sobradinho. His story exemplifies that many older residents' consciousness has not been fully captured by the capitalist model and indeed older forms of being and producing are still part of their subjective experience. In addition, he and other residents who participate in the *fundo de pasto* model nurture new forms of subjectivity, that might be different from older models. They are different in the sense that they involve the active process of managing and participating in the association, but they are not contrary to older practices of self-production without a *patron* (boss). This model, while allowing a certain degree of autonomy in one's work patterns, is simultaneously rooted in a broader collective project. In the section that follows, I will explore how some youth are also questioning what it means to be an employee and the accompanying migratory labor model. I also explore how youth are attempting to establish collective projects which allow them to remain in Sobradinho.

#### *Youth and the Carteira Assinada (Signed Worker's Card)*

As Marcos Silveira noted above, he felt his work goat-raising was more satisfying than migrating and working as an employee. However, many youth, due to the meager formal employment opportunities in Sobradinho, still migrate in search of work and there has been a rising trend towards permanent out-migration. Many youth are in a different situation than their parents and grandparents—many were raised in Sobradinho and around agriculture, but not necessarily working “in” agriculture.<sup>205</sup> Unlike their elder

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<sup>205</sup> This might be contrasted to what I heard many people (especially women) of the elder generation state, “*Fui criada na roça*,” meaning “I was raised in the fields.” This meant that one spent one's childhood working in agriculture, usually on the plot of one's family, whether as a tenant farmer or on an

relatives and neighbors, most have received a high school education and some have attended or are attending colleges or universities in neighboring Juazeiro-Petrolina, but their experience with agriculture may be limited. Their work expectations tend to be oriented towards non-agrarian occupations, since moving away from farming is seen to be a “step upwards” in terms of class mobility. For residents of the older generation, such as Marcos Silveira, their experience as a farmer or agriculturalist is “more sedimented” (Butler 1993) and, as such, a return to agriculture is not a leap into something new for them, but rather, is experienced as a sort of return. This means that many youth have to create new forms of identity and to learn to desire differently in order to enter into agricultural livelihoods; they were taught to desire waged employment in a firm. But, given the marginal employment opportunities within Sobradinho and in neighboring municipalities, some youth are themselves questioning the capitalist employment model and what options are available to them.

I spoke with João Fernandes, who was the president of a youth-led bee-keepers’ association. He and other youth in the Catholic Youth Pastoral (PJMP) started the association to raise honeybees for honey production.<sup>206</sup> They also started to care for some plots of land in the community garden of the Catholic Church Community Center Antonio Conselheiro<sup>207</sup> in order to learn how to cultivate. When I asked him why he and the other youth formed the association, he responded:

independently owned plot of land.

<sup>206</sup> I understand that many are wary of the viability of bee-keeping projects being touted as a route to “local economic development” and I understand and share these concerns. However, in my examination of the youth’s bee-keeping association I want to highlight the understandings that the association’s president and other youth have of the value of such projects. Participation in the project could potentially have more impact than the actual financial outcome of the bee-keeping project itself. This is because it is part of a broader vision in which youth are rethinking their relationship to market-based economic models and to negative representations of the semiarid region.

Since we had this youth group, we started to think of [creating] some form of stability. Today there is this idea of the *carteira assinada* [signed worker's card]—to have an income you have to have a *carteira assinada* and have a boss [*patron*]. We tried to escape from [*fugir*] this idea – and to end migration because a lot of us were leaving to work elsewhere. So, we tried to think of a way in which we could work in this city and stay [*permanecer*] in this city.

Established under the Rural Worker's Statute of 1963, the *carteira assinada* (a signed workers identification card), requires employers to provide Sundays off, a month's bonus at the end of the year, and employer contributions to a social security program for rural workers (Collins and Krippner 1999: 520).<sup>208</sup> A similar set of measures are assured by a signed worker's card in other labor sectors.<sup>209</sup> Most significant for many in Sobradinho is that the employer must pay into the national social security system, which allows workers with a signed worker's card to qualify for retirement pensions— a big concern of many in Sobradinho.<sup>210</sup> The receipt of a worker's card and its associated benefits was considered a victory of workers' movements. However, as we can see from João's statement, some

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<sup>207</sup> The Community Center is named after Antonio Conselheiro, an itinerant preacher who established the messianic community of Canudos in Bahia in the early 1890s. Considered to be a threat to the newly founded republic the government centered in the Center-South of Brazil sent a series of military expeditions to Canudos, eventually leading to the slaughter of most of the community after years of resistance. The choice of the name for the community center is notable as Antonio Conselheiro and the war of Canudos are seen to be representative of the resistance of *sertanejos*, their religious faith, and also the injustices that they have consistently faced by those in power.

<sup>208</sup> During the first half of the 1930s the Vargas regime established a series of measures which legalized unions, established working papers (*carteiras profissionais*) as mandatory, set maximum hours of labor, regulated the employment of women and children, mandated paid vacations, and organized pension funds (*aposentaria*) (French 1992: 49). Largely oriented towards the urban industrial sector, these gains were only extended to the rural sector under the Rural Worker's Statute of 1963 when they were modified to address the particularities of the rural (agrarian) sector. The worker's identification cards are known alternately under the names of *carteira de trabalho* (work card), *carteira assinada* (signed card), or a *carteira profissional* (professional card).

<sup>209</sup> Agrarian workers with signed worker's cards are also entitled to severance pay if they are terminated without just cause (Neffa 1986: 54; Palmeira 1979: 80).

<sup>210</sup> One must indicate what sort of work sector one is employed in when applying for a worker's card. If one works independently in agriculture, one can sign up as a "rural worker" through the Rural Labor Union. If a worker is employed on an agro-firm, workers are expected to have the employer sign the card in order to pay into the state social security system. Workers can only receive state pensions if they have the required number of years working with a signed worker's card at the time of retirement or if the Rural Labor Union provides verification of one's status as an independent rural worker.



youth in the area are starting to rethink what such a card means in terms of how they imagine their life and work possibilities.

I think it is significant that João uses the word *fugir* (to escape from) to describe youth's attempts to rethink their relationship to the worker's card and having a boss (*patron*).<sup>211</sup> He and other youth identified how a worker's card has made it seem that formal employment by an outside employer is the only (viable) option, which in turn leads to youth migrating to larger cities in order to seek work or alternately work in agroindustrial firms in neighboring municipalities. Collins and Krippner (1999) in an analysis of labor contracts among agricultural firms in the São Francisco Valley examined how permanent or semi-permanent contracts (also called temporary-permanent) have combined with older systems of patronage-based relations of *fazenda* owners in the region.<sup>212</sup> In agricultural firms, workers who conducted what was considered "more skilled" or "artisanal" work (particularly care of grapes) were given permanent worker's cards, which effectively required relations of subjection (*subjeição*) to employer's needs.<sup>213</sup> Employers on these firms were able to do this because these

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<sup>211</sup> I will return to this issue of the worker's cards in the next chapter when I discuss women's involvement in the community economy.

<sup>212</sup> Collins and Krippner cite the work of Schaffner (1993) on sugar estates in northeastern Brazil in the 1940s and 1950s in which Schaffner argues that the higher annual wages associated with permanent labor allowed employers to demand subjection (*subjeição*) from workers: "Subjection involves not only strict discipline and low absenteeism, but also obligations of wider scope, such as being ready around the clock to respond to the employers call for service, and demonstrating loyalty to the employer by not acting counter to his wishes in local politics (1993: 708, cited in Collins and Krippner 1999: 517)." Collins and Krippner argue that now there is no simple dichotomy between permanent and temporary but rather there is a continuum of practices. Many employers prefer to provide stable but discontinuous contracts that create class of workers that are often called "semi-permanent," "permanently temporary," or "stable temporary" (Collins and Krippner 1999: 515).

<sup>213</sup> These employees often lived on-site on employer provided housing, sometimes with on-site schools and crèches. As Collins and Krippner state, "Consistency of income, social benefits—and sometimes housing and crèches – provided a powerful incentive for workers to remain with their employer (1999: 529-530)."

employment contracts created two pools of workers in the region: those in the privileged permanent or stable temporary sector and those in a disadvantaged labor reserve army (Collins and Krippner 1999: 531). Given the regional employment context, when Paulo asserts that youth in Sobradinho are trying to escape from a signed worker's card, he is, to a certain extent, arguing that youth are trying to rethink what sort of choices (and sacrifices) must be made in order to receive a card through employment by a firm.<sup>214</sup> Youth are refusing to be pitted into these two camps (the privileged employed and the disadvantaged reserve army) or to be forced to leave Sobradinho. João was implying that concern about the worker's card has stopped youth from creating alternatives to waged labor and that it has also encouraged many youth to migrate out of the city in search of work, as an employee. What is interesting about João's case is that, unlike many youth in Sobradinho, he possessed a signed worker's card and was employed in what was considered a very good job in Sobradinho as a salesperson in an appliance store, yet he was still questioning the role of the *carteira assinada*.

These youths' questioning of the *carteira assinada* is directly tied to the work of the Catholic Church, several NGOs, and activist organizations in the region, which are involved in a project of rethinking the effects of the education system on youth.<sup>215</sup> In fact, the idea that education results in increased out-migration is something that many educators and activists in the semiarid see as a key concern and they believe it is directly

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<sup>214</sup> The association allows the youth to access a worker's card, but one which classifies them as a "rural worker," without need of being hired by someone else as long as the Rural Labor Union recognizes their profession as a rural worker on the card.

<sup>215</sup> Organizations directly or peripherally involved in this project are the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Articulation of the Semi-Arid (ASA), RESAB, IRPAA, and several other groups associated with the progressive Catholic Church.

tied to development policy in the region. Salete Pereira of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) in Juazeiro asserted that education in the region needed to be reworked to create an understanding of a *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* (Living with/in the Semiarid), in contrast to state policies oriented towards “combating drought”:

[Teaching *convivência*] is necessary in both the urban and rural areas because we all need to know the particularities of our climate. So that [the children] have this [sense of] *convivência* and learn it from the time they are small, that you aren’t trying to “combat drought.” It isn’t possible to combat drought. But, it is possible to live with it. So, this is a serious question that needs to be discussed in our schools and education needs to be based on this. We need to avoid what was done 10 or 15 years back, when they were taught to read so that they could grow up to live in São Paulo. We don’t want this anymore . . . We want them to read and write and have an education based on our reality and to encourage them to stay here, so there is continuity . . . We want the *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* to be included in the [school] curriculum.

Recalling the descriptions of the three benches that I discussed in the previous chapter, particularly the Bench of the Elderly, we can see how the issues of education and migration are interrelated and how they help explain why some youth argue that soon Sobradinho and other small towns in the region will “only be composed of old people.” The education project of a *Convivência com o Semi-Árido*, then, is an active project countering out-migration and making the semiarid a desirable place to live for youth. This project is the enactment of a politics of place connected with thinking about the potentialities of the regional economy, in a way that differs from that of state-coordinated development. This is part of a broader vision to rework negative portrayals of the semiarid in general. It is also tied to the concerns of members of the Catholic Church: that youth are drawn to the urban centers of Brazil because of media representations and the twin lures of materialism and consumerism. Catholic Church activists and clergy worry that youth are taught that urban life is more valuable than rural life. As

demonstrated by João's statements, some youth do valorize urban life over small-town life, but he and others see this as troublesome and do not want to leave Sobradinho.

Claudia Nunes, who is in her mid-twenties, reflected on the principles that she has learned from the efforts of the Catholic Church and educators in the region, and how she is coming to adopt the *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* position:

I think some of those [youth] who left [Sobradinho] did not believe it could change and also education—the education has changed a little. Teachers taught us to want to go to big cities like São Paulo and so we only learned about what came from there—textbooks did not depict our dry [climate]. The books did not represent our *caatinga* [brushlands], so they did not teach us how to live here. Just to live here. So this has influenced us since the time we were little. I had a teacher who taught us about a streetlight and I asked her why we were learning about this if there were no streetlights in Sobradinho. I still remember it-- she said we don't have them here, but there could be a day when you go to a big city and will encounter them. But I told her I wasn't planning to move away from here. So, we are all taught about what we don't even have anything here! They pass [this idea] on to us like this—that what we have here is not good, that the *caatinga* [brushlands] and the dry [environment] are not good. You cannot change the *seca* [drought], you need to live with/in [*conviver*] it—we don't learn this.

Claudia's comments reflect some educators' critiques about how education has been conducted in the region to date. This critique is premised on the idea that education in the region has historically served to encourage youth to leave the semiarid in order to live in the cities. I noted youth were increasingly taking up this vision of the *Convivência com o Semiárido* and were developing a critical consciousness about the education they had received. They were beginning to question the (negative) understandings they had been taught about the region and instead had started to envision the semiarid's potentialities. I do not think the significance of this can be overstated given the historical marginalization of the *sertão* and its residents.

Edmerson dos Santos Reis is a faculty member at the State University of Bahia in Juazeiro and affiliate of the Network of Educators in the Brazilian Semiarid (RESAB),

which has worked extensively on developing this idea of the Living with/in the Semi-arid. He argued that the *Convivência* model this is a broader project of rethinking how development has been conducted in the region:

The whole reason we are doing this work is that all of the public policies in the semi-arid always reflected a project of development that never considered and [still] never consider local potentialities. These projects—the dams, the huge reservoirs, Brazilian assistance-based politics—justify a situation of misery. These policies that were assistance-oriented created negative visions of this region.

Reis' arguments resounds with the work of Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. (1998), discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, who argued that the Northeast needs new visions of itself which are not based on victimhood or supplication. Instead the new visions should identify the “winners” and “losers” of the current situation of the Northeast, portrayed in their complexity. RESAB's educators and researchers are working on these new sorts of visions that Albuquerque urges, while at the same time providing a broader critique of development practices and policy in the region. My experience in Sobradinho indicated that some youth are taking up this critique and are attempting to rework their understandings of the region, even if the formal school curriculum in Sobradinho has not yet adopted this pedagogic model.

When I asked João, the president of the beekeeper's association, if he wanted to add anything at the end of his interview, he went on to describe, with enthusiasm, the youth retreat that the Pastoral of Youth from the Popular Classes (PJMP) was organizing and coordinating that weekend. At this retreat, youth presented several workshops to rethink employment possibilities in Sobradinho. One workshop was called “The Generation of Sustainable Income,” another was titled “Water Resources,” and another discussed governmental resources and programs that support youth. All these workshops

were run and coordinated by youth involved in the Pastoral youth group; they were driven by their own concerns and visions, albeit influenced by the broader projects of the Catholic Church, academics, activists and non-governmental organizations in the entire semiarid, as well as in the Sobradinho lake region more specifically. There was an active attempt by these youth to rethink dominant representations of the town and the region.<sup>216</sup> These youth were clear that they do not simply want access to higher consumption patterns, but identify their work with a broader vision of social change. At a PJMP gathering of youth groups from around the lake region, the Sobradinho contingent put on a skit called the “*Analfabeto Político*” (the Political Illiterate), which was about youth who do not want to engage in politics: implying youth should start to engage in their communities. In this skit, they explicitly asserted, “We don’t just want money;” implying that their desires go beyond the realm of simple material gain and include broader social change. These youth had not, from what I could see, become capitalist or market-oriented subjects, nor were they entranced by the promises of urban life like many of their peers. They wanted to social change in their community and the semiarid.

João Fernandes saw youth’s concerns about migration as a cultural issue. He said, “The tendency of youth here has been to leave to other cities, to move somewhere where the culture is very different from their own. So, [the bee-keeping association] was an attempt to deal with this situation.” For the younger generation in Sobradinho who have grown up with the “promise” that education will lead to employment and life as an

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<sup>216</sup> This is an on-going and active project of what might be called *resubjection*. In an interview with one woman in her early 30s, she started to repeat some of the negative visions of the region (about it being a dry, unpleasant place, for example). But, catching herself, she started talking about the possibilities of the region realizing she had fallen into repeating negative scripts about the semiarid. Some may see this as a superficial set of changes, but I believe that the reimagining of the region is a slow process that begins with such moments of rethinking how one understands the world.

employee, there is a struggle for some youth to rework their economic identities and economic desires. Reworking their economic desires also entails reworking the often pejorative images that they received about their region in the media and in their schooling.

While a revalorization of the semiarid was seen as essential, youth were also keenly aware of the mundane practicalities of establishing livelihoods in the region. There are sometimes tensions between activists' calls for a longer term vision of change and some of the youth's immediate need to find ways to make a living. I witnessed these tensions during a workshop at the *Semana Social* (Social Week) in June 2005, which was the local variant of the World Social Forum. In attendance were residents and youth from all over the Sobradinho lake region.<sup>217</sup> At this event, I attended a workshop on *Emprego e Renda* (Employment and Income) sponsored by the Pastoral Land Commission and led by a CPT activist and social organizer, a young man in his twenties with a masters degree who came from an urban area in Brazil.

The workshop focused on a Marxist critique of the dominant neoliberal labor model; the facilitator's critique emphasized the individualizing pressures of the current labor model being implanted in the region.<sup>218</sup> However, several youth at this meeting expressed a sense of urgency that workshops be given on basic livelihood skills—such as hairdressing or other trade skills. The facilitator argued that such skills workshops were

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<sup>217</sup> I want to make it clear that I do not bring up this example as a critique of the work of the workshop facilitator; in fact, I have great respect for it. I bring up this example, instead, to illustrate the differing viewpoints about employment, income, and strategy that circulate in the region—and the tensions amidst them.

<sup>218</sup> I was pretty sure I could hear the words of geographer David Harvey being voiced in this facilitator's critique of neoliberalism.

tricks (*enganos*) because they individualized both the problem and the solution, by making it seem as if individually (by learning some skills) that they could achieve success on their own, whereas in his opinion the solution needed to be collective. Youth were clearly upset and argued that they wanted to discuss concrete alternatives and said they would appreciate workshops where they could learn income producing skills. In summary, the facilitator was providing a critique of the neoliberal model by positing that it offers individualistic, entrepreneurial solutions to social and economic problems. Being well inculcated into this form of Left academic hesitance, I tended to agree with him. But the youth were earnest in their resistance to his argument.

I was surprised when during the session break a number of youth came up to me and asked my opinion on what the facilitator said because they disagreed with him. They did not think that what they wanted was individualistic and insisted that they did not plan on abandoning the popular movement (*movimento popular*, as they put it) just because they would seek out livelihood solutions. I was evasive with my response, wanting to both support them, but also feeling that the facilitator was “on” in his critique. They also called over the parish priest from Sobradinho (these youth were from around the lake region), to get his support for their stance. It was clear that the academic critique being offered was not their own perspective of the problem and I could not help but think that maybe the facilitator and myself were missing something in what the youth were arguing.

When we got back into the workshop they argued their point again. In many ways, what was presented at the workshop was a repetition of the globalization script, this time being argued from the perspective that individuals become market subjects



when confronted with neoliberalism.<sup>219</sup> But, these youth felt they were able to differentiate between neoliberalism as a discourse and model and what they experienced in terms of their sense of self and what they desired for themselves and others. The youth were insistent that they did not see the problem in individualized terms. This moment highlighted a difference between the more (pessimistic) performative power of academic discourses about neoliberalism, and the youth's sense that they could enact real change. There was a sense of immediacy by this group of youth who did not believe that they were going to abandon thinking about class issues (the struggle—*a luta*) just by learning “entrepreneurial” skills. They insisted, however, that there needed to be short-term solutions, and one young woman insisted “*A barriga vazia não tem ideologia*” (the empty stomach doesn't have ideology) and that they had to have some of their basic needs met to even be able to participate in the struggle. Youth listed a number of issues as major concerns and problems, such as not being able to attend university due to bus cost alone and there was visible pain and frustration on their part about these inequalities.

These youth wanted to solve the problems they faced but wanted assistance in doing so. They were also clear that it was not just about individual gain. Their interpretations, I believe, are in keeping with Gibson-Graham's approach that focuses on the sorts of practices that are occurring “in the cracks” of capitalism and neoliberalism. As argued earlier in this chapter, perhaps their responses demonstrate that the discourse of entrepreneurialism can be used against the capitalization of subjectivity. These young

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<sup>219</sup> In their 1996 book, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*, J.K. Gibson-Graham argue that many academic representations of globalization follow what they term a “globalization script,” whereby local communities are portrayed as inherently vulnerable to global capital. The script, they argue, presumes that the inevitable outcome of globalization is the dominance of market models. In the case above, that would be that individuals necessarily become neoliberal subjects.

people had certainly not been “captured” by neoliberal thinking; it seems that the Marxist critique may be been off the mark here. Perhaps the only way that youth can “escape” (*fugir*) the worker’s card dilemma discussed by João earlier in this section is by continued support for their desire for and apparent receptivity to these sorts of “skills-based” projects, rather than foreclosing these possibilities by labeling them as “tricks” or individualistic. These youth were not duped or tricked—they knew what they were up against, but still sought other opportunities. The same young woman who argued strongly for these sorts of projects was the same who asserted that during the meeting: “The rights that the worker’s cards provide are very beautiful [*bonito*], but they are only guaranteed on paper.” She was well aware that the promise of full employment was a near impossibility, but she seemed to believe that she and her peers could find other ways to become economy-makers themselves.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter traced aspects of the *diverse economy* of Sobradinho, documenting how, despite the draw of the subject position of “employee,” residents are engaged in a whole host of economic activity that does not simply fall into the category of market-oriented economic activity. While forms of wage-based employment still have a strong hold on many residents’ desires, the material in this chapter indicates there are a whole host of other economic practices that *Sobradinhenses* are engaged in. By highlighting the variety of existing economic practice, I hoped to document that the “economy” of Sobradinho consists of a vast array of practices, only part of which can be defined strictly as “capitalist” or market-oriented forms.

The chapter also examined residents' experience of the economy, highlighting both their descriptions of their experience of the "economic" and also how their voices indicated that they have not become capitalist subjects at a level of consciousness. It explored residents' voices about their experience with the market economy and their own economic desires. Their statements indicated that they were far from becoming "capitalist" or "neoliberal" subjects. This was examined on two levels: from the perspective of the elder residents and from the perspective of the youth. First, I discussed the elder residents' experience of the economy and their attachment to older forms of economic practice based on semi-subsistence production on a family farm. It was clear that some elder residents are resistant to the migratory labor model and have sought varied livelihood strategies (self-production, *fundos de pasto*) to avoid becoming a waged "employee." Both the elder generation's responses and the younger generation's response are significant because they indicate that global capitalist models have not fully captured residents' consciousness. Some *Sobradinhenses*, and other inhabitants of in the lake region, are reworking hegemonic representations of the town and the semiarid and are trying to forge economic alternatives. For an older generation with roots in agriculture, there is a more sedimented association with agricultural livelihoods and less of a desire to work as an "employee."

Second, the chapter examined youth's responses to the subject position of "employee" and their questioning of the desire for waged employment. Youth's responses were based upon their assessment that the supposed "promises" of development -- full employment-- have not been kept. They were aware that despite

access to more education than their parents' generation that they still cannot access forms of social mobility – that is unless they are willing to migrate. Those jobs that have emerged in the São Francisco Valley, such as work in agroindustrial firms, are marginally desirable by many youth. The younger generation of *Sobradinhenses* struggles to develop alternatives to the lifestyle models and material desires that have been introduced in the region with the encroachment of market-based economic models. For youth, desiring different economic identifications may involve an active process of resubjectivation. By this I mean that youth attempt to develop different cognitive models to understand the potentiality of their region and their town, and also work with other youth and organizations in the region to develop alternatives. While these processes of resubjectivation are still incipient, there are indications that youth have begun a process of rethinking hegemonic forms of economic identity and the push to adopt the subject position of “employee.” In particular, there was a questioning of what they need to “give up” in order to access the seeming “gains” of the workers’ cards in Brazil. Some youth have come to see the security promises of the signed “worker’s card” as limiting, in that the desire for a worker’s card forecloses other economic possibilities that they might develop.

Both the projects of the elder generation discussed in this chapter and those of youth are part of a broader vision of reworking representations of both the semiarid and the town in particular by residents, activists, and organizations the semiarid. This imaginative project is shored up by a host of programs and initiatives supported by the Catholic Church, NGOs and other groups in the semiarid. These examples highlight the

ways in which different groups have negotiated the changes introduced in the region over the past thirty years. In their discussion of *practices of resubjection*, Gibson-Graham, indicate that there are moments of “interruption” in the processes of regional subjection. What they are referring to are those moments when people question and experience emotions that push the limits of given models and subjectivities. We could read residents’ responses in the same way that Gibson-Graham have in their study of economic restructuring in the Latrobe Valley of Australia:

The view that the regional economy is defined purely or primarily by its energy resources prevails, but it is *exclusion* from this instrumental vision that is today’s subjection. What might this mean for a subject now deprived of economic citizenship? Might the exclusion from dominant economic calculus liberate new subjectivities and alternative forms of economic being? (Gibson-Graham 2006: 51)

They urge attention to what they call expressions of “fugitive energies” and emotions “that exceed the fund of subjectivities institutionally provided and ‘assumed’ (Gibson-Graham 2006: 51).” Similarly, both the elder generation and youth in Sobradinho expressed sentiments and forms of dissatisfaction with the given labor model in the São Francisco Valley. These might fade into nothing if they were not given the appropriate frame to support them. As traced in this chapter, the Catholic Church, associated NGOs, researchers, and other organizations are developing a cognitive framework (the *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* and associated projects) for these sorts of “fugitive energies.” The organizations and individuals also provide forms of material support for residents’ attempts to enact different form of economic practice, such as their support for founding the *fundos de pasto* or by assisting small producers with acquisition of land titles. By reframing understandings of the region with those filled with positivity and possibility, they encourage a funneling of these expressions of discontent towards the

creation of alternative livelihood strategies. This work helps assure that expressions of dissatisfaction with the current economic model are not reassimilated back into negative discourses about the region. However, this process is not seamless, as even representatives of institutions working on reframing the region may inadvertently revert back to describing the region in terms of capitalist dominance—it clearly is a process. But the enthusiasm I witnessed among youth in Sobradinho and the region indicates that there is hope for the development of a number of alternate economic becomings in place.

Walkerline has discussed how the new demands of the neoliberal subject require an internally located “security” (to replace the security of the long-term labor contract) which is not rooted in “any material space or geographical location (2006: 28).” Alternately, Collins and Krippner (1999) argue that theorists who have focused on the shifting nature of the neoliberal labor landscape have taken for granted that job security was the norm in all places around the globe, which has simply not been the case for most people around the world. Instead, livelihood strategies for many in the Global South have consisted of shifting, overlapping, and varied forms of waged labor, informal economic activity, and semi-subsistence or subsistence based activities (Chase 1997). Some residents certainly did experience a brief period of “security” while they were employed by CHESF (a situation similar to that of which Walkerline describes). But, many *Sobradinhenses* may have never had the “security” of the long term waged job. For some of the older generation, with roots in agriculture, a return to “security” might instead mean a return to (the more comfortable, more sedimented) practice of family agriculture. Some are rethinking both what it means to have boss (*patron*) and to also have steady

employment and are seeking to create alternative livelihood strategies. These projects may be incipient, but they reflect people's struggle over place and over cultural and religious values.

These expressions of discontent by young and old alike reflect deeper conflicts over meanings, production paradigms, and environmental rationalities (Escobar 2008: 105). The *fundos de pasto* demonstrate sustainable models that are rooted in cultural identities and ecological conditions, something Escobar (2008) has highlighted as occurring among communities in the Pacific lowlands of Colombia. These practices represent a politics of place and a defense of place, as they are rooted in existing social conditions in the town and the region. Residents seek to out forms of economic practice that allow for permanence, amidst the number of processes that urge youth and others to leave the community. These practices are a form of defense of place as residents witness the impacts of the dominant development model in their region, such as declining native fish populations, the drying up of streambeds, the deforestation of the *caatinga*—just to name a few of residents' ecological concerns.

What the existence of these practices and projects indicate is that the region and residents have not become subsumed to capitalism or transitional forms of capitalism. Residents' practices might give rise to counter-tendencies to capitalist development and new forms of economic difference. Residents (young and old alike) are refusing to enter into a pool of workers, the "cheap and plentiful" labor supply that development documents lauded to woo investors into the region. In the process they are enacting a politics of place and resubjectifying themselves. In the next chapter I will further explore

some of these tensions as I examine women's participation in the community economy in Sobradinho.



## CHAPTER 5: WOMEN, CARE, AND THE COMMUNITY ECONOMY

We have to share, because if we have food it is possible that my brother on my side might not have any. What does it cost us to get what we have and share it with him? Sometimes my husband thinks differently, he says, “Oh, Arlinda, you see that our market basket [*feira*] is so little and we do not have money to buy and you take stuff and give it to others. You receive a packet and then you give it away.” I say, “Yes, I do. Whenever I have something in the pot I will go to it and give it away. Because it gives [*dá*], we share [*dividir*]. Look, Ana, there are days that I look and I think that I don’t have anything to put on the stove but I don’t worry because I know something will arrive. Jesus Christ is going to resolve this problem. When I think it is not going to arrive, a car from the other *vila* or from Santana stops in front of my door and someone brings me a market basket. If I was *parada* [did nothing] the way that he would like me to be, I would pass two months without it. But, no, I divide it with total pleasure. It provides enough for me to divide with others. Because I think about it like this, whoever multiplies—no, who multiplies is Jesus Christ through his good heart, he sees to it that we receive bread and eat more.

Arlinda and I were in the kitchen of the Community Center Antonio Conselheiro as she told me this. She was stirring a large pot of soup, which she makes on the same day each week, to distribute to some of the least well-off residents of her block. In this quote, Arlinda expresses a common sentiment among those involved in community projects in Sobradinho: the idea that one should be willing to give more and help others in the community. These sentiments are both influenced by a sense of care and of common cause with others in the town that are, in part, due to the influence of Christian Catholic theology, which argues that one should care for one’s neighbor’s needs here on Earth. At the same time, Arlinda’s comments reflect the ambivalent emotions felt by those living in an area deeply impacted by a development project and the accompanying market-based economic models: she indicates the importance of being “active” (not *parada* or “inactive”) implying the valorization of industriousness, which is one of the

cornerstones of modernist economic views. However, she does not value productivity for its own sake, instead she imbues it with a different sort of moral evaluation, the end-goal of which is the sharing of the fruits of one's labors with others. In doing so, Arlinda's statement both re-asserts the communitarian value of working with and for others, but also reflects how the development discourse shaped some residents' sense of self and how they view others in their community.

This chapter will address the tensions between group-oriented values and those market-oriented values and practices introduced with state-led development, with attention to how residents, particularly women, are involved in reworking and, in some ways rejecting, market-oriented notions of value by integrating the realms of work and care through their community-oriented practice. Their work involves a valuation of the principles of compassion and care, which is linked to the Catholic Church mission of serving the poor and those who cannot help themselves, such as children or the elderly. This religious aspect of her work is demonstrated in an important part of Arlinda's statement above: she sees it as Jesus who multiplies, while she and other volunteers are mere servants of Jesus' work here on Earth.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the mid- to late-1980s witnessed a flurry of organizing activity by community residents to better the living conditions of those in the town in general, and the Vila São Joaquim, in particular. This chapter focuses on the experiences of participants in several community projects that were sponsored and initiated by members, some clergy and some lay, of the Catholic Church. In particular, it focuses on the participation of women involved in these projects because they made up

the majority of those active as community volunteers during the time of my fieldwork. As discussed in earlier chapters, the Catholic Church was the principal institution involved in organizing and defending the interests of those who were to be dislocated by the lake waters of the Sobradinho dam.<sup>220</sup> In the 1980s the Church continued its work in Sobradinho, inspired by the principles of liberation theology. The tenets of liberation theology that were focused on during this period were working with a preferential option for the poor and oppressed and, also, valorizing regional (“folk”) knowledge and forms of religious practice. During this time, Sobradinho went through alternating periods of having and not having a parish priest, so that in the intervening periods lay residents took leadership of the spiritual life of the community.

In keeping with the Church mission, several projects were set up to better living conditions in Vila São Joaquim. These projects included an herbal pharmacy, community gardens, the Children’s Pastoral, the Health Pastoral, an after-school center for adolescent girls, a rest-home for homeless elderly, and a community crèche. These projects were intended to ameliorate the high levels of malnutrition and the precarious social conditions brought about, in large part, by the high rates of unemployment and the destruction of the livelihoods of those who were relocated by the dam’s waters.<sup>221</sup> Due to a pattern of out-migration by many men from the community there was a gendered dimension to much of this organizing, so that these works tended to focus on the needs of the many single female heads of household and their children. A spirit of working together prevailed

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<sup>220</sup> For more on the involvement of the Catholic Church in organizing against the Sobradinho dam, please see both the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>221</sup> Both the Regional Institute of Appropriate Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (IRPAA) and the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), discussed in Chapter 3, emerged out of the social organizing work of bishop Dom José Rodrigues de Souza in the 1980s, who was inspired by the tenets of liberation theology.

amongst many in the town in the 1980s, even as social cleavages emerged with the state-sponsored participatory planning process.<sup>222</sup>

In the first section below I will provide a framework for thinking about the social/economic implications of women's involvement in community-oriented projects. Next, I discuss several community-oriented projects and highlight the ways in which these projects serve to both cultivate collective social/economic subjects and, also, forms of understanding the realms of the "economic" which do not necessarily align with market models of the economy. In the third section of this chapter I discuss the tensions involved in instituting collective economic models and values, and those values introduced with market-based models of the economy. I conclude with a feminist analysis of these projects and their implications.

### **Care and the Community Economy**

Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, in his book *Saber Cuidar* (To Know [How] To Care), postulates that there are essentially two modes of being in the world: that of work (*trabalho*) and that of care (*cuidado*) (1999: 92). The world of work represents the world of instrumental reason, intervention and objectivity (Boff 1999: 93-94). The world of care is made up of *convivência* (being-in-common), coexistence, and a way of being that is non-interventionist. He argues that there has been a rupture between care and work in the process of industrialization and that the great struggle of humanity is to bring them back together, particularly as the world of care has been marginalized (Boff 1992: 97).

As we will see in this chapter, residents involved in community works are inspired by the

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<sup>222</sup> Recall from Chapter 2 that this is the same era in which residents were organizing for the "political emancipation" of Sobradinho and in which state development planners focused on "participatory development" projects in the community.

same liberation theology principles as Boff's. I argue in this chapter that, in part, residents are participating in a recombination of these two complementary spheres through the practices of giving and participating in the volunteer care projects in their community.<sup>223</sup>

Similar to the distinction between the world of work and the world of care is what feminist economist Barbara Brandt has referred to as the visible (monetized) economy, which exists alongside of the invisible (non-monetized) economy (1995: 54). The visible economy is centered around business and money-making whereas the invisible economy is centered around household, neighborhood, and community. A chart laying out the particulars of these two sectors of the economy is below (see Table 4, next page). The projects and practices discussed in this chapter make up part of the invisible economy, particularly as they focus on neighborhood and community, even more than the household level.

Similarly, anthropologist Stephen Gudeman theorizes that the economy is made up of two realms, that of the community realm and that of the market realm (2001). He argues that in the community realm of the economy, the base<sup>224</sup> (a community's shared interests) and social relationships are most salient, although other value concerns can be found within this realm (2001: 9). For example, the community realm does not preclude involvement in impersonal trade in order to secure items that maintain community. In

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<sup>223</sup> Residents' anxieties about "unemployment" and "employment" are discussed at length in Chapter 3: Everyday Discourses of the Economy. These anxieties could be attributed to this disconnect between the worlds of "work" and "care," as they have manifested in Sobradinho over the past three decades.\

<sup>224</sup> Gudeman asserts that one value domain of the economy is the base or foundation which is made up of a community's shared interests (2001: 7). These can include lasting resources such as land or water, produced things, and ideational constructs such as knowledge, technology, laws, practices, skills and customs (Gudeman 2001: 7).

addition, accumulation can be exercised within social relationships in the community economy (Gudeman 2001: 9). In contrast, the market realm centers on short-term material relationships and transactions which are undertaken in order to secure a good or achieve a project (2001: 10). The primary motive in the market realm is self-interest of the unit (whether individual, family, or community). The community and market realms complement each other and overlap at times, as already suggested.

<b><i>The Visible / Monetized Economy</i></b>	<b><i>The Invisible / Non Monetized Economy</i></b>
Centered around businesses and making money.	Centered around household, neighborhood, community.*
Perceived as the real economy.	Perceived as secondary (if at all).
Monopolizes resources, public attention and power.	Deprived of resources and power.
Shaped by efficiency and the bottom line: The producers are working for others.	Shaped by the needs of the producers: The producers are working for themselves.
Serves those who can pay.	Serves everyone, including dependent people (those who can't pay).
Its costs and mistakes are displaced onto the invisible economy.	Bears the brunt of the visible economy's dysfunctions, and cleans up its messes.
Traditionally men's work: the masculine realm.	Traditionally women's work: the feminine realm.
* Note: the invisible economy also includes the natural environment. Many of the characteristics listed here also apply to nature and its relation to the invisible economy.	

**Table 4: The Visible and Invisible Sectors of the Economy**<sup>225</sup>

In this chapter I argue that women participating in volunteer projects in Sobradinho are contributing to the invisible sector of the economy (following Brandt) as well as the community realm of the economy (following Gudeman), but more particularly they are involved in the *care economy*.<sup>226</sup> Feminist economists use the term the “care economy” (Brandt 1995) or care work (England and Folbre 2003) to refer to those

<sup>225</sup> This chart can be found in *Whole Life Economics: Revaluing Daily Life*, by Barbara Brandt.

<sup>226</sup> I am not making a cultural feminist argument that women are “naturally” inclined towards care work. Rather my attention to this sphere is due to care work being culturally coded as “feminine” work.

practices of care which by traditional economic standards have no economic value (Brandt 1995: 53). In particular, Brandt notes how care for those who are dependent, such as children or the elderly, is especially disregarded by the visible economy. Care for dependents is seen as having no value “since the recipients of care are considered unproductive, the modern paradigm further devalues the act of caring for them (1995: 137).” Thus care-giving, because it is devalued by the visible economy, falls to the informal economic sector which is governed by different rules and values. People who need care are defined as “noneconomic” problems and are thus dealt with by underfunded government programs, nonprofit or religious-based charities, community volunteers, and fellow family members, especially women (Brandt 1995: 53, 137). In Sobradinho this manifests as women volunteers caring for the poor, the elderly, and children.

Amy Lind’s (2005) study of state restructuring in Ecuador noted that as women’s household and community labor became institutionalized and relatively permanent, women tended to bear the brunt of cuts to social programs. Lind sees women’s volunteer labor as having weathered the debt crisis through their individual and collective survival strategies (2005: 5). A similar analysis to Lind’s could certainly be applied to women’s volunteer labor in Sobradinho, read in the context of the economic downturn following the dam construction and the “exclusion” of Sobradinho from the expanding agroindustry in neighboring municipalities. In light of this seeming economic exclusion, post-dam-construction Sobradinho has only become an increasingly economically “redundant” space by mainstream economic measures within the broader regional economy of the São Francisco Valley. Lind’s analysis parallels Brandt’s assertion that the invisible economy

often “bears the brunt of the visible economy’s dysfunctions, and cleans up its messes” as many of the women in this chapter did pick up the burden of lack of state investment in their community. However, I would prefer to focus on another aspect of women’s participation in their communities—their creation of and continued support of non-market oriented economic paradigms and economic selves, as outlined below.

Brandt notes how the invisible (non-marketized) economy often appears to be a last resort because it is often practiced by the poor. The state, certainly, “takes advantage” of women’s willingness to take up the burden of care work, in the absence of state support for social programs. However, more importantly, Brandt notes how the invisible economy is actually a place where emerging economic paradigms might be cultivated (Brandt 1995: 54). This chapter explores how emergent and non-market dominated economic subjectivities are cultivated in the invisible or community economy in Sobradinho.

Like the last chapter, this chapter examines what have been termed practices of *resubjectivation* by theorists Gibson-Graham (2006).<sup>227</sup> They take this term (resubjectivation) from the work of Foucault (1997) on *ethical self-transformation* or what Connolly (1995, 1999) has termed a “micropolitics of (re)subjectivation.” For Gibson-Graham, the experiences of retrenchment and privatization serve as moments of interruption in the practices of regional economic subjection (2006: 25). So, I argue that as state and capital investment in the town of Sobradinho withdrew following the dam construction, women, in particular, were more receptive to work that was not organized

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<sup>227</sup> For a complete outline of what this political project entails (what Gibson-Graham terms a “politics of the subject”), see “Chapter 6: Cultivating Subjects for a Community Economy,” in *A PostCapitalist Politics*.



according to a market model, especially as these women had never been fully subjected as market-oriented individuals to begin with. Through a process of working with others or “being-in-common” with others, residents have been able to strengthen desires for other forms of economic activity.<sup>228</sup> These projects are not just about “coping” with the lack of state investment in their town, but about actively creating different visions about what it means to live in community. In tracing the construction of women’s economic subjectivities and participation in different realms of the economy, I identified the intersecting and overlapping influences of the different sources of “economic” thinking in Sobradinho: i) market oriented models introduced by state-led development in the region; ii) liberation theology influenced teachings of the Catholic Church present in the region since the struggle against the Sobradinho dam; and iii) residents’ “traditional”<sup>229</sup> forms of economic value and practice which at times differ from both Church or the State economic models.

In this chapter I will explore how state-led economic development in the broader São Francisco Valley region intersects with the values encouraged by the Catholic Church in the region, including how, paradoxically, the Catholic Church works to nurture values that run counter to market-based notions of value but also serves to instill certain forms of market-oriented practice. Central to this process is an analysis of the processes

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<sup>228</sup> Gibson-Graham (2006: 85) takes the term “being-in-common” from the work of Jean Luc Nancy (1991). The Portuguese term for “being-in-common” is *convivência*.

<sup>229</sup> I recognize that the term “traditional” is problematic. What I am referring to, in this case, are those forms of the economy which do not have their roots in either state projects oriented towards the modernization and economic development of the region, or which are not the explicit outcome of Church-based attempts to cultivate communitarian Christian values or, as we will see, market-oriented economic practice. I chose not to use the term “local” to describe these values because residents of Sobradinho have moved to the area from all over Brazil in order to work in the dam construction, so the concept of local would lump together a potential variety of value-systems.

of governmentality (Foucault 1990) that make up part of women's motivation to participate in these practices. By governmentality I am referring to the process by which the state produces citizens whose subjectivities are best suited to fulfill governmental policy. Governmentality also refers to the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which residents (as subjects) are governed. Rose and Miller have referred to these as "technologies of government" or the strategies, techniques, and procedures that make certain governmental programs operable (Rose and Miller 1992: 183).

In particular, and relevant to this chapter, are the ways in which assistance to the poor becomes a means of government. Procacci (1991) documents how programs oriented towards poverty alleviation often revolve around both the creation of consumers, and the creation of "needs." She highlights how the politics of poverty gets linked to morality; the task of changing people's behavior becomes a moral issue, a process which Procacci identifies as the "grafting of morality onto economics (1991: 158)." Ultimately, governmental projects targeting the poor are not so much about eliminating poverty as they are about eliminating difference. Therefore those who "refuse" a transition from penury to comfort represent the danger of subversion (Procacci 1991: 155). A number of techniques serve to create a subject who is aware of his/her duties—a social and political subject. Some of these techniques are the use of statistics, the emphasis on hygiene, education, and habits such as saving, participation, and forms of association (Procacci 1991: 166). All of these will become relevant in examining the projects in this chapter.

David Mosse (2005), similarly, discusses developmental governmentality as he documents how development does not operate through compulsion. Instead, its productive power wins legitimacy and empowers actions while at the same time putting in place regimes of truth that structure what sorts of action can be taken (Mosse 2005: 13). He argues that the new international aid and development frameworks operate through the liberal art of government and through the internalization of disciplines. Yet at the same time, he cautions that the “governmentality” approach can be problematic in that it can be empirically weak and bordering on functionalist—instead he urges for analysis that focuses on the power embedded in organizations and personal relationships (Mosse 2005: 14).

In keeping with Mosse’s cautioning, this chapter will examine what I find are the more interesting aspects of residents’ relationship to their work that demonstrate that the act of “governing” is never complete.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, the governing of the market economy was never complete since women volunteers identified with other forms of social/economic thinking. Ethnographic examples in this chapter will highlight how tensions emerged between the more group-oriented, counter-market values encouraged by the Church and future-oriented and market-oriented values that were simultaneously encouraged by the same institution. For example, Church members often encouraged residents to “save” money and learn to “*economizar*” (to economize), and some church members expressed a sort of frustration about the precarious situation that residents

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<sup>230</sup> “In many governmentality studies, the voice of the subject is absent and the opportunity is thereby lost to explore the ways that the project of governing and subjecting is never complete (O’Malley, et al. 1997: 503, cited in Gibson-Graham 1996: 25).”

sometimes found themselves in when they “failed” to save or economize.<sup>231</sup> As will be shown, the Church’s project for social change at times works “in collusion” with the State’s economic, modernist vision, but it also serves as a font of resistance to the cold instrumentalist logic of the State or the market, especially when it reconnects the realms of work and care.

### **The Emergence of the Pastorals and Catholic-based Community Projects in Sobradinho**

Residents who lived in Sobradinho in the mid- to late-1980s, particularly those who lived in the Vila São Joaquim, often recall the work of several priests who worked with residents to start community projects. In particular, Children’s Pastoral members described how in the mid-1980s Padre Eduardo made a call during mass for volunteers to do a work “out of love” (*por amor*) for the community. Betinha Goncalves, a volunteer with the Children’s Pastoral and a Community Health Agent, saw this as a pivotal moment in her life and noted how she felt “called” at this moment by God:

My life began like this: I was called by God and I always liked the celebration of the masses. One Sunday I was there, and after the mass, Father Eduardo made an invitation to those people who would like to work voluntarily, out of love of their brothers, to stay there after mass. And I felt called by God. God called me in that moment, so I stayed after the mass. We talked about the number of children in Sobradinho who were dying. Everyday there were 2 small coffins, two children dying. We had to put an end to this, we had to start a work out of love, for love because there was no money, for the love of our brothers. I felt called, it was so gratifying that until today I exist for the *Pastoral da Criança*.

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<sup>231</sup> Residents have always been conservative with their use of goods because they produced much of what they needed prior to the entrenchment of the market economy in the region. However, the idea of “saving for the future” (such as for education) and “economizing” are somewhat novel. Economizing and saving for the future have become, I argue, moral issues. It is not that the rural communities did not plan ahead (by saving and storing crops until the next rainy season or flood season), however there was never a “need” to think about and save money for the future. Futurity concerns are expressive of anxieties about the social/economic changes that have occurred in the region over the past three decades.

Betinha's description struck me because she did not say that "her involvement began like this" but that *her life* began with her participation in these Church projects and that she *exists for* the Pastoral. These sentiments echo Betinha's response when I first asked her for an interview. She exclaimed with enthusiasm, "My story is very beautiful, God called me! I was called by God."<sup>232</sup> For Betinha, the start of her participation in these works was a transformational and spiritual moment—and something ultimately very gratifying. This sentiment of being called by God and feeling contentment about one's participation because of doing God's work was expressed by many of the women involved in such initiatives. It is the sort of sentiment that the Children's Pastoral hopes to instill in its volunteers on the national level; the website describes the project as a "work of love." While involvement in these projects is not without its problems, as I will outline later in this section, I will first discuss how these projects serve to bridge the spheres of work and care.<sup>233</sup>

Part of this bridging is captured by the sense of moral imperative and urgency in Betinha's comments: they could not let these children die and had to do what they could to put an end to the situation. Those who worked on the early projects to address the

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<sup>232</sup> Betinha's expression of being "called by God" echoes that of the national-level *Pastoral da Criança*'s founder, Zilda Arns Neumann who also claims on the Pastoral website that she was called by God to do this work. ([http://www.pastoraldacrianca.com.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastoral/english/pressroom/news/news\\_0004.htm](http://www.pastoraldacrianca.com.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastoral/english/pressroom/news/news_0004.htm), accessed August 16, 2008).

<sup>233</sup> For a feminist and governmentality-focused critique of the *Pastoral da Criança*, see the work of Brazilian scholar Gabriele dos Anjos (2007). She argues that the program's examination techniques and teachings on the care of the body seek to develop a self-identification as mothers among those who are the intended recipients of the program. In contrast, the volunteers are urged to self-identify as "leaders." She argues that the program is counter-feminist in its politics of the body. I do not disagree with her analysis and concur with the processes of governmentality that she describes (such as the focus on hygiene, care of the self, etc.). But, the meaning of the projects for participants cannot be reduced to this logic, as will be discussed in this chapter.

issue of childhood death in Sobradinho felt urgently that this problem was unacceptable and took it upon themselves to address the situation. Betinha's comments that this work had to be done "out of love" because there was no money reflects how residents felt that they themselves needed to prioritize care over the market-based principles, despite state neglect of the situation.<sup>234</sup> The Brazilian feminist scholar dos Anjos (2007) has critiqued the national Pastoral da Criança program for its focus on "life," an argument I cannot help but agree with, to a certain extent, on a national level given the organization's official pro-life stance.<sup>235</sup> Therefore, I do not present the women in this chapter's Pastoral work as part a "feminist" politics, especially because none of the women would self-identify as feminist. However, I *am* arguing that a broader feminist project could valorize the domains of care in which these women are engaged and that the Pastoral may not, as it is practiced by members, serve as an entirely anti-feminist force as will be discussed at the end of this chapter. These women's participation in the community was conducted prior to the pastoral's officialization. This means that, in a situation of state neglect and devaluation of life, these women's insistence that lives in Sobradinho mattered *was* a political act and should be understood as such.

This call by Padre Eduardo for volunteers happened during an era when the area was hit by severe rains that destroyed several homes in the community. In response, Padre Eduardo organized a campaign to rebuild the homes. It was this campaign that

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<sup>234</sup> This is similar to the sentiments expressed by Ghislaine Ferreira in Chapter 2 in which she described residents' volunteer work to distribute milk to children in Sobradinho during the mid-1980s when the rates of childhood death were high. However, the work described by her was not associated with the Catholic Church.

<sup>235</sup> Brazilian feminists responses to the anti-choice position has centered on, as feminist arguments elsewhere have, the number of women whose lives are endangered by illegal abortions. Abortion is illegal in Brazil except in the case of rape or a pregnancy that puts the mother's life at risk.

many attributed as the beginning of pastoral work in Sobradinho. Dona Paula and Dona Angélica described the *mutirão*<sup>236</sup> that Padre Eduardo organized:

Dona Paula: Dona Angélica, do you remember that time of the very strong rains. . . Do you remember what we did with these houses? Do you remember how Padre Eduardo reconstructed these houses?

Dona Angélica: Doing a *mutirão*.

AA: He asked the community to help out?

Dona Paula: Yes, it went like that. He also asked at the time that he was celebrating mass that people contribute bricks, wood, and one time we arranged for a car . . . I am only remembering for Dona Angélica, and this car went from N-18 [the name of a street block] and some people together with the driver asking using a megaphone if each person contribute some material—a brick, anything.

AA: And people contributed?

Dona Paula: Contributed, yes! Whoever could! There were even people who would take a roof tile from atop their houses, or take a brick from their houses that they would not miss so that they could contribute. We brought this material together. And all of these houses are still there.

The work described above evolved into several projects: the establishment of a community garden, the Health Pastoral, the Children's Pastoral and the herbal pharmacy. This early work is now officially organized and sanctioned under the Children's Pastoral, an aspect that highlights how organic forms of community organizing were encompassed under forms of state power or governmentality. Dona Paula is currently a Children's Pastoral volunteer and a Community Health Agent and was one of the participants who approached me at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration for the Children's Pastoral, saying that I should meet the elderly Dona Angélica, who appears in the quotes above. At this celebration, several community members commented to me that the pastoral in

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<sup>236</sup> A *mutirão* is a collective house-raising project that has long roots in the region; community members are asked to give some of their time and energy to build something or make something happen. The Michaelis Brazilian Portuguese Dictionary defines it as: a) A meeting of farmers with the end of freely helping a friend, neighbor to weed, set up a field, plant, or to execute other farm-related tasks. b) Physical voluntary work done by a community of volunteers to benefit the community. The word originates from the indigenous Tupí word *motiró*.

Sobradinho was actually more than 10 years old and that the 10 year anniversary referred to its formal recognition by the national Pastoral headquarters in Curitiba. These volunteers attributed the start of the Children's Pastoral to the work spurred by Padre Eduardo in the 1980s.

The national volunteer organization the Children's Pastoral (*Pastoral da Criança*) was established in 1982 by Dr. Zilda Arns Neumann, inspired by her brother Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns Cardinal Archbishop of São Paulo and James Grant, then executive director of UNICEF, in an attempt, as the organization states, to encourage popular solutions to ameliorate the high rates of infant mortality in Brazil.<sup>237</sup> As such, the program fits within neoliberal economic shifts that have increasingly placed the burden of social service provision in the hands of civil society. In particular, the program fits what Brazilian political scientist Evelina Dagnino (2007) has termed a "perverse confluence" of the neoliberal model with the participatory democracy project of Brazilian social movements which urged for "active" forms of citizenship. The *Pastoral da Criança* is a highly organized and systemized program with 155,000 volunteers nation-wide, 92% of whom are women. Volunteers are trained locally to serve as monitors to approximately a dozen families in order to track the health and nutrition of children under the age of six in order to identify those children who are at risk for malnutrition. The group is largely Christian Catholic in message, although its website describes it as supra-religious and not

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<sup>237</sup> The *Pastoral da Criança* website describes the project like this: "*Pastoral da Criança* is a social action body of CNBB (The National Conference of Bishops of Brazil) that carries out a monthly follow-up of 76,842 impoverished expectant mothers and 1,635,461 children under 6, in 32,743 communities, in 3,555 Brazilian municipalities." ([http://www.pastoraldacrianca.com.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastoral/english/pressroom/news/news\\_0004.htm](http://www.pastoraldacrianca.com.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastoral/english/pressroom/news/news_0004.htm), accessed August 16, 2008).



all of its volunteers are Catholic.<sup>238</sup> In Sobradinho in the late 1990s the informal volunteer group became an official Children's Pastoral when one of the Catholic sisters in the community established a Children's Pastoral chapter in the community. Official sponsorship by the national level pastoral was seen by participants as beneficial because it provided the community with financial resources from the central Pastoral commission in Curitiba in the South of Brazil.

The officialization of these projects represented a shift in how these projects were run. Earlier when the work was "unofficial," residents had a good deal of say in how the projects were conducted. Those who had traditional forms of knowledge, such as Dona Angélica who was known to work with herbs, were valued for the knowledge they put towards community use. Dona Angélica, now in her 80s, was a central figure in establishing the Health Pastoral and the herbal pharmacy because of her knowledge of plants and herbs available in the region. Dona Angélica vividly remembered the construction of the dam since she and her husband were dislocated from their land by the dam. They had once lived in the original site of the *povoado* of Sobradinho which was situated near the falls of Sobradinho, where the dam was built.

However, once a federally-run Community Health Agent Program and the national level Children's Pastoral became established in the community, some residents who did not have formal education felt they could not participate in the same ways they once had. Because the health agents had to be *concurzada*<sup>239</sup>, those who had been involved in these projects for years, but who could not read or write, were not

<sup>238</sup> Of the approximately 40 volunteers in Sobradinho only a handful do not belong to the Catholic Church and only one or two of the volunteers were male. At one Children's Pastoral volunteer trainings volunteers discussed an Evangelical volunteer who stopped participating because of the recitation of the prayer the "Hail Mary" at many pastoral events.

employable by the municipality, nor were they able to fill out the paperwork required of official Children's Pastoral volunteers. There were attempts to make accommodations at the local level for those who have volunteered but who did not pass the *concurso*, but ultimately the requirements resulted in a preference for those who have formal schooling.

For example, throughout our discussion Dona Angélica presented herself as “not knowing very much” and lacking *sabedoria* (formal education/knowledge), although she was central to, as Dona Paula saw it, the initiation of the Health and Children's Pastoral because of her knowledge of herbal remedies. In contrast to Dona Angélica's description of herself as not having knowledge, Dona Paula described Dona Angélica's work this way:

I remember, Ana, that the first time I came to the house of Dona Angélica. Inside her fence, in the yard of her house, she had a garden. It was the first garden of medicinal plants that I saw here in Sobradinho, here in her house. When I entered into this group and when we found someone who was sick here in block N-18 . . . I came here many times to look for herbs to make teas. She would also give me a quantity herbs to make a *garrafada* and a quantity to make a tea for those who were sick.<sup>240</sup>

Dona Paula brought me to speak to Dona Angélica knowing that I would otherwise never hear from her or about her work because of Dona Angélica's humble nature. Dona Angélica's sentiments reflect the sense of lack that those deeply impacted by the development processes may feel, especially those who perceive themselves to “lack learning.” Dona Angélica only perceives herself to “lack knowledge” because she now lives in close proximity to those who are perceived to have “knowledge” (formal schooling and reading abilities) and has also seen and experienced the social inequalities

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<sup>239</sup> The *concurso* refers to a process by which applicants must pass a federal exam to fill federally funded municipal government positions.

<sup>240</sup> A *garrafada* is a folk remedy used in healing traditions of Northeast Brazil. The term *garrafada* is derived from the word *garrafa* (for bottle) and it usually consists of an herbal mixture that is placed in a bottle along with some water or other liquid. This liquid is ingested for treatment.

that are the result thereof—an experience which was not present in residents’ of the region’s everyday lives prior to the construction of the dam. This experience aligns with the coloniality/modernity critique which argues that the foundational dynamics of modernity have led to a dynamic of inclusion-exclusion for communities now impacted by “economic development”; in the past, this dynamic of inclusion-exclusion would have operated through literal colonial control (Medeiros 2005: 18).<sup>241</sup> The coloniality/modernity critique rests, in part, on the idea that local forms of knowledge have been disregarded since the era of conquest and that the process of devaluing them has continued under the novel guise of development or economic growth, as we can see in the case of Sobradinho.

Dona Angélica’s feelings highlight one of the contradictions in this project and some of the other church-sponsored projects: the Children’s Pastoral sees itself as passing “information” on to those who need it, yet the very skill set required to be a volunteer is exclusionary. These requirements lead to the marginalization of certain forms of residents’ everyday knowledge.<sup>242</sup> The shift in the practice of these projects highlights how the Church has both served as a liberatory force by first working with and valorizing

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<sup>241</sup> Quijano’s (2000) asserts that coloniality is the underside of modernity. By modernity/coloniality he is referring to the idea that colonial relations of oppression and domination were central to the processes of Latin American nation-building. Modernity/coloniality refers to the existence of colonial situations after the demise of colonial administration.

<sup>242</sup> For example, the history of the pastoral provided on their website, Dr. Neumann states, “I felt that she was being called by God for a great mission of life. I explained that, from my experience in public health, as pediatrician and sanitation specialist, what the mothers lacked was the knowledge and brotherly solidarity. Thus it was not enough to teach to the mothers to use the oral serum. It was also necessary to teach them the importance of the prenatal care, breast feeding, nutritional monitoring, vaccination, integral development of the children, human relations, similar to that of which they already knew so that they were stimulated to take care of better of their children so that “they grew in wisdom and grace” (Lc 2,52).” ([http://www.pastoraldacrianca.org.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastcri-dev/arquivos\\_genericos/porta/historico.html](http://www.pastoraldacrianca.org.br/htmltonuke.php?filnavn=pastcri-dev/arquivos_genericos/porta/historico.html), accessed August 18, 2008.)

residents' traditional skills and knowledge, but how it has also resulted in forms of governing power through the Children's Pastoral. This situation highlights the form of power that Foucault referred to as "pastoral power," whereby the state integrated an earlier form of power that originated in Christian Church institutions (1994: 332). It operates by making one's salvation dependent on what one does in this world and not the next (as the Church did), through a focus on health and well-being as practiced by medical and welfare programs (Foucault 1994: 334). People are drawn into these pastoral projects as agents of pastoral power, such as philanthropists, welfare institutions, and even older institutions such as the family. The aims and agents of pastoral power came to focus on the development of knowledge about humankind around two roles: 1) the globalizing and quantitative documentation of the population; and 2) an analytical focus on the individual. We can see the coming together of these forms of power in the Children's Pastoral, as it is both a Church and a semi-state institution that focuses on monthly detailed statistical counts of its program participants. The pastoral also served to legitimize certain forms and routes to knowledge, while discounting others. Medeiros (2005) in her analysis of residents reactions to development in the Bolivian highlands highlights residents' senses of being systematically excluded from power positions by hegemonic knowledge, while the simultaneously experiencing the effects of that power (2005: 14). Sobradinho's residents experienced a similar sense of exclusion from hegemonic knowledge and power positions.

Participants do recognize a qualitative difference in how these projects are now conducted as opposed to when they first began. This was expressed by some of the Pastoral participants as they reflected on the early years of their participation:

Dona Paula: We would visit the sick. Make an herbal tea, make a curative when it was needed. Give them massages. . . and even do a campaign for those who were passing through a period of need. We would ask people to help those folks without food. We would pass through the street asking for foodstuffs for them. . . There was no weight [*pesagem*—i.e. no official authority] at that time, it wasn't registered.

Betinha: It was a very sincere thing.

Dona Angélica: It was a group of us, including Padre Eduardo. We would get a little group together, and without security [*não tem segurança*].

This is not to say that residents do not still feel a strong sense of connection to and mission in the work, however, it is striking that Betinha and Dona Angélica describe the early work as “a very sincere thing,” but with no weight (*pesagem*) or security. Despite the effects of bureaucratization and officialization, some still see their work as a mission and feel that they do this work out of love.

At the community level there is a struggle over this process as residents seek to acknowledge those who are not officially recognized by formal institutions and even attempt to make positions (sometimes paid) for them at the municipal level.<sup>243</sup> An example was when Dona Paula asserted the value of Dona Angélica's knowledge and its centrality to the establishment of the pastoral. By nurturing subjectivities that deny this individualizing power of the state, residents thereby deny its ability to fully capture them

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<sup>243</sup> For example, the municipal government made a position for Arlinda Costa who is not hired as an official health agent by the federal government (i.e. she is not *concurrada*). She is paid by the municipality for her coordination of the Community Center.

as market-oriented subjects. This is how these community projects, despite their bureaucratization, serve as forms of resistance to the instrumental logic of the state.

Betinha was very earnest in describing a very visceral sense of pleasure from working with the Pastoral. But, she also expressed her sense that the state does not value their work in the same way that the volunteers do:

I feel more pride in it [the Children's Pastoral], especially in the mass—more than being a health agent. In the past, we have gone two months working for the Ministry of Health without receiving [our salaries]. In the *Pastoral da Criança* you work because of love [*por amor*]. Since we do it for love, it is more satisfying than other work you could do. The federal government does not value what we do. But, we are not going to stop because of this, because we have a mission. When I wear this t-shirt [pointing to her *Pastoral da Criança* t-shirt], I feel very proud. Very proud.

Betinha feels that the federal government does not value the work of the pastoral workers, despite the fact that international institutions (UNICEF) and the federal government both support and fund the project. Her opinion reflects a common critique made by scholars that women volunteers of the popular classes in Latin America serve as “stop gaps” for those services that the federal government does not fund, especially under state restructuring (Lind 2005). Yet despite a sense that the government does not value their work, both Betinha and Dona Paula explained their personal satisfaction with this work:

Betinha: Today I have some [adult literacy students] in third and second grade, in school. This work is very gratifying, very gratifying. This is a very satisfying [*gostoso*] work. Look, Ana, to be a [pastoral] leader is a work that is so satisfying [*gostoso*], much more so than being a health agent, do you understand this?

AA: So, you have more love for the Pastoral?

Together: Yes.

Dona Paula: We leave from it feeling like ourselves.

Many women in Sobradinho recounted to me that they did their work “out of love” (*por amor*).<sup>244</sup> But also significant in the quote above is the way that Dona Paula says, that they leave from the work “feeling like ourselves.”<sup>245</sup> Similarly a young woman who volunteered in the community-run daycare, which will be discussed later in this chapter, claimed that she “learned how to be more human” during her time working at the community-run crèche. While I also concur with analyses that critique the failure of government programs to support and fund social programs, I think it important to stress the significant politics of care that women engage in through their involvement in such projects and how this involvement serves to nurture social/economic subjects who do not self-identify on market terms or as liberal individuals.

Refusing to assess these projects by market-based or governmental notions of value, volunteers reassert the importance of the realm of care as they work in these projects. These works cultivate a sort of responsibility-based ethic (Spivak 1992; 2000) which transcends the realm of government bureaucracy and which fosters community-based responsibility and prioritizes *care* of others over other motives. Volunteers were aware that they received insufficient support (both monetary and symbolic) from

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<sup>244</sup> The terms that Betinha uses to describe how she experiences her work are both gratifying (*gratificante*) and satisfying (*gostoso*). I want to note the very visceral and bodily connotations of using the word she uses to describe the work: *gostoso*. The term can be used for any sort of bodily pleasure: anything from an enjoyable experience to eating delicious food to sexual pleasure. The term could be translated more simply as “to like” but it also implies that one’s “likes” and “dislikes” are connected with affective and embodied domains.

<sup>245</sup> Certainly a theory of subjectivity argues that there is no “core self.” However, the sense of satisfaction that is expressed by these women I do not think can or should be attributed to a form of governmentality. What these women are referring to are, as I understand it, aspects of human connection that transcend the instrumental logic of governmental policy and programs. Dos Anjos (2007) might disagree, as she argues that the Pastoral aims to produce subjects who identify as “leaders” in the Pastoral program (which the Program certainly does). I am arguing that the situation is more complex, since these women are not applying an instrumental logic to their work.]

governmental authorities but were proud of the work they accomplished themselves without the support of the government. There was a sense of pride in knowing that they knew how to get things done for the community. For example, Maria proudly recounted how she managed to purchase the land where the Pastoral center in her area of town is located, including how she and other volunteers constructed the center piece-by-piece. Another volunteer recounted the story of a bridge that was built to one of the out-lying *povoados* in the municipality of Sobradinho; it was built by residents because if they had waited for the municipal government to do it, “it would never happen.”

The *Pastoral da Criança* is one of several children-oriented programs that receives funding from a national telethon called *Criança Esperança* (Children’s Hope), sponsored by Brazilian media giant Globo television. This yearly telethon includes a number of performances by Brazil’s top performers intended to tug at viewers’ heartstrings. Godelier (1999) provides a critique of just these types of calls as what he terms the “unreturned gift.” The unreturned gift in the neoliberal context, Godelier argues, is called upon to solve the problems of society – healthcare, education, and other social programs. He asserts that giving creates a set of obligations from the “receivers” to the anonymous “givers” which constitutes a form of violence. Godelier has noted how gift-giving for much of the later 20th century had been relegated to the realms of private life and personal relations, but now, under neoliberal policy and market ideology, gift-giving is moving into public political realm. I would argue that the Pastoral da Criança and the now defunct *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger) programs of the Lula administration were part of that trend, as they depend on or depended on civil society’s donations and support



for their work. Godelier critiques this development, asserting that this form of giving does not strengthen those socially “progressive” aspects of the Gift (such as building community).<sup>246</sup> This form of unreturned gift-giving instead allows for a form of passive participatory citizenship: one is asked simply to give money without any further sense of social obligation. This analysis applies to the *Criança Esperança* telethon; however, the forms of giving and reciprocity practiced by the actual volunteers in the pastorals differs significantly from the “unreturned gift” by anonymous Brazilian television. These volunteers live with and generally belong to the same social class as those who they are serving. Not only do volunteers make claims of “receiving” something from their volunteer activities, such as a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, but they also create forms of communal reciprocity and connection through their Pastoral work. This occurs at the same time that the project may participate in forms of governmentalizing power.

While I am not advocating that the government should not support government-based social programs and projects, I think these volunteers’ stances indicate the cultivation of collective economic subjectivities. Betinha and Paula assert that the pastoral work that they do without pay is in fact more satisfying than the work they get paid to do as Community Health agents. In essence, they refer to the sort of bridging between work and care that theologian Leonardo Boff calls for in his work. I will further discuss the implications of these projects in the concluding section of this chapter but first I want to discuss the community gardens and the herbal pharmacy.

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<sup>246</sup> By “The Gift” I am referring to the book piece by the same name by Marcel Mauss (1990 [1950]) in which he conducts an anthropological analysis of practices of reciprocity.

## The Community Gardens and the Herbal Pharmacy at the Community Center

Connected to the projects discussed above are also the community gardens, one of which is located within the compound of the Community Center and the associated Herbal Pharmacy, which is run from the Community Center. Residents working in these projects particularly women volunteers, reconnect the worlds of work and care through everyday practice, despite governmental policy and regulations. These volunteers contribute to a care economy, but also rub up against state regulations that at times make it difficult to continue the work of the care economy.

Padre Eduardo's work, discussed in the previous section, also resulted in the establishment of a community garden. In honor of his role, the families working in the garden decided to name the garden after him once he left the community. Betinha described the founding of the garden to me:

Betinha: We acquired the land through the prefecture. It was a huge garbage dump, so we had to work hard to make it what it is. We solicited to the prefecture and they said they had no land close to this area, except for where there was this garbage dump [*lixão*]. They said that if we would remove the trash we could have it. So, we had to use our arms and to invite 22 families to participate and we took the trash from the area. The prefecture lent us a machine that allowed us to till the land and donated the stakes and wire [for the fencing]. It was a *mutirão*-- we fenced in the area and divided it into lots and so now each one has their own lot there.

AA: Are they there still?

Betinha: They are there still, but now it is 11 families. Now some families are working for different motives—some had a sickness, some don't have conditions.<sup>247</sup> So today we have this garden there, the community garden . . . They grow herbs and plants for natural medicine to donate to the community.

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<sup>247</sup> Betinha uses a very common idiom in the Portuguese language to speak about one's economic situation: "not having the 'conditions'" (*não tem condições*) or being "without conditions" (*sem condições*). This is a common term in Brazilian Portuguese, not just in Sobradinho, to describe not having the money to pay for something or to do something. To "not have conditions" conveys much more than "not having money." For example, one's ability to go to college or to move (some of the situations about which I heard the term used) entails much more than financial resources. It is about a much broader set of "conditions" under which one can make such a decision or which makes something doable or not doable. In effect, it conveys a sense of context under which decision are made.

AA: So they produce for themselves and then sell the extra?

Betinha: They live off of what they produce there. They live off what they grow and sell. And they donate the herbs for the natural medicine.

Claiming unused lots of land was fairly common practice in the early days of Sobradinho—many residents acquired their house properties in such a way. Residents also commented to me that the practice of the *mutirão* was much more common in the early days of the founding of the town.<sup>248</sup> Through this group work, Betinha describes how they transferred a site of essentially no-value (a dump) into something that serves to nourish community members. She found it noteworthy because they transformed it through their own hard work: “we used our arms” (*nossos braços*) and that no agency did this for the community.

As already discussed, Dona Angélica played a central role in the establishment of the herbal pharmacy as she had intimate knowledge of herbal remedies of the region. In addition, the Catholic Church diocese organized trainings to expand on residents’ existing knowledge of herbal remedies and treatments in the 1980s. This worked morphed into a formal “herbal pharmacy” run through the Church community center which continues to distribute these remedies today. The Sisters of the Daughters of Jesus worked with a lay Catholic leader to establish the garden and herbal pharmacy at the community center. This individual was church activist and social organizer who moved into the São Francisco Valley region to assist with church-based social organizing. He later attempted to serve as an intermediary between local residents and state “participatory development”

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<sup>248</sup> Residents often worked together to help others build houses or establish community facilities—such as the construction and later expansion of the Catholic Church in Vila São Joaquim. The practice of the *mutirão*, some residents reflected to me, is less common now than it was in the early days of Sobradinho. Although a *mutirão* still happens on occasion such as when the community crèche underwent remodeling fathers of children in the crèche or friends of the crèche helped with the needed labor.

projects in the 1980s. He petitioned the state development planning agency (CAR-*Companhia de Ação Regional*) for funding for the garden and community center; thus, these projects are, in part, the outcome of the state-sponsored participatory planning projects of the 1980s. At its initiation, the garden had the express purpose of providing a space for youth that would keep them off the street, in addition to growing food for their families and the community in general.

Arlinda, one of the women who distributes soup at the community center, described how she came to Sobradinho with her husband in November 19, 1986.<sup>249</sup> She soon started working with the Catholic nuns in the community garden at the Community Center Antonio Conselheiro. When I asked her about how the community garden was started, she explained:

This garden was an example for all the families in Sobradinho. Because there were people who would put a pan on the fire to sustain their household of up to 12 people for the entire month with not even one day lacking. Because we planted everything here. In this garden here! So many people looked at this garden with admiration and this garden benefited so many people. There were 60 families planting here: planting and collecting—the objective was to eat greens and to sell what was left over. Sister Fernanda would make a big [pot of] soup and she would get cow bones to make it better and I would cook it. This soup was a very rich soup and it was available everyday. And the children, those of the garden, would do this too. Many of them did not know how to eat greens and they learned to eat greens. They learned so much that we would put greens in the soup and the pan and they would go and get more greens and put more in the pan! [AA: They started to like it!] They learned to like greens.

After the interview was over she laughingly told me that those children who worked in the garden grew up to be taller and bigger than many other youth in the town because of the healthy foodstuffs that they produced and consumed. While Arlinda's assessment of the importance of eating greens certainly reflects the influence of scientific discourses of health and nutrition, it also reflects residents' assessments of the positive contributions

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<sup>249</sup> Arlinda, like many of those interviewed, named the date of her arrival at Sobradinho to the day.

that the garden made to the community.<sup>250</sup> As the garden was started at a time when malnutrition was a severe problem in the town, the garden served as a hopeful example of what could be done and provide an important source of both nutritious food but also social support.

For example, for Arlinda the experience working in the garden went beyond the results of producing food for herself and community members. For her, the experience of *convivência* (being-in-common) in the garden was central:

Thank God that I had the community garden when I got pregnant with Terezinha. I worked in the garden with her by my side. The *convivência* [being together] and all of that [was important], the girls would say “Arlinda, let me pick up Terezinha!” After Terezinha was born, then after two years my son was born, then Laura was born. Terezinha was from ’88, and me working in the garden with them.

The term “*convivência*”<sup>251</sup> that Arlinda uses connotes the feeling of “being together” or “living with others.”<sup>252</sup> This is the same term that theorist Jean Luc Nancy (1991, 2000) refers to in his analysis of “being in common” that Gibson-Graham (2006: 81-82) have adopted in their work on the creation of a community economy, noting that it is this act of “being in common” that creates a sense of community. They argue that *convivência* serves as a ground for thought and political action, even though this connection has been

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<sup>250</sup> When I asked Arlinda why the work with youth in the garden ended, she said that federal child labor regulations forced them to put an end to this program. The Church and community organizers were concerned that the Church would be accused of perpetuating child labor, so now it is mainly adults from some of the least well-off families in the town which garden here. The issues of legality and adherence to state regulations came up frequently in reference to many community projects: laws intended to “protect” children or other groups often served as barriers to residents continuing certain projects due to concern about legal reprisals.

<sup>251</sup> The Oxford Portuguese-English Dictionary defines *convivência* as either “coexistence” or “close contact”; the term implies relationality.

<sup>252</sup> It is worth noting, as discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 3, that the term *convivência* was chosen by social movements and academics in the region to reframe understandings and mainstream approaches to the semiarid area of Northeast Brazil. The project of these movements centers on creating an attitude of “*convivência com o semi-árido*”—learning to live and work with the conditions of the semiarid region. This spirit of *convivência* is opposed to the developmentalist and interventionist approaches of “solving the problems” of the region through the construction of large-scale development projects.

denied in Western philosophy. For Nancy, as Gibson-Graham note, it is being-in-common which makes possible the cultivation of more community-oriented subjectivities (Gibson-Graham 2006: 85). Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff also points to the practice of *convivência* as what in part makes up the world of care (*cuidado*) and as one of the practices that needs to be nurtured in the efforts to reconnect the world of care and work.

Arlinda was not alone in remembering this time in the Community Center garden as a time of being with others. Rosa Oliveira, who works at the Rural Labor Union in Sobradinho and who used to be one of the most active volunteers in the community center garden also felt the same. She described the joys of working in the garden:

I liked it. I liked working with them [the children]. As you made friends with people you started calling more people in. It was very good. Today, there are still many of them here. They call me “Aunt” or “Mother”. . . That group of young people there [active in the Church], they all worked with us in the garden. João left the garden when he was 12 years old. So he started to do things there in the store. He started getting older and so today he is the manager of the store. But, he passed through the Community Garden.

Rosa Oliveira expresses a sense of an expanded kin network created by her work in the garden with these youth that now call her “Aunt” or “Mother.” Her pride in these youth is apparent in her description of them and their continued participation with the Church and community. In this same interview, she recalled running into a former youth of the garden, now an adult living in São Paulo, who she had not seen in years and who had once been addicted to drugs. He called her mother, hugged her, and introduced her to his wife and child. She saw this as an example of how the garden had served as a positive influence on youth of the time and was clearly delighted to find him happy in life.

Both she and Arlinda referred to several of the politically active youth, now members in the Church and the Pastoral of Youth of the Popular Classes (*Pastoral de Juventude do Meio Popular*), as having worked in the garden at one point. Both women, with an element of humility, implied that it was, in part, these youths' work in the garden that led them to participate as they do today in community. From both of these women's statements, it seems possible that it was the being-in-common in the garden that encouraged these youth to take active roles in the community and to be open to community-oriented projects.<sup>253</sup> In either case, these women's sense of satisfaction and the friendship that they derived from the work was a source of value.

Today, adult residents, elderly, and some older youth still use the garden, but it is not as active of place as it was when it first started.<sup>254</sup> The garden continues to serve as a "safe space," but not necessarily for youth. Rosa Oliveira's sister who might be deemed "mentally ill" by bio-medical or psychiatric standards (although I never heard anyone refer to her in such terms) works in the garden on a daily basis. The garden serves as a social space for her and allows her to converse with the nuns and other residents who work in garden. This is a relief to Rosa while she is at work at the Rural Labor Union; she can rest assured that her sister will be both occupied and looked after by others in the community. This form of communal care which makes up the fiber of everyday life

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<sup>253</sup> I will discuss this further in the concluding chapter, yet it is worth noting here that these are the same youth who are working on projects of rethinking representations of the town and the region as a place of possibility, as touched on in Chapter 4.

<sup>254</sup> While the garden no longer functions as a "safe space" for adolescents, several youth involved in the Youth Pastoral have taken a renewed interest in the garden and are now tilling some plots here in order to learn agricultural skills. This is part of a broader interest among youth in creating alternative livelihood strategies in the town; however, this was an incipient project.

serves as an alternative to formal models of institutionalization that were introduced by modernist biomedical practices.<sup>255</sup>

As we can see, the garden was and is central to maintaining a community economy and in reinforcing acts of reciprocity and giving, in addition to serving as a site for communal sociality for many residents. In many ways the community center and the community garden (a joint space) serve as a form of the “base,” meaning that they are shared interests of the community (Gudeman 2001). The community center was a central location for social meetings in the Vila São Joaquim, the community health agents held their weekly meetings there, trainings and events have happened there, and it housed the community herbal pharmacy as well as the community garden. The door was almost always open and one could walk in at any time and be assured of socializing with other residents, something I certainly took advantage of during my stay in Sobradinho.

When the herbal pharmacy was first established in the community center, it was run under the aegis of the Health Pastoral. The pharmacy provides a set of herbal remedies for residents of the community that are made out of herbs that are grown within the community gardens. These herbs are made into a series of infusions, teas, and syrups (made out of honey) that are sold for five reais a bottle or given out freely to residents who, to use a local idiom, “do not have conditions” to pay for the remedies.

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<sup>255</sup> Similarly a community-run rest-home was established by Padre Eduardo and community volunteers in the 1980s. This rest home called *Casa das Pedras Preciosas* (House of Precious Gems) is now owned by the municipality and partially funded by it. However, residents’ contributions of food and goods were essential to the maintenance of this home. For example, a new gas stove was bought for the home by an anonymous giver during my stay in Sobradinho. Neighbors brought mangoes or other fruit over if they had extra from their garden or farm plots to supplement the elderly residents’ diets. The home was run by dividing the social security payments of those elderly who received social security (not all of them did) in order to support a larger group of homeless elderly.



Arlinda runs the herbal pharmacy. Arlinda was not formally hired as a health agent at the federal level because she has not been *concurzada*, meaning she has not passed to federal level exam for health agents. However, she is employed by the municipality to run the center as a central meeting place for the Community Health Agents—one example of the ways in which residents find ways to accommodate those who have not passed state regulations to work on these projects. Arlinda had this to say about the pharmacy:

We just maintain the pharmacy, we cover only the costs to produce [the remedies]. Whoever can contribute for a syrup, contributes. The money that is contributed stays here to help those who do not have the money. The people who come here who do not have the conditions to buy a remedy, we give it to them.

AA: Is this work related to your work as a Health Agent?

No, this work is Pastoral work. I do it, but it is not supported by [the government], it is done to benefit the community. It is like a non-governmental organization because it belongs to the community [*é da comunidade*].

These syrups are sought after by Sobradinho's residents who come to the center specifically to get one of these home-made remedies when they are sick. Many residents prefer these herbal treatments to the pharmaceutical remedies available in the drugstores of Sobradinho. The pharmacy runs based on practices of redistribution: those who can contribute do, so that those who cannot will still be able to receive a remedy when they need it. As Arlinda describes it "*é da comunidade*" implies that it both came from the community and that it belongs to the community.<sup>256</sup> For Gibson-Graham (1996; 2005)

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<sup>256</sup> Arlinda's comments reflect the increasing governmental role of non-governmental organizations. She compares the pharmacy to an NGO to "legitimize" the project. Gupta and Ferguson have used the term "transnational governmentality" to refer to the current governing role that transnational NGOs and institutions (2002). Community-based initiatives are becoming increasingly NGO-ized or at least feel the pressures to present their work in such terms; certainly the *Pastoral da Criança* described in this chapter falls within the domain of a seeming non-state actor that has assumed governing power along the lines of Foucault's notion of governmentality. I was surprised and amused to hear Arlinda describe the work of the herbal pharmacy as "like an NGO" because the description seemed "out of place" to me and certainly not part of Arlinda's everyday speech. The fact that Arlinda was speaking to me, a foreigner, and, perhaps,

and Gudeman (2001) this is one of the central elements of a community economy: the redistribution of surplus within the community.<sup>257</sup> The herbs produced in the garden are redistributed among its members and those who can contribute are expected to do so in order that those who cannot will still receive a remedy. The herbs, which are produced in the garden, are then freely given to the pastorals and to the herbal pharmacy. Food that is produced in excess is also often donated to the community daycare, to the adolescent girls' center, or to the home for the elderly. When the bananas or acerola in the garden ripen, the fruits are collected and brought to these institutions to be added to the meals of the day. As discussed earlier, the community center serves as a form of the "base" or patrimony of the community as it serves as a community resource and space for *convivência*.

While the herbal pharmacy was established under Church initiative, the municipal government has since taken interest in their work.

This pharmacy, these remedies that are bottled, the multi-mixture [a syrup of various herbs]-- in the beginning the municipality helped with the costs of making the multi-mixture and they always gave some help to the Pastoral. The last mayor, in his two terms, gave us \$500 reais to help with the multi-mixture. They helped because for the municipality there was an advantage because the levels of malnutrition ended. Childhood death ended. And this is why the municipality became interested in us. [But,] [w]e reinforce the work of the Pastoral, of the Church.

Arlinda's comment reflects her awareness of governmentality: she is aware that the municipality's interest in the Pastoral was due to the work that they were involved in lowering infant mortality in the town, not due to any sort of "good-will" on the

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seeming like a representative of an NGO, likely influenced her description of the pharmacy's work causing her to use terms that she thought might be more intelligible to me.

<sup>257</sup> If one of the defining characteristics principles of capitalism is the expropriation of surplus, then the communal distribution of surplus indicates an area in which one can identify practices that contribute to the community (not market) economy. See J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006: 90-93).

municipality's part. Yet the women involved in these programs (the Children's Pastoral and the Health Pastoral) are very proud of the fact that they contributed to the diminution of childhood malnutrition in Sobradinho. It is something spoken of with pride by many of the women involved in the *Pastoral da Criança*. What I am implying is that even if these women's work suits "governmental" needs, the intent and motivation behind their efforts follows a different cultural/economic logic than that of state power. I believe the volunteers are well aware of this difference. The residents involved in the pastoral strongly felt that the numbers of children dying was unacceptable and their work was an assertion of the value of the lives of children and residents of their community. This same sort of sentiment was reflected by many involved with the community-run daycare, as I will discuss below.

### **The Community Run Daycare**

This section focuses on the work of the *Creche Comunitária Gente Valente*—the Courageous Folks Community Daycare. In a similar fashion to the previously discussed projects, those who work in the daycare unite the realms of work and care and consequently cultivate group-oriented subjectivities. The crèche itself is an example of the care economy at work. It is something that was built out of "necessity" or as a seeming "last resort," but more importantly it serves to cultivate group-oriented values. Volunteering at the crèche was a full-time job and an intensive work experience. Most of the volunteers at the crèche were young women aged 18 to 24, a different demographic than the mixed ages of the other pastoral volunteers. The crèche was also a largely feminine space, as all of the permanent volunteers were young women. Fathers and other

men in the community contributed at times when construction or remodeling work was needed. Parents who use the facilities do not have to pay for childcare, but it is hoped (and expected) by the coordinators that if a mother is between jobs that she will help out in the crèche. Some of the mothers stay on to volunteer full time.

The crèche was started in 1987 by the Catholic Sisters of the Daughters of Jesus when they first arrived in the town. With the help of the parish priest they held a town meeting with residents under a tree<sup>258</sup> in order to find out what projects would best suit the needs of residents. Many women whose spouses had left in search of work showed up at the meeting and requested a plot of land on which they could grow food and a daycare to keep their children while they were working the fields. The plot of land later became the *Roça das Mulheres*, the women's farm plot.<sup>259</sup> The request for a daycare ultimately became the community crèche, which today cares for 144 children within the municipality, most of whom are children of some of the lowest income residents of the Vila São Joaquim. Both the Sisters and the crèche's director, Clara da Silva, described the crèche's humble beginnings with minimal resources in a house that was falling apart. Now the crèche has a full cafeteria, a newly remodeled nursery, and is working towards becoming legalized as a school.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Residents involved in various projects in Sobradinho often recalled that the first meeting of that group (such as the *Pastoral da Criança*, the NGO-supported Project Sobradinho, and many of the first masses in Vila São Joaquim) was held "under a tree" in order to avoid the hot sun of the region. Residents recall that there were few public buildings at the time of these meetings—one reason why today's community center is so important to community life in the Vila São Joaquim.

<sup>259</sup> There was a split in the leadership of this women's group and a few years after it was started two women's plots were set up with two different coordinating committees. One group of women remained in close association with the Catholic Church and the other has closer ties with the Rural Labor Union in Sobradinho.

<sup>260</sup> Much of the funding for the materials for these renovations comes from a German church group which has raised money to support various projects in Sobradinho since the 1980s.

Clara da Silva the director of the daycare is known for her militant care of the *Crèche Comunitária Gente Valente*. She is also very active in organizing church events, such as masses and celebrations. The former cook of the crèche once affectionately described Clara as *danada*, which indicates being stubborn and crafty, but the sort of stubbornness that is admired for the ability to get things done.<sup>261</sup> She is known as someone who will fight fiercely for the crèche; Clara ensures that funds that are supposed to arrive from the municipality actually do arrive for the children instead of disappearing into the local government coffers (as they have been known to do). She is known to be opinionated and a question-asker; unafraid to ask where and how funds within the municipality are being allocated. She also serves on several municipal committees which address the distribution of social services in Sobradinho. The young women who volunteer in the crèche with her are held to very high standards in terms of their comportment both within and outside of the crèche. They are expected not only be attentive monitors while in the crèche but to also serve as Christian role models when out in the community. I mention all of this because it is in many ways Clara's strong character that has shaped how the crèche is organized.

Because of these standards, working in the crèche entails a project of re-subjectivation. Clara seeks to create a sense of unity and involvement in a common mission among volunteers. For example, one day I dropped by to find a piece of paper posted on one of the crèche walls that stated in Portuguese, "The least important word = Me. The most important word = We." Clara did not put this up as a trite inspirational

<sup>261</sup> According to the Dictionary of the Northeast *danada/danado* indicates "Something very good, very cool [ *muito legal*], extraordinary (Navarro 2004: 128)." The definition which best conveys the use here in the Michaelis Brazilian Portuguese dictionary is "Sharp, able, skilled [*jeitoso*], courageous [*valente*]" although there are negative connotations of the word as well.

phrase—she expects others in the crèche to put aside their individual needs and to think about group needs. For example, each monitor (as the women who work there are called) receives a monthly “gratuity,” which comes to the amount of approximately R\$80 per month. The money for this gratuity is provided by the Congregation of the *Filhas de Jesus*, the congregation of the nuns of Sobradinho. Because money is limited, the women at the crèche decide together how much each member will receive from this fixed pool of cash. Rather than a model based upon the assumed fairness of dividing the payments equally amongst participants, instead attention is given to the specificities of each volunteer’s home situation: whether they have children, an employed or unemployed spouse, are attending university, whether their funds help support their parents and siblings, and so on.<sup>262</sup> These decisions are made as a group. Each volunteer’s situation or problems are seen as everyone’s problem, so each monitor’s home situation is taken into account when dividing the gratuity. At any one time approximately 2-3 volunteers may earn a bit more than the others.<sup>263</sup> From what I witnessed, there was no resentment around this issue. What this case demonstrates is how the process of resubjection in the crèche extends beyond the Gibson-Graham’s reference to the formation of economic subjects—this process is about a broader re/creation of relationality. Working in the crèche serves to create collective subjects, not just different sorts of “economic” subjects.

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<sup>262</sup> The practice of dividing monetary resources is not unique to the crèche. When the Rural Labor Union experienced hard economic times and was to cut some younger members’ from their staff, elder staff members gave up a portion of their own minimum salaries. This brought their wages well below the minimum of R\$300 at the time, but this assured that everyone received some sort of salary. Similarly, this could also be equated with the way that social security payments are shared among the elderly at the community-run rest home for homeless elderly.

<sup>263</sup> For example, one volunteer who was attending university was having a hard time paying for the bus fare to attend university in Petrolina. This was seen to be a problem that the entire crèche had to deal with—not an individual problem that this young woman was left to her own devices for which to find a solution.

However, the money received was not considered a payment or salary; rather it was referred to as a “gratuity” (*gratificação*) by Clara. The amount is small (compared to the R\$300-350 that was the minimum salary at the time of research) and volunteering at the crèche is demanding work.<sup>264</sup> Therefore, the Catholic Sisters and Clara recognize that this payment is much more of a way to thank the volunteers for their service rather than a salary.<sup>265</sup> The crèche is understaffed and there are often more children per adult than might be ideal. Many young women do not stay long because of the demanding work. For these reasons, and for reasons which will be explored below, Clara expects that the young women’s motivation to work at the crèche should transcend those of receiving the “gratuity.” Many former volunteers cited the richness of what they received from their work, beyond the gratuity, as we will see below.

As some of the women get older, have children, or get married, they seek out other service-oriented forms of work, such as taking the *concurso* to become a community health agent. In doing so, they continue these forms of care work, but also receive a salary that provides more stability for their household. Several of the women I spoke with who worked in the crèche explained that they had learned a lot from their

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<sup>264</sup> Monitors arrive at 7:00 am in order to be there when parents and children arrive. They usually are on site until 5 or 6 in the evening. Each monitor has a group of 20-30 children of the same age-group to attend to. In the nursery, where babies and toddlers are kept, there are about 2-3 women for a group of approximately 20-30 babies. There are no “disposable” diapers and often by the end of the day the crèche runs out of clean cloth ones to place on the babies; but by the time mothers arrive in the afternoon all of the babies have been bathed, redressed in fresh clothing and laid down to nap with much playful attention on the part of the women who work there. The floor is swept and mopped amidst joking and laughing. The day includes at least 2-3 feedings of the babies with homemade baby foods made by the monitors. This is just one example an average day at the crèche—although duties vary depending on the age of the children.

<sup>265</sup> The total of R\$80 is more than many women make working as a domestic servant in many of the homes in the Vila Santana of Sobradinho. While the minimum wage was R\$300-350 a month at the time of my fieldwork, many domestics made between R\$80-150 a month.

experiences at the crèche. For example, twenty-seven year old Taís dos Anjos had this to say about the years she spent working in the crèche:

Clara helps us a lot in regards to family relations in the teachings [*formações*] that she provides us. She teaches you how to *conviver* [to live with] your family and in society. For example, before I entered into the crèche I was very *brigante* [argumentative]. I always liked to help, but before if my husband left and returned when he arrived I was angry. But, now I want to hear him explain where he was. Now I know that first you need to listen. Clara taught this to me—I thank her for this. She spoke of things like this in the teachings that she provided for us – she would say that we need to learn how to listen in order to afterwards speak.

Taís then went on to explain:

I learned from her that we don't need to ask things from our husbands but instead communicate with them. We should not say, "Fulano, will you let me go to this place?" Instead we should say, "Look, Fulano, I am going to a conference." *Pronto!* [Done!]- I am communicating!

Taís's statements are significant because she highlights that despite feminist concerns that church-oriented projects do not challenge gender hierarchy or rework the domestic division of labor, under the right sort of setting and leadership, I observed that they may contribute to such changes.<sup>266</sup> Although she would never label herself a feminist, I found that Clara's instruction and role-modeling often followed what might be deemed feminist principles of mutual respect, speaking one's mind, and asserting individual autonomy without compromising group commitment. Women involved in the crèche were not taught to submit to their husbands but to communicate with them and, more importantly, prioritized a group ethic that did not sacrifice individual self-respect. Here individual autonomy entailed responsibility towards others and a sense of connection to and care for others. Granted there *was* a priority given to care of children and nurturing qualities, but I

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<sup>266</sup> The works of Alvarez (1990), Drogus (1997), Drogus and Stewart-Gambino (2005) all came to similar conclusions: participation in Ecclesiastical Base Communities (CEBs) and other Catholic Church organized projects did little to challenge existing gender hierarchy or to create gender consciousness, but they did allow some participants to rethink gender roles and led to personal empowerment for some participants (Drogus and Stewart-Gambino 2005).



argue that this prioritization serves as a response to the capitalization of daily life not some sort of “failure” to become proper feminist subjects. These projects are not set up to challenge or restructure existing gender roles, but they do end up empowering women in ways that do not reinscribe women’s subordination.<sup>267</sup>

However, I do not want to misrepresent these projects as taking radical stances on the reconstruction gender roles. The focus of Church projects was often on cultivating community-oriented economic subjects, *not* feminist subjects. (And that’s OK!) For Clara, doing Pastoral work implies that you are doing what you do for free, without payment, because of a desire to serve God. This is a key element of pastoral work for Clara: one needs to do this work because one has an orientation towards involvement in community work. For example, when I asked Clara about the importance of what I often heard her refer to as “testimony” (*testemunho*) in the community, she had this to say:

They [the volunteers] have to develop a pastoral work, linked with the church. The majority are catechists. So, they have a community [oriented] characteristic: the giving of service linked with the church. Others are agents of block meetings, and serve as block organizers [*animadores de quadra*]. They organize meetings, celebrations [in their town blocks]. They need to have testimony of a Christian life. The person [who volunteers] has to be honest, bringing their values and principles with them. Someone who is in the crèche cannot be [hanging out] in any which environment. There are certain environments which are sites of prostitution [*campos de prostituição*], she cannot hang out inside these. Sobradinho has environments like this. People frequent these places and an educator in the crèche cannot frequent this sort of environment.

As is explained above, “testimony” refers not to verbal testimony but to the idea that monitors’ actions and behavior were testimony or proof of their commitment to a Christian life. *Testemunho*, then, means that their behavior was to teach others by

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<sup>267</sup> For example, the young women in the crèche were encouraged to pursue higher education. The crèche directory made efforts to support these young women, (financially, if necessary) in pursuing advanced degrees. The desire was that they would then become educators, with teaching degrees, in the crèche. I do not think the value of this should be underestimated, in the context of the difficulty of accessing post-secondary education in Sobradinho.

example. As we can see, Clara's expectations extend beyond these young women's work at the crèche, but include forms of community and church participation. In addition, her expectations encompass a set of behaviors that are supposed to attest to these young women's proper moral conduct in the community.<sup>268</sup> In this regard, these projects do reproduce certain forms of gendered standards for young women: the propriety of abstention from sexual relations prior to heterosexual marriage<sup>269, 270</sup> and from frequenting places which are deemed disreputable. One reason participation in the crèche may have

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<sup>268</sup> This is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the concerns expressed by Clara about improper sites (*campos de prostituição*) was a common concern expressed by young women: several women in their thirties commented that women wanted to be sure not to be seen frequenting certain bars or restaurants in town lest one be gossiped about. I gathered that this concern was less about literal prostitution than about concern about moral propriety and abstention from sexual intercourse outside of marriage. A few residents indicated a snack shop to me that "*gente boa*" (good people) hung out at; this was told to me as a form of advice as to where I should want to eat should I want to grab a snack away from home and where I would not be judged for doing so. In addition, when I asked about a particular bar-restaurant that had live music shows on Sundays, I was told (by not particularly pious or religious young women) that I probably wouldn't want to be seen there, nor would they, because the crowd was "mixed" (in this case, meaning "prostitutes" and regular folks). One could be gossiped about for going there, especially if one was seen to be drinking.

<sup>269</sup> The possibilities of a gay or lesbian lifestyle were also never broached as a possible lifestyle choice among young women or men involved in Church projects. The few times that the subject came up or in which I probed the issue, reactions tended towards those of disgust. There was a small group of *travestis* (transvestites) in Sobradinho and there was a "hotel" that many rumored and gossiped about as the home of lesbians. In addition, during a meeting with women in Sobradinho to set up a *Pastoral da Mulher Marginalizada* (Pastoral for Marginalized Women) to work in support of prostitutes in the town, lesbian relationships were discussed with a mixture of curiosity and disgust by the potential volunteers. The radical Catholic nun of the Oblate order in Juazeiro asserted the validity of this lifestyle option to the women at the meeting despite their seeming incredulity. When I spoke with this nun later in Juazeiro, she asserted that the women's moralism and judgment were some of the first things that would need to be addressed before a *Pastoral da Mulher* could be established in Sobradinho. Similarly, the Catholic priest of Sobradinho asserted during that same meeting that the effort to start a *Pastoral da Mulher* was not to "save" these women. Indeed, the Church did not serve simply as a conservative nor a radical force, but was much more complex of an institution than either characterization.

<sup>270</sup> Linda Rebhun (1999) documents the increasing social significance of the elaborate Victorian "white wedding" in the interior of the Northeast— complete with white bridal gown, formally decorated Church ceremony, and reception. She notes that these wedding ceremonies have become markers of social status more than a religious sacrament. The older generation either had simple wedding ceremonies and/or marriage was established by prolonged cohabitation. Young women in Sobradinho were eager to show guests their wedding albums and these frequently included photos of the wedding gifts piled together, indicating the increasing importance of consumer goods in wedding rituals. Some young couples waited years to get married just to they could do it "right"—i.e. afford all of the expected wedding accouterments.

been attractive to many of these Catholic young women was that it was often considered “appropriate” work outside the home that did not expose them to any questions regarding their moral character.<sup>271</sup> It paid comparable to what a domestic servant might make in the engineer’s villa of Vila Santana, but also did not require one being placed in position of “servant” to a family and it was a social and lively atmosphere where the young women bonded and developed close, supportive friendships.

Clara felt that a proper wage was important even though they could not provide one, but she also thought that working in the crèche required a different way of being in the world. For Clara this work is related to ways of “being,” which she opposed to a mode of existence based on “having” that are tied to a Catholic Christian ethic:

When you have a Pastoral work you are on a mission to serve, which implies doing it for free. So when we have this desire to serve God in the person of our Brothers, we feel it necessary to attend to those who need it the most. In this case, today, it is children, the majority of whom do not even have the support of their family. So we need to attend to this necessity, we need to have this “charisma,” which is linked with religion. We need to deepen our spiritual side, to really strengthen this desire to serve. And this does not happen through this way of living which “wants to have” [*querer ter*] but through that which “wants to be” [*querer ser*]. Because we live in a capitalist country that values those who have, right? The most important thing in a capitalist country is that you work in function of this. And when you have this other vision of community work, truly the service of the Church is not “to have” but “to be,” you give of the “to be” [being] in favor of life.

Here Clara elaborates on their work on cultivating certain desires: she sees their mission in the Church and in the crèche as to cultivate the desire “to be” rather than a striving mode of being oriented towards “having” (material goods). We can see echoes of Clara’s words in Brandt’s (1995) analysis of the care economy: caring for those who are dependent, such as children has no value in the visible market economy, which is why

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<sup>271</sup> An interesting contrast to Clara’s high standards for propriety was a comment from the former Mother Superior, stating that she felt it would be easier to staff the crèche if Clara’s standards were not so high. The Mother Superior’s standards were, apparently, more lax than that of the lay director, as this nun did not see the young women’s outside moral conduct as pertinent to their work in the crèche. I bring this up to highlight that congregants, not the Church clergy, could be the enforcers of stricter moral standards.

Clara saw it as an urgent need. Also echoing Boff's contrast between the world of work and the world of care, Clara provides her own contrast of modes of being: that of being in the world (which entails acting in it) versus a mode of being in the world oriented towards the acquisition of material goods. If the entrenchment of waged labor in the region has created a sense of lack among residents, Clara takes a strong stance against being positioned as a subject of lack and instead hints at the possibilities of resistance by focusing on "being" (with others). In essence this is a refusal to be subjected as a market-oriented subject.

Clara knew of my research interests in "alternative economics and values" (as I short-handed it in descriptions) so it is certainly possible that her knowledge of my interest influenced her discourse about "living in a capitalist country." However, this sort of thinking was put into Clara's actual practice and expectations of others and it was also a system of values elaborated in the Catholic Church teachings in the community, which I witnessed throughout my stay in Sobradinho.<sup>272</sup> In emphasizing the importance of creating a desire "to give" rather a desire "to have" Clara is articulating one of the projects of the progressive Church in the region which seeks to cultivate a desire for giving and sharing wealth rather than that of material accumulation. In many ways this could be seen as a resacralization of life (in Clara's words, "being in favor of life"), which modernized state bureaucracy and market-oriented models of value have desacralized in many ways. This is one reason that reading these politics as "anti-feminist" is problematic; it fails to address the other sorts of politics that could be at play in this valuation of life. Similarly, this could be read as a project of revalorizing the realm of

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<sup>272</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the parish priest's explicit critique of the market.

care and of reuniting the split between the worlds of work and care (Boff 1999). So, for Clara this is a very explicit project of nurturing forms of community-oriented, non-market subjectivities.

Clara could be considered what Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci referred to as an “organic intellectual,” in that she expresses a vision rooted in local issues and her community. Similar to Gramsci’s formulation of an organic intellectual, she derives her analyses from her class-positioning and concrete experience. She could also be likened to what philosophers Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997) have referred to as a “history maker.” In their formulation, a history maker is one who has a special skill in entrepreneurship, citizen action, and solidarity cultivation (Spinoza, Dreyfus, and Flores 1997). History making, in their elaboration, changes the ways in which people understand and deal with themselves and things in the world. Clara, rather than disclosing new possibilities as Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus describe, instead discloses how a particular world (traditional, religious values) which are in need of defense against the onslaught of “modernist” values introduced over the past several decades in the semiarid. She actively cultivates a space and project in which these values can be supported and furthered. Because of her particular positioning, she does not easily fit the category of “progressive” or “conservative.”

But, how do the volunteers experience it? For many volunteers the work in the crèche is an experience of establishing solidarity and in building strong friendships with other women. Linda Rebhun’s ethnography *The Heart is Unknown Country: Love in the Changing Economy of Northeast Brazil* (1999) explored the importance of women’s

friendships and networks under increasing economic insecurity and the emergence of new marital, cohabitation, and fidelity patterns in a town in the semiarid region of Pernambuco. In this sensitively written ethnography, she demonstrates how affective ties were inextricably bound up in forms of economic and material support. However Rebhun avoids reducing women's friendships and relationships to a calculating economic logic despite the importance of these relationships in maintaining economic security. Similarly the young women volunteering in the crèche supported each other in ways that were both material and affective. Many other women in Sobradinho who were not necessarily linked with Church projects also commented on the importance of their friends and neighbors in helping them raise their children and in make it through tough economic times.

The value of their friendships were tied to volunteers' sense that the crèche was a formational experience and place, one which taught them different ways of being and relating to others. Claudia Nunes, who is now a community health agent and who once served as part-time coordinator of the crèche, has this to say about her time there:

The experience there was fantastic . . . I learned how to be more human and to not hurt others in a way I had never learned before . . . So, my experience there made me stronger in my [spiritual] path. What brought me a lot in this work was love itself, [the love] that I had for others. I discovered that I had this love for other people. I think if you live in life without loving other people, without giving to others there is no way to live.

She and other former volunteers expressed how they learned how to work with and deal with differences among others. She laughingly commented on the disagreements that arose when she worked there, and how she and the other volunteers worked through those disagreements. Claudia is getting at one of the essences of Gibson-Graham's view of *convivência* (being in common) and community—community is constructed through

being together rather than an essentialist conception of community that assumes a pre-existing unity. The crèche served as a space of sociality and conviviality among those who worked there and those who visited, which, along with their sense of service, contributed to the young women's commitment despite the hard work demanded of them. The holiday celebrations, the day-to-day camaraderie and frustrations, and the group decision-making process helped to create a sense of community among the young women who work at the daycare. This smaller community ends up serving the broader community by providing much needed free daycare services for some of the lowest income mothers and fathers in Sobradinho. In addition, on a material level it assures that the children who attend the daycare receive at least two well-rounded meals a day.

### **Economizing and Futurity Concerns**

However, despite the benefits to the monitors and to the wider community that the crèche, the pastorals, and other church-based projects provide, there are tensions and anxieties around volunteering rather than seeking paid employment which might provide one with a federally issued worker's card.<sup>273</sup> These tensions are related to emerging concerns about "the future" and about one's financial security that are tied to the social and economic changes introduced by the construction of the Sobradinho dam and the rise of export-oriented agroindustry in the São Francisco Valley. Residents' emerging concerns about the future and security existed alongside some Church members' worries that some in the community did not economically plan for the future. I will explore how new anxieties were produced by concern for the future and planning, which are related to

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<sup>273</sup> The workers' identification cards are known alternately under the names of *carteira de trabalho* (work card), *carteira assinada* (signed card), or a *carteira profissional* (professional card) and were considered victories of the workers' movements of the 1960s. For further explanation see Chapter 3.

the entrenchment of market-oriented and future-oriented economic models in the region. These anxieties complicated some residents' willingness and desire to give of themselves as volunteers in community-oriented projects. Other residents worked in opposition to such anxieties to assure that they are not "captured" as market-oriented subjects. I emphasize that these insecurities were created by the dam construction and the agroindustrial production in the valley in order to counter the dominant representations of the economy of the São Francisco Valley asserts that agroindustry brought economic and social well-being to the region's residents.

While Clara and other church organizers seek to cultivate a sense of giving and sharing among those involved in church projects, and, by and large, those who participated in these works felt that they benefited from their experiences, some participants expressed concern over the fact that they did not receive a salary. Herein lies some of the contradictions of this volunteer work, the Church mission, and some of the cultural values and assumptions of some of its adherents. While the Church seeks to cultivate communitarian, altruistic, and solidary values, some Church organizers also find it frustrating that the local population had no tradition of saving and planning (monetarily) for the future. They decried what they described as a regional tendency to spend what one had today because "you never know if you may have it tomorrow."

Some activists and social organizers in the region attributed this "lack" of future-orientedness as being the outcome of patterns of labor migration and landlessness: i.e. tenant farmers and *vaqueiros* (cowboys) in the region who may have been forced to move at the landowner's whim, which resulted in a sense of never feeling "tied" to the land and



consequently not planning for a future in that locale in the same way that a permanent resident and their community might have. Certainly many residents in Sobradinho were not migratory laborers prior to the construction, and whatever the root, many social organizers expressed a desire to encourage those in the region to save and plan to the future in order to guard against the vagaries of the market. I repeat this not to assert the “truth” of such statements but merely to relate a common perception I heard expressed about the “cultural traits” and economic practices of residents of the region.

These worries were not couched as criticisms, but rather anxieties expressed by organizers over what they saw as practices that did not serve residents well, given the changing social and economic conditions introduced by the increasing hegemony of market-based economic models in the region. These concerns were expressed (largely, but not entirely) by those associated with the Church who had come to the region from the South of Brazil and whose background would have been more fully integrated into a market economy. Thus, market-oriented ways of thinking were more “sedimented” (Butler 1993) and congealed for these Church participants, as opposed to ways in which dependence on the market was thrust upon those residents who had been dislocated by the lake’s waters and who had lived in small towns and settlements in the semiarid. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the residents of the region had always been connected to the market so my intent is not to portray residents as having been “disconnected” in the past. However, *dependency on* the market was a new situation for many residents.

Older economic models were often more conducive to church participation because they were premised on mutual obligation and reciprocity, whereas new models, premised upon market terms and futurity, were not. In what follows, Clara expresses the values that she thinks those who are involved in Pastoral and Church work should have:

For many people it is important to think of tomorrow, to study, to guarantee that you can have a better mode of life and to have some stability. But for me, and for those who are truly involved in this work, this does not have value. Your desire is to look for, to become educated in [*formar*] in how you can better attend [to others], to be placed in the service of your brother.

Here Clara implies that learning and education happen through service to others, rather than formal education. The verb “*formar*” which Clara uses above is usually used in reference to graduating from a university or high school degree program. However, Clara uses the term in a very different way, emphasizing that she believes that there are other sorts of experiences that can serve as important learning opportunities. At the same time, Clara *has* received a university degree in pedagogy (through the patronage of the Catholic sisters). She has done this because once the crèche applies to become a school, her possession of a secondary education will enable her to pass through the regulatory hoops to legalize the crèche. Thus while she values “everyday learning,” she also has had to deal with the exigencies of running a crèche that must meet governmental guidelines and standards.

Yet she highlights the tensions that have emerged with a belief system which focuses on “security” and success and those group-oriented values that the Catholic Church seeks to nurture. While many participants in the Church urge residents to live in concern for the group, there are many other forces, including participation in the Church, that urge residents to think about their future “security.” In many ways members of the

Church saw their work and mission as one of “teaching” residents to plan for the future—not because they devalued their practices, rather out of concern about their security.

However, I want to make it clear that these values were *not* aligned like this:

Communitarian Economic/Social Ethic = Values Supported by the Catholic Church

Nor were they merely aligned like this:

Market-oriented, future-oriented thinking = Values Supported by the Catholic Church

Nor like this:

Market-oriented, future-oriented thinking = Secular Orientation

What I do want to suggest is that the Church served both as an institution which encouraged certain forms of communitarian, non-market oriented values, while at the same time instilling certain market-oriented values (perhaps unwittingly) in residents.

Clara described the tension between a future-oriented way of being and one which is oriented towards the now:

If people do not have this understanding in religion, this charisma, they could start feeling something different—you feel that you are being exploited, that this is trash [*besteira*], that you have to donate but that it does not have to be so much, that you need to think of your future, of your retirement-- many people criticize [these projects like] this. The only document that I do not have in my hands is a worker’s card. I never sought to get one because no one is going to employ me, because I work at the crèche as part of my mission. But, there are many people who worry about this, that you have children so you need to think about your future, that you need to think about tomorrow. But I usually say, “Tomorrow belongs to God, I need to live my present.” My present today is to attend to my brother. What is in my control is to serve. So, [it means] understanding that, whether we like it or not, we live and die for God.

As clearly expressed by Clara this work should be considered a mission and she clearly thinks that concern for the future prevents people from giving. She identifies the government issued worker’s card as contributing to this way of thinking, a concern and tension that was discussed at length in the previous chapter. While Clara distinctly links a

giving-oriented way of thinking to Catholic theology, I want to make it clear that clergy and activists in the Church sometimes express a need to get residents to save for the future. Many of these clergy and activists (not all) were from the Center-South of Brazil. Thus, “traditional” models, which residents of the semiarid Northeast may perceive as associated with the Church, may not necessarily be the same as those actually promoted by some people who are in official positions within the Church hierarchy or in Church-related organizations. I am suggesting that this is a Catholic ethic that emerges from residents own value systems and interpretations of theology, rather than one that emerges from those clergy and organizers they encounter—even though clergy’s support of these interpretations could be crucial.<sup>274</sup>

Church members (and here I am referring to clergy, nuns and church-based activists from outside the region) wanted to “help” residents. At times this resulted in a desire that residents would adopt a sense of concern about their future security. Some of those involved in assisting residents in their negotiations with the participatory planning projects of the 1980s commented that it was frustrating work because residents did not tend to “think of the group” and were not used to a formal cooperativist style of working with others but instead wanted to be able to work on their own terms.<sup>275</sup> It was often commented that residents are and were willing to come together for a one-time event—in

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<sup>274</sup> The Catholic practices that emerged in many of the small communities and settlements in the semiarid developed on their own with little formal guidance from the Church hierarchy since these communities only occasionally witnessed the visit of a priest. As such, many of the religious practices and festivals of the region emerged as local traditions rather than from the institutional Catholic Church hierarchy. For example, Easter week (the most important holiday of the year in the semiarid) is practiced with a traditional “fast” (*jejum*). However, in this context, the “fast” refers to a basket of food that is given to neighbors: a feast is the fast in this context. The Catholic nuns in Sobradinho (most from the Center-South of the country) got a kick out of this the first time they were given their *jejum* on Easter week.

<sup>275</sup> For a discussion of the participatory planning projects of the 1980s, see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

the style of a *mutirão*—but that formalized cooperative work was an introduced model which was not consistent with traditional practices of residents of the semiarid. This, it would seem, would be due in part to the necessity of future-oriented and formalized planning that goes into creating a cooperative system—which although “cooperative” is part of a more formal and rationalized economic model than, say, family production. I bring this up not to suggest that residents somehow “failed” or were to blame for these projects’ demise, instead I am trying to point out the differing cultural/economic logics that were at play and the Catholic Church’s contradictory role in both encouraging and discouraging economic logics which differed from market ideology.

In any case, Clara saw her work at the crèche as encouraging different (economic) modes of being which are supported by the Church:

If we don’t let ourselves care about society’s philosophy of “having” [*ter*], it stops filtering into our minds. You take all of your service, your ideals, your philosophy of life and you place it on one side, in order to move toward a way of thinking focused on society’s needs [rather than ‘having’]. It is important for me to have this link with the Church, feeding and deepening my spiritual side, so that this way of thinking that is oriented towards “having” does not take a hold of me.

What Clara means by “having” here is a way of being in the world oriented toward material acquisition and possessions. Clara sees her work as a project that counters materialistic trends that are tied to concern for one’s future security. This philosophy of Clara’s of “not worrying about the future because it is in the hands of God,” echoes popular understandings of how many in the region understand “how the world works.” I did hear some long-term participants lament that despite years of service to the Church, they were anxious that their work was never formally recognized with a worker’s card and that they had never paid into the social security system. The Church was not able,

despite some women making their life “career” out of these projects, to provide them with a full salary. However the Church did provide opportunities that might not have been available to many of these women, such as supporting some through college or providing them with training that enabled them to become community health agents.<sup>276</sup> As already mentioned, some women left the crèche to work in positions that they saw as service-oriented, but which also allowed them to receive a minimum salary such as the health agent positions.

In summary, the crèche and other church projects serve as spaces in which group-oriented subjects are cultivated and encouraged. Young women involved in the projects find themselves going through a process of resubjection in which they come to see the importance of serving and caring for others. At the same time they are faced with the introduction of concerns for one’s “future” and economic “security”— by the media, society at large, and by Church members themselves, all of which challenge their ability to nurture such subjectivities. They have to negotiate between pressures to focus on one’s own salary and future “security” and a value system focused on sharing and dividing what one has. While it can certainly be argued that a sharing orientation is actually the source of security because of the social networks it creates, anxieties were still expressed by some about future security.

### **Conclusion: Making Feminist Sense Out of the Care and Community Economy**

Before I head into an analysis of the implications of each of these projects I want to relate a story of one of the *Pastoral da Criança* volunteers that highlighted the role that

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<sup>276</sup> Obviously, the need for training is the result of the social and economic changes that have occurred in the region since the construction of the dam.

participation in such projects played in women's lives. Maria Bezerra is a community health agent and a volunteer with the *Pastoral da Criança*. She has been involved with the Catholic Church in Sobradinho since the late 1980s. In my interview with her she related both her history of an unhappy first marriage at the age of 16 and her recurrent problems with her second and current husband, who had a drinking problem. She raised her first child on her own, cleaning houses in the middle-class Vila Santana to earn an income, until marrying her current husband, with whom she had experienced many years of domestic conflict. She recounted her physical-emotional experience of these conflicts and how her involvement in the Church and the community helped change the situation for her:

I had a day when I was in agony, feeling suffocated, and inside of me there was an enormous emptiness. I didn't know how to explain it. Why did I have this emptiness inside of me? . . . It was suffocating me! . . . And I always said to Sister Fernanda, "I know how a prisoner feels because I feel like a prisoner inside my own house. [My husband] tried to capture me inside the house, he didn't want me to go out and work.

She went on to relate how a neighbor invited her to participate in the Legion of Mary, a prayer group devoted to Mary.<sup>277</sup> She started to participate with that group and with the Biblical Circuit (a prayer group). She recounted that before her participation, "I considered myself imprisoned. I was a sad person! Full of suffering! But after that, I learned to see, to walk, to hear, and to speak." During her interview Maria related how as a little girl she had seen women in the Legion of Mary during a mass and had desired to

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<sup>277</sup> In Drogus's (1997: 61) work she refers the Legion of Mary as a group whose "primary constituency was female, and [whose] message emphasized Mary's example of virginity, motherhood, and long-suffering patience and self-abnegation of women (citing Azzi 1984:100-103)." I do not want to repeat outworn representations of *marianismo* (a complex web of beliefs about the Virgin Mary and practices devoted to her) that are often premised on motherhood and suffering—which have been used to pigeon-hole the religious beliefs of Catholic Latin American. Instead I want to highlight how Maria's participation in the Legion of Mary had the opposite effect of empowering her and enabling her to take control of her life and to participate actively in the community.

one day belong to this group, but she did not know what the group was or what they did. She described her participation in the group as a story of “finding something she had lost” (the women in the Legion of Mary) but also a process of “filling herself” (getting rid of the emptiness inside her). Indeed, through this process, she felt she regained abilities she had lost: the ability to see, walk, hear and speak. In essence, Maria described a process of coming into her own and an awareness of her own capacities. This stands in contrast to how Maria described herself as a young woman, as *lesa*<sup>278</sup> -- a far cry from the laughing, talkative, and social woman I knew her to be.

Her participation and faith in God gave her the strength to confront her husband and ultimately this faith was connected to community participation:

I said to him [her husband], “Look, one day I am going to find something that you will not be able to break! And he said, “What will you be able to do?” I said, “I don’t know, but God is going to illuminate something for me that I can do that you will not be able to break.” And so, it was like this. “You can break everything in the house, but my faith in God, my desire to serve God and Jesus Christ and to work in the community-- each day, each time you make this mess, it makes my faith stronger.” I had the desire, and it gave me the strength: it was God.

Today Maria runs the Children’s Pastoral chapter near her house and is very active in Church and volunteer activities within the community.

After the Legion and the Biblical Circuit that emptiness that I had disappeared. The emptiness that I felt was the necessity to look for God, to look for Jesus Christ, to work with the community. It was this, that emptiness. [AA: And you never felt this way again?] Not for many years!

Maria’s need to look for God and Jesus, was accompanied by a need to work in the community. Her story highlights how a false dichotomy is created between “feminist” and “non-feminist” organizing by dividing women’s activities into those which serve to

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<sup>278</sup> *Lesa* is a Northeastern term to describe someone who is passive or lacking in energy; it has negative connotations.



reinforce “traditional” gender roles and those which contribute to their reconstruction.<sup>279</sup>

Maria’s story indicates that she has bridged the assumed divide between notions of individual autonomy and empowerment with the qualities associated with care, not self-abnegation. Maria’s religious experience and her community involvement provided her with a sense of security that served as an antidote to the futurity concerns of many residents.

An important feminist conceptual tool developed by Maxine Molyneux (1986) was the idea that rather than speaking of “women’s interests” (implying a unity) researchers should refer to “gender interests”—or those interests which develop due to one’s social positioning related to gender attributes. She divides the tactics of women’s movements in Latin America into those which advance *practical* gender interests and those which address *strategic* gender interests. For example, practical gender interests could encompass addressing the cost of living as it relates to the gendered division of labor. Practical interests are those advanced by feminine movements. The other set of interests, *strategic* gender interests are those which have to do with feminist (rather than feminine) issues, which are those which particularly relate to the female condition such as reproductive rights. Alvarez reminds us that class and race are constitutive of gender interests and that one group of women’s strategic gender interests might threaten another’s practical interests (1990: 26). She notes, for example, that middle-class women’s practical interests might include the continuation of the domestic servant category whereas the strategic interests of a dark-skinned working class woman might

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<sup>279</sup> Lynn Stephen’s work (1997:10-12) among women’s movements in Latin America argues this point as well: the dichotomy between feminine and feminist is not useful as it premised on the private/public dichotomy that does not reflect women’s lived experience.

clash with these interests. Many poor and working class women may be reluctant to adopt feminism as it was developed in the “West” due to a lack of survival alternatives outside the patriarchal family structure and also perhaps less of a desire to do so, as well.

Alvarez asserts that all women might be able to agree on some issues such as the eradication of violence in the home or sexual abuse (1990: 27).

Marianne Marchand (1995: 62-63) has challenged the division between “feminine” and “feminist” movements which runs throughout the literature on Latin American women’s movements and the state, arguing that this division serves to create a dichotomy between these interests and does not advance an understanding of women as political subjects and actors.<sup>280</sup> Citing the work of bell hooks (1984), Marchand suggests that this division might serve to maintain a racist and classist dichotomy. She cites hooks’ argument that gender-related survival needs are just as “feminist” as a struggle for reproductive rights. Marchand concludes by urging researchers to position these interests (feminine-feminist) on a continuum rather posing them as feminine/feminist or practical/strategic dichotomies (1995: 64).

I am inclined to agree with Marchand’s analysis and I would like to highlight its connection to the work of some feminist economists. Feminist economist Julie Matthaei argues that the social and economic shifts that have occurred in the U.S. over the last several decades might give rise to new selves which transcend “the negative masculine struggle to dominate and control the other with the negative feminine quality of self-subordination and sacrifice, creating a new kind of masculine-with-feminine self that develops and expresses itself (positive, masculine) in ways that integrate caring and

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<sup>280</sup> Marchand takes this analysis from the work of Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (1993: 20).

concern for others (positive, feminine) (2001: 463).” Certainly a shift towards the integration of these spheres is present in the community work of these women volunteers in Sobradinho. Similarly, Paula England asks, “Could we valorize both connection and autonomy? Could we imagine male and female selves that were both connective and yet somewhat individuated (2003: 37)?”

In many ways the work of the women discussed in this chapter could be seen as extensions of feminine gender roles: care work that would correspond to women’s cultural positioning as nurturers of others. Although these projects are not set up with the intention of challenging or changing existing patterns of gender hierarchy, they may indeed end up doing so.<sup>281, 282</sup> As we can see with Maria’s story—her faith and participation in the community enabled her to take on a subject positioning that could challenge her husband’s violence and attempts to dominate her in the home. I would argue that the communication skills that volunteers in the crèche learned from Clara (who does not define herself as a “feminist”) about how to be assertive, but also lovingly communicative, with their husbands also falls within that same realm.

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<sup>281</sup> I want to make it clear that the Catholic Church was not gender-blind: gatherings such as the tri-municipality Liberation Spirituality gathering in Sobradinho (called Cansosé) on August 13, 2005 specifically addressed gender issues, in addition to indigenous issues, Afro-Brazilian spiritual traditions, the *Movimento Sem Terra* (Landless Worker’s Movement), and more. Non-profit and advocacy organizations that emerged out of the Liberation Theology influenced Church movements of the 1980s also regularly conducted gender workshops as part of their work with rural communities and with educators and teachers in the semiarid region.

<sup>282</sup> In addition, I do not intend to present the women of the rural Northeast as disconnected from the flows of transnational feminisms. Certainly feminist discourse has influenced *Sobradinhense* women’s understanding of themselves as women, although few women other than a select number in the rural labor union would identify as “feminist.” Millie Thayer (2000) examines the feminist projects of the Rural Women Workers’ Movement (MMTR) in rural Pernambuco, demonstrating the impact of feminist discourse in this seeming “structurally irrelevant” and “disconnected” region. Critiques of existing gender arrangement made by the MMTR and their programmatic work are explicitly conducted from a feminist angle.

Spivak has argued for recognition of what she terms *responsibility-based ethics* as opposed to rights-based ethics of Western liberal traditions (1992: 2000). Critiquing the assumptions of a developmentalist ideology based on the notion of technological progress and economic privatization, she argues that such claims for “freedom” are “imperialist presuppositions that colonized us and the pressures of de-colonization, for us, are located in the impasse between indigenous and global imperatives – responsibility-based and rights-based ethics (1992: 10).” This notion of responsibility-based ethics is aligned with an emphasis upon mutual responsibility and collective survival, rather than an individuated self who is seen to be separate from the social relations in which s/he is embedded. Spivak is wary of some feminist projects that urge a sense of “autonomy” which she sees as conducive to the spread of capitalist market models and market-oriented subjectivities. This responsibility-based ethic can be equated with the world of care that Boff calls for in his book *To Know [How] To Care*. The assertiveness that women involved in these projects gain is also representative of the sort of bridging of the world of work and the world of care that Boff calls for. These projects might help women to develop a sense of autonomy and self-possession yet they are simultaneously involved in the process of creating collective subjects.

In essence, the projects described in this chapter could be seen as what some theorists (Harcourt and Escobar 2005) have termed a women’s “politics of place.” Grassroots and subaltern women have responded to the destructive impacts of development and economic restructuring by engaging in forms place-based struggles that center on various types of “place”: around the body, the home, the environment, the

community, and public space. The early pastoral work (children's and health pastorals), the community gardens, the herbal pharmacy and the crèche could all be seen as projects created in defense of place: of community. The politics of place perspective highlights that while such organizing efforts by subaltern women may not be read as "political," they are in fact representative of a form politics. In Sobradinho, women volunteers' projects were oriented towards ameliorating the impacts of development and later economic restructuring in their community. Women were the most sensitive to the impacts of these changes on their families and themselves due to their responsibilities as care-takers of children and the home. In particular, this chapter highlights women's experience of the local economy and their participation in building interdependent forms of economic practice that redistribute surplus back into the community, in ways that are not capitalist. The projects described in this chapter are not subsumed by global logics, but instead are rooted in the specificity of the women volunteers' social, cultural and economic location.

Thus while the notion of an autonomous self has been critiqued as an imposition of Western liberal models of the individual, the ethnographic examples in this piece highlight the possibility of selves that are both assertive and self-possessed but not individualistic or immersed in an ideology that extracts one from their social relations or being-in-common (*convivência*) with others. I bring up these arguments because all of the projects discussed in this chapter (the crèche, the Pastorals, the herbal pharmacy and the community gardens) serve to encourage a way of being in the world which values group needs over those of the self without sacrificing a sense of selfhood. Participants both

learn to share and divide what they have with others. In doing so, they practice one of the central facets of the community economy in which surplus is redistributed back into the community. These projects also serve to cultivate a sense of limits, of limiting one's supposed "needs" and desires—a major task of the Church given residents' anxieties about materialist concerns pulling youth away from Sobradinho and into the urban centers of Brazil.

However, I do not want to present these projects and involvement with the Church as some "pure," conflict-free site of alternative economic self cultivation. As Alvarez notes in her work among women's movements in Brazil, the continued hegemony of the Church severely circumscribed the nature and content of women's political organizing movements in São Paulo, despite the fact that the same institution played a critical role in offering support for women's initial organizing experiences (1990: 131). Similarly the nature of what was pursued by women volunteers in Sobradinho did not diverge from those tenets of Church philosophy supported by local clergy. While at times clergy could be supportive of gender discussions (such as a re-evaluation of hierarchical gender relations within the home) there was little discussion or support for an analysis which strongly challenged women's traditional gender roles.<sup>283</sup> But, as noted, at times residents themselves could reassert "traditional" gender roles more strictly than even those in the clergy, such as Clara's insistence of the crèche monitors moral upstanding in the community.

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<sup>283</sup> For example, one member of the Church told me that she would have liked to have encouraged the use of contraceptives (if women desired them), but that she felt that she could not because the Church hierarchy prohibits their use. Another example would be the sense that the volunteers with the *Pastoral da Mulher Marginalizada* (Marginalized Women's Pastoral) in Juazeiro had that the Church did not care about their work because they provided support for sex workers.

Another example of the complicated (empowering-disempowering) role of the Church is demonstrated in the disappearance of the Health Pastoral which emerged alongside of the Children's Pastoral and the Herbal Pharmacy. The Health Pastoral was largely a women's project to provide basic health care to those who could not get formal medical service. Volunteers gave injections to those who needed them, and provided massage and other alternative health treatments, such as *bio-energia* (a healing practice akin to reiki), to residents at minimal or no cost. However, a few years prior to my research it was "suggested" to the group of women who ran the Health Pastoral, by someone involved with the church, that they quit their work because the Children's Pastoral and the community health agents were already "enough," so their work was no longer needed. Some of the women involved in this project were upset by the suggestion that they stop providing these forms of assistance, yet they felt they had little say in the matter. This issue appeared to both have to do with Church hierarchy, as well as the increasing impact of state bureaucratic regulation in the town—perhaps there was fear that the Church would be held liable for these unofficial health treatments.

Yet I want to conclude this chapter by emphasizing that the women involved in these projects did not express the same sense of "lack" or negative senses of place that were present among many other residents in the town. They did not appear to be as strongly impacted by market-based categories and values in their understanding of themselves or of Sobradinho. These volunteers do not identify as being "unemployed" despite the fact that most receive a marginal salary, if any. I am not justifying underpayment, but I *am* arguing that their feelings of contributing to the broader

community do not allow them the space to give in to the negative economic sense of self that many of those cast aside by state development projects in the region possess. I would like to highlight, that these women could certainly take a bus to work in the agroindustry of the neighboring municipalities of Juazeiro and Petrolina, but they have chosen instead to work and volunteer within their own community. Their choice to work in their community is significant in the context of the preference for women's labor by the export-oriented agricultural firms in the São Francisco Valley (Branco 2000; Collins 1993; Fischer 2000; Fischer and de Melo 1996). As discussed, women's participation in the community economy is often spoken of in glowing terms: of what they gained, how they "feel like themselves" or feel "more human" by doing this work. These women, through their reintegration of care and work, are countering the negative evaluations produced by the development discourse and the seeming economic redundancy of their town in broader state regional development schemes. They do this at the same time that they negotiate the values of "futurity" and "security" that were introduced with market-based models into the region.



## CONCLUSION

Contemporary dynamics in the São Francisco Valley can be read as the outcome of the processes of colonization, nation-building and its associated developmentalist thinking, and, finally, neoliberal restructuring. Despite the fact that the area that has been profoundly transformed by developmentalist policies of the Brazilian state from the post World War II era and through the 1970s, the material presented in this dissertation highlighted that a number of non-capitalist practices or practices of economic difference exist in Sobradinho and the broader São Francisco Valley. These practices exist amidst the seeming entrenchment of the neoliberal productive model in the São Francisco Valley since the 1980s, due to the proliferation of export-oriented agroindustry. While residents of the semiarid have long been included in the national project of economic growth (as migratory or cheap labor) even prior to the implantation of the neoliberal model, they have also simultaneously been excluded from dominant economic calculus (in terms occupying positions of power). It is this very exclusion that may have given rise to new forms community and economic practice. Some residents have responded to the social and economic changes in the area by either attempting to return to former non-capitalist modes of production, while others, such as youth, are attempting to rethink their relationship to capitalist labor regimes despite the fact that they have been raised to believe that the wage labor model is the only available option. Therefore, while forms of wage-based employment still have a strong hold on many residents' desires, the material

in this study indicates that there are a whole host of other economic practices that *Sobradinhenses* are engaged in. In essence, economic restructuring has not had the effect of making residents capitalist subjects.

I want to recall the words of one resident who asserted that “Sobradinho has a history that is different from normal cities. This city was planned to be destroyed.” This statement is significant in that it reminds us that Sobradinho and a sense of community emerged out of a place that was supposed to be put to the utilitarian ends of state-sponsored capitalist development strategies and energy production. What I am referring to by community in this context is forms of everyday relationality, a sense of common cause, and an ethic of mutual responsibility and survival—what some might term the process of being-in-common, or in Portuguese, *convivência*. As such, this project addressed the formation of a politics of place in Sobradinho and the broader São Francisco Valley. The focus on the particularities of the semiarid ecology and climate, community economies, and alternative livelihoods all indicate attention to place-based specificity, which create forms of economic “development” that are in keeping with local cultural values and ecological conditions--constituting a form of place-based politics. Gibson-Graham (2003, 2006) and Harcourt and Escobar (2005) argue that forms of place-based politics and organizing are increasingly being taken up by women, environmentalists and those struggling for alternative forms of livelihood and are critical to rethinking our current economic and development models. This form of particular and situated action is significant as these same theorists see place-based politics as an antidote

to those who argue that the only viable response to capitalist globalization is a “politics of empire” (Hardt and Negri 2000).

Because of the focus on everyday practice and action, as well as forms of difference, I sought to document the formation or continued cultivation of non-capitalist economic subjectivities or senses of self. The practices discussed in this dissertation indicate that residents are far from becoming capitalist subjects and certainly have not become the prototypical “neoliberal subject” that so many theorists have asserted is the product of neoliberal economic restructuring. In fact, a number of the practices discussed indicate the creation of collective economic subjects.

I have hoped to show how the impacts of economic globalization and development can be read in a different light from that of the “globalization script.” In their 1996 book, Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham argue that academic representations of the impacts of economic globalization often script communities as inevitable victims to the impacts of transnational capital—meaning that all forms of noncapitalisms are presented as already “damaged, violated, fallen, subordinated to capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996: 125).”<sup>284</sup> While Sobradinho was certainly subject to global capital in a certain fashion, the voices of residents in this work indicate that they have not been won over on the level of consciousness. Residents’ very disillusionment with development promises (and the failure of development to make good on those promises) have caused residents to rethink their relationship to market-based production, consumption, and distribution models. They resist and rework market models by participating in a project of

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<sup>284</sup> Gibson-Graham also highlights the gendered metaphors and phallocentrism of most literature on economic development and developmentalist theory, following Fee (1986).

constructing community and non-market oriented economic practices. In highlighting these processes, I have attempted to follow Gibson-Graham's urging that researchers look for and highlight the new economic possibilities that capitalist globalization might generate, not just its destructive capacities.

Similarly Escobar urges researchers to explore how the very development apparatus might be used to cultivate subjects of diverse developments and diverse modernities (2008: 175). The construction of the dam, the rise of export-oriented agriculture and the number of "participatory" development projects sponsored by the state (along with the support of international development institutions, such as the World Bank) no doubt had destructive effects on the region, but these changes have also opened up new ways of engaging with the economy and new forms of economic subjectivity—not all of which can be reduced to neoliberal or capitalist forms. De Vries (2007) argues that development, rather than just being a form of governmentality, is a desiring machine. He means that development creates the desire for development goods (roads, jobs, financial security, etc.), but the same development apparatus requires its own banalization and that its promises be rescinded. Certainly residents' economic worries indicate that they are aware that the promises of development "goods" have not been kept. However, moments of opening might arise under the processes of regional subjection, if theorists and residents to do "not compromise their desire for development" and engage in an "ethics of sustaining the capacity to desire (de Vries 2007: 40)." De Vries argues that those impacted by development often keep searching and asking for something more than what development has offered and perhaps these can give rise to new or alternative forms

of development or alternative modernities. The projects being developed by everyday residents, locally-based non-governmental organizations, and researchers in the region indicate that such an ethics is being cultivated right now.

Accordingly my research methodology and descriptive tactics have followed an analytic perspective that Gibson and Graham have termed “weak theory.” Following Sedgwick (2003), Gibson-Graham ask, “What if we asked theory . . . to help us see openings, to help us find happiness, to provide a space for freedom and possibility (2006: 7)?” Sedgwick and Gibson-Graham urge theory to localize its focus, practicing a “weak” form of theory that cannot encompass the present or shut down the future. Weak theory does not presume that social experiments are already coopted, doomed to fail, or likely to reinforce dominance—and it does not tell us that the world will be transformed by world revolutionary movements (Gibson-Graham 2006: 8). But, it may offer us the tools to see possibilities being developed in the here and now, creating openings for future possibility. Weak theory can be seen as an antidote to grand, totalizing visions (a politics of empire) and supposedly universalist development solutions, as it instead analyzes the particular and situated. This thinking is helpful, they argue, when theorizing the economy where the problem is the scarcity of economic concepts, not their inconsistency – one reason I have paid attention to those moments when residents contest or provide differing vision of the economy than that of mainstream economic models. The benefit of “weak” theory is that it allows for a form of strong politics because it serves to widen the field of economic and social possibility rather than foreclosing it. The focus is on emergence and

possibility (i.e. a politics of becoming) in existing actions and projects—reading for forms of cultural and economic difference that exist amidst global processes.

As discussed in the introduction, these projects and associated visions could be seen as a “politics of the small” as opposed to the grand nationalist developmentalist projects that have been the goal of many nations in the Global South since World War II. A politics of the small is the perfect companion to “weak theory,” as it is focused on the particular, the everyday, and localized visions. Clearly the work of activists, researchers, and residents of the semiarid might be interpreted as a politics of the small, as they focus on small-scale solutions like cisterns, collective pastures, and the formation of associations and cooperatives which might be contrasted with large scale state development plans. Clearly grand development schemes (what Brazilian researchers term “pharaonic projects”) still capture the imagination of state planners, as residents of the São Francisco River basin struggle against the state’s proposal to transpose the course of the São Francisco River. In response to yet another in a series of grand developmentalist projects, activists, researchers, and residents of the Sobradinho lake region have attempted to rethink what sorts of projects are viable, culturally sensitive, and ecologically sustainable for residents of the Brazilian semiarid.

The projects of these groups (such as the CPT, IRPAA, and RESAB, among others) are significant because they build upon existing potentialities and visions and are not about grand, capital-intensive interventions or mass initiatives. This politics of the small focuses on the particulars of the ecology and culture of the region—reworking conventional understandings of development and the economy in the process. Therefore

these projects contribute to what some call a “postdevelopment” era or alternative forms of development. In particular, the model for the *Convivência com o Semi-árido* (Living in/with the Semiarid) being elaborated by activists and researchers in the Northeast offers a cognitive frame *and* forms of material support (help in forming legalized associations, gaining land titles, etc.) for groups who seek out alternative livelihood practices so that forms of non-capitalist consciousness do not fade into nothing or get re-integrated into frameworks that foreclose possibility or flatten these forms of social/economic difference.

The cultivation of these responses requires that these “fugitive currents” (Connolly 1995, 1999)—responses that exceed the fund of given models—are supported by a cognitive frame that allows them to serve as mechanism for social change rather fading away. With the right framing, they might contribute to what Guattari (1995) has termed “dissident subjectivities” (cited in Escobar 2008). The responses of organizations like IRPAA, the CPT, RESAB, and others both work to support such sentiments and to allow residents to critically reflect on the labor and productive situation. In doing so, these groups provide the cognitive frames to support these fragile and incipient projects. But, as discussed in this study, sustaining these visions is a process and those involved in such projects are constantly involved in reworking their own understandings of the region, which are often influenced by hegemonic representations of the region. Residents of communities such as Sobradinho are already involved in a reworking of developmentalist visions and engaging in forms of resistance to neoliberal economic models. Certainly these projects can only continue if they are recognized and if there is

support for them. As such, this research constitutes an ethnography of possibility in a particular place. And while it is focused on a particular place, it comments on a much broader project of re-constructing our economic, social and ecological models.

Can we envision forms of economy rooted in particular places and embedded in forms of sociality in a particular place? These visions are closely tied to local cultural values that valorize forms of sociality and relationality (mutual responsibility and collective survival) that many feel are being rapidly transformed by new economic dynamics. They are reflected in residents' conscious choices about the sorts of lifestyles and values they want for themselves and their children—part of what constitutes a politics of the small, a politics of the everyday. When older residents nostalgically recall lives that they had prior to the construction of the dam and the flooding of the Sobradinho Lake, they are not just recalling the past. They might be involved in what Blunt (2003) has termed “productive nostalgia”.<sup>285</sup> Blunt asserts that this form of nostalgia, rather than being apolitical or confining, offers liberatory potential and can be documented in embodiment and practice (not just in imagination). Rather than just being about loss or mourning of a lost past, productive nostalgia offers potential for present and future action. When residents of Sobradinho or the São Francisco Valley recall their lives when they lived only peripherally connected to the market, they are commenting on and acting on it in the here and now as they seek out agrarian or pastoral livelihoods. They are also offering models for the future. These are forward-looking sentiments, even if based upon past experience.

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<sup>285</sup> I thank Patricia Sawin for introducing the concept of productive nostalgia to me and its potential application to this study.



Fagan (1999) suggests that the cultural politics of postdevelopment has to start with everyday lives and struggles of concrete groups of people, particularly women, as he brings together both Marxist and poststructuralist approaches (in Escobar 2008: 171). Similarly, theorists Arce and Long (2000) have highlighted forms of what they term “counterwork” or “counter-tendencies” to development. Counterwork refers to “the interplay of ‘hegemonic’ and ‘non-hegemonic’ discourses and values – irrespective of whether they emanate from global or local scenarios (Arce and Long 2000: 8).” Western standards or models might be disembedded and re-embedded within local understandings and practices of social life. Exemplars of “counterwork” or counter-tendencies to development are some of the projects discussed in this dissertation. For example, the associative model of conventional state-run and international development institutions might be re-embedded in novel local practices (goat pastures) to result in the *fundo de pasto* associative model. Thus the *fundo de pasto* is a “modern ” form, but one that represents a non-hegemonic model of modernity. The model is representative of local actors’ struggles over the meaning and practicality of a form of livelihood.

As suggested at the beginning of this conclusion, these projects are linked with longer historical forms of marginalization of the region and its residents since the era of colonization, and molded in their particular form by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century elaboration of the “two Brazils” concept . The *Convivência com o Semi-Árido* project attempts to rectify historical forms of symbolic violence and marginalization by making central the perspectives of the region’s residents. Those involved in the *convivência* project literally see it as an attempt to redress colonial wrongs and to bring *sertanejo*

ways being and knowing, which have been denigrated, to a level on par with forms of scientific knowledge produced in the West. Therefore the reworking of representations of the *sertão* and the Northeast presents a vision of the region based on local visions, struggles, desires, values, and hopes, rather than those which emanate from hegemonic centers of power and which have served to denigrate local cultural, social, and economic forms and models.

This ethnography is one of possibility, hope, and desire—about alternative social worlds currently being enacted and also those envisioned for the future. In particular I want to highlight the element of possibility. These projects might be incipient and fragile, but given the proper forms of support they just might serve as localized, culturally sensitive alternatives to mainstream economic development. I hope this project has given a reader some insight into the ways in which these non-capitalisms are taking shape in the São Francisco valley—even amidst the seeming triumph of neoliberal models in the region. As Escobar argues in his study of the projects of Pacific lowland communities in Colombia, these sorts of practices more likely represent the economic and social reality of many people living on the planet—although mainstream economic discourse and models would deny their existence or see them as merely peripheral to the “real” economy. What is happening in the São Francisco Valley has much broader implications for how theorists and researchers approach the study of the spread of capitalist market models and the impacts of neoliberal restructuring. These practices indicate that there might be projects of possibility happening elsewhere around the globe, similar to those going on in Sobradinho and the São Francisco Valley.

While there are specificities to the Sobradinho experience—such as its location in a semiarid region, its experience with a particular type of large-scale water-based development project, and the specificities of the colonial legacies in the region, there are some commonalities with other places experiencing the influence of global processes. Many communities around the planet have witnessed the negative impacts of the withdrawal of industrial production and the retrenchment of state and private investment in former industrial regions. Similarly, the encroachment of the market economy (often termed “development”) on peoples who have existed only partially articulated with the market has parallels around the globe—particularly in many places in the Global South. The existence of such projects, practices, and modes-of-being in Sobradinho suggest that other communities facing several decades of the failure (or limited success) of conventional economic development projects and models might also be involved in a process of questioning their engagement with models. Perhaps documentation of such projects might indicate, as Escobar suggests, that we are entering into a post-neoliberal moment. But, certainly this can only be possible by recognizing and cultivating such forms of economic difference.

A project focused on rethinking our current economic models and on place-based struggles and livelihoods can contribute to an emerging political imaginary which valorizes difference and possibility, building off of everyday action around the globe. With this ethnography I hoped to contribute to that project and, more importantly, to document the ways in which people in a particular community are involved in their own reworking of dominant economic models with the practice of particularized

social/economic models based upon local conditions and cultural values. These constitute a project of social change starting with “modest beginnings and small achievements (Gibson-Graham 2006: 196),” rather than resorting to grandiose or totalizing visions for social change. This project, I hope, contributes to that of Brazilian theorist de Albuquerque (1998), who has urged for an undoing of current understandings of the Northeast in order to make way for new possibilities and new visions for social change. He asks for new voices and new visions to replace tired tropes that describe the area as one of deficiency and lack—the voices of residents in this piece I believe offer just such novel visions. Albuquerque calls readers to engage in a project of re-visioning the region—a project which many researchers, activists, and residents are engaged in right now. This model of the *convivência* represents a reworking of earlier interventionist and paternalistic approaches to economic development in the region and contributes to a postdevelopment vision for the region. I hope that this dissertation contributes in a small way to this project. As I wrote this, I have attempted to maintain the vision of hope and possibility that was present among the youth I encountered, even amidst the struggles they faced in creating livelihoods for themselves. I hope that this dissertation did justice to their visions, hopes, and desires for the future.

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